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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022



The World According to Xi Jinping

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The World According to Xi Jinping

What China's Ideologue in Chief Really Believes

KEVIN RUDD

In the post–Cold War era, the Western world has suffered no shortage of grand theories of history and international relations. The settings and actors may change, but the global geopolitical drama goes on: variants of realism and liberalism compete to explain and predict state behavior, scholars debate whether the world is witnessing the end of history, a clash of civilizations, or something else entirely. And it is no surprise that the question that now attracts more analytical attention than any other is the rise of China under President Xi Jinping and the challenge it presents to American power. In the run-up to the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as Xi has maneuvered to consolidate his power and secure an unprecedented third term, Western analysts have sought to decode the worldview that drives him and his ambitions for China.

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Photograph by Xosé Bouzas

One important body of thought has been largely absent from this search for understanding, however: Marxism-Leninism. This is odd because Marxism-Leninism has been China's official ideology since 1949. But the omission is also understandable, since most Western thinkers long ago came to see communist ideology as effectively dead—even in China, where, in the late 1970s, the CCP leader Deng Xiaoping set aside the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy of his predecessor, Mao Zedong, in favor of something more akin to state capitalism. Deng summed up his thoughts on the matter with characteristic bluntness: *Bu zhenglun*, "Let's dispense with theory," he told attendees at a major CCP conference in 1981. His successors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao followed his lead, rapidly expanding the role of the market in the Chinese domestic economy and embracing a foreign policy that maximized China's participation in a global economic order led by the United States.

Xi has brought that era of pragmatic, nonideological governance to a crashing halt. In its place, he has developed a new form of Marxist nationalism that now shapes the presentation and substance of China's politics, economy, and foreign policy. In doing so, Xi is not constructing theoretical castles in the air to rationalize decisions that the CCP has made for other, more practical reasons. Under Xi, ideology drives policy more often than the other way around. Xi has pushed politics to the Leninist left, economics to the Marxist left, and foreign policy to the nationalist right. He has reasserted the influence and control the CCP exerts over all domains of public policy and private life, reinvigorated state-owned enterprises, and placed new restrictions on the private sector. Meanwhile, he has stoked nationalism by pursuing an increasingly assertive foreign policy, turbocharged by a Marxist-inspired belief that history is irreversibly on China's side and that a world anchored in Chinese power would produce a more just international order. In short, Xi's rise has meant nothing less than the return of Ideological Man.

These ideological trends are not simply a throwback to the Mao era. Xi's worldview is more complex than Mao's, blending ideological purity with technocratic pragmatism. Xi's pronouncements about history, power, and justice might strike Western audiences as impenetrable or irrelevant. But the West ignores Xi's ideological messaging at its own peril. No matter how abstract and unfamiliar his ideas might be, they are having profound effects on the real-world content of Chinese politics and foreign policy—and thus, as China's rise continues, on the rest of the world.

PARTY MAN

Like all Marxist-Leninists, Xi bases his thinking on historical materialism (an approach to history focused on the inevitability of progress through ongoing class struggle) and dialectical materialism (an approach to politics that focuses on how change occurs when contradictory forces collide and are resolved). In his published writings, Xi deploys historical materialism to position the Chinese revolution in world history in a context in which China's move to a more advanced stage of socialism necessarily accompanies the decline of capitalist systems. Through the lens of dialectical materialism, he portrays his agenda as a step forward in an ever-intensifying contest between the CCP and reactionary forces at home (an arrogant private sector, Western-influenced nongovernmental organizations, religious movements) and abroad (the United States and its allies).

These concepts may seem abstruse and arcane to those outside China. But they are taken seriously by elites in the CCP, senior Chinese officials, and many of the international relations scholars who advise the government. And Xi's published writings on theory are vastly more extensive than those of any other Chinese leader since Mao. The CCP also draws on the kinds of economic and strategic advice that typically guide Western political systems. But within the Chinese system, Marxism-Leninism still serves as the ideological headwaters of a world view that places China on the right side of history and portrays the United States as struggling in the throes of inevitable capitalist decline, consumed by its own internal political contradictions and destined to fall by the wayside. That, in Xi's view, will be the real end of history.

In 2013, barely five months after his appointment as party general secretary, Xi gave an address to the Central Conference on Ideology and Propaganda, a gathering of top party leaders in Beijing. The contents of the speech were not reported at the time but were leaked three months later and published by China Digital Times. The speech offers an unfiltered portrait of Xi's deepest political convictions. In it, he dwells on the risks of the ideological decay that led to the collapse of Soviet communism, the West's role in fomenting ideological division within China, and the need to crack down on all forms of dissent. "The disintegration of a regime often starts from the ideological area," Xi said. "Political unrest and regime change may occur overnight, but ideological evolution is a long-term process," he continued, warning that once "ideological defenses are breached, other defenses become

very difficult to hold.” But the CCP “has justice on our side,” he assured his audience, encouraging them not to be “evasive, bashful, or mince our words” in dealing with Western countries, whose goal is “to vie with us for the battlefields of people’s hearts and for the masses, and in the end to overthrow the leadership of the CCP and China’s socialist system.”

This meant cracking down on anyone “harboring dissent and discord” and demanding that CCP members demonstrate loyalty not only to the party but also to Xi personally. What followed was an internal “cleansing” of the CCP, accomplished by purging any perceived political or institutional opposition, in large part through a decadelong anticorruption campaign that had begun even before the speech. A “rectification campaign” brought another round of purges to the party’s political and legal affairs apparatus. Xi also reasserted party control over the People’s Liberation Army and the People’s Armed Police and centralized China’s cybersecurity and surveillance systems. Finally, in 2019, Xi introduced a party-wide education campaign titled “Don’t Forget the Party’s Original Purpose, Keep the Mission in Mind.” According to an official document announcing the initiative, its goal was for party members “to gain theoretical learning and to be baptized in ideology and politics.” By around the end of his first term, it had become clear that Xi sought nothing less than to transform the CCP into the high church of a revitalized, secular faith.

HIGH MARX

In contrast to those immediate moves toward a more Leninist discipline in domestic politics, the shift to Marxist orthodoxy in economic policy under Xi has been more gradual. Economic management had long been the domain of the technocrats who serve on the State Council, China’s administrative cabinet. Xi’s personal interests also lay more in party history, political ideology, and grand strategy than in the details of financial and economic management. But as the party apparatus increasingly asserted control of the economic departments of the state, China’s policy debates on the relative roles of the state and the market became increasingly ideological. Xi also progressively lost confidence in market economics following the global financial crisis of 2008 and China’s homegrown financial crisis of 2015, which was sparked by the bursting of a stock market bubble and led to a nearly 50 percent collapse in the value of Chinese stocks before the markets finally settled in 2016.

China's economic policy trajectory under Xi—from a consensus in support of market reforms to an embrace of increased party and state intervention—has therefore been uneven, contested, and at times contradictory. Indeed, in late 2013, less than six months after Xi's revivalist sermon on ideology and propaganda, the Central Committee of the CCP (the top several hundred leaders of the party) adopted a remarkably reformist document on the economy, starkly titled "The Decision." It outlined a series of policy measures that would allow the market to play "the decisive role" in the allocation of resources in the economy. But the rollout of these policies slowed to a standstill in 2015, while state-owned enterprises received trillions of dollars in investment from "industry guidance funds" between 2015 and 2021—a massive infusion of government support that brought the Chinese state roaring back to the center of economic policy.

Xi's rise has
meant nothing
less than the
return of
Ideological Man.

At the 19th CCP Party Congress, in 2017, Xi announced that going forward, the party's central ideological challenge would be to rectify the "unbalanced and inadequate development" that had emerged during the "reform and opening" period of market-based policy changes that Deng had inaugurated in the late 1970s. In a little-noticed speech published in the party's ideological journal in 2021, Xi in effect challenged Deng's definition of "the primary stage of socialism" and Deng's belief that China would need to endure inequality for hundreds of years before achieving prosperity for all. Instead, Xi hailed a faster transition to a higher phase of socialism, declaring that "thanks to many decades of hard work, [this] is a period that marks a new starting point for us." Xi rejected Deng's gradualism and the notion that China was doomed to an indefinite future of developmental imperfection and class inequality. Through more rigorous adherence to Marxist principles, he promised, China could achieve both national greatness and greater economic equality in the not-too-distant future.

Such an outcome would rely on party committees increasing their influence on private firms by playing a larger role in selecting senior management and making critical board decisions. And as the Chinese state began securing equity in private firms, the state would also encourage successful entrepreneurs to invest in state-owned enterprises, mixing the market and the state to an ever-greater degree.

Meanwhile, CCP economic planners would be tasked with designing a “dual circulation economy,” which in effect meant that China would become increasingly self-reliant across all sectors of the economy while the world’s economies would become increasingly dependent on China. And in late 2020, Xi laid out an approach to income redistribution known as the “common prosperity agenda,” through which the rich were to be expected to “voluntarily” redistribute funds to state-favored programs to reduce income inequality. By the end of 2021, it was clear that Deng’s era of “reform and opening” was coming to a close. In its place stood a new statist economic orthodoxy.

“HISTORY IS THE BEST TEXTBOOK”

Xi’s push toward Leninist politics and Marxist economics has been accompanied by his adoption of an increasingly bracing form of nationalism, fueling an assertiveness abroad that has replaced the traditional caution and risk aversion that were the hallmarks of China’s foreign policy during the Deng era. Xi’s recognition of the importance of nationalism was evident early in his tenure. “In the West, there are people who say that China should change the angle of its historical propaganda, it should no longer make propaganda about its history of humiliation,” he noted in his 2013 speech. “But as I see it, we cannot heed this; forgetting history means betrayal. History objectively exists. History is the best textbook. A nation without historical memory does not have a future.” Immediately after Xi was installed as CCP general secretary in 2012, he led the newly appointed Politburo Standing Committee on a tour of an exhibition at the National Museum of China in Beijing titled “The Road to Rejuvenation,” which chronicled the perfidy of the Western imperial powers and Japan and the party’s heroic response during China’s “100 years of national humiliation.”

In the years since, the concept of “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” has become the centerpiece of Xi’s nationalist vision. His goal is for China to become the preeminent Asian and global power by 2049. In 2017, Xi identified a number of quantitative benchmarks that the country must reach by 2035 on the road to that status, including becoming a “medium-level developed economy” and having “basically completed the modernization of China’s national defense and its armed forces.” To capture and codify his vision, Xi has introduced or highlighted a number of ideological concepts that collectively authorize China’s new, more assertive approach. First among these is



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“comprehensive national power” (*zonghe guoli*), which the CCP uses to quantify China’s combined military, economic, and technological power and foreign policy influence. Whereas this concept was used by Xi’s predecessors, only Xi was bold enough to claim that China’s power has grown so rapidly that the country has already “entered the leading ranks of the world.” Xi has also emphasized rapid changes in “the international balance of forces” (*guoji liliang duibi*), which refers to official comparisons the party uses to measure China’s progress in catching up with the United States and its allies. Official CCP rhetoric also features references to growing “multipolarity” (*duojihua*) in the international system and to irreversible increases in China’s power. Xi has also rehabilitated a Maoist aphorism hailing “the rise of the East and the decline of the West” (*dongsheng xijiang*) as a euphemism for China surpassing the United States.

Xi’s public praise for China’s growing national power has been much sharper and more expansive than that of his predecessors. In 2013, the CCP formally abandoned Deng’s traditional “diplomatic guidance,” dating from 1992, that China should “hide its strength, bide its time, and never take the lead.” Xi used the 2017 Party Congress Report to describe how China had promoted its “economic, scientific, technological, military, and comprehensive national power” to the extent that it had now “entered into the leading ranks of the world”—and that owing to an unprecedented increase in China’s international standing, “the Chinese nation, with an entirely new posture, now stands tall and firm in the East.”

THEORY AND PRACTICE

What matters most to those warily eyeing China’s rise is how these changing ideological formulations have been put into practice. Xi’s doctrinal statements are not only theoretical—they are also operational. They have laid the groundwork for a wide range of foreign policy steps that would have been unimaginable under earlier leaders. China has embarked on a series of island reclamations in the South China Sea and turned them into garrisons, ignoring earlier formal guarantees that it would not. Under Xi, the country has carried out large-scale, live-fire missile strikes around the Taiwanese coast, simulating a maritime and air blockade of the island—something that previous Chinese regimes refrained from doing despite having the ability to do so. Xi has intensified China’s border conflict

with India through repeated border clashes and by building new roads, airfields, and other military-related infrastructure near the border. And China has embraced a new policy of economic and trade coercion against states whose policies offend Beijing and that are vulnerable to Chinese pressure.

China has also become far more aggressive in going after critics abroad. In July 2021, Beijing for the first time announced sanctions against individuals and institutions in the West that have had the temerity to criticize China. The sanctions are in harmony with the new ethos of “Wolf Warrior” diplomacy, which encourages Chinese diplomats to routinely and publicly attack their host governments—a radical departure from Chinese diplomatic practice over the last 35 years.

Xi’s ideological beliefs have committed China to the goal of building what Xi describes as a “fairer and more just” international system—one anchored in Chinese power rather than American power and one that reflects norms more consistent with Marxist-Leninist values. For that reason, China has pushed to strip UN resolutions of all references to universal human rights and has built a new set of China-centric international institutions, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, to rival and eventually replace Western-dominated ones. A Marxist-Leninist quest for a “more just” world also shapes China’s promotion of its own national development model across the global South as an alternative to the “Washington consensus” of free markets and democratic governance. And Beijing has offered a ready supply of surveillance technologies, police training, and intelligence collaboration to countries around the world, such as Ecuador, Uzbekistan, and Zimbabwe, that have eschewed the classical Western liberal-democratic model.

These changes in Chinese foreign and security policy were signaled well in advance by earlier shifts in Xi’s ideological line. Using what Western audiences might see as obscure, theoretical mumbo jumbo, Xi has communicated to the party a crystal-clear message: China is much more powerful than it ever was, and he intends to use this power to change the course of history.

Xi’s doctrinal statements are not only theoretical—they are also operational.

IN IT TO WIN IT

Xi is 69 years old and seems unlikely to retire; as a lifelong student and practitioner of Chinese politics, he knows full well that if he did leave office, he and his family would be vulnerable to retribution from his successors. So Xi is likely to lead the country for the rest of his life, although his formal designations may change over time. His mother is 96 and his father lived until he was 89. If their longevity is any indication of his, he is poised to remain China's paramount leader until at least the late 2030s.

Xi faces few political vulnerabilities. Elements of China's society may begin to chafe at the increasingly repressive apparatus he has built. But contemporary surveillance technologies allow him to control dissent in ways that Mao and Joseph Stalin could hardly imagine. Xi exhibits growing confidence in China's rising "nationalist generation," especially the elites who have been educated at home rather than abroad, who came of age under his leadership rather than during the more liberal regimes of his predecessors, and who see themselves as the vanguard of Xi's political revolution. It would be foolish to assume that Xi's Marxist-Leninist vision will implode under the weight of its own internal contradictions in the near to medium term. If political change does come, it will more likely arrive after Xi's death than before it.

But Xi is not completely secure. His Achilles' heel is the economy. Xi's Marxist vision of greater party control over the private sector, an expanding role for state-owned enterprises and industrial policy, and the quest for "common prosperity" through redistribution is likely to shrink economic growth over time. That is because declining business confidence will reduce private fixed capital investment in response to growing perceptions of political and regulatory risk; after all, what the state gives, the state can also take away. This applies in particular to the technology, finance, and property sectors, which have been China's principal domestic growth engines for the last two decades. China's attractiveness to foreign investors has also declined because of supply chain uncertainty and the impact of the new doctrines of national economic self-sufficiency. At home, China's business elites have been spooked by the anticorruption campaign, the arbitrary nature of the party-controlled judicial system, and a growing number of high-profile tech titans falling out of political favor. And China has yet to figure out how to leave behind its "zero COVID" strategy, which has compounded the country's economic slowdown.

Adding to these weaknesses are a number of long-term structural trends: a rapidly aging population, a shrinking workforce, low productivity growth, and high levels of debt shared between state and private financial institutions. Whereas the CCP had once expected average annual growth to remain around six percent for the rest of the 2020s before slowing to around four percent for the 2030s, some analysts now worry that in the absence of a radical course correction, the economy will soon begin to stagnate, topping out at around three percent in the 2020s before falling to around two percent in the 2030s. As a result, China might enter the 2030s still locked in the so-called middle-income trap, with an economy smaller or only marginally larger than that of the United States. For China's leadership, that outcome would have profound consequences. If employment and income growth falter, China's budget would come under pressure, forcing the CCP to choose between providing health care, elder care, and pension entitlements on the one hand and pursuing national security goals, industrial policy, and the Belt and Road Initiative on the other. Meanwhile, China's gravitational pull on the rest of the global economy would be called into question. The debate over whether the world has already witnessed "peak China" is only just beginning, and when it comes to China's long-term growth, the jury is still out.

Therefore, the critical question for China in the 2020s is whether Xi can engineer a course correction to recover from the significant slowing of economic growth. That, however, would involve a considerable loss of face for him. More likely, he will try to muddle through, making as few ideological and rhetorical adjustments as possible and putting in place a new team of economic policymakers, hoping they can find a way to magically restore growth.

Xi's Marxist nationalism is an ideological blueprint for the future; it is the truth about China that is hiding in plain sight. Under Xi, the CCP will evaluate changing international circumstances through the prism of dialectical analysis—and not necessarily in ways that will make sense to outsiders. For example, Xi will see new Western institutions intended to balance against China, such as the Quad (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic cooperation agreement between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States) and the AUKUS (a defense agreement linking Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), as both strategically hostile and ideologically predictable, requiring new forms of political, ideological, and military

“struggle” to roll back. In his Marxist-Leninist view, China’s ultimate victory is guaranteed because the deep forces of historical determinism are on the CCP’s side, and the West is in structural decline.

This view will affect the likelihood of conflict in Asia. Since 2002, the CCP’s code language for its belief that war was unlikely has been the official phrase “China continues to enjoy a period of strategic opportunity.” This statement is meant to convey that China will face a low risk of conflict for the foreseeable future and can therefore seek economic and foreign policy advantages while

Xi’s ideological
worldview
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plain sight.

the United States is bogged down elsewhere, especially in the broader Middle East. But in the wake of Washington’s official labeling of China as a “strategic competitor” in 2017, the ongoing U.S.-Chinese trade war, mutual (if selective) forms of economic decoupling, and the hardening of U.S. alliances with Aus-

tralia, Japan, South Korea, and NATO, the CCP is likely to change its formal analytical conclusion about the strategic environment.

The danger is that dialectical methodologies and the binary conclusions that they produce can lead to spectacularly incorrect conclusions when applied to the real world of international security. In the 1950s, Mao saw it as dialectically inevitable that the United States would attack China to snuff out the Chinese revolution on behalf of the forces of capitalism and imperialism. Despite the Korean War and two crises in the Taiwan Strait during that decade, no such attack materialized. Had Mao not taken such an ideological view, the thawing of China’s relationship with the United States could perhaps have been initiated a decade earlier than it was, particularly given the unfolding reality of the Sino-Soviet split that began after 1959. In similar fashion, Xi now sees threats on every front and has embarked on the securitization of virtually every aspect of Chinese public policy and private life. And once such threat perceptions become formal analytical conclusions and are translated into the CCP bureaucracies, the Chinese system might begin to function as if armed conflict were inevitable.

Xi’s ideological pronouncements shape how the CCP and its nearly 100 million members understand their country and its role in the world. They take such texts seriously; the rest of the world should, too. At the very least, Xi’s embrace of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy should put to

rest any wishful thinking that Xi's China might peacefully liberalize its politics and economy. And it should make clear that China's approach to foreign policy is driven not only by a rolling calculus of strategic risk and opportunity but also by an underlying belief that the forces of historical change are inexorably driving the country forward.

This should, therefore, cause Washington and its partners to carefully evaluate their existing China strategies. The United States should realize that China represents the most politically and ideologically disciplined challenger it has ever faced during its century of geopolitical dominance. U.S. strategists should avoid "mirror imaging" and should not assume that Beijing will act in ways that Washington would construe as rational or serving China's self-interests.

The West won an ideological contest in the twentieth century. But China is not the Soviet Union, not least because China now has the second-largest economy in the world. And although Xi may not be Stalin, he is certainly not Mikhail Gorbachev, either. Xi's adherence to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy has helped him consolidate his personal power. But this same ideological stance has also created dilemmas that the CCP will find difficult to resolve, especially as slowing economic growth puts in doubt the party's long-standing social contract with the people.

Whatever may unfold, Xi will not abandon his ideology. He is a true believer. And this presents one further test for the United States and its allies. To prevail in the unfolding ideological war that now stretches before them will require a radical reembrace of the principles that distinguish liberal-democratic political systems. Western leaders must defend those ideals in word and deed. They, too, must become true believers. 🌐

Russia's Dangerous Decline

The Kremlin Won't Go Down Without a Fight

ANDREA KENDALL-TAYLOR AND MICHAEL KOFMAN

At a White House ceremony on August 9, days after the U.S. Senate agreed in a near-unanimous vote to ratify the expansion of NATO to include Finland and Sweden, U.S. President Joe Biden highlighted how Russia's invasion of Ukraine had backfired on Russian President Vladimir Putin. "He's getting exactly what he did not want," Biden announced. "He wanted the Finlandization of NATO, but he's getting the NATOization of Finland, along with Sweden." Indeed, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been a massive strategic blunder, leaving Russia militarily, economically, and geopolitically weaker.

Ukraine's offensive in Kharkiv in September underscored the magnitude of Putin's error. As Russian forces grew exhausted, losing

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momentum on the battlefield, Ukraine seized the initiative, dealing the Russian military a decisive blow. Ukraine's battlefield successes revealed the extent of the rot in Putin's army—the sagging morale, the declining manpower, the deteriorating quality of the troops. Instead of giving up, however, Putin responded to these problems by ordering a partial military mobilization, introducing tougher punishments for soldiers who desert or surrender, and moving forward with the illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions. Putin reacted to Russia's falling fortunes in Ukraine just as he did to its shrinking role on the world stage: dealt a losing hand, he doubled down on his risky bet. To Putin's evident surprise, the war in Ukraine has accelerated long-standing trends pushing his country toward decline. Europe is moving to reduce its energy dependence on Russia, diminishing both the country's leverage over the continent and the government revenues that depend heavily on energy exports. Unprecedented international sanctions and export controls are limiting Russia's access to capital and technology, which will cause Moscow to fall even further behind in innovation. A year ago, we argued in these pages that reports of Russia's decline were overstated and that Russia was poised to remain a persistent power—a country facing structural challenges but maintaining the intent and capabilities to threaten the United States and its allies. Putin's disastrous invasion underscored the dangers of dismissing the threat from Russia, but it has also hastened the country's decline. Today, Russia's long-term outlook is decidedly dimmer.

Given these factors, there will be a strong temptation to downgrade Russia as a threat. That would be a mistake, and not just because the war has yet to be won. In Ukraine and elsewhere, the more vulnerable Moscow perceives itself to be, the more it will try to offset those vulnerabilities by relying on unconventional tools—including nuclear weapons. In other words, Russian power and influence may be diminished, but that does not mean Russia will become dramatically less threatening. Instead, some aspects of the threat are likely to worsen. For the West, recognizing that reality means abandoning any near-term hopes of a chastened Russia and maintaining support for Russia's targets. That effort should begin in Ukraine: the United States and its allies must provide sustained support to Kyiv to ensure that Russia suffers a defeat. But even if Putin loses, the problem that Russia poses will not be solved. In many ways, it will grow in intensity. So, too, should the response to it.

PAYMENT DUE

The war in Ukraine has dealt a blow to Russia's global economic influence. Russia's GDP is set to contract by six percent over the course of 2022, according to the International Monetary Fund. And that could be just the beginning, as the full brunt of Western measures are yet to be felt. Western export controls will curtail Moscow's access to key technologies and components, hobbling an economy that depends heavily on foreign inputs and know-how. Already there are signs of struggle in car manufacturing and other major commercial sectors in which Russian dependence on foreign components or parts is especially pronounced.

Moreover, Russia's status as a major energy power is on shaky ground. To be sure, Europe faces challenges in securing alternatives to Russian energy imports in the coming decade. But over the long term, the political leverage that the Kremlin derives from energy exports will diminish. Western sanctions scheduled to take effect by the end of 2022 will block the issuance of commercial insurance for Russian tanker shipments, increasing the risks and costs of Russian oil transactions. The G-7, meanwhile, is imposing a price cap on the sale of Russian oil. Over time, the noose may tighten, forcing Russia to offer greater discounts for the purchase of its oil. There are growing signs of declining Russian exports and, hence, shrinking revenue, leading the Russian government to slash its budget in many departments by ten percent. Europe will steadily decrease its imports of Russian energy, giving Moscow less room to negotiate with other consumers, such as China and India. Russia has also hemorrhaged some of its best talent, including programmers, engineers, and information technology specialists, which will curtail its future competitiveness.

Although those factors will take a significant toll, the full extent of the looming economic contraction and its impact on Russia is unclear. The effects of sanctions and export controls will largely depend on the West's success in enforcing them and Europe's success in reducing its dependence on Russian energy. The Kremlin, for its part, will work hard to circumvent the restrictions and find workarounds to blunt their damage. Moscow will resort to trading goods illegally through networks that transit friendly countries, such as the Eurasian Economic Union states, and to working with countries such as China to jointly develop technologies. It will be difficult for Russia to access the large volume of components required to supply key sectors of its economy,

such as the automotive industry, but it may be able to secure the specific technologies needed to sustain select weapons programs.

Rather than facing a total collapse, the Russian economy is likely headed toward scarcity, autarky, and a steady decoupling from the global economy. As conditions deteriorate, the Kremlin will grow more desperate, resorting to shadowy or illicit means to get by and flouting the rules that govern global commerce in which it no longer has a stake. The more marginalized and threatened the Kremlin becomes, the less predictable and restrained its behavior will be.

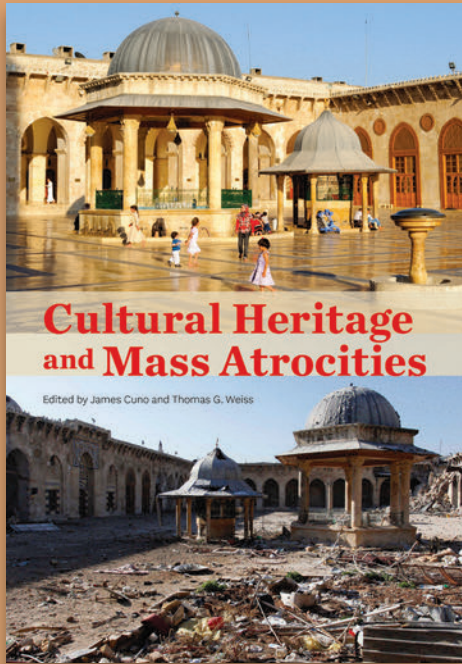
It is worth considering that before the war, Russia was already a relatively weak great power, with poor economic foundations for its global influence. Yet its ability to contest U.S. interests has often been greater than any raw economic indicators would suggest. Russia tends to punch above its weight and, though lacking in dynamism, is known for its resilience. The country has also lost its share of wars yet has remained a consequential actor in European security. With that track record, it would be unwise to assume that an economically weaker Russia will necessarily be less threatening to U.S. interests in the years to come.

BATTLEFIELD DEARTH

The Russian military has been badly mauled in Ukraine. The war has consumed millions of artillery shells and worn out a massive quantity of Russian equipment, from artillery barrels to tank engines. More than 80,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or wounded in the fighting. Mobilized personnel from Russian-held Ukrainian territories in Donetsk and Luhansk and volunteer fighters make up a significant percentage of the more recent losses, but many of Russia's best troops were lost early in the war. At the same time as it faces personnel shortages, the Russian military is increasingly having to bring old equipment out of storage to outfit new volunteer units.

Moscow has addressed these problems piecemeal, allowing its troops to muddle through, but that ultimately won't resolve the fundamental problems as the quality of the force degrades. Mobilization may extend Russia's ability to sustain the war, introducing a degree of uncertainty to the medium and long term, but it is unlikely to resolve the structural problems in Russia's military performance. As Western export controls cut Russia off from key components such as computer chips and Western machine tools, armament programs have been delayed and Moscow has been forced to pursue expensive workarounds.

NEW & NOTABLE



Cultural Heritage and Mass Atrocities

Edited by James Cuno and Thomas G. Weiss

A pathbreaking call to halt the intertwined crises of cultural heritage attacks and mass atrocities and mobilize international efforts to protect people and cultures.

“Protecting cultural heritage is not a luxury that can be left for better days but rather a tool for peace and reconciliation in many parts of the world today. Often the first victim of war, cultural heritage heals and can restore ties that have been broken.”

—Irina Bokova,
former Director-General of
UNESCO

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These measures will reduce the quality and reliability of such parts in weapons systems and, over time, substantially weaken Russia's defense industry.

Still, the West should not assume that the Russian military will be rendered harmless after its disastrous war with Ukraine. Russia is likely to find ways around the Western restrictions, especially given the difficulty of enforcing them. Moscow may not be particularly good at producing its own substitutes for imports, but it has a knack for skirting Western export controls. After its illegal annexation of

Ukraine revealed
the extent of the
rot in Putin's army.

Crimea in 2014, Russia, despite an array of sanctions, still managed to maintain access to Western-made parts for many of its weapons. China may also work to lessen the pressure. Although Beijing has so far been reluctant to increase defense-military cooperation with Russia for fear of incurring U.S. penalties

for violating sanctions, it is likely to find ways to support Moscow as the international spotlight moves away from Ukraine, including by providing computer chips and other crucial components.

What is more, the war has left untouched many of the Russian capabilities that most worry the United States and NATO. Russia remains a leader in integrated air defenses, electronic warfare, anti-satellite weapons, submarines, and other advanced systems. Although it at first seemed that Russia had not used cyber-operations during its attack on Ukraine, according to an analysis by Microsoft, Russia did in fact conduct almost 40 destructive cyberattacks against Ukraine in the first three months of the invasion, including a devastating cyber-campaign across Europe that blocked Ukrainian access to commercial satellites. To the extent that Moscow exercised restraint on that front, it probably did so because Putin envisioned a swift victory and planned to occupy the country thereafter.

Last but not least, Russia still has a sizable nuclear arsenal—4,477 warheads, according to some estimates—that remains a significant factor shaping U.S. and NATO decision-making. Even as the Russian military invested more heavily in conventional weaponry, it maintained a capable tactical nuclear arsenal and poured billions of rubles into modernizing its strategic nuclear forces. Despite Russia's conventional losses in Ukraine, its nuclear arsenal is a logical offset to its conventional vulnerability and poses a credible threat. Western policymakers, therefore, should not assume Russia can no longer endanger European

security, nor should they imagine that Russia can't recover its lost military capabilities. Russia retains considerable latent power, resilience, and mobilization potential even if the present regime is inept at capitalizing on those resources. There is a reason Russia features so prominently in the wars of the past several hundred years: the country frequently uses, misuses, and eventually restores hard military power.

BEYOND PUTIN

To justify the war, the Kremlin has stoked a dark and ugly form of “patriotism” inside Russia. Putin and his propagandists have broadcast the message that the war in Ukraine is in fact a civilizational conflict with a West that seeks to keep Russia weak. They allege that Russia is fighting NATO in Ukraine and that the United States and Europe are out to break Russia apart. Although such anti-American rhetoric is not new—portraying the United States as an enemy has been a long-standing Putin tactic—it is growing angrier and more aggressive. This confrontational, anti-Western tone will continue as long as Putin is in power.

There are now renewed questions about Putin's longevity in office, particularly after he called for a partial mobilization in September. Before that announcement, Putin had gone to great lengths to shelter politically consequential Russians from his war in Ukraine. The regime raised pensions to win over the country's millions of retirees, insisted the “special military operation” was continuing “in accordance to the plan,” and disproportionately recruited people from Russia's most impoverished regions to fight. Indeed, Putin sought Russians' passive approval, and for many, life continued as normal. By declaring a partial mobilization, however, Putin has awakened Russian society to the grim realities of the war. His grip on power is weaker now than before his decision to call on Russians to prolong his misguided endeavor.

What comes after Putin is harder to predict. Some commentators have warned that Russia's next leader could be even worse for the West. That is certainly possible, but that likelihood may be lower than many expect. Data on authoritarian regimes most similar to Russia's suggest that if Putin exited office as a result of domestic dynamics—that is, because of a coup, a protest, or his natural death—Russia's political trajectory would be unlikely to worsen in terms of stability and repression and might even improve. Research that one of us (Kendall-Taylor) has conducted with the political scientist Erica Frantz found that in the post-Cold War era, coups, wide-scale protests, and

more violent forms of conflict are no more likely to erupt in the years after such leaders leave the scene than when they were in office. Repression, in fact, tends to subside after a change.

But although domestic dynamics might not become more combustible, authoritarianism in Russia will likely outlast Putin. In the post-Cold War era, authoritarianism persisted past the exit of longtime leaders in roughly 75 percent of cases, according to Kendall-Taylor and Frantz. Moreover, there is a strong chance that the elites who hold antagonistic views of the West will remain in power. According to the same research, a regime often remains intact after longtime leaders leave office—a prospect made more likely if Putin exits on account of natural death or an elite-led coup. Since Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Russia's security services, especially the Federal Security Service, the successor to the KGB, have become only more empowered and entrenched. The more Putin must rely on repression to maintain control, the more power he must grant them. The security services—a group that historically has held especially hostile views of the United States and the West—are therefore primed to maintain influence beyond Putin. Unless there is significant turnover among the ruling elite in conjunction with Putin's exit, Russia's confrontational posture will endure.

WOUNDED BUT DANGEROUS

Russia may face mounting challenges, but the Kremlin will try to adapt. In particular, the more vulnerable Putin feels given the degradation of Russia's conventional forces in Ukraine, the more likely he is to rely on unconventional methods to accomplish his objectives. With its back against the wall, the Kremlin will also have less compunction about trying to destabilize its enemies through sometimes exotic and hard-to-track methods in the biological, chemical, cyberspace, or artificial intelligence realms.

For starters, the Kremlin will almost certainly intensify its disinformation campaigns. Russia has seen just how effective such campaigns can be: disinformation and propaganda have contributed to decisions by leaders in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to remain neutral or circumspect in the aftermath of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. By accusing Ukraine of carrying out atrocities that Russian soldiers have committed in the war, framing Western sanctions instead of Russia's invasion as responsible for high food and energy prices, and convincing many that it is fighting a defensive war against an expanding NATO, Russia has diluted criticism of its military aggression.

Cyberattacks will also become an ever more important and disruptive tool, as recent incidents in Estonia and Lithuania suggest. In August, in response to Tallinn's announcement that it would remove all Soviet monuments from public spaces, a Russian hacker group targeted more than 200 state and private Estonian institutions—the biggest wave of cyberattacks on Estonia in more than a decade. The same hacker group similarly targeted state and private institutions in Lithuania in June after the government placed restrictions on the transit of goods sanctioned by the European Union to Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave between Lithuania and Poland that depends on Lithuanian railways and roads for supplies.

Most ominously, the more damage the Russian military incurs in Ukraine, the more likely it is to rely on the prospect of nuclear escalation to offset NATO's conventional superiority in Europe. The Russian military appears genuinely more comfortable with the notion of limited nuclear use relative to its Western counterparts. To be sure, the use of nuclear weapons is a political decision, but the preponderance of evidence suggests that Russia's political leadership might well consider limited nuclear use if faced with the kind of defeat that could threaten the regime or the state. A future crisis or conflict with NATO would leave Moscow with few conventional options before it decided to threaten or potentially use nuclear weapons, shortening the pathway to nuclear war.

The growing import of nonstrategic (or tactical) nuclear weapons to Russia's military means that the country is less likely than ever to agree to negotiated limits on its nuclear arsenal. That is particularly problematic given that Russia has a more diversified nuclear arsenal than the United States does, with different types of nonstrategic weapons, and doctrinally appears to be more willing to use those weapons in a conflict. The current hostility in the U.S. Congress toward Russia and Moscow's record of violating the treaties it signs also lowers the odds that the United States and Russia will agree to a replacement for the New START treaty once it expires in 2026. In the absence of an agreement, Russia's ability to produce strategic nuclear weapons and deploy new systems would be unchecked, and the United States would lose important insights into Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal. Notably, China is also modernizing its nuclear arsenal. As a result, the United States will find itself dealing with two unconstrained nuclear powers, both focused on the United States as the primary threat.

**Authoritarianism
in Russia
will likely
outlast Putin.**

THE DANGER OF COMPLACENCY

Any sensible effort to counter Moscow must start in Kyiv. U.S. and European support for Ukraine has so far been remarkable. The United States alone has sent more than \$45 billion in assistance. This support has helped Ukraine not just defend itself but launch a counteroffensive to retake territory occupied by Russian forces. With the momentum on Kyiv's side, now is the time to step up the support and the provision of weapons Ukraine needs to, at a minimum, return its borders to where they stood before the invasion. Anything less would increase the prospects of another war down the line.

Even if Ukraine and its Western backers are wildly successful, however, Russia will remain a challenge for European security. Russia's war, at its core, is an imperialist endeavor rooted in the still unfolding collapse of the Soviet Union. As some historians rightly point out, the dissolution of the Soviet Union is best thought of as a process that in many ways is still going on rather than as a discrete historical event; the war in Ukraine is just the latest in a series of conflicts that have accompanied this process. It is optimistic to assume that this war is the dying gasp of Russian imperialism or that Russia, even under a different leader, will quickly abandon revanchism to become a stakeholder in European security.

Moscow's war is also leading to ripple effects that will create new risks in Western relations with Russia. For example, Finland's and Sweden's entry into NATO—a direct result of Russia's attack on Ukraine—will increase security tensions with Russia in the Baltic and Arctic regions. NATO has been strengthened by their addition, but their membership also brings new borders for NATO to defend and contingency plans to develop. Moreover, a Russia that feels vulnerable about its conventional forces is more likely to overreact to Western actions. That is particularly true in the aftermath of Russia's failures in Ukraine, which could prod the Kremlin to seek opportunities to demonstrate that Russia is still a power to be feared. Such dynamics will create new challenges for NATO to manage.

Russia is not in a position to start another war today and certainly not with NATO. But this does not mean Western policymakers can be complacent. Yes, it will take Russia the better part of a decade to recapitalize its conventional forces in the aftermath of its attack on Ukraine. But NATO has its own recapitalization woes. It will take years for member states to replenish the weapons and ammunition they sent

to Ukraine in this war. That toll will mount if the war goes on longer, which it most likely will. It is also important not to plan to fight the previous war. NATO must consider how best to counter the Russian military that will eventually emerge from this war years from now and invest accordingly. Given Russia's demonstrable failures in this war, it is unlikely that Moscow will seek to rebuild the same military, with its brittle force structure, weak training, and anemic logistical capacity.

Some have argued that Russia's poor performance in Ukraine suggests that the United States can hand over the Russian challenge to Europe, allowing Washington to focus on Beijing. But if anything, this war has provided a stark reminder of why Europe's defense is and will likely remain highly dependent on the United States. The ability to employ military power on a large scale means working out such issues as logistics, command and control, and communications for hundreds of thousands of troops. European countries would struggle on their own to scale operations to counter a future Russian campaign similar in size to the one Moscow launched in Ukraine. It is naive to think that any European country can provide the integration, enabling, and other critical support functions currently being performed by the United States. Defense planning based on Washington's ability to offload the Russian challenge onto Europe in the next decade amounts to wishful thinking.

Likewise, the Russian war against Ukraine underscores the way in which the outcome of major wars ultimately comes down to attrition and the ability to replace lost personnel, materiel, and ammunition. NATO has deficits across the board in these categories. A European army would have been forced off the field long ago if it had taken even a fraction of the casualties suffered by the Russian or the Ukrainian armed forces. NATO has meager stocks of advanced weapons, militaries often composed of difficult-to-replace and expensive platforms, and a defense industrial capacity that would struggle to scale up production. Six months of support for Ukraine has exposed major gaps in the West's ability to produce ammunition and key replacement parts. Getting Europe to do more for its own defense is a noble goal—but it will take years, perhaps even decades, to get there.

CONSTRICT AND CONSTRAIN

Russia under Putin will never be a stakeholder in European security. The Kremlin has shown that it is far more interested in imperialist revanchism than in strategic stability. In the near term, then,

Washington and its allies must keep working to reduce the risks of escalation—especially of a nuclear exchange—and to diminish Russia’s ability to wage war. Although Washington has rightly suspended its arms control and strategic stability dialogue with Russia, it will need to maintain strategic communication with Moscow to avoid the chance of a nuclear confrontation. The United States and NATO, however, must plan for Russia’s growing reliance on unconventional tactics, including the possibility that Russia will increasingly rely on nuclear threats and may be willing to follow through with limited nuclear use.

Meanwhile, Washington must also work to constrict and constrain Russia—to prevent it from waging aggression beyond its borders. Degrading Russian power requires Washington to build on the policies it set in motion following Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. In particular, the United States must continue to help Europe transition away from Russian oil and gas and rebuild the arms it has given to Ukraine. Critically, Washington and its allies must invest in the enforcement of the sanctions, export controls, and anticorruption measures against Russia that have been put in place. Already there is evidence that Russia is working to circumvent them; the West must prevent it. Constraining Moscow will also require Washington and its European allies to sustain their engagement with India and other fence-sitting countries in Africa and the Middle East that continue to provide a lifeline to Russia. This will mean paying greater attention to the global South, where Russia enjoys greater influence and is able to contest the narrative.

In the long term, however, the United States and Europe share an interest in stabilizing the relationship with Russia. That will not be possible as long as Putin is in power. But one way or another, there will inevitably be a post-Putin Russia, and a change in leadership—especially in Russia’s highly personalized political system—will provide a chance to reestablish guardrails on the relationship. Even though any future Russian leader is likely to remain intent on restoring Russia’s global influence, especially on its periphery, it is clear that Ukraine has been a particular obsession for Putin. A resounding Russian defeat in Ukraine may teach future Russian elites a valuable lesson about the limits of military power. Russia’s growing subservience to Beijing could also raise the odds that a future leader will want options and pursue a foreign policy less antagonistic toward the West. Strategic cultures can change over time, including in response to dramatic defeats.

Washington and its allies must therefore confront Moscow while sticking to their values. This means being thoughtful in discussions of collective responsibility and in meting out forms of collective punishment. The U.S. government should actively assist the Russian exile community, including journalists, activists, and other Russians who support a freer and more democratic Russia, by providing U.S.-based professional fellowships for persecuted human rights defenders and journalists, for example, and addressing shortcomings in the implementation of anticorruption and sanctions policies that cause collateral damage to oppressed civil society actors.

As the United States and its allies cope with the current Putin regime and think about what might eventually follow it, they would do well to remember the old adage that Russia is never as strong as it looks or as weak as it looks. The country often goes through cycles of resurgence, stagnation, and decline. Even with its capacity and global standing diminished by its war in Ukraine, Russia will continue to be driven by its resentments, a quest for a geopolitical space outside its borders, and a desire for status. Washington cannot afford to write Russia off in an effort to ease its own mind, nor should it imagine that Europe can manage the problem on its own. The threat may evolve, but it will persist. 🌐

The Sources of Russian Misconduct

A Diplomat Defects From the Kremlin

BORIS BONDAREV

For three years, my workdays began the same way. At 7:30 AM, I woke up, checked the news, and drove to work at the Russian mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva. The routine was easy and predictable, two of the hallmarks of life as a Russian diplomat.

February 24 was different. When I checked my phone, I saw startling and mortifying news: the Russian air force was bombing Ukraine. Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Odessa were under attack. Russian troops were surging out of Crimea and toward the southern city of Kherson. Russian missiles had reduced buildings to rubble and sent residents fleeing. I watched videos of the blasts, complete with air-raid sirens, and saw people run around in panic.

As someone born in the Soviet Union, I found the attack almost unimaginable, even though I had heard Western news reports that

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an invasion might be imminent. Ukrainians were supposed to be our close friends, and we had much in common, including a history of fighting Germany as part of the same country. I thought about the lyrics of a famous patriotic song from World War II, one that many residents of the former Soviet Union know well: “On June 22, exactly at 4:00 AM, Kyiv was bombed, and we were told that the war had started.” Russian President Vladimir Putin described the invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation” intended to “de-Nazify” Russia’s neighbor. But in Ukraine, it was Russia that had taken the Nazis’ place.

“That is the beginning of the end,” I told my wife. We decided I had to quit.

Resigning meant throwing away a twenty-year career as a Russian diplomat and, with it, many of my friendships. But the decision was a long time coming. When I joined the ministry in 2002, it was during a period of relative openness, when we diplomats could work cordially with our counterparts from other countries. Still, it was apparent from my earliest days that Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs was deeply flawed. Even then, it discouraged critical thinking, and over the course of my tenure, it became increasingly belligerent. I stayed on anyway, managing the cognitive dissonance by hoping that I could use whatever power I had to moderate my country’s international behavior. But certain events can make a person accept things they didn’t dare to before.

The invasion of Ukraine made it impossible to deny just how brutal and repressive Russia had become. It was an unspeakable act of cruelty, designed to subjugate a neighbor and erase its ethnic identity. It gave Moscow an excuse to crush any domestic opposition. Now, the government is sending thousands upon thousands of drafted men to go kill Ukrainians. The war shows that Russia is no longer just dictatorial and aggressive; it has become a fascist state.

But for me, one of the invasion’s central lessons had to do with something I had witnessed over the preceding two decades: what happens when a government is slowly warped by its own propaganda. For years, Russian diplomats were made to confront Washington and defend the country’s meddling abroad with lies and non sequiturs. We were taught to embrace bombastic rhetoric and to uncritically parrot to other states what the Kremlin said to us. But eventually, the target audience for this propaganda was not just foreign countries; it was our own leadership. In cables and statements, we were made to tell the Kremlin that we had sold the world on Russian greatness and

demolished the West's arguments. We had to withhold any criticism about the president's dangerous plans. This performance took place even at the ministry's highest levels. My colleagues in the Kremlin repeatedly told me that Putin likes his foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, because he is "comfortable" to work with, always saying yes to the president and telling him what he wants to hear. Small wonder, then, that Putin thought he would have no trouble defeating Kyiv.

The war is a stark demonstration of how decisions made in echo chambers can backfire. Putin has failed in his bid to conquer Ukraine, an initiative that he might have understood would be impossible if his government had been designed to give honest assessments. For those of us who worked on military issues, it was plain that the Russian armed forces were not as mighty as the West feared—in part thanks to economic restrictions the West implemented after Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea that were more effective than policymakers seemed to realize.

The Kremlin's invasion has strengthened NATO, an entity it was designed to humiliate, and resulted in sanctions strong enough to make Russia's economy contract. But fascist regimes legitimize themselves more by exercising power than by delivering economic gains, and Putin is so aggressive and detached from reality that a recession is unlikely to stop him. To justify his rule, Putin wants the great victory he promised and believes he can obtain. If he agrees to a cease-fire, it will only be to give Russian troops a rest before continuing to fight. And if he wins in Ukraine, Putin will likely move to attack another post-Soviet state, such as Moldova, where Moscow already props up a breakaway region.

There is, then, only one way to stop Russia's dictator, and that is to do what U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin suggested in April: weaken the country "to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine." This may seem like a tall order. But Russia's military has been substantially weakened, and the country has lost many of its best soldiers. With broad support from NATO, Ukraine is capable of eventually beating Russia in the east and south, just as it has done in the north.

If defeated, Putin will face a perilous situation at home. He will have to explain to the elite and the masses why he betrayed their expectations. He will have to tell the families of dead soldiers why

The war shows that decisions made in echo chambers can backfire.

they perished for nothing. And thanks to the mounting pressure from sanctions, he will have to do all of this at a time when Russians are even worse off than they are today. He could fail at this task, face widespread backlash, and be shunted aside. He could look for scapegoats and be overthrown by the advisers and deputies he threatens to purge. Either way, should Putin go, Russia will have a chance to truly rebuild—and finally abandon its delusions of grandeur.

PIPE DREAMS

I was born in 1980 to parents in the middle strata of the Soviet intelligentsia. My father was an economist at the foreign trade ministry, and my mother taught English at the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations. She was the daughter of a general who commanded a rifle division during World War II and was recognized as a “Hero of the Soviet Union.”

We lived in a large Moscow apartment assigned by the state to my grandfather after the war, and we had opportunities that most Soviet residents did not. My father was appointed to a position at a joint Soviet-Swiss venture, which allowed us to live in Switzerland in 1984 and 1985. For my parents, this time was transformative. They experienced what it was like to reside in a wealthy country, with amenities—grocery carts, quality dental care—that the Soviet Union lacked.

As an economist, my father was already aware of the Soviet Union’s structural problems. But living in Western Europe led him and my mother to question the system more deeply, and they were excited when Mikhail Gorbachev launched perestroika in 1985. So, it seemed, were most Soviet residents. One didn’t have to live in western Europe to realize that the Soviet Union’s shops offered a narrow range of low-quality products, such as shoes that were painful to wear. Soviet residents knew the government was lying when it claimed to be leading “progressive mankind.”

Many Soviet citizens believed that the West would help their country as it transitioned to a market economy. But such hopes proved naive. The West did not provide Russia with the amount of aid that many of its residents—and some prominent U.S. economists—thought necessary to address the country’s tremendous economic challenges. Instead, the West encouraged the Kremlin as it quickly lifted price controls and rapidly privatized state resources. A small group of people grew extremely rich from this process by snapping up public assets. But for most Russians, the so-called shock therapy

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led to impoverishment. Hyperinflation hit, and average life expectancy went down. The country did experience a period of democratization, but much of the public equated the new freedoms with destitution. As a result, the West's status in Russia seriously suffered.

It took another major hit after NATO's 1999 campaign against Serbia. To Russia, the bombings looked less like an operation to protect the country's Albanian minority than like aggression by a large power against a tiny victim. I vividly remember walking by the

U.S. embassy in Moscow the day after a mob attacked it and noticing marks left by paint that had been splattered against its walls.

Russia's
bureaucracy
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independent
thought.

As the child of middle-class parents—my father left the civil service in 1991 and started a successful small business—I experienced this decade of turbulence mostly secondhand. My teenage years were stable, and my future seemed fairly predictable. I became a student

at the same university where my mother taught and set my sights on working in international affairs as my father had. I benefited from studying at a time when Russian discourse was open. Our professors encouraged us to read a variety of sources, including some that were previously banned. We held debates in class. In the summer of 2000, I excitedly walked into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an internship, ready to embark on a career I hoped would teach me about the world.

My experience proved disheartening. Rather than working with skilled elites in stylish suits—the stereotype of diplomats in Soviet films—I was led by a collection of tired, middle-aged bosses who idly performed unglamorous tasks, such as drafting talking points for higher-level officials. Most of the time, they didn't appear to be working at all. They sat around smoking, reading newspapers, and talking about their weekend plans. My internship mostly consisted of getting their newspapers and buying them snacks.

I decided to join the ministry anyway. I was eager to earn my own money, and I still hoped to learn more about other places by traveling far from Moscow. When I was hired in 2002 to be an assistant attaché at the Russian embassy in Cambodia, I was happy. I would have a chance to use my Khmer language skills and studies of Southeast Asia.

Since Cambodia is on the periphery of Russia's interests, I had little work to do. But living abroad was an upgrade over living in Moscow.

Diplomats stationed outside Russia made much more money than those placed domestically. The embassy's second-in-command, Viacheslav Loukianov, appreciated open discussion and encouraged me to defend my opinions. And our attitude to the West was fairly congenial. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs always had an anti-American bent—one inherited from its Soviet predecessor—but the bias was not overpowering. My colleagues and I did not think much about NATO, and when we did, we usually viewed the organization as a partner. One evening, I went out for beers with a fellow embassy employee at an underground bar. There, we ran into an American official who invited us to drink with him. Today, such an encounter would be fraught with tension, but at the time, it was an opportunity for friendship.

Yet even then, it was clear that the Russian government had a culture that discouraged independent thought—despite Loukianov's impulses to the contrary. One day, I was called to meet with the embassy's number three official, a quiet, middle-aged diplomat who had joined the foreign ministry during the Soviet era. He handed me text from a cable from Moscow, which I was told to incorporate into a document we would deliver to Cambodian authorities. Noticing several typos, I told him that I would correct them. "Don't do that!" he shot back. "We got the text straight from Moscow. They know better. Even if there are errors, it's not up to us to correct the center." It was emblematic of what would become a growing trend in the ministry: unquestioned deference to leaders.

YES MEN

In Russia, the first decade of the twenty-first century was initially hopeful. The country's average income level was increasing, as were its living standards. Putin, who assumed the presidency at the start of the millennium, promised an end to the chaos of the 1990s.

And yet plenty of Russians grew tired of Putin during the aughts. Most intellectuals regarded his strongman image as an unwelcome artifact of the past, and there were many cases of corruption among senior government officials. Putin responded to investigations into his administration by cracking down on free speech. By the end of his first term in office, he had effectively taken control of all three of Russia's main television networks.

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, Putin's early moves raised few alarms. He appointed Lavrov to be foreign minister in 2004,

a decision that we applauded. Lavrov was known to be highly intelligent and have deep diplomatic experience, with a track record of forging lasting relationships with foreign officials. Both Putin and Lavrov were becoming increasingly confrontational toward NATO, but the behavioral changes were subtle. Many diplomats didn't notice, including me.

In retrospect, however, it's clear that Moscow was laying the groundwork for Putin's imperial project—especially in Ukraine. The Kremlin developed an obsession with the country after its Orange Revolution of 2004–5, when hundreds of thousands of protesters prevented Russia's preferred candidate from becoming president after what was widely considered to be a rigged election. This obsession was reflected in the major Russian political shows, which started dedicating their prime-time coverage to Ukraine, droning on about the country's supposedly Russophobic authorities. For the next 16 years, right up to the invasion, Russians heard newscasters describe Ukraine as an evil country, controlled by the United States, that oppressed its Russian-speaking population. (Putin is seemingly incapable of believing that countries can genuinely cooperate, and he believes that most of Washington's closest partners are really just its puppets—including other members of NATO.)

Putin, meanwhile, continued working to consolidate power at home. The country's constitution limited presidents to two consecutive terms, but in 2008, Putin crafted a scheme to preserve his control: he would support his ally Dmitry Medvedev's presidential candidacy if Medvedev promised to make Putin prime minister. Both men followed through, and for the first few weeks of Medvedev's presidency, those of us at the foreign ministry were uncertain which of the two men we should address our reports to. As president, Medvedev was constitutionally charged with directing foreign policy, but everybody understood that Putin was the power behind the throne.

We eventually reported to Medvedev. The decision was one of several developments that made me think that Russia's new president might be more than a mere caretaker. Medvedev established warm ties with U.S. President Barack Obama, met with American business leaders, and cooperated with the West even when it seemed to contradict Russian interests. When rebels tried to topple the regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya, for example, the Russian military and foreign ministry opposed NATO efforts to establish a no-fly zone over the country. Qaddafi historically had good relations with Moscow, and our country had investments in Libya's oil sector, so our ministry didn't

want to help the rebels win. Yet when France, Lebanon, and the United Kingdom—backed by the United States—brought a motion before the United Nations Security Council that would have authorized a no-fly zone, Medvedev had us abstain rather than veto it. (There is evidence that Putin may have disagreed with this decision.)

But in 2011, Putin announced plans to run for president again. Medvedev—reluctantly, it appeared—stepped aside and accepted the position of prime minister. Liberals were outraged, and many called for boycotts or argued that Russians should deliberately spoil their ballots. These protesters made up only a small part of Russia's population, so their dissent didn't seriously threaten Putin's plans. But even the limited display of opposition seemed to make Moscow nervous. Putin thus worked to bolster turnout in the 2011 parliamentary elections to make the results of the contest seem legitimate—one of his earlier efforts to narrow the political space separating the people from his rule. This effort extended to the foreign ministry. The Kremlin gave my embassy, and all the others, the task of getting overseas Russians to vote.

I worked at the time in Mongolia. When the election came, I voted for a non-Putin party, worrying that if I didn't vote at all, my ballot would be cast on my behalf for Putin's United Russia. But my wife, who worked at the embassy as chief office manager, boycotted. She was one of just three embassy employees who did not participate.

A few days later, embassy leaders looked through the list of staff who cast ballots in the elections. On being named, the other two nonvoters said they were not aware that they needed to participate and promised to do so in the upcoming presidential elections. My wife, however, said that she did not want to vote, noting that it was her constitutional right not to participate. In response, the embassy's second-in-command organized a campaign against her. He shouted at her, accused her of breaking discipline, and said that she would be labeled "politically unreliable." He described her as an "accomplice" of Alexei Navalny, a prominent opposition leader. After my wife didn't vote in the presidential contest either, the ambassador didn't talk to her for a week. His deputy didn't speak to her for over a month.

BREAKING BAD

My next position was in the ministry's Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control. In addition to issues related to weapons of mass destruction, I was assigned to focus on export controls—regulations

governing the international transfer of goods and technology that can be used for defense and civilian purposes. It was a job that would give me a clear view of Russia's military, just as it became newly relevant.

In March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and began fueling an insurgency in the Donbas. When news of the annexation was announced, I was at the International Export Control Conference in Dubai. During a lunch break, I was approached by colleagues from post-Soviet republics, all of whom wanted to know what was happening. I told them the truth: "Guys, I know as much as you do." It was not the last time that Moscow made major foreign policy decisions while leaving its diplomats in the dark.

Among my colleagues, reactions to the annexation of Crimea ranged from mixed to positive. Ukraine was drifting Westward, but the province was one of the few places where Putin's mangled view of history had some basis: the Crimean Peninsula, transferred within the Soviet Union from Russia to Ukraine in 1954, was culturally closer to Moscow than to Kyiv. (Over 75 percent of its population speaks Russian as their first language.) The swift and bloodless take-over elicited little protest among us and was extremely popular at home. Lavrov used it as an opportunity to grandstand, giving a speech blaming "radical nationalists" in Ukraine for Russia's behavior. I and many colleagues thought that it would have been more strategic for Putin to turn Crimea into an independent state, an action we could have tried to sell as less aggressive. Subtlety, however, is not in Putin's toolbox. An independent Crimea would not have given him the glory of gathering "traditional" Russian lands.

Creating a separatist movement in and occupying the Donbas, in eastern Ukraine, was more of a head-scratcher. The moves, which largely took place in the first third of 2014, didn't generate the same outpouring of support in Russia as did annexing Crimea, and they invited another wave of international opprobrium. Many ministry employees were uneasy about Russia's operation, but no one dared convey this discomfort to the Kremlin. My colleagues and I decided that Putin had seized the Donbas to keep Ukraine distracted, to prevent the country from creating a serious military threat to Russia, and to stop it from cooperating with NATO. Yet few diplomats, if any, told Putin that by fueling the separatists, he had in fact pushed Kyiv closer to his nemesis.

My diplomatic work with Western delegations continued after the Crimean annexation and the Donbas operation. At times, it felt

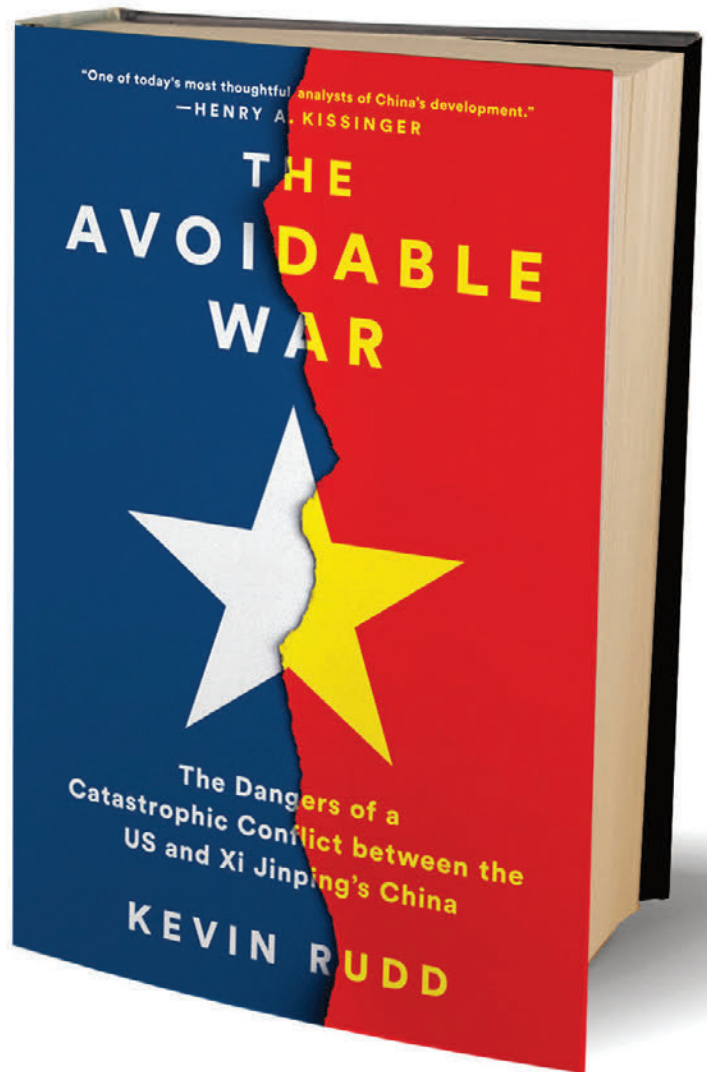
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unchanged. I still had positive relations with my colleagues from the United States and Europe as we worked productively on arms control issues. Russia was hit with sanctions, but they had a limited impact on Russia's economy. "Sanctions are a sign of irritation," Lavrov said in a 2014 interview. "They are not the instrument of serious policies."

But as an export official, I could see that the West's economic restrictions had serious repercussions for the country. The Russian military industry was heavily dependent on Western-made components and products. It used U.S. and European tools to service drone engines and motors. It relied on Western producers to build gear for radiation-proof electronics, which are critical for the satellites Russian officials use to gather intelligence, communicate, and carry out precision strikes. Russian manufacturers worked with French companies to get the sensors needed for our airplanes. Even some of the cloth used in light aircraft, such as weather balloons, was made by Western businesses. The sanctions suddenly cut off our access to these products and left our military weaker than the West understood. But although it was clear to my team how these losses undermined Russia's strength, the foreign ministry's propaganda helped keep the Kremlin from finding out. The consequences of this ignorance are now on full display in Ukraine: the sanctions are one reason Russia has had so much trouble with its invasion.

The diminishing military capacity did not prevent the foreign ministry from becoming increasingly belligerent. At summits or in meetings with other states, Russian diplomats spent more and more time attacking the United States and its allies. My export team held many bilateral meetings with, for instance, Japan, focused on how our countries could cooperate, and almost every one of them served as an opportunity to say to Japan, "Don't forget who nuked you."

I attempted some damage control. When my bosses drafted belligerent remarks or reports, I tried persuading them to soften the tone, and I warned against warlike language and constantly appealing to our victory over the Nazis. But the tenor of our statements—internal and external—grew more antagonistic as our bosses edited in aggression. Soviet-style propaganda had fully returned to Russian diplomacy.

HIGH ON ITS OWN SUPPLY

On March 4, 2018, former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned, almost fatally, at their home in the United Kingdom. It took just ten days for British investigators

to identify Russia as the culprit. Initially, I didn't believe the finding. Skripal, a former Russian spy, had been convicted for divulging state secrets to the British government and sent to prison for several years before being freed in a spy swap. It was difficult for me to understand why he could still be of interest to us. If Moscow had wanted him dead, it could have had him killed while he was still in Russia.

My disbelief came in handy. My department was responsible for issues related to chemical weapons, so we spent a good deal of time arguing that Russia was not responsible for the poisoning—something I could do with conviction. Yet the more the foreign ministry denied responsibility, the less convinced I became. The poisoning, we claimed, was carried out not by Russia but by supposedly Russophobic British authorities bent on spoiling our sterling international reputation. The United Kingdom, of course, had absolutely no reason to want Sergei dead, so Moscow's claims seemed less like real arguments than a shoddy attempt to divert attention away from Russia and onto the West—a common aim of Kremlin propaganda. Eventually, I had to accept the truth: the poisonings were a crime perpetrated by Russian authorities.

Many Russians still deny that Moscow was responsible. I know it can be hard to process that your country is run by criminals who will kill for revenge. But Russia's lies were not persuasive to other countries, which decisively voted down a Russian resolution before the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons meant to derail the prominent intergovernmental organization's investigation into the attack. Only Algeria, Azerbaijan, China, Iran, and Sudan took Moscow's side. Sure enough, the investigation concluded that the Skripals had been poisoned by Novichok: a Russian-made nerve agent.

Russia's delegates could have honestly conveyed this loss to their superiors. Instead, they effectively did the opposite. Back in Moscow, I read long cables from Russia's OPCW delegation about how they had defeated the numerous "anti-Russian," "nonsensical," and "groundless" moves made by Western states. The fact that Russia's resolution had been defeated was often reduced to a sentence.

At first, I simply rolled my eyes at these reports. But soon, I noticed that they were taken seriously at the ministry's highest levels.

The West's
2014 sanctions
substantially
weakened the
Russian military.

Diplomats who wrote such fiction received applause from their bosses and saw their career fortunes rise. Moscow wanted to be told what it hoped to be true—not what was actually happening. Ambassadors everywhere got the message, and they competed to send the most over-the-top cables.

The propaganda grew even more outlandish after Navalny was poisoned with Novichok in August 2020. The cables left me astonished. One referred to Western diplomats as “hunted beasts of prey.” Another waxed on about “the gravity and incontestability of our arguments.” A third spoke about how Russian diplomats had “easily nipped in the bud” Westerners’ “pitiful attempts to raise their voices.”

Such behavior was both unprofessional and dangerous. A healthy foreign ministry is designed to provide leaders with an unvarnished view of the world so they can make informed decisions. Yet although Russian diplomats would include inconvenient facts in their reports, lest their supervisors discover an omission, they would bury these nuggets of truth in mountains of propaganda. A 2021 cable might have had a line explaining, for instance, that the Ukrainian military was stronger than it was in 2014. But that admission would have come only after a lengthy paean to the mighty Russian armed forces.

The disconnect from reality became even more extreme in January 2022, when U.S. and Russian diplomats met at the U.S. mission in Geneva to discuss a Moscow-proposed treaty to rework NATO. The foreign ministry was increasingly focused on the supposed dangers of the Western security bloc, and Russian troops were massing on the Ukrainian border. I served as a liaison officer for the meeting—on call to provide assistance if our delegation needed anything from Russia’s local mission—and received a copy of our proposal. It was bewildering, filled with provisions that would clearly be unacceptable to the West, such as a demand that NATO withdraw all troops and weapons from states that joined after 1997, which would include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Baltic states. I assumed its author was either laying the groundwork for war or had no idea how the United States or Europe worked—or both. I chatted with our delegates during coffee breaks, and they seemed perplexed as well. I asked my supervisor about it, and he, too, was bewildered. No one could understand how we would go to the United States with a document that demanded, among other things, that NATO permanently close its door to new members. Eventually, we learned the document’s origin: it came straight from the Kremlin. It was therefore not to be questioned.

I kept hoping that my colleagues would privately express concern, rather than just confusion, about what we were doing. But many told me that they were perfectly content to embrace the Kremlin's lies. For some, this was a way to evade responsibility for Russia's actions; they could explain their behavior by telling themselves and others that they were merely following orders. That I understood. What was more troubling was that many took pride in our increasingly bellicose behavior. Several times, when I cautioned colleagues that their actions were too abrasive to help Russia, they gestured at our nuclear force. "We are a great power," one person said to me. Other countries, he continued, "must do what we say."

CRAZY TRAIN

Even after the January summit, I didn't believe that Putin would launch a full-fledged war. Ukraine in 2022 was plainly more united and pro-Western than it had been in 2014. Nobody would greet Russians with flowers. The West's highly combative statements about a potential Russian invasion made clear that the United States and Europe would react strongly. My time working in arms and exports had taught me that the Russian military did not have the capability to overrun its biggest European neighbor and that, aside from Belarus, no outside state would offer us meaningful support. Putin, I figured, must have known this, too—despite all the yes men who shielded him from the truth.

The invasion made my decision to leave ethically straightforward. But the logistics were still hard. My wife was visiting me in Geneva when the war broke out—she had recently quit her job at a Moscow-based industrial association—but resigning publicly meant that neither she nor I would be safe in Russia. We therefore agreed that she would travel back to Moscow to get our kitten before I handed in my papers. It proved to be a complex, three-month process. The cat, a young stray, needed to be neutered and vaccinated before we could take him to Switzerland, and the European Union quickly banned Russian planes. To get from Moscow back to Geneva, my wife had to take three flights, two cab rides, and cross the Lithuanian border twice—both times on foot.

In the meantime, I watched as my colleagues surrendered to Putin's aims. In the early days of the war, most were beaming with pride. "At last!" one exclaimed. "Now we will show the Americans!

Now they know who the boss is.” In a few weeks, when it became clear that the blitzkrieg against Kyiv had failed, the rhetoric grew gloomier but no less belligerent. One official, a respected expert on ballistic missiles, told me that Russia needed to “send a nuclear warhead to a suburb of Washington.” He added, “Americans will shit their pants and rush to beg us for peace.” He appeared to be partially joking. But Russians tend to think that Americans are too pampered to risk their lives for anything, so when I pointed out that a nuclear attack would invite catastrophic retaliation, he scoffed: “No it wouldn’t.”

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Perhaps a few dozen diplomats quietly left the ministry. (So far, I am the only one who has publicly broken with Moscow.) But most of the colleagues whom I regarded as sensible and smart stuck around. “What can we do?” one asked. “We are small people.” He gave up on reasoning for himself. “Those in Moscow know better,” he said. Others acknowledged the insanity of the situation in private conversations. But it wasn’t reflected in their work. They continued to spew lies about Ukrainian aggression. I saw daily reports that mentioned Ukraine’s nonexistent biological weapons. I walked around our building—effectively a long corridor with private offices for each diplomat—and noticed that even some of my smart colleagues had Russian propaganda playing on their televisions all day. It was as if they were trying to indoctrinate themselves.

The nature of all our jobs inevitably changed. For one thing, relations with Western diplomats collapsed. We stopped discussing almost everything with them; some of my colleagues from Europe even stopped saying hello when we crossed paths at the United Nations’ Geneva campus. Instead, we focused on our contacts with China, who expressed their “understanding” about Russia’s security concerns but were careful not to comment on the war. We also spent more time working with the other members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—a fractured bloc of states that my bosses loved to trot out as Russia’s own NATO. After the invasion, my team held rounds and rounds of consultations with these countries that were focused on biological and nuclear weapons, but we didn’t speak about the war. When I talked with a Central Asian diplomat about supposed biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine, he dismissed the notion as ridiculous. I agreed.

A few weeks later, I handed in my resignation. At last, I was no longer complicit in a system that believed it had a divine right to subjugate its neighbor.

SHOCK AND AWE

Over the course of the war, Western leaders have become acutely aware of Russia's military's failings. But they do not seem to grasp that Russian foreign policy is equally broken. Multiple European officials have spoken about the need for a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine, and if their countries grow tired of bearing the energy and economic costs associated with supporting Kyiv, they could press Ukraine to make a deal. The West may be especially tempted to push Kyiv to sue for peace if Putin aggressively threatens to use nuclear weapons.

But as long as Putin is in power, Ukraine will have no one in Moscow with whom to genuinely negotiate. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will not be a reliable interlocutor, nor will any other Russian government apparatus. They are all extensions of Putin and his imperial agenda. Any cease-fire will just give Russia a chance to rearm before attacking again.

There's only one thing that can really stop Putin, and that is a comprehensive rout. The Kremlin can lie to Russians all it wants, and it can order its diplomats to lie to everyone else. But Ukrainian soldiers pay no attention to Russian state television. And it became apparent that Russia's defeats cannot always be shielded from the Russian public when, in the course of a few days in September, Ukrainians managed to retake almost all of Kharkiv Province. In response, Russian TV panelists bemoaned the losses. Online, hawkish Russian commentators directly criticized the president. "You're throwing a billion-ruble party," one wrote in a widely circulated online post, mocking Putin for presiding over the opening of a Ferris wheel as Russian forces retreated. "What is wrong with you?"

Putin responded to the loss—and to his critics—by drafting enormous numbers of people into the military. (Moscow says it is conscripting 300,000 men, yet the actual figure may be higher.) But in the long run, conscription won't solve his problems. The Russian armed forces suffer from low morale and shoddy equipment, problems that mobilization cannot fix. With large-scale Western support, the Ukrainian military can inflict more serious defeats on Russian

troops, forcing them to retreat from other territories. It's possible that Ukraine could eventually best Russia's soldiers in the parts of the Donbas where both sides have been fighting since 2014.

Should that happen, Putin would find himself in a corner. He could respond to defeat with a nuclear attack. But Russia's president likes his luxurious life and should recognize that using nuclear weapons could start a war that would kill even him. (If he doesn't know this, his subordinates would, one hopes, avoid following such a suicidal command.) Putin could order a full-on general mobilization—conscripting almost all of Russia's young men—but that is unlikely to offer more than a temporary respite, and the more Russian deaths from the fighting, the more domestic discontent he will face. Putin may eventually withdraw and have Russian propagandists fault those around him for the embarrassing defeat, as some did after the losses in Kharkiv. But that could push Putin to purge his associates, making it dangerous for his closest allies to keep supporting him. The result might be Moscow's first palace coup since Nikita Khrushchev was toppled in 1964.

If Putin is kicked out office, Russia's future will be deeply uncertain. It's entirely possible his successor will try to carry on the war, especially given that Putin's main advisers hail from the security services. But no one in Russia commands his stature, so the country would likely enter a period of political turbulence. It could even descend into chaos.

Outside analysts might enjoy watching Russia undergo a major domestic crisis. But they should think twice about rooting for the country's implosion—and not only because it would leave Russia's massive nuclear arsenal in uncertain hands. Most Russians are in a tricky mental space, brought about by poverty and huge doses of propaganda that sow hatred, fear, and a simultaneous sense of superiority and helplessness. If the country breaks apart or experiences an economic and political cataclysm, it would push them over the edge. Russians might unify behind an even more belligerent leader than Putin, provoking a civil war, more outside aggression, or both.

If Ukraine wins and Putin falls, the best thing the West can do isn't to inflict humiliation. Instead, it's the opposite: provide support. This might seem counterintuitive or distasteful, and any aid would have to be heavily conditioned on political reform. But Russia will need financial help after losing, and by offering substantial funding, the United States and Europe could gain leverage in a

post-Putin power struggle. They could, for example, help one of Russia's respected economic technocrats become the interim leader, and they could help the country's democratic forces build power. Providing aid would also allow the West to avoid repeating their behavior from the 1990s, when Russians felt scammed by the United States, and would make it easier for the population to finally accept the loss of their empire. Russia could then create a new foreign policy, carried out by a class of truly professional diplomats. They could finally do what the current generation of diplomats has been unable to—make Russia a responsible and honest global partner. 🌐

Why American Power Endures

The U.S.-Led Order Isn't in Decline

G. JOHN IKENBERRY

For over a century, people around the world have lived through an American era: a period dominated by U.S. power, wealth, institutions, ideas, alliances, and partnerships. But many now believe this long epoch is drawing to a close. The U.S.-led world, they insist, is giving way to something new—a post-American, post-Western, postliberal order marked by great-power competition and the economic and geopolitical ascendance of China.

Some greet this prospect with joy, others with sorrow. But the storyline is the same. The United States is slowly losing its commanding position in the global distribution of power. The East now rivals the West in economic might and geopolitical heft, and countries in the global South are growing quickly and taking a larger role on the international stage. As others shine, the United States has lost its luster.

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Divided and beleaguered, melancholy Americans suspect that the country's best days are behind it. Liberal societies everywhere are struggling. Nationalism and populism undercut the internationalism that once backed the United States' global leadership. Sensing blood in the water, China and Russia have rushed forward to aggressively challenge U.S. hegemony, liberalism, and democracy. In February 2022, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a joint declaration of principles for a "new era" when the United States does not lead the world: a shot across the bow of a sinking American ship.

But in truth, the United States is not foundering. The stark narrative of decline ignores deeper world-historical influences and circumstances that will continue to make the United States the dominant presence and organizer of world politics in the twenty-first century. To be sure, no one knows the future, and no one owns it. The coming world order will be shaped by complex, shifting, and difficult-to-grasp political forces and by choices made by people living in all parts of the world. Nonetheless, the deep sources of American power and influence in the world persist. Indeed, with the rise of the brazen illiberalism of China and Russia, these distinctive traits and capacities have come more clearly into view.

The mistake made by prophets of American decline is to see the United States and its liberal order as just another empire on the wane. The wheel of history turns, empires come and go—and now, they suggest, it is time for the United States to fade into senescence. Yes, the United States has at times resembled an old-style empire. But its role in the world rests on much more than its past imperial behavior; U.S. power draws not only on brute strength but also on ideas, institutions, and values that are complexly woven into the fabric of modernity. The global order the United States has built since the end of World War II is best seen not as an empire but as a world system, a sprawling multifaceted political formation, rich in vicissitudes, that creates opportunity for people across the planet.

This world system whirred into action most recently in the global reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The struggle between the United States and its rivals China and Russia is a contest between two alternative logics of world order. The United States defends an international order it has led for three-quarters of a century—one that is open, multilateral, and anchored in security pacts and partnerships with other liberal democracies. China and Russia seek an

international order that dethrones Western liberal values—one that is more hospitable to regional blocs, spheres of influence, and autocracy. The United States upholds an international order that protects and advances the interests of liberal democracy. China and Russia, each in its own way, hope to build an international order that protects authoritarian rule from the threatening forces of liberal modernity. The United States offers the world a vision of a postimperial global system. The current leaders of Russia and China increasingly craft foreign policies rooted in imperial nostalgia.

This struggle between liberal and illiberal world orders is an echo of the great contests of the twentieth century. In key earlier moments—after the conclusions of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War—the United States advanced a progressive agenda for world order. Its success rested somewhat on the blunt fact of American power, the country's unrivaled economic, technological, and military capacities. The United States will remain at the center of the world system in part because of these material capabilities and its role as a pivot in the global balance of power. But the United States continues to matter for another reason: the appeal of its ideas, institutions, and capacities for building partnerships and alliances makes it an indispensable force in the years ahead. This has always been, and can remain, the secret of its power and influence.

The United States, despite repeated announcements of its demise as a world leader, has not truly declined. It has built a distinctive type of order in which it plays an integral role. And in the face of threatening illiberal rivals, that order remains widely in demand. The reason the United States does not decline is because large constituencies within the existing order have a stake in the United States remaining active and involved in maintaining that order. Even if U.S. material power diminishes relative to, say, China's growing capabilities, the order the United States has built continues to reinforce its power and leadership. Power can create order, but the order over which Washington presides can also buttress American power.

Like an onion, the United States' liberal internationalist order has several layers. At the outer layer are its liberal internationalist ideas and projects, through which the United States has provided the world a "third way" between the anarchy of states furiously competing with each other and the overweening hierarchy of imperial systems—an arrangement that has delivered more gains for more people than any

prior alternative. Beneath the surface, the United States has benefited from its geography and its unique trajectory of political development. It stands oceans apart from the other great powers, its landmass faces both Asia and Europe, and it accrues influence by playing a unique role as a global power balancer. Adding to this, the United States has had critical opportunities following major conflicts in the twentieth century to build coalitions of like-minded states that shape and entrench global rules and institutions. As the current crisis in Ukraine shows, this ability to mobilize coalitions of democracies remains one of the United States' essential assets. Beneath the realm of government and diplomacy, the United States' domestic civil society—enriched by its multiracial and multicultural immigrant base—connects the country to the world in networks of influence unavailable to China, Russia, and other powers. Finally, at the core, one of the United States' greatest strengths is its capacity to fail; as a liberal society, it can acknowledge its vulnerabilities and errors and seek to improve, a distinct advantage over its illiberal rivals in confronting crises and setbacks.

No other state has enjoyed such a comprehensive set of advantages in dealing with other countries. This is the reason that the United States has had such staying power for so long, despite periodic failures and disappointments. In today's contest over world order, the United States should draw upon these advantages and its long history of building liberal order to again offer the world a global vision of an open and rules-based system in which people can work freely together to advance the human condition.

AMERICA'S THIRD WAY

For over a century, the United States has been the champion of a kind of order distinct from previous international orders. Washington's liberal internationalism represents a "third way" between anarchy (orders premised on the balance of power between competing states) and hierarchy (orders that rest on the dominance of imperial powers). After World War II and again after the end of the Cold War, liberal internationalism came to dominate and define the modern logic of international relations through the construction of institutions such as the United Nations and alliances such as NATO. People across the world have connected to and built on these intergovernmental platforms to advance their interests. If China and Russia seek to usher in a new world order, they will need to offer something better—an onerous task indeed.

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The first generation of liberal internationalists in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century were heirs to an Enlightenment vision, a belief that through reason, science, and measured self-interest, societies could build political orders that improved the human condition. They imagined that institutions and political orders could be devised to protect and advance liberal democracy. International order can be a forum not just for waging war and seeking security but also for collective problem solving. Liberal internationalists believed in peaceful change because they assumed that international society is, as Woodrow Wilson argued, “corrigible.” States could tame factious, belligerent power politics and build stable relations around the pursuit of mutual gains.

The prophets of
American decline
are wrong.

The essential goal of liberal order building has not changed: the creation of a cooperative ecosystem in which states, starting with liberal democracies, manage their mutual economic and security relations, balance their often conflicting values, and protect the rights and liberties of their citizens. The idea of building international order around rules and institutions is not unique to the United States, Western liberals, or the modern era. But U.S. order building is unique in putting these ideas at the center of the country’s efforts. What the United States has had to offer is a set of solutions to the most basic problems of international relations—namely, the problems of anarchy, hierarchy, and interdependence.

Realist thinkers claim that states exist in a fundamental condition of anarchy that sets limits on the possibilities for cooperation. No political authority exists above the state to enforce order or govern relations, and so states must fend for themselves. Liberal internationalists do not deny that states pursue their own interests, often through competitive means, but they believe that the anarchy of that competition can be limited. States, starting with liberal democracies, can use institutions as building blocks for cooperation and for the pursuit of joint gains. The twentieth century offers dramatic evidence of these sorts of liberal ordering arrangements. After World War II, in the shadow of the Cold War, the United States and its allies and partners established a complex and sprawling system of institutions that persist today, exemplified by the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, and multilateral regimes in diverse areas of trade, development, public health, the environment, and human rights. Grand shifts in the global distribution

of power have occurred in the decades since 1945, but cooperation remains a core feature of the global system.

The problems of hierarchy are the mirror opposite of the problems of anarchy. Hierarchy is political order maintained by the dominance of a leading state, and at the extreme, it is manifest as empire. The leading state worries about how it can stay on top, gain the cooperation of others, and exercise legitimate authority in shaping world politics. Weaker states and societies worry about being dominated, and they want to mitigate their disadvantages and the vulnerabilities of being powerless. In such circumstances, liberal internationalists argue that rules and institutions can simultaneously be protections for the weak and tools for the powerful. In a liberal order, the leading state consents to acting within an agreed-upon set of multilateral rules and institutions and not use its power to coerce other states. Rules and institutions allow it to signal restraint and commitment to weaker states that may fear its power. Weaker states also gain from this institutional bargain because it reduces the worst abuses of power that the hegemonic state might inflict on them, and it gives them some voice in how the order operates.

Unique in world history, the U.S.-led order that emerged after 1945 followed this logic. It is a hierarchical order with liberal characteristics. The United States has used its commanding position as the world's leading economic and military power to provide the public goods of security protection, market openness, and sponsorship of rules and institutions. It has tied itself to allies and partners through alliances and multilateral organizations. In return, it invites participation and compliance by other states, starting with the subsystem of liberal democracies mostly in East Asia, Europe, and Oceania. The United States has frequently violated this bargain; the Iraq War is a particularly bitter and disastrous example of the United States undermining the very order it has built. The United States has used its privileged perch to bend multilateral rules in its favor and to act unilaterally for parochial economic and political gains. But despite such behavior, the overall logic of the order gives many countries around the world, particularly liberal democracies, incentives to join with rather than balance against the United States.

The problems of interdependence arise from the dangers and vulnerabilities that countries face as they become more entangled with each other. Starting in the nineteenth century, liberal democracies have responded to the opportunities and dangers of economic, security, and

environmental interdependence by building an international infrastructure of rules and institutions to facilitate flows and transactions across borders. As global interdependence grows, so, too, does the need for the multilateral coordination of policies. Coordinating policies does entail some restrictions on national autonomy, but the gains from coordination increasingly outweigh these costs as interdependence intensifies. U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt made this case in his appeal to the delegates grappling with postwar financial and monetary issues at the Bretton Woods conference in July 1944. Great gains could be obtained from trade and investment across borders, but domestic economies had to be protected from destabilizing economic actions taken by irresponsible governments. Such logic is in wide application today within the U.S.-led liberal order.

In each of these areas, the United States sits at the center of a liberal system of order that offers institutional solutions to the most basic problems of world politics. The United States has been an imperfect champion of these efforts to shape the operating environment of international relations. Indeed, a great deal of the criticism directed at the United States as a global leader stems from the perception that it has not done enough to move the world in this “third way” direction and that the order it presides over is too hierarchical. But that is precisely the point—if the world is to organize itself to address the problems of the twenty-first century, it will need to build on, not reject, this U.S.-led system. And if the world is to avoid the extremes of anarchy and hierarchy, it will need more, not less, liberal internationalism. China and Russia have themselves benefited from this system, and their reactionary vision of a post-American order looks more like a step backward than a step forward.

THE ANTI-IMPERIAL EMPIRE

The United States is a world power like no other before it, a peculiarity that owes much to the idiosyncratic nature of its rise. It alone among the great powers was born in the New World. Unlike the United States, the other great powers, including China and Russia, find themselves in crowded geopolitical neighborhoods, struggling for hegemonic space. From the very beginning of its career as a great power, the United States has existed far from its main rivals, and it has repeatedly found itself confronting dangerous and often violent efforts by the other great powers to expand their empires and regional

spheres of influence. These circumstances have shaped the United States' institutions, its way of thinking about international order, and its capacities for projecting power and influence.

Distance from other powers has long given the United States space to build a modern republican-style regime. The Founding Fathers were quite conscious of this uniqueness. With the European powers an ocean away, the American experiment in republican government could be safeguarded from foreign encroachments. In *The Federalist Papers*, Alexander Hamilton argued that the United Kingdom owed its relatively liberal institutions to its location. "If Britain had been situated on the continent, and had been compelled . . . to make her military establishments at home co-extensive with the other great powers of Europe, she, like them, would in all probability be at this day a victim to the absolute power of a single man." The United States was similarly lucky. Its European counterparts had to develop the robust state capacities to swiftly mobilize and command soldiers and materiel to wage the continent's endless wars; the United States did not. Instead, it began as a fragile attempt to build a state that was institutionally weak and divided—by design—to prevent the rise of autocracy at home. The United States' isolation gave it the opportunity to succeed.

More prosaically, the vast natural resources of the continent gave the United States the capacity to grow. By the turn of the twentieth century, the United States had joined the world of the great powers, a peer of its European counterparts. But it had become powerful at great remove, unimpeded by the acts of counterbalancing so frequently evident in the relations between rival powers in Europe and East Asia.

The United States' sheltered experiment in republican rule invariably shaped its thinking about international order. One of the oldest worries in the liberal-republican tradition, noted by theorists across the ancient and modern eras, is the pernicious impact that war, power politics, and imperialism have on liberal institutions. Historically, republics have been vulnerable to the illiberal imperatives and impulses generated by war and geopolitical competition. Warfare and imperial expansion can lead to the militarization and regimentation of a society, opening the door to the "garrison state" and turning a would-be Athens into a Sparta. The cause of protecting national independence curtails liberties.

The world cannot
afford the end of
the American era.

Indeed, the American founders argued for union among the colonies by insisting that if left unbound, the postcolonial states would fear each other and militarize their societies.

This concern, of course, did not stop the United States from joining the world of great powers or from ultimately becoming the world's largest military power. Nonetheless, this republican worry kept alive the liberal internationalist notion, dating back to Immanuel Kant and other Enlightenment thinkers, that societies can protect their way of life best by working together and creating zones of peace that push tyrannical and despotic states to the periphery.

Such an orientation helped shape the United States' response to the geopolitical circumstances it faced as a rising great power in the early twentieth century in a world dominated by empires. The United States, for a time, was itself engaged in empire building in the Caribbean and the Pacific, in part to compete with its peers. Indeed, every one of the United States' great-power peers during this era was pursuing empire in one way or another. This global system of empire reached its zenith in the late 1930s when Nazi Germany and imperial Japan embarked on wars of territorial aggression. Add to that the Soviet Union and the far-flung British Empire, and the future appeared as one in which the world would be permanently divided into blocs, spheres, and imperial zones.

In this bleak mid-twentieth-century setting, the United States was forced to contemplate what kind of order it wanted to bring into existence. The question that U.S. strategists grappled with, particularly during World War II, was whether the United States could operate as a great power in a world carved up by empires. If vast stretches of Eurasia were dominated by imperial blocs, could the United States be a great power while operating only within the Western Hemisphere? No, policymakers and analysts agreed, it could not. To be a global power, the United States would need to have access to markets and resources in all corners of the world. Economic and security imperatives, as much as lofty principles, drove this judgment. U.S. interests and ambitions pointed not to a world where the United States would simply join the other great powers in running an empire but to one where empires would be swept away and all regions would be opened up to multilateral access.

In this way, the United States was unique among its peers in using its power and position to undermine the imperial world system. It made alliances and bargains with imperial states at various moments

and launched a short-lived career of empire at the turn of the twentieth century in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. But the dominant impulse of U.S. strategy across these decades was to seek a postimperial system of great power relations, to build an international order that would be open, friendly, and stable: open in the sense that trade and exchange were possible across regions; friendly in the sense that none of these regions would be dominated by a rival illiberal great power that sought to close off its sphere of influence to the outside world; and stable in the sense that this postimperial order would be anchored in a set of multilateral rules and institutions that would give it some broad legitimacy, the capacity to adapt to change, and the staying power to persist well into the future.

The United States' geographic position and rise to power in a world of empires provided the setting for a distinctive strategy of order building. Its comparative advantage was its offshore location and its capacity for forging alliances and partnerships to undercut bids for dominance by autocratic, fascist, and authoritarian great powers in East Asia and Europe. Many countries in those regions now worry more about being abandoned by the United States than being dominated by it. As a result, alliances with fixed assets, such as military bases and forward troop deployments, provide partners with not just security but also greater certainty about U.S. commitment. This confluence of geographic circumstances and liberal political traits gives the United States a unique ability to work with other states. The United States has over 60 security partnerships in all regions of the world, while China has only a scattering of security relationships with Djibouti, North Korea, and a few other countries.

COLLECTIVE POWER

The merits of the U.S.-led order don't just lie in what Washington made but in how it brought this order into being. The United States did not become a great power through conquest. Rather, it stepped opportunistically into geopolitical vacuums created at the ends of major wars to shape the peace. These moments occurred after the two world wars and the Cold War, when upheavals in great power relations left the global system and the old world of empires in tatters. At these junctures, the United States demonstrated the ability to build coalitions of states to hammer out the new terms of world order. During the twentieth century, this settlement-oriented, coalitional approach to order building overwhelmed

the aggressive efforts of rival illiberal great powers to shape the future. The United States worked with other democracies to produce favorable geopolitical outcomes. This method of leadership continues to give the United States an edge in shaping the terms of world order today.

At three pivotal moments during the last century—after the end of World War I, again in the wake of World War II, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union—the United States found itself on the winning side of major conflicts. The old order was in ruins, and something new had to be built. In each case, Washington aimed to do more than merely restore the balance of power. The United States saw itself in a struggle with illiberal great-power aggressors, contesting world order principles and defending the liberal democratic way of life. In each case, the mobilization for war and great-power competition was framed as a contest of ideas and visions. U.S. leaders sent a message to their citizens: if you pay the price and bear the burdens of this struggle, we will endeavor to build a better United States—and a more hospitable world order. The United States sought to better organize the world when the world itself was turned upside down.

The United States chose to exercise its power in these crucial moments by working with other democracies. In 1919, 1945, and 1989, the United States was the leading member of a coalition of states (the Allies, the United Nations, the “free world,” respectively) that won the war and negotiated the terms of the subsequent peace. The United States provided leadership and material power that turned the tide in each war. U.S. officials emphasized the importance of building and strengthening the coalition of liberal democracies. A slew of U.S. presidents, including Wilson, Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and George H. W. Bush, argued that the country’s survival and well-being had to be premised on building and maintaining a critical mass of similarly disposed partners and allies.

In a world of despotic, hostile, and powerful rivals, the United States and other liberal democracies have repeatedly concluded that they are safer working as a group than alone. As Roosevelt put it in January 1944, “We have joined with like-minded people in order to defend ourselves in a world that has been gravely threatened by gangster rule.” Of course, liberal states have always been willing to ally with nondemocracies within larger coalitions. During the Cold War and again today, the United States has allied itself and partnered with authoritarian client states around the world. Nonetheless, in these eras, the core impulse

has been to build U.S. grand strategy around a dynamic core of liberal states in East Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania.

Democratic solidarity also creates a setting for generating progressive ideas and attracting global support. Collective security (defined by Wilson in his Fourteen Points speech as “mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike”), the Four Freedoms (Roosevelt’s goals for postwar order: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear), and the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance, are all grand ideas forged out of great-power contests. The world order contest underway between the United States and its autocratic rivals China and Russia offers a new opportunity to advance liberal democratic principles around the world.

AT HOME IN THE WORLD

The United States is not just a unique great power, it is also a unique kind of society. Unlike its great-power rivals, the United States is a country of immigrants, multicultural and multiracial, or what the historian Frank Ninkovich has called a “global republic.” The world has come to the United States, and as a result, the United States is profoundly connected to all regions of the world through family, ethnic, and cultural ties. These complex and far-reaching ties, operating outside the realm of government and diplomacy, make the United States relevant and engaged across the world. The United States is more knowledgeable about the outside world, and the outside world has a greater stake in what happens in the United States.

The immigrant tradition in the United States has also paid dividends in building the country’s human capital base. Without this immigrant culture, the United States would be less affluent and distinguished in the leading fields of knowledge, including medicine, science, technology, commerce, and the arts. Of the 104 Americans who have been awarded Nobel Prizes in chemistry, medicine, and physics since 2000, 40 have been immigrants. Chinese students want to come to the United States for their university education; foreign students do not flock to Chinese universities at similar rates.

Just as the diversity of its population links it to the world, so, too, does the United States’ welter of civil society groups build an influential globe-spanning network. In the past century, U.S. civil society has increasingly become part of an expansive global civil society. This

sprawling transnational civil society is an often overlooked source of American influence, fostering cooperation and solidarity across the liberal democratic world. China and Russia have their own political networks and diaspora communities, but global civil society tends to reinforce liberal principles, amplifying the United States' centrality in global confrontations over world order.

Civil society comes in many guises, including nongovernmental organizations, universities, think tanks, professional associations, media organizations, philanthropies, and social and religious groups. In recent decades, civil society groups have proliferated and spread across the world. The most salient of these groups engage in transnational advocacy, focused on causes such as the environment, human rights,

The United States
is uniquely a
global republic.

humanitarian assistance, the protection of minorities, citizenship education, and so forth. In fact, these activist groups are at least partially creatures of the postwar liberal international order. Operating in and around the United Nations and other global institutions, civil society groups have seized on the idealistic principles and norms espoused by liberal states—and endeavor to hold those states to account.

Global civic activism often targets Western governments, but with its focus on human rights and civic freedoms, autocratic and authoritarian governments find themselves most under pressure. By definition, civil society groups seek to function outside the reach of the state. Not surprisingly, both China and Russia have cracked down on the activities of international civil society groups within their borders. Under Putin, Russia has sought to extend state control over civil society, discrediting foreign-funded groups and using government tools to weaken civic actors and promote pro-government organizations. China has also acted aggressively to restrict the activities of civic groups and to crack down on democracy activists in Hong Kong. At the UN, China has used its membership on the Human Rights Council to block and weaken the role of NGO advocacy groups. Global civil society tends to stimulate reform within liberal democracies while threatening autocratic and authoritarian regimes.

A multicultural immigrant society is more complex and potentially unstable than more homogeneous societies such as China. But China is home to a number of ethnic and religious minorities, and despite

the country's putative communist commitment to egalitarianism and equality, such minorities suffer intense discrimination and repression. Even though the United States must work harder than China to be a stable and integrated society, the upside of its diversity is enormous in terms of creativity, collaboration, knowledge creation, and the attraction of the world's talent. It is hard to imagine China, with a shrunken civil society that is closed to the world, as a future center of global order.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Given the country's recent domestic convulsions, these exhortations for the centrality of the United States in the coming century might seem odd. Today, the United States looks more beset with problems than at any time since the 1930s. Amid the polarization and dysfunction that plague American society, it is easy to offer a narrative of U.S. decline. But what keeps the United States afloat, despite its travails, is its progressive impulses. It is the idea of the United States more than the country itself that has stirred the world over the last century. The country's liberal ideals have inspired leaders of liberation movements elsewhere, from Mahatma Gandhi in India to Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Young people in Hong Kong protesting against the Chinese government have routinely waved U.S. flags. No other state aspiring to world power, including China, has advanced a more appealing vision of a society in which free individuals consent to their political institutions than has the United States.

The story that the United States presents to the world is one of an ongoing enterprise to confront and overcome painful impediments to a "more perfect union," starting with its original sin of slavery. The United States is a constant work in progress. People around the world held their breath when Americans voted in the 2020 presidential election and again during the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of President Donald Trump. The global stakes of these moments were profound.

By contrast, in 2018, when Xi overturned the Chinese Communist Party's long-standing rules and laid the groundwork to make him, in effect, dictator for life, the world simply shrugged. People across many parts of the world seem to expect more of the United States than they do of China, invariably measuring U.S. actions against the standard of avowed American principles and ideals. As the political scientist Samuel Huntington once observed: "America is not a lie, it is a disappointment. But it can be a disappointment only because it is also a hope."

What will keep the United States at the center of world politics is its capacity to do better. The country has never fully lived up to its liberal ideals, and when it commends these ideals to others, it looks painfully hypocritical. But hypocrisy is a feature, not a bug, of liberal order, and need not be an impediment to making the liberal order better. The order over which the United States has presided since World War II has moved the world forward, and if people around the globe want a better world order that supports greater cooperation and social and economic advancement, they will want to improve on this U.S.-led system, not dispense with it.

The crises over Taiwan and Ukraine underline this fact. In both cases, China and Russia are seeking to draw unwilling open societies into their orbit. The people of Taiwan look at the plight of Hong Kong and, not surprisingly, are horrified at the prospect of being incorporated into a country ruled by a Chinese dictatorship. The people of an embattled democratic Ukraine see a brighter future in greater integration into the European Union and the West. That China is ramping up pressure on Taiwan and that Russia sought to yoke Ukraine to its sphere of influence does not suggest American decline or the collapse of liberal order. On the contrary, the crises exist because Taiwanese and Ukrainian societies want to be part of a global liberal system. Putin famously grouched that the liberal idea is becoming obsolete. In reality, the liberal idea still has a long life ahead of it.

EMPIRE BY INVITATION

The United States enters today's struggle to shape the twenty-first century with profound advantages. It still possesses the vast bulk of the material capabilities it had in earlier decades. It remains uniquely positioned geographically to play a great-power role in both East Asia and Europe. Its ability to work with other liberal democracies to shape global rules and institutions is already manifest in its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and will stand it in good stead in any future collective response to Chinese aggression in East Asia. Although China and Russia seek to move the world in the direction of regional blocs and spheres of influence, the United States has offered a vision of world order based on a set of principles rather than competition over territory. Liberal international order is a way of organizing an interdependent world. It is, as the Norwegian historian Geir Lundestad called it, an "empire by invitation." Its success

depends on its legitimacy and appeal and not on the capacity of its patrons to force obedience. If the United States remains at the center of world politics in the decades to come, it will be because this type of order generates more supporters and fellow travelers around the world than that offered by China and Russia.

The U.S. confrontation with China and Russia in 2022 is an echo of the great-power upheavals of 1919, 1945, and 1989. As at these earlier moments, the United States finds itself working with other democracies in resisting the aggressive moves of illiberal great powers. The Russian war in Ukraine is about more than the future of Ukraine; it is also about the basic rules and norms of international relations. Putin's gambit has placed the United States and democracies in Europe and elsewhere on the defensive. But it has also given the United States an opportunity to rethink and reargue its case for an open, multilateral system of world order. If the past is any guide, the United States should not try to simply consolidate the old order but to reimagine it. U.S. leaders should seek to broaden the democratic coalition, reaffirm basic values and interests, and offer a vision of a reformed international order that draws states and peoples together in new forms of cooperation, such as to solve problems of climate change, global public health, and sustainable development. No other great power is better placed to build the necessary partnerships and lead the way in tackling the major problems of the twenty-first century. Other powers may be rising, but the world cannot afford the end of the American era. 🌐

Mexico's Dying Democracy

AMLO and the Toll of Authoritarian Populism

DENISE DRESSER

When Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador took office four years ago, he promised to deliver what he branded a “Fourth Transformation,” the next in a series of defining junctures in Mexican history: the War of Independence in the early 1800s, the liberal movement of President Benito Juárez later that century, and the Revolution of 1910. To “make Mexico great again,” he said he would fight deeply ingrained corruption and eradicate persistent poverty. But in the name of his agenda, López Obrador has removed checks and balances, weakened autonomous institutions, and seized discretionary control of the budget. Arguing that police forces cannot stop the country’s mounting insecurity, he has supplanted them with the Mexican military and endowed it with unprecedented economic and political power. Today, the armed forces carry out his bidding on multiple fronts and have become a pillar of support for the government.

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López Obrador, or AMLO as he is known, seems intent on restoring something akin to the dominant-party rule that characterized Mexican politics from 1929 to 2000, but with a militarized twist.

Despite these questionable moves, the president and his party, Morena, remain popular. His supporters applaud the return of a strong and unencumbered leader, capable of enacting change in a country that is clamoring for more social justice for the many and less entitlement for the few. But his presidency, and the country's trajectory, worry scholars, activists, opposition parties, and members of civil society who fought to dismantle the hegemony of the former Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which was in power for 71 years, and now seek to defend Mexico's transition to multiparty democracy. These critics contend that López Obrador is polarizing the populace and jeopardizing the country's fledgling democracy with his routine attacks on civil society organizations, his stated desire to take apart key institutions, and his use of the bully pulpit to lambaste the media and members of the opposition.

His playbook is like those of strongmen in other countries, who argue that they have too many constraints on their power to effect foundational change, promote participatory politics, and rid the country of immoral and rapacious elites. Yet as Western scholars have lamented the rise of autocrats in Hungary, Nicaragua, Poland, Turkey, Venezuela, and even the United States, they have often overlooked Mexico's prominence in the growing list of countries where democracy is being subverted by elected leaders.

López Obrador's personalistic style of governing is a form of democratic backsliding. His rhetoric and policy decisions have put democratic norms and institutions at risk. He has reshaped the Mexican political ecosystem so quickly and fluidly that defending democracy has become extremely difficult, for civil society groups as well as opposition parties. López Obrador is eroding, in word and in deed, the democratic norms and rules that Mexico has developed since the PRI lost its grip on the political system. He denies the legitimacy of his opponents by deeming them "traitors to the country." He tolerates criminality and violence to justify the militarization of the country. And he has displayed a willingness to curtail the civil liberties of critics, including those in the media. Reports of Mexican democracy's death may be exaggerated; it is not dead. But it is grievously ill. And López Obrador's leadership is

affecting U.S.-Mexican relations in a way that could turn back the clock on three decades of economic integration, revive the previous mistrust between the two countries, and halt collaboration on issues of binational concern, including security, immigration, and climate change. The Biden administration does not seem to fully understand the dangers that loom ahead as Mexico becomes a more insecure, more militarized, and less democratic country.

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

According to a saying popular in Mexico in the 1970s, “Not a leaf moves without the president knowing about it.” That is how the country worked until Mexico’s transition to electoral democracy in the 1990s. Then, power became more dispersed, incipient checks and balances were put in place, and autonomous institutions, independent from the presidency, were created. A highly imperfect, and in many ways dysfunctional, political system emerged. Over the past four years, however, López Obrador has sought to re-create many of the political and institutional arrangements that characterized dominant-party rule. He is putting in place a strong presidency with ample discretionary powers, capable of dominating Congress, influencing the judiciary, determining economic policy, remaking the apparatus of the state according to the president’s personal preferences, and exercising metaconstitutional powers, such as issuing decrees that enable the armed forces to be in charge of public security or allow them to carry out public works without fulfilling legal requirements.

López Obrador argues that he is cleaning house and combating corruption. He says he can do so only by being in full command of all levers of government. The fight against the model of economic liberalization and political competition that emerged in the 1990s—which the president derides as “neoliberal”—has led to bypassing Congress and the constitution, ignoring regulatory procedures, and channeling a growing number of government activities to his cronies and the military. Dismissing the state as a “rheumatic elephant,” López Obrador has proceeded to undermine Mexico’s civil service, regulatory bodies, and administrative institutions, either by breaking them up or by filling them with his own loyalists. The Human Rights Commission is led by Rosario Piedra, a militant member of Morena, who kowtows to the president while remaining silent on

human rights violations committed by the military. The Energy Regulation Commission, an oversight body, has been staffed by men with personal and political ties to Rocío Nahle, the minister of energy. López Obrador has also let months go by without naming new members to the Competition Commission, a regulatory institution responsible for investigating and sanctioning monopolistic practices, which is currently understaffed and without a president. In decree after decree, López Obrador has eviscerated the Mexican state, often in the name of fiscal austerity, while giving many plutocrats free rein and refusing to carry out fiscal reform that would tax his rich allies. He may disparage neoliberalism, but Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan would approve of his behavior.

In recent years, political movements across the ideological spectrum in many liberal democracies have called for “bringing the state back in”—that is, shoring up the capacity of the state to address inequality, regulate markets, combat climate change, and respond to global health emergencies. The reverse is taking place in Mexico, with significant social and political ramifications. The government’s reluctance to design a fiscal rescue package or social welfare spending policies to soften the blow from the COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects. As a result of what López Obrador described as “republican austerity,” Mexico has suffered one of the world’s highest excess mortality rates during the pandemic, with over 600,000 Mexicans dying of COVID-19. The ranks of the poor have swelled by almost four million people since 2019, according to the National Council for Evaluation of Social Development Policy. During the first year of the pandemic, vaccines were scarce, hospitals were beyond capacity, over one million businesses collapsed, and immigration to the United States rose sharply. Today, fewer Mexicans have public health-care coverage than at any point over the last 20 years, and the education system lies in shambles as a result of government disinvestment and mismanagement. A study carried out by the School of Governance at the Monterrey Institute of Technology reports that since the pandemic began in 2020, over one million children abandoned school, and there was a historic reduction of enrollment for all grades.

López Obrador’s personalistic style of governing is a form of democratic backsliding.

These consequences all flow from López Obrador's style of governing. He has formulated ineffective policies using questionable assumptions, such as his belief that the most indebted state oil company in the world—Pemex—can recover past levels of production and help the economy grow, instead of dragging it down. He has developed a personalistic method of carrying out policies, one that is prone to clientelism, including the distribution of cash to the poor, and based on an unreliable, politically motivated census developed by his party. And he has terminated initiatives in a haphazard and seemingly arbitrary way, for example, eliminating government-run trusts for science, technology, and educational evaluation. Arguing that a slew of government-run programs were corrupt, including childcare facilities, women's shelters, and environmental institutes, he proceeded to shut them down by decree and without evidence of malfeasance.

López Obrador's government claims to embody progressive values, but it contradicts them at every turn. It refuses to tax the rich, to prioritize the fight against climate change, and to support activists who decry the country's growing number of femicides. An average of 11 women are killed every day in Mexico, in what the UN calls a "femicide pandemic," but the government has cut funding for public shelters for the victims of gender-related violence. López Obrador promises to "put the poor first," but his government's budgetary allocations belie that assertion. He has done away with a broad swath of social safety nets, leaving the dispossessed in a more dire situation than when he assumed office. The 2021 National Poll on Health and Nutrition shows that as a result of cuts to the public health system—and the dismantling of prior national health coverage such as Seguro Popular, or Popular Insurance—the poorest segments of the population spend a greater percentage of their income on health care than they did under previous governments, and 66 percent of the uninsured have been forced to seek private care.

López Obrador champions direct cash transfers to the poor, but new social programs have been plagued by financial irregularities, charges of corruption, and wasted resources. The Federal Auditing Commission has documented these failings in two of the most touted government initiatives: "Planting Life," in which beneficiaries burned down trees in order to receive public funds to plant new ones, and "Young Building the Future," in which funds were disbursed to non-existent companies that hired nonexistent workers.



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Meanwhile, federal budget cuts are starving institutions that have been fundamental to the construction of level-playing-field capitalism, such as the Competition Commission and the Federal Telecommunications Institute. Funding has also been slashed for independent bodies that have been particularly important to Mexico's path to democracy, including the National Electoral Institute, the Federal Transparency Institute, and the National Human Rights Commission. By flooding these institutions with partisan loyalists and delegitimizing their work by calling them

An average of 11 women are killed every day in Mexico, in what the UN calls a "femicide pandemic."

instruments of "the conservative, hypocritical elite," López Obrador is harming their ability to carry out their roles as checks and balances on the government. Positioning himself as the sole representative of "the will of the people," López Obrador is rigorously adhering to the authoritarian populist playbook.

His actions have damaged not only Mexico's democracy but also its economy. Domestic and foreign investment have dwindled as the government botched its response to the pandemic; rolled back reforms that had helped boost growth, such as investment in renewable energy; and created regulatory uncertainty, thanks to the president's adversarial attitude toward the parts of the private sector that do not comply with his clientelistic system. Between 2019 and 2021, when bad economic conditions worsened with the COVID-19 crisis, Mexico's GDP shrank more than that of any other Latin American country. And the prospects for a recovery are dim, given global inflation and investor distrust in López Obrador's economic leadership.

For years, López Obrador decried what he called "the mafia in power" and railed against greedy oligarchs and their accomplices operating within the structure of the state. But instead of tackling social inequality at its source by strengthening the state's capacity to promote growth and more fairly redistribute its gains, López Obrador has simply reproduced the crony-capitalist model that defined the Mexican economy since the PRI seized control in 1929. His government has maintained and developed strategic alliances with some of the wealthiest members of Mexico's business community, earning the praise and support of influential figures such as the telecommunication

magnates Carlos Slim and Ricardo Salinas Pliego. Both have been the beneficiaries of discretionary government contracts in the banking, telecommunications, and construction sectors. By revising the Mexican tradition of mixing state capitalism and oligarchy, López Obrador and his party are emulating the PRI's vision of governance as a system for distributing the spoils.

MILITARIZING MEXICO

First as an opposition leader and later in his 2018 presidential campaign, López Obrador decried the government's growing use of the Mexican military to combat drug trafficking and cartel-related violence, a practice that began in the 1990s and escalated under López Obrador's two immediate predecessors, Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto. One of López Obrador's most popular campaign slogans was *abrazos, no balazos* (hugs, not bullets), and he promised to return the armed forces to the barracks. He garnered significant support among left-wing and progressive voters precisely because he vowed to redesign the failed security strategy that Calderón and Peña Nieto pursued. Both previous presidents had given the armed forces expansive powers, which led to an explosion in human rights violations but no significant reduction in homicides or other types of crime. López Obrador vowed to address the root causes of violence by channeling more public resources to the poor and keeping the military off the streets.

But in a surprising about-face, shortly after assuming office, López Obrador started to backtrack on his vow to demilitarize the country. Pressured by prominent generals who viewed his stance as unrealistic, López Obrador argued that because the police force was corrupt and inefficient, the army would have to maintain and even broaden its role. He pushed through a constitutional reform in 2019 that established a new militarized force called the National Guard that was to take over public security for five years. But from the start, López Obrador undermined what was supposed to be civilian control and oversight by naming Luis Rodríguez Bucio, a recently retired general, as head of the new body and staffing it largely with active members of the armed forces.

Instead of reining in Mexico's army, López Obrador has unleashed it. Over the past three years, the armed forces have taken on unparalleled political and economic roles. The military is now operating outside civilian control, in open defiance of the Mexican constitution, which

states that the military cannot be in charge of public security. As a result of presidential decrees, the military has become omnipresent: building airports, running the country's ports, controlling customs, distributing money to the poor, implementing social programs, and detaining immigrants. According to the National Militarization Index created by the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics, a research institute based in Mexico City, during the past decade, the military has gradually taken over 246 activities that used to be in the hands of civilians. The armed forces have been allocated larger and larger amounts of federal money, and many projects under their control have been reclassified as "matters of public security," thus removing them from public scrutiny under Mexico's National Transparency Law. Admittedly, López Obrador inherited armed forces that were increasingly given roles traditionally carried out by the police. But he has made things far worse by eliminating any semblance of civilian oversight or accountability. He has placed the National Guard under the direct control of the defense ministry, doing away with even the pretense of civilian control.

As he tries to win the loyalty of the military, López Obrador has ignored its history of acting with impunity and violating human rights. He parades with generals at his side and invites them to his morning press conference. At most public events, he surrounds himself with top brass, referring to them as *el pueblo bueno* (the good people) and claiming that they are incorruptible. But the history of the Mexican military is stained by its complicity with drug traffickers and criminals, beginning with the 1997 arrest of General Gutiérrez Rebollo, who was convicted of working with one of Mexico's top drug lords. The Zetas, one of the most savage criminal groups in Mexico, was originally made up of members of the military who moved into the drug trade and conducted lucrative criminal operations. And in 2020, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in Los Angeles detained General Salvador Cienfuegos, Mexico's former minister of defense, and the U.S. government charged him with drug trafficking. In a reversal that remains unexplained, Washington later returned him to Mexico after negotiations between the Mexican government and the Trump administration's attorney general, William Barr. Upon his arrival, Cienfuegos was rapidly exonerated by Mexican authorities, and two of his top collaborators remain in key military positions, including Luis Crescencio Sandoval, head of the ministry of defense.



Soldiers and the state: López Obrador reviewing troops, Mexico City, September 2021

The armed forces were also involved in the disappearance of 43 students in the town of Ayotzinapa in 2014, when the young men were kidnapped by local police and their allies in the drug trafficking trade in the region. Criminal gangs who pursued and ultimately killed the students were aided by members of the army's 27th Battalion, including a general who was indicted in September 2022.

López Obrador is unwilling to limit the armed forces because he is governing with them, out of distrust for the civilian institutions of the state. He doesn't believe that the country's civil bureaucracy will be unconditionally loyal to him; the military, on the other hand, he says, is "fundamental and strategic" to his transformative project, and that may assure its longevity beyond his six years in office. He is also trying to carry out massive public works projects to cement his legacy, and the military provides an attractive option for getting things done quickly. López Obrador frequently refers to a supposed coup d'état that right-wing conspirators are allegedly preparing against him. He has clearly decided that a way of preventing that outcome is to have some of his most powerful potential enemies—including those in the military—inside the tent pissing out, instead of outside the tent pissing in.

The militarization of Mexican politics will be López Obrador's most enduring and consequential policy decision. Future governments

will be forced to either respect the enlarged power of the military or risk confronting it. Meanwhile, militarization is not producing the results López Obrador promised. According to the U.S. military, drug cartels have expanded their territory and now control a third of Mexico. Violence continues in many parts of the country, with over 100,000 people becoming the victims of forced disappearances since 2007, when the military was assigned to wage the “war on drugs.” Organized crime has access to increasingly lethal weaponry such as rocket-propelled grenades, and attacks on civilians in cities are now everyday occurrences. López Obrador’s term in office is on track to become the most violent in Mexico’s recent history.

DISMANTLING DEMOCRACY

Since Mexico’s democratic transition in 2000, the emphasis among reformers has been on building institutions that would assure accountability, transparency, and autonomy from the president and the ruling party. It was also important that opposition candidates have an equal chance in elections. López Obrador seems intent on undermining these objectives and erasing the country’s hard-won (albeit incomplete) democratic gains.

Despite its many flaws, Mexico’s electoral democracy had established basic rules for electoral competition that were largely respected. Fundamental to this system was the National Electoral Institute (INE), which is in charge of guaranteeing free and fair elections. For more than three decades, political scientists have viewed the INE, and its predecessor, the Federal Electoral Institute, as the jewel in the crown of Mexico’s democratic transition. Yet since arriving in office, López Obrador has taken aim at it. He associates it with the contentious election of 2006, in which he believes fraud prevented what should have been a victory for him, and the electoral authorities carried out only a partial recount of the vote. His stated goal is to replace the INE with a new entity overseen by his party, thus propelling the political system back to the era of PRI rule, when the party in power controlled every aspect of the electoral process.

López Obrador’s constant verbal attacks on the INE and substantial cuts to its budget have been accompanied by his frequent use of referendums and *consultas populares* (popular consultations) intended to establish what he calls a “true democracy.” Whenever the president feels that his agenda is being stalled by constitutional limitations, he establishes

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a mechanism for obtaining popular support for decisions that would otherwise be stopped by the courts. In 2019 he promoted a “popular consultation” to see whether the people supported the construction of the new Maya train line, the Dos Bocas oil refinery, and other large-scale public works, but his party did not install enough voting booths countrywide to assure the level of participation required by constitutional rules for the consultation process. Nonetheless, López Obrador used the “yes” vote to validate the advancement of his projects, even though they failed to comply with legal requirements such as conducting environmental impact studies. In addition, states governed by Morena had more voting booths than others did, thus skewing the result in favor of the president.

Instead of reining in Mexico’s army, López Obrador has unleashed it.

The implications are worrisome: if a badly organized instrument of direct democracy supports López Obrador’s views, he embraces it, even if that entails bending the law to his bidding. He publicly pressures and threatens judges and ministers of the Supreme Court when they attempt to place legal obstacles in his path, including their refusal to support his punitive policy of automatic prison without bail for petty crimes. Alejandro Gertz Manero, the pliant attorney general, has also come to López Obrador’s aid when the president wants his opponents jailed or indicted, as was the case with Jorge Luis Lavalle, a congressman who was put behind bars, without evidence, for allegedly taking bribes from Odebrecht, a Brazilian construction company.

This bullying and manipulation of the legal system makes it nearly impossible for opposition parties to sap support for López Obrador. Plus, they are burdened by a history of bad governance and corruption while in office and remain weak, divided, and leaderless. Although the opposition was able to wrest voter support away from Morena in Mexico City during elections in 2021, the party made significant electoral inroads at the state level and now controls 21 out of 32 governorships. According to the most recent public opinion polls, it is poised to win the presidency again in 2024. Because López Obrador is constitutionally limited to only one term in office, he will use the resources of the state to assure victory for a candidate he selects himself. Just like the PRI presidents of the past, López Obrador will choose a successor who will remain true to his vision, even if it means abandoning basic democratic principles.

The only true thorn in López Obrador's side are Mexico's feminists, a singular political movement that he does not seem to understand, cannot control, and has not been able to suppress. Women in Mexico are angry, and rightly so, given the tide of femicide sweeping the country. Women's long-standing frustration with the government's lack of response to the murders has been intensified by a president who seems impervious to and disdainful of their demands. Despite keeping his promise to establish gender parity in his cabinet, López Obrador has instituted policies and economic austerity that have been harmful to women. His government has closed publicly subsidized daycare centers, eliminated shelters for victims of domestic violence, defunded the National Women's Institute, and cut many national programs that protect women, especially those in indigenous communities. Today, Mexican feminists are more energized and more combative than ever, while they seek to reframe the public debate in favor of their rights and against increased militarization. Throughout his term, women's marches and public protests have been constant and have drawn enormous crowds. When they occur, López Obrador erects steel barriers around the presidential palace, a defensive measure no past president has ever resorted to. In the polls, support for the president among women has been falling because of his budget cuts, his repeated public attacks on feminism, and his tendency to tear-gas the protesters when they march.

PUSHING FOR MEXIT?

As part of his strategy to govern through fear and division, López Obrador has chosen to pursue an openly anti-American stance. In contrast with the conciliatory, even friendly posture that he assumed toward U.S. President Donald Trump, López Obrador has picked public fights with President Joe Biden on many issues, the most important being energy policy. López Obrador has pushed through a series of laws that discriminate against energy production by foreign companies and U.S.-generated energy in favor of state-owned oil and gas companies, such as Pemex and Mexico's Federal Electricity Commission (CFE). U.S. and Canadian enterprises have assumed increasingly critical public stances, arguing that Mexico is violating commitments it made in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 2020.

To resolve the spat, the Biden administration pursued quiet diplomacy. John Kerry, the U.S. special envoy for climate change, has visited

Mexico several times over the last two years, while other senior U.S. officials expressed concern, hoping that behind-the-scenes pressure might lead López Obrador to reconsider his position and strike down measures that give electricity produced by the CFE an unfair edge over energy from private companies and cleaner sources such as wind and solar. The usual tools of diplomacy, however, proved of little use, as López Obrador dug in and began to escalate his attacks on the United States, frequently asserting that Mexico is “not a colony,” decrying American “interventionism” in his country’s internal affairs, calling Mexican defenders of free trade “treasonous,” and proclaiming that the USMCA violated Mexico’s sovereignty. To fire up his base, López Obrador has turned a trade dispute into a political battle.

Biden’s patience finally wore out, and U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai announced in July that the administration would begin a process of dispute settlement consultations, a first step in what could lead to tariffs on a wide range of Mexican products. The Canadian government soon followed suit, challenging López Obrador’s effort to establish government control over the country’s oil and electricity sector and backtrack on the liberalization of the energy sector that the trade agreement established. If Mexico refuses to relent, and if the arbitration panel finds it to be in violation of the USMCA, the country could face severe financial penalties and compensatory tariffs. Even though Biden still depends on Mexico’s assistance with immigration and security issues, he seems to have decided it is time to stop an emboldened López Obrador. Although López Obrador has not openly threatened to exit the USMCA, his confrontational rhetoric and his unwillingness to reverse his nationalistic energy policies has generated concern in Washington and Ottawa.

For Mexico, leaving the agreement would be economic and political suicide. Mexico’s inclusion in a free-trade zone with its richer neighbors to the north has turned the country into a manufacturing powerhouse and has functioned as a guarantor of stability by reassuring international investors that the Mexican government would play by the rules. As a result of NAFTA and later the USMCA, investors came to see Mexico not as an unstable Latin American basket case but as a North American player that, in the event of a crisis, had a lender of last resort. When Mexico’s economy collapsed in 1994, U.S. President Bill Clinton bypassed Congress to provide a \$20 billion loan to help the country recover. Had Mexico not been a NAFTA partner, it would not have

received that assistance. And if Mexico withdraws from the USMCA, Washington would be unlikely to rescue Mexico from a similar crisis.

By rejecting the political and economic tenets of the North American neighborhood, López Obrador is reviving views of Mexico as a country subject to pendular macroeconomic policy shifts and presidential whims, which produced crisis after crisis in the 1970s and 1980s. Even if he chooses not to withdraw from the USMCA, his erratic policymaking could lead to further disinvestment, capital flight, and a return to cyclical bouts of economic instability. In 2021, Mexico suffered record capital outflows of over \$10 billion, caused by increased risk aversion among investors.

But López Obrador knows that playing the anti-Yankee card can yield political benefits, despite polls showing that a majority of the country supports free trade. With the 2024 presidential elections not far off, he believes that his popularity with an energized political base matters more than the maintenance of a trilateral trade accord. Scoring political points and amassing political capital matters more to him than avoiding a return to what the Mexican poet Octavio Paz once called the country's "labyrinth of solitude," where Mexico would once again waste away, brought down by protectionism, nationalism, corruption, crime, and poverty.

PEDESTAL POLITICS

More than a government, López Obrador's administration is a daily act of political theater. His is a performative presidency that spins a tale of a heroic fight against privileged elites, perverted feminists, and corrupt experts, all conspiring against the public. He claims that he alone represents the will of the pure, true people. His rhetoric is simple: he seeks a seismic shift, not a mere course correction. He isn't interested in renovating; he wants to burn down the house. López Obrador believes that he embodies a moral revolution, unconstrained by the imperatives of democracy or the niceties of constitutional rule.

The core goal of López Obrador's presidency is the maintenance of personal popularity to assure that his party remains in power. His government is therefore uninterested in the material consequences of its policies and actions. It doesn't matter whether the critics think the performance is any good; all that matters is that the audience keeps applauding. As a political strategy, it has worked so far: recent polls show that over 60 percent of Mexicans approve of

López Obrador personally, regardless of the well-documented and easily observable adverse effects his rule has had on the economy, on crime, and on democratic consolidation.

His continued popularity does not bode well for Mexico's future. Stepped-up military involvement in domestic affairs is a threat to democracy and human rights. López Obrador's assault on the state will destroy or degrade the democratic institutions that Mexican reformers had managed to build over the last 30 years. His inward-looking policies will inhibit economic recovery and Mexico's entrance into competitive post-pandemic global markets. Crony capitalism will perpetuate a system based on favors, concessions, and collusion that will favor the powerful and hurt consumers and citizens.

Democracy relies on rules, procedures, and institutions—not a leader endowed with mythical qualities. The cult of personality that the Mexican president has promoted and the polarizing ideas that he has injected into the public sphere have created an “us against them” environment. Mexican politics is increasingly fueled by fear and resentment instead of by debate, deliberation, and fact-based arguments, and public discourse has become unmoored from any sense of what is best for the country. Mexico has a long history of placing its destiny in the hands of an authoritarian president as it lurches from crisis to crisis. Now, López Obrador is taking the country down a familiar path, not to a strong, healthy democracy but to a lawless, corrupt kleptocracy, supported by people who should know better. 🌐

The Real China Hands

What Washington Can Learn From Its Asian Allies

MICHAEL J. GREEN

For four years, as an increasingly belligerent China breathed down their necks, the United States' allies in Asia quietly endured a torrent of abuse from President Donald Trump. Under President Joe Biden, they again have a winning hand in Washington. By the time he took office, Biden, a leading optimist about cooperation with China when he was vice president, had transformed into a hardened skeptic. He has promoted key alliance builders to the top Asia posts at the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Pentagon and ensured that his first in-person summit was with Yoshihide Suga, then Japan's prime minister. His administration has elevated the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), the group linking the United States with Australia, India, and Japan, to a regular summit and agreed to help Australia build nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS pact with that country and

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the United Kingdom. The White House's Indo-Pacific strategy, issued in February 2022, mentioned allies or alliances more than 30 times in a 19-page document. China merited only two references.

Despite this welcome attention, the United States still fundamentally gets the relationship with its Asian allies backward. These countries are not reluctant partners that need to be shaken out of their complacency; they live with the threat of China every day, are eager to blunt it, and in fact originated many of the Biden administration's initiatives to counter the country's influence. Nor are they reckless novices that fail to understand the dangers of competition with China; they often have a far more subtle understanding of coexistence than the one that prevails in Washington. As it refines its China strategy, the United States should increasingly take its cues from Australia, Japan, and South Korea.

Indeed, as the United States becomes more dependent on allies to maintain a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, those countries will naturally expect a larger voice in formulating strategy on China. But the United States remains out of sync with its allies on two of the biggest strategic questions: the role that regional free-trade agreements should play in competition with China and the ultimate goal of allied policy toward China. And there are dangerous deficiencies in technology sharing and command and control that need to be addressed. These misalignments are not merely harmless differences between friends. The longer they last, the more China will be able to take advantage of them.

EARLY WARNING

As U.S. policymakers revamp their country's China policy, a good place to start would be to recognize that it was not the United States that moved first to respond to the China challenge but its allies. A decade ago, the Obama administration was flirting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping's proposal for a "new model of great-power relations," which, in Beijing's version, would have relegated Japan and South Korea to second-tier status in a new bipolar U.S.-Chinese condominium. Tokyo and other capitals quietly protested, as they had in 2009, when President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao signed a joint statement promising to respect U.S.-Chinese "core interests" and when Obama administration officials proposed "strategic reassurance" to Beijing. It was not that U.S. allies sought confrontation, but they had legitimate concerns about losing U.S. support at a time of growing Chinese coercion in their region.

U.S. officials shifted their stance near the end of the Obama administration, when the revisionist dimensions of China's strategy became more apparent. The mood of the broader public was changing, too. In 2012, a survey by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that 40 percent of Americans favored placing a higher priority on building good relations with China than with U.S. allies; by 2018, that number had fallen to 26 percent. The sentiment was mirrored on the other side of the Pacific, with polls in Australia, Japan, and South Korea showing overwhelming support in each country for their alliances with the United States.

In waking up to the threat of China, Washington was far behind its most important allies in Asia, especially Japan. Back in 2013, as Washington anticipated a closer partnership with Xi, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government released a strategy for longer-term competition that was based on assumptions about Chinese behavior that are now widely accepted in U.S. policy circles. Abe's controversial views on Japan's own history—he had argued that Japan was often unfairly criticized for its conduct during World War II—made him look to many in Washington like an unwelcome spoiler in U.S.-Chinese relations. Beijing sought to exploit those doubts by targeting him with a global media campaign. (In one of the more histrionic episodes of Beijing's relentless campaign, the Chinese ambassador in London went so far as to write an article for *The Telegraph* comparing Abe to the evil Lord Voldemort from the Harry Potter books.) But Abe persisted with his strategy. He had been returned to power by a ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) looking to reset relations with Beijing after years of embarrassing Chinese incursions around the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyu Islands). Abe understood full well what Washington was only beginning to realize: that China's leaders judged both the United States and Japan as being in precipitous decline. He intended to change that perception.

Faced with a deteriorating balance of power in relation to China, a nation such as Japan has three basic choices. The first is to get on the bandwagon of the rising power. But that was never an option that Abe or any other Japanese leader would consider. As he told an American audience in 2013, "Japan is not now and will never be a tier-two power." The second option is internal balancing: enhancing one's own power to meet the threat. In Japan's case, the fastest way to accomplish that would have been to acquire nuclear weapons, which the country could develop in less than two years, but the Japanese public remains overwhelmingly opposed, as do its allies. Instead, Abe invested in more

targeted defense capabilities and new sources of economic growth. He proposed the acquisition of long-range missiles that would go beyond the strictly defensive mission of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, ended a two-decade decline in defense budgets, and centralized national security decision-making in the prime minister's office. On the economy, Abe did not undertake the full-throated reforms that most experts have called for, but he did spur growth by deregulating a handful of sectors and by pushing for more women in the workforce.

Washington's
Indo-Pacific
strategy flows
from Abe's original
framework, often
verbatim.

It was the third way to redress a power imbalance that formed the centerpiece of Abe's overall strategy: external balancing, or strengthening one's alliances. A decade ago, Washington may have still been debating the relative importance of cooperating with allies versus cooperating with China, but for Tokyo there was no question which was more important. For most of Japan's postwar history, governments had interpreted the country's pacifist constitution as forbidding Japan from coming to the

aid of friendly nations under attack. Because the Japanese public feared getting trapped in the United States' Cold War adventures more than it feared being abandoned, this interpretation provided a convenient alibi for sitting out conflicts from the Vietnam War through the Gulf War. But Abe was now more worried about abandonment than entrapment. The growing chorus of dovish voices in Washington, along with China's expanded military footprint around Japan, led him to throw out the alibi.

In 2014, Abe introduced legislation recognizing that Japan would exercise the right of collective self-defense and could fight alongside the United States if the need arose. Although Abe was motivated in part by ideological opposition to Japan's constitutional constraints, he fundamentally sought to ensure that the United States could depend more on Japan in a crisis so that Japan would still be able to depend on the United States. After a grueling 100-plus hours of debate in Japan's parliament, the country backed him. Abe's motivation was not a nostalgic attachment to U.S. leadership so much as a realistic assessment of what it would take to shore up U.S. power and commitments in the region for Japan's own security. That was why he, more than any other world leader, was willing to absorb Trump's barbs and ensure that he kept the mercurial U.S. president on his side.

Abe's external balancing strategy also involved reinforcing countries' resilience against undue Chinese influence and coercion. His "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy not only matched China's Belt and Road funding but also promised high-quality infrastructure investments that would protect the environment and spare the recipients dangerous debt traps. This focus on helping the region paid off: today, Japan enjoys favorability ratings in South and Southeast Asia that far exceed those of China or any other country in the world. Abe gradually won over skeptical partners on his proposal for reestablishing the Quad after China's incursions into the South China Sea and the contested Himalayan border with India. Free-trade agreements aimed at reinforcing open economic rules for the region also expanded under Abe. When he began his second stint as prime minister in 2012, less than 20 percent of Japan's trade was covered by such agreements, but by the time he left office in 2020, the share had reached 80 percent. When the Trump administration withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017, Abe stepped in with his counterparts from Australia, Canada, and Singapore to ensure that the agreement went forward, leaving a place at the table should the United States regain its bearings on trade policy.

No other world leader did more in the face of Chinese revisionism to align the major powers and invest in countries' durability against it, and that ultimately shaped U.S. strategy. The Trump and Biden administrations' free and open Indo-Pacific strategies and their embrace of the Quad all flow from Abe's original framework, often verbatim. Governments across Europe and Asia have begun modeling their approach to the region on the Indo-Pacific concept rather than on Xi's fading China-centric alternative of a "community of common destiny."

When Abe was assassinated in July 2022, the world acknowledged his impact. Scholars and diplomats also noted the shortcomings of his approach: challenged relations with South Korea, fruitless diplomatic efforts with Russia, and incomplete efforts at spurring economic growth and sustaining the economic empowerment of women to address Japan's tough demographic picture. But to move forward, Washington's own approach to allies must include an understanding of how persistently and effectively Abe introduced the framework that defines competition with China—and where U.S. strategy falls short by comparison.

THE STALWARTS

Japan has emerged as the most important net exporter of security in the Indo-Pacific, but Australia and South Korea remain critical bookends,

given their capable militaries and their development and diplomacy toolkits. Largely for reasons of geography, Canberra and Seoul were not as quick to organize in response to the China challenge as Japan—Australia because it is so far from China and South Korea because it is so close. U.S. allies all have closer trade relations with China than the United States does, particularly Australia and South Korea: 35 percent of Australian exports and 25 percent of South Korean exports go to China, compared with 22 percent of Japanese exports and nine percent of U.S. exports. But both Australia and South Korea are increasingly finding ways to adopt the same Indo-Pacific framework that Japan championed and Washington embraced.

Two decades ago, Australia began making a fortune exporting natural resources to China and importing students and tourists. Without the kind of manufacturing base that alerted the Japanese public early on to Chinese misbehavior in the global market—stealing intellectual property, dumping exports at below-market prices, and restricting foreign investment—Australians mostly saw upsides to their economic relationship with China. The Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank, found in 2013 that 76 percent of Australians thought their economic future lay with China rather than with the United States, an outlook that mirrored the United States' growing optimism about China at the time. Whereas successive U.S. administrations spurred Beijing's request for a "strategic partnership," Canberra formed a "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Beijing in 2014.

Beijing's expansion into the South China Sea in 2014 and 2015 alarmed members of the Australian national security community just as it did their U.S. counterparts. But for most Australians, the wake-up call came in 2018, when Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced that China was trying to build a submarine base in the Pacific Island of Vanuatu—a development that would have put potentially hostile forces in Australia's neighborhood for the first time since World War II. Then, in 2019, an influential Australian news program exposed vivid details about the Chinese Communist Party's extensive operations to influence Australian politics and society, prompting Parliament to draft tough laws against foreign interference.

When the Australian government called for an international inquiry into the origins of COVID-19 in 2020, the Chinese ambassador in Canberra threatened a massive consumer boycott of Australian goods. Chinese imports of coal, copper, barley, and wine from Australia soon fell to



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a trickle as Beijing tried to use economic interdependence as a tool for coercion. Australian journalists were detained inside China, and Chinese propagandists launched a disinformation campaign in the region with provocative charges of Australian racism and war crimes. Beijing escalated tensions further by delivering a list of 14 demands that Canberra had to meet before relations could improve, including silence on Chinese human rights abuses and an end to funding for think tanks critical of Chinese military activities.

The Chinese gambit failed spectacularly. This year's Lowy poll found a stunning reversal in views of China, with 75 percent of Australians saying that China will become a military threat to Australia in the future. Australia became the first country to ban the Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE from its telecommunications markets, and a new foreign investment review board is limiting Chinese acquisitions of strategic assets in Australia. The government of Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who took office in August 2018, defied China's demands by agreeing to build nuclear-powered submarines and develop other advanced capabilities with the United States and the United Kingdom under the AUKUS pact. Australia has also expanded defense cooperation with Japan, signing an agreement this year that provides reciprocal access to military facilities in the two countries and inviting increasing numbers of Japanese forces to participate in military exercises in Australia. The country has also signed new defense agreements with India. Like Japan, Australia has moved faster than the United States to manage competition with China.

South Korea is the latest U.S. ally in Asia to join the dance. In its case, China's proximity left it with much less flexibility than Australia and Japan. Japan has thwarted one Chinese invasion, in the thirteenth century, and Australia has faced none, but South Korea's history is scarred with dozens of invasions from its giant neighbor to the north. Moreover, China's influence on North Korea—the most important security challenge for South Korea—is only increasing as Pyongyang has come to rely on China for 90 percent of its trade.

At times, Seoul's efforts to manage relations with the great powers around the Korean Peninsula have only incited greater suspicion, jealousy, and pressure. The governments of the previous two presidents, Park Geun-hye and Moon Jae-in, both fell into that trap. Park solicited Beijing's support despite her pro-alliance bona fides with Washington, and her government implicitly endorsed a U.S.-Chinese structure to Asian geopolitics by proposing a trilateral dialogue for the United States, China, and South



Group project: Biden with the leaders of South Korea and Japan, Madrid, June 2022

Korea, much to the chagrin of Tokyo. In response to a multibillion-dollar Chinese boycott of South Korean companies to punish Seoul for accepting U.S. Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) batteries in 2016, the Moon government promised Beijing that it would limit future military cooperation on missile defense with the United States. This unparalleled accommodation of China with respect to the U.S.–South Korean alliance invited suspicion in Washington and raised ambitions in Beijing.

The South Korean public, however, was souring on China even faster than Australia had. The THAAD boycott, sympathy with Hong Kong's citizens after Beijing's crackdown, and mounting troubles for South Korean companies operating in China all cratered that country's approval ratings. By 2021, 77 percent of South Koreans said they did not trust China. When the conservative politician Yoon Suk-yeul became president in May 2022, he realigned South Korean diplomacy with the United States and even Japan despite lingering tensions with Tokyo over painful historical issues. Yoon will still be constrained by geography and the North Korea problem. When Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, visited Tokyo after her contentious visit to Taiwan in August, for example, she met with Japan's prime minister, but when she stopped in Seoul, Yoon was conveniently on vacation. Nevertheless, Seoul's growing alignment with the United States is now tracking that of Australia and Japan.

In the larger tapestry of U.S. relationships in the Indo-Pacific, the Biden administration is rightly focused on expanded engagement with India through the Quad, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, longtime treaty allies such as the Philippines and Thailand, and, now, with the Pacific Island countries. Many of the nations the United States is courting have dynamic populations poised to play leading roles in the future of the region and the world. Some compete with China but in measured fashion, such as Vietnam and India. All are debating their future trajectories, including their longer-term relationships with the United States and China. That soul-searching makes deeper U.S. engagement all the more important.

At the same time, for the foreseeable future, Australia, Japan, and South Korea will be in a league of their own. These are the alliances that the United States will need most in any regional crisis, and the Biden administration has been right to prioritize them. But it will have to begin thinking of allies not just as instruments of U.S. policy but as strategic innovators who see clearly the gaps in Washington's own approach.

TELL THEM HOW THIS ENDS

One subtle but crucial difference concerns the long-term vision for relations with China. Abe's strategy was premised on resetting relations with China, not containing or decoupling entirely from the Chinese economy. In April 2022, when the LDP's hawkish Research Commission on National Security prepared the ruling party's framework for Japan's next defense plan, its members called for a doubling of defense spending to two percent of GDP in five years and an expansion of Japan's strike capability. Still, the document clarified that the country's ultimate goal was a "constructive and stable relationship" with China. Even after Beijing's economic boycott, the Morrison government in Australia expanded funding for exchanges with China through organizations such as the National Foundation for Australia-China Relations, and the new Labor foreign minister, Penny Wong, has spoken of her desire for relations to be "stabilized." Although South Korean President Yoon promised to back Biden's Indo-Pacific strategy and to be less deferential toward China, his foreign minister, Park Jin, pledged in Beijing to support regional and global cooperation.

One could interpret these stances as duplicitous accommodation, but a more accurate reading would be that all three major allies seek to work with Beijing on issues of concern from a position of strength backed

by closer alignment with the United States and other like-minded countries in the region. Put another way, U.S. allies in Asia still hope for some version of the strategy that U.S. presidents from Richard Nixon to Obama pursued in the region: a combination of balancing and engaging China, but with a longer-term aim of integrating the country under rules favorable to the advanced industrial democracies. The idea is to compete with China, but with a clear end state in mind.

There is broad consensus in Canberra, Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington that Xi will present geopolitical and economic challenges for the next decade and that U.S. allies need to cooperate to blunt his worst ambitions. But where the allies differ from Washington is on the need for a framework that does more than isolate Beijing. Although much of the United States' post-Cold War strategy explicitly sought to shape China in the belief that a combination of engagement and counterbalancing could bend Beijing toward a more durable relationship for the long term, the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy clearly abandons that mission: "Our objective is not to change the [People's Republic of China] but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence in the world that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share," the document states.

Xi's China is a much tougher counterpart, and competition across all domains, from military to technology, will be intense. But the current U.S. approach has left allies and partners wondering what the American endgame is for relations with China. If they haven't given up on shaping China, neither should the United States.

IT'S THE ECONOMIC STRATEGY, STUPID

Asian allies' well-known frustration with the lack of a U.S. trade strategy since the Trump administration is rooted in this longer-term search for a workable equilibrium with China, the top trading partner to most of the region. The TPP appealed to the United States' Indo-Pacific partners not only because it integrated them into the attractive U.S. market but also because it set the stage for more successful negotiations with Beijing over economic rules going forward. The original vision for the TPP was that the weight of so many open regional economies would propel talks on the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with Europe and put enormous pressure on Beijing while providing it with incentives to negotiate along similar lines with all the member states.

In Sydney in 2007, the United States and other leaders attending the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum agreed that the TPP would be one building block for a broader free-trade area in the Asia-Pacific that included China. (The U.S. delegation insisted on the term “area” rather than “agreement” to avoid triggering congressional notification before the table was set for taking on negotiations with Beijing.) When the momentum behind the TPP was at its height in 2015, Obama briefed Xi on the pact, and prominent Chinese officials pointed to it as external

U.S. allies are making big moves and taking on new risks.

validation of economic reforms, just as Premier Zhu Rongzi used the agreement creating the World Trade Organization in the 1990s to restructure China’s state-owned enterprises.

Whether that original vision for TPP as a counterweight to Beijing could ever have been realized is now a moot question, since the Trump administration withdrew from the

partnership, and the Biden administration is adamant that it will not return. This leaves U.S. allies, the U.S. business community, and even many Chinese businesses in a much weaker negotiating position vis-à-vis the Chinese state. More alarming to those depending on a U.S.-led order is the vacuum created by Washington’s retreat on trade policy. In 2022, an index of regional power maintained by the Lowy Institute upgraded the United States to the top regional diplomatic influence but noted that its economic sway had declined ever more since the Trump years. Xi underscored the point in 2021 when he announced China’s intention to join the successor to the TPP—an agreement Washington had once championed.

Understanding the geopolitical ramifications of its absent economic strategy, the Biden administration announced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) in May 2022 in Tokyo. The IPEF brings the United States together with 13 other regional economies for dialogue on topics including digital trade, the environment, and corruption. Although the participation of countries that have previously avoided trade pacts with the United States, such as India and Indonesia, is a geopolitical plus, Biden administration officials insist that the IPEF is not a trade agreement and that there will be no market-access provisions characteristic of the TPP. India and Indonesia agreed to participate precisely because they were not being asked to open up their markets in any significant way. The IPEF certainly addresses important modern issues such as digital trade, and it is possible that the talks could gather

momentum and yield meaningful agreements short of trade liberalization or market access. But it is a shell of what the TPP would have been.

Recognizing that the quarter loaf of the IPEF is better than no loaf at all, U.S. allies are publicly championing the framework as evidence that the United States is back in the economic rule-making game in Asia. Privately, however, there is still great concern that the framework is insufficient to blunt China's growing economic clout. The obvious way to make the IPEF more substantive would be to negotiate a digital trade agreement based on existing provisions in the U.S. pacts with Canada, Japan, and Mexico that the Trump administration negotiated and in comparable deals that Australia and Singapore signed. This is not likely to happen soon, given the protectionists in the Biden administration and Congress who worry that the IPEF might be a gateway drug to the TPP, but the pressure from allies and business to deliver substantive agreements will continue to build.

BETTER TOGETHER

Just as close allies need the United States to lead constructive engagement with Beijing and meaningful economic initiatives for the region, they also require U.S. backing to strengthen deterrence capabilities in the face of a more menacing China. (That may sound contradictory, but allies in the region have to deal with both realities.) U.S. allies are making big moves and taking on new risks. Japan's recognition of the right of collective defense and its introduction of strike capability put Tokyo directly in Beijing's cross hairs. Beijing now regularly releases satellite images of testing ranges shaped like Japanese bases that have been destroyed by ballistic missile attacks. In addition to committing to AUKUS, Australia has pledged to expand weapons production with U.S. firms through the Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise, a multibillion-dollar program. In response to growing Chinese military challenges, Australia is developing new initiatives to host more U.S. troops and give the U.S. military greater access to the north and west of the country. And in South Korea, despite threats from Beijing, Moscow, and Pyongyang, Yoon has sought to increase readiness by resuming regular defense exercises with the United States that Trump and Moon had paused.

These developments have all been embraced by the Biden administration and Congress. Yet even though U.S. allies are making major changes in their defense production and operations, the mechanics of alliance management in Washington are still based on antiquated designs. True, the United States has upgraded its security cooperation

with Japan by creating new military-to-military working groups, but the U.S.-Japanese alliance lacks anything like the combined commands that characterize the U.S. alliances with South Korea or NATO—alliances on the frontline that were designed during the Cold War to “fight tonight,” a readiness level still maintained by the U.S. Command in South Korea. Nor was the U.S.-Australian alliance designed for joint warfighting in the Indo-Pacific, despite the close operational relationship that U.S. and Australian forces developed fighting together in the Middle East. Integrated command and control is critical for these alliances because North Korean missiles and Chinese naval deployments have put Japan and even Australia on the frontlines of a potential war for the first time. It also matters because Japan’s deployment of long-range strike capabilities could trigger escalation by China or North Korea if that deployment is not well integrated into U.S. military planning.

Australia, meanwhile, is counting on the Pentagon and the State Department to share military technology in ways that follow through on Biden’s commitment to help build nuclear-powered submarines and other advanced military capabilities. In 2017, Congress expanded the definition of “the national technology and industrial base,” a legal concept demarcating countries whose companies are given national security priority, adding the United Kingdom and Australia. But in parts of the Pentagon and the State Department, the rules governing export licensing and technology transfer continue to be implemented case by case, as if the addition of Australia and the United Kingdom had not occurred, and “buy American” provisions in U.S. legislation continue to obstruct efforts to transfer technologies and integrate production between trusted allies. Without reform, AUKUS and other Australian investments in deterrence will be difficult to realize. That would be a setback for Australia’s defense, its alliance with the United States, and the overall balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Allies have big decisions to make as well. For Japan to actually increase defense spending to two percent of GDP, the government would have to cut social welfare programs or issue much more debt than it has. And if it is to further integrate itself into U.S. military planning, it will have to improve its protection of information to the levels of Five Eyes intelligence partners such as Australia that can be trusted not to leak the most sensitive intelligence and technical information. Australia’s initiatives will require increased spending or hard choices about priorities. South Korea under Yoon has pledged to support the Biden administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy in Southeast Asia but is sticking to its excuses when it comes to

Taiwan contingencies closer to home, preferring to remain neutral rather than upset Beijing. Without more proactive reform from Congress and the Biden administration, however, these choices may remain too hard for U.S. allies to make, which would put all the participants' security at risk.

HUB, MEET SPOKE

The United States has one advantage in the unfolding geopolitical contest with China that Beijing cannot replicate: a network of security alliances with democracies spanning the Pacific Ocean. Although China can claim growing influence in parts of the global South, Beijing's closest security partnerships are limited to a flailing Russia, an isolated Iran, and a provocative North Korea. The United States, in contrast, has well-established treaties with the region's most advanced economies and militaries.

In 1991, James Baker, then the U.S. secretary of state, wrote in these pages that Asian security was underpinned by the "hub and spokes" of America's bilateral alliances in the region. Today, that structure is shifting more and more toward the hubs. Australia and Japan are establishing deeper security cooperation with each other and building partnerships and capacity in other countries in the region, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Greater U.S. investment in its closest alliances will pay dividends not only in the integration and readiness of those bilateral relationships but also in the ability of U.S. allies to bolster cooperation and resilience across the region.

The strengthening of these broader alliance networks will also help reset China's expectations about American staying power and the durability of regional security networks. The economic interdependence of all U.S. allies with China makes a NATO-style collective security arrangement a nonstarter in the absence of major military moves by Beijing. But the Quad, AUKUS, and the burgeoning security ties among Asian democracies serve as useful reminders to Beijing that its coercion has consequences and that collective security arrangements that constrain China's choices are indeed possible.

At the same time, some in Beijing may also find that the U.S. emphasis on allies helps stabilize U.S.-Chinese relations. Abe's strategy for competition with China helped define U.S. strategy under both Trump and Biden. Abe's search for a sustainable equilibrium with China should also shape thinking in Washington. After all, from Canberra to Tokyo, there is a deep consensus: that beyond the immediate task of defending against China's coercion, the long game is achieving a productive relationship with Beijing. 🌐

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Apart from being known for its economic and technological leadership, Japan is also known as the home of one of the world's so-called Blue Zones, where life expectancy is higher than the global average.

In Japan, the islands of Okinawa purportedly have one of the highest concentration of centenarians in the world. Researchers believe that, aside from the close sense of community and active lifestyle, their proximity to the sea and its bounty account for the longevity of the local population.

Tapping on the abundance of the seas that surround Okinawa, **Kanehide Bio Co. Ltd.** has succeeded in extracting fucoidan from the edible *mozuku* seaweed (*Cladophora okamuranus Tokida*) using its original technology.

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Aside from fucoidan, Kanehide Bio also processes local bitter melon, turmeric, and herbs into tablets, powders, and liquids through integrated production to meet consumer needs.

"We would like to continue to provide you with safe and reliable health foods made from natural ingredients from Okinawa," said **Kanehide Bio President & COO Mikio Miyagi**.



**Elionix Inc. President
Minoru Shichino**

Meanwhile, as the base of many of the largest global brands, like Toyota, Sony, Honda, to name only a few, Japan built its economic muscle on the back of thousands of small- and medium-sized firms, some of them still family-owned, that maintain a strong ethos of workmanship, or *monozukiri*, while adapting an innovative spirit to keep them competitive.

From the country that pioneered the miniaturization of technology, Tokyo-based **Elionix Inc.** has applied the same commitment to high quality manufacturing in its design and development of devices and appliances that use electron beam and ion beam technology for high resolution lithography and nanofabrication.

"We are always looking out for global partnerships, whether for research or business partnerships, especially within North America, because they invest a lot of effort into science and technology. Our ultimate goal is to expand our business all over the world and really solidify our foothold in

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nanotechnology," said **Elionix Inc. President Minoru Shichino**.

In North America, Elionix Inc. operates in the state of Massachusetts through SEMTech Solutions (STS-Elionix), which focuses on microfabrication technology at the nanoscale. Its electron beam lithography systems can write more than 1 million lines within one cubic centimeter.

Sanwa Kasei Kogyo Co. Ltd. has produced lubricant oil for 75 years from its base in Kanagawa and Shizuoka prefectures.

Its technology was applied to automotive, industrial processing and rust preventive oils, etc. which significantly extends the life of machinery and improves energy conservation.

Its unique hydrocarbon gel is also playing an important role in the pharmaceutical field.

Sanwa Kasei Kogyo President Eisuke Muto has increased the imports and sales of base oil materials in preparation for a carbon neutral world.

Muto also oversaw the construction and launching of an automated mega-warehouse in July 2022 amid a serious shortage of storage space for dangerous goods. He also wants the company to

become a one-stop service that makes, blends, stores and sells lubricant oils, as well as paraffinic, naphthenic, aromatic, synthetic base oils.

Another champion of *monozukiri*, **Sankin Corp.** in Osaka makes steel pipes and tubes, mainly for automobile and motorcycle manufacturers and, until a several years ago, for parking lift systems and storage solution providers.

Founded in 1946, the company is very proud of its ISO 9002 certification, a clear testament to its commitment to quality manufacturing. However, because of a persistent slowdown in car sales in Japan, Sankin Corp. remains focused on the United States, both as a material source and a product market.

A large consumer of cold-drawn steel produced in the United States, the company provides its pipes and tubes for around 80% of vehicles made and assembled in the country, as well as supplies many factories in Mexico.

"In Japan, our competitors purchase steel from trading companies. However, we purchase our steel directly from the source," said **Sankin Corp. President Takaharu Den**. ■



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The Rewards of Rivalry

U.S.-Chinese Competition Can Spur Climate Progress

JEFF D. COLGAN AND NICHOLAS L. MILLER

In many ways, competition between the United States and China is just that—a rivalry between two powerful countries. But it is also much more than that. This is a contest not only between two rival states but also between two rival hierarchies. As the United States and China square off against each other, they are also vying for the allegiance of countries across the globe.

The broad arena of competition does increase the number of potential points of friction and raise the odds that countries wishing to remain outside the contest will be dragged into it. But the main effect is to force the United States and China to outdo each other, to the benefit of the states they are trying to woo. Just as competition between the United States and the Soviet Union contributed to remarkable accomplishments—such as sending humans to the

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moon, developing civilian nuclear power, and lifting millions out of poverty—so, too, could a new era of international rivalry. Already, U.S. and Chinese efforts to win over other countries mimics the patterns of Cold War competition between Washington and Moscow. The two superpowers are engaging in competitive shaming, attempting to attract or retain partners by drawing attention to the abuses of their rival. And they are trying to outbid each other, bestowing economic benefits on countries to win them over to their side. They also, however, sometimes pursue institutionalized cooperation when facing common threats. To combat the influence of authoritarianism and illiberal economics—and to intelligently compete against a rising China—U.S. policymakers must understand how these three styles of engagement work.

At stake is leadership of the global order and its rules for the world economy. To prevail, Washington will need to understand how far to press its competition with Beijing. As the war in Vietnam and other Cold War proxy conflicts demonstrated, it is possible for U.S. leaders to become so obsessed with the potential influence of a rival superpower that they walk into a quagmire of their own making. Washington will also need to manage the domestic responses to such competition, so that electoral politics does not sabotage national strategy.

The twenty-first century version of superpower competition is important for a variety of issues but perhaps none more consequential than climate change. New environmental conditions create new threats and opportunities for many countries, altering the geopolitical landscape. The United States can use its recent domestic accomplishments on climate change, most notably the adoption of the Inflation Reduction Act, to pressure China to do more to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to climate solutions. Working with European partners, the United States can force China to either clean up its act or become a climate villain in the court of world opinion.

THE BARGAINING STAGE

An international hierarchy is, in effect, a network of semi-explicit bargains between a dominant state, such as the United States or China, and one or more smaller states. A dominant state offers its smaller partners benefits, such as military protection and favorable economic ties. In return, the smaller state gives up some of its sovereignty. In the extreme, it becomes a colony in the dominant state's formal empire,

but modern hierarchies are generally less formal. Dominant states typically want to enlarge their hierarchies; doing so involves competing for the allegiance of smaller states.

That type of competition characterizes the world today, as the United States and China each try to attract smaller states to their respective spheres of influence. For instance, in the South Pacific, the Chinese recently signed a security pact with the Solomon Islands. Beyond giving China access to a key maritime outpost between Australia and Guam, the agreement contained alarming language that could allow Beijing to deploy Chinese police and military forces at the Solomon Islands' request to "maintain social order" in the country. Recently, the Solomon Islands turned down a request from a U.S. Coast Guard vessel to refuel there. In the economic realm, Pacific nations such as Papua New Guinea have accepted large loans from China that could be unaffordable. Indeed, in November 2018, the prime minister of Tonga called on other Pacific Island leaders to urge China to write off their debts, saying his small nation was suffering "serious" debt distress.

In June 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi took a ten-day regional diplomatic tour to float a proposed cooperation agreement on security, policy, cybersecurity, and economic development with other countries in the region, including Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and Samoa. In response, Micronesian President David Panuelo warned in a letter to 22 other Pacific leaders that the Chinese proposal was intended to pull Pacific Island nations with diplomatic ties to China "very close into Beijing's orbit."

To counter China's moves, the United States and its allies are seeking to shore up their support in the South Pacific. The Biden administration convened the first-ever U.S.-Pacific Island Country Summit on September 28 and 29 in Washington. It followed up on the June 24 announcement that Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States were launching a scheme called the Partners in the Blue Pacific, which aims to help small island countries in the region tackle issues from climate change to illegal fishing. The United States also offered sweeteners such as an increased U.S. diplomatic presence in the region, more COVID-19 vaccines, and an initiative to send young leaders from the region to executive education courses in the United States. U.S. officials acknowledged that all these moves were intended to reverse a long-declining U.S. presence in the region.

Meanwhile, Washington has repeatedly sought to cast Beijing's actions in the region in a negative light. In 2021, the United States successfully dissuaded Kiribati, Micronesia, and Nauru from pursuing a Chinese company's low bid to build an undersea Internet cable that would improve communications capabilities but potentially open them up to Chinese spying. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also warned leaders of Pacific countries about "threats to the rules-based international order" and "economic coercion" in a thinly veiled swipe at China's growing influence in the region. He argued that "every country, no matter its size, should always be able to make choices without fear of retribution." In July of 2022, speaking in Fiji, U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris criticized Chinese policies in the region, referring to "bad actors seeking to undermine the rules-based order."

China has launched its own attacks, of course. Cui Tiankai, China's former ambassador to the United States, told CNN in June that Western countries treat the South Pacific like their "backyard" in a throwback to the colonial era, whereas Beijing sees the small island nations as "equals." China has often turned to "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy—that is, assertive language and actions to safeguard China's interests—to damage the United States' image. In a March 2021 meeting with Blinken, for instance, Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi unleashed a 16-minute tirade, denouncing U.S. actions and attitudes. The effectiveness of this style of diplomacy is open to question, but clearly China is trying to assert its own power and legitimacy and erode those of the United States.

The South Pacific is not the only region where this rivalry is playing out. Consider the Arctic, where geopolitical competition has been no less intense. Greenland, a semiautonomous part of Denmark, has for decades been chafing against its relationship with Copenhagen. And although the U.S. controlled Thule Air Base in Greenland offers local authorities benefits, such as jobs and profitable contracts, it also disrupts the lives of local residents—a continual source of friction between Greenland and Washington. Here, China saw not only economic potential but also a geopolitical opportunity to drive a wedge between Greenland and the West. In 2015, a Chinese company with the improbable name General Nice Group invested in an iron mining project in

Rival hierarchies
rely on two tools
of persuasion:
competitive
shaming and
outbidding.



Unmuted: watching a virtual meeting between Biden and Xi, Hong Kong, July 2022

Greenland and then followed up with an offer to buy an abandoned Danish naval base at Kangilinnguit. These moves appeared to follow a playbook that scholars say describes China's actions in Africa and elsewhere: use engineering projects as a way to gradually bind local political interests to China's. But in 2016, Denmark turned down the Chinese offer and withdrew the base from the market. Although Denmark did not officially comment, anonymous sources told Reuters that the Danish government backed away from the deal out of fear that the sale might antagonize Washington.

A similarly competitive dynamic has played out elsewhere. In a number of places, China gained partners with its Belt and Road Initiative, a multitrillion-dollar infrastructure and investment effort to encourage global trade and economic integration, centered on the needs of the Chinese economy. The BRI has led to Chinese control of ports in Greece and Pakistan, transportation hubs in Kenya and Sri Lanka, and industrial activities in Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. Increasingly alarmed by Chinese efforts, the G-7 countries responded in 2022 with the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment. According to a White House announcement in June, the United States plans to offer \$200 billion over five years to finance global infrastructure projects, principally in developing countries.

China was never explicitly mentioned in the announcement, but there was no doubt about why the new partnership was formed and whose influence it was intended to contain.

ECHOES OF THE PAST

This form of competition, in which rival hierarchies vie for dominance across the globe, has a long and rich history. European empires competed for centuries, as did the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Just as China and the United States do today, previous hierarchies often relied on two tools of persuasion: competitive shaming and outbidding.

To understand the dynamic of shaming in foreign policy, it is helpful to consider the geopolitics of nuclear technology in the early 1950s. The United States had demonstrated its terrible weapon in 1945, but afterward kept nuclear technology a closely guarded secret. That secrecy extended to civilian nuclear applications, which scientists were then developing for electrical generation and medical purposes. In the early days of the Cold War, the Soviet Union seized on this secrecy and reliance on nuclear weapons to shame and delegitimize the United States on the world stage, especially at the newly formed United Nations. Then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles argued that “propaganda picturing us as warmongers on account of our atomic capabilities has done incalculable harm.”

Largely to combat this shaming and draw attention to U.S. beneficence and the peaceful application of nuclear energy, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace program dramatically reversed the U.S. policy of nuclear secrecy. He proposed that the United States and other atomic powers transfer nuclear material to an international body—what would become the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA—that would use it for peaceful purposes worldwide, under safeguards. When he unveiled the program in a speech at the United Nations in 1953, Eisenhower declared his desire for “all peoples of all nations to see that . . . [the United States is] interested in human aspirations first, rather than in building up the armaments of war.” The U.S. government quickly circulated the speech internationally. In truth, however, the government was making the most of a situation it had not wanted: Soviet shaming had worked, forcing the United States to change policy to repair its reputation.

Moscow responded to this new American effort by seeking to outbid the United States with a nuclear cooperation program of its own.

Until then, the Soviet Union had given no serious attention to the export of nuclear technology or expertise. After Eisenhower's address, however, Moscow began offering nuclear assistance to communist allies such as China and Czechoslovakia, as well as unaligned countries such as Egypt and Yugoslavia. Crucially, the Soviets offered nuclear technology with fewer restrictions on its use, shaming the United States as imperialist for requiring safeguards on the material it transferred.

The Soviet entry into the nuclear assistance game only accelerated the outbidding. Worried that Moscow would successfully use nuclear assistance to win over key unaligned countries, the United States ramped up its own program. Within four years of the Atoms for Peace speech, the United States sealed agreements to provide nuclear assistance to more than 40 countries. The State Department proudly reported that these efforts "put atomic energy at the service of major political objectives—in Asia, that of [tying] the uncommitted countries to those Asian countries more closely associated with the United States, in Europe, that of utilizing atomic energy to further European integration."

One of the key lessons from this Cold War experience is that when competition between rival hierarchies is fierce, the smaller states often receive more benefits. Indeed, many states in what was then considered the Third World became remarkably adept at playing off the two superpowers and eliciting increasingly generous foreign aid packages or other concessions from one or even both sides. India, for instance, used the prospect of Soviet assistance to prod the United States to provide substantial nuclear aid, which ultimately helped India develop nuclear weapons the following decade.

Today's politics mirrors this behavior, especially in Asia, as countries try to maximize the benefits they gain from their relationships with China, the United States, or both. Many of the members of U.S.-led initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework—including Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam—also participate in China's Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan and Turkey seem especially well positioned to squeeze benefits from both sides. And just as during the Cold War, shaming seems to have sparked outbidding, as China has responded to U.S. criticism of its statecraft by stepping up its role as a mediator in Africa and providing more generous debt relief.

Rival hierarchies don't simply compete, however—they can also cooperate when they face shared risks. Their cooperation can cut

against the interests and desires of their smaller partners. Here again, the nuclear politics of the early Cold War are instructive. After launching nuclear assistance programs, both the United States and the Soviet Union worried about inadvertently accelerating the spread of nuclear weapons. By the early 1960s, the superpowers were cooperating to create stronger safeguards, especially through the IAEA, which seeks to block states from using civilian nuclear technology to help produce weapons. As unaligned states such as India and Indonesia foresaw at the time, the creation of the IAEA eventually led to intense restrictions and regulations on civilian nuclear power. Despite the objections of smaller partners and unaligned states, the superpowers not only created the IAEA but went on to negotiate the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty of 1968 and more nuclear control measures in subsequent years. In today's context, smaller states should be mindful of how the politics of rival hierarchies can turn against them, if and when the great powers decide they have a mutual interest in cooperation.

BRAGGING RIGHTS

One crucial area where competition and cooperation between China and the United States could benefit rather than harm the interests of smaller states is climate change, which has altered the strategic landscape and therefore the context of today's rival hierarchies. Climate change in the Arctic, for instance, is shaping Chinese strategy. Warming temperatures have made mining opportunities in Greenland increasingly attractive and could open up shipping lanes north of Russia, theoretically cutting travel times from Asia to Europe by weeks. Like their counterparts in the West, many Chinese analysts saw Greenland as potentially the first place to win independence on account of climate change; according to this thinking, climate change would unlock economic opportunities that could free Greenland from its current dependence on Danish subsidies. Some analysts in China advocated investing in Greenland to make that economic independence from Denmark possible while positioning China as an economic and political partner.

In the South Pacific, however, climate change is seen as an existential threat rather than an economic liberator. Rising sea levels and increased storm activity could destroy many Pacific Island nations. Those countries tend to see Washington as failing to take seriously the risks they face. In the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security, Pacific Island lead-

ers embraced an “expanded concept of security” to deal with regional challenges, including climate change. Washington should realize that leaders in the Pacific and elsewhere are looking for more robust U.S. commitments to offsetting climate change and helping threatened countries adapt. Accepting that role offers the United States a chance to cast China as a climate laggard. Failure to do so invites the reverse.

Fortunately, competition and cooperation between the United States and China on climate change could also generate benefits for

Rival hierarchies
can cooperate, not
just compete.

everyone. One example of beneficial cooperation is the diplomacy the Obama administration conducted with China to pave the way for the 2015 Paris accord on climate change, the first time developing countries agreed to a set of emissions cuts. In the long run, however, competition over green tech-

nologies might prove as beneficial as cooperative diplomacy, perhaps even more so. For instance, European countries, the United States, and others have become alarmed at Chinese dominance of the supply chain for minerals such as copper and lithium and other commodities that are essential for producing clean energy. As those governments belatedly act to shore up their supply chains, they are facilitating mining investments worldwide that could lower the costs of decarbonization for everyone.

The more the United States accomplishes its own climate goals, the more pressure it can apply on China. Already, diplomats are trumpeting U.S. accomplishments such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) as a way of spotlighting China’s economic reliance on activities that harm the climate. After the legislation passed in August 2022, for example, U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns boasted on Twitter, “You can bet America will meet our commitments,” and he pointed to the disparity between the emissions of the United States and those of China. This type of competitive shaming in front of international audiences might be at least as productive as nominal cooperation. As Todd Stern, who led U.S. climate negotiations under U.S. President Barack Obama, put it: “If someone said to me, ‘You can have lots of interaction between the United States and China but no IRA, or you can have the IRA but less dialogue and collaboration,’ I would absolutely pick No. 2. The more China sees the U.S. charging in the direction of the clean energy transformation, the better.”

HOW THE COLD WAR CAN STAY COOL

The long view of how great powers build and maintain rival hierarchies provides three key lessons. First, competitive behavior is normal and should not be an occasion for panic. Indeed, in some instances it can provide benefits for smaller states—so long as a cold war doesn't turn hot at their expense. During the U.S.-Soviet competition, it became common for politicians and analysts to worry about smaller countries being "lost" to the other side. Such concerns can be warranted but sometimes go too far. An example of this pitfall is the desperate fear in the 1960s of "losing" Vietnam, which led the United States into a quagmire, as well as other proxy wars in the developing world that killed millions of people. Competing for the support of states through incentives should take precedence; direct military intervention should be employed only when vital U.S. interests are at stake, for example, to defend a treaty ally or a small set of other crucial partners.

In a competition between rival hierarchies, one cannot expect either side to win all the time, and one should not assume that "losing" one ally in a peripheral region will create a domino effect globally. Indeed, because dominant powers routinely engage in competitive outbidding when offering benefits to smaller states, one might argue that if a dominant state never loses such a competition, it might be "overpaying" for the loyalty of its subordinate states. A corollary to this lesson is that the need for outbidding is in part a function of how effectively a great power can shame its rival on the international scene. In other words, if dominant powers are perceived as more benign, they do not need to provide as many material benefits to attract smaller states. This offers another reason to avoid overreacting to prevent a "loss" of a country, either through military force or support for regime change or coups: these efforts often provide effective propaganda that can be used against the intervening state.

The second lesson is that a network of international partners is a costly but powerful source of national strength. One main reason Soviet leaders embraced reform and retrenchment in the 1980s is the terrible strategic situation they found themselves in, overextended by the task of competing with the United States around the globe. In the shorter run, the strength of a hierarchy influences its ability to shape the rules for the global economy and the international order more broadly. For example, if most countries accept Western ideas about sovereignty and market capitalism, it is much easier to call out Chinese abuses of those

norms than if China has a large sphere of influence. More selfishly, American and Western businesses will find it far easier to prosper if the U.S. government shapes the rules of international business than if its influence is weak. Thus, a foreign policy designed around “America first” is folly. The American network of allies is one of its strongest geopolitical advantages, and keeping that network requires treating allies with respect and offering them benefits for cooperation.

Third, U.S. politicians must effectively manage domestic politics if they are to succeed in this competition. Democracies have considerable advantages in the international competition for legitimacy, status, and loyalty. For instance, recent research on the effects of foreign aid in Africa identifies a remarkable asymmetry between Chinese assistance and U.S. aid. Chinese loans and investment appear to have done little to improve public opinion about China, and might harm it, whereas foreign aid from the United States has had a strong positive impact. Despite many mistakes in its past, the United States has also learned what works in foreign aid and economic development. That experience, along with an ideological commitment to individual freedom and democracy, could serve as a significant strength in the global competition for influence.

Of course, democracy has downsides, as well. In the nuclear realm, for instance, research shows how the Soviet Union and, later, Russia supplanted the United States as the dominant supplier of civilian technology, in large part because of domestic opposition to the nuclear industry in the United States. Public pressure led the U.S. nuclear industry to wither, and legislators intervened to make it more difficult to export nuclear reactors, gradually ceding the overseas market to more autocratic countries.

More broadly, democracies seeking to build their network of allies and partners face domestic accusations of hypocrisy and illegitimacy when they cooperate with foreign autocrats, putting them at a potential disadvantage. When Chinese leaders travel to Saudi Arabia to woo its leaders, for instance, they feel no need to criticize their hosts, but U.S. leaders are expected to talk about human rights records when they make similar visits.

Another important disadvantage is the growing domestic polarization that has made U.S. foreign policy more erratic over time, as shown by U.S. withdrawals from the Paris agreement and the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. American politicians must guard against being seen as “weak on

China”—that is, not doing enough to entice allies and losing some countries to China’s influence—and being too aggressive or “spending too much overseas” by being too generous to allies and getting involved in conflicts peripheral to U.S. security interests. Politicians who want to avoid those twin pitfalls must craft a coherent foreign policy vision and forge a quasi-bipartisan elite consensus. Doing so would keep complex diplomatic issues off the radar for most voters.

Ultimately, as U.S. policymakers compete with China for global influence, they should heed past lessons about the usefulness of competitive shaming and outbidding to rally allies and partners. If they conduct this diplomacy with finesse, officials in Washington could make a crucial difference on climate change while preserving the core components of the American-led international order. 🌐

The Age of Inflation

Easy Money, Hard Choices

KENNETH S. ROGOFF

Coming on the heels of the pandemic-induced economic slowdown, the inflation crisis of the past two years seemed to catch much of the world by surprise. After three decades in which prices grew slowly across the world's advanced economies, suddenly the United Kingdom, the United States, and the eurozone were contending with near or above double-digit inflation. Prices across many emerging markets and developing economies have risen even faster, for example, with inflation exceeding 80 percent in Turkey and nearing 100 percent in Argentina.

True, the worldwide inflation of the 2020s does not yet rival the worst inflation crises of past decades. In the 1970s, annual price increases in the United States stayed above six percent for ten years, reaching 14 percent in 1980; inflation in Japan and the United Kingdom peaked at over 20 percent.

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For low- and middle-income countries, the early 1990s were even worse: more than 40 such countries had inflation rates above 40 percent, with some reaching 1,000 percent or more. Still, in 2021 and 2022, the global economy moved in a deeply worrisome direction as governments and policymakers belatedly discovered they were facing runaway price increases amid a war in Ukraine and other large-scale shocks.

Voters do not like inflation or recessions. In an August 2022 Pew Research Center poll, more than three out of four Americans surveyed—77 percent—said that the economy was their number one election issue. Even in September, when prices in the United States had stabilized somewhat, a poll led by Marist College found that inflation continued to be voters' top issue, ahead of both abortion and health care. As with many elections, the 2022 midterms may ultimately hinge on noneconomic issues; nevertheless, the state of the economy has significant predictive power over voter preferences, and politicians know it.

Although much of the debate about the new inflation has focused on politics and world events, just as crucial is the question of central banks' policies and the forces that shape them. For years, many economists have assumed that inflation had been permanently tamed, thanks to the advent of independent central banks. Beginning in the 1990s, central bankers in many countries began setting targets for the level of inflation; a two percent goal became an explicit part of U.S. Federal Reserve Bank policy in 2012. Indeed, well into the COVID-19 pandemic, most regarded a return to the high inflation of the 1970s as implausible. Fearing a pandemic-driven recession, governments and central banks were instead preoccupied with jump-starting their economies; they discounted the inflationary risks posed by combining large-scale spending programs with sustained ultralow interest rates. Few economists saw the dangers of the enormous stimulus packages signed by U.S. Presidents Donald Trump, in December 2020, and Joe Biden, in March 2021, which pumped trillions of dollars into the economy. Nor did they anticipate how long it would take for supply chain problems to sort themselves out after the pandemic or how vulnerable the global economy would be to sustained high inflation in the event of a major geopolitical shock, as happened when Russia invaded Ukraine. Having waited too long to raise interest rates as inflation built up, central banks are scrambling to control it without tipping their economies, and indeed the world, into deep recession.

In addition to suffering the consequences of myopic economic thinking, central banks have also been buffeted by dramatic political and economic changes. The 2020s are shaping up to be the most difficult era in central banking since the 1970s, when the global economy was contending with both the Arab oil embargo and the collapse of the postwar Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. Today, large-scale global shocks such as war, pandemic, and drought seem to be coming one after another or even at the same time. Meanwhile,

Few economists
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into the economy.

the forces of globalization that for much of the past 20 years have helped sustain long-term growth have instead turned into headwinds, both because China is rapidly aging and because of growing geopolitical frictions between China and the United States. None of these changes is good for productivity and growth, but they are all contributing to higher inflation now and will into the future.

By their nature, supply shocks are difficult for central banks to address. In the case of a simple demand shock—too much stimulus, for example—central banks can use interest rates to stabilize both growth and inflation. With supply shocks, however, central banks must weigh difficult tradeoffs between bringing down inflation and the costs to businesses and workers of lower growth and higher unemployment. Even if central banks are prepared to raise interest rates as needed to tackle inflation, they have far less independence than they did two decades ago. The 2008 financial crisis weakened central banks' political legitimacy by undermining the idea that their policies ultimately work to the benefit of all; many people lost their homes and their jobs in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. As central banks today deliberate how far to tamp down on demand, they have to consider whether they are willing to risk causing yet another deep recession. If during a recession the government's social safety net is inadequate, doesn't the central bank need to take that into account? Those who dismiss such concerns as external to monetary policy have not been reading central bankers' speeches over the past decade.

Amid an unending series of supply shocks, central banks may also be confronting a long-term shift that neither policymakers nor financial markets have yet taken into account. Although many of the immediate drivers of the extraordinary rise in prices in 2021 and 2022

will eventually dissipate, the era of perpetual ultralow inflation will not come back anytime soon. Instead, thanks to a host of factors including deglobalization, rising political pressures, and ongoing supply shocks such as the green energy transition, the world may very well be entering an extended period in which elevated and volatile inflation is likely to be persistent, not in the double digits but significantly above two percent. Most central bankers insist that they can make no bigger mistake than allowing high inflation to linger so long that it starts pushing expectations of long-term inflation by any noticeable amount, and it is probably fair to say that the majority of Wall Street economists buy that argument. But they may be facing more painful choices over the next decade, and certainly in the immediate future. The social and political implications of a central-bank-induced deep downturn—coming after the two worst recessions since the Great Depression (2008 and 2020)—are profound.

PASSING THE BUCKS

Ever since U.S. monthly inflation began to rise sharply in the spring of 2021, Washington has been divided between those who blame it on excessive stimulus spending by the Biden administration and those who maintain that it is mostly caused by global factors beyond Washington's control. Neither argument is terribly convincing. The stimulus view is clearly overblown: countries across the world today have been experiencing high inflation, despite vast differences in the extent to which they stimulated their economies. Although their stimulus packages were considerably smaller, the United Kingdom and the eurozone have had even higher inflation than the United States, with Australia, Canada, and New Zealand only slightly lower. Some have also pointed to the Biden administration's clampdown on fossil fuel pipelines and exploration as a contributor to inflation, though the main effects on production and output probably lie in the future.

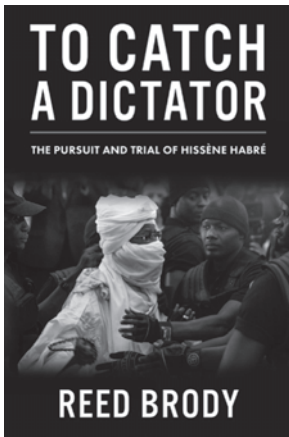
Yet blaming inflation mostly on Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine, Chinese President Xi Jinping's war on COVID-19, or post-pandemic supply chain breakdowns is also wrong. For one thing, prices were already ramping up in the United States in 2021, long before Putin invaded Ukraine. And inflation initially manifested itself in different countries in very different ways. In much of the world, higher food and energy costs were the main driving factors, but in the United States, the most pronounced price increases came

in rents, vehicles, clothing, and recreation. At this point, second- and third-round effects are working their way through the economy, and price increases are radiating even more broadly across many sectors.

Many economists think the real culprit was the Federal Reserve, which did not begin hiking interest rates until March 2022, at which point inflation had been rising sharply for a year. That delay was a huge mistake, although more easily seen as such in hindsight, knowing that the worst effects of the pandemic could have quickly been brought under control. And the root of the mistake lies not just with the Fed and its staff but also with a broad consensus within the economics profession, which had become heavily wedded to the view that, most of the time, it is far better to have too much macroeconomic stimulus—high deficits, very low interest rates—than too little.

Almost no one has questioned the massive spending programs implemented around the world in the early stages of the pandemic. The point of having governments preserve fiscal capacity is precisely so they have the resources to take large-scale actions to protect the vulnerable in the event of a deep recession or catastrophe. The issue is when to stop. Inevitably, stimulus spending is political, and those who promote large rescue packages are often also motivated by the opportunity to expand social programs whose approval in Congress might in ordinary times be impossible. This is one reason why there tends to be far less talk about reducing stimulus once a crisis is over.

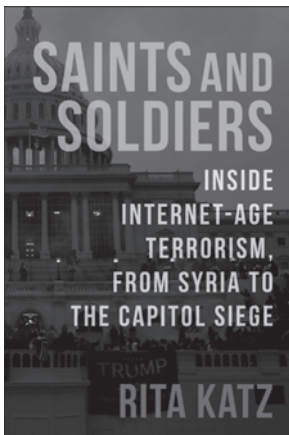
As a candidate, Biden pledged that he would expand government spending if elected, partly with the aim of facilitating the post-COVID economic recovery but mainly to share the benefits of growth more equally and to put significant resources into the national response to climate change. As a lame-duck president, Trump attempted to frustrate his winning opponent's ambitions by passing his own \$900 billion COVID-19 relief package in December 2020, even though the economy was already rebounding strongly. Just three months later, although the economy was continuing to recover, Democrats under Biden passed a new \$1.9 trillion stimulus package, with a number of prominent economists, including *New York Times* columnist and Nobel laureate Paul Krugman, cheering them on. Krugman and others argued that the package would enhance the recovery and provide insurance against another wave of the pandemic and that it carried minimal risks of igniting inflation.



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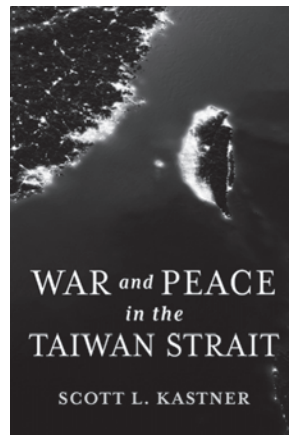
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—Thomas J. Christensen, former deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs

LET THEM SPEND

Already in early 2021, there were reasons to question the prevailing wisdom about the Biden stimulus. Most notably, Harvard economist and former U.S. Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers began warning that the bill being contemplated could lead to inflation. Although serious inflation had not occurred in decades, Summers had a simple and compelling insight. Throwing trillions of dollars into an economy with severe supply constraints and only a modest demand shortage had to be inflationary. If too many people are trying to buy cars at the same time and have the cash to do so, car prices will rise.

A key element of Summers's logic was that the stimulus-fueled consumption binge would not be satisfied by foreign suppliers, including China. Normally, when U.S. consumers go on a spending spree, the U.S. trade deficit supplies at least a partial outlet from internal price pressures: if U.S. demand exceeds U.S. production, Americans can still buy from abroad. But in the spring of 2021, with the U.S. economy emerging from the pandemic faster than most and with global supply lines in even greater disarray than domestic U.S. supply lines, the availability of foreign goods was limited. Although economists have differed over the precise figure, a reasonable guess is that excess demand accounted for as much as half the cumulative rise in prices in the United States immediately after the pandemic.

Faced with this vast gap between demand and available supply, the Fed could have stepped in and taken action. The Fed cannot change how the government chooses to allocate stimulus funds or negate any inefficiencies it might entail. But it does have a powerful instrument to prevent excess demand from creating high inflation, namely the short-term interest rate, which it effectively controls. By raising interest rates, the Fed makes it more expensive to borrow money, which in turn lowers the price of all long-term assets, from equities to art. The most important example of this phenomenon is the housing market, which is by far the largest component of most Americans' personal wealth. Higher mortgage rates make it more expensive to buy houses, which ultimately pushes down home values. The resulting fall in wealth reduces consumption. More generally, higher interest rates discourage borrowing and encourage savings, damping consumer demand. Higher interest rates also cause firms to reevaluate long-term investment projects, directly and indirectly lowering their demand for workers.

But before it decided on a series of rate hikes, the Fed had to be confident that high inflation was a serious risk. Despite Summers's



Backup failure: container ships waiting off the coast of Los Angeles, September 2021

towering stature, his views made him an outlier. Although a few respected economists, including former IMF Chief Economist Olivier Blanchard, agreed with his warnings, Wall Street and most academics discounted them. After all, inflation had not risen above four percent for several decades, and many of the progressives that dominated Biden's economic team believed that the inflation effects of their stimulus would be minor. What right did the Fed have to push back on a signature policy of an administration that had come to office promising to help ordinary Americans and that had the support of many progressive economists? Had the Fed started hiking interest rates in spring 2021 and had a recession then occurred for any reason—such as a bad turn in the COVID-19 pandemic—the Fed would have been subject to withering criticism and could potentially have compromised its future independence. Given these considerations, it was hardly surprising that the Fed was hesitant to act.

Yet the Fed delayed taking action even after it became clear that inflation was rising. By the fall of 2021—six months after the Biden stimulus—the economy was rapidly heating up, yet the Fed left interest rates untouched. It is hard to escape the fact that Jerome Powell's term as Fed chair was set to expire at the end of the year and Biden had not yet announced his reappointment. If Powell had chosen to

initiate a cycle of interest-rate hikes, it is entirely possible, indeed likely, that Biden would have replaced him with a different chair, perhaps Lael Brainard. A well-respected economist and prominent former treasury official in the Obama administration, Brainard was viewed by financial markets as more dovish on interest rates, more willing to risk inflation to sustain growth. In the event, the Fed held back on raising rates, and Biden eventually reappointed Powell. Only then, with Powell comfortably in his new term, did the Fed finally raise interest rates in the spring of 2022. If the administration had wanted the Fed to raise interest rates sooner, as some later argued it did, the right move would have been to reappoint Powell in the summer of 2021, giving him a clear mandate to act as the Fed saw fit.

MAGICAL MONETARY THINKING

Amid these pressures from Washington, the Fed was also influenced by an increasingly dominant strand of Keynesian economic theory that argued that there was considerable scope for using macroeconomic stimulus more aggressively. Long before the start of the pandemic, many economists had concluded that it was possible to significantly increase government spending (and/or lower taxes) without having to raise interest rates and without causing inflation. After nearly a decade of ultralow interest rates and low inflation, some thought that upward price pressures could be avoided even if the entire spending increase was financed by “printing money”—having the central bank pump money into the economy by buying up government debt. “Modern monetary theory” is perhaps the best known version of this approach, although more moderate versions had already become mainstream.

One prominent idea was that running the economy “hot,” through high government spending and ultralow interest rates, could be an effective tool for reducing inequality. As low-wage workers were brought into the labor force, they would gain skills that would translate into higher lifetime earnings. Strong temporary stimulus could thus result in permanent gains, or so many assumed. Support for this approach was not limited to left-leaning policymakers. Trump’s economic team often touted the effect of the strong, tax-cut-driven economy on incomes for low-wage workers and minorities.

By 2019, when the Fed gathered policy perspectives from leading academics as part of a review of its fundamental monetary framework, many economists were studying how to stimulate an economy

stubbornly resistant to inflation and monetary stimulus, even after interest rates had been taken to zero. Within the profession, there were growing concerns about “lowflation”—inflation well below two percent—a fear that became a major reason for the Fed’s inaction two years later. Along with many academic economists, the Fed concluded that rapid price increases were no longer a serious concern, since it could always raise interest rates to quell them, forgetting the difficulty of getting the timing right and the political challenges that might ensue. In August 2020, the Fed announced the results of its policy review, making clear that it would no longer act preemptively to fight inflation just because labor markets were getting tight but would wait until the economy showed clear signs that inflation was actually taking root.

Despite its concerns about lowflation, however, the Fed failed to embrace one innovation that might have helped in the subsequent crisis: negative-interest-rate policy. That is, it could have allowed very-short-term interest rates to go below zero in order to push up inflation expectations and longer-term interest rates in a deflationary economy. It may seem counterintuitive that such a tool could help deal with inflation as well. But if the Fed in 2021 had had such a “bazooka” in its arsenal, to paraphrase former Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, it could have been more proactive in raising interest rates, knowing that if it overshot, it could cut them as much as needed without running into the dreaded “zero bound.”

Admittedly, for negative-interest-rate policy to be fully effective, a number of legal, institutional, and tax changes would have to be implemented, and the Fed would need the cooperation of the Treasury and Congress. The most important single challenge is how to prevent significantly negative rates—say minus two percent or lower—from causing investors to switch from bank accounts and Treasury bills to paper currency, which has a zero interest rate. So far, even Japan and Europe, which have tiptoed into negative rates, have avoided this issue, but there are two solutions that would prevent arbitrage into paper currency. One involves establishing an exchange rate between paper currency and central bank reserves (which are digital) that depreciates over time just enough to offset the fact that, storage and insurance costs aside, paper currency might otherwise look good in a negative-interest-rate world. The other, of course, is to eliminate paper currency entirely, while ensuring that free basic banking services were available to all, either by introducing a central bank digital currency

or by requiring banks to offer free basic accounts to unbanked individuals (as, say, Japan does). Between these two alternatives, it is likely possible to implement negative rates as low as perhaps minus three percent, simply by phasing out large denomination notes (hundreds and fifties) and taking other regulatory steps to make large-scale currency hoarding, in the billions of dollars, impractical.

In the event, the adoption of negative-interest-rate policy was deliberately taken off the table in the Fed's 2019 review out of fear of political repercussions, although if used effectively, it would help power the economy out of a deep recession. (Indeed, greater short-term stimulus would actually push up longer-term rates because of higher growth and inflation expectations.) When the Fed next reconsiders its policy framework, one hopes that it will consider what legal and institutional changes might be necessary to allow it to use such tools.

In short, the Fed's failure to respond to inflation in 2021 illustrates how much central bank independence is often affected by both political and intellectual undercurrents—particularly during elections but also when the government in power is subject to populist pressures. But it also shows that in today's environment, the Fed needs to expand its toolkit for stimulating the economy in a severe downturn if it wants to strengthen its resolve to fight inflation when the economy overheats.

UNMOVING TARGET

One of the recurring questions about the 2021–22 inflation has been whether the current trajectory resembles the Great Inflation of the 1970s. How bad can it get? Central bankers insist they will never allow the kind of complicity and complacency in economic management that characterized that era. At the start of the 1970s, the chair of the Fed at the time, Arthur Burns, recklessly expanded the money supply in what many viewed as an effort to help President Richard Nixon get reelected. Then, in 1978, Burns was succeeded by G. William Miller, who was so focused on printing money to keep short-term interest rates low that he failed to recognize that expectations of rising inflation were driving up long-term interest rates as lenders demanded higher payments to keep up with inflation. Under Miller, inflation in the United States rose to double digits.

Only with the appointment of Paul Volcker, who succeeded Miller after a year and a half, did the Fed begin to conquer the problem. Volcker is remembered for having raised the Fed's short-term policy

rate above 19 percent, eventually bringing down inflation from its peak of 14 percent in 1980. Far less noted, however, is that the Volcker Fed initially held back, worried that causing a recession would affect the 1980 presidential election; instead, it allowed inflation to rise initially, possibly causing the later recession to be even larger. By 1982, the Volcker Fed had brought annual inflation down to the three to 4.5 percent range, where it remained until Alan Greenspan took over as Fed chair in 1987. Notably, although Greenspan is famous for having masterfully steered the economy while lowering inflation even further, it took the Fed a while to get it to two percent. Measured by the Consumer Price Index, annual inflation rose during Greenspan's first few years, reaching more than five percent before falling decisively in the mid-1990s. True, it was arguably a much more difficult task back then when high inflation expectations were deeply ingrained. In the current crisis, so far, inflation expectations have risen relatively modestly, though central bankers remain concerned that they might rise much more.

At the time of the Great Inflation, central banks also faced very different challenges. The breakup of the Bretton Woods fixed exchange rate system in the early 1970s removed any remaining link between currency and gold. Yet the United States was among only a few countries that had independent central banks for which maintaining stable prices was an important part of their mandate. Over time, this mandate has proven invaluable as a counterweight to political pressures to hold down interest-rate increases, pressures that central bankers again find themselves fighting today; politicians more often push central bankers to take it easy on interest-rate hikes than beg for more, especially in the year before an election.

Still, the current inflation crisis and its predecessor have some remarkable similarities. Above all, both eras were catalyzed by new kinds of supply shocks. The OPEC oil embargo of 1973–74 was the biggest shock the global economy had seen since World War II, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has likewise shaken the foundations of the global economic system, hugely exacerbating problems in global supply chains, which were already frayed by the pandemic. And in both episodes, Keynesian-oriented stimulus policies were in high fashion among academic economists and policy commentators, with supply-side economics all but forgotten.

Central bankers must realize that pushing up interest rates risks creating a deep recession.

Central bankers today seem confident when they say they know how to bring inflation back to two percent, but they are less convincing when they insist that they will not rest until inflation returns to that target. They must realize that pushing up interest rates risks creating a deep recession. And central bankers know that a deep recession is going to fall particularly hard on low-income people, the young, and workers from historically disadvantaged groups. These are precisely the groups that the Fed, in its new policy framework, expressly aims to help. In light of recent events, the Fed will need to reconsider this shift in emphasis, but helping disadvantaged groups will certainly remain a priority.

Some economists argue that central banks should never have formed a consensus around a two percent inflation target in the first place and that a three or even four percent target would be better. According to this view, by building higher expected inflation into interest rates, central banks would have more room to cut rates in a crisis. It is a complex debate with many nuances; in essence, raising the target rate could provide an alternative to negative-interest-rate policy. For central bankers, the drawback of such a move is that having sworn up and down that they are absolutely committed to a long-run inflation target of two percent, any change—particularly from a position of weakness—might undercut their credibility, suggesting that the target could be pushed even higher in the future. For this reason, if the economy stabilizes at a higher rate of inflation for several years, central bankers are likely to say that although they are tolerating moderately higher inflation for the moment, they still intend to return to two percent in the future and will look for opportune ways to smoothly achieve it without causing a prolonged downturn. There are other drawbacks to having permanently higher inflation—wages and prices will eventually adjust more often, making monetary policy less powerful—and in a severe recession the extra room to cut rates might still not be enough.

THE PRICE OF STABILITY

For all their complaints about inflation, one wonders how prepared voters are for yet another deep recession. The Fed is surely concerned about such an outcome. Another risk is that long-term real interest rates—that is, inflation-adjusted rates, which collapsed after the 2008 financial crisis—could continue moving back up toward the very long-term trend, which tilts down at about 1.6 percent per century, but nothing like the nearly three percent drop that occurred just a few years after the financial crisis.

This would make it more expensive for governments to borrow money and put more pressure on central banks to keep interest rates low and devalue government debt through inflation. Indeed, the changes in the political and economic landscape have become so profound that it seems unlikely for the foreseeable future that the Fed will choose to bring inflation down to prepandemic levels and keep it there.

Monetary policy has a big effect on politics; the economic cycle is a strong predictor of elections almost everywhere in the world. But as the current crisis has made clear, politics also affects monetary policy. The European Central Bank was doing cartwheels to explain why it had to keep buying large quantities of debt from countries on Europe's periphery, most notably from Italy. It originally marketed this policy as necessary for fighting deflation, but it has now rebranded the program while raising interest rates to fight inflation. The real reason for the policy, of course, has always been to demonstrate the commitment of northern eurozone countries to backstopping southern eurozone government debt, a profoundly political goal. In the United Kingdom, Liz Truss, who became prime minister in September 2022, has openly advocated reining in the Bank of England, just at the moment when her fiscal policies are likely to place upward pressure on long-term inflation.

The economist Milton Friedman once opined that inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon. That is, of course, a polemic overstatement. As the world is now witnessing, many factors affect inflation, including government spending stimulus and global supply shocks. It is true that central banks can bend long-term inflation rates to their will if they are patient enough and independent enough. But it is unclear how far they can go if the global economy continues to suffer seismic shocks. One upside of this episode of high inflation is that it may increasingly force politicians to once again recognize that low and stable inflation cannot be taken for granted and that central banks must be allowed the freedom and focus necessary to achieve their core mandate. Central bankers, for their part, should be more open to using new tools such as unrestricted negative-interest-rate policy to fight severe recessions, tools that could provide crucial help in resisting political pressures to hold rates down in an overheating economy. Whether or not the Fed manages to engineer a "soft landing" in the current crisis, the challenges it will face in the coming decade are likely to be considerably more difficult than what it confronted in the pre-pandemic world. 🌐

After Neoliberalism

All Economics Is Local

RANA FOROOHAR

For most of the last 40 years, U.S. policymakers acted as if the world were flat. Steeped in the dominant strain of neoliberal economic thinking, they assumed that capital, goods, and people would go wherever they would be the most productive for everyone. If companies created jobs overseas, where it was cheapest to do so, domestic employment losses would be outweighed by consumer benefits. And if governments lowered trade barriers and deregulated capital markets, money would flow where it was needed most. Policymakers didn't have to take geography into account, since the invisible hand was at work everywhere. Place, in other words, didn't matter.

U.S. administrations from both parties have until quite recently pursued policies based on these broad assumptions—deregulating global finance, striking trade deals such as the North American Free Trade

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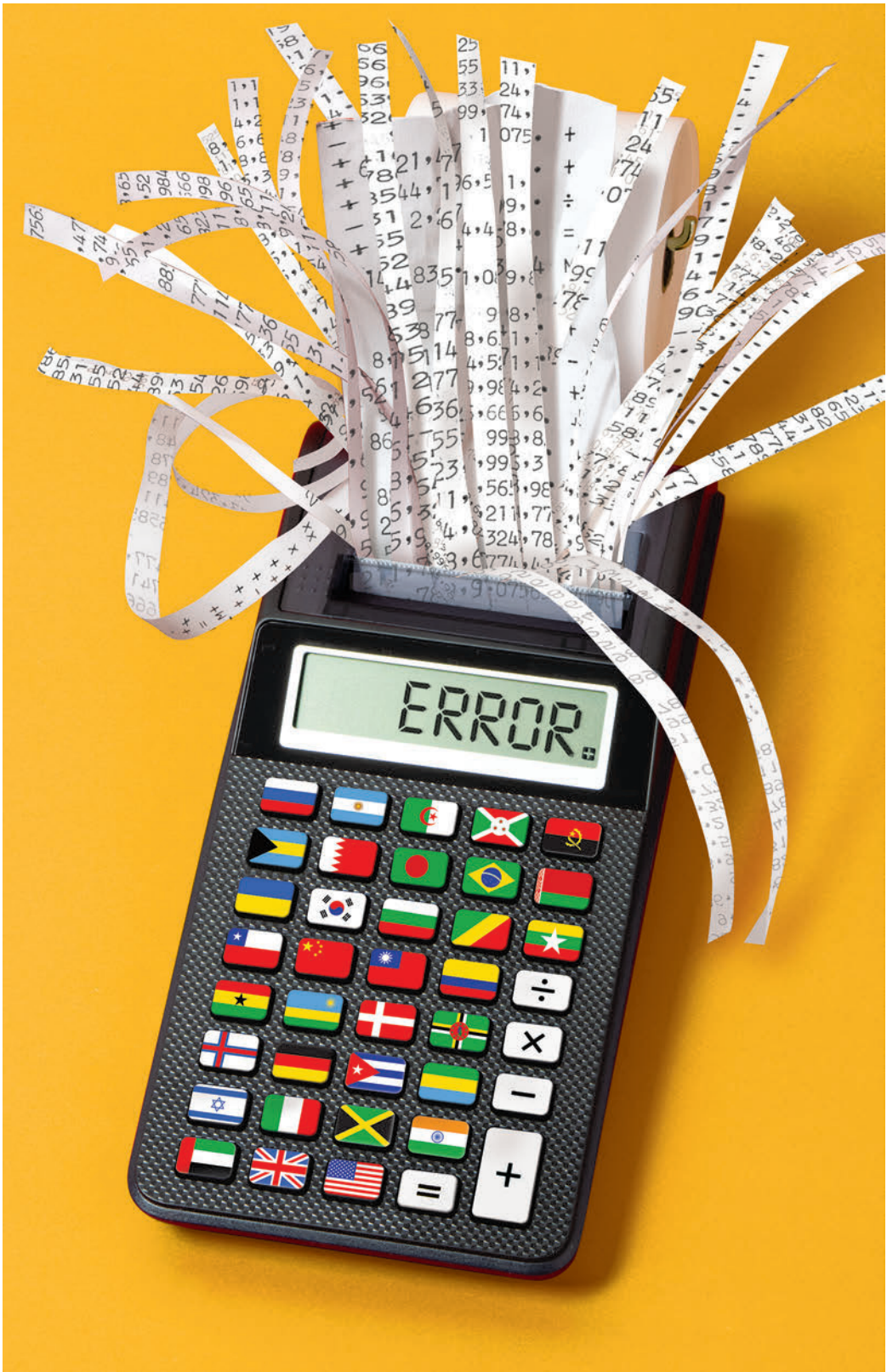


Illustration by Doug Chayka

Agreement, welcoming China into the World Trade Organization (WTO), and not only allowing but encouraging American manufacturers to move much of their production overseas. Free-market globalism was of course pushed in large part by the powerful multinational companies best positioned to exploit it (companies that, of course, donated equally to politicians from both major U.S. parties to ensure that they would see the virtues of neoliberalism). It became a kind of crusade to spread this new American creed around the globe, delivering the thrill of fast

Neoliberal policies caused the global economy to become dangerously untethered from national politics.

fashion and ever-cheaper electronic gadgets to consumers everywhere. American goods, in effect, would represent American goodness. They would advertise American philosophical values, the liberalism tucked inside neoliberalism. The idea was that other countries, delighted by the fruits of American-style capitalism, would be moved to become “free” like the United States.

By some measures, the results of these policies were tremendously beneficial: American consumers in particular enjoyed the fruits of cheap foreign manufacturing while billions of people were lifted out of poverty, especially in developing countries. As emerging markets joined the free-market system, global inequality declined, and a new global middle class was born. How free it was politically, of course, depended on the country.

But neoliberal policies also created immense inequalities within countries and led to sometimes destabilizing capital flows between them. Money can move much faster than goods or people, which invites risky financial speculation. (The number of financial crises has grown substantially since the 1980s.) What is more, neoliberal policies caused the global economy to become dangerously untethered from national politics. Through much of the 1990s, these tectonic shifts were partly obscured in the United States by falling prices, increased consumer debt, and low interest rates. By the year 2000, however, the regional inequalities wrought by neoliberalism had become impossible to ignore. While coastal U.S. cities prospered, many parts of the Midwest, the Northeast, and the South were experiencing catastrophic job losses. Average incomes among U.S. states began to diverge, having converged throughout the 1990s.

Trade with China especially altered the economic geography of the United States. In a 2016 article in *The Annual Review of Economics*, the economists Gordon Hanson, David Autor, and David Dorn described how neoliberal policies had laid waste to certain regions of the United States even as it had conferred enormous advantages on others. China “toppled much of the received empirical wisdom about the impact of trade on labor markets,” they wrote. Suddenly, there wasn’t a single American dream, but rather a coastal dream and a heartland dream, an urban dream and a rural dream. The invisible hand didn’t work perfectly, it turned out, and its touch was felt differently in different parts of the country and the world.

This was not an entirely new insight. Since the beginning of the neoliberal era, a handful of economists had pushed back against the received wisdom of the field. Karl Polanyi, an Austro-Hungarian economic historian, critiqued classical economic views as early as 1944, arguing that totally free markets were a utopian myth. Scholars of the postwar period, including Joseph Stiglitz, Dani Rodrik, Raghuram Rajan, Simon Johnson, and Daron Acemoglu, also understood that place mattered. As Stiglitz, who grew up in the Rust Belt, once told me, “It was obvious if you were raised in a place like Gary, Indiana, that markets aren’t always efficient.”

This view, that location plays a role in determining economic outcomes, is only just beginning to land in policy circles, but a growing body of research supports it. From the work of Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman to that of Raj Chetty and Thomas Philippon, there is now a consensus among scholars that geographically specific factors such as the quality of public health, education, and drinking water have important economic implications. That might seem intuitive or even obvious to most people, but it has only recently gained broad acceptance among mainstream economists. As Peter Orszag, who served as President Barack Obama’s budget director, told me, “If you ask a normal human being, ‘Does it matter where you are?’ they would start from the presumption that ‘Yes, where you live and where you work and who you’re surrounded by matters a ton.’ It’s like Econ 101 has just gone off the path for the last 40 to 50 years, and we’re all little islands atomized into perfectly rational calculating machines. And policy has just drifted along with this thinking.” He added, “The Economics 101 approach, which is place-agnostic, has clearly failed.”

The importance of place has become even more evident since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic decoupling of the United States and China, and Russia's war in Ukraine. Globalization has crested and begun to recede. In its place, a more regionalized and even localized world is taking shape. Faced with rising political discontent at home and geopolitical tensions abroad, governments and businesses alike are increasingly focused on resilience in addition to efficiency. In the coming post-neoliberal world, production and consumption will be more closely connected within countries and regions, labor will gain power relative to capital, and politics will have a greater impact on economic outcomes than it has for half a century. If all politics is local, the same could soon be true for economics.

THE NEOLIBERAL VISION

Neoliberalism's agnosticism about place is striking, given the origins of the political philosophy. It emerged in Europe in the 1930s, when nations were turning inward and international trade was breaking down. Later, neoliberalism became a pillar of the post-World War II economic system precisely because it sought to ensure that such problems of place never recurred. Neoliberals wanted to connect global capital and global business to prevent nations from warring with each other. But ultimately, the system went too far, creating not only asset bubbles and a glut of speculation but also a major disconnect between capital and labor. This in turn fueled the rise of a new kind of political extremism.

These events have in some ways mirrored those of 100 years ago. Between 1918 and 1929, the prices of nearly all assets, whether stocks, bonds, or real estate, rose in Europe and the United States. Central bankers everywhere had opened the monetary spigots and encouraged people to buy things on credit. But this sense of easy money and a rising tide lifting all boats masked ominous political and economic changes. The Industrial Revolution had accelerated urbanization in many countries and displaced millions of workers. Labor forces that were once primarily agricultural now toiled mostly in factories and industry. Wages didn't rise as fast as prices, which meant that economic well-being for most people depended on debt.

Meanwhile, trade between countries slowed. World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic, which lasted well into 1920, caused international trade to fall from 27 percent of global output in 1913 to 20 percent on



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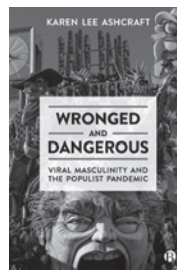
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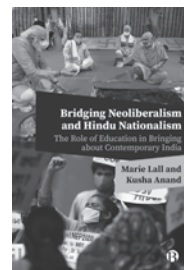


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average between 1923 and 1928. The debt bubble exploded in 1929, and the ensuing Great Depression caused international trade to collapse to just 11 percent of the world economy by 1932. Trade tariffs and punitive taxes on both sides of the Atlantic added to the problem, and it wasn't until after World War II that cross-border flows of goods and services exceeded 15 percent of the global economy again.

Out of this bleak economic landscape grew fascism, first in Italy and then in Germany. European nations hunkered down in their colonial stances, grabbing resources from the developing world to finance their war efforts. A Hobbesian atmosphere of "all against all" fell over Europe, leading inexorably to the horrors of World War II.

In the aftermath, leaders and intellectuals in Europe and the United States understandably sought a way to prevent such carnage from ever happening again. They believed that if capital markets and global trade could be connected through a series of institutions that floated over the laws of any given nation-state, the world would be less likely to descend into anarchy. They also thought such a liberal arrangement could counter the rising threat of the Soviet Union. As the historian Quinn Slobodian has argued, the goal of the neoliberal thinkers was "safeguarding capitalism at the scale of the entire world." The institutions of the neoliberal project, he claims, were designed "not to liberate markets but to encase them, to inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy, to create a framework to contain often-irrational human behavior."

CAPITALISM UNBOUND

For a long time, this idea worked, in part because the balance between national interests and the interests of private businesses didn't get too far out of whack. Even during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, there was a sense that global trade needed to serve the national interest rather than merely the interests of large multinational companies. Reagan framed government as a problem rather than a solution, but his administration made national security a consideration in trade talks and used tariffs and other trade weapons to push back against Japanese efforts to monopolize supply chains for computers.

The notion that trade should be a handmaid to domestic policy interests fell out of favor during the Clinton administration, when the United States struck a series of trade deals and pushed for China's entry into the WTO. That latter development was a seismic shift that removed the guardrails from the global economy. Adam Smith, the

father of modern capitalism, believed that for free markets to function properly, participants needed to have a shared moral framework. But the United States and many other liberal democracies were suddenly enmeshed in major trade relationships with countries—from Russia and the petrostates of the Middle East to numerous Latin American dictatorships to the biggest and most problematic trading partner of all, China—that had fundamentally different moral frameworks, to say nothing of their economic ones.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the two biggest beneficiaries of neoliberal globalization have been the Chinese state, which never played by the letter of the WTO's laws, and multinational companies, which were mostly unaffected by national political turmoil. The result in the United States has been more political extremism on both sides of the aisle, much of it capitalizing on the economic disenchantment of the masses. The idea that the global economy must be put back in the service of national needs is gaining traction, but neither party has put forward a complete plan for how to do so (although the Biden administration has come the closest).

What is clear is that globalization is in retreat, at least in terms of trade and capital flows. The 2008–9 financial crisis, the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine all exposed the vulnerabilities of the system, from capital imbalances to supply chain disruptions to geopolitical turmoil. Countries now want more redundancy in their supply chains for crucial products such as microchips, energy, and rare earth minerals. At the same time, climate change and rising wages in many emerging markets are reducing the incentive to ship low-margin products such as furniture or textiles all over the world. Different political economies call for different financial systems and even different currency regimes. Technological innovations such as 3D printing that allow products to be made quickly and in one place are changing the economic calculus, too, making it far easier and cheaper to build hubs of production close to home. All these shifts suggest that regionalization will soon replace globalization as the reigning economic order. Place has always mattered, but it will matter even more in the future.

NO GOING BACK

At some point, the pandemic will end, as will the war in Ukraine. But globalization will not revert to what it was a decade ago. Nor will it disappear entirely, however. Ideas and, to a certain extent, data will still

flow across borders. So will many goods and services, albeit through far less complicated supply chains. In a 2021 survey by the consulting firm McKinsey & Company, 92 percent of the global supply chain executives polled said they had already begun changing their supply chains to make them more local or regional, increase their redundancy, or ensure that they are not reliant on a single country for crucial supplies. Governments have encouraged many of these changes, whether through legislation such as the Biden administration's industrial policy bill or guidance such as the European Union's New Industrial Strategy, both of which aim to restructure supply chains so that they are less far-flung.

Place has always mattered, but it will matter even more in the future.

tion's industrial policy bill or guidance such as the European Union's New Industrial Strategy, both of which aim to restructure supply chains so that they are less far-flung.

The exact shape of the coming post-neoliberal economic order is not yet clear. But it will likely be far more local, heterodox, complicated, and multipolar than what came before. This is often

portrayed as a bad thing—a comedown for the United States and a risk for much of the world. But arguably it is just as it should be. Politics takes place at the level of the nation-state. And in the post-neoliberal world, policymakers will think much more about place-based economics as they work to rebalance the needs of domestic and global markets.

This is already happening in the arena of trade. In the United States, for example, both major political parties are rightfully questioning certain aspects of neoliberal trade policy. The idea that local politics and cultural values don't matter when it comes to trade policy is belied by the rise of authoritarian countries, particularly by the rise of China. Partly as a result, the Biden administration has kept in place many of Trump's tariffs on Chinese products and sought to bolster domestic manufacturing of goods that are critical for national security.

Nationalism isn't always a good thing, but questioning the conventional economic wisdom is. Rich countries such as the United States cannot outsource everything save finance and software development to emerging markets without making themselves—and the broader economic system—vulnerable to shocks. Conventional trade policy will therefore have to evolve as countries and regions rethink the balance between growth and security, efficiency and resilience. Globalization will inevitably morph into regionalization and localization.

Consider the debate about manufacturing, which represents a small and declining proportion of jobs in most rich countries and in many

poor ones, too. Some economists argue that countries should cast off factory work as they move up the food chain to services, trading low-skilled labor forces for higher-skilled ones. But manufacturing and services have always been more intermingled than the jobs data suggest, and they are becoming ever more so. Research shows that knowledge-intensive businesses of all sorts tend to spring up most frequently in manufacturing hubs, spurring higher overall growth. No wonder industrial powerhouses such as China, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have opted to protect their industrial bases in ways the United States does not. They have done so not with wasteful subsidies or failed policies such as import substitution but by incentivizing high-growth industries and training a workforce to support them. The United States and other developed countries are looking to do that now, particularly in key parts of the supply chain, such as semiconductors, and in strategically important industries, such as electric vehicles.

Muscular industrial policy will be increasingly common in the post-neoliberal world. Even in the United States, most Democrats and a growing number of Republicans believe that government has a role to play in supporting national competitiveness and resilience. The question is how. Subsidizing skill building, underwriting domestic demand, and spending to keep prices of key goods relatively stable will likely all be part of the answer. The United States is more reliant on overseas manufacturing inputs than many of its competitors, including China. It meets just 71 percent of its final consumer demand with regionally sourced goods while China meets 89 percent and Germany meets 83 percent with such products. Achieving parity with China could add \$400 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product, according to estimates by McKinsey, and that is without taking into account future earnings from clean energy and advanced biotech innovations such as gene therapy. Pandemic-related efforts to fill supply chain gaps for essential products such as personal protective equipment and pharmaceuticals—along with efforts to increase domestic capacity in strategic areas such as electric batteries, semiconductors, and rare earth minerals—have created a tailwind for local production of high-value goods. And that could eventually pay enormous dividends for the United States.

As global trade and supply chains regionalize and localize, global finance will do the same. Russia's invasion of Ukraine will have lasting consequences for currency and capital markets. One consequence will be to accelerate the division of the financial system into two systems,

one based on the U.S. dollar and the other on the yuan. China and the United States will increasingly compete in the realm of finance, using currency, capital flows, and trade as weapons against each other. U.S. policymakers have yet to seriously consider the implications of broader competition of this sort: asset values, pensions, and politics will all be affected. Capital markets will become a place to defend liberal values (for example, through sanctions against Russia), pursue new growth strategies, and create new alliances. All this means that markets will be far more sensitive to geopolitics than they have been in the past.

Decentralized technologies will allow more goods to be produced for local consumption, something that may benefit the environment. High-tech “vertical farms” that grow produce on city walls or rooftops rather than in vulnerable climates are springing up as a solution to food insecurity. Large companies have been moving toward vertical integration—owning more of their supply chains—as a way to cushion themselves against shocks, whether climatic or geopolitical. Cutting-edge manufacturing technologies such as 3D printing will speed up this shift toward local industrial systems. Such manufacturing saves money, energy, and emissions. And during the pandemic, it helped plug supply chain gaps, allowing everything from masks and other protective equipment to testing devices and even emergency dwellings to be “printed” locally. The 3D printing market grew 21 percent from 2019 to 2020 and is expected to double by 2026. Taken together, these trends foretell a surge in localized manufacturing.

THE POST-NEOLIBERAL WORLD

Like the neoliberal world, the post-neoliberal world will bring challenges as well as opportunities. Deglobalization, for instance, will be accompanied by a number of inflationary trends (although technology will continue to be deflationary). The war in Ukraine has put an end to cheap Russian gas. The global push toward carbon neutrality will add a permanent tax on fossil fuel usage. Spending by companies and governments to shore up supply chains will fuel inflation in the short term (although to the extent that it boosts strategic industries such as clean tech, it will ultimately spur growth and improve the fiscal position of countries that invest now). Meanwhile, the end of the U.S. Federal Reserve’s bond-buying program and its repeated interest-rate hikes are putting a cap on easy money, pushing up the prices of goods and services.

Aspects of this new reality are good. Counting on autocratic governments for crucial supplies was always a bad idea. Expecting countries with wildly different political economies to abide by a single trade regime was naive. Polluting the planet to produce and transport low-margin goods over long distances didn't make environmental sense. And maintaining historically low interest rates for three decades has created unproductive and dangerous asset bubbles. That said, there is no getting around the fact that a deglobalizing world will also be an inflationary one, at least in the short term, which will force governments to make tough choices. Everybody wants more resilience, but it remains to be seen whether companies or customers will pay for it.

As U.S. policymakers and business leaders seek to address these challenges, they must push back against conventional economic thinking. Instead of assuming that deregulation, financialization, and hyperglobalization are inevitable, they should embrace the coming era of regionalization and localization and work to create productive economic opportunities for all segments of the labor force. They should emphasize production and investment over debt-driven finance. They should think about people as assets, not liabilities, on a balance sheet. And they should learn from the successes and failures of other countries and regions, drawing place-specific lessons from place-specific experiences. For too long, Americans have used outdated economic models to try to make sense of their rapidly changing world. That didn't work at the height of neoliberal mania in the 1990s, and it certainly won't work today. Place has always mattered when it comes to markets—and it is about to matter more than ever. 🌐

Africa's Past Is Not Its Future

How the Continent Can Chart Its Own Course

MO IBRAHIM

Africa is a vast and abundant continent. Roughly ten times the size of India and three times the size of China, it is home to nearly 18 percent of the world's population and roughly 30 percent of its mineral resources. With an average per capita GDP of just over \$2,000, however, it remains the poorest continent by far. Of the 46 countries the United Nations has rated as the least developed, 35 are African. More than three-quarters of the continent's population lives in countries where life expectancy, income, and education are well below the global mean. Africa, as the Ghanaian diplomat Kofi Annan once said, "is a rich continent with many, many poor people."

We Africans are poor for a variety of reasons—some that are of others' making and some that are of our own. Slavery, colonialism, and the Cold War caused serious damage to African societies and economies, much of

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which endures. Exclusion from Western-dominated institutions of global governance does still more harm today. But the blame for Africa's failures cannot be pinned on external forces alone. The continent's colonial history has another enduring insidious legacy: it gives some African leaders, and too many of Africa's people, an excuse for not getting their own houses in order and for continuing to blame the West. Misrule, coups, and corruption have hindered progress and wasted many years since independence some 60 years ago. Yet we continue to point the finger at others.

Almost every nation suffered some form of colonialism or exploitation at some point. Unfortunately, that is our history as a human race. But most countries have picked themselves up and moved on. We Africans need to look forward, not backward, and take responsibility for and ownership of our destiny. That means continuing to fight for better governance, the rule of law, and decent leadership. But our friends in the West must also display more integrity and less hypocrisy. They must give Africa a bigger voice in institutions of global governance, improve the governance of these institutions and of multinational corporations, and close the regulatory loopholes that enable massive illicit financial flows out of the continent. Africa needs allies in its development, not accomplices to its plunder.

THE GHOSTS OF COLONIALISM

Undoubtedly, colonial rule did lasting damage to Africa. European powers drew casual and haphazard borders, mostly disregarding ethnic, geographic, and historical realities. Some countries, such as the Gambia and Lesotho, came to exist mostly or entirely within other countries. Many others ended up landlocked and therefore dependent on their neighbors for access to the sea. Most of the fragile countries of the Sahel belong to that category: Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, and Niger. Each is a far cry from the great Mali Empire, which from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century ruled over territory spanning nine present-day African countries. Wisely, African countries agreed at independence to freeze these artificial borders to avoid conflict, but the seeds of instability had already been planted.

Take the continent's agricultural sector. The colonial powers built economies to serve their own needs, focusing on the export of resources—whether wood, cotton, cocoa, tea, or coffee. These priorities go some way toward explaining the difficulties many African countries still have in ensuring their own food security. Ghana,

Kenya, and Senegal, for example, still grow crops for export on more than half of their cultivable land while importing food to feed their people. The war in Ukraine has suddenly highlighted the fact that most African countries are net importers of wheat, with Russia and Ukraine being the largest providers.

The infrastructure Africa inherited at independence was similarly tailored to an extractive economy. Most of the roads and railways that colonial powers built were designed to take raw commodities to ports. Partly as a result, African countries remain poorly connected to one another. It is easier to move goods from Nigeria to Kenya by sea than by road or rail and cheaper to move goods from West Africa to China than from West Africa to East Africa.

Governance was another area that colonial powers neglected. Rather than building inclusive democratic institutions, they fostered brittle, hierarchical ones. Independence brought colorful new flags, proud national anthems, and rewarding jobs for presidents and those in their inner circles but not much else. The weak institutions of the newly independent African nations were no match for the wave of military coups that took place in the wake of independence. During the 1960s and 1970s, Africa weathered 82 coup attempts—one every 89 days, on average. Roughly half of them succeeded.

Constitutional and civilian rule remains tenuous in much of the continent today. West Africa in particular has seen a resurgence of military coups over the last five years and an erosion of the rule of law. There and in other parts of Africa, an overreliance on military cooperation with foreign powers such as France, Russia, and the United States seems to have encouraged national security forces to turn their guns on their fellow citizens to grab power instead of protecting their populations and borders and fighting terrorists.

The malign influence of foreign powers waned but did not cease with the end of colonialism. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union both treated Africa as an arena for competition over resources, military outposts, and votes at the United Nations. Both often made common cause with dictators and kleptocrats, downplaying the importance of good governance and ignoring human rights abuses. Although the World Bank channeled funds toward the United States'

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allies on the continent, few of these countries achieved much in the way of development. Conditional foreign aid became a driving force in African economic policy, fostering economic dependence on the West rather than the much-needed continental integration.

It was not a coincidence, then, that Africa's governance began to improve after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Many countries transitioned to multiparty elections, adopting new constitutions that included presidential term limits. According to the latest Ibrahim Index of African Governance, published in 2021 by the foundation that I run, more than 60 percent of Africa's population now lives in a country where overall governance has improved over the last decade.

THE LOST DECADES

As destructive and painful as it was, Africa's troubled history of colonialism and Cold War meddling cannot explain all its current woes. Missed opportunities, bad governance, corruption, and even crimes committed by African leaders have also held the continent back. Among the costliest errors was the mismanagement of vast natural resource endowments. Oil and diamond producers in particular have provided a powerful example of what not to do with natural resources—looting nation wealth, growing overly reliant on mineral “rents,” while allowing other sectors of the economy to waste away.

Before oil was discovered and developed in Nigeria, the country had a successful agricultural sector, producing enough food to feed its population until the outbreak of civil war in 1967. Now, Nigeria is a major importer of food. With its vast copper, cobalt, and oil endowments, the Democratic Republic of Congo should be one of the richest countries in the world. Instead, it is poor, fragile, and home to one of the UN's largest peacekeeping force, now a permanent feature on the landscape there.

By contrast, Botswana stands out as a role model for the continent, with its healthy democracy and strong governance. Botswana was blessed with natural resources—diamonds, mainly—but it also had great leaders: President Ketumile Masire, who led the country from 1980 to 1998, and President Festus Mogae, who succeeded Masire and stepped down after his second five-year term in 2008. Both served their people instead of themselves. Thanks in part to their good governance, Botswana has gone from one of the poorest countries in continental sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1960s to the region's

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highest ranked on the Human Development Index, which measures overall social and economic development.

Good governance and decent leadership have unfortunately been in short supply. Africa had its fair share of strongmen and dictators in the second half of the twentieth century. They looted their countries, enriched their families and friends, and curtailed the rights of their citizens. The most notorious leaders fueled the perception that the whole continent was corrupt, prompting serious investors to shun Africa and a swarm of corrupt businesspeople to descend on the continent. The harm inflicted was grievous and is still being felt today.

The end of the Cold War was a boon to Africa, as dictators lost much of their value to the victorious West. The United States and Europe started to pay more attention to corruption, human rights, and democracy—in most cases, making aid contingent on improvements in these areas. But by then, the continent had already lost half a century to corruption and misrule.

STILL FROZEN OUT

Today, Africa still exists at the margins of the global order, largely excluded from international institutions and treated as a basket case to be fixed. The current multilateral system, created at the end of World War II, does not effectively represent or serve the present world. Almost everyone agrees with this assessment, but the international community keeps kicking the can down the road. A fresh look at the mission and the governance of institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund is overdue.

Take the UN Security Council, which has been rendered impotent by the veto powers of its five permanent members: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. None of these countries is keen to give up its unfair privileges, even if that means crippling a vital institution. All can act with impunity and offer protection to their client states, allowing atrocities to go unpunished and shielding dictators in Africa and elsewhere from scrutiny. This state of global governance is unacceptable.

The G-7 and G-20 groups of major economies are also failing Africa. Understandably, no African countries are members of the former and just one, South Africa, is included in the latter. But unlike the European Union, the African Union does not get a seat at either table. It is occasionally invited to dinner but never into the meeting room.

This treatment has enormous consequences for Africa, which has little say in the setting of international standards that affect everything from fighting corruption to financing development to mitigating the effects of climate change. Debates and decisions on these and other issues would be fairer and more efficient if the G-7 and G-20 didn't simply dictate to Africa but treated it as an equal partner.

Africans have been asking for more cooperation from the West as they seek to battle corruption. After all, funds stolen from the continent nearly always end up in Western banks. North American and European countries need to establish public registries that identify those who own or benefit from secretive, anonymous companies. Yet they have resisted doing so, despite regularly haranguing Africans about corruption. Now, Western countries are getting a small taste of their own medicine as they struggle to trace the assets of Russian oligarchs.

Illicit financial flows out of Africa, mispricing of exports and imports, and the shifting of profits within multinational companies cost African countries more than \$88 billion every year between 2008 and 2017, according to one estimate by the United Nations. That exceeds the \$52 billion in annual international aid the continent received during those years, raising the question of who was funding whom. Western countries must act swiftly to close the tax and banking loopholes that are bleeding the African continent dry.

The West should also take Africa's financing needs more seriously. African countries struggle to borrow in international financial markets to fund their development needs or deal with crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and food insecurity. Countries that manage to borrow must pay punitive interest rates, reaching as high as ten percent. It is little wonder that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, even as Western officials lecture Africans about inequality.

International credit-rating agencies should ask themselves whether their assessments are driven by prejudice or reality. Often, when they rate African economies as subinvestment grade, thereby depriving them of much-needed financing or forcing them to borrow at ruinous rates, they actually engineer the failures they predict. As the economist Jeffrey Sachs recently pointed out, Ghana's debt-to-GDP ratio of 83.5 percent

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is lower than Greece's (206.7 percent) and Portugal's (130.8 percent). Yet Moody's rated Ghana several notches below both European countries in 2021, leading creditors to overestimate the risk of lending to Ghana's government and to charge an interest rate of nine percent on ten-year bonds. Greece and Portugal, meanwhile, paid just 1.3 percent and 0.4 percent, respectively. The result was predictable: in its 2021 review of Ghana's debt sustainability, the IMF warned that the country was at high risk of debt distress and vulnerable to shocks, and in August 2022, Fitch downgraded the country's credit rating to CCC, indicating "substantial risks."

Finally, Western countries should take full responsibility for their contribution to the climate crisis and stop asking African nations to sacrifice their development goals to fix a problem they didn't create. North Americans still generate 14 tons of carbon emissions per person every year, on average, while Europeans and Chinese generate seven tons. Africans, by contrast, emit just 1.1 tons. And yet Western countries still resist the obvious solution: putting a price on emissions and letting the market forces they worship play their role. Instead, they focus on reaching carbon neutrality through "energy sobriety" or encouraging people to change their lifestyles and behaviors to reduce emissions. This is a reasonable approach for developed countries that are high emitters, but it makes no sense for low emitters whose populations still lack basic access to energy.

ONE AFRICA

For Africa to live up to its potential, its leaders and citizens must address their own challenges and shortcomings. First and foremost, Africa must speed up its economic integration. Yes, the continent's arbitrary division into 54 countries is unhelpful. But it is irreversible, so the best and only way forward is to deepen the economic and political links between them. The African Union has done much to knit the continent closer together. For one thing, the continental free trade agreement the union brokered in 2018 promises to reduce barriers to trade and perhaps one day create the largest free trade area in the world. But this monumental commitment has yet to be fully and effectively implemented.

For years, I have asked Africans a simple question: If China, whose population is only slightly larger than that of Africa, had been divided into 54 countries with different regulations and currencies, could it

have developed into the superpower it is today? For markets, size matters, so Africans must buy from and sell to each other. That is the only way to develop the continent's economy and attract foreign capital. African countries should come together to establish a pan-African stock exchange, which would encourage investment and improve African companies' access to finance.

Greater integration and market size will spur the development of African industries, including those producing pharmaceuticals and vaccines. The lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic are clear. In emergencies, countries rediscover nationalism, erect trade barriers, and seek to put their own people first. African countries still import almost 95 percent of the medicinal and pharmaceutical goods they consume—and 99 percent of the routine vaccines. In times of global crisis, they cannot depend on the kindness of others to ensure that their people will remain healthy and secure.

In that sense, the pandemic has been useful. In April 2021, the African Union and the African Center for Disease Control set a goal of producing 60 percent of the vaccines the continent will need by 2040. With the help of the European Union, Africa is now working to establish or strengthen six manufacturing hubs on the continent—in Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa. Assuming African governments are willing to make the necessary investments, including in public health, these initiatives will improve the continent's health security and potentially create jobs.

Similar efforts to become more self-reliant are needed in the realm of food security, as evidenced by the disruptions to crucial grain and fertilizer exports to Africa caused by the war in Ukraine. For too long, Africa has disregarded its agricultural sector, allowing its crop yields to fall far below the global average. This in some ways is good news because it means there is enormous potential for improvement. Africa still has more arable land than the rest of the world combined, which is also good news. But the continent must reexamine its agricultural model, still mostly based on subsistence farming. African governments should prioritize production systems that benefit their own people first. Exports should continue, of course, but in a way that does not jeopardize food security.

African states must move up the value chain in agriculture and in other industries such as mining. Otherwise, they will continue to earn relatively low fees for raw materials while other countries reap

much larger rewards from exporting final products sold at prices many Africans cannot afford. It is unacceptable that an African farmer receives a few cents for the cocoa used to make a chocolate bar that sells for \$4 in the West.

Then there is the need for power. Some 600 million people in Africa continue to live without access to electricity. Without power, forget about development, education, and health. It has not helped that some well-meaning countries and development finance institu-

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tions have pushed to end funding for oil and gas projects in Africa and elsewhere. None of them seem to have thought of the millions of African women and children who have gotten sick or died from breathing fumes from unclean cooking fuels. Western countries are now scrambling for access to African gas to

offset the loss of access to Russian gas, but many still don't want Africans to develop such resources for their own use.

Africa is already doing well when it comes to green energy. Twenty-two African countries currently rely on renewables such as hydropower and geothermal as their main source of electricity. But renewables alone cannot meet the enormous and growing need for energy across Africa. To bridge that gap, while of course speeding up the development of renewable energy, Africa must be able to tap its natural gas endowments. This will require African governments and their partners to commit resources to upgrade and scale up gas storage, transportation, and distribution. Without such investment, Africa will not be able to reach the UN's Sustainable Development Goals or the African Union's Agenda 2063 development goals.

Last but not least, demographics. Africans love to brag about their youthful population and the many advantages it confers, including a strong labor force, a growing market, dynamism, and an innovative spirit. But the so-called demographic dividend is a double-edged sword, paying off only if young people are educated and trained to succeed in the twenty-first-century economy. Unemployment among African youth is high and rising, which poses a risk to the stability of African countries and other countries as well. Unemployed youth who have lost hope often opt to migrate illegally and sometimes join criminal or terrorist groups. African governments must create an environment for them to succeed on their own continent, expanding

access to power, building needed infrastructure, and strengthening governance and the rule of law. But they must also improve access to family planning and make it less taboo. If population growth outpaces economic growth, as it does in many African countries, our people will continue to move backward instead of forward.

A WAY UP?

To meet all these challenges, Africa needs better governance and better elected leaders. We Africans need to stop complaining about a past we can do nothing to change and start focusing on the future we can own. We need to look forward, work on our development, and rely on ourselves. Only we are responsible for our future and that of our children.

We hope that Western countries will also improve their governance, be more honest and inclusive in their dealings with Africa, and appreciate the depth of mistrust their past misbehavior and current hypocrisy has created. There are promising signs that both sides are starting to talk to each other rather than past each other. In February, Senegalese President Macky Sall, chair of the African Union; French President Emmanuel Macron, chair of the European Union; and European Council President Charles Michel hosted the sixth European Union–African Union summit in Brussels. Instead of the endless speeches by heads of state that so often eat up all the available time at international summits, this meeting featured a series of substantive and interactive roundtables focused on vital, often contentious issues such as security, health, finance, migration, and agriculture. Both the African and the European leaders committed to equal partnership and better governance. Let us hope both sides implement these commitments so that one day we can look back on this sixth summit as a new beginning. 🌍

REVIEW ESSAY

Boom and Bust

Why It's Hard to Predict Economic Growth

LIAQUAT AHAMED

Slouching Towards Utopia: An Economic History of the Twentieth Century

BY J. BRADFORD DELONG. Basic Books, 2022, 546 pp.

Brad DeLong's highly anticipated economic history of the twentieth century, *Slouching Towards Utopia*, begins with the reminder that economic growth is overwhelmingly a twentieth-century phenomenon. According to the best estimate, between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the living standard of an average person rose by barely one third—1.5 percent every 100 years. Even after 1750, when the economy began appreciably expanding thanks to the steam engine, improvements in the welfare of a typical person remained paltry, scarcely doubling over 120 years in the global North as the benefits of economic expansion were matched by population growth. It was only in the late nineteenth century that the economy began growing

notably faster than the population, allowing living standards to meaningfully increase.

As DeLong notes, in the 150 years since 1870, the world's total economic output has increased by a factor of 50, and the average output per person has gone up almost ninefold. He argues that this quantum leap in the growth of productivity was brought about by three developments: "the coming of the industrial research lab, the modern corporation, and truly cheap ocean and land transport." Collectively, DeLong writes, these led to a "technological cornucopia" that made "the world one global market economy."

Yet *Slouching Towards Utopia* is not a book about these wellsprings of productivity growth. DeLong, an economic historian and professor at the University of California,

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Berkeley, has instead written a masterfully sweeping account of the ups and downs of the global economy on its century-and-a-half climb to prosperity. Almost half the book is devoted to all the things that seemed to go wrong during the climb, for the same century that brought unparalleled plenty for so many was also uniquely and violently unstable, characterized by wars, revolutions, economic depressions, financial crises, and stock market crashes—the “most terrible century in Western History,” according to political theorist Isaiah Berlin. It is these upheavals that give DeLong’s book so much of its excitement and drama.

Slouching Towards Utopia is as much about politics as economics, and DeLong obviously relishes telling the story. His distinctive voice, with its exuberant vocabulary and wonderful cadence, familiar to the many thousands who have been reading his widely followed economics blog for the last 20 years, makes the book a joy to read. Few economic historians have as fluent a grasp of political or military history or, more important, write as lucidly and with such great flair about these subjects.

For a book that begins discussing the glorious technological advances that the twentieth century delivered, *Slouching Towards Utopia* has a particularly downbeat view of the future. DeLong notes that over the last 15 years, productivity growth—usually defined as the growth in GDP per capita—has stalled. That’s especially true for the global North, but it’s also increasingly true for the global South, where the increase in GDP per capita (though still higher than in

the global North) is clearly slowing down. The world, DeLong writes, has been convulsed by “waves of political and cultural anger from the masses of citizens, all upset in different ways and for different reasons at the failure of the system of the twentieth century to work for them as they thought that it should.” He therefore concludes that the circumstances that produced more than 100 years of extraordinary growth have come to an end.

The pessimism, however, may be unwarranted. One of the great virtues of *Slouching Towards Utopia* is the central importance that DeLong attaches to the role of human agency in reshaping political and economic events. He constantly reminds his readers that these events were not preordained. Nor, over the 150 years he chronicles, did growth happen in a straight line. Its pace varied dramatically from one decade to another, sometimes by a factor of four to one. Decades like the current one, when economic growth faltered and the future looked similarly grim, were followed by a rebound and a new boom. It would therefore be premature to conclude that the present slowdown means the era of growth is truly done.

BOOM AND BUST

The twentieth-century expansion in the global economy can be broken down into four great waves, alternating periods of 30 to 50 years during which productivity growth accelerated and then decelerated. The first such wave, from 1870 to 1913, was perhaps the most remarkable. In a stark break with the past, total output in the West tripled, and standards of living doubled.

DeLong, quoting the economist John Maynard Keynes, describes it as an “economic El Dorado.”

That “golden age,” however, was shattered by the onset of World War I, which DeLong sees as the result of an irrational collective spasm of nationalism. In the period following the war, from 1919 to 1938, growth in the heart of the global North—Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the United States—slowed to half the pace of the previous wave, thanks in part to the Great Depression, making it seem as if the economic machine powering the whole Western enterprise had started to wobble and was perhaps irretrievably broken. It is not a coincidence that this period also saw intense political turmoil—multiple revolutions, a second world war—that proved to be a near-death experience for capitalism. It was a powerful reminder that the global North’s upward march and economic success were not predetermined.

But the Allied victory ushered in the third wave, lasting from 1945 to 1973. It was another golden era, during which the world economy once again leaped ahead at an unprecedented pace. Economic output nearly quadrupled. Standards of living in Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the United States almost tripled.

Finally, in 1973, the last wave arrived. As with the interwar years, it was one of slowdowns. Productivity growth in the global North went from three percent a year to half that, and inequality began rising again as the paychecks of the middle and working classes stagnated. In DeLong’s view, the productivity slowdown was in part caused by the need to retool advanced

economies to be more energy efficient after the sharp jump in energy prices. But as he confesses, the ultimate reasons for this sharp slowdown remain “a mystery even today.”

DeLong isn’t the first person to suggest that the modern global economy is subject to 30- to 50-year cycles—decades of good years followed by decades of lean ones. It was first popularized during the 1930s by the great Harvard economist Joseph Schumpeter. Schumpeter, in turn, got it from the obscure Soviet economist Nikolai Kondratiev, who identified these waves in the 1920s. (Kondratiev eventually fell afoul of the Stalinist regime and was executed for failing to wholeheartedly embrace the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that capitalism was inexorably doomed.) Schumpeter attributed these waves to the ebb and flow of investment associated with innovation and the introduction of new technology. But he was never able to produce a satisfactory account of why technological innovation came in historical bunches or why the up-and-down cycles came so regularly.

DeLong does not fully dismiss the Schumpeterian idea that bursts of technological innovation lie behind these decadelong phases. He argues, for example, that the slowdown in productivity growth after 1973 was in part because the world was “running out of the backlog stock of undeployed useful ideas that had been discovered and partially developed,” especially after Japan and Western Europe’s postwar catch-up. But for the most part, he attributes these cycles to the global economy being randomly buffeted

and thrown off course by unpredictable external shocks—such as a cataclysmic war in 1914 or the massive rise in the price of energy in the early 1970s—and to the dysfunctional political response to these jolts.

THE BIG IDEA

Slouching Towards Utopia is concerned with more than just economic cycles. Onto these four periods, DeLong superimposes waves of a wholly different nature: ideas. The twentieth century, he posits, was the battleground between two opposing sets of doctrines—one arguing that unfettered free markets were best at generating economic expansion and the other emphasizing that markets needed regulation and state spending to generate fair and just growth. He calls the tug of war between these two ideologies the “grand narrative” of his book.

It is certainly a recurring theme, a sort of leitmotif, one that DeLong traces to the writings of two men both born in late-nineteenth-century Vienna. One was Friedrich Hayek, who attributed the leap in productivity during the nineteenth century to governments giving unregulated markets full play. The other was Karl Polanyi, who thought that free-market capitalism was a massively disruptive force that upended traditional forms of social protection. Polanyi still saw capitalism as a positive, but he argued that to protect groups from the disruptions, governments would have to temper its effects.

In DeLong’s account, one or the other of these ideologies has been ascendant at various points. During the first wave, free market ideas almost

completely dominated the intellectual climate. But the dramatic widening of the franchise following World War I and the extensive social and economic changes that came with it meant that unregulated capitalism was no longer sustainable. Questions of economic justice rose to the fore, especially when Western economies collapsed during the Great Depression. Ideologies such as socialism, fascism, and communism all gained new adherents during the interwar years.

All these doctrines proved to be failures. But it was only after World War II that Western economies finally hit upon a model capable of both producing high growth and sharing the fruits of that prosperity more widely. They did so by preserving markets while dramatically expanding the role of government in regulating capitalism to avoid another Great Depression and establishing strong social safety nets—in DeLong’s memorable phrase, “a shotgun marriage” between Hayek and Polanyi. It was a paradigm that would produce a sort of zenith for Western capitalism.

Then, in the mid-1970s, slowdowns pushed Western policymakers to reconsider their economic philosophy. Almost every major capitalist economy responded with what DeLong calls the neoliberal turn: radically shifting to more market-oriented policies and jettisoning the hybrid model that had worked so well for a whole generation. The politicians were not entirely misguided in making this call. Although the new menu of policies—freeing up labor markets, deregulating industries, privatizing public services, and cutting taxes—did not initially succeed in reversing the slowdown in productivity,

by the late 1990s, the change had actually begun to reap some benefits. There was a nearly decadelong revival in productivity growth in the early years of the twenty-first century.

But the success was cut short when the global financial crisis hit in 2008. Unlike after the Great Depression, policymakers did not follow it with New Deal-style reforms to curb the influence of markets. Instead, most countries made the puzzling decision to stick with neoliberal, market-friendly policies, largely, in DeLong's view, because the model's major beneficiaries—the rich and the superrich—had come to dominate Western political discourse, especially in the United States. Nevertheless, there are signs that the continued embrace of neoliberalism may end. A backlash against free-trade policies both from the nationalist right, which resents the rise of China, and from the left, which wants to temper trade's effect on the working class, has led many Western states to turn away from embracing unregulated free markets.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Viewing the twentieth century through the prism of ideological and growth cycles is an illuminating way of understanding recent history. It shows that the rate of productivity growth is more than just an economic statistic. It is a measure of the vitality of a society, with a pervasive impact on so many other economic variables—wages, investment rates, the stock market, and public spending that is possible, to name just a few. Changes in GDP per capita therefore have the power to define the ethos of an entire generation or even a whole era.

The problem is that for all the importance of increased productivity, economists still don't have a good handle on what drives it. Hayek, for example, may have been right that pro-market policies are necessary for strong growth. But it is clear that by themselves, they are not enough. Otherwise, the last half century—when pro-market ideas have overwhelmingly dominated politics—would not have coincided with a sharp economic slowdown. Similarly, economics has a long tradition of positing a fundamental tradeoff between policies that seek to maximize economic growth with those that seek a more equitable distribution of income. Yet the years from 1945 to 1973 resulted in both the twentieth century's strongest period of growth and its biggest improvements in the distribution of income; the so-called tradeoff between efficiency and equity thus seems to dissolve when viewed through the wider lens of history. This uncertainty means that any account that puts productivity growth on center stage—including DeLong's—has a gaping hole.

But *Slouching Towards Utopia* is, ultimately, not a prescriptive book. It is a work of narrative history, with all the ambiguities and contingencies that make any full account of the past so rich—and with a special emphasis on the choices that key political actors make in shaping the trajectory of the future.

DeLong's emphasis on human agency is most apparent in his descriptions of how the United States behaved after World War I and World War II. He draws heavily on the writings of his old teacher Charles Kindleberger, a professor of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology,

who argued that a well-functioning global economy required one country to act as the hegemon, serving as the supplier of capital of last resort during crises and the economic locomotive for the world. Before World War I, the United Kingdom held this role. Left nearly bankrupt by the conflict, however, it was unable to fulfill that function. The mantle of leadership should have passed to the United States at that point, but Washington, dominated by isolationists, was too parochial and insular to seize its position. The result was 30 years of global economic turmoil. After World War II, by contrast, U.S. policymakers fully embraced their country's role as hegemon. As DeLong notes, the result was 30 years of high and stable growth across the West.

DeLong also remarks on the astonishing speed with which free-market beliefs came to dominate the economic discourse in the late 1970s and 1980s—and, with it, policymaking. Neoliberalism succeeded undoubtedly because these theories had been incubating for over a quarter century in circles led by the economist Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago. DeLong speculates almost wistfully about what might have happened if there had been an equally well-prepared ideological vanguard on the social democratic side. “Might social democracy have survived, regrouped, and staggered onward?” he asks. “Here again is a place where a great deal of the course of history might, or might not, have evolved differently had a relatively small number of influential groups of people thought different thoughts.”

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Given this emphasis on agency, one would not expect *Slouching Towards Utopia* to end on the gloomy note that it does. Yet in the final chapters, DeLong suggests that statesmen will not again be able to seriously reshape economic history. He gives a litany of factors that all point to a somber future: the continued slide in productivity since the global financial crisis, stalling globalization, eroding confidence in U.S. leadership following the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the failure of Western policies to restore full employment, and the inability of the world to take needed collective action to deal with global warming. He goes so far as to proclaim that the long march upward in fact ended in 2010, the year when it became apparent that the world's recovery from the Great Recession would be disappointingly anemic.

There is no hint, however, that DeLong believes that the fall in productivity growth is somehow permanent because humans have lost their ability to find creative technological solutions to problems. Instead, his pessimism stems from the dysfunctional global political climate. The failure of neoliberalism to revive growth in the wake of the Great Recession and ever-increasing levels of inequality are fueling the sort of toxic combination, albeit in milder form, of the political populism and xenophobia that poisoned the world in the 1930s. He fears that society may be in for a period comparable to the interwar years, when growth slowed because of dangerous political instability.

The interwar period was also the last time that global economic leadership made a tumultuous switch,

from the United Kingdom to the United States. Today, the world is in the middle of a comparable shift in the economic landscape. During most of the twentieth century, the global South represented less than a third of the world economy. It is what allowed DeLong, in *Slouching Towards Utopia*, to focus unapologetically on the West and largely ignore the rest of the world. But with the remarkable growth of China, India, and other Asian economies over the last quarter century, the role of the global South in the world has been transformed—it now accounts for close to 60 percent of humanity's economic output. The global North, headed by the United States, can no longer act on the assumption that it is in charge.

The wider lesson of DeLong's sweeping history, however, has to be that one should be wary of making categorical pronouncements about the future. The interwar period and subsequent, cataclysmic conflict were not, after all, the end of rapid growth. In 1945, with Europe in rubble, few experts foresaw the extraordinary transformation that made the continent so wealthy over the next 30 years. In 1973, just as Western capitalism seemed to be reaching its peak, almost no one predicted that a decade of financial turmoil and hard times was just around the corner.

Today, despite the political challenges the global economy confronts, there are causes for optimism. Over the last two decades, entrepreneurs and scientists have created a whole new generation of technologies with the potential to dramatically alter the trajectory of growth. Advances in artificial intelligence promise to radically

improve the efficiency of economies. Improvements in battery storage and solar cell technology could change the way energy is used and generated and also lower its cost. And recent breakthroughs in vaccine technology could have enormous dividends for treating all sorts of diseases.

The course of the twentieth century can almost be defined by the events of the few hinge years—1919, 1932, 1945, 1973—when the global economy was shifting from one gear to another and the future was unpredictable. Given the inventions of the last 20 years, it is possible that the world is once again at a critical turning point. 🌐

REVIEW ESSAY

Good at Being Bad

How Dictatorships Endure

SHERI BERMAN

Revolution and Dictatorship: The Violent Origins of Durable Authoritarianism
BY STEVEN LEVITSKY AND LUCAN WAY. Princeton University Press, 2022, 656 pp.

In the early 1980s, the great scholar of democracy Robert Dahl observed that “in much of the world the conditions most favorable to the development and maintenance of democracy are nonexistent, or at best only weakly present.” Barely had Dahl penned these pessimistic words when it became clear that democracy was on the verge of its greatest historical efflorescence. During the late twentieth century, a democratic wave engulfed the globe, toppling dictatorships in Africa, Asia, Latin America, southern and eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union. By the beginning of the present century, the world had more democracies than ever before.

If Dahl turned out to be overly gloomy about the future of democracy, however, many of his successors would be far too optimistic. Francis

Fukuyama’s often misunderstood concept of “the end of history”—positing that the world had reached “the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government”—captured the era’s *Zeitgeist*. Many other social scientists produced books and articles seeking to fathom this democratic wave and whether the democracies it created would endure. Since Dahl and his counterparts in the previous generation had not anticipated the wave, the scholarship that arrived in its immediate wake focused less on the preconditions supposedly associated with successful democracy and more on the process of democratic transition. This perspective, which came to be known as “transitology,” argued that the origins of

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democratic regimes—that is, the way they transitioned from dictatorship to democracy—critically affected their development and chances of success.

In fact, despite the extraordinary number of countries that embraced democracy, this democratic moment inevitably came to an end. As was the case in previous such waves in 1848, 1918, and 1945, the late-twentieth century democracy wave was followed by a strong undertow that pulled in the opposite direction. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, more countries were moving in an authoritarian direction than were democratizing. Consider Hungary, Thailand, and Turkey, where once promising democratic regimes have turned into de facto authoritarian ones. In response, scholars have again followed the historical cycle and are trying to determine whether the world is entering a new age of autocracy.

Into this debate step two of the most prolific and respected scholars of democracy and dictatorship, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. Levitsky, an expert on Latin America, and Way, an expert on the countries of the former Soviet Union, bring together their immense regional and theoretical expertise in their new book, *Revolution and Dictatorship*. For those trying to understand where history is headed, their approach offers useful insights and lessons.

The book makes two related arguments. The first concerns the staying power of authoritarian regimes. To figure out whether the world is at the dawn of a new autocratic era, one needs standard criteria by which to assess contemporary dictatorships

and determine which ones are likely to last. But since political scientists have largely neglected the study of authoritarian governments and what made some “successful” during the late-twentieth-century expansion of democracy, few scholars have discussed such criteria. Levitsky and Way address this gap, offering an argument about the political and institutional structures necessary for what they call “authoritarian durability.” The second argument they put forward concerns where these structures come from. Here *Revolution and Dictatorship* harks back to the perspective that transitologists adopted not that long ago: namely, that a regime’s origins critically affect its development and durability.

At a time when authoritarian states such as Russia and China are not only proclaiming that their regimes are superior to Western democratic ones but also becoming increasingly aggressive abroad, the debate about the durability of dictatorships is of more than passing interest. If these and other similar regimes share underlying features that can predict their longevity, as Levitsky and Way suggest, it is crucial that strategists and policymakers learn to recognize them.

BUILT TO LAST

Levitsky and Way begin their analysis with a commonsensical yet underappreciated insight: durable dictatorships, like durable democracies, require strong states capable of defending and controlling their territory, solving problems, and dealing with challenges to their stability. (Here and elsewhere, *Revolution and Dictatorship* echoes a classic study of the relationship

between revolutionary regimes and state building, Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*.) Scanning the history of modern dictatorships, Levitsky and Way identify three features in particular, or what they call "pillars," of long-lasting authoritarian regimes.

The first is a cohesive ruling elite. This is necessary because authoritarian regimes are commonly undermined via internal schisms. Such divisions hinder a dictatorship's ability to deal forcefully and effectively with problems, and they provide opportunities for opposition movements to entice elite defections from within the regime. As examples of this dynamic, Levitsky and Way offer the ruling parties in Georgia, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, and Zambia, all of which were weakened or destabilized by intra-elite conflicts and/or suffered large-scale defections. By contrast, durable regimes such as Enver Hoxha's Albania, communist China, Fidel Castro's Cuba, and the Islamic Republic of Iran "suffered virtually no defections, often for decades."

The second pillar of dictatorial durability is a powerful and loyal coercive apparatus. Authoritarian regimes often collapse as the result of mass uprisings or mobilized opposition. If the military, the police, or other arms of the state have interests that are independent of those of the regime, they are less likely to use violence against their fellow citizens to defend the regime when it has become unpopular. Therefore, strong dictatorships need armed forces, police, and intelligence agencies that are controlled by or fused with political authorities—for example, by being integrated into the ruling party or

elite or by being overseen by political commissars or other party institutions. This is the case with Iran's Revolutionary Guard and the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Similarly, authoritarian regimes often fall prey to coups, which are best guarded against by ensuring that the military's interests coincide with those of the regime. Pakistan provides a classic example of the dangers of an independent military, with the country's armed forces regularly intervening in politics and even overthrowing governments. During the Arab Spring, Egypt's military abandoned longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak in the face of growing mass mobilization and foreign condemnation; two years later, it also toppled the semidemocratic Muslim Brotherhood regime that succeeded Mubarak once that government appeared weak and unable or unwilling to defend the military's interests and prerogatives.

The third pillar of dictatorial durability is a weak and divided opposition. This helps prevent the planning of sustained mass protests and other forms of political activity that can undermine an authoritarian regime or force it to engage in violence against its own citizens, which would further feed dissatisfaction and dissent. In communist Vietnam, the authors note that by the 1960s, "all independent sources of power outside the state had been crushed, leaving opponents without a mass base." Scholars and observers have also pointed to divisions between secular and Islamist oppositions as a key factor underpinning dictatorial durability in parts of the Muslim world.

STRENGTH FROM STRUGGLE

Despite their importance, Levitsky and Way argue, these sustaining features do not alone determine a regime's longevity. It also matters how autocracies come to power. *Revolution and Dictatorship* asserts that dictatorships with revolutionary origins are "extraordinarily durable." According to Levitsky and Way, such regimes last on average nearly three times as long as their nonrevolutionary counterparts; 71 percent of them survived for three decades or more, compared with only 19 percent of nonrevolutionary regimes. Although many authoritarian regimes collapsed at the end of the Cold War, some revolutionary governments, such as those of China, Cuba, and Vietnam, remained intact. Levitsky and Way define "revolutionary" regimes as those whose origins lie in mass movements that violently overthrow the old regime, subsequently produce a fundamental transformation of the state, and engage in radical socioeconomic and cultural change. The authors claim that 20 such regimes have existed since 1900.

Somewhat confusingly, however, they then differentiate within this category. They note that not all revolutionary regimes embark on radical paths after toppling the old regime. Some pursue moderate, or what they call "accommodationist," courses instead, entailing more restrained state transformation and socioeconomic and cultural change. (Out of their 20 revolutionary regimes, three—Bolivia, Guinea-Bissau, and Nicaragua—fit in this category.) Levitsky and Way argue that this accom-

modationist path may seem sensible in the short term, as it creates less instability and chaos, but proves counterproductive in the long term because only radicalism triggers the "reactive sequence" they assert is necessary for authoritarianism to endure.

The key feature of this process is violent domestic and/or international counterreaction. The authors observe that "from revolutionary France to Communist Russia and China, to postcolonial Vietnam, to late twentieth-century Iran and Afghanistan, revolutionary governments have often found themselves engulfed in war" or other types of violent conflict. Sometimes a new revolutionary regime cannot survive such intense internal or external resistance: four of the 20 regimes they cite—the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, post-World War I Finland and Hungary, and the first Taliban regime in Afghanistan—did not. But by Levitsky and Way's count, for a large majority of these regimes, the violent counterreactions created the conditions necessary for building the pillars of dictatorial durability.

Here is where the reactive sequence—a concept the authors borrow from the scholar James Mahoney—comes into play. First, the existential threat that violence and war pose to a new regime leaves no room for division or disunity; elite cohesion is the result. This cohesion is further cemented by the memory of war and the suffering it entailed, as well as by the ideological component of revolutionary regimes, which, Levitsky and Way argue, tends to "lengthen actors' time horizons" and inhibit "short-term egoistic behavior." In their view, "In Russia, China, Vietnam, Cuba,

Nicaragua, Iran, Mozambique, and elsewhere, fear of annihilation amid civil or external wars generated a powerful and often enduring incentive to close ranks.” And this “siege mentality” helps explain why elites remained committed to the regime in these countries even in the face of economic and other crises.

Second, confronting the challenge of war on the heels of the old regime’s collapse pushes new revolutionary regimes to quickly construct a large security apparatus, as the Castro regime did in the face of a persistent U.S. military threat. By building such security forces from scratch, revolutionary leaders are in turn able to “penetrate the armed forces with political commissars and other institutions of partisan oversight and control.” And finally, Levitsky and Way find that counterrevolutionary conflict almost inevitably leads to the weakening or destruction of alternative power bases, not least because wars “provide revolutionary elites with both a justification and the means to destroy political rivals.”

While identifying the qualities that make autocracies last is a worthwhile goal, Levitsky and Way’s emphasis on revolutionary origins leaves some important questions unanswered. Unavoidably, scholars will differ over which regimes belong in the revolutionary category. It is not clear, for example, why regimes such as Bolivia’s or Nicaragua’s—which adopted moderate or “accommodationist” positions and accordingly achieved less than transformative social and economic change after taking power—should be considered “revolutionary.”

Conversely, Levitsky and Way omit a number of regimes that fit the definition better than some they have included. Most interesting here are Benito Mussolini’s Italy and Adolf Hitler’s Germany, which the authors leave out on the grounds that these regimes came to power “through institutional means” that did not involve state collapse. Yet both were obviously revolutionary and transformed their states, societies, and cultures at least as much as and perhaps more than other regimes the authors include. Both also created cohesive elites, employed vast security forces, and successfully eliminated opposition groups. Nonetheless, rather than being strengthened, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were undermined by the violent counterreaction—World War II—they triggered. This outcome challenges the causal chain that *Revolution and Dictatorship* posits. Also worth noting, as Levitsky and Way do, is the question of whether the “revolutionary” regimes discussed in *Revolution and Dictatorship* reflect in part the forces that were in play during a particular historical era: from the great ideological clashes that preceded World War II through the Cold War that followed it.

NURTURE OVER NATURE?

Today, pessimism about democracy is once more widespread. As noted above, however, the authoritarian resurgence should not come as a surprise: all previous waves have been followed by backsliding and the disappointment that inevitably accompanies it. Yet the authoritarian undertow of the past decade or so has been weaker than those that followed



The enemy within: Orban visiting Vienna, Austria, July 2022

the previous waves. More of the new democracies created in this most recent wave have survived than did their counterparts in previous waves. And although the world has fewer democracies today than a decade ago, it has many more democracies than when the wave began in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps, just as Dahl's pessimism in the 1980s turned out to be unwarranted, so, too, will be recent assertions, such as that made by the Hungarian autocrat Viktor Orban, that "the era of liberal democracy is over."

Nonetheless, the number of countries becoming authoritarian has undoubtedly been growing. A crucial task for scholars, accordingly, is figuring out whether this trend will continue and whether the dictatorships produced by it will prove resilient. One way to tackle this question is to again focus on transitions. Indeed, the origins and early phases of a new

regime's existence critically shape the development of its institutions, power structures, international standing, and more. But transitions are only one piece of the puzzle. As with people, a regime's birth can influence but not entirely determine its fate.

One difficulty with *Revolution and Dictatorship's* argument about revolutionary regimes is that few of them exist today. Instead, the most common type of contemporary dictatorship is what is often called "electoral autocracy." Regimes such as Orban's Hungary, Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey, and Narendra Modi's India do not engage in extensive violence or in radical socioeconomic or cultural experiments. What they do instead is hold tainted elections and severely restrict critical features of liberal democracy such as a free press and civil society, checks on executive authority, an independent judiciary, and respect for civil

rights and liberties. Levitsky and Way's emphasis on revolutionary origins can explain only so much about these new autocracies. But the authors' identification of the three pillars that make dictatorships work can help determine how likely they are to endure.

In this regard, *Revolution and Dictatorship* adds to a growing body of work. Scholars such as Roberto Foa have argued that in recent decades, the state capacity of dictatorships has generally increased, at least when compared with democracies. Levitsky and Way's analysis suggests that such strong states are better able to meet the social, economic, and external challenges they face and therefore are more resilient. In other words, the greater the number of strong-state dictatorships, the more durable the current autocratic wave will be. Even without the radicalism and extensive violence characterizing Levitsky and Way's revolutionary regimes, dictatorships that can create cohesive elites and strong but politically subservient militaries and police forces while keeping opposition movements weak and divided are more likely to be resilient.

Thus, present-day revolutionary regimes such as communist China and the Islamic Republic of Iran possess cohesive military and political elites, and their opposition is practically nonexistent. This is surely why these regimes have been relatively stable over the past few decades. Yet Russian President Vladimir Putin, although his regime does not have revolutionary origins, also seems to have the military firmly under his control, has tied the country's oligarchs to his rule through

a web of corruption, and has eliminated all organized opposition. These factors may lead us to predict further stability. They have also likely helped persuade Putin not just that he could survive but that he could enhance his and his country's standing by leading Russia into a war in Ukraine. The war has turned out to be far more difficult than he expected, however, and it remains unclear whether this military adventure will ultimately strengthen or weaken Putin's hold on power. Levitsky and Way contend that violent conflicts during the early phases of a revolutionary regime are likely to strengthen it; perhaps we need more study of the factors or contexts that determine how well dictatorships can withstand violent conflicts that come later in their development. 🌐

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REVIEW ESSAY

The Unwinnable War

America's Blind Spots in Afghanistan

LAUREL MILLER

The Fifth Act: America's End in Afghanistan

BY ELLIOT ACKERMAN. Penguin Press, 2022, 288 pp.

In August 2021, Afghanistan was thrust back into the headlines. Taliban forces rapidly closed in on Kabul, and the United States began making its final military withdrawal. Suddenly, the world was confronted with images of desperate people squeezing their way into Kabul's airport for a chance to flee. Almost overnight, nearly everything that the United States and its allies had accomplished in 20 years of fighting, spending, and building in Afghanistan disintegrated. For the one million or so Americans who had taken part in those failed endeavors, and for the millions of young Afghans who had grown up under a Western-backed democracy, flawed though it was, such losses were head spinning. With their livelihoods

imperiled, and with many fearful for their lives, hundreds of thousands of Afghans sought to leave the country, posing a new challenge for withdrawing Western forces.

The United States didn't expect to mount such a large evacuation, or at least not so quickly. Over ten days, the U.S. military and its allies airlifted about 120,000 people, including 80,000 Afghans, from Kabul, mostly to military bases in the Middle East, from where they eventually left for the United States and elsewhere. The effort was chaotic. For those without a U.S. passport or visa, often the only ticket out was a personal connection to someone who could pull strings with U.S. personnel on the ground. American veterans, former diplomats, aid workers, and journalists

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scrambled to find passage for vulnerable Afghans. Many Afghans who wanted to leave were turned away. Amid this crisis, many Americans who had served in Afghanistan were angry that the evacuation was so haphazard and left behind so many Afghans they believed to be at risk.

One of those Americans was Elliot Ackerman, who served in Afghanistan as a marine and later as an adviser to Afghan counterterrorism teams under a CIA-led program. In the final weeks before the U.S. withdrawal, he joined a series of impromptu efforts to help evacuate small groups of Afghans. Ackerman used his connections to the U.S. military and other agencies involved in the evacuation to help Afghans get into Kabul Airport and onto planes. In *The Fifth Act*, Ackerman describes these efforts, interweaving the account of the withdrawal with his combat experiences and views on what went wrong with the war.

For decades, U.S. veterans have written books that use their intimate experiences of war to challenge the prevailing wisdom of U.S. strategists and military planners in Washington. That is not the case with *The Fifth Act*. Paradoxically, in setting out to explore the missed opportunities of the U.S.-led war and the botched withdrawal, Ackerman ends up reflecting the same misguided mindset that drove the war's architects. Looking at the conduct of the war through a narrow aperture, he focuses, as Washington did, largely on U.S. forces and U.S. policy; the politics, motivations, and experiences of Afghans are pushed offstage. In doing so, however, the

book usefully, if inadvertently, reveals many blind spots that compromised Washington's strategy.

CURTAINS UP

Ackerman's book is divided into five parts, or "acts" (hence the title), and the drama proceeds by combining a number of disparate narrative strands. The most resonant one centers on Ackerman's combat experience and describes two missions in which he participated as a Marine Special Operations team leader in 2008. In each mission, one of his comrades was tragically killed. This narrative intends to convey the importance of the "leave no one behind" ethos in the U.S. military, a theme that resurfaces in the evacuation narrative.

In the aftermath of a mission gone wrong, Ackerman is particularly haunted by having had inadequate personnel and equipment left to retrieve the body of one of his men. He decides to defer the task to another unit of marines, in the interest of protecting the lives of others under his command, but he writes that "a measure of guilt settled its weight on me." More than a dozen years later, he still carries the weight of regret about this decision. Ackerman's prose successfully transports the reader to the battlefield and into the midst of ambiguities facing young combatants required to make life-and-death decisions. He writes lovingly of his comrades, bringing them to life and heightening the poignancy of the stories he tells.

But that message about military valor is overshadowed by the powerful illustration he provides of wasted life. One of the missions on which one of Ackerman's comrades died achieved

no apparent military objectives. Ackerman notes that the team did not find the Taliban forces they were looking for, leaving readers with a sense of the counterinsurgency's futility.

Yet, Ackerman's war-fighting narrative fails to address why the United States lost. Ackerman skates over crucial problems with how the U.S. military carried out the war. For instance, in describing his work as a CIA paramilitary operator, during which he advised an Afghan counterterrorism unit established and funded by the agency, he does not seem to recognize that these teams were a double-edged sword. He celebrates their tactical successes, such as when they kill or capture enemy targets. But he ignores the mountain of evidence that their routine night raids on villages, including ones in which he took part, fomented bitterness toward foreign militaries and undermined the Afghan government's ability to build popular support.

Consider also an operation that Ackerman describes that took place in the Zerkoh Valley in Herat Province in 2008, when he was a marine. He briefly notes that a U.S. general had to pressure Afghan President Hamid Karzai to green-light the operation because Karzai had concerns about civilian casualties. He also dismissively refers to the "tribal politics that had allowed Zerkoh Valley to become a Taliban sanctuary." But Ackerman leaves out the fact that a year earlier, U.S. airstrikes in the same area killed dozens of civilians, causing local outrage and demonstrations against the government. (Although the United States never made an accounting of the casualties, the Afghan govern-

ment claimed that 42 had been killed, and Human Rights Watch reported at least 25 deaths.) Karzai's concerns were justified, and no Afghan leader could simply brush aside tribal politics as Ackerman seems to propose.

In recounting another 2008 operation, this time in Farah Province, Ackerman refers to "a turbaned man and his family who we'd turned out of their home." The man shouted at the marines searching his home each time he heard "the sound of an item crashing to the floor." Ackerman misses a chance to discuss the corrosive effect of foreign invaders repeatedly harassing Afghan civilians—a mistake that U.S. policymakers and Pentagon planners made, as well.

The Fifth Act mirrors another flaw in the thinking of strategists in Washington about what U.S. forces could achieve in Afghanistan. Ackerman advised a large group of Afghan commandos as well as CIA-led counterterrorism units. Yet these men are no more than bit players in his story. Repeatedly, Ackerman refers to "our war," "my war," "us," and "our Afghan tragedy." In doing so, he calls to mind the habit of U.S. policymakers to see themselves as the primary protagonists of the war and to perceive the conflict in Afghanistan as an American initiative built around the United States bending Afghans to its will, rather than as one in which the actions and motivations of Afghans on both sides would hold ultimate sway.

In the face of the Taliban's rapid reconquest of the country in 2021, Ackerman seems baffled by the "bitter" and "humiliating" defeat by a far inferior force. But he looks for



On a wing and a prayer: waiting for evacuation, Kabul, Afghanistan, August 2021

answers only in U.S. policy errors and, to a lesser extent, in the failings of the U.S.-backed Afghan government. The Taliban, an enemy poorly understood by the United States, are largely missing from his picture. Ackerman tries to explain why the United States lost, yet he overlooks half the equation. The real story is not only one of U.S. failure but of Taliban success, owing to strong motivation, organizational resilience, and support from outside the country, particularly Pakistan.

BLAME GAME

Ackerman is least persuasive when he strays from his own memories of combat in Afghanistan. When the book comments on policy and politics, it offers no basis for its reasoning besides Ackerman's personal experience. Ackerman leans heavily on the idea that the United States lost the war because "we never understood what winning meant."

But he never makes clear what, in his own view, "winning" meant.

A better explanation for Washington's failures in Afghanistan is that the United States should have focused from the outset on how to end the war, not how to win it. That might have meant seeking to prevent an insurgency from gaining traction in the first place by including the Taliban early on as minority stakeholders in the post-2001 government. Or it could have meant negotiating seriously with the Taliban at the height of U.S. power, around 2011, rather than waiting to do so until 2019, at which point U.S. influence in the country was approaching its nadir and U.S. leaders had made clear their intention to pull out. Quiet negotiations with the insurgents began in 2009 but proceeded in fits and starts and lacked strong political commitment from Washington until it was too late.

In February 2020, the United States struck a deal with the Taliban that included a timeline for withdrawal. Ackerman blames the agreement for having “fatally delegitimized President [Ashraf] Ghani and his central government.” That agreement was flawed and probably accelerated the government’s downfall. But it was far from a primary cause of the collapse. For all its problems, the deal should be credited as an effort to salvage the possibility of intra-Afghan peacemaking and for ensuring that the United States could withdraw without a fight. The agreement must be judged against the backdrop of President Donald Trump’s decision to pull out U.S. forces from the country. There is little evidence to suggest that the brittle Afghan government would have remained intact had the United States withdrawn without a deal.

Ackerman joins a sizable camp of critics who have blamed the United States for not being committed enough to fighting the war. But he fails to explain what being committed enough would have looked like, beyond creating an impression that the U.S. military would remain in the fight indefinitely. What should the United States have done that it had not already done—and for how much longer? Ackerman does not say. However long the United States might have stayed, the Taliban would have stayed longer.

Ackerman decries the lack of a “social construct to sustain” the war, by which he means a war tax or draft that would have, in his view, entailed greater buy-in from the American public. But he leaves unclear how such

steps would have helped and ignores their political implausibility. At the same time, he implies that the United States should have rationalized keeping troops in Afghanistan, instead of pulling out, by claiming they were not “at war,” such as the United States has done in Syria and parts of Africa. But it strains credulity to suggest that even keeping a relatively small number of U.S. troops in the country indefinitely would have meant that there was anything other than a war going on: in 2021 alone, there were over 35,000 war-related deaths in Afghanistan. What is more, to suggest that U.S. officials should have downplayed the war sits uneasily with Ackerman’s contention that they also should have encouraged ordinary Americans to personally invest in it more.

THE DENOUEMENT

Ackerman played a laudable role in helping Afghans escape their country as the Taliban advanced on Kabul in August 2021. And his depiction of the evacuation as chaotic is undeniably true. But his vantage point, from thousands of miles away, could offer only a limited view. He weaves descriptions of text messages, emails, and phone calls about evacuating Afghans with vignettes from his family vacation in Italy, which happened at the same time, a juxtaposition that is hardly illuminating.

Ackerman provides limited portraits of the Afghan evacuees he assisted; as he notes, he didn’t know most of them. His efforts to aid strangers in need were admirable. But the lack of a personal connection means that readers who want a

rich account of the final days of the U.S. war in Afghanistan—including the experience of the Afghans whose lives were turned upside down—will need to look elsewhere.

Despite the book's subtitle, its focus is not the end of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. Ackerman was not there during the withdrawal, and he does not suggest that he has closely studied the denouement. Nonetheless, he regards the timing of the withdrawal as arbitrary and its handling as a betrayal. He proposes that the United States should have extracted more Afghans, and sooner. But nothing would have precipitated widespread panic and the collapse of the Afghan government with greater certainty than the United States evacuating hundreds of thousands of Afghans well in advance of the withdrawal date—whenever that date was set to be. And it is doubtful that a more deliberate evacuation, rather than a quick and reactive one, could have been sustained with less chaos as the government crumbled and the Taliban rolled into Kabul.

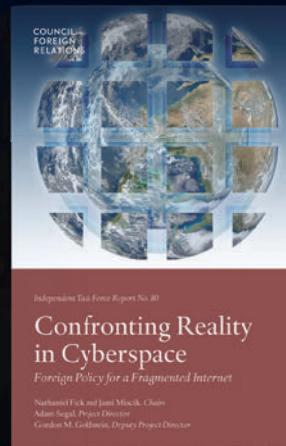
Ackerman's position presupposes that the United States should have risked this highly probable sequence of events. But Ackerman, like many critics of the withdrawal process, fails to acknowledge the dilemma that U.S. policymakers faced. It is undeniable that aspects of the emergency evacuation could have benefited from advance planning. For example, the U.S. government could have processed more Special Immigrant Visas, for which Afghans who worked for the United States are allowed to apply. But the notion that a massive

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FOREIGN
RELATIONS

INDEPENDENT TASK FORCE REPORT NO. 80

Confronting Reality in Cyberspace: Implications for the United States

The era of the global internet is over. A bipartisan Task Force finds that, with the rise of authoritarian powers like China and Russia, the United States needs a new foreign policy for cyberspace to secure its economic and security interests.



Read the full report:
[cfr.org/Cyberspace](https://www.cfr.org/Cyberspace)

evacuation could have been carried out well ahead of the August 31 deadline without turmoil is fanciful. Furthermore, since the withdrawal, the United States and private groups have arranged for passage out of the country for thousands more Afghans, including many who were vulnerable or who had worked with U.S. forces.

NO WAY OUT

In the final years of the war, it became clear that Washington's choice in Afghanistan was between losing quickly or losing slowly. When U.S. President Joe Biden decided in April 2021 to completely pull out, he chose to lose fast, though how fast was uncertain. Ackerman claims that "the Afghan government had fought the Taliban to a stalemate when President Biden announced his withdrawal." This is false; in fact, the Taliban had been gaining ground for years, especially since the United States began to draw down its forces after 2014. After that point, some U.S. officials called the situation an "eroding stalemate"—an oxymoron. Moreover, Ghani's domestic legitimacy and grip on the political system had become shaky, and he remained dependent on foreign aid and military support.

Once Biden decided to withdraw, there were two plausible outcomes to the war that might have taken hold. In the first scenario, the Taliban would gain ground, sparking a protracted battle to control cities, which would possibly have devolved into a multifactional civil war. In the second scenario, which is the one that materialized, the withdrawal would provoke a crisis of confidence among

Afghans, leading to a rapid collapse of their government and security forces. It would have been difficult for the United States to predict the likelihood of the second scenario because it depended on accurately evaluating how a vast number of Afghans would feel about continuing their fight—a measurement the U.S. had little capability to make.

There was always a risk that the chaos that blighted the denouement would have occurred in any withdrawal. Some critiques of how the Biden administration handled the pullout, including several leveled by Ackerman, are fair. But by dwelling so much on what happened during 15 days in 2021, his book implies that the principal failures had to do with how the United States got out of Afghanistan, rather than how it got in—and what it did while it was there. What the final days show most of all is the hollowness of the Afghan government and the security institutions that the United States tried so hard to build over two decades. If the story that Americans come to tell themselves about the Afghan war focuses not on those realities but on the organization and timing of the U.S. exit, it will distract them from the war's most important lessons: there is a limit to what American money and willpower can achieve, and the best way to avoid having to get out of an unwinnable war is to avoid getting into one. 🌐

REVIEW ESSAY

The World Tech Made

Can Silicon Valley Be Redeemed?

MARGARET O'MARA

The Internet Is Not What You Think It Is: A History, a Philosophy, a Warning
BY JUSTIN E. H. SMITH. Princeton University Press, 2022, 208 pp.

Work Pray Code: When Work Becomes Religion in Silicon Valley
BY CAROLYN CHEN. Princeton University Press, 2022, 272 pp.

Dignity in a Digital Age: Making Tech Work for All of Us
BY RO KHANNA. Simon & Schuster, 2022, 368 pp.

“**W**e are as gods and might as well get used to it.” So began Stewart Brand’s introduction to the first issue of *The Whole Earth Catalog*, an encyclopedic compendium of resources for back-to-the-land living that became a foundational document of Silicon Valley’s techno-utopian culture. The *Catalog* departed from typical countercultural fare in seeking to impart technological know-how to commune dwellers. It included the use of handheld calculators and treatises on information theory among its recommended essentials for self-sufficient living. Such skills and knowledge, Brand explained, were

hoarded by big corporations, government agencies, schools, and churches. It was time to return power to the people and give them the tools to shape their individual destinies.

In 1968, the year of the *Catalog*’s debut, the real power in American life lay far from Brand’s storefront publishing house in the sleepy northern California suburb of Menlo Park. The ten firms atop the Fortune 500 were four oil companies, three carmakers, two other major manufacturers, and only one computer company: IBM.

Today, six of the ten most valuable corporations in the world are U.S. computer hardware and software companies.

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A seventh, Tesla, produces electric cars that are essentially supercomputers on wheels. All of these companies hail from the West Coast. All have grown to enormous size on promises of individual empowerment and social betterment, with slogans such as “think different,” “don’t be evil,” and “make history.” Today’s technology firms are not merely enterprises but social institutions driven by an almost messianic sense of purpose. They have taken Brand’s urging quite literally. The gods, it appears, have gotten used to it.

The social and political upheavals of recent years have gravely tested this sunny narrative, however, leading to intense public scrutiny of the data-extracting business models behind Silicon Valley’s growth and wealth. Algorithmically curated social media platforms have connected most of humanity, but they have also allowed disinformation and political extremism to metastasize. Mobile apps have delivered frictionless convenience by relying on armies of underpaid gig workers. In 2019, the social theorist Shoshanna Zuboff gave the industry’s inescapable data-tracking a piquant and malevolent handle—“surveillance capitalism”—becoming one of many authors crowding the bestseller lists with sharp critiques of Silicon Valley as a place, an industry, and an idea.

But even as public ambivalence grew, the COVID-19 pandemic directed more and more users to the platforms, sending tech-sector market valuations soaring, along with their founders’ fortunes. Large technology companies have become more powerful than any of the firms *The Whole Earth Catalog* hoped to subvert.

Three new books—one by a historian and philosopher, another by a sociologist, a third by a sitting member of Congress—insist on a Silicon Valley reckoning. In *The Internet Is Not What You Think It Is*, the philosopher Justin Smith looks to the past to explain both the Internet’s true antiquity and its unparalleled capacity to distract, consume, and transform its users. In *Work Pray Code*, the sociologist Carolyn Chen dissects the immersive and influential work culture of Silicon Valley’s present. And the U.S. Congressman Ro Khanna’s *Dignity in a Digital Age* looks to the future: to a techno-geography remade, a tech workforce reimagined, and a policy environment reformed.

All three works offer fresh takes on what is now a well-worn subject. Although remote on their own stratospheric plane of existence, the gods of technology may want to listen to what these critics have to say.

THE SEARCH FOR ORDER

Few texts have placed the Internet in a broader context than does Smith’s probing critique. “We are the targets of a global corporate resource-extraction effort on a scale the world has never before seen,” Smith writes darkly in the first pages of *The Internet Is Not What You Think It Is*. But this trim volume should not be mistaken for merely another surveillance-capitalism lament. His “philosophy of the internet” is less concerned with tearing down or breaking up big technology companies than with “clarifying the nature of the force with which we are contending.”

Overloaded with information, Smith observes, people fail to grasp the significance of the Internet. Users are dis-

tracted and disengaged, living a life of continual interruption, their prefrontal cortexes muddled by online society's perpetual anxiety and alarm. "By allowing the internet to compel us to attend to a stream of different, trivial things," he writes, "we have become unable to focus on the monolithically important thing it is." Underneath the platforms, apps, and multitudinous diversions lies the backbone of the digital world—a material force with a physicality, a politics, and a history.

To unpack the crisis of online life, Smith goes back in time, earlier than most histories of computing and beyond human histories altogether. Consider the Internet the latest network of many, he urges. Think of telecommunication as not something merely human-made but natural, ecological, essential.

Thus, 50 pages into a book about the Internet, the reader must consider the sonic vibrations of an elephant's stomp, the chemical signals emitted by tomato plants, and the pheromones of moths. In all these cases, critical fragments of information move through space from one living thing to another, hold equal sonic or olfactory weight, and form webs of connection without one central node. In this delicate light, the Internet's nonhierarchical design does not seem that novel after all.

Smith then returns to the human realm, moving back and forth across continents and centuries as he chronicles human efforts to reckon with space, time, and knowledge itself. For millennia, human beings have tried to impose their own order on the ineffable, not only through religion and other systems of knowledge but

also through machines. Roger Bacon, a thirteenth-century English natural philosopher, allegedly devised what Smith describes as a "medieval Siri," a bronze automaton known as Brazen Head that was supposed to be capable of answering yes-or-no questions. The seventeenth-century German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, a figure about whom Smith has written extensively, pursued an early modern variety of artificial intelligence that could calculate without judgment, eliminate philosophical confusion, and bring clear resolution to human disputes. If Leibniz were living in the twenty-first century, he would probably be a Google engineer.

These early modern thinkers and tinkerers were trying to wrest rationality out of a thicket of mysticism. They dreamed of a machine-aided society unmuddled by religious belief. The ensuing age brought about the Industrial Revolution and a new, secular faith in organizations, bureaucracies, and balance sheets, a faith that venerated systems of classification capable of precisely surveying conquered land, cataloging flora and fauna, and, in its most damaging incarnations, arranging humankind into hierarchies of intelligence predicated on ethnicity, religion, and skin color.

Smith skips most of the twentieth century and thus does not tease out the connections between that earlier search for order and the Cold War political economy that built the foundations for Silicon Valley's eventual ascent. But the through lines are there: in Stanford University's reputation as a center of eugenics "science" in the early twentieth century; in a defense economy



Know the code: programming in San Francisco, July 2016

that enlisted the brightest engineering minds in developing high-tech and highly deadly weapons of war; in the *Catalog's* techno-optimistic faith that “access to tools” could transform the very structures of power; and in the creation of the Internet itself.

Like many other foundational technologies of the digital age, the Internet began as a Department of Defense project. It was funded in 1969 with a \$1 million appropriation that was a rounding error in the military's space budget. Its distributed design was the brainchild of computer scientists whose politics aligned more closely with those of Brand than of the Pentagon brass but whose aims were practical rather than political. They needed a way for the computers in their far-flung laboratories to communicate, and they didn't want one single institution—or the Pentagon—to be in charge. The resulting

nonhierarchical, interoperable system remained primarily academic and government-run for two decades, a network as far removed from commerce and profit as those of stomping elephants or fluttering moths.

The Internet is a good example of how the indirect nature of much Cold War defense spending—grants to universities, contracts to electronics and aerospace companies—both allowed technologists creative freedom and ultimately obscured the true extent of public-sector involvement in generating their success. Much of what the countercultural readers of *The Whole Earth Catalog* knew about computers came via something funded by the U.S. government: a college computer lab, a physics course, a research assistantship, a job at a defense-electronics firm. The military-industrial complex was everywhere they looked, its Vietnam War-era failures fueling their

desire to escape its tight embrace. When they successfully did so, a new creation story emerged: of young idealists in garages, tinkering their way to entrepreneurial glory, with nary a government bureaucrat in sight.

GOING TO CHURCH

The long tail of that narrative reframing comes into focus in Chen's *Work Pray Code*, a meticulous, absorbing ethnography of Silicon Valley workplaces. Temporally and geographically, Smith ranges far beyond Silicon Valley in search of answers to the problems created by full immersion in modern technology. Chen, a sociologist at the University of California at Berkeley, looks deep inside it. There, amid snack stations and Ping-Pong tables, she finds religion.

The gospel of the *Catalog* endures in the Valley's gargantuan office complexes but now provides a technoutopian gloss for an especially relentless variant of modern corporate capitalism. Workers tell Chen of their desire "to make a difference in the world" by logging 70-hour weeks. Firms invite New Age spiritualists to deliver keynote addresses at corporate meetings and sponsor workplace seminars on personal and spiritual improvement. (Participants in one such course, at Google, called the exercise "going to church.")

Sprawling tech campuses are as immersive and as attentive to the lives of employees as 1960s communes were for their residents. Workers at enterprises such as Apple and Google can access abundant organic produce and yoga on demand. One-time countercultural seekers have pivoted

to lucrative careers as "meditation entrepreneurs," coaching corporate employees through their inescapable periods of burnout.

The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly silenced this busy beehive, beginning two years of mostly remote operations that cast doubt on the future of office work. But as Chen notes in her later chapters, the perks of working for these companies seamlessly migrated home as well: free meditation apps and online therapy, cash stipends for self-care, subsidies for office furniture. Although the form of Silicon Valley's post-pandemic workplace remains uncertain—will workers return to their desks, maintain hybrid schedules, or go completely remote?—these institutional habits are now too ingrained to abandon. Perks are not extras, but essentials.

Even in prosperous times, success does not come easy in Silicon Valley. Most startups fail, many new products flop, and true technological innovation is elusive. One bad performance review or disappointing quarter can cost a worker a job. To keep faith in technology, as in any religion, Chen notes, one must "believe in things yet unseen."

Religiosity has long infused American capitalism. Earnest Silicon Valley mission statements are latter-day updates of the oil magnate John Rockefeller's pious declaration in 1905 that "the power to make money is a gift from God." Altruistic pronouncements by technology billionaires—"I believe that the wealthy have a responsibility to invest in addressing inequity," Bill Gates wrote in 2009, shortly after pledging his Microsoft riches to

establish the world's largest philanthropic foundation—deliberately echo Andrew Carnegie's 1889 essay "The Gospel of Wealth," which declared that the rich had a moral obligation to give away their fortunes in their lifetimes. Silicon Valley's saintly elevation of the founder-entrepreneur follows a century of management theory that celebrated such figures for their work ethic and higher purpose. "The impulse which drives him forward," wrote one panegyrist about a tycoon of industry in 1914, "is the joyful power to create."

But all this faith ultimately serves the bottom line. Extravagantly appointed tech cathedrals, such as the sprawling Google headquarters in Mountain View, California, are the latest incarnation of Gilded Age company towns, designed to forestall labor organizing and impose moral order on a workforce. Such welfare capitalism has morphed into what Chen resonantly terms "corporate maternalism," which "monetizes the nonproductive parts of life that the busy tech worker has no time for—eating, exercising, rest, hobbies, spirituality, and friendships—and makes them part of work." Exhortations to practice mindfulness and get more sleep seem like empathy but are really geared to making workers more efficient. Focused, well-rested employees are more productive and less likely to jump ship.

The quirks and perks of Silicon Valley work culture have been extensively chronicled by tech journalists, deftly satirized by Hollywood showrunners, and exuberantly evangelized in business bestsellers. Through Chen's sharply focused sociological lens, they inform a bigger story: about the human

search for meaning and security in a world where a handful of companies and people wield so much power over what matters and who wins.

The rise of technology companies is the ironic culmination of the United States' long revolt against bigness. Institutions that once knit communities together in shared, though not necessarily harmonious or equitable, understanding—churches, civic groups, unions, and the government itself—have been diminished or discredited. Once stable jobs and industries have succumbed to the churn of economic globalization and cost cutting. But people still need to find meaning and purpose in their lives. An earnest, privileged, beatific enclave on the far western edge of North America has rushed in to fill the gap.

TAMING THE VALLEY

Tales of the techlash tend to operate at one of several levels of analysis. Many focus, as Smith does, on how the digital affects the individual, grappling with what technology is doing to brains, habits, and attention spans. Others, such as Chen's, examine the world of the digital-age corporation and the business ecosystems those corporations create.

A third group scales up to the level of countries and societies. They don't only ask why the technology sector has become so indispensable and so problematic: they search for policy remedies.

Khanna is a former Obama administration official who currently represents Silicon Valley in the U.S. Congress. In some respects, his *Dignity in a Digital Age* is a policy book of familiar type. It is dense with human

stories and legislative ideas, written by a lawmaker of wonky enthusiasm and political ambition, cannily published at the start of an election year. But few books of its kind offer folksy tales of encounters with constituents interwoven with sober discussion of political theorists and philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas and Martha Nussbaum or invoke Frederick Douglass and John Rawls while making a case for better platform regulation.

The crisis that Americans face, Khanna argues, cannot be solved by simply taming a few technology companies. Instead, it requires reordering society's priorities. The goal should be to ensure human dignity, a concept Khanna draws from Amartya Sen, the Nobel Prize-winning economist who also supplied the book's foreword. "A key pillar of building a multiracial, multireligious democracy is providing every person in every place with the prospect of a dignified life," writes Khanna, "including the potential to contribute in and shape the digital age." Thoughtful public policy can bring about this kind of change, he argues with convincing technocratic optimism. All that is needed is political will. Americans may live in the world Silicon Valley has made, Khanna avers, but they can and must make that world better.

The author has navigated this middle ground nimbly since he arrived in Congress in 2017, a progressive-left Democrat representing the capital of Big Tech in a time of intensifying fury against the industry. He is an ally and admirer of the tech trustbuster Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, and his critique of

the industry's failings is unsparing, particularly when calling out the sexism and racial exclusion in technology firms, whose top ranks remain overwhelmingly white and male. Yet Khanna also proclaims the Valley "a magical place for start-ups and founders," where appetite for risk, forgiveness of failure, and enthusiasm for big challenges "are in direct contrast to how Washington, D.C., works."

Despite such Reaganesque flourishes, Silicon Valley's congressman channels the spirit of another U.S. president, Franklin Roosevelt, in making his case for bringing the state back in. Khanna's main prescriptions echo the original New Deal in structure and soul: public investment to bring jobs and growth to a left-behind hinterland; legislation to advance workers' rights and raise pay and benefits; regulation of big companies to protect consumers and advance democracy. "Instead of passively allowing tech royalty and their legions to lead the digital revolution and serve narrow financial ends before all others," Khanna writes, "we need to put it in service of our broader democratic aspirations."

Khanna's emphasis on public-sector solutions is a contrast to the passionately held gospel of many of his high-tech constituents. Because technology companies grew large and successful in an era when government deliberately minimized its own role, today's tech leaders generally see public policy as an impediment to innovation and disdain the grubby business of policymaking and partisanship.

In a widely hailed 2020 essay, Netscape co-founder and venture capitalist

Marc Andreessen lamented that the grievous institutional failures of the United States' COVID-19 response exposed the country's "widespread inability to build." Andreessen refrained from saying precisely who or what should lead a turnaround but declared in characteristic tech-mogul fashion that "we need to separate the imperative to build these things from ideology and politics."

A recent follow-up blog post by Andreessen's colleague Katherine Boyle was more pointed: the solution lies with entrepreneurs. "The *only* way to reverse the course of stagnation and kickstart nationwide renewal post-COVID is through technologists building companies that support the national interest," Boyle wrote. She added, "It's now easier to solve critical national problems through startups."

Few places in the United States are deeper shades of blue than the Bay Area and its big-tech sibling, Seattle. But the contrast between the way many in tech hubs see the world and Khanna's "progressive capitalist" agenda is a reminder of how much the modern technology industry is a product of the United States' 40-year turn toward the market.

Silicon Valley had its roots in the Keynesian military-industrial complex, but it became a corporate colossus in a supply-side age of tax cuts and deregulation. The policy shift propelled technological and economic growth, making billionaires out of talented computer geeks such as Andreessen. But this growth came at the cost of denuded government revenues and degraded public services.

In California, the 1978 passage of Proposition 13, a strict property-tax

cap, so sharply curtailed local revenue that the state's public schools now have one of the lowest rates of per capita student funding in the nation. In Silicon Valley and other tech hubs, fragmented public transit and overburdened infrastructure make for choking traffic and grinding commutes. Cushioned from the full impact of governmental austerity by school fundraising, corporate shuttles, and the workplace perks Chen describes, it is perhaps unsurprising that technologists do not always recognize the urgent need for public reinvestment.

A DIVINE SYNCHRONICITY

The intense concentration of corporate power and cultural capital in the technology sector has sparked a fierce backlash, its reverberations evident in these three books. Yet the sound and fury has done little to slow the Silicon Valley wealth machine. The digital economy has supersized and expanded, disrupted old categories and classifications, and liberated people to join the glorious online mess. Americans lament the turbulent times and argue over how much social media is responsible for them. They curse their endless scrolling and shattered attention spans. Yet they are utterly, hopelessly dependent on the information and connective social tissue that the Internet provides.

The COVID-19 pandemic made this dilemma clear. For Khanna, the pandemic underscored digital capitalism's stark inequities but also showed how remote work could more fairly distribute wealth and talent. Chen conducted her 100-plus interviews between 2013 and 2017 and thus discusses

the pandemic only at her book's end, but she pointedly notes that going remote only widened Silicon Valley's vast inequities and underscored the economic chasm bifurcating modern American life. White-collar technologists remained safely at home in their company-bought ergonomic chairs, while thousands of gig workers, custodians, and shuttle drivers lined up at food banks and dodged eviction.

Smith has the sharpest pandemic commentary, as his book exists only because COVID-19 lockdowns closed off archives he planned to use during a sabbatical year. Instead, he was at home, with e-books and pixelated digital facsimiles his only sources and Zoom meetings his only means of collegial conversation.

Smith realized that the ad hoc arrangements the pandemic produced were less a workplace reboot than an acceleration of existing trends toward work lives of perpetual digital immersion. "While we may attempt to write this off as a temporary compensation," he ruefully concludes, "the truth is that the pandemic has really only pushed us over a ledge on which we already teetered."

The reckoning machines have succeeded beyond their creators' wildest dreams. The rationalists have triumphed. A society-smashing pandemic enriched the technology sector so enormously that its moguls gave away billions and still saw their net worth rise. Even as the market turned bearish in early 2022, the combined market capitalization of the five largest technology companies made up over one-fifth of the value of the S&P 500. These giants have amassed

enough profit and market share to weather an economic downturn and possibly emerge even stronger.

Silicon Valley's empire of binary code encircles the planet, leaving individuals and firms searching (and paying) for relief through the mysticism of ancient faiths: mindfulness apps, yoga retreats, walking meditation labyrinths with corporate logos at their center. These diversions are but brief interludes away from lives of staring at screens, tapping keyboards and smartphones, communing with the digital tools with which the modern mind is now melded. "I find there is perfect coordination, almost like ballet, in my own human-computer interface," Smith muses about his online writerly self, "of not just hand and eye, but of hand, eye, and world." It is a synchronicity so complete as to be nearly divine. 🌐

Recent Books

Political and Legal

G. JOHN IKENBERRY

Liberalism and Its Discontents

BY FRANCIS FUKUYAMA. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022, 192 pp.

In this learned work, Fukuyama shows that liberalism's great advantage over rival ideologies in the modern era has been its ability to create the political conditions that allow for the coexistence of an array of hallowed but often contradictory values: liberty, equality, individualism, and community. He argues that liberalism is now being challenged from both the right and the left, as older compromises over class and culture have broken down. Progressives decry liberalism as neoliberalism, as manifest in ruinous financial crises and growing inequality. Conservatives point to the elevation of personal autonomy and identity politics as a threat to traditional religious and cultural beliefs. According to Fukuyama, the extreme versions of these critiques will lead not to reform, compromise, and a rebalancing of principles but to a deeply divisive postliberal future. Right-wing forces may push their societies in the direction of authoritarianism, while those on the left will seek a more systemic

redistribution of wealth and power, as well as the greater formal recognition of group, rather than individual, rights. Fukuyama sees the right-wing threats to liberalism as much more immediate and existential. But if liberalism is to survive, partisans across the political spectrum will need to find new grand compromises, rediscovering and forging national traditions of universal civic rights and shared political community.

The Age of the Strongman: How the Cult of the Leader Threatens Democracy Around the World

BY GIDEON RACHMAN. Other Press, 2022, 288 pp.

Rachman provides one of the most vivid and incisive accounts yet of the new authoritarianism that has swept the world. In Brazil, China, Hungary, India, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Turkey, and the United States, a diverse cohort of would-be authoritarian leaders have emerged, each seeking to establish personalistic forms of one-man rule by serving up political cocktails of fear, grievance, nationalism, and reactionary populism. What Rachman finds most interesting is that the strongman model of rule has grown in both democratic and autocratic systems. From former U.S. President Donald Trump

to Russian President Vladimir Putin, strongman leaders cement their hold on power through a cult of personality, contempt for the rule of law, and populist attacks on the elite establishment and the liberal consensus of the 1990s. In country after country, strongman leaders appeal to people “left behind” in rural areas and small towns, invoking nostalgia for a lost glorious past. Rachman argues that the strongman ethos is deeply rooted in global economic and technological changes and in the failures of and disillusionment with liberal democracy. But strongmen have their own weaknesses: personalistic rule cannot last forever, and dictators are rarely able to deliver what they promise.

*Rules: A Short History of
What We Live By*

BY LORRAINE DASTON. Princeton University Press, 2022, 384 pp.

In this intimidatingly erudite tour de force, Daston offers a sweeping global history of the rise and evolution of rules in societies and civilizations. Most of what Daston uncovers is hidden in plain sight. Rules emerged and proliferated everywhere to support and constrain human activity, ranging from the simple (rules for driving, tipping in a restaurant, and when to leave a dinner party) to the intricate and world-spanning (rules for managing the global economy, fighting wars, and pursuing scientific research). Daston’s history suggests that rules have proliferated in the last two millennia, creating a “cat’s cradle of complexity almost as complex as culture itself.” She argues that since Greco-Roman antiquity, rules have taken three forms: tools of

measurement and calculation, models or paradigms, and laws. Using these categories, the book ranges omnivorously across monastic orders, cookbooks, mechanical calculations, military manuals, and legal treaties. Daston traces an arc of development from the ancient era to modern times that moves from a world of high variability and unpredictability to a more predictable and knowable world. But there is no inexorable logic of modernity at work in the evolution of rules; in the past and the present, rules can be used both to liberate and to oppress.

Where the Evidence Leads: A Realistic Strategy for Peace and Human Security
BY ROBERT C. JOHANSEN. Oxford University Press, 2021, 440 pp.

In this ambitious and masterful study, Johansen advances a set of sweeping principles and strategies for peace-building and security in the twenty-first century. Driving the book is a sustained critique of realist-inspired U.S. foreign policy, which may have served U.S. interests during the Cold War but which is now completely incapable of grappling with today’s planetary threats and dangers. Johansen hopes for a paradigm shift in Washington’s global security strategy, one that recognizes that the United States must reckon with the declining utility of war, the rise of nonstate actors, the proliferation of transnational problems such as climate change, and the growth of world poverty and desolation. If this new vision is to take hold, activists and transnational social movements will need to lead the way. Johansen’s eloquent appeal for new thinking is inspired by cosmopolitanism and deep moral conviction, but his eye

remains firmly fixed on how policymakers in the real world can shift their priorities to move the United States and the rest of the world closer to the realization of unifying human ideals.

The Downfall of the American Order?

EDITED BY PETER J. KATZENSTEIN AND JONATHAN KIRSHNER. Cornell University Press, 2022, 246 pp.

This engaging collection of essays brings distinguished scholars of political economy together to explore the changing faces of economic liberalism within the U.S.-led postwar international order. Kirshner considers the role of Keynesian ideas in the postwar efforts to find a “third way” between unfettered markets and planned economies. Mark Blyth offers a revisionist account of the establishment of the initial U.S.-led order between World War II and the 1970s, stressing not the farsighted power of planners in Washington but accidents and improvisations driven by Cold War imperatives. Rawi Abdelal makes the provocative argument that the neoliberalism that came to the fore in the 1980s was the work of European thinkers, not American ones, and that it ushered in growth and prosperity in the global South even as it generated economic inequality and financial instability in the North. Katzenstein offers trenchant observations on the complexity and contingency of the evolution of liberalism in all its varieties across the last century. The value of this volume is not in a shared judgment about the future of the U.S.-led international order but in the richness of the debate about how orders, liberal and otherwise, are shaped and reshaped.

Economic, Social, and Environmental

BARRY EICHENGREEN

The Journey of Humanity: The Origins of Wealth and Inequality

BY ODED GALOR. Dutton, 2022, 304 pp.

To call this book ambitious is an understatement. The author offers a unified account of the development of living standards over the course of human history. Galor attributes the stagnation of incomes for 99 percent of history to the Malthusian trap—to the tendency for populations to grow in response to technological progress that raises incomes, putting pressure on the land until living standards fall back to subsistence levels. But he also links the acceleration of technological progress to population growth, arguing that more people made for more inventors and more successful inventions. As technological progress accelerated, societies reached a tipping point. Parents realized that to succeed in a quickly changing world, their offspring had to be equipped with education and skills to enable them to adapt; this expensive investment in children in turn required fertility control. From this point, population growth no longer responded positively to technological progress, and living standards took off. The argument ranges over the roles of culture, institutions, and genetics in economic development and underdevelopment. One need not agree with the author that his framework is entirely novel to be provoked.

Streets of Gold: America's Untold Story of Immigrant Success

BY RAN ABRAMITZKY AND LEAH BOUSTAN. PublicAffairs, 2022, 256 pp.

In this scholarly yet engaging book, the authors synthesize more than a decade of their historical research on U.S. immigration, dispelling myths and discerning patterns. They combine personal stories drawn from memoirs, secondary accounts, and other sources with careful data analysis. Abramitzky and Boustan helped pioneer the use of machine learning to link records and trace individuals across decennial population censuses and to harvest data from genealogical websites such as Ancestry.com. Putting these sources and methods to work, they establish that today's immigrants to the United States continue to succeed economically to at least the same extent as those of earlier eras. Children of immigrants do even better economically than children of the native born. Immigrants erroneously seen as slow to assimilate (for instance, the Irish in the nineteenth century and Central Americans today) in fact assimilate the fastest. More surprising, immigrants rarely compete for jobs and success with native-born workers. They are a source of entrepreneurial and scientific talent that benefits the country as a whole. This evidence-based analysis leads the authors to recommend less restrictive immigration policies.

Fixing the Climate: Strategies for an Uncertain World

BY CHARLES F. SABEL AND DAVID G. VICTOR. Princeton University Press, 2022, 256 pp.

The climate crisis poses a problem of global collective action that governments have sought to address through high-level international negotiations. The resulting arrangements, such as the 2015 Paris agreement, mandate compulsory reductions in emissions and require comprehensive plans for meeting those targets. The authors argue that these treaties are failing because they provide inadequate opportunity for initiative and experimentation at the subnational level. Since the route to successful emissions reduction is fundamentally uncertain, experimentation with different technologies and approaches is essential. Given that the best course is unknowable at the outset, successful strategies are likely to be developed locally and contextualized to local needs. Instead of insisting that all countries must endorse the details of a global agreement, like-minded governments and firms should forge ahead with their own solutions. Sharing the results of their efforts—what works, what doesn't—will then limit the costs and risks of adaptation to climate change, while trade taxes and reputational penalties can bring reluctant governments and firms on board. The authors point to the 1987 Montreal Protocol, which protects the ozone layer, as a successful example of this kind of experimental governance. Californians similarly might point to their state's stringent fuel economy standards and to its plan for banning the internal combustion engine.

Military, Scientific, and Technological

LAWRENCE D. FREEDMAN

*Fugitives: A History of Nazi
Mercenaries During the Cold War*
BY DANNY ORBACH. Pegasus, 2022,
400 pp.

Orbach has written a detailed, sobering, and absorbing account of the many ways in which ex-Nazis managed to lead comfortable and active lives after World War II. He begins with General Reinhard Gehlen, a former Wehrmacht analyst, who used his trove of material on Soviet forces to start a new career running an intelligence organization, first for the Americans and then later for West Germany. Gehlen drew on the Third Reich's vehement anticommunism while shedding the rest of his Nazi baggage. Other former Nazis moved closer to Moscow, including as KGB agents who used Gehlen's organization to insert themselves into West German intelligence. Many never abandoned their anti-Semitism. One of the architects of the Holocaust, Alois Brunner, ended up in Damascus, where he advised the regime of Hafez al-Assad on torture techniques and sought to avoid the fate of his former boss Adolf Eichmann, who was kidnapped by the Israelis in 1960 while hiding in Argentina. Orbach includes some jaw-dropping stories of double dealing, espionage, and outright criminality. The book inevitably raises questions about those in

the West who were happy to make use of these ex-Nazis without worrying about their checkered pasts.

*The Great War and the
Birth of Modern Medicine*
BY THOMAS HELLING. Pegasus,
2022, 496 pp.

It is one of the paradoxes of war that the enormous effort put into harming people often gives rise to medical breakthroughs and great strides in the treatment of the wounded. This valuable and thoroughly interesting study, informed by the author's own experience of military surgery, contributes to the histories of both World War I and modern medicine. Helling shows how the horrors of war spurred medical research, including about how to address the effects of gas, reconstruct disfigured faces, use simple splints so that shattered limbs mended in ways that avoided later deformities, understand the psychology of "shell shock," and deal with the influenza epidemic that began in 1918. It was not just new techniques that made the difference but also new infrastructure, as surgical facilities were moved closer to the frontlines so that soldiers could be treated as quickly as possible.

*A Question of Standing:
The History of the CIA*
BY RHODRI JEFFREYS-JONES.
Oxford University Press, 2022, 320 pp.

Jeffreys-Jones, who has been studying the trials and tribulations of the CIA for many years, provides a concise, informed, and thoughtful history of the agency.

Intelligence agencies will never fully satisfy their political masters because some important events simply cannot be anticipated. The CIA has had the additional problem of being responsible for covert operations. The exposure of such operations and consequential embarrassment (perhaps most famously in the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961) has given the CIA an unwelcome reputation for torture, assassinations, and coups. It can be tempting to treat the agency's history as a succession of scandals, awkward revelations, and official investigations—a “legacy of ashes,” as the journalist Tim Weiner has dubbed it. Jeffreys-Jones's approach is more balanced, addressing such issues as “excessive Ivy League influence” and lack of diversity in the agency. He notes that much of the CIA's influence depends on its relationship with the sitting administration. For the system to work best, the CIA's director must have access to the president and be given the autonomy to present uncomfortable assessments while resisting politically convenient claims—a task the agency has often failed to accomplish, perhaps most significantly in the run-up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

A Continent Erupts: Decolonization, Civil War, and Massacre in Postwar Asia, 1945–1955

BY RONALD H. SPECTOR. Norton, 2022, 560 pp.

After the Japanese surrender in World War II in August 1945, European powers reclaimed their former colonies in Asia, failing to appreciate how much their return would be resented and resisted. The world is still living with the consequences of this complacency and the

violent conflicts it triggered. In this compelling account, Spector combines meticulous research with lively writing to describe these extraordinary bloody conflicts, as the Dutch struggled to hold on to Indonesia, the French to Indochina, and the British, more successfully, to Malaya. The United States became involved in Asia to check the growth of communism (especially in the wake of Mao Zedong's victory over the nationalists in China in 1949), culminating in the decision to defend South Korea from the North's invasion in the summer of 1950. Washington viewed matters through a Cold War lens, neglecting the strong anticolonial currents rippling through the upheavals of the time. By 1955, the end of Spector's period of investigation, most of the old colonies had won their independence, and the Korean War was over with the seemingly indelible partition of the peninsula.

The United States

JESSICA T. MATHEWS

Laboratories Against Democracy: How National Parties Transformed State Politics

BY JACOB GRUMBACH. Princeton University Press, 2022, 288 pp.

In 1932, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis labeled the 50 U.S. states “laboratories of democracy,” where new policies could be incubated, tested, and spread to other states. Grumbach uses masses of mostly quantitative data to take a new look at this widely held belief and concludes

that, if anything, the opposite is now true: state governments have become, in the author's phrasing, "laboratories against democracy." In today's deeply partisan environment, state governments are often dominated by one of the two national parties. In theory, lawmakers at the state level should be closer to their constituents and therefore more responsive to their needs. In practice, this doesn't hold. Voters pay even less attention to state elections than they do to ones at the federal level, allowing the choice of poorly prepared and extreme candidates and policy outcomes that are increasingly divorced from public opinion. (Bans on abortions passed by many states this summer are an obvious case in point.) Worse still, because states exert constitutional authority over election rules, many Republican-controlled states bent on suppressing Democratic voter turnout have become a threat to American democracy writ large. Grumbach concludes that in the interest of democracy and justice, the roles of state and local government should be reduced over the long term.

America's Great-Power Opportunity: Revitalizing U.S. Foreign Policy to Meet the Challenges of Strategic Competition

BY ALI WYNE. Polity, 2022, 224 pp.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's threats over the future of Taiwan underline the increasingly widespread view that U.S. foreign policy must return to the familiar realm of great-power competition. The "opportunity" in Wyne's somewhat misleading title is the opportunity not to accept that paradigm.

Great-power competition, he points out, is a phenomenon, not a framework: a description rather than a useful blueprint for policy. It dictates a posture that is inherently reactive, which would "cede the strategic initiative" to China and Russia and lure the United States into geopolitical detours tangential to its true national interests. Instead, the United States should build an "affirmative vision" based on its various competitive advantages (including its geography, ability to attract immigrants, strong currency, and numerous allies) that recognizes how much the world has changed in recent decades through globalization and the emergence of transnational threats that demand urgent collaboration. Wyne does not attempt to describe in any detail what such a policy might look like. But he makes a timely and compelling case that the United States should resist the temptation of simply reacting to the agendas and actions of other powers and instead pursue the more demanding but rewarding route of setting an independent course.

Social Media, Freedom of Speech, and the Future of Our Democracy

EDITED BY LEE C. BOLLINGER AND GEOFFREY R. STONE. Oxford University Press, 2022, 448 pp.

The evolution of digital technology—especially of social media—threatens the freedoms of speech and of the press enshrined in the First Amendment. In this elegant volume, equally valuable to specialists and lay readers, two lifelong scholars of First Amendment jurisprudence gather an array of experts to explore the problems presented by digital

technology and their possible solutions. The authors conclude that First Amendment law can adapt to this new technology as it has to new media in the past. Hate speech, conspiracy theories, and false and misleading information may be constitutionally protected, but placing limitations on the algorithms and artificial intelligence used to amplify such speech would be “content neutral,” hence constitutional. The authors also propose a way to modify, rather than revoke, the controversial Section 230 law that prevents online platforms from being held liable for the third-party content they publish. In the authors’ view, near-monopoly control by a few corporations, coupled with the system’s “perverse incentives” to avoid developing responsible standards, pose “extraordinary risks” to democracy. The rapid rate of technological change and the need for international coordination make workable regulation extremely difficult to design, but responsible reform, the authors conclude, is both possible and necessary.

The Destructionists: The Twenty-five Year Crack-Up of the Republican Party
BY DANA MILBANK. Doubleday,
2022, 416 pp.

Partisans: The Conservative Revolutionaries Who Remade American Politics in the 1990s
BY NICOLE HEMMER. Basic Books,
2022, 368 pp.

These two books cover much of the same history but merit individual attention. Both identify the 1990s as the key

decade that spawned the Republican Party that exists today. Milbank compresses every awful political occurrence of the past quarter century into a page-turner that is both difficult to stomach and hard to put down. He traces Donald Trump’s prehistory to the Republican revolution of 1994 which made Newt Gingrich become Speaker of the House and indelibly changed the language—and soon the content—of politics. Gingrich identified one of the Republican Party’s “great problems” as insufficient nastiness and produced a memo that laid out the words Republican candidates should use to describe their Democratic opponents: “sick, corrupt, cheat, betray, lie, steal, greed, destroy, pathetic, bizarre, anti-family,” and so on. Political compromise with such a group was obviously out of the question: unyielding obstructionism was the course to follow.

Rather than trace Trumpism’s roots, Hemmer begins several decades earlier by asking why the more moderate doctrine of Reaganism collapsed so quickly after President Ronald Reagan left office in 1989. Anticommunism, she finds, was the glue that held the various strands of American conservatism together. With the end of the Cold War, traditional conservatives and the New Right diverged, with the latter turning toward populism and increasingly overt racism. Pat Buchanan is the central figure in this telling. In three presidential runs, Buchanan championed the strand of conservative politics that Trump later channeled in his “America first” slogan, his opposition to NATO, hostility to immigrants, and support for trade tariffs. This was Buchanan’s populist,

xenophobic agenda with “few updates.” Hemmer focuses on the evolution of conservative views on key policies from isolationism to trade and on the crucial role of far-right media that sidelined mainstream Republicanism. Two weeks into the Barack Obama administration, the right-wing talk-show host Glenn Beck sensationally denounced the new president as a dictator: “We are really, truly stepping beyond socialism, and we’re starting to look at fascism.” As the narrative nears recent years, Hemmer’s account and Milbank’s converge in a similar retelling of the anger, grievance, nativism, anti-elitism, and conspiracy that Trump recognized and exploited.

Western Europe

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

Chums: How a Tiny Caste of Oxford Tories Took Over the UK

BY SIMON KUPER. Profile Books, 2022, 240 pp.

Most foreigners are perplexed by the flagrant air of diffidence and dilettantism with which former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other contemporary Brexiteers have ruled the United Kingdom. According to this engaging and detailed book, their conduct reflects their upbringing. Since 1955, five Conservative prime ministers (and a surprising number of their close associates) have attended Eton College and then Oxford University. At Eton, most of them studied ancient languages, read nostalgic tales of the British Empire,

honed their ability to speak in public, and triumphed over their peers in cutthroat schoolboy politics. Also, whether born to it or not, they learned how to wear white tie, speak with a proper accent, and break rules with a witty insouciance that signaled unquestioned upper-class privilege. Once at Oxford, they eschewed the study of the natural and social sciences in favor of English, constitutional history, and classics—subjects whose obvious lack of practical utility further cemented their social distinction and whose ease allowed them to fake their way through tutorials without sharpening analytical skills or spending hours reading. Instead, they frequented the Oxford Union, a venerable institution of which Johnson was president. At its parliamentary-style debates, they perfected the arts of manipulating arcane procedures, stabbing fellow students in the back, and, above all, making others laugh, which allowed them to triumph over those who came armed with facts, analysis, and a sense of public purpose. Three decades later, the result is an experienced cohort of superficially eccentric yet in fact resolutely reactionary leaders whose ability to appeal to both wealthy interests and popular prejudices has been honed to a fine edge. Theirs may be the last generation of such Oxford Tories, yet their policies may well influence the United Kingdom for generations.

Salazar: The Dictator Who Refused to Die
BY TOM GALLAGHER. Hurst, 2020, 360 pp.

In this book, a British academic expert on Portugal seeks to salvage the reputation of António Salazar, the autocrat who

ruled the country from 1932 to 1968. Few would quibble with the first half of the author's argument: rather than being a totalitarian, Salazar was a conservative. His rule was milder than that of contemporaries such as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and Franco. He engaged in only modest domestic repression, sought no territorial expansion, remained neutral in World War II, and took the side of the West in the Cold War. He wore no uniform, proposed no radical ideology, eschewed cults of personality, avoided mobilizing the masses, and lived a restrained and apparently incorrupt personal life. Some may balk, however, at the second half of the argument, namely that Salazar was a "benevolent autocrat," an interpretation that overlooks his suppression of multiparty democracy, his support for the Catholic Church's socially reactionary values, and his disinterest in economic development as long as the government budget remained in balance. The book also dismisses as insignificant Salazar's stubborn (and overtly racist) decision to defend the remains of Portugal's empire. Yet today Portugal is a stable democracy where a recent poll found that its citizens consider Salazar the greatest leader the country has ever had. Gallagher invites readers to wonder whether, in the end, Portugal's slow and cautious road to democracy might have been for the best.

Do Elections (Still) Matter?: Mandates, Institutions, and Policy in Western Europe
BY EMILIANO GROSSMAN AND
ISABELLE GUINAUDEAU. Oxford
University Press, 2022, 224 pp.

Many citizens of European countries, notably those on the far right and left,

believe that elections are meaningless. Politicians make promises, but no matter who wins, shadowy elites and self-serving politicians collude or produce gridlock. This rigorous and data-rich study of five European countries draws a less cynical conclusion. Although the leaders of victorious political parties cannot simply impose their preferred policies, their electoral promises do shape political priorities during their time in government. In multiparty proportional representation systems, such as those in Denmark, France, Germany, and Italy that accord some political representation on the basis of votes cast (and not simply seats won), important issues command focused attention from small groups of voters, who demand action. Ironically, opposition parties often play a critical role in this process of translating election promises into action, because they gain advantage by mobilizing those small groups to punish the government for its failure to deliver on its promises. The United Kingdom, however, emerges as an exception: British parties do not keep their promises. The first-past-the-post electoral system suppresses the distinct ideological identities of the major parties as politicians must try to win a broad electorate; they can afford to ignore the niche inclinations of small groups, whose particular interests have little hope of finding political representation. In such a system, opposition parties cannot score points by appealing to small groups and are therefore less able to hold their rivals to account. This dynamic helps explain not just the widespread perception of some recent British governments as

arbitrary and unpredictable but perhaps also the increasingly disillusioned attitude of voters in the world's other prominent majoritarian political system: the United States.

Foreign States in Domestic Markets: Sovereign Wealth Funds and the West
BY MARK THATCHER AND TIM VLANDAS. Oxford University Press, 2022, 192 pp.

Rising economic interdependence within a neoliberal global economy is often believed to be undermining the power of sovereign states. These authors respond that, in fact, states are in many respects more active than ever. Over the past 20 years, for example, massive state-run sovereign wealth funds based in Asia and the Middle East have, often acting at the direction of their governments, purchased or invested in many leading financial, retail, sports, media, industry, and technology companies in the United States and Europe. One might have expected a hostile reaction to efforts by figures from nondemocratic countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates to buy into Western economies. Yet most in the West have welcomed such state investment. The only major country to enact laws discriminating against these foreign entities, thereby limiting their presence, is the United States. Despite their patina of political science jargon, the four case studies in this book offer basic data and succinct analysis of recent policies on this issue—which is sure to loom large as Western democracies ponder how to respond to the rising geoeconomic power of their global competitors.

The New Atlantic Order: The Transformation of International Politics, 1860–1933

BY PATRICK O. COHRS. Cambridge University Press, 2022, 1,112 pp.

This magisterial work focuses on the failure to prevent World War II. Realists and liberal defenders of the League of Nations have long contended that after World War I, France, the United Kingdom, and, above all, the United States should have formed a military alliance to contain Germany. Cohrs advances a less well-known argument. In his view, any European order based solely on military containment was doomed unless it addressed the deeper sources of all European conflicts from 1850 to the present: diverging claims of national self-determination, opposing economic and financial interests, and intense ideological strife between the political right, left, and center. Not enough was done at Versailles—and, the author sometimes seems to suggest, not enough could possibly have been done—to resolve these matters in ways that would have lent the settlement a critical measure of domestic and international legitimacy. This failure encouraged nondemocratic revisionist powers (notably, but not only, Hitler's Germany) to make intractable demands, such as to revise the Treaty of Versailles and to restore lost territory, with fatal consequences for the post-war peace. Although this account owes much to classic works by the economist John Maynard Keynes and the sociologist Max Weber, among others, its sweeping synthesis and grounding in primary sources makes an impressive thousand-page read.

Western Hemisphere

RICHARD FEINBERG

*A Small State's Guide to
Influence in World Politics*

BY TOM LONG. Oxford University
Press, 2022, 240 pp.

Building on his seminal 2015 work, *Latin America Confronts the United States*, Long persuasively presses his case that smaller states, with creative leadership, can often successfully defend their national interests in contests with bigger ones. He urges his scholarly colleagues to redefine international relations studies by stretching beyond the interactions of great powers to focus on the many smaller states that light up the geopolitical firmament. Deploying some 20 illustrative country studies, Long outlines the key variables that smaller states must consider in designing winning bargaining strategies: which policy issues matter in dueling countries, the extent of policy divergence between them, and the cohesion among elites in great powers. Smaller polities can be ambitious but must admit the very real constraints imposed by asymmetries of power and by global norms and institutions. Long's success stories in Latin America include Panama gaining control over its canal at the end of the twentieth century and, more recently, El Salvador negotiating with the United States over military facilities and Bolivia bargaining with neighboring Brazil over natural gas.

*Globalizing Patient Capital:
The Political Economy of Chinese
Finance in the Americas*

BY STEPHEN B. KAPLAN. Cam-
bridge University Press, 2021, 390 pp.

Drawing on his academic expertise and his practical experience as a researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Kaplan presents an in-depth, carefully reasoned assessment of the sudden burst in Chinese lending to Latin American governments. Some critics allege that China surreptitiously seeks to lure vulnerable countries into debt traps, but Kaplan emphasizes how Chinese state banks are working to export what they perceive as their successful state-led development model while creating fresh business opportunities for large state-owned enterprises. In contrast to capitalist banking, Chinese lenders offer long-term loans that better fit the development needs of Latin America; less concerned with the near-term debt repayment capabilities of loan recipients, patient Chinese lenders don't seek to impose intrusive macroeconomic conditions on countries. But Chinese banks do seek assurances by demanding collateral in commodity exports and by tying credits to purchases of Chinese industrial products and sometimes even by requiring a Chinese workforce for local projects. Kaplan advises Latin American governments to push back against Chinese procurement demands, to insist on greater transparency in project contracts, and to mitigate future debt burdens through alternative forms of financing, including direct foreign investment.

Escaping the Governance Trap: Economic Reform in the Northern Triangle

BY NEIL SHENAI. Palgrave Pivot, 2022, 175 pp.

Security and Illegality in Cuba's Transition to Democracy

BY VIDAL ROMERO. Tamesis, 2021, 174 pp.

Two books seek ways to ward off chaos in Central America and the Caribbean. Shenai, a former U.S. Treasury Department official responsible for Central America, has written a thoughtful study of the vexing problems plaguing the countries of the Northern Triangle: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Loyal to his Treasury training, Shenai makes the case for structural economic reforms such as improving tax collection, reducing barriers to legitimate commerce, and expanding the access of citizens to financial instruments. If combined with enhanced public-sector accountability and financial integrity, these economic reforms could lead to virtuous cycles of more rapid economic growth, renewed trust in government institutions, and stronger, more efficacious development. Recognizing that reform-minded forces in Central America confront entrenched vested interests, Shenai calls on the United States—along with Canada, Mexico, and international financial institutions—to actively engage when domestic constituencies eager for reform gain sway. Shenai's hopeful policy recommendations are broadly in line with those of the Biden administration's

“root causes” strategy for reducing immigration from the Northern Triangle. Fixing Central America is a complex generational project, and Shenai urges patience even as he recognizes that many politicians, in the region and in Washington, inevitably search for quick fixes.

Romero, a Mexican political scientist, fears that Cuba, a decaying socialist state, could descend into the gang-infested criminality and corruption that haunt the nearby Northern Triangle. Currently, the Cuban government guarantees public security while tolerating a culture of illegality characterized by petty corruption in the public sector and widespread black markets. Romero imagines a disturbing future wherein an inefficient bureaucratic state allows a degree of economic liberalization only to open the floodgates to international criminal organizations; the consequent turmoil prompts popular demands for an even more authoritarian government. To escape this nightmare scenario, Romero proposes preemptive measures remarkably similar to those the Biden administration and the international community are now urging for the Northern Triangle: enhancing public-sector transparency, combating money laundering, incorporating informal entrepreneurs into the legal economy, and constructing positive, independent civic organizations. He adds that Cuba should be admitted to international financial institutions to receive assistance in building competitive markets and pursuing progressive governance reform.

Unsettled Land: From Revolution to Republic, the Struggle for Texas
BY SAM W. HAYNES. Basic Books,
2022, 496 pp.

Haynes delivers a powerful counter-narrative to the traditional foundational myths about the defense of the Alamo and the origins of Texas: the shopworn narrative of a heroic American resistance overcoming Mexican despotism. In so doing, he proposes another myth: a pre-independence, Mexico-ruled multicultural province where English speakers, Hispanics, indigenous tribes, and freed Blacks coexisted in relative harmony. For all these groups, apart from white males, independence for Texas in 1836 and then its incorporation into the United States as a state in 1845 resulted not in liberation but in a devastating loss of liberty. Haynes enriches this revisionism with the histories of embattled indigenous tribes (some native to the region, others recently arrived), all tragic victims of a purposeful, blood-soaked ethnic cleansing perpetrated by whites. Endemic political chaos in Mexico City and an underfunded and poorly led Mexican military allowed Texas, with a population of under 100,000 (only some 30,000 of whom were Anglo-Americans), to win independence from Mexico, with a population of some eight million people. Haynes's riveting tale of the state's violent, intolerant, color-coded history reverberates in the radical politics of today's increasingly radical Texas Republican Party.

Infinite Country: A Novel
BY PATRICIA ENGEL. Avid Reader
Press, 2021, 256 pp.

Engel's unstated premise is that national borders are artificial, illegitimate boundaries and that enduring family love and human compassion should outweigh restrictive, often brutal immigration laws. She wraps her worldview in a poignant if at times overwrought tale, threaded with Andean mythologies, of three generations of urban, working-class Colombians who overcome social barriers and personal flaws to finally reunite in their new homeland, the northeastern United States. Burdening her progressive credentials, Engel, a dual U.S.-Colombian citizen, insists on leavening her heroes' achievements with sharp if familiar criticisms of the depreciated American dream. In describing the heartbreak of family separations and betrayals across generations, Engel's style lies between the lyricism of the prolific Chilean novelist Isabel Allende and the deeper erudition of the younger Mexican writer Valeria Luiselli. Tellingly, Engel fails to consider the route to redemption suggested, albeit through a form of magical realism, in Disney's blockbuster film *Encanto*: namely, that internally displaced persons, rather than venture across international borders, can find safer havens within their Colombian homeland, rich in natural beauty, community solidarity, and economic opportunities.

Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Republics

MARIA LIPMAN

*Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism
in the Third World*

BY JEREMY FRIEDMAN. Harvard
University Press, 2022, 368 pp.

Many developing countries that had liberated themselves from Western, capitalist rulers in the twentieth century were naturally drawn to socialism. Friedman's impressive study, which spans several decades and five countries—Angola, Chile, Indonesia, Iran, and Tanzania—is devoted to “the trial and error” of postcolonial socialist projects in these places. China, the Soviet Union, and other communist countries tried to guide these initiatives, but they found that promoting an ideology based on class was almost impossible in societies where social relations were often defined by race. Friedman points out that citizens in newly independent countries frequently saw the Soviets as “whites”—that is, the same as their former imperialist oppressors. And although militant atheism remained the cornerstone of communist ideology, the Soviets had to learn to regard Islam as a positive force in national liberation movements in countries such as Indonesia and Iran. The communist mentors also grappled with the independent ambitions of their protégés, such as Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, who firmly

insisted that his country was building its own kind of socialism and would not become a client of either China or the Soviet Union, despite relying on their economic aid and expert assistance. Although the pursuit of socialism in the global South generally ended in failure, Friedman argues that it left lasting legacies across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

*Strategic Uses of Nationalism and
Ethnic Conflict: Interest and Identity in
Russia and the Post-Soviet Space*

BY PAL KOLSTO. Edinburgh
University Press, 2022, 294 pp.

*Fluid Russia: Between the Global and the
National in the Post-Soviet Era*

BY VERA MICHLIN-SHAPIR.
Northern Illinois University Press,
2021, 264 pp.

Two books explore the evolution of Russian national identity in recent decades. Kolsto's in-depth study looks at the intricacies of nationalism in the post-Soviet space, from perestroika in the late 1980s to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas in 2014. As the Soviet Union disintegrated, leaders of the newly independent states promptly switched from championing communism to embracing ethnic nationalism. In Russia, however, national identity remained vague, and the term “Russianness” was ambiguous and politically charged. On the one hand, Russia was (and remains) a multiethnic nation comprising two dozen ethnic territories, some of them ethnic-racials in their own right. On the other hand, “Russianness” was not confined

to Russia's borders: the government and the people alike tend to claim that their neighbors, Ukrainians and Belarusians, are mere subgroups of a larger Russian nation, and self-identified ethnic Russians live across the post-Soviet space. Kolsto's thorough analysis portrays Russian identity as an entanglement of the imperial and the ethnic. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was universally applauded in Russia, including by ethnonationalists who used to criticize Putin for neglecting the interests of ethnic Russians. They subsequently condemned Putin, however, for not going all the way to Kyiv in what they saw as a betrayal of their Russian kin in Ukraine. With his new invasion of Ukraine, Putin has suppressed his ethnonationalist opponents and fully appropriated the broad nationalist cause.

Michlin-Shapir posits, contrary to many scholars, that the blurred character of Russian national identity—its “fluid Russianness,” variably about language, culture, ethnicity, citizenship, and residence—is neither abnormal nor a source of crisis. The collapse of habitual social routines and the withdrawal of the state from people's lives following the disintegration of the Soviet Union left Russians confused and disoriented. But it was not simply the destruction of the Soviet state that shook Russians. Michlin-Shapir emphasizes that there was another, more common factor at play: postcommunist Russia was exposed to the forces of globalization. The experience of freedom of movement, the free flow of information and capital, and a fast-changing social environment produced in Russia a fragmented national identity and a sense of insecurity, familiar to many societies

in the globalized West. Putin worked to instill a sense of stability and security among Russians after becoming president in 2000 but, Michlin-Shapir writes, his attempts to grant his people a unified identity proved unsuccessful because “he never isolated Russia from the global world.” Soon after her book was published, the invasion of Ukraine led to Russia's radical deglobalization, demonstrating how even the most insightful analysis may be tested by the heinous actions of a dictator.

Soviet Nightingales:

Care Under Communism

BY SUSAN GRANT. Cornell University Press, 2022, 336 pp.

Grant delves into a fascinating yet understudied topic: the history of nursing in the Soviet Union. The pre-revolutionary Sisters of Mercy were strongly associated with religious virtue but became increasingly secularized and professionalized during World War I. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, these nurses were reinvented as Soviet medical workers. Any religious connections were banned, and political instruction became an indispensable element of nursing education. In 1920, the Sisters of Mercy became simply known as “sisters.” Grant emphasizes the incongruity between the brutal reality of the communist regime and its inexorable demand—even during Stalin's Great Terror—that nurses be kind, caring, and devoted to their patients. The government took very seriously patients' complaints about neglect or callousness on the part of nurses. Meanwhile, nurses suffered low wages,

long shifts, and a chronic shortage of housing and often worked in dismal conditions without running water or functioning sewage systems. Grant admits that some of these problems also troubled nurses in Western countries, but even by the end of its existence, in 1991, the Soviet Union had not improved the lot of these workers.

globalization as well as the kind of classical ethnonationalism that globalization is often presumed to undermine. Kazakh citizens are encouraged to engage with the world but to speak Kazakh at home, or else risk marginalization. Ethnic minorities, meanwhile, have left the country in droves despite its post-Soviet prosperity.

JEFF EDEN

Central Peripheries: Nationhood in Central Asia

BY MARLENE LARUELLE.
UCL Press, 2021, 264 pp.

Laruelle, a prolific expert on post-Soviet Central Asia, compiles ten updated essays on nationalist ideologies in the post-Soviet era. The oldest of the essays here—a 2007 paper positing the resurgence of pagan Tengrism, the old Turko-Mongolic religion of the Eurasian steppes, as a rival for Islam—admittedly feels a bit dated; Islam still dominates in all Central Asian republics. Fortunately, the rest of the book offers a stronger introduction to Laruelle’s important work. One highlight is her alarming study of the embrace of “Aryanism” in Tajikistan, where President Emomali Rahmon dubbed 2006 “The Year of Aryan Civilization” and Tajik historians proposed that their “Aryan” ancestors embarked on a civilizing mission against neighboring Turkic nomads. Another is her incisive survey of Soviet ethnography, in which she connects Soviet forms of “race science” to the ethnic chauvinism endorsed by some post-Soviet regimes. The volume’s second half uses case studies from Kazakhstan to show how the country has at once embraced

Middle East

LISA ANDERSON

States of Subsistence: The Politics of Bread in Contemporary Jordan

BY JOSÉ CIRO MARTÍNEZ. Stanford University Press, 2022, 368 pp.

The nine million residents of Jordan consume ten million loaves of the local flat *khubz arabi* a day, nearly all of it made with government-subsidized wheat. Martínez worked as a baker in Amman, accompanied government inspectors on their rounds, talked to customers, and visited bakeries from Aqaba to Ma’an. In this fascinating book, he reveals the extent to which the bread subsidy is intimately woven into the economic, social, and political life of the kingdom. The Jordanian government did not always support this staple: the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply and its subsidy were introduced in the mid-1970s; before that, as one of Martínez’s informants observed, “We used to feed ourselves.” As bread-making moved from the

family hearth to the neighborhood bakery, bread became both an essential staple and a symbol of state authority. Decades of economic liberalization, however, have left the Jordanian welfare state in tatters. As Martínez deftly shows, the public debates about bread—a universal demand in the Arab Spring uprisings—illustrate both the state’s profound role in shaping national identity and its fading influence in popular understandings of political authority. As Martinez says, “The bread subsidy was never just about providing food.” It symbolized the monarchy’s patrimonial responsibility for its people, a role lost in neoliberalism’s cash transfers to low-income families.

Degrees of Dignity: Arab Higher Education in the Global Era

BY ELIZABETH BUCKNER.
University of Toronto Press, 2021,
264 pp.

A brisk, comprehensive look at universities in the Arab world, this book seeks to assess how well the institutions fulfill their missions. Buckner has lived and worked throughout the region, and she puts to good use her understanding of a variety of educational systems, including in Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, and Syria. Growing populations, shrinking government budgets, and increasing global competition have put a strain on ministries of higher education in the region. Many governments have responded by authorizing the establishment of private, sometimes for-profit institutions to operate beside the public universities that were established soon after many of these countries won independence in the twentieth century. Sometimes, these new

private initiatives have absorbed some of the demand for university places, created healthy competition, and encouraged the introduction of novel curricula, particularly if they are affiliated with foreign institutions or offer instruction in foreign languages. But often they have failed in these tasks and poorly serve their faculty and students. Buckner argues that by framing education and research as technical issues—quantified in terms of graduation rates, citation frequencies, and institutional rankings—governments end up crippling universities and suppressing their intrinsically political, often subversive missions of fostering critical thinking, thoughtful research, and creative invention.

Black Markets and Militants: Informal Networks in the Middle East and Africa

BY KHALID MUSTAFA MEDANI.
Cambridge University Press, 2021,
426 pp.

In this dense, deeply researched, and edifying volume, Medani takes on the vexed question of how Islamist political movements use informal financial networks in recruiting and sustaining their members. He draws on an unusual and remarkably fruitful comparison of the Islamists of Egypt, Somalia, and Sudan, starting in the 1980s. That decade witnessed the rapid expansion of migrant labor to the Gulf and the parallel growth of remittances sent home by migrant workers. The elaborate informal mechanisms for transferring money were shaped by, and in turn reinforced, networks of clan, tribal, and religious affiliation.

New private banks and other financial institutions helped strengthen an Islamist bourgeoisie in Egypt and an Islamist military elite in Sudan. In the 1990s, an economic downturn in the region limited the capacity of states to manage the economy and restrain local militant mobilization. Somalia's state succumbed altogether; the regime in Egypt cracked down, pushing many moderate Islamists into the waiting arms of more militant groups; and Sudan staggered under the international sanctions imposed on its Islamist government. Medani is particularly acute in describing the complexity of local politics in these countries. The utility of regional identities, clan links, and religious ties varied with fluctuations not only of state policy but also of global business cycles.

Reaching for the Heights: The Inside Story of a Secret Attempt to Reach a Syrian-Israeli Peace

BY FREDERIC HOF. U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2022, 216 pp.

In the early years of the Obama administration, Hof led a U.S. attempt to secure a peace treaty between Israel and Syria. The effort foundered in 2011 when Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's bloody crackdown on peaceