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U.S. Foreign Policy under Trump's Second Term:

Responding to a New International Order

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I. Introduction

The world has been jolted by U.S. foreign policy since President Donald Trump was re-inaugurating this past January. The United States—the post-WWII superpower that built and guarded the "liberal international order"—is now openly criticizing and dismantling it. The Trump 2.0 administration argues that while the liberal international order—symbolized by free trade, multilateralism, and democracy—once served U.S. interests, it no longer does, and therefore a new international order must be established. Under the banner of "America First," it is prioritizing the maximization of U.S. national interest and pushing through foreign policies that run counter to the principles of the liberal international order. This article examines what that order is, why the Trump 2.0 administration seeks to dismantle it, and what foreign policies the administration is pursuing in the process.

II. The Liberal International Order

1. Concept

The liberal international order refers to an international order grounded in "liberalism." Alongside realism, liberalism is a leading IR theory that views the international system as anarchic (lacking a central authority) yet still conducive to inter-state cooperation. It does not treat states as the only important actors in international relations; it highlights non-state actors such as international organizations and multinational corporations and holds that international organizations and regimes

enable cooperation among states. Through free trade and advances in science and technology, interdependence increases, wealth and prosperity expand, democracy spreads, and peace becomes possible (Park, 2016).

Realism, by contrast, sees the international system as anarchic, assumes states pursue power and security and therefore conflict and competition, and argues that states fail to cooperate even when they share common interests. It treats the state as the most important actor and does not grant independent status to non-state actors. States are rational actors that calculate costs and benefits to maximize their interests (Park, 2016).

2. Characteristics

Key features of the liberal international order grounded in liberalism include the following (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.):

1) Emphasis on multilateralism

It aims at multilateral cooperation to address international problems. States are seen as capable of solving global issues through international organizations and regimes such as the UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO, and NATO.

2) Rule-based order

It holds that order and stability arise when states honor rules, treaties, agreements, international law, and customary norms and act within a legal framework, rather than relying on sheer power.

3) Free trade and growing economic interdependence

By lowering tariffs and liberalizing trade, the global market expands, interdependence deepens, and cooperation is expected to prevail over war.

4) Spread of democracy

Democracy is viewed as the ideal form of government; the likelihood of war among democracies is lower, so the spread of democracy and the protection of human rights are emphasized

(democratic peace theory (Doyle, 1983)[1]).

5) U.S. leadership as a "benign hegemon"

Exercising overwhelming military, economic, and diplomatic power, the United States punishes states that undermine the liberal order and unilaterally supplies "public goods" in security and economics to states that seek to uphold it—acting as a benign hegemon (Kindleberger, 1973).

3. Historical Background

The liberal international order was constructed by the United States at the dawn of the Cold War to counter the Soviet Union, targeting what Dean Acheson called "a free half"—Western Europe, Japan, and others (Acheson, 1969; Allison, 2018).

1) The Bretton Woods system

After WWII, the U.S. launched the Bretton Woods international monetary system, laying the order's economic foundation. Agreed in 1944 in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, the system made the U.S. dollar the key currency for trade and finance and established a fixed-exchange-rate regime pegging other currencies to the dollar. This stabilized postwar finance and promoted trade expansion. It also created the IMF and IBRD to fund reconstruction. Western Europe, Japan, Korea, and others borrowed to rebuild infrastructure such as power plants, roads, and ports, rapidly restoring their industrial base. In 1947, the U.S. concluded the GATT, which underpinned tariff cuts and the dismantling of trade barriers to promote free trade; GATT later evolved into the WTO.

2) NATO and the United Nations

The U.S. launched NATO and supported the UN, spreading norms of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law and establishing the political (indeed political military) foundations of the order. In 1949 Washington created NATO as a collective security arrangement to contain the USSR, and it

[1] With the end of the Cold War and the democratization of many Eastern European states, democratic peace theory drew intense interest and provided a rationale for U.S. efforts to expand democracy and market economies worldwide.

concluded bilateral alliances with Japan (1951), Australia (1951), and Korea (1953). Earlier, in 1945, the U.S. led in founding the UN and, together with the IMF, IBRD, and GATT, designed a multilateral, rule-based order. The 1948 Marshall Plan provided about $13 billion (roughly $100 billion in today's dollars) to 16 European countries to rebuild Western democracy. During the Cold War's ideological confrontation ("democracy vs. communism"), Washington sought to diffuse human rights, the rule of law, and democracy as international norms. It launched Voice of America (1942) and Radio Free Europe (1949) to beam information into the USSR and Eastern Europe. In 1961 it created USAID to provide aid to developing countries as a counterweight to Soviet influence.

3) Globalization of the liberal order

With the Soviet collapse in 1991, many judged that the U.S.-led liberal order had triumphed over Soviet communism (Fukuyama, 1992)[2], ushering in the "globalization" of that order. The WTO was launched in 1995, FTAs proliferated, tariffs fell, non-tariff barriers came down, and world trade surged. Global supply chains[3] formed, with advanced economies consuming and developing countries manufacturing; multinationals invested worldwide and offshored production to low-wage countries; China emerged as the "world's factory." The U.S. also attempted to spread democracy by force (Allison, 2018): President Clinton bombed Yugoslavia in 1999 to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo; President George W. Bush launched the Iraq War in 2003 under the Bush Doctrine[4], which held that democratizing the Middle East would bring peace; and in 2011 President Obama struck Qaddafi's regime as it violently suppressed the Arab Spring protests in Libya.

4. Challenges

From the late 2000s, analyses held that the liberal order was in decline due to the rise of

[2] "The end of history" in the sense that, with liberal democracy's victory over Marxism-Leninism, no rival ideology remained to challenge it.

[3] A global supply chain is a cross-border production network: one country supplies raw materials, another processes components, a third does final assembly, and products are exported to consumer markets—both a symbol of globalization and a core structure of today's international economy.

[4] President Bush drew on Natan Sharansky's *The Case for Democracy* to articulate the Bush Doctrine: democracies favor diplomacy over war, so worldwide democratization is essential for a peaceful and stable order—an idea consonant with neoconservatism.

"revisionist powers" that refused to conform and sought to revise it; failures and reversals in the spread of democracy; the rise of illiberalism; resurgent nationalism; and American public fatigue with overseas engagements (Liblett, 2017).

1) Rise of revisionist powers (Mearsheimer, 2001)

The U.S. government has labeled China and Russia as "revisionist powers" (White House, 2017). Many in Washington also count Iran and North Korea among them, seeing the four as an "axis of revisionist powers" (Mead, 2025). Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 in violation of another state's territorial sovereignty and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. China pursues its "Belt and Road" strategy[5], militarizes the South China Sea, and pressures Taiwan to alter regional order (Mead, 2014). Iran and North Korea undermine the nonproliferation regime by developing nuclear weapons and have supported Russia's war effort in Ukraine.

2) Democratic diffusion stalled and reversed

U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and Libya (2011) failed to entrench democracy. The Arab Spring (2011) led to unrest and civil wars in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, followed by reversion to authoritarianism. The U.S. and Europe expected that integrating China and Russia into the international economic system (e.g., the WTO) would gradually democratize them: economic interdependence would yield peace, an expanding middle class in open markets would demand democracy, and participation in international institutions would socialize them into norms as "responsible stakeholders" (Zoellick, 2005). China (2001) and Russia (2012) joined the WTO, but the outcome diverged from expectations: President Putin deepened authoritarianism after returning to power in 2012, and President Xi consolidated power from 2012 and abolished term limits in 2018.

Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2024* reported that political rights and civil liberties declined globally for the 19th consecutive year. Democratic backsliding has been observed in countries including Hungary, Poland, Türkiye, India, the Philippines, Brazil, Tunisia, and Ethiopia (Freedom House, 2024). Backsliding involves the gradual erosion of democratic institutions—elections persist, but the

[5] The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, is a strategy to link Asia, Europe, and Africa through infrastructure, trade, finance, and cultural cooperation.

rule of law, media freedom, civil society, and separation of powers deteriorate (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). This trend is described as "illiberalism."

3) Rise of illiberalism

In Hungary, since 2010 Prime Minister Orbán has strengthened a long-term hold on power through constitutional and electoral changes, weakened judicial independence, and pressured media and civil society[6]. In Poland, the ruling PiS party infringed on judicial independence and constrained media under the banner of "judicial reform." In Türkiye, President Erdoğan has curtailed media and judicial independence since 2003 and concentrated power via a 2017 constitutional shift to a presidential system. Tunisia—once a post-Arab Spring democratic success—has seen President Saied dissolve parliament and centralize power since 2021.

Populism, often accompanying illiberalism, frames society as a struggle between a pure people and corrupt elites (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Populist leaders claim to embody the "true will of the people" and dismiss institutional constraints (courts, media, legislatures). President Trump is often cited as a prototypical populist leader who persistently attacks democratic institutions (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Illiberalism and populism erode institutions and norms, posing challenges to the liberal international order.

4) Resurgent nationalism

The UK left the EU in 2016 (Brexit)[7], largely to "take back control"—to restore sovereignty by making decisions independently of Brussels (KDI Economic Education Center, 2022). This challenged the EU, a model of supranational governance under the liberal order, and showcased nationalism (the nation-state) as a barrier to that order (Mearsheimer, 2017). The 2015 influx of Syrian refugees into Europe saw EU burden-sharing proposals rejected by Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, while far-right nationalist parties surged in states like Germany, France, and Italy. President Xi champions the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," and President Putin justifies annexing Crimea and the war in Ukraine as protecting the Russian nation. President Trump's "America First" is likewise assessed as "illiberal nationalism" (Kim, 2021).

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[6] Orbán has argued that Western-style liberal democracy is in decline and that Hungary should build a new model—an "illiberal state."

[7] "Brexit" is a portmanteau of Britain + exit, referring to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

5) American fatigue

Fatigue with the U.S. acting as "global policeman" became pronounced after the 2008 financial crisis (Pew Research Center, 2013). Domestic recovery took priority over overseas involvements, and skepticism grew over the costs of order maintenance (military interventions, foreign aid). War-weariness deepened with Iraq and Afghanistan: while Saddam Hussein was deposed, building a liberal democratic Iraq failed; and the 20-year Afghan war ended in 2021 with a Taliban return, prompting many Americans to question the loss of thousands of U.S. service members and trillions of dollars—and to oppose further stewardship of the liberal order (In Nam-sik, 2025).

III. President Trump and the Liberal International Order

1. Critique of the order

Against this backdrop, Donald Trump—an outsider to America's political establishment—was elected president in 2016 on the slogan "Make America Great Again (MAGA)," and again last year. In both terms, his foreign-policy lodestar has been "America First." He argues that the liberal international order the U.S. has built and upheld for 80 years harms U.S. interests and should be dismantled; American power and deal-making should be used to maximize U.S. gains (Brands, 2025).

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who also serves as National Security Advisor, encapsulated this view during his January confirmation hearing. He called the post-Cold War liberal international order a "dangerous delusion" that has become a "weapon aimed at America" (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2025). He cited obsessive devotion to free trade that hollowed out the middle class, weakened America's industrial base, and offshored supply chains to competitors; uncontrolled migration that exacerbated immigration and refugee crises; and the exploitation of the order by China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The Chinese Communist Party, he argued, joined the WTO and reaped benefits without meeting obligations, "lying, hacking, and stealing" its way to superpower status at America's expense. Iran and North Korea foment disorder through nuclear programs and terrorism while evading accountability via UN Security Council vetoes. In this chaos, he said, the free world must be refounded—and only a strong, confident America can do it—by pursuing an interest-first foreign policy that makes the U.S. safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Liberal IR scholars (e.g., Joseph Nye, John Ikenberry) counter that President Trump is the true revisionist—doing more to destroy the liberal order than China or Russia (Keohane & Nye, 2025; *Chosun Ilbo*, 2025a). Realist scholars (e.g., John Mearsheimer, Stephen Walt) argue that Trump is a consequence, not the cause, of the structural challenges outlined above.

2. U.S. foreign policy in Trump's second term

The hallmark of Trump's second-term foreign policy is to move, item by item, against the liberal order of free trade, multilateralism, and democracy.

1) Protectionism via tariffs

Viewing the free-trade regime as unfair, the administration wields tariffs to protect U.S. industry (manufacturing) and jobs. On April 2 it declared "Liberation Day," imposing a 10% baseline tariff on nearly all countries. It added "reciprocity tariffs," differentiated by bilateral imbalances and market barriers, ranging from 11% to 50% (average 15%) (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2025b). Beyond economics, tariffs serve as diplomatic leverage—pressuring the EU, Japan, Korea, and others to concede on security, investment, or burden-sharing[8].

2) Weakening multilateralism

Arguing that multilateral bodies constrain U.S. sovereignty and harm its interests, the administration has withdrawn from them. On inauguration day, President Trump signed an order to leave the WHO. He then withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement, declined to rejoin the UN Human Rights Council, and sanctioned the ICC for seeking to prosecute senior Israeli officials even though Israel is not a party to the Rome Statute. The administration prefers bilateralism over multilateralism in handling international issues.

[8] Korea–U.S. understanding of July 30, 2025: Korea lowers the reciprocal tariff rate from 25% to 15% in exchange for $350 billion in investment in the U.S. and $100 billion in U.S. energy purchases.

3) De-prioritizing democracy and human rights

President Trump is highly reluctant to foreground democratic values in foreign policy (Kim, 2021). He sees past U.S. efforts—such as promoting Middle East democratization—as squandering energy on changing other regimes rather than serving U.S. interests. The administration dismantled USAID, the main agency for development assistance to Global South. It effectively shuttered VOA, RFA, and RFE—key instruments for information outreach to promote democracy in Eastern Europe and Asia. It allocated no FY2026 budget for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). The State Department's annual human rights report—traditionally released each year for 198 countries—was delayed by six months and finally published on August 12; it was more than halved in length compared with the previous year, and criticism of North Korea's political system was substantially reduced (King, 2025).

4) Selective engagement in international crises

President Trump is not an isolationist; his thinking aligns more with "offshore balancing" (Choi, 2024; Kim, 2021). Offshore balancing counsels against acting as a global police force and instead engaging selectively in key theaters—Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Middle East—encouraging regional powers to maintain balance themselves and intervening only when necessary. It avoids value-driven interventions (democracy promotion, regime change) to reduce costs (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016). At the June NATO summit, he secured a pledge for members to raise defense spending up to 5% of GDP and pressed Korea and Japan to increase host-nation support. On Ukraine, he said no U.S. troops would be deployed and that Europe—not the U.S.—should be at the center of Kyiv's security (AP News, 2025). By shifting responsibility to allies and regional powers, he acts as an offshore balancer (Mearsheimer, 2001). The June U.S. airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities sought to constrain Iran's program via precision strikes rather than occupation and long-term intervention, to prevent Iran's rise as a regional hegemon, and to channel post-strike diplomacy back to the EU3—an offshore-balancing approach. Striking Iran, a revisionist power, also pressures China, Russia, and North Korea.

