



Orion
Policy
Institute

January 2025





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PREPARED BY

Ayse Ergene

AT A GLANCE

ABOUT US

Orion Policy Institute (OPI) is an independent non-profit think tank based in Washington D.C. We address a broad range of issues including national and global security, democracy, human rights, political and economic development, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and various other issues at the local, national, and global level. OPI is a 501(c)(3) organization, with an IRS ruling year of 2021, and donations are tax-deductible.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to contribute to stability and good governance, advance human rights, and promote policy through high-quality research and analysis. OPI seeks to generate practical and sustainable solutions based on multi-disciplinary, diverse, and in-depth scientific research.

HIGHLIGHTS



PODCASTS

In the 2023-2024 period, Orion Policy Institute has hosted 15 podcasts on various topics including human trafficking, critical energy infrastructure, artificial intelligence, Afghanistan, terrorism, law enforcement, and more.

PUBLICATIONS

In the 2023-2024 period, Orion Policy Institute has published three research reports, 31 Op-Eds, nine policy briefs, and three expert panels. The publications addressed pressing issues around the world.



WEBINARS

In the 2023-2024 period, Orion Policy Institute has hosted eight webinars on topics ranging from security challenges in Africa to transnational repression and hate crimes to NATO.







EXPERT

PANEL

Expert Panel: The Hamas-Israel Conflict and Its Global and Regional Implications

Colin P. Clarke

Published October 23'

Within the region, there is a major risk of escalation between Israel and the groups comprising the so-called “axis of resistance,” including Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Houthi movement in Yemen, and Iraqi Shia militias.



Following the Hamas attacks and Israel's response, which has already killed many civilians, it is difficult to imagine the deal going forward anytime soon, despite U.S. pressure to keep things on track. Gulf Arabs have long been a defender of Palestinian rights, at least rhetorically, and abandoning Palestinians to make a deal with Israel in the current geopolitical environment seems like a non-starter. There are also questions about how the conflict between Israel and Hamas will impact the war in Ukraine, which has received far less attention as the world focuses on the Middle East.

[Read More](#)

Expert Panel: The Hamas-Israel Conflict and Its Global and Regional Implications

Sara Harmouch

Published October 23'

The October 7th attack, executed with notable sophistication, showcases a Hamas empowered and capable of operations across multiple fronts. Iran's post-attack statement introduces a heightened phase, highlighting the complexity of the emerging multi-dimensional threat landscape.



A destabilized Middle East threatens global security. America's strategic interests, allies, and energy resources are at stake. Economic disruptions are inevitable, given the Middle East's pivotal role in global oil supply. Terrorism, already a persistent threat, is bolstered by the ongoing conflicts, raising global security concerns. Groups like al-Qaeda, exploiting the Palestinian cause to bolster their ranks, could see a surge in membership amidst the ongoing turmoil. Also, there are scenarios where groups with differing ideologies and objectives, like Hezbollah and al-Qaeda might find common ground in such an escalating conflict.

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Trump 2.0 Africa

Federico Donelli

Published December 24'



Donald Trump's victory has inevitably prompted a general reflection on how his administration will affect American foreign policy and global dynamics. Most of the discussion are focusing on the possible scenarios in the two active conflicts, Ukraine and the Middle East. However, there is no lack of thoughts on other regional contexts. Africa is one of them. How will the Trump 2.0 policy affect the relationship between the US and African countries? How will the US address some of Africa's most important issues, such as climate change, terrorism, development, and global competition, and how will this shape the continent's internal dynamics?

[Read More](#)

Sudan: A Conflict Far from a Resolution

Marta Furlan

Published November 23'

Considering that the conflict has progressively extended to new states within Sudan and has drawn in more militias and armed groups, a bilateral negotiation process is no longer reflecting the military reality on the ground. In this context, should an agreement even be reached by the SAF and the RSF, many doubts remain on the extent to which that would affect other groups and militias, which might rather, prefer to continue fighting to better secure their interests.



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Djibouti and Ethiopia-Somaliland's Memorandum of Understanding

Federico Donelli

Published February 24'

The MoU halted any further development of the initiative. This failure has shown how Guelleh's ability to read the region's politics is gradually fading. This is not an insignificant trend for a leader who has consolidated his regime on two pillars: diversifying political relations with extra-regional players and engaging in the role of broker in regional affairs. Guelleh seems to have reached the end of his political path.



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The Moscow Terror Attack: ISIS' Global Ambitions and the Challenge of Counterterrorism

Suleyman Ozeren & Suat Cubukcu

Published April 24'

ISIS Core is still the leading entity within the ISIS network, owing partly to its massive network of affiliates, including returnees or current FTFs. Therefore, the security threat of the returnee FTFs or those who are stuck in countries neighboring Syria and Iraq should be taken seriously by the host countries.



[Read More](#)

From the Horn of Africa to Southern Arabia: A Perilous Journey through War-Torn Yemen

Marta Furlan

Published September 23'

There is an urgent need to address the multiple conditions that lie behind their decision to migrate. This will include supporting regional governments in their efforts to address the climate crisis, designing interventions aimed at strengthening the resilience of local communities (e.g., training in climate-smart agriculture), enhancing access to alternative and sustainable livelihood opportunities.



[Read More](#)

Cities Need to Better Protect Themselves from Attacks Like the One That Disrupted the Paris Olympics

Ismail Onat

Published August 24'

The attacks on Paris' railroad system occurred just hours before the opening ceremonies of the 2024 Summer Olympics, causing widespread travel chaos. Cancellations and delays of high-speed trains followed, affecting both domestic and international travel. It became difficult for athletes, officials, journalists, and spectators to travel to and from Paris. The sudden transportation issues created logistical challenges for the Olympic organizing committee, requiring them to quickly adapt their transportation plans. Undoubtedly, the attacks have cast a shadow over the beginning of the Olympics and generated negative publicity along with concerns about security.



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AI Policy Under Trump 2.0: Continuities and Curveballs from Trump to Biden and Back Again

Vincent Carchidi

Published November 24'

AI policymaking from 2017-2024 tracks an industry-specific expectation in the continued successes of Machine (and specifically Deep) Learning models, particularly insofar as models are trained on scaled-up training datasets, requiring greater computing power and energy. That said, Trump 2.0 may face (at least) two curveballs that re-frame the policy agenda. First, open-source, potentially hybrid efforts to achieve models capable of more robust abstraction and generalization are slowly coming to fruition. Second, an underappreciated risk for Trump 2.0 is an AI industry downturn.

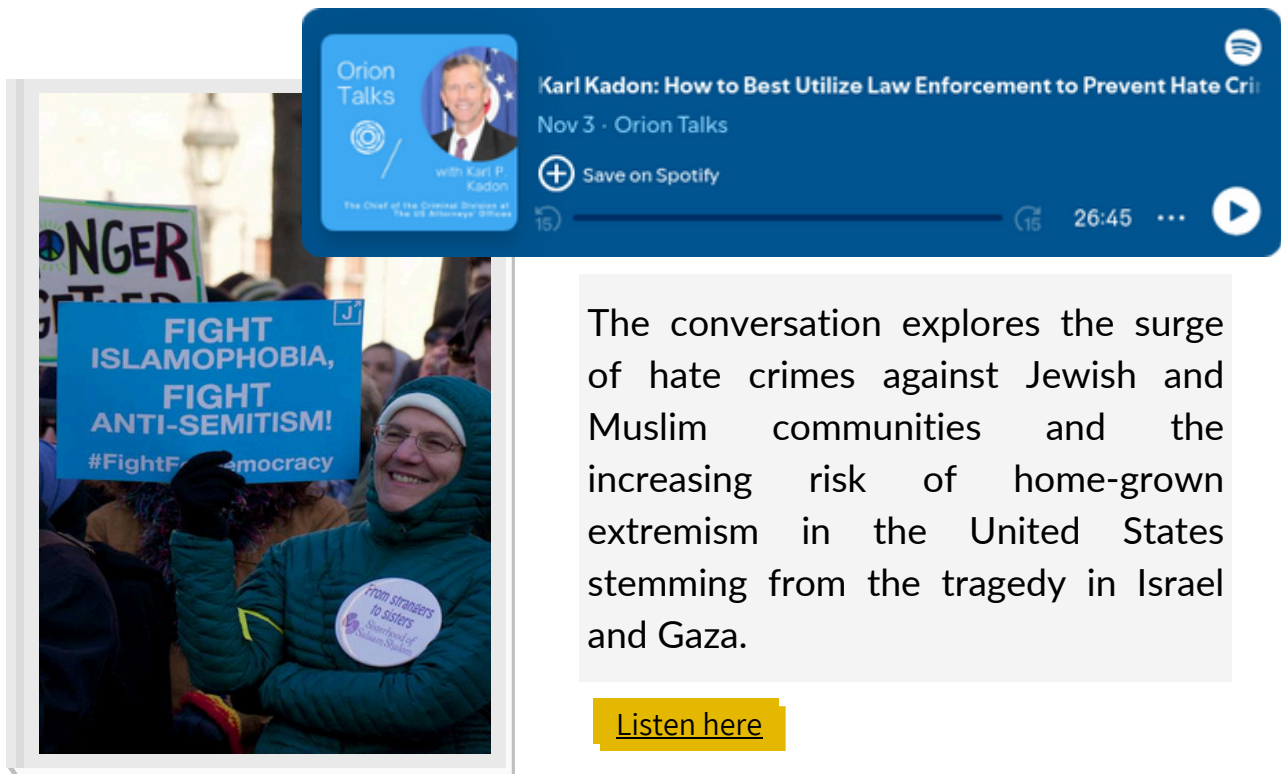


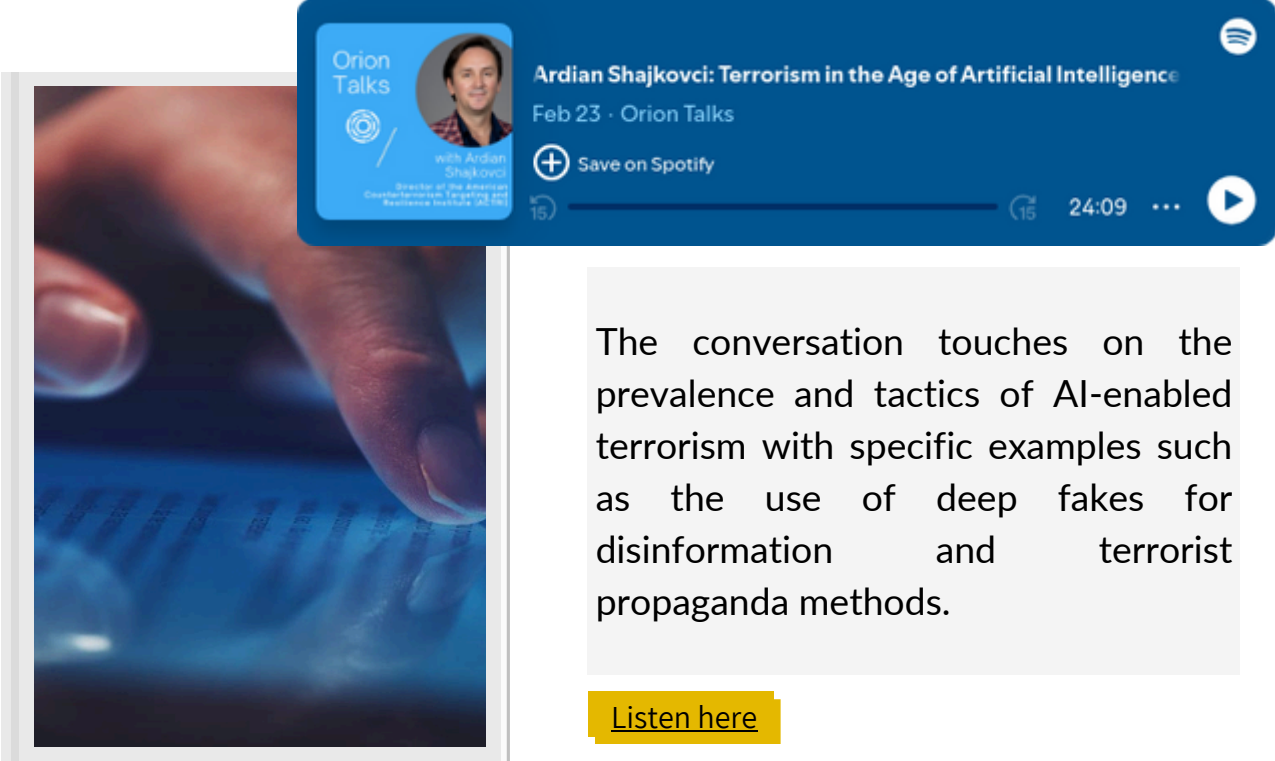
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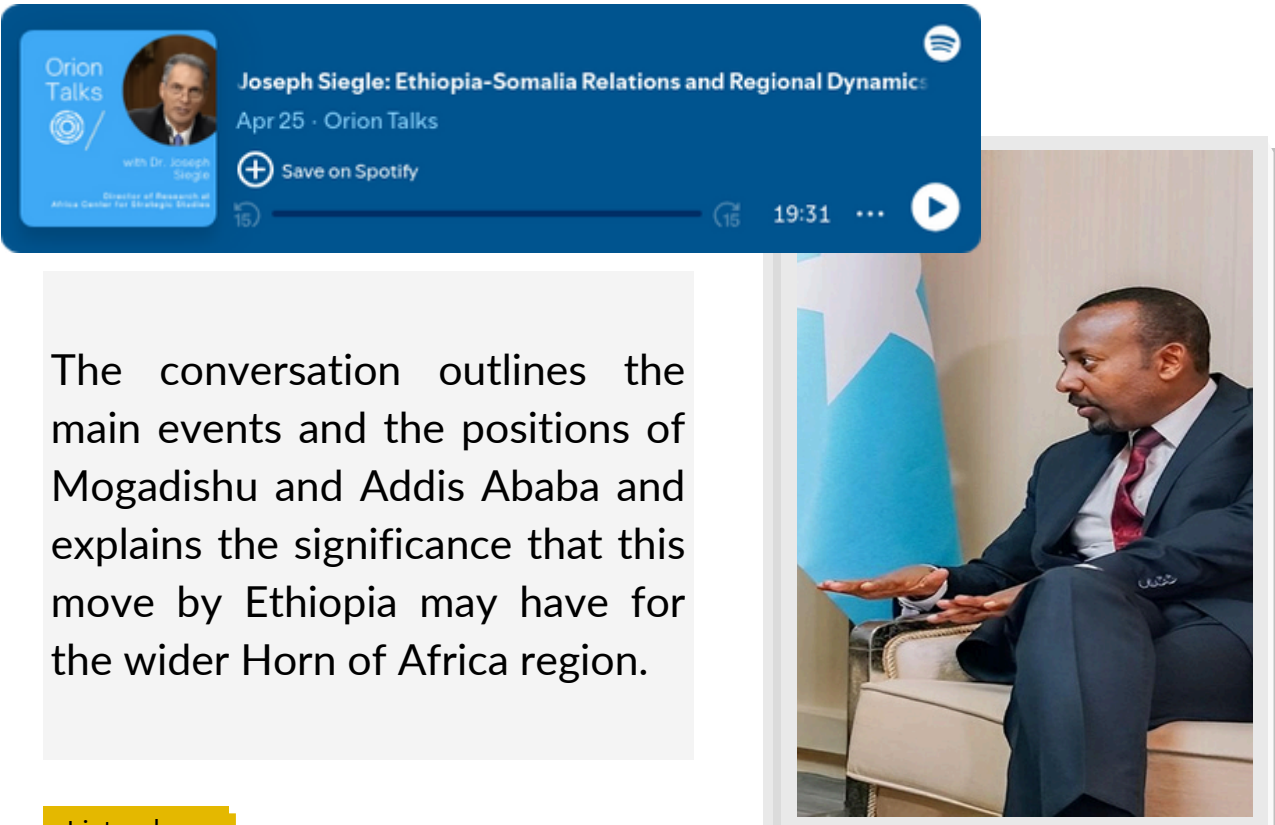
PODCAST





The conversation touches on the prevalence and tactics of AI-enabled terrorism with specific examples such as the use of deep fakes for disinformation and terrorist propaganda methods.

[Listen here](#)



The conversation outlines the main events and the positions of Mogadishu and Addis Ababa and explains the significance that this move by Ethiopia may have for the wider Horn of Africa region.

[Listen here](#)



Orion Talks
with Min Ye
Professor of International Relations
Paris School of Business, EBS, University of
Bonn


Min Ye: Xi Jinping's European Visit and Implications for EU-China Relations
May 25 · Orion Talks

Save on Spotify

15 19:08

The conversation guides us through the climate that has characterized China-EU relations in the past few years and shares valuable thoughts on how Xi Jinping's visit can be expected to impact EU-China relations and intra-European relations.

[Listen here](#)



Orion Talks
with Travis Moran
Senior Policy & Security Advisor
at S&P, Reliability Corporation

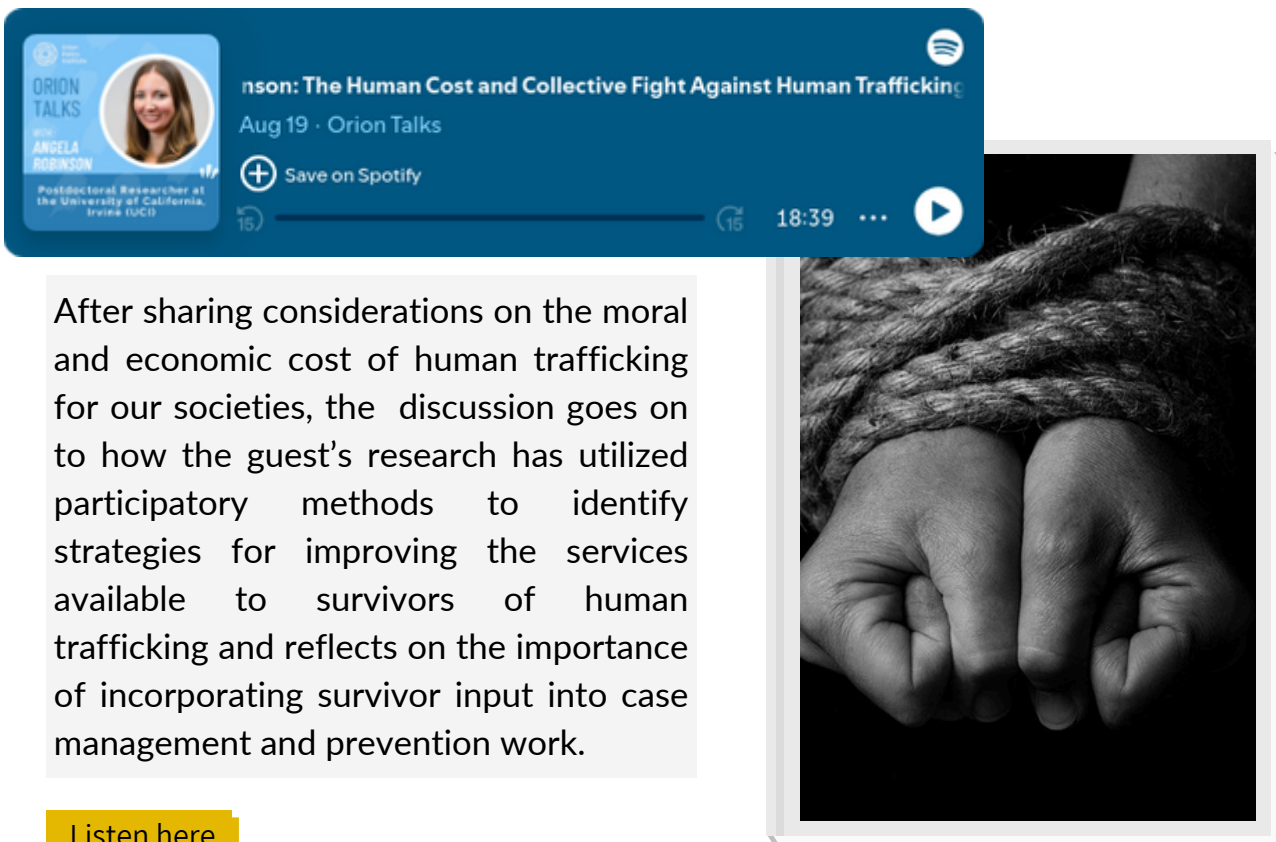
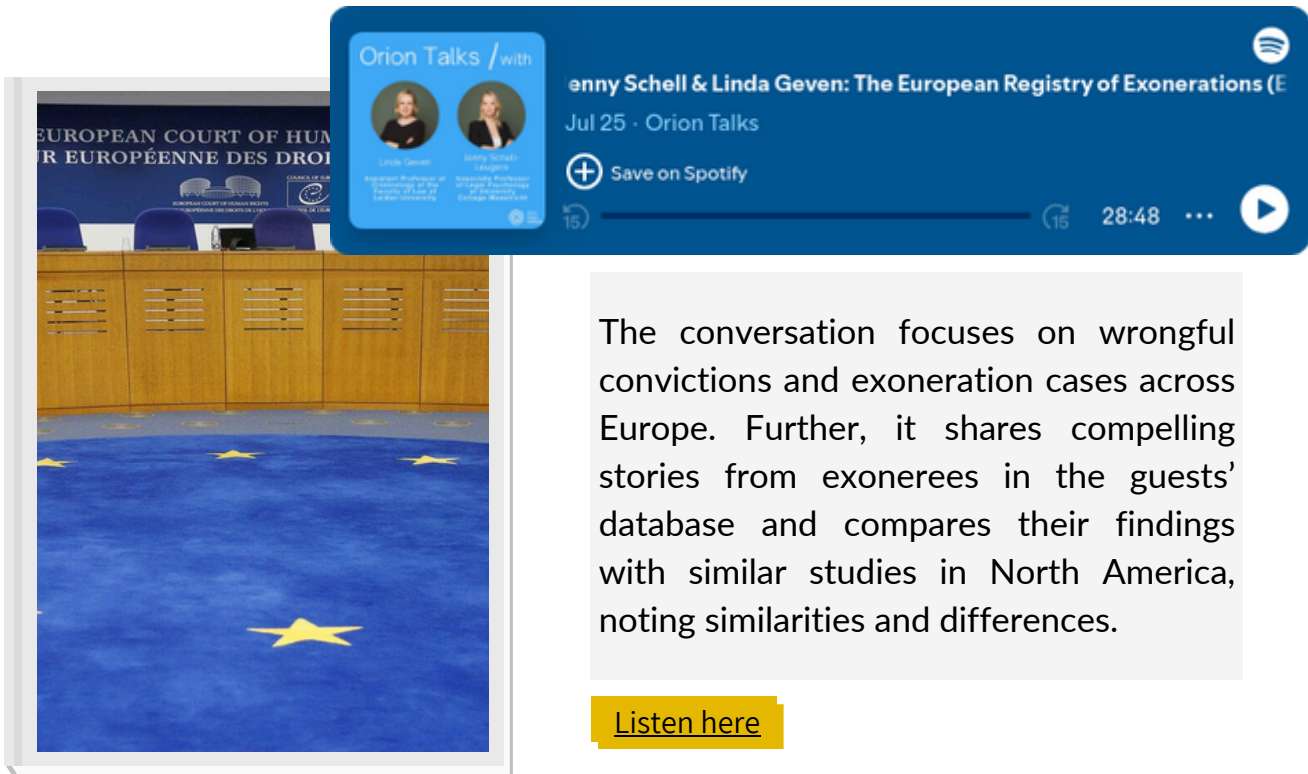
Travis Moran: Unmanned Systems and Threats to Critical Energy Infrastructure
Jul 4 · Orion Talks

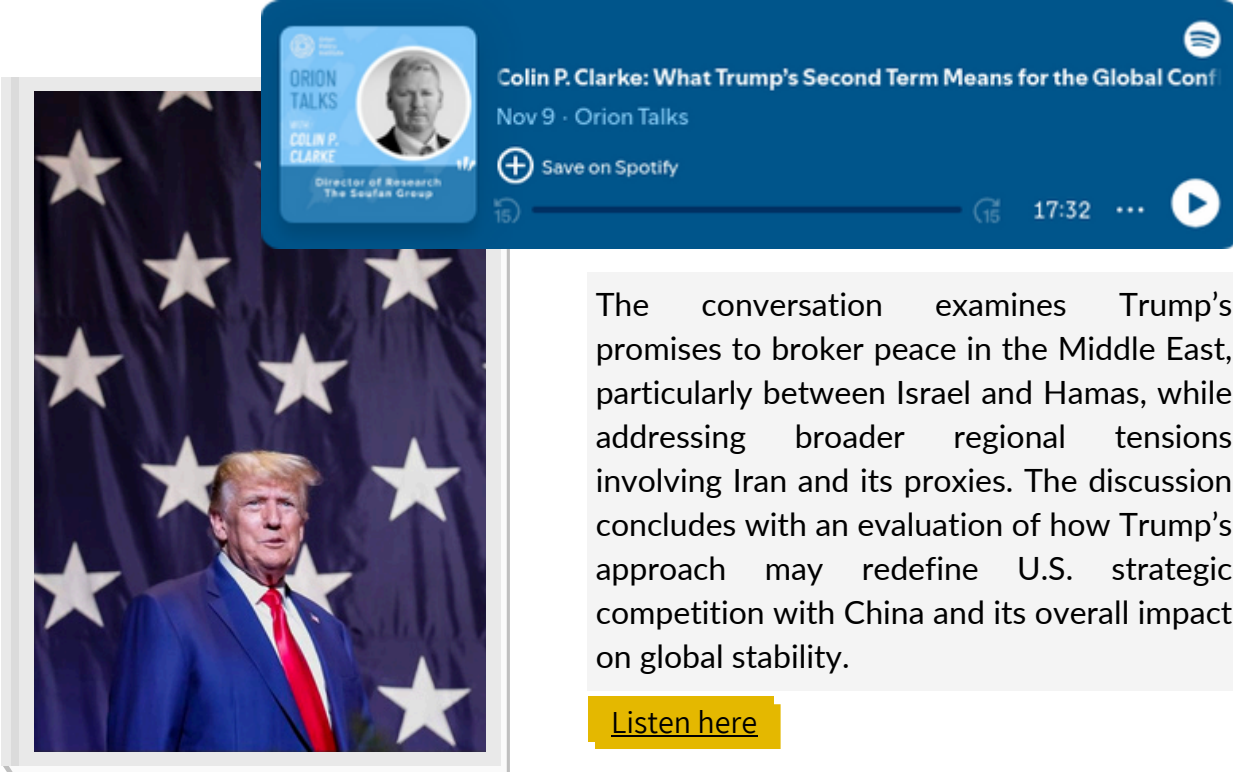
Save on Spotify

15 22:57

The conversation sheds light on the major threats facing U.S. electric infrastructure, discussing their vulnerabilities and the extent to which they are exposed. The discussion extends to the proliferation and expansion of unmanned systems, such as drones, and the additional risks they pose to the infrastructure.

[Listen here](#)





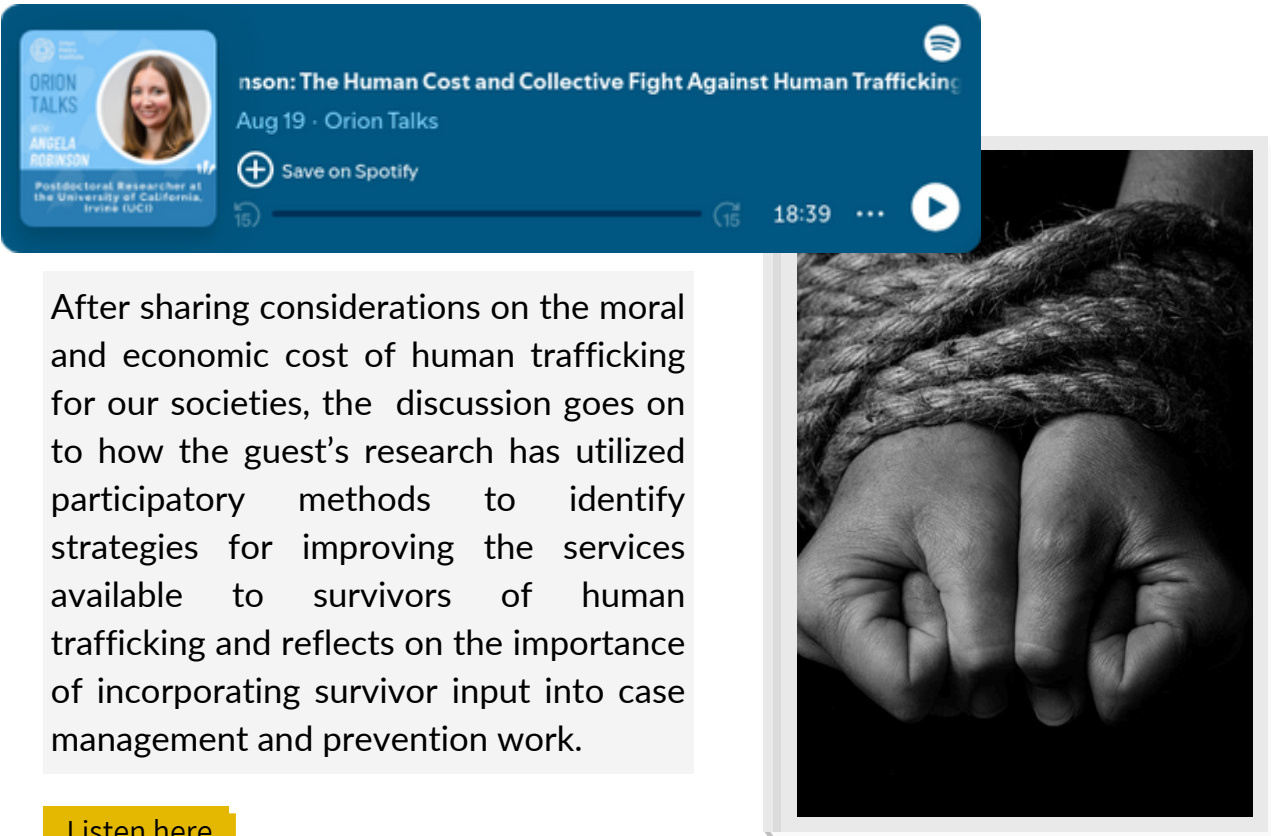
Colin P. Clarke: What Trump's Second Term Means for the Global Conflict
Nov 9 · Orion Talks

Save on Spotify

17:32

The conversation examines Trump's promises to broker peace in the Middle East, particularly between Israel and Hamas, while addressing broader regional tensions involving Iran and its proxies. The discussion concludes with an evaluation of how Trump's approach may redefine U.S. strategic competition with China and its overall impact on global stability.

[Listen here](#)



Angela Robinson: The Human Cost and Collective Fight Against Human Trafficking
Aug 19 · Orion Talks

Save on Spotify

18:39

After sharing considerations on the moral and economic cost of human trafficking for our societies, the discussion goes on to how the guest's research has utilized participatory methods to identify strategies for improving the services available to survivors of human trafficking and reflects on the importance of incorporating survivor input into case management and prevention work.

[Listen here](#)



OP-ED

The West Can Work with Sahelian Democracies to Restore Civilian Rule and Regional Security

Jacob Zenn

Published December 23'



The rapid withdrawal of the UN and other Western troops as well as the reduction in the Western diplomatic presence in post-coup Sahelian states alongside the intensified focus on the Middle East as a result of the Israel-Gaza conflict indicates that Western influence, if not also interest, in the Sahel is clearly at a low point. Nonetheless, the trends are clear that democratic backsliding and growing insecurity will continue—and Wagner will do little to stem the tide of either.

[Read More](#)

UN-led Meeting with the Taliban on Afghanistan: Seizing Opportunities or Betraying Promises?

Marta Furlan

Published July 24'

The importance of the international community engaging in direct dialogue with the Taliban cannot be overlooked. Regardless of what one might think of the Taliban government, they are Afghanistan's de facto authority and failure to engage with them may risk condemning the Afghan people to greater isolation, poverty, and suffering.

[Read More](#)



Russia's Growing Military Footprint in Africa: Arms Deals and Defense Cooperation

Selcan Karabektas

Published March 24'



The US and EU should continue to support African countries in strengthening their military and defense capacities as well as the fight against extremist groups. While the EU's initiatives on the continent remain mostly focused on peacebuilding efforts, a need exists for further measures to promote conflict prevention, negotiation, and mediation among the continent's countries.

[Read More](#)

Rethinking Alliances: France, Rwanda, and the Future of Regional Power Dynamics

Federico Donelli

Published June 24'

The Franco-Rwandan case is emblematic of some global trends. Above all, it highlights the contradictions of the Western approach to the rest of the world. One factor contributing to the weakening of the Liberal International Order (LIO) is the decline of liberal values and principles in the behavior of the states that purport to promote them globally.

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Cyber Civil Defense: A Path Towards Comprehensive and Coordinated Cybersecurity

Matt Saglam

Published April 24'



Today, as our reliance on digital technologies surges—further accelerated by the increase in remote activities during the COVID period—our societal vulnerability to cyber-attacks has exponentially grown. This vulnerability is compounded by the cyber attackers' inherent advantages.

Cybersecurity can be provided by utilizing different types of strategies. So that the gaps in cybersecurity measures are clearly understood, the Cyber Civil Defense maturity model should include the following strategies:

- *Proactive strategies aim to prevent cyber threats by preparing for them and fortifying them in advance.*
- *Active strategies involve ongoing efforts to detect and neutralize threats as they occur.*
- *Reactive strategies focus on efficiently responding to and recovering from cyber incidents and analyzing them to prevent future occurrences.*

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Biden And Xi In San Francisco, Learning To Agree To Disagree?

Miquel Vila Moreno

Published November 23'



The meeting between President Joe Biden and Xi Jinping during the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' summit in San Francisco has been the diplomatic event of the year. Xi and Biden didn't come out of their conversation empty-handed, and while it seems that after San Francisco, the relationship between Beijing and Washington hasn't deteriorated, it is still too soon to conclude they have improved.

Taking a closer look at the respective official read-outs of the Biden-Xi meeting released by the White House and the PRC Foreign Ministry, both parties don't seem to even agree on the current state of their relationship. While the US clearly states the existing rivalry between Washington and Beijing, China prefers to stick to its "win-win" rhetoric, reluctant to acknowledge the nature of the current relationship and work along the existing reality. After San Francisco, China and the US are still a long way from learning to agree to disagree.

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2023 Cybersecurity Year in Review: Notable Facts and Policies

Mehmet Bastug

Published February 24'



Despite significant investments in cybersecurity infrastructure and new technologies, cyber threats are still rising. Several hacking incidents, such as the MOVEit, 23andMe, and MGM Resorts hacks, marked the year 2023. We also saw the launch of the Biden-Harris administration's National Cybersecurity Strategy and the National Cyber Workforce and Education Strategy (NCWES) to address current and future cyber threats. Another important development was the rise of Artificial Intelligence, which is already changing the cyber threat landscape.

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How is Artificial Intelligence Redefining Business Today?

Suleyman Demirci

Published January 24'

The evolution of AI technologies, combined with broader integration and adoption, will continue redefining industry norms and charting new vistas for growth and innovation. Looking ahead, the integration of AI technology within small businesses not only marks their utilization but also hints at the potential for these enterprises to ascend to the level of influential institutions actively shaping the future evolution of this technology.



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Hayat Tahrir al-Sham Advances: The Latest Round of Escalation in the Syrian Conflict

Marta Furlan

Published December 24'



As Assad concentrates his forces on the northwest, the fighting could offer renewed opportunities to the Islamic State, which has maintained a significant attack capacity in parts of Syria, to the point that its attacks rose by 30% over the month of November; the involvement, and the extent thereof, on part of Russia, Iran, Israel, and Turkey – and the role that the US under the upcoming Trump administration will decide to play – will impact dramatically the course of current events in Syria, including the survival of the Assad regime and the country's political arrangement.

[Read More](#)

Combating Illicit Maritime Drug Flows to the United States

John Wallshein

Published May 24'

There are two main destinations for illegal drugs sourced from Latin America: the United States and Europe. On the one hand, after the narcotics arrive in Mexico, most of them are shipped through the land border of the United States rather than the coastlines. While on the other hand, narcotics travel directly to United States coastlines and seaports. The easiest way to seize drugs is at the border because it all gets consolidated in chokepoints.



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West Africa's Compounding Security Challenges

James Barnett

Published November 23'



The regional security situation in West Africa looks grim. While dynamics in each country or province vary, on the whole, the region is witnessing more jihadist expansion than contraction. The political turbulence of repeated coups and the bellicose rhetoric between regional states, exacerbated by competition between global powers like Russia and France, distracts regional governments from addressing internal security at best and provides a pretext for them to engage in self-destructive policies at worst.

[Read More](#)

Adaptive Governance: A Sustainable Solution to Address MENA's Climate Challenge

Mohammad Salami

Published July 24'

The flexibility and reduction of climate impacts in MENA remain weak due to the unwillingness of governments to use social capital and interact with social actors, which is the cornerstone of adaptive approaches in the field of water and climate. In the MENA region, adaptive governance strategies remain a low priority for political leadership, resulting in the adoption of low adaptive capacities and a lack of engagement of citizens with government officials.



[Read More](#)





WEBINAR

LIVE WEBINAR

Syria and the Region After Assad

December 19, Thursday → 10:00 – 11:00 am (EST)

Moderator

Caroline Rose
New Lines Institute

Suleyman Ozeren
American University
Orion Policy Institute

Sara Harmouch
H9 Defense

Kawa Hassan
The Stimson
Center

Suat Cubukcu
Orion Policy Institute
Towson University

Orion Policy Institute
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Orion Policy Institute hosted a live webinar "Syria and the Region After Assad." The conversation examined how the fall of Assad could alter the balance of power among regional players like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, shifts in U.S., Russian, and European policies towards Syria and the Middle East, the potential for extremist groups to exploit any power vacuum, and spillover effects on Iraq, Lebanon, and the wider region.

[Watch here](#)



 LIVE WEBINAR



Transnational Repression: Trends and Policy Recommendations



Bridgette Savino
Senior Program Analyst
U.S. Government Accountability Office



Suleyman Ozeren
Professorial Lecturer
American University



Kathryn Bolduc
Assistant Director
U.S. Government Accountability Office



Edward Lemon
Professor
Texas A&M University



Suat Cubukcu
Assistant Professor
Towson University

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2024
11:00 AM – 12:30 PM (EST)

www.orionpolicy.org

Orion Policy Institute hosted a live webinar on Transnational Repression: Trends and Policy Recommendations. The conversation covered the latest trends, tactics, and scopes of Transnational Repression, providing valuable insights that transcend borders. Our expert panelists explored illuminating case studies and dissected the complexities of this phenomenon, bringing a wealth of knowledge to the discussion.

[Watch here](#)

LIVE WEBINAR

Human Trafficking in 2024: Trends and Patterns

January 29, Monday → 11:00 am (EST)



GEORGE HANCOCK
Project Officer,
Humanity Research Consultancy



CHYLIAN IFY AZUH
Founder,
Female Returned
Migrants Network



SUTIRTHA SAHARIAH
Independent
Researcher



CATHERINE FOUGERE
MASTERS
Research Fellow,
University of Nottingham



MARTA FURLAN
Non-Resident Fellow,
Orion Policy Institute
Research Officer,
Free the Slaves



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Moderator

Orion Policy Institute hosted a live webinar on Human Trafficking in 2024: Trends and Patterns. The conversation covered human trafficking trends, policies and programs to tackle human trafficking and modern slavery, case studies, and beyond.

[Watch here](#)

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SECURITY CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

Coups, Terrorism, and External Interventions

LIVE WEBINAR

Moderator

				
Daisy Muibu Assistant Professor Security Studies at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies	Bulama Bukarti Vice President Bridgeway Foundation	James Barnett Research fellow Hudson Institute	Lily Lousada Mercy Corps Africa Regional Office	Jacob Zenn Non-Resident Fellow Orion Policy Institute

25 OCTOBER 2023  **10:00 AM-11:30 AM (EST)**

Orion Policy Institute hosted a live Webinar on Security Challenges in Africa: Coups, Terrorism, and External Interventions. The conversation covered counter-terrorism and political instability in the Sahel and beyond; external actors expanding their footprint in African internal conflicts, West African coup contagion, Wagner, and the relation between politics and banditry root causes; current government offensive against al-Shabaab and the role of foreign actors; broader ideological developments of IS/AQ/jihadism in Africa in the continent's evolving political landscape, and more.

[Watch here](#)





RESEARCH

Transnational Repression: Trends, Tactics, and Policy Recommendations

OPI Team

Published September 23'

Collaboration and collusion between the state of origin and the so-called host country are uppermost in the toolkit of transnational repression.



Today, at least 38 countries employ tactics of transnational repression in as many as 91 host states. In what can be called the "toolkit" of authoritarian control, the hydra-heads of transnational repression encompass tactics ranging from surveillance to harassment and intimidation, use of state media, assassinations, spyware, physical violence, abduction, rendition, forcible return, conspiracy, and collaboration with actors in the host country.

[Read More](#)

Autocracies are founded on the control of individuals and the masses. While some of their methods—surveillance, intimidation, manipulation, threats, false confessions, coerced returns, enforced disappearances, lies blended with wisps of truth, and many more—have been staples of authoritarian power throughout the ages.

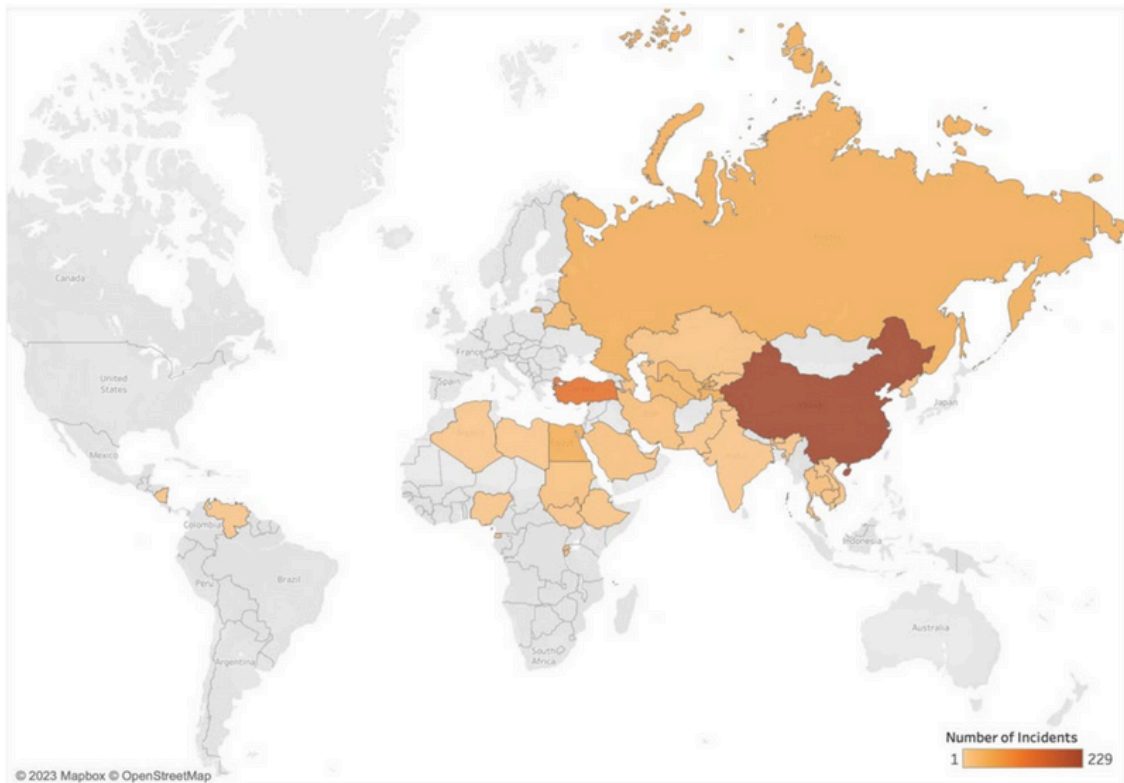


Figure 1. Origin Countries of Transnational Repression (2013-2022) Source: Freedom House

Targeting political exiles and dissidents has long been a practice of authoritarian regimes. As these regimes have become increasingly embedded in the global system, their censorship and propaganda activities and their repressive tactics have spread beyond their borders to invade the sovereignty of other nations. Based on the data provided by Freedom House, the most frequent perpetrators include the governments of China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Tajikistan.

[Read More](#)

Women and War in Sudan: Gendering of the 2023 Sudanese Civil War

Ayse Ergene & Nihal Eken

Published October 24'

Sudan's modern history has been marked by protracted civil wars and non-democratic governance systems. Behind the conflicts between armed groups and militaristic rules, women and children have borne the brunt.



The ongoing war in Sudan underscores the critical need for inclusive and comprehensive peace processes that prioritize the voices and experiences of those most affected – particularly women. Despite their pivotal roles in humanitarian response and community resilience, women remain underrepresented in Sudanese peace negotiations. This underrepresentation not only perpetuates cycles of violence but also fails to properly address critical issues such as gender-based violence and access to essential services. As Sudanese women continue to demonstrate remarkable leadership and resilience, it is imperative that their contributions and efforts be recognized and incorporated into the formal peace process. The international community and all involved parties must ensure that women's voices are not sidelined and that women are active participants in shaping Sudan's future. Their involvement is not only a matter of justice but also a necessity for achieving peace and stability in Sudan.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

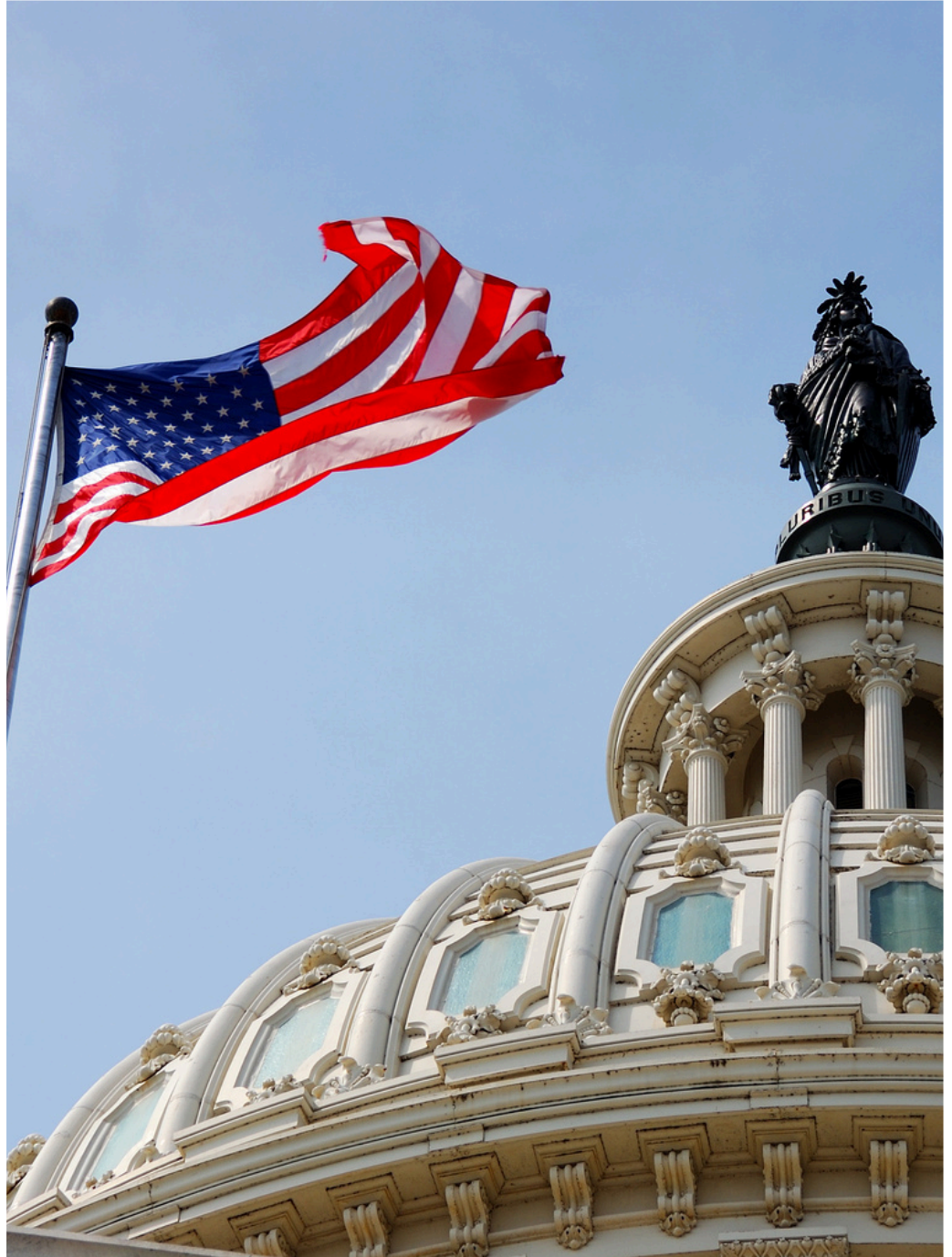
In 2023-2024, Orion Policy Institute (OPI) made significant strides in its mission to influence policy through insightful research and in-depth analysis. Our team published a series of impactful reports, policy briefs, and articles that covered critical global issues ranging from geopolitical dynamics and security challenges to human rights and economic development. Notably, our comprehensive analysis of regional conflicts and their global implications received wide recognition, underscoring OPI's growing influence in shaping informed discourse.

The positive reception of our publications across various sectors has reinforced our role as a key contributor to policy discussions. Looking ahead, we are committed to expanding our research agenda, exploring new and emerging issues, and deepening our influence in critical areas.

As we continue to grow, OPI will remain at the forefront of shaping informed policy decisions, driving meaningful change, and contributing to a safer and more equitable world.



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