Meanwhile, as in his first term—when he brokered the Abraham Accords normalizing relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan—President Trump in his second term has actively mediated peace: e.g., between the DRC and Rwanda, India and Pakistan, Cambodia and Thailand (border clashes), and Armenia and Azerbaijan.

IV. Theoretical Underpinnings of Trump's Foreign Policy

Trump's second-term foreign policy is grounded in realism: it privileges power and national interest, downplays international organizations, regimes, and norms, employs coercive tariff power to pursue protectionism, and deemphasizes democracy and human rights. Given the rise of revisionist powers (China, Russia, Iran, North Korea) seeking to revise the status quo and given U.S. selective engagement as an offshore balancer in key theaters (Europe, Northeast Asia, Middle East), it can be seen as rooted in offensive neorealism[9] (Kang, 2019).

Unlike defensive neorealism—which assumes status-quo states seeking balance—offensive neorealism argues that anarchy prevents states from trusting others' intentions; to ensure survival against potential aggression, states aggressively maximize power and seek hegemony. Once a state becomes a regional hegemon, it acts as an offshore balancer to prevent the rise of peer hegemons in other regions (Walt, 2011).

V. Trump's Middle East Policy in the Second Term

Trump's Middle East policy is characterized by active engagement (Mead, 2025)—not the neoconservative approach of long-term deployments for democratization (as under George W. Bush), but an offensive-neorealist strategy: leveraging regional powers to prevent rival hegemons while shaping key outcomes in line with U.S. interests. The regional powers most aligned with Trump today appear to be Israel, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia (The Washington Post, 2025). In May, on his first overseas trip of the term, he visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, securing deals worth hundreds of billions of dollars. In Saudi Arabia he met Syria's new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa, for the first time, promising sanctions relief and urging normalization with Israel. Since April the administration has held five rounds of nuclear talks with Iran, and in June launched surprise strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. President Trump has also proposed large-scale relocation of Gaza residents, continued to press for an end to the

[9] Whereas classical realism grounds conflict in human nature, neorealism explains it through the structure of the anarchic international system.

Israel–Hamas war, and advocated for Gaza's reconstruction.

VI. Conclusion

U.S. foreign policy in Trump's second term can be summarized as dismantling the "liberal international order" that Washington built and defended for the 80 years following the Cold War. As a result, the United States—once a "benign hegemon" that provided global public goods as the "world's policeman"—now appears to transact coercively with friend and foe alike to prioritize U.S. interests, leveraging its immense economic and military power. Some predict that, as with President Biden's partial restoration of the liberal order after Trump's first term, the U.S. will revert again once Trump leaves office. However, "America First" appears to be a response to structural changes and challenges buffeting the liberal order. For that reason, America's new strategy for a new international order—epitomized by Trump's second-term foreign policy—may well persist beyond Trump.

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Q&A Section

Question 1.

After reading your article, it seems that the content of the Trump Administration's second-term foreign policy was influenced more by changes in the international community than by President Trump's personal characteristics. Do American citizens generally agree with and support Trump's policies?

Answer 1.

American citizens' responses to Trump's foreign policy differ markedly according to party affiliation.
According to a recent Gallup poll, more than 90% of Republicans agree with and support Trump's policies, whereas only 3% of Democrats do. About 33% of independents express support.
Overall, approval for Trump's foreign policy has declined from 44% at the beginning of his term to 39% in August.
Thus, in general, public sentiment toward Trump's foreign policy is predominantly unfavorable.
However, President Trump has stated that his election itself reflected voter support for the foreign policies he pledged during his campaign, and therefore he intends to continue implementing them.

Question 2.

How do you view the recent arrest of 475 people at the Hyundai LG factory? Is this also an example of "America First," that is, the prioritization of U.S. national interests over others?

Answer 2.

This incident is one example of the current, rigorous crackdown on illegal immigrants in the United States.
It is reported that most of the approximately 300 South Koreans detained and arrested were working in the U.S. while holding B1 visas (for meetings or business contracts) or ESTA (visa waiver authorization). Since such employment is illegal, they were classified as illegal residents and targeted for arrest.
Until recently, such cases were often overlooked, but growing anti-immigration sentiment—fueled by the belief that illegal immigrants cause numerous problems in the U.S.—has changed that.
Elected on the promise to correct this under the slogan "America First," President Trump initiated the

current crackdowns.

Illegal-immigration enforcement is now widespread, and even the granting of U.S. citizenship to immigrants has become increasingly restrictive.

Question 3.

Personally, I think the limitations of previous policies for promoting democratic values led to the emergence of the second Trump administration.

During the period when the Biden administration sought to restore the pre-Trump liberal international order, Russia invaded Ukraine, and China implemented its Zero-COVID policy.

As a result, returning to the liberal international framework produced significant security and economic consequences not only for the U.S. but also globally.

We saw during COVID-19 the dysfunction of the WHO, and that the WTO failed to address China's privileges—revealing the inherent weaknesses of multilateralism and how easily revisionist states can manipulate this structure.

The suspension of U.S. funding for VOA and the NED, which you mentioned in the context of human rights, also seems to warrant reconsideration of their practical effectiveness.

Institutions established during the Cold War to promote democracy—are they truly functioning effectively today?

From this perspective, while "America First" may serve as a policy goal for Trump's second term, on a broader level, might it not represent the final line of defense for preserving liberal democracy itself?

The liberal international order has been premised on America's benevolent hegemonic leadership — implying that "without America, nothing works." Now it seems that America's leadership as the "beacon of democracy" is approaching a critical point, even if the nation itself remains intact.

Thus, Trump's "America First" policies might not be dismantling democratic values, but rather supplementing or restructuring them. Would that interpretation be reasonable?

Answer 3.

In Trump's second-term foreign policy, the promotion of democratic values can be considered a secondary priority.

This is because spreading democracy worldwide is not viewed as providing direct or short-term benefits to the United States.

In this sense, the global democracy-promotion policies pursued by previous U.S. administrations are being dismantled under Trump's leadership.

Examples include the suspension of funding for U.S. international broadcasters such as VOA and the NED, as you mentioned.

VOA, originally launched during the Cold War to counter the Soviet Union, now broadcasts to regions where democratic values are needed, including Russia, China, the Middle East, and North Korea.

The NED functions similarly.

When the Trump administration effectively shut down VOA and RFA, even members of Congress voiced opposition for these reasons.

Therefore, while it cannot be said that the Trump administration outright denied the value of democracy, it is difficult to argue that it aimed to supplement or restructure this value as a foreign-policy goal.

Question 4.

You mentioned that Trump's second-term Middle East policy is characterized by "offensive neo-realism," which seeks to prevent the rise of other hegemonic powers through regional strong states such as Israel, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. You have already explained the cases of Israel and Saudi Arabia, but what are the distinctive features of the U.S.–Turkey relationship?

Answer 4.

President Trump stated that his decision to meet with the newly elected Syrian president in Saudi Arabia last May was made after receiving a phone call from Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan.

This indicates that the Trump administration attaches considerable importance to Turkey's position in its Middle East policy.

Turkey is also playing an active mediating role in efforts to end the war between Russia and Ukraine.

In May, a mediation meeting was held in Istanbul attended by mid-level officials from both sides.

Turkey maintains a good relationship with Russia, and President Trump appears to hope that Turkey will also contribute to ending the war in Ukraine.

Question 5.

It seems that this is not the first time the U.S. government has abandoned the liberal international

order.

As you mentioned, the Bretton Woods system collapsed in 1971 due to America's economic situation, and later the Nixon tariffs and the Plaza Accord also demonstrated that the U.S. has pursued realist, self-interested policies depending on circumstances.

Even so, how does the current Trump administration's policy differ from those of Nixon or Reagan?

Answer 5.

The U.S. has not consistently upheld the liberal international order; it has adopted realist and self-interested policies whenever necessary.

Representative examples include Nixon's suspension of dollar–gold convertibility in 1971 (ending Bretton Woods), the 1985 Plaza Accord, and Reagan's trade pressures.

However, Trump's second-term policy differs in key respects.

The Nixon and Reagan policies represented partial and temporary adjustments; they did not challenge the legitimacy of the liberal international order itself.

Trump's policies, however, fundamentally question and attempt to dismantle that order.

While Nixon and Reagan pursued realist measures but still maintained alliances and multilateral institutions, Trump withdrew from and rejected multilateral frameworks, emphasizing conditional, transactional relationships even with allies.

Furthermore, Reagan, during the Cold War, promoted democracy and human rights, whereas Trump does not.

Instead of advancing values, his administration prioritized transactional deals and national interest — that is the distinction.

Question 6.

In Reagan's era, democracy and human rights were values that garnered widespread popular support. Given the current political and economic situation you described, could it be said that the American public's growing desire to prioritize national interests reflects how difficult America's circumstances have become?

As you mentioned, Trump seems to be the product of that popular sentiment.

Answer 6.

A recent Gallup survey of American adults found that promoting democracy in other countries and

providing foreign aid ranked lowest among important foreign-policy goals.

After the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans have grown weary of U.S. involvement in spreading democracy abroad.

Therefore, Trump's foreign policy—which excludes democracy and human rights—has gained support among the public, particularly among supporters of the MAGA movement (though Democrats and establishment Republicans hold different views).

Trump won the last election by carrying key swing states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin — the so-called "Rust Belt," where manufacturing had collapsed.

He appealed to these voters with promises to revive manufacturing and create jobs under the slogan "America First," thereby gaining their support.

Now, by imposing tariffs worldwide and pressuring global companies to relocate production to the U.S., Trump is voicing a call for American industrial revival.

In this sense, his foreign policy embodies the aspirations of those who support the MAGA ("Make America Great Again") movement.

Question 7.

Throughout history — whether individuals, corporations, or nations — we have seen actors pursue their own interests, which is often considered rational behavior.

The U.S. established and expanded the liberal international order after World War II because it served its national interests, and Trump's recent "America First" policy can also be understood in that context.

Behind "America First" lie the decline of democracy and liberalism, the rise of nationalism, and the emergence of revisionist powers such as China and Russia that challenge the existing order.

Its specific features include protectionism, the weakening of multilateralism, the reduction or loss of international institutions' influence, regression in human rights, and the abandonment of America's role as the world's policeman.

The current liberal international order was designed to prevent the repetition of two world wars, yet today's international situation seems to be reverting to a prewar state.

Question 1) What are your thoughts on this? And can this situation be linked to the growing number of local conflicts (e.g., the Russia–Ukraine war, the Israel–Palestine conflict, the Thailand–Cambodia tensions) and quasi-civil uprisings (e.g., Myanmar, Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh)?

Question 2) Missionaries and mission organizations, who spread the Gospel through education, medical

services, and other means, can be viewed as benevolent non-state actors similar to NGOs.
If "America First" triggers global imitation of nationalist self-interest and leads states to apply rules arbitrarily, missionaries might face detention or deportation based on national interest.
In such cases, how should they respond?

Answer 7.

As you said, America's contraction of the liberal international order—and Trump's dismantling of it—both ultimately serve U.S. national interests.
After World War II and the Cold War, maintaining and defending the liberal international order benefited America's global hegemony.
However, with the rise of revisionist powers and the shift toward a multipolar international system, the weakening of U.S. relative power has made dismantling that very order advantageous for America.
Today's international situation indeed resembles that of the pre–World War era.
By asserting "America First" and relinquishing the role of global policeman, President Trump has effectively created a power vacuum.
Leaders of revisionist states—China's Xi Jinping, Russia's Vladimir Putin, North Korea's Kim Jong-un, and Iran's president—recently gathered in China for the first time in 60 years to demonstrate anti-U.S. solidarity.
Since Trump's inauguration, Russia has increased drone attacks on Ukraine, even violating Polish airspace, prompting Poland to deploy 40,000 troops along its border.
Israel recently carried out airstrikes against Hamas targets in Qatar, where U.S. military bases are located; when the U.S. criticized this, Prime Minister Netanyahu responded that Israel acts independently — showing indifference to U.S. opinion.
A recent Pew survey shows that trust in the U.S. has sharply declined in traditionally pro-American nations such as those in Western Europe, Japan, and South Korea, due to Trump's demands that allies raise defense spending and accept higher tariffs. Meanwhile, favorable perceptions of China have increased.
The growing number of regional conflicts and quasi-civil uprisings is therefore linked to Trump's foreign policy, which deprioritizes norms, democracy, and human rights.

In summary, as the U.S. renounces its former role as world policeman, revisionist powers like China and Russia are rising openly, while former U.S.-aligned states, losing trust, now pursue their own self-interest. This vacuum has produced a surge in regional wars and unrest.

Regarding Question 2, the spread of nationalism following Trump's "America First" has led more countries to adopt similar self-prioritizing policies.

Far-right parties with anti-immigrant slogans have gained traction in countries such as the U.K., Italy, France, and Germany.

For example, Britain has launched the "Make Britain Great Again" movement, echoing Trump's "America First."

As the Trump administration devalued democracy, human rights, and development aid — and disregarded related international organizations — NGO activity in these areas has been significantly constrained.

Missionaries and mission agencies, which share similar characteristics with NGOs, are likely to be affected.

In the past, when missionaries were detained abroad, the U.S. government intervened to secure their release, and foreign governments were mindful of American pressure.

But if the U.S. no longer does so, missionaries may face greater risks of mistreatment.

One possible response would be for the U.S. church community to exert pressure on the Trump administration to act against governments that harm missionaries.

Since President Trump regards American evangelical Christians as his core supporters and listens to their voices, mobilizing the evangelical church to assist persecuted missionaries could be an effective means of response.

Unreached People Groups and Unengaged Unreached People Groups

Kyo-un Jeong (Head of the Persian Studies Association)

Abstract

We are currently serving among Unreached People Groups (UPG).In recent years, within the global mission community, there has been growing discussion about those among them who have no known missionary presence or evangelistic effort—the Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPG).

This presentation first examines how the paradigm of missions has shifted in history—from being nation-based to people group–based. It will then explore the differences in evangelistic approach and methods among various ethnic groups.In addition, it seeks to define more concretely the concept of UUPG, and to share practical examples from mission fields where diverse ethnic groups coexist within one nation.

Through this process, we will reflect on how missionaries serving among UPGs can understand the UUPGs within them and develop strategic approaches. Furthermore, we will discuss the missionary's attitude and approach toward people groups, and how mission to UUPGs can serve as a channel for expanding the scope of ministry.

Table of Contents

1. The Beginning of Mission to Unreached People Groups

1-1. The First Lausanne Congress — Why "People Groups"? (1)

The 1974 Lausanne Congress brought a great shock to the world mission community. At this gathering, Ralph Winter and Donald McGavran officially presented the concept of "Unreached People Groups. "A *people group* is a community that shares a common language, culture, and identity; within the same group, the Gospel spreads far more naturally. Conversely, between groups that differ in language and culture, there exist social and cultural barriers that inevitably slow the spread of the Gospel.

McGavran (1955) explained, "People usually follow Christ collectively within their own cultural and linguistic sphere, "emphasizing that the actual unit of evangelism is not the individual, but the people group. This idea was organized under the concept of the "Homogeneous Unit Movement."

According to Jung Seung-hyun (2016), McGavran's theory can be explained as follows: His homogeneous unit theory was born and practiced in the Hindu context of India, but it can also be applied to mission among Muslim Unreached People Groups.In fact, within Indonesia—where the Muslim population exceeds 200 million—many Protestant denominations were formed based on specific ethnic backgrounds. For example, HKBP (Huria Kristen Batak Protestant), one of Indonesia's largest denominations, is based on the Batak people of Sumatra; in northern Sulawesi, GMIM (Gereja Masehi Injili di Minahasa) is centered on the Minahasa people; and in central and southern Kalimantan, there is GKE (Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis), a denomination based on the Dayak people. Thus, people group–based mission not only accounts for religious factors but also effectively minimizes unnecessary social and cultural conflicts that may arise.

Within this flow, the unit of mission shifted from the nation to the ethnic group that shares language, culture, and identity. Accordingly, the focus of research also moved from national or official language levels to individual people groups, and the evangelization status of each group began to be analyzed separately. The size and number of unreached groups were announced, fundamentally transforming the direction of field missions. In short, the target of mission was newly defined—not as a nation, but as a people group.

At first glance, the diverse ethnic groups within a single country seem to share the same institutions (education, taxation, labor, etc.) and communicate through a common language, so it may appear that there are no barriers to mission. However, in reality, the barriers to Gospel transmission differ greatly depending on each group's language, culture, history, and identity.

Regarding this, Han Chul-ho (2016) explains:

"Mission exists because of the social nature of cultural differences among people. The Gospel can only be freely transmitted within the same culture. Therefore, in order to deliver the Gospel across cultures, one must inevitably cross-cultural barriers. The Gospel is like throwing stones into multiple small ponds. The ripples in one pond have no effect on another. To create ripples in a different pond, one must throw another stone directly into that pond. This is what mission is—and to create ripples in

every cultural group, missionaries must enter each people group and approach them with distinct strategies and methods."

The unique history, legends, and major events that each ethnic group possesses deeply influence the thoughts and actions of its members. Even when faced with the same event, different peoples respond in entirely different ways. This is the fundamental reason why the unit of mission changed from the nation to the people group.

1-2. Nations in the Bible and Mission History — Why "People Groups"? (2)

The Bible is the book of God's history, and that history progresses toward the fulfillment of God's will.The Bible clearly reveals the direction of this process.

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*(Genesis 12:1–3)*

God called Abraham and promised that all nations would be blessed through him. The blessing that began with the father of faith was declared to flow to all people groups.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." *(Matthew 28:18–20)*

Through the Great Commission, the Lord commanded His disciples to make disciples of all nations. Once again, He made clear that the Gospel would spread to every people group through the disciples. An interesting point is that it is translated as "all nations" in English. In 17th-century English, the term *nation* was closer in meaning to *ethnic group* or *people* rather than *state*. Thus, the translators intentionally chose *nation* to refer to a people group, not a modern nation-state.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of

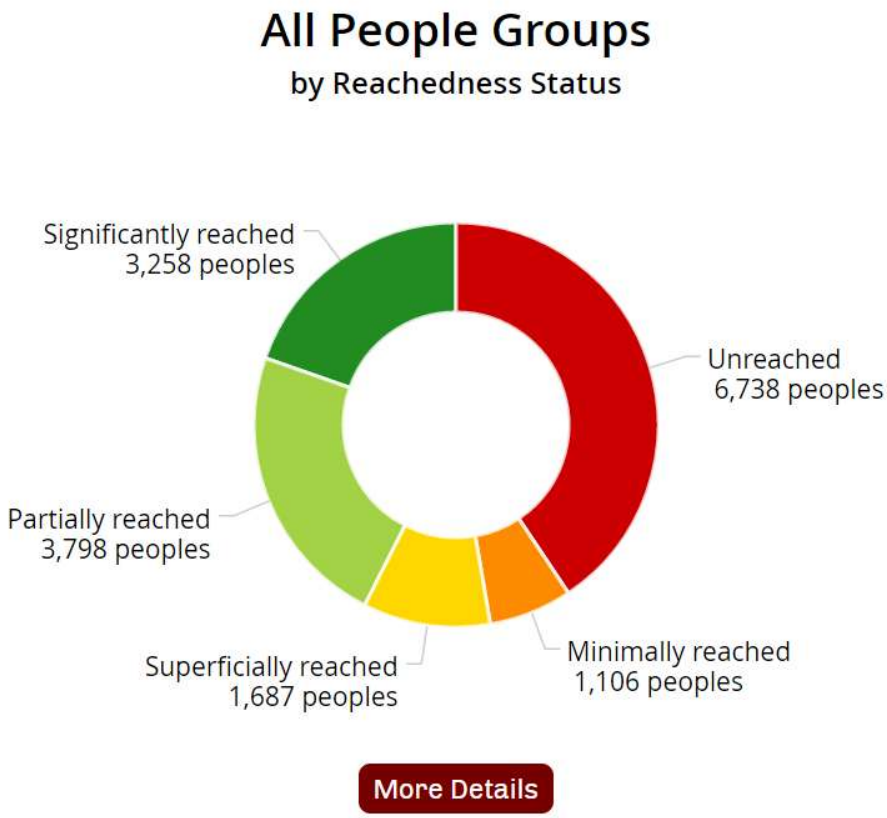
them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them….Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,…people from Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome,…Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"(Acts 2:1–11)

The event of Pentecost vividly illustrates this principle. When Jews scattered across many regions and nations gathered in Jerusalem to observe Passover and the Feast of Weeks, they each heard the Gospel in their own native languages. This scene symbolically demonstrates the principle that the Gospel is communicated within the language and culture of each people.

In this way, the Bible consistently testifies that God's redemptive history moves toward the nations. God's work is accomplished not through nations (as states), but through peoples. The history of the Jewish people itself confirms this. After the Jewish–Roman War of A.D. 70, the Jews were scattered throughout the world and lived for 2,000 years without a state, yet preserved their ethnic identity through language, culture, and religion. Finally, in 1948, on the basis of that ethnic identity, the State of Israel was reborn. This demonstrates that, in the history of the Gospel, the people group is a more essential unit than the nation-state.

This shift is also clear in mission history. The 1974 Lausanne Congress marked a decisive turning point, redirecting the focus of mission targets from nation-states to ethnic groups. Furthermore, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, numerous hidden ethnic groups within it were revealed, and mission work toward each began. Previously, all had been perceived as one collective "Soviet" people, with Moscow and other major cities as the centers of mission. However, after the dissolution of the Union, what emerged before the Church were many distinct ethnic peoples. While politically, diplomatically, and economically the event was called a "collapse," from the perspective of mission, it was an event in which God revealed the peoples that had been hidden.

1-3. The Current Status of Mission to Unreached People Groups

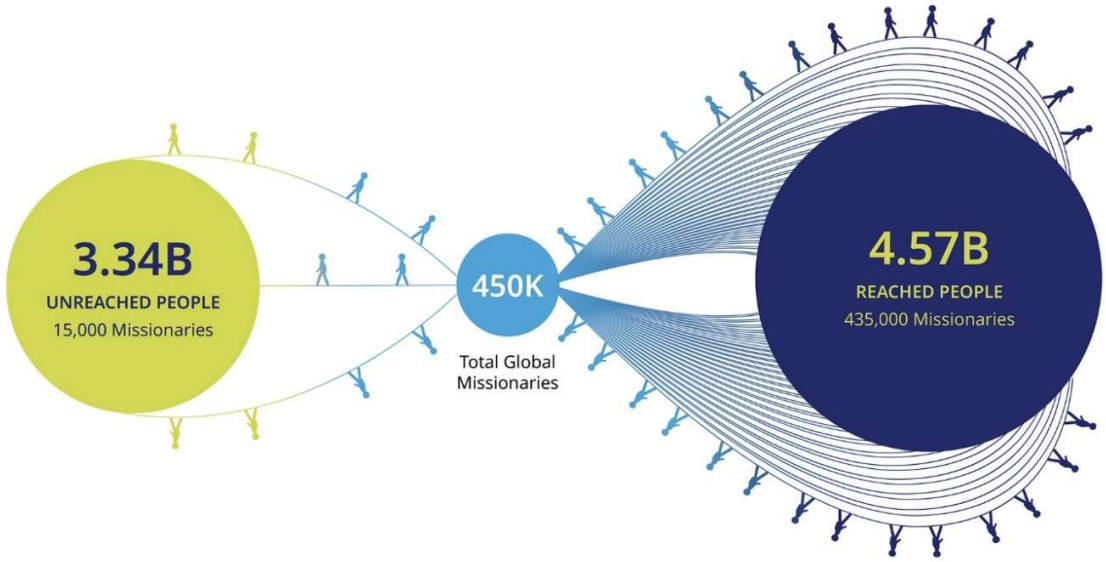


JOSHUA PROJECT

The International Mission Board (IMB) defines an Unreached People Group (UPG) as "a group in which evangelical Christians comprise less than 2% of the population. "The Joshua Project goes a step further, defining it as "a people group that, even if there are believers within it, does not have sufficient numbers and resources to evangelize its own people."

Since the Lausanne Congress, the global Church has discovered the ethnic groups hidden within nations and begun sending missionaries to them. However, when we look at the actual situation, there is still a long way to go.

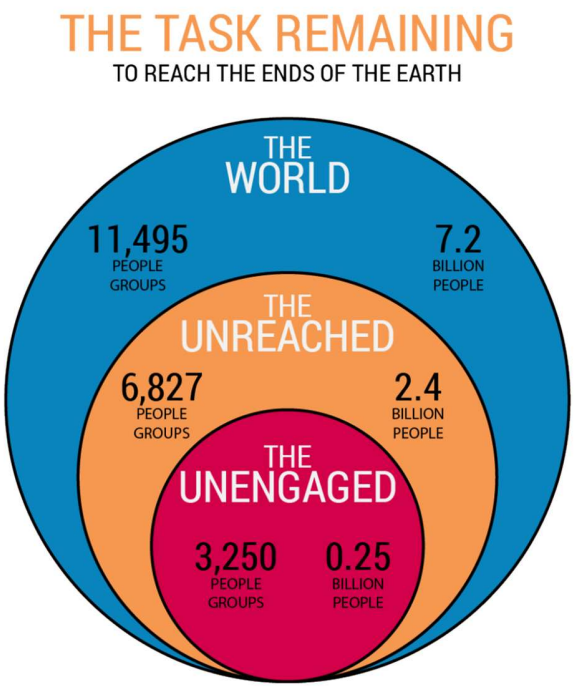
Currently, the number of foreign missionaries in the world is estimated at about 450,000, but among them, only about 15,000 are serving among Unreached People Groups—a mere 3.3% of the total. Half a century after the Lausanne Congress, the proportion of mission to UPGs remains low.



Movements such as Lausanne and related studies have consistently emphasized the need to focus on Unreached People Groups. Yet in actual resource allocation, 97% of missionaries serve in areas where churches already exist, and only 3% are sent to unreached regions. Even in mission finances, less than 1% of global mission funds are directed toward work among Unreached People Groups.

2. What Are Unengaged Unreached People Groups?

2-1. The Concept of Unengaged Unreached People Groups



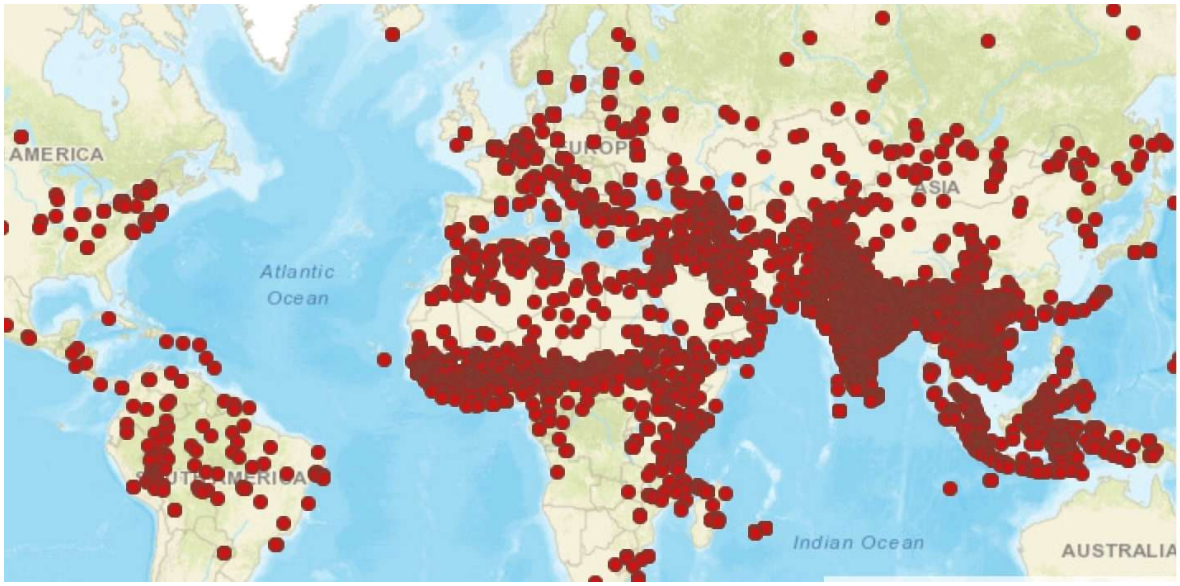
At present, approximately 17,400 people groups (some estimates: about 11,500 groups) are classified worldwide, and among them about 7,000 groups (42%) are Unreached People Groups (UPG) with almost no access to the Gospel. Of these, about 3,000 groups (42% of UPGs), that is, approximately 290 million people, are classified as Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPG) for whom no missionary approach has yet been made. Strategically, they are concentrated mainly in the 10/40 Window.

There are slight differences by organization in the definitions, but they are in the same vein.

- IMB defines UUPGs as "people groups among whom there is no known church-planting strategy."
- The Joshua Project defines them as "unreached people groups with no known believers and no church-planting strategy."

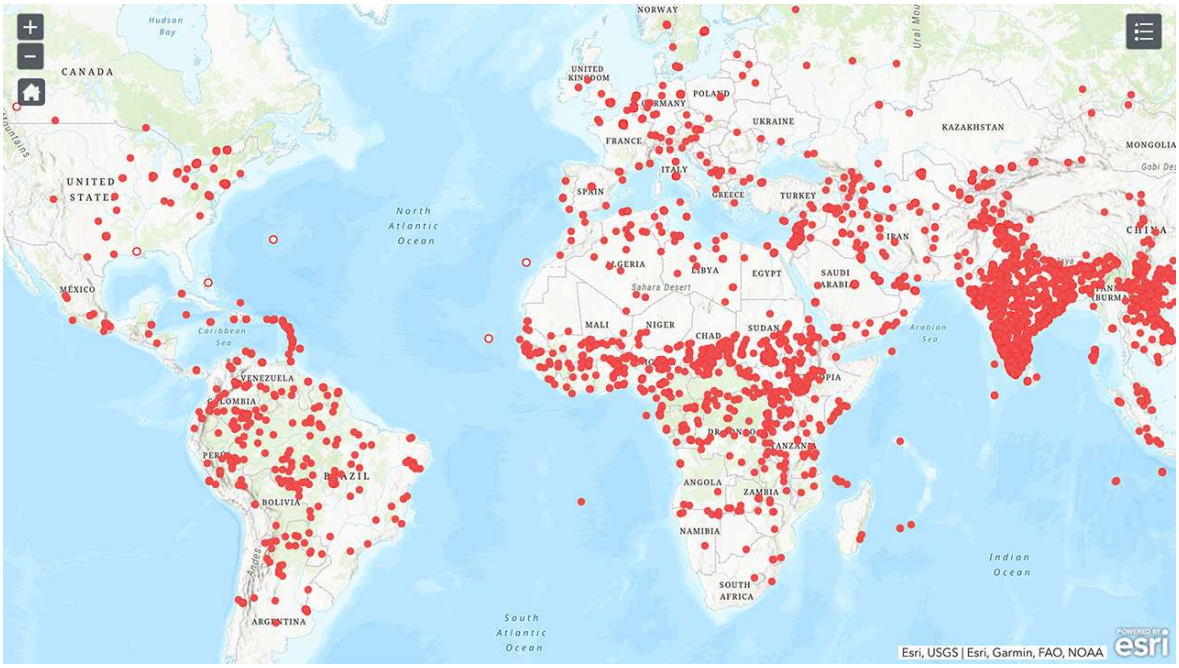
- Finishing the Task (international network) defines them as "groups within the unreached among whom no one has engaged to the present."

2-2. UUPGs (together) within UPGs



Distribution of Unengaged People Groups (Pray 1040)

Although criteria vary somewhat by research body, the distribution largely coincides. According to a survey by SEMIYEON (세미연), the regions with large numbers and populations of UUPGs are, in order, India, Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. This shows that most UUPGs in fact reside within the borders of existing states.



Distribution of Unengaged People Groups (IMB)

Some of them live in mountainous remote areas, cut off from state systems; however, a considerable number live in cities within the state together with majority peoples. In other words, "UUPG" does not necessarily mean only isolated tribes in far-off regions.

2-3. Changes in the Mission Field and Mission to UUPGs

Today, technological development is rapidly binding the world into one. With the development of transportation and logistics, movement has become freer, and a virtual space centered on the Internet connects the whole world in real time. This network is gradually breaking down the spatial and psychological isolation of groups.

This applies directly to the situation of people. UUPGs generally exist as minorities within a state, living under the same national systems of judiciary, education, taxation, labor, conscription, media, arts, and sports. Underdeveloped regions are gradually being developed, road networks are being expanded, and urbanization is accelerating. As the use of the official language expands through education and media, traditional ethnic characteristics seem to be increasingly diluted. To some extent this is so.

Most important of all is the fact that the Bible and Gospel materials (booklets, videos, audio files, etc.) have already been translated into the language of the majority people (the UPG within the state). Moreover, missionaries are serving among the majority and churches are being planted.

At this point we are confronted with an important question: "If mission to UPGs is already underway, is a separate missional approach to the UUPGs who live together within them truly necessary?"

3. Field Application of Mission to Unengaged Unreached People Groups

3-1. Direction and Strategy of Field Missionaries

The Bible clearly states that the target to which the Gospel must be testified is "all nations. "The Lord commanded, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, our ministry moves toward the Unreached People Groups (UPG) and the Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPG).

At the same time, the Lord also presented a principle for the strategy of ministry. The saying "one must first bind the strong man" (Matthew 12:29) is not only a principle of spiritual warfare but also a practical wisdom that increases the efficiency of ministry. Accordingly, many missionaries have carried out ministry centered on strategic base areas and gateway cities.

Ultimately, direct attempts at mission toward UUPGs are important. However, at the same time, it is also essential, from a strategic standpoint, to conduct ministry centered on base cities. In other words, the direction of the Gospel is "the people," and the strategy for proclaiming the Gospel can be explained by the two axes of "base and gateway cities."

3-2. Practical Mission among UUPGs: Case Studies of Ministry to Diverse Peoples within One Nation

Representative cases where various ethnic groups coexist within a single country can be seen in Iran and Pakistan. About 70 Unreached People Groups live in Iran. Missionaries who have entered the field have ministered not to one ethnic group but with the concept of embracing "the entire Iran. "According to an Iranian missionary (M), ministry has thus far been carried out mainly around gateway

cities, where both UPGs have settled and UUPGs also visit, so both groups can be served simultaneously. There is also an expectation that when the majority people (UPG) become evangelized, they can in turn share the Gospel with the UUPG. Therefore, ministry centered on gateway cities must continue.

However, some UUPGs are located far away from gateway cities and have almost no opportunity to encounter the Gospel. Also, it will take a considerable amount of time before UPGs can evangelize the UUPGs. As a result, UUPGs inevitably remain in a blind spot of the Gospel.

Therefore, mission to UUPGs should be approached as a concept complementary to existing UPG ministry. For example, the Pamir region of Tajikistan is a remote area that takes a full day by car from a base city. Access by short-term teams is difficult, and neither local workers nor majority of people are ministering there. Such places require a separate UUPG team to enter directly.

In terms of ministry roles, short-term teams mainly preach the Gospel, while long-term and mid-term missionaries focus on evangelism and church planting. In this process, team ministry is essential. Therefore, it is desirable for long- and mid-term missionaries to base their ministry in base cities (UPG areas). However, if the UUPG is large in scale and there are coworkers, entry into the field may be possible.

In Pakistan, about 490 Unreached People Groups reside. Mission there is carried out under one umbrella called the "Pakistan Team," ministering to various minority peoples. Each ethnic group is specifically targeted, and missionaries enter directly into their dwelling regions, while cooperation and unity are maintained at the national level.

Missionary H in Pakistan explained the background and reasons why UUPGs remain un-evangelized compared with UPGs. According to him, UUPGs have far higher entry barriers than UPGs. The representative factors include geographical isolation—that is limitations of accessibility due to poor transportation—and political reasons. For ethnic groups that are in conflict or confrontation with the central government, visits and long-term stays by foreigners are realistically difficult, so missionary activity inevitably faces serious restrictions.

Considering these peculiarities, H explained that mission to UUPGs generally employs a strategy of first establishing a missionary base in UPG regions and then entering UUPGs using that platform. An interesting point is that in this process, awareness and need for UPGs become more widely

known. Consequently, mission to UPGs and to UUPGs can develop not as separate ministries but as complementary works that create synergy.

The actual ministry method in Pakistan is also noteworthy. Each unit in charge of church planting worked as a team by ethnic group within Pakistan. The situation and prayer requests of the people each team served were regularly shared with other teams, enabling continuous intercession and exchange of information and opinions beyond ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, in regularly held camps, opportunities were given to serve the souls of different peoples together. From the perspective of local believers as well, when various ethnic groups gathered in one place to worship and fellowship, they experienced a special grace and unity. Thus, within one nation, as one overall team embracing many ethnicities, this church-planting network demonstrated clear synergy and expansiveness.

3-3. Example of Operating a Short-Term Team for UUPG Mission

Let us look at the case of a youth short-term team this summer targeting the Zaza people in country The Zaza are classified as a branch of the K people, and therefore a long-term missionary working among the K people led the Zaza short-term team. The team entered a base city of the K people and stayed there for several days, learning the local common language and adapting to the culture. Then, passing through a city where the K and Zaza peoples live together, they moved on to the homeland of the Zaza people. There, they stayed for several days, met people, visited museums to understand their ethnicity, culture, and religion, and afterward met young people through street evangelism and performances. After completing their ministry, they returned to the K people's base city.

The Zaza people live within the national system of country T, sharing culture with the K people. Therefore, the operation of the short-term team was also carried out on the foundation of the K people's ministry. Through this experience, the short-term team developed a strong heart toward the Zaza and began to think about mobilization for Zaza mission even before their ministry ended. In the future, Zaza mission will continue in cooperation with the K people's ministry. The K missionary team plans to recognize the Zaza as a separate mission target group and to serve them. Missionaries to the Zaza will go out as part of the K missionary team, ministering from the K people's base city and conducting visiting ministry and other outreach. If an independent long-term team is established in the future, it could be sent to the Zaza's base city.

3-4. Mobilizing for Mission to UUPGs

We are "those dedicated to the nations," and we divide the nations to mobilize mission resources. Ralph D. Winter said,

"Mission mobilization is more important than the activities of local missionaries. It is better to wake up a hundred sleeping firemen than to jump into a big fire and pour water with a bucket."(Larry Reesor, 2015)

In fact, Mission Mobilizing Ministry has been essential for the development of the global Christian movement and has played a unique role throughout mission history (Ralph D. Winter, 2010: 494).

Then, what does "mobilization" toward the UUPGs mean for missionaries who are already serving among UPGs? If short-term teams come, and young people embrace these peoples and dedicate themselves as long- or mid-term missionaries, how can missionaries among UPGs assist them? How should we serve the UUPGs living together within the UPGs?

Mission to UUPGs begins with acknowledging their unique circumstances and characteristics. At the same time, they live together within the same national system as the majority people. Therefore, strategically, it is desirable to establish a ministry base in gateway cities where the majority live, and to carry out UUPG mission on that foundation. Depending on the characteristics and size of each UUPG, it is not necessary for all to have separate mission teams sent only for them. It would be ideal for UPG teams to engage in UUPG mission, and for UUPG missionaries to join existing UPG mission teams, cooperating and serving together.

4. Implications and Prospects That Unengaged Unreached People Groups Give to Field Ministry

4-1. The Attitude of the Worker Toward Ethnic Groups

It is God who determined the boundaries of the nations. God speaks and works through the unit of the nation. Therefore, the worker must view ministry from the perspective of the nations. Caution is needed so that UUPGs are not approached merely as subordinate groups according to the perspective of the majority people within a country or the strategic needs of mission. Careful sensitivity

is required toward the group that becomes the target of mission—both the people group and the individuals within it.

The Lord left His heavenly throne and came into the world in the form of a human being. The Son of God, who created heaven and earth, came to find human beings living in one corner of the vast universe. And He proclaimed the Gospel not in the language of heaven or of angels, but in human language. By becoming a powerless human being in the face of sin, He accomplished salvation. In the Moravian mission movement, there were missionaries who sold themselves into slavery to evangelize slaves. They went to the islands where slaves lived, having taken on the identity of a slave, to do mission there. This teaches us much about our approach and attitude toward Unreached and Unengaged People Groups. Before considering the size of the people group or the efficiency of ministry, we must think from the perspective of the people and enter into them.

4-2. Expansion of Ministry — Evangelism toward Unreached Classes and Generations

The perspective and missional approach toward UUPGs can provide insight for ministry toward specific classes and generations in society who are alienated from the Gospel. This is because it offers an important clue as to how to approach groups that share culture and identity and have their own language of self-expression.

For example, refugees, migrant workers, or nomadic groups who do not settle in a particular region can fall into this category. In addition, the evangelization rate among Korean youth is only about 4%, and thus a missional approach toward such specific generations can also be applied. Even within the same country, using the same language, the approach and strategy for Gospel access must differ due to cultural differences—this can serve as a useful reference.

At the same time, there are groups that share certain ideologies such as communism or veganism. These people, transcending regional boundaries, possess globally similar patterns of thought, behavior, and attitude. They, too, can be recognized as unengaged groups. The approach toward them can also serve as a meaningful reference.

5. Conclusion

The unit of mission is not the "nation-state" but the "people group. "Mission to Unengaged Unreached People Groups (UUPG) must be understood as an extension of mission to Unreached People Groups (UPG).The barriers that resist the Gospel differ for each people group; therefore, even when they live within the same country, mission must be approached by each people group. This will naturally also be applied to ministry toward unengaged classes and generations.

The fact that UUPGs are drawing attention in missional discourse is evidence that the final hidden peoples within the UPGs are now being revealed. Mission to UUPGs is like discovering a hidden treasure buried in a field. The Gospel must be testified not to "every individual," but to "every people group, "and the Lord is now showing us the last remaining peoples before us. Standing before the Lord who said that the end will come when the Gospel has been preached to all nations, we must cry out "Maranatha" and go forth to the final remaining peoples.

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Q&A Section

Question 1.

I fully agree with the validity of approaching the mission at the ethnic-unit level, which has often been neglected in favor of state-level approaches.

However, I have doubts as to whether the modern concept of "nation" formed during the process of nation-state building is truly the same as the biblical concept of "nations."

As Eric Hobsbawm argued that "the idea of the nation is a construct produced out of political necessity during the formation of modern states," in reality, many modern national identities extend beyond purely genealogical or blood-based relations.

For example, the term *Turkish* refers to a politically constructed nationality, distinct from the broader ethnolinguistic group *Turkic*.

Furthermore, the Turkic and Arab peoples among whom we primarily minister are divided across multiple countries. In this sense, one could argue that the state might actually exist *within* the broader concept of ethnicity, rather than the other way around.

While there are countries where an approach centered on Unreached and Unengaged People Groups (UUPGs) is essential, there may also be those where it is not.

Therefore, might it be difficult to assert that "the mission unit must be the ethnic group, not the nation-state" as an absolute principle?

For peoples such as the Turkic or Arab groups that span several nations, it seems that the UPG/UUPG framework does not fully capture their missiological reality.

Although I agree that an ethnic approach in mission is important, such an approach — as your paper notes — was developed mainly in the pluralistic religious contexts of India and Indonesia.

In contrast, within regions dominated by a strong monotheistic faith such as Islam, this approach can feel somewhat incongruent.

For instance, while Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, it is not generally viewed as the *center* of the global Islamic world.

Despite many debates, I think the "Back to Jerusalem" movement provided a valuable strategy in that it compensated for the shortcomings of ethnic-based approaches by addressing the strongholds of Islam.

While I find the complementarity between UPG and UUPG approaches useful, I would like to emphasize that, in the field, there remain other significant challenges that these frameworks alone do not fully explain.

Answer 1.

As you noted, during the formation of modern nation-states, the concept of "nation" became redefined through its entanglement with politics, and nationalism must likewise be understood in this context.
As in your example, *Turkish* and *Turkic* indeed refer to different ethnolinguistic groups — differing in culture, history, and collective consciousness.
Therefore, I believe this reinforces the need for missionary focus at the *subnational* or *ethnic-group* level.
As explained in the paper, an ethnic group is defined by shared language, culture, and identity.
Each group faces distinct barriers to receiving the Gospel due to its own linguistic and cultural particularities; thus, mission approaches must be tailored accordingly.

In Turkey's case, the modern nation defined all residents who spoke Turkish as "Turks."
However, there are about seventy ethnic groups living within Turkey.
Although they use the Turkish language, they are distinct peoples with their own languages, cultures, and identities.
Hence, mission cannot be approached at the national level alone.
As you mentioned, under each dominant ethnic group there exist multiple states, and within each state reside various sub-ethnic communities.

The concept of "nation" during Abraham's era (4,000 years ago) or the early Church (2,000 years ago) would have been quite different from today's.
Both UPG and UUPG frameworks classify peoples based on ethnicity, yet not purely on genealogical grounds — they subdivide peoples more precisely from a *missiological* perspective.

For example, in Dagestan, there exists the Nogai people, who speak a Turkic language.
However, it would be difficult to minister to them in the same way as to the Turks of Anatolia, even though they are ethnolinguistically related.
Such distinctions are crucial for both Dagestani and Turkic field missionaries.

According to the Joshua Project, Arabs within Turkey are divided into twelve subgroups based on their country of origin.
While these may be viewed collectively as one larger group for mission purposes, acknowledging their internal distinctions remains important.
Even within Islam, there are many sects and subgroups, making it difficult to regard all Muslims as a single religious category.

The missionary Donald McGavran once observed, while ministering in an Indian village, that he could not establish a single church due to caste divisions.
He realized that evangelization must occur *within* each social group, leading to conversions that remain inside that group.
This experience led to the shift from nation-based to people-based mission approaches.

This presentation therefore aims, alongside specific UUPG ministry practices, to encourage a renewed understanding of how we view "peoples" — the actual target groups of mission.

Question 2.

Thank you for your article, which offers much to ponder for those engaged in field ministry.
Through such fundamental questions, we are reminded to humbly seek the Lord's will in our generation and to align our work with His ways.
I would like to connect my question to this reflection.

Since the Second Lausanne Congress, there seem to have been several major missiological currents — roughly four, as I understand them:

1. The first stream extends from the Second Lausanne Congress through the Heidelberg, Pattaya, Manila, Cape Town, and Seoul congresses.
   This flow originated from the dual concerns of John Stott's *social engagement* and Billy Graham's *evangelistic proclamation*, and eventually led to Lesslie Newbigin's idea of the *missional church* and *holistic mission.*
   The concept of the missional church sought to bridge, rather than separate, Ralph Winter's earlier distinction between parachurch organizations and local churches.
   Van Engen's understanding of the missional church emphasized the church as both healer and

liberator, extending the missionary mandate to every sphere of society, generation, and environment.

The phrase "Everything is mission, nothing is mission," echoing Stephen Neill's warning, pointed out that calling *everything* "mission" risks diluting the true meaning of mission itself.

Notably, the original focus on "unreached peoples" that was emphasized in early Lausanne discussions gradually weakened over time, becoming less central in current evangelical mission discourse.

Your paper's section 4-2, *Expansion of Mission — Evangelization of Unreached Classes and Generations*, seems to reflect this trajectory.

2. The second stream continued the initial focus on unreached peoples championed by Ralph Winter at Lausanne, advanced through initiatives like the Joshua Project and Frontier Ventures (formerly the U.S. Center for World Mission).

   This movement emphasized the importance of Unreached People Groups (UPGs), Unreached and Unengaged People Groups (UUPGs), and the *Finishing the Task* movement (FTT).

   As it relied heavily on statistical data, attention naturally centered on regions such as India and Pakistan.

   After 9/11, when Western missionaries found it increasingly difficult to operate in the Middle East and North Africa, focus shifted toward South and Southeast Asia.

3. The third stream emerged after 9/11, recognizing shifts in leadership between Western and non-Western churches, with the Korean church playing a key role.

   It accepted Lausanne's distinction between *modalities* (local churches) and *sodalities* (mission agencies), emphasizing parachurch-led mission leadership.

   It reinterpreted Islam not merely as a region of low evangelization but as an organized resistance movement to the Gospel — framing mission within a *global spiritual warfare* context.

   As Western missionaries withdrew post-9/11, non-Western churches, particularly in Korea, responded to this historical call.

   Movements of professional lay missionaries, short-term strategic teams, and student missionaries emerged, fueling rapid global evangelization and revival movements.

   This stream often viewed eschatological phenomena such as the rise of the Antichrist through the lens of a "global fellowship of the remnant."

4. The fourth stream comprises traditional Western mission organizations (e.g., OM, IMB, Interserve) with over a century of overseas experience prior to Lausanne.
   They maintained a focus on church planting, indigenous leadership development, and the steady recruitment, training, and sending of missionaries.

Other movements such as the WCC's "Gospel of Life" also exist, but within evangelical circles, these four streams seem most prominent.

Given this historical context, what significance does UUPG ministry hold today for field missionaries already serving among UPGs?

Answer 2.

Thank you for your thorough summary of modern mission history.

Mission, at its core, is *cross-cultural evangelism* — entering another culture to proclaim the Gospel.
Traditionally, "cross-cultural" referred to work across national boundaries, but later expanded to include other ethnicities.
Thus, mission was conventionally defined as the sending of missionaries to another nation or people — crossing cultural boundaries.
However, as societies developed and became more diversified, the concept of cross-culturality broadened to include *subcultural groups within a nation or ethnicity* (e.g., generations, classes).
Accordingly, evangelistic work targeting such groups has increasingly come to be recognized as part of "mission."

After the First Lausanne Congress, the importance of UPG-focused mission rose to prominence, and since 9/11, non-Western churches have taken greater leadership.
Ultimately, the goal of mission remains *indigenous church planting.*

Within this historical flow, UPG missionaries should renew their awareness of UUPGs within their own regions and seek ways to engage them.
This is not something entirely new — when we minister to one ethnic group, we inevitably meet people of diverse backgrounds whose points of contact with the Gospel vary.
Thus, viewing and engaging UUPGs alongside UPG ministry is a helpful approach, provided that these groups have sufficient social identity and cohesion.

In this light, it is also beneficial to consider various social strata within nations and ethnic groups.
Furthermore, we now witness globally shared ideologies and movements — such as communism, veganism, or feminism — that transcend geographic boundaries.
These can be approached as *social peoples* or *transnational missional categories* in their own right.

Question 3.

Ralph Winter (2002) classified people groups into four categories:

1. Cultural Blocs
2. Ethnolinguistic Peoples
3. Unimax Peoples
4. Sociopeoples

Among these, the concept of the *Unimax People* is particularly noteworthy.
It refers to the largest group within which the Gospel can spread without encountering significant social or cultural barriers.
Winter emphasized that the value of this approach lies not merely in recognizing such boundaries but in inspiring devoted Christians to reach *beyond* them — ensuring that smaller groups within larger ethnic blocs are not isolated from the Gospel.

Each approach, Winter noted, has distinct utility:
The *Cultural Bloc* framework is effective for surveying global mission progress;
the *Ethnolinguistic* framework aids in strategy formation and mobilization;
the *Unimax* approach best suits church-planting efforts;
and the *Sociopeople* concept is useful for small-group evangelism.

Would it therefore not be more appropriate to view missionary target units not only through the categories of "nation" or "ethnicity," but to apply different frameworks according to the purpose?
For example, the *cultural bloc* level when grasping the global mission overview, the *ethnolinguistic* level for strategic planning, and the *unimax* level for practical church planting.

Answer 3.

It seems we need a shared understanding of what we mean by *people groups.*
A people group can be defined as "a reasonably large group of individuals who perceive themselves as sharing a common affinity, bound together by shared language and culture — and, from a missiological perspective, the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church-planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance."

Generally, people groups are categorized as *ethnolinguistic* or *ethno-sociological.*
Winter proposed three main classifications:

1. Ethno-linguistic Peoples: groups sharing common ancestry, history, customs, and language — typically what we understand as "ethnic groups."
2. Sociopeoples: smaller social groups formed around common interests or functions (e.g., migrant workers, occupational classes) that can exist *within* ethnolinguistic peoples.
3. Unimax Peoples: groups of sufficient size and cohesion for a church-planting movement to occur, within which no significant barriers hinder Gospel transmission.

The *unimax* concept helps identify internal boundaries — such as cultural prejudices — that may impede evangelism even within one ethnolinguistic group.
Thus, it prevents smaller, hidden communities from remaining "unseen" in missionary strategy.

Language often expresses one's cultural identity, but to reach all peoples, we must also consider other dividing factors — religion, caste, education, political ideology, clan hostility, customs, and behaviors — which can form powerful sociocultural barriers within a unimax group.
These subtle yet potent boundaries may appear invisible to outsiders.
Therefore, adopting a *unimax* perspective means that the first step toward evangelism — identifying these resistant barriers — has already been taken.

In this sense, "unreached peoples" are not limited to ethnic or linguistic categories; they can include *social peoples* such as migrant worker communities or ideological movements.
The key question is: "Are there additional barriers that resist the Gospel?"

According to this criterion, diasporic peoples — such as Armenians in Armenia versus Armenians in Turkey — may be treated as distinct groups.

Similarly, in India, caste divisions justify separate classification even among fellow Indians.
For nomadic tribal cultures like the Kurds, large clan-based distinctions may also apply.
Furthermore, ideological communities — such as vegetarians or other global lifestyle-based movements — might also constitute "peoples" in a sociomissional sense.

Ultimately, the value of the unreached-people concept lies in helping us identify those *hidden behind new barriers to the Gospel* within nations, regions, and ethnicities, and enabling missional penetration into these groups.

Question 4. (In Response to Answer 3)

The threefold typology proposed by Ralph Winter should perhaps be viewed not as a universally accepted sociological classification but as a *strategic missiological framework.*
Therefore, it may have limitations if applied as a general definition of "ethnic group."
Particularly, categorizing migrant workers or specific social classes as "peoples" diverges from conventional anthropological definitions of *ethnic group.*
Overextending this concept risks confusion when interpreting biblical prophecies concerning "the nations."

This does not mean such social or class groups should be ignored in mission strategy.
On the contrary, from a missiological viewpoint, it is vital to recognize that not only language and bloodline but also social class, migration, and cultural hostility can serve as barriers to the Gospel.
The issue, then, is not whether to acknowledge such groups, but how to describe them.
When necessary to subdivide target groups for strategic reasons, it may be better to use distinct terms — such as *sub-groups* or *socio-groups* — rather than redefining them wholesale as "ethnic groups."

Thus, missionary targets need not be limited exclusively to *ethne* (nations).
As Winter suggested, engaging smaller subgroups can offer strategic advantages.
Yet instead of forcing socially unfamiliar definitions, it seems more appropriate to preserve the original meaning of *ethnos* while employing supplementary categories as needed.

Question 5.

Ralph Winter's concept of the Unreached People Group (UPG) emerged roughly fifty years ago.
At that time, he used a quantitative threshold of 2% evangelization, but this was based less on empirical data and more on the experiential observation of field missionaries — essentially, "This is what we hear on the ground."
However, over the past half-century, humanity's political, social, cultural, and technological environment has changed dramatically.
Hence, the UPG concept should now be revisited and refined.

Its core idea is the existence (or absence) of a self-sustaining indigenous church without outside missionary assistance.
Yet relying solely on evangelization percentages has its limits.
Low evangelization rates do not automatically mean that indigenous churches cannot grow; nor does a high percentage guarantee self-sufficiency.
A group with over 5% believers may still lack autonomous churches due to political, social, or economic factors, while another group with only 1% Christians may experience self-propagating revival.
Since many variables influence church growth, evangelization rate is merely one factor.

Therefore, in contemporary mission strategy, we should respect the legacy of the UPG framework while supplementing its limitations and developing new strategic concepts more suitable for today's context.

Answer 5.

Your question opens the door for important new discussion.
When we refer to unreached peoples, the *quantitative* standard has been evangelization rate — the proportion of Christians within the population.
But there is also a *qualitative* dimension: the *self-sufficiency* of local churches — their capacity to evangelize others.

Does a higher number of believers necessarily correlate with greater church self-reliance?
Looking at the churches in India and Pakistan, we find that despite large numbers of believers, self-sufficiency remains relatively weak.
Hence, clearer criteria for indigenous self-reliance are needed.

I believe the "Three-Self" principles pursued by the early Korean church — self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating — provide an excellent framework.

Thus, we must clarify whether "unreached peoples" should be defined as groups *without access to the Gospel* or as those *without self-sustaining indigenous churches.*
The direction of external missionary work will depend greatly on how this distinction is understood.

Living Together— How did various peoples with different languages come to live together in Dagestan?

Young-rae Cho (Head of the Russian Ethnic Minority Studies Association)

According to a Caucasian legend, when an angel of heaven was distributing languages to different peoples, the bag of tongues tore while crossing the rugged Caucasus Mountains, scattering many languages and peoples across the North Caucasus.

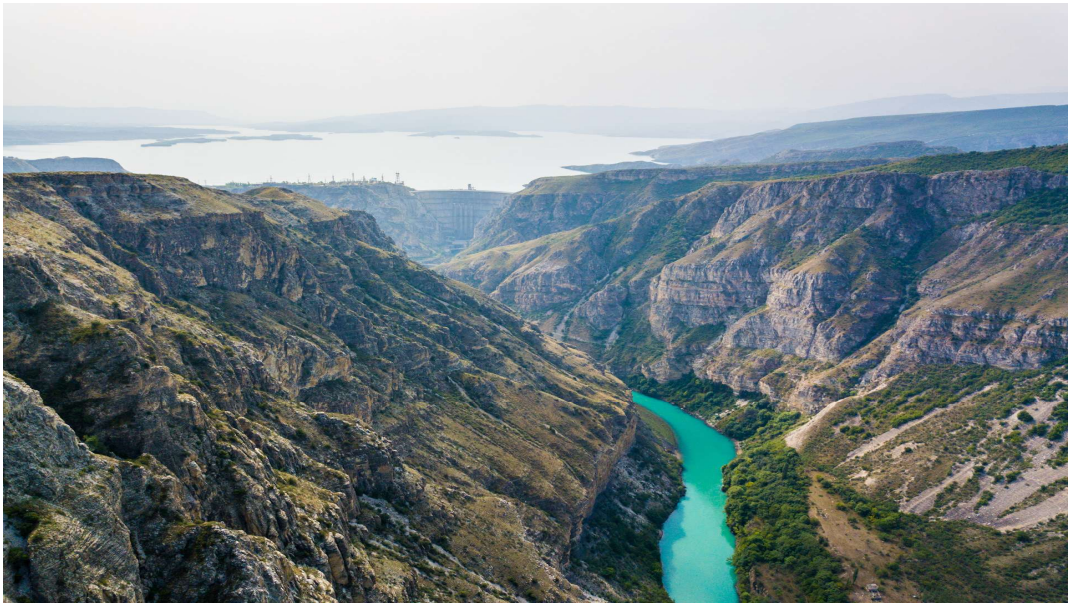
Within the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation — encompassing the republics of Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan — more than a hundred ethnic groups live side by side.

Among them, Dagestan is known to be the most ethnically and linguistically diverse. The name "Dagestan," derived from Turkic, means "land of mountains." It is a land of blue seas and steep peaks, strict customs and warm hospitality, fierce patriotism and generosity, passion and calmness coexisting together. More than sixty ethnic groups — including the Avar, Dargin, Kumyk, Lezgin, Lak, and Nogai — call this place home.

Along the Caucasus Mountains overlooking the Caspian Sea stretches a narrow coastal plain, and for thousands of years, the Silk Road and the steppe routes of Eurasia intersected here. Countless nomadic peoples traversed these routes, spreading throughout southern Caucasus and western Asia (Gamkrelidze & Ivanov, 1990).

This study aims to examine how Dagestan came to possess such linguistic and ethnic diversity — through geographical and geopolitical factors, as well as the imperial policies of its ruling powers.

From a geographical perspective, Dagestan's terrain can be divided into three distinct zones. The southwestern highlands form part of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, featuring snow-capped peaks exceeding 4,000 meters (e.g., Mount Bazardüzü, 4,466 m) and deep gorges. The central inland plateau is characterized by intermountain basins and terraced farmlands, where historically significant settlements were established. The eastern coastal plain runs narrowly along the Caspian Sea, containing the capital city, Makhachkala, and most other urban centers.



Dagestan's rugged and complex mountain terrain played a decisive role in creating one of the world's highest levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity (Polinsky, 2021). Analyzing how this geography influenced diversity reveals that the "fortified environment" created by nature was a key factor. The region exhibits great variation in altitude — about 40% of its land area is mountainous, ranging from 0 m at the Caspian coast to 4,466 m at Mount Bazardüzü. Deep, steep valleys cut through the mountains, forming U- or V-shaped gorges, with isolated plateaus and basins between them. In winter, heavy snow blocked passage; in summer, torrential streams made travel between valleys nearly impossible. Such natural barriers severely limited interregional access, profoundly shaping Dagestan's ethnic and linguistic landscape.

First, the terrain caused separation and isolation among peoples. The deep gorges and high ridges acted as natural walls dividing valleys and basins. Groups that once shared a common origin settled in different valleys and, over centuries, developed distinct languages and cultures. Linguistic changes are fixed quickly within small, isolated populations, while restricted contact with outsiders fostered unique linguistic traits. Moreover, adaptation to each valley's altitude, climate, and resources led to the development of distinct vocabularies related to agriculture, herding, and crafts — further reinforcing differentiation.

Second, it fostered defense and autonomy. The mountains served as natural fortresses that made invasion by foreign powers — Roman, Persian, Arab, Mongol, or Russian — extremely difficult. Even if one valley were conquered, the next would remain under a different power, preventing complete domination. Thus, centralized rule was virtually impossible, and local communities retained autonomy and independence.

Third, it enabled vertical ecological zones and economic interdependence.Because climate and resources vary sharply with elevation, seasonal vertical migration developed: highlands as summer pastures, mid-altitudes for farming, and lowlands for winter grazing or orchards.This led to limited inter-valley exchanges — trade in wool, grain, and salt — forming networks of mutual dependency and coexistence that respected difference.

Through these natural and social mechanisms, a small territory (roughly half the size of South Korea) came to host over 30 native languages and numerous ethnic groups.Even within the same linguistic family (Northeast Caucasian), dialects in adjacent valleys became mutually unintelligible, eventually forming separate languages.Culturally, each village preserved its own traditions, attire, and customary laws. As a result, local ethnic identities such as "Avar," "Dargin," or "Lezgin" remained stronger than a broader "Dagestani" identity.

Ultimately, Dagestan's geography produced a paradox:while natural barriers promoted fragmentation and isolation, they also compelled limited exchange and cooperation in the face of harsh conditions and external threats.Thus emerged a society that was "neither fully isolated nor fully assimilated" — maintaining difference while staying interconnected.This makes Dagestan a living example for anthropology and linguistics of how geographical isolation generates cultural diversity (Kuchukova & Bauaev, 2022).

Geopolitically, Dagestan has long been a crucial corridor across Eurasia. To the north lies the vast Pontic–Caspian steppe, serving as an invasion route for nomadic tribes. Empires such as the Scythians, Sarmatians, Huns, Khazars, and Mongols all advanced southward through it. To the south, powerful civilizations like Persia and Mesopotamia viewed the mountains as both frontier outposts and conduits of cultural influence. To the west, the Byzantine and later Ottoman empires brought religious and political competition between Christianity and Islam. To the east, the Caspian Sea provided a maritime route for trade and movement. Thus, Dagestan became a melting pot where nomadic and sedentary civilizations, Europe and Asia, empires and tribes, met and mingled. No single power ever fully controlled it — yet all sought to pass through or occupy it.

This geopolitical significance brought a history of continuous invasions and domination, deeply shaping Dagestan's social structure. Persian, Arab, Mongol, and Russian conquests are recurring themes in the historical studies of Dagestan (Magomedov, 1961). Russian academic research also regards Dagestan's ethnic diversity as a major topic (Terekhov, 1997).

Persian and Arab rule introduced Islam and Persian culture — Arabs influencing administration and script, Persians architecture and literature. Mongol invasions caused immense destruction but also connected Dagestan to the trade networks of their vast empire. Russian conquest, the most recent and enduring, established modern administrative boundaries and Russian as the lingua franca.

Yet, remarkably, none of these empires annihilated or fully assimilated Dagestan's native peoples.The constant inflow of outsiders was not purely destructive — it paradoxically fostered multicultural synthesis (Yakubova, 2023).Indigenous languages borrowed countless words from neighboring tongues while preserving their own grammatical systems — much like Dagestan's traditional clothing, woven from many colored threads into one harmonious pattern.

Dagestan, like a deep-rooted tree, remained unshaken by the storms of history.Its roots were firmly embedded in each valley, while its branches met the winds of foreign cultures, sprouting new leaves.The dozens of languages spoken today are not mere relics of the past but living evidence of resilience against the tides of geopolitics.

From the perspective of imperial policy, Soviet-era scholarship on Dagestan's languages displays a striking duality — the coexistence of systematic documentation and research on the one hand, and political control and standardization on the other.Their work went beyond academic inquiry; it was deeply intertwined with the Soviet Nationalities Policy (Jung, 2012).

Soviet linguists conducted the first systematic scientific investigations of Dagestan's languages. Researchers from Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) entered local communities and recorded, transcribed, and analyzed many previously unwritten languages and dialects. They produced detailed

descriptive grammars — phonology, morphology, and syntax lying the foundation for academic study (Gamzatov, 2000).

In the 1920s–30s, Latin-based scripts replaced Arabic for several Dagestani languages as part of literacy campaigns that dramatically raised literacy rates.

By the late 1930s, in line with Soviet-wide policy, all scripts were forcibly converted to Cyrillic — a move aimed at political control, but which ultimately provided standardized orthographies.

The first scientific dictionaries were compiled, and textbooks and readers in local languages appeared, briefly allowing native-language education. Even today, Dagestani primary and secondary schools include instruction in students' mother tongues. Institutions such as the Dagestan Scientific Center in Makhachkala established enduring foundations for local linguistic research.

This article has explored how, in the southwestern region of Russia — the "museum of languages" known as the North Caucasus — diverse peoples came to live together in Dagestan. The Bible says that God Himself named all nations. Even now, He waits for every people to return and worship Him. Yet most of Dagestan's roughly 30 linguistic groups remain unreached peoples — with evangelization rates of 0.01% or even 0%.

"In Dagestan, we speak in thirty languages but sing in thirty-three —and all our songs are about one mother: our homeland."— Rasul Gamzatov, *My Dagestan*

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (Revelation 7:9–10)

Thus, the people of Dagestan have learned to acknowledge difference while depending on one another. They sing different songs in each valley, but all share one theme — love for their homeland. Dozens of languages have become one heart. Though their eyes are now veiled by false Islam and they do not yet see Christ the Bridegroom, when the wind of the Holy Spirit begins to blow through every valley of Dagestan through the prayers and service of the global Church, that veil will be lifted and they will see Jesus, the Light of life. On that day, the name of the Lamb will resound in every language of Dagestan: **"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."**

Ethnic Groups and Languages of Dagestan *(Terekhov, 1997)*

Northeast Caucasian languages

Avar, Andi, Akhvakh, Bagulal, Botlikh, Godoberi, Karata, Tindi,Chamalal, Bezhta, Ginukh, Ghodzhib, Didoi, Khvarshin, Archin,Dargin, Kaitag, Kubachi, Lezgin, Agul, Rutul, Tsakhur,Tabasaran, Lak

Turkic languages

Kumyk, Nogai

Indo-European languages

Russian, Tat, Mountain Jewish

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Q&A Section

Question 1.

The geographical features of Dagestan are quite fascinating.
As a Korean, I naturally find myself comparing them to those of Korea.
In Korea, each region has its own dialect, and in some cases, these dialects are so distinct that people from other regions often have difficulty understanding them.
However, since we have public education in the standard language, communication within the country is rarely an issue.
Even in Jeju Island, where the dialect is considered the most difficult, younger generations educated in the national standard language can interpret for mainland Koreans, so there are no major communication barriers.

In Dagestan, as I understand it, Russian serves as the official language, and public education is primarily conducted in Russian, with native languages taught additionally.
If that is the case, can most people in Dagestan communicate with one another regardless of ethnicity?
Since linguistic research and education were institutionalized during the Soviet period, I assume that public education in Russian has been in place for decades.
If a common language allows all ethnic groups to communicate, wouldn't their native languages gradually diminish in use as society develops?
From a ministry standpoint, wouldn't proficiency in Russian alone be sufficient for communication with all ethnic groups, since learning thirty or more languages would be virtually impossible?

Answer 1.

Thank you for your thoughtful reading and question.

The peoples of Dagestan have been under Russian rule for more than 160 years.
Thus, most Dagestani ethnic groups can communicate in the common language, Russian.
Those who do not speak Russian are extremely few—typically elderly people who have spent their entire lives in remote mountain villages using only their native tongue.

People born in rural or mountainous regions generally receive their primary education locally and live in a community centered on their native language until adolescence.
However, when they reach college age, many move to cities for higher education (which is mostly tuition-free).
After graduation, a large number remain in urban areas instead of returning home.
There, they naturally intermarry with members of other ethnic groups and communicate with their children in Russian, the common language.
As a result, among urban-born and younger generations, it is increasingly common for individuals not to know their ancestral language.

Although the school curriculum includes classes on native languages, the quality of instruction is often poor.
In some cases, "Literary Russian" is used instead of the actual ethnic language.
Thus, not all minority languages are systematically taught, and many fear that after several generations, their languages may disappear altogether.

From a missionary standpoint, communicating in Russian poses no difficulty in reaching all ethnic groups residing in Dagestan.

Question 2.

Do the more than sixty ethnic groups in Dagestan maintain their individual ethnic identities well, or is the collective identity of being "Dagestani" stronger?
If Russian continues to serve as the common language and native languages gradually disappear along with distinct cultural identities, might it be that, after several decades, these numerous groups would remain only as "the Dagestani people"?
Throughout history, many ethnic groups have fused, disappeared, or subdivided.
If the "Dagestani" identity becomes stronger than individual ones, wouldn't that lead to such an outcome?
Also, in China, many minority groups have lost their languages and identities due to assimilation policies.
Does the Russian government implement similar assimilation strategies toward the peoples of the North Caucasus?

Answer 2.

Thank you for your continued interest and question.

The peoples living in Dagestan still identify primarily with their *own* ethnic groups rather than as "Dagestani."
They continue to use their own languages and preserve traditional customs.
When you meet friends and ask which ethnicity they belong to, very few will say "Dagestani"; most will name their specific group.
Although Russian is used as the common language, members of the same ethnic group still speak to one another in their native tongue.
Among urban youth and adolescents, the number of those who cannot speak their ethnic language is increasing, yet they still tend to feel embarrassed about it.

Given that these ethnic identities have formed over centuries, it would be difficult for them to disappear within just a few decades.
Unlike China, Russia does not pursue an active assimilation policy toward minority groups.
Instead, it has long employed a *divide-and-rule* strategy—preventing minorities from uniting strongly enough to oppose Moscow by fostering internal divisions.

For example, in Dagestan, the powerful southern Lezgin group was subdivided into smaller categories—Agul, Rutul, Tabasaran, and Tsakhur—while fifteen small tribes in the northwestern highlands were merged into the broader "Avar" identity, setting them up as counterbalances to one another.
Consequently, the Avars now make up about 30% of Dagestan's population and have become the most influential group, while the Lezgins have gradually lost their former dominance.
As the Avars gained influence politically, economically, and socially, many who once identified as Andi, Didoi, or Botlikh began referring to themselves as Avar, following the Russian classification.

Question 3.

I have a related question.
When Japan colonized Korea, it sought to eradicate Korean identity through a policy of linguistic and cultural annihilation.

Yet in Dagestan, each ethnic group still retains its own language, which is even taught in schools. Does this mean that Russia governs by political control while allowing subject peoples to keep their languages and cultures?
And how do Dagestani peoples generally perceive Russian rule — do they mostly accept it, or is there any resistance or independence movement, as seen in Chechnya?

Answer 3.

Thank you for your keen interest and question.

Russia's minority policy must be understood in historical phases:
(1) the Imperial Russian period (18th–early 20th century),
(2) the Lenin era after the Communist Revolution,
(3) the Stalin era,
(4) the Gorbachev and Yeltsin period, and
(5) the Putin era.

Policies toward minorities differed greatly across these periods.
During the Imperial and Stalinist eras, Russification and repression of minorities prevailed.
In contrast, Lenin, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin pursued relatively conciliatory policies.
Many dictionaries and cultural preservation efforts for minority languages originated during Lenin's time.

Since Vladimir Putin came to power in the 2000s, the general tone has remained conciliatory toward minorities, though combined with tight control over radical or separatist elements to maintain social stability.

As for attitudes toward Russian rule, Dagestani peoples generally live in acceptance of the current situation.
Unlike the Chechens, there is no active independence movement.
In presidential elections, for instance, support for President Putin in Dagestan has reached as high as 93%.

Question 4.

The situation in the North Caucasus is extremely fascinating and offers a new perspective when compared to the Middle East today.
It is astonishing that more than a hundred "ethnic groups" live in such a small area.
An ethnic group, by definition, shares language, culture, and identity — elements that take time and history to form.
Within this compact region, diverse peoples coexist under one national system, using a common language yet maintaining distinct cultures and identities.

As a missionary in the North Caucasus, how do you approach them?
Do you experience differences in evangelistic barriers according to their respective ethnic and cultural characteristics?
And for missionaries entering regions like the North Caucasus where many ethnic groups coexist within one country, what guidance would you offer regarding how to approach them effectively?

Answer 4.

Thank you very much for your attentive reading and question.

Indeed, within the seven republics of the North Caucasus, I have experienced how evangelistic barriers differ according to each group's cultural traits and historical background.
Although all are part of the Russian Federation, each republic — and each ethnic group within it — has its own traditions, value systems, and distinct relationships with neighboring peoples and with Russia itself.
These historical and relational factors profoundly shape how each group responds to the Gospel.

For instance, in Chechnya, which fought two wars against Russia in the 1990s, a pro-Russian government now presents an outward image of loyalty — people publicly say "Russia is good, and President Putin is the best."
Yet deep in their hearts, many still believe "Christianity is Russia's religion, and Jesus is the God of the Russians."
For them, to accept Christianity is to betray their nation and embrace the faith of their enemies.
Thus, resistance to the Gospel remains strong.

Although most are nominally Sunni Muslims, many have been influenced by Sufism, which emphasizes mystical experience and practical spirituality.

Therefore, when serving in such a multi-ethnic context, one must study deeply both the history of dominant groups and that of the subjugated ones — their interethnic relationships, their history with Russia, and their spiritual trajectories.
Only with such comprehensive understanding can one discern which peoples to prioritize for ministry.

A long-term perspective is essential: mobilizing resources, allocating workers strategically, and maintaining consistent ministry over time.
Once more resources become available, the region should be divided so that each group can be served by those with specialized cultural understanding.
In this respect, the approach of early Western missionaries who first came to Korea provides an instructive model.

Question 5.

How many ethnic groups would you say you personally have friendships with?
Do you sense distinct temperamental or spiritual differences among them?
And when they come to faith in Christ, how do these differences manifest in their lives or ministries?

Answer 5.

That's an enjoyable question — thank you.
I had never really counted how many ethnic friends I have until now.

I have the most friends among the Lak and Avar peoples, and others among the Dargin, Lezgin, Kumyk, Tabasaran, Agul, Didoi, Botlikh, Kaitag, Kubachi, Azerbaijani, and Russian peoples.

In Dagestan, when several groups gather, it is common for people to gossip about another group once its members leave:
"The Avars are strong but not very bright; the Dargins care only about money; the Laks are cunning; I would never let my child marry a Lezgin..."

But in my observation, the Avars are brave, loyal, and quick to defend others when they see injustice.
The Dargins have excellent business acumen.
The Laks are intelligent — many scientists and even astronauts come from them.
The Lezgins are less patriarchal than most others; men often cook and help their wives, making them a very family-oriented people.

In 2010, the pastor of a local church — an Avar — was martyred.
Despite numerous threats from Islamic fundamentalists, he continued preaching boldly until armed men took his life.
I believe that when the Avar people come to faith, God will use them as courageous witnesses who will not yield to persecution.

There is a local saying that "when the Laks were born, the Jews wept" — meaning they are equally wise and intelligent.
One of my Lak friends who became a Christian memorizes nearly every sermon and Bible study by heart and can recall passages word for word.
If the Laks return to the Lord, I believe they will be used as teachers of Scripture, like Apollos.

The Lezgins, being family-centered, have gentle and cheerful temperaments.
Even in anger, they remain witty and composed.
When the Lezgins turn to the Lord, I believe they will become compassionate shepherds and evangelists.

Question 6.

The peoples of the North Caucasus seem to possess strong ethnic identities.
How did they come to accept Islam, and why have they remained so exclusively loyal to it since?
It seems that among Caucasian peoples, only those of the North Caucasus embraced Islam.
Is there any connection between the religious character of Islam and the cultural traits of these mountain peoples?

Answer 6.

Thank you for your excellent question.

Before accepting Islam, the North Caucasian peoples practiced shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity (mainly Eastern Orthodoxy).
When Arab armies invaded in the 7th century, the mountain alliances of Dagestan resisted fiercely for a long time.
After capturing the southern fortress city of Derbent, the Arabs resettled about 20,000 Muslims from Syria there.
Through their missionary work and taxation system, the local nobility gradually began adopting Islam between the 9th and 10th centuries.

Subsequent invasions — the Mongols in the 13th century and Timur in the 15th — further accelerated its spread.
During the 18th–19th century Caucasus wars with Russia, Islamic identity was further solidified.
After forty years of conflict ending in Russian victory, imperial rule began.
The later Communist revolution brought severe persecution: many clerics were executed, and mosques were closed.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and following the Chechen wars of 1994–1995, Islamic fundamentalism spread rapidly throughout the North Caucasus, reviving exclusivist attitudes and an Islamic revival movement.
This period shaped the anti-Christian and anti-Jewish sentiments that persist today.

Culturally, the North Caucasian peoples have always valued autonomy and independence.
Thus, when Arab rulers attempted domination, they resisted, but during the wars with Russia, they found unity and identity in Islam — defining themselves religiously in opposition to Russian Christianity.

Today, although most say, "Our nation *is* Islam," one can still find Christian elements embedded in their customary laws, clothing patterns, and moral codes.
South of the Caucasus Mountains, the populations of Georgia and Armenia are predominantly Orthodox Christian, while Azerbaijan remains Muslim.

Historical Reflection on Jewish National Identity and Understanding Israel's Middle East Policy

Joseph Kwon (Editorial Board Member)

1. Introduction

Most nations conduct their foreign policy with goals such as expanding national interests, achieving economic benefits, and strengthening international prestige. However, since its founding, Israel has pursued foreign policy with survival itself as its top priority (Webster University Global Policy Horizons Lab, 2023).

Fundamentally, every state begins from the most basic condition of survival within the international community. Yet most nations do not regard survival as their sole or highest goal, since under ordinary circumstances—absent extreme situations such as war, economic collapse, or regime overthrow—state continuity is generally ensured.

Israel, however, is an exception. From its inception, it has made survival itself the foremost objective of its foreign and, particularly, Middle East policy. This marks the essential distinction between Israel's policy and that of most other countries. To understand this difference, it is insufficient to analyze only present phenomena; rather, one must reflect on the millennia of historical experience of the Jewish people. Within that long history, the repeated experiences of exile, persecution, massacre, and the Holocaust have become the foundation upon which Israel's modern national policy is built.

Within the theories of international relations, realism posits survival as the highest value of the state. Liberalism, by contrast, emphasizes that states also pursue economic interdependence and cooperation within international institutions, beyond mere survival or national interest. From this theoretical perspective, Israel serves as one of the most representative cases of realism in

practice. Israel's overall policy prioritizes security and survival over international norms or institutions, and it is often willing to endure global criticism if necessary to defend its national security interests.

Thus, from a realist standpoint, Israel's every diplomatic move can be understood as a continuous sequence of strategic choices revolving around the absolute imperative of state survival. Recognizing this allows us to understand why Israel often appears exceptional by international standards, and what deep historical and existential anxieties underlie such decisions.

Today, as antisemitism rapidly spreads worldwide, the persistence of Israel's security policy can be explained in this context. The 77-year-long reserve mobilization system; the fact that middle-aged men in their 40s and 50s are still called up and fall in battle; the phenomenon of foreigners voluntarily enlisting in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF); the nation's practice of relentlessly pursuing terrorists and demolishing their families' homes; Yahya Sinwar's 2023 "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation and the emphasis on taking as many hostages as possible; the significance of hostage issues; Israel's preemptive strikes despite its army being officially called the "Defense Forces"; the debates within Israel over the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip; the social functioning of a nation where 21% of the population (outside these territories) is Arab; and the wartime rallying cries such as *"Am Yisrael Chai" (The people of Israel live), "Beyachad Nenatze'ach" (Together we will prevail),* and *"I stand with Israel"*—all can be understood through this lens.

To properly comprehend these internal and external realities, one must grasp the perceptions of Israeli citizens themselves. The foreign policy of a modern representative democracy is deeply shaped by domestic politics, which in turn reflects citizens' collective consciousness. This civic consciousness is the outcome of historical experience—of what lessons a community has learned from its past and how it has collectively interpreted and applied them.

In Israel's case, understanding how the Jewish people responded to millennia of diaspora and antisemitism, and how these responses are embodied today, is essential.

The primary actors in Israel's internal politics are the Jews. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the Jewish mindset—the Jewish spirit. As long as this spirit remains alive, the nation survives. And that spirit has been forged through history.

This article therefore examines how Israel's society—rooted in the soil of Jewish history—has evolved through three phases:① *Diaspora to Independence (1948)*,② *post-Independence to the 2020s:*

The Modern Israeli Spirit, and③ *Post-2020: The Israeli Spirit amid Internal Division*. Through these lenses, it seeks to interpret Israel's behavior not only in Middle Eastern conflicts but also within broader global tensions.

2. From the Diaspora to Independence: The Historical Journey for Survival and the Formation of the Israeli Spirit

The two core concepts essential to understanding the Jewish people are antisemitism and survival. For thousands of years, Jews have faced an almost obsessive, persistent force intent on their annihilation.

In the present day, Hamas's ultimate objective remains the denial of Israel's very existence. Likewise, Iran's nuclear ambitions and the resulting existential threat to Israel, the Arab–Israeli wars, the Holocaust perpetrated by Nazi Germany some seventy years ago, the medieval European inquisitions, forced conversions and expulsions, the destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman Empire and the ensuing Diaspora, and even further back—the genocidal plot by Haman in the Book of Esther, the conflicts between the Moabites and Israel, and the struggle between Esau and Jacob—all form part of the collective memory deeply embedded in Jewish consciousness. While some of these are verifiable historical facts and others bear mythic dimensions, together they have operated as collective trauma whenever antisemitic incidents have arisen throughout history.

Across millennia, Jewish responses to antisemitism have been simple yet profound: to survive. To ensure that survival, the Jewish people historically adopted three main strategies:(1) Survival through separation, (2) Survival through assimilation, and (3) Survival through the struggle for a Jewish state (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2025).

(1) Survival through separation

This form of survival was an effort to preserve Jewish identity at all costs. The inseparability of Judaism and Jewishness today stems from the historical conviction that safeguarding religious identity was the key to collective survival. Following the Diaspora, Jewish communities scattered around the world often chose voluntary isolation. Such separation was common in premodern societies, where

ethnic and religious distinctions were sharply maintained. Jews preserved their identity through minimal economic interaction with surrounding societies while maintaining strong internal cohesion.

Interestingly, what sustained the Jewish spirit over thousands of years was not a common spoken language such as Hebrew. Modern Hebrew itself was a revival, brought back from ritual and liturgical use in the 18th century by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.). Most Diaspora Jews did not speak Hebrew, and thus the Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures were accessible only to rabbis. Sociologist Erich Fromm (1927) located the secret of Jewish spiritual endurance in the Sabbath. For Jews, the Sabbath was not merely a day of rest but a foretaste of divine rule—a temporal sign of ultimate hope.

Throughout centuries of hardship and change, Jews never abandoned their faith in the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of God's kingdom. This hope was concretized through the observance of the Sabbath and the memory of Jerusalem, the city that embodied divine promise. The expectation that "one day, when God's wrath has ended, we will return to Jerusalem, the Messiah will come, and God's rule will be complete" became the axis of Jewish spiritual life. Judaism's rejection of idolatry meant that its identity was maintained not through icons or images but through ritual time (the Sabbath) and sacred memory (Jerusalem).

(2) Survival through assimilation

The rise of modernity introduced a new concept—the citizen. After the Napoleonic era, this idea spread throughout Europe, asserting that individuals could enjoy civil rights regardless of ethnicity if they fulfilled their civic duties such as taxation and military service. This represented a revolutionary challenge to Jewish communities. Whereas in the Middle Ages they survived through separation, modern civil society opened the possibility of survival through integration.

The development of cities and the expansion of capitalist opportunity provided Jews with unprecedented social mobility. Many began to fulfill civic obligations and to claim the accompanying rights. This model proved successful and soon spread across Jewish communities in Europe. Assimilation, including intermarriage and cultural adaptation, appeared to offer a path toward safety and prosperity.

However, the Dreyfus Affair of the late 19th century shattered this illusion. In France, a Jewish army officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was wrongfully convicted of treason based on flimsy evidence. Even after

the real culprit was identified, the military sought to suppress the truth for reasons of institutional honor. Writer Émile Zola's famous open letter, *"J'accuse...!"*, ignited national outrage, and Dreyfus was eventually exonerated. Witnessing the anti-Jewish mobs shouting, "Death to the Jews!" during the trial, Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl, then serving as a Paris correspondent, was deeply shaken. He realized that no matter how loyally Jews assimilated into their host societies, antisemitism would never disappear. This revelation led him to propose modern Zionism, the political movement for the establishment of a Jewish state (Britannica, n.d.).

(3) Survival through nationhood

The Holocaust during World War II confirmed Herzl's fears in the most horrific way. Even fully assimilated Jews were hunted down and exterminated based on ancestry. Herzl's assertion—that the root of antisemitism lay in the absence of a Jewish state, and that only by establishing one could the Jewish people ensure their survival—was now seen as prophetic truth (Herzl, 1896).This conviction galvanized the global Zionist movement.

In 1948, the dream materialized: the State of Israel was born. From that moment onward, Israel's policy orientation became unmistakable: to face threats with unity and strength, to compromise with no enemy, and to defend itself by its own power—for survival itself is victory.

Through this long historical process, the Jewish spirit forged in suffering transformed into the Israeli spirit, which remains the foundational ethos sustaining the modern State of Israel.

3. The State of Israel's Post-1948 Ethos and Strategic Orientation

Following statehood, Israel's governing ethos combined unyielding realism with a secular, humanistic utopianism (Ofek, 2018). Millennia of suffering—culminating in the civilizational rupture of the Holocaust—profoundly shook faith in divine providence and embedded the conviction that "only our own strength and solidarity can safeguard us." Because everything was, in effect, a live-fire exercise, practical problem-solving took precedence over form, and a culture that valorized individual capability and creative initiative became a core social value. Within this climate emerged the notion of the "new

Jew," which permeated education and public life and provided the basis for a civic identity rooted in Zionist ideals (Cohen, 1998).

Even after independence, security and survival remained Israel's paramount policy imperatives. The state had to endure the Fourth Arab Israeli War, two Intifadas, numerous military operations and terrorist campaigns, and repeated threats of full-scale war—at least a dozen times. The post-Holocaust vow of "Never Again" took deep root at the heart of Israeli collective consciousness. Amid recurrent conflict, the values of liberty, self-reliance, and the right of self-defense were accentuated, and the imperative to "work and wage war simultaneously" shaped socialization within both societies at large and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Israeli policy has been grounded not in vague optimism or rhetorical bravado but in rigorous realism. Consequently, the principles of "peace through strength"[10] and "if you desire peace, prepare for war"[11] crystallized as cornerstones of national security doctrine.

A further pillar of security has been the enhancement of national competitiveness composite encompassing not only economic growth but also international influence, intelligence capacity, and scientific-technological prowess. The Jewish tradition of inquiry and disputation has remained a crucial intellectual asset of the modern state. When confronted with problems, Israelis tend to pursue solutions through debate and provisional consensus, a style of reasoning that has yielded world-class achievements in science, technology, and philosophy. Here, "consensus" denotes not mere political compromise but a disciplined search for the context-appropriate optimum under changing conditions.

Israel lacks a single codified constitution. Instead, a norm of ceaseless deliberation aims to locate the best available answer for an evolving reality. This deliberative culture, fused with a civic ethic that respects divergent styles and viewpoints, underwrites a sense of communal mutualism (arevut)—the conviction that "all Israel are guarantors for one another." Plural opinions may persist, yet in decisive moments the polity coheres, and duties and rights are applied with a perceived fairness. The ultimate rationale is the primal value of national survival, coupled with a sober recognition that, beyond the

[10]This is an expression used by Prime Minister Netanyahu, but it is a concept that is commonly used by realist international political theorists of the 20th century.

[11] This is an ancient Roman proverb that often appears in Israeli news columns.

Jewish collective, allies may shift with circumstances—today's friend can be tomorrow's adversary (Kremnitzer, 2005).

Measured against its founding aims, this Zionist-based ideology has been broadly successful. Despite chronic threat, Israel not only survived but expanded its footing, transforming from a poor, developing polity into an advanced knowledge economy.

During this evolution, even highly secular or avowedly atheistic Jews have, to varying degrees, internalized a sense of historical vocation as a chosen people. This was not merely a doctrinal revival; rather, the state's secular growth and territorial consolidation appeared—even to the secular—to resonate with biblical prophecies, stirring religious emotion and wonder.[12]

4. Internal Identity Debates between Ultra-Orthodox and Secular Jews in the 2020s

A new variable has emerged in Israeli domestic politics: the demographic and political ascent of the ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) community. At the time of Israel's founding, ultra-Orthodox Jews constituted less than five percent of the population, and only about 400 yeshiva students were exempted from military service to dedicate themselves solely to Torah study (Shany & Lavi, 2024).

However, the Haredi population's exceptionally high birth rate has steadily expanded its demographic and political influence within Israeli society. Over decades, ultra-Orthodox parties—holding the parliamentary balance of power (casting vote)—have leveraged their role to secure disproportionate political benefits relative to their population share (Israel Policy Forum, 2024).

As of today, approximately 20 percent of Israel's Jewish population identifies as Haredi[13], and projections indicate that by 2065, this share could exceed 40 percent if current trends persist

[12]When the Israeli army recaptured East Jerusalem during the Six-Day War, the Third Middle East War of 1967, many secular Jewish soldiers who arrived at the Western Wall for the first time said, "I do not believe in God, but today, I am speaking with Him. "Such expressions gave even secular Jews in Israel a certain spiritual inspiration.

[13] As of December 2023, according to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of Israel, the Jewish population of Israel is 7,208,000. According to the latest report by the Israel Democracy Institute

(Rosenberg, 2020). In the 25th Knesset, Haredi parties now control roughly 15 percent of the seats (The Times of Israel, 2025). Consequently, they have evolved from mere coalition brokers into independent agenda-setting actors, increasingly capable of shaping the national policy trajectory (The Times of Israel, 2025).

The primary goal of ultra-Orthodox political movements is to ensure that Jewish life, as defined by Torah law (Halakha), is upheld at the national level. Their policies aim to strengthen religious observance by institutional means—such as enforcing public observance of the Sabbath, tightening kashrut regulations, and expanding the jurisdiction of rabbinical courts (ARZA, 2023).

Haredi theology holds that Torah study itself constitutes a spiritual shield for the nation; thus, they insist on maintaining military service exemptions for full-time scholars. In parallel, religious settlers—many aligned ideologically with Haredi and nationalist movements—seek legislation granting armed defense privileges for Jewish residents in settlements (Leykin, 2024).

The religious-nationalist agenda also promotes the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, justified through biblical-historical claims. It further envisions restoring Jewish sovereignty over the Temple Mount and even preparing for the reconstruction of the Third Temple, a notion that, while once fringe, is now entering public discourse (Jewish News Syndicate, 2025).

These developments have intensified the ideological confrontation between ultra-Orthodox and secular Jews, generating persistent internal divisions. The repercussions of this divide have become increasingly visible, especially since the Israel–Hamas war of October 7, 2023, which has reshaped both domestic politics and Israel's external posture toward the broader Middle East.

5. Short-Term Outlook

The spirit of Israel fundamentally focuses on the survival and preservation of the Jewish people. This is not an imperial concept that embraces various nations and expands its borders. However, Israel pursues strengths that great empires in history have demonstrated—such as rationality, flexibility,

(IDI), the ultra-Orthodox population is 1,390,000.Converted to percentages, the proportion of ultra-Orthodox Jews among the total Jewish population is 19.3%.

innovativeness, and inclusiveness toward diversity—because it understands from history that these factors strengthen the competitiveness of the community. Therefore, Israel possesses the strengths of an empire, including an international sense, but does not pursue expansion like an empire.

However, due to its high birth rate, the position of Orthodox religious Jews is gradually strengthening over time, and the direction they pursue continues to collide with that of existing Israeli society. Orthodox religious Jews maintain their community based on faith, oppose mandatory education in secular subjects such as mathematics, English, and science, and adhere to their own worldview. Furthermore, they apply religious values to actual politics and pursue a theocratic form of government. As a result, Israel's rationality, flexibility, inclusiveness toward diversity, and innovativeness are gradually weakening, and the debate between secular and religious Jewish groups will intensify. Although this internal identity debate will continue, it is highly likely to remain largely parallel, without convergence.

Under such circumstances, it is expected that issues related to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Temple Mount will increase further. In fact, the July 23 parliamentary announcement of a bill to annex Gaza and the West Bank is being promoted despite concerns and opposition from secular Jews, because of the parliamentary political structure of Israel (Pellman & Novik, 2025). In addition, the movement to build the Third Temple on the Temple Mount is gradually emerging as a key agenda item, as it continues to be exposed to the media by religious politicians (Summers, 2025).

At the same time, Prime Minister Netanyahu's policies, such as the Abraham Accords, are not all based on religious ideology. On one hand, some interpret Israel's actions as an effort not only to maintain its position in the Middle East but also to dominate Middle Eastern hegemony and establish itself as a major actor. In other words, this can be understood as a move toward pursuing national prosperity beyond mere survival (Ailam, 2025).

Overall, the hardline right-wing policies of Jewish religious groups take the same hardline stance on the Palestinian issue. Policies such as West Bank settlement construction and the annexation of the Gaza Strip shake the long-standing *status quo*, accelerating anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiment in the international community. In particular, the recent spread of antisemitism globally is being reinforced by an alliance between Muslim immigrant groups and left-wing groups representing minorities, due to the increase in Muslim immigration. As provocative images and incitements are disseminated through social media, the influence of these movements is likely to grow even stronger.

Moreover, in Europe and the United States—where globalization was once led—far-right nationalist parties are coming to power or emerging as major political forces, resulting in heightened hostility toward immigrants and refugees. Within this international trend, antisemitic sentiment is also spreading into American society.

If this antisemitism accelerates further, approximately 7.5 million Jews in the United States[14] may potentially return to Israel. Among them, around 871,000 are Messianic Jews who believe in Jesus (LifeWay Research, 2020).Considering the characteristics of ordinary Jews other than these groups, if their return to Israel—or their influence in various forms—increases, it could serve as a new variable capable of overcoming the internal identity confusion in Israel caused by the population increase of Orthodox religious Jews.

The global spread of antisemitism is also causing anxiety within Israeli society about the weakening of pro-Israel forces in the international community. Except within Israel itself, Jews increasingly feel that nowhere in the world is truly safe.

Within the Christian world, interpretations concerning Israel will also gradually become more divided and controversial. Within Middle Eastern Arab Christian communities, the issue of Israel will become an increasingly tangible and significant subject of discussion.

[14] The Jewish population in the United States varies depending on the statistical source.According to Pew Research Center (2020), the Jewish population in the United States is about 7.5 million.The Steinhardt Social Research Institute at Brandeis University (2020) estimates about 7.6 million, while the Jewish Agency (2023) reports approximately 6.3 million.This paper uses the figure from Pew Research Center.

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Q&A Section

Question 1

How do the policies of ultra-Orthodox Jews and secular Jews differ regarding the Gaza Strip and the West Bank?
If secular Jews seek "peace through strength" by suppressing Palestine, while ultra-Orthodox Jews attempt to absorb Palestinian territory based on "religious conviction," are they not, in essence, pursuing the same outcome?

Answer 1

That is an excellent question. Israeli society contains a broad spectrum of perspectives, most clearly reflected in the composition of its parliament, the Knesset, where far-left, left-wing, centrist, right-wing, and far-right parties coexist.

Traditionally, the left has maintained a stance of "coexistence between Israel and Palestine." For a long period, Israel's basic policy orientation was left-leaning—completely withdrawing settlements from the Gaza Strip, promoting peace through economic revitalization of Gaza, and granting work permits to Gaza residents so that they could work in Israel.

In contrast, the right-wing also nominally presupposed coexistence with Palestine but took a more hardline approach—for example, pursuing additional settlement construction in the West Bank, though halting such projects under intense international pressure.

These policies persisted for many years largely because Israeli society drew important lessons from the Second Intifada (2005). The dominant view became: *recognize the Palestinians, contain extremists, integrate moderates into the Israeli economy, and by improving the Palestinian economy, reduce extremist tendencies.*

However, Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack convinced many Israelis that this long-held policy was no longer viable. Notably, many kibbutzim near Gaza that suffered the attacks were left-leaning communities that had long pursued ideals of peaceful coexistence with Palestinians.

Against this background, the proportion of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel has steadily increased, and since 2020 they have held about 15% of parliamentary seats—rising beyond the role of a mere swing bloc to that of a major political force. By allying with right-wing parties, they have come to wield even greater influence.

Traditionally, ultra-Orthodox Jews held a theological position that essentially denied the legitimacy of the State of Israel itself. They argued that *"the 1948 independence of Israel was achieved by secularists and thus was not established by God; it is no different from other gentile states."* For that reason, they long refrained from active political participation, and when they did participate, it was mostly to secure practical benefits such as religious education or welfare subsidies.

In recent years, however, they have begun to express views on national issues such as the Palestinian question. Their approach differs from Israel's "logic of survival" in that it is grounded in religious belief. For example, their call for full annexation of the West Bank may in fact threaten Israel's survival strategy, and their demand for building the Third Temple on the Temple Mount could endanger Israel's security. Nevertheless, they advocate such policies out of theological conviction.

This marks a crucial distinction between Israel's survival-oriented policies and the religiously motivated positions of the ultra-Orthodox.

Question 2

Has Israel truly placed survival itself as its foremost priority?
From a realist perspective, every state ultimately prioritizes its survival. In ordinary times, nations pursue economic growth, diplomatic influence, cultural exchange, and adherence to international norms, but in crises, the preservation of the state becomes paramount.

However, Israel has sometimes sought to preserve certain values even at the risk of its survival—particularly the *Zionist ideal of the Promised Land.*

A representative case is the so-called "Uganda Plan" proposed by British Prime Minister Joseph Chamberlain in 1903. Facing severe persecution in Europe, Jews were offered the chance to establish a Jewish state in part of Britain's African colonies (actually in today's Kenya). This could have been an attractive solution for survival. Yet the Jewish leadership rejected the offer and chose instead to build

their nation in the ancient land of Canaan—accepting mortal risks. Had they prioritized survival, they might have established a state in Africa, and the Holocaust might never have occurred.

Even today, many scholars argue that the "two-state solution" would strengthen Israel's security. If Palestine became an independent state, it would no longer be able to stage attacks as easily as now, and deterrence between two sovereign states would operate differently. Professor Arie of the Hebrew University, for example, argues along these lines.

Of course, like any nation, Israel prioritizes survival. Yet historically, it has sometimes placed ethnic identity and Zionist ideals above sheer survival. This is an essential context for understanding its Middle East policy.

Modern politics, moreover, is not shaped only by civic consciousness but also by the character of parties and leaders. Just as U.S. policy changes from administration to administration, or South Korea's policies would differ under President Yoon Suk-yeol versus Lee Jae-myung, so Israel's policy directions can shift depending on electoral outcomes.

In conclusion, Israel is a state that seeks survival but also upholds values that transcend survival—its ethnic identity and Zionist vision. However, this identity does not always manifest consistently in contemporary politics; it varies with changes in leadership and party dynamics. This interplay must be considered when analyzing Israel's overall Middle East policy.

Answer 2

Thank you for highlighting such an important point.

What is most significant in Israeli policy is not mere survival but the reflection of *Jewish religious values and ideals* within national identity. Among Israel's founding leaders were atheists, deists, and theists alike, yet even the most secular among them sought to preserve Jewish religious values as a unifying cultural core.

The exemption of ultra-Orthodox Jews from military service, a major domestic issue today, actually originated from this founding context.

Such phenomena are common among nation-states seeking identity formation, but Israel is somewhat unique. Most nations maintain identity through the adaptation of national myths, whereas Israel's

national identity is built upon the Hebrew Bible. The Old Testament possesses a distinctive character—even a strict atheist cannot easily dismiss the power of its prophecies.

Thus, even those who deny God's existence amid life's absurdities often find themselves acknowledging the possibility of a transcendent God revealed through Scripture, regarding the Hebrew Bible as the source of that transcendence.

A nation that knows where it came from also knows where it must go.
From this perspective, Israel's national policy—grounded in the Old Testament—adds biblical value to human rationality and thereby exhibits a powerful sense of conviction.

Finally, proposals by ultra-Orthodox groups to build the Third Temple or annex the West Bank may raise concern from an international-political standpoint. Yet viewed through the lens of prophetic fulfillment, such developments remind us that even amid turmoil and imperfection, history unfolds under God's sovereign plan as recorded in Scripture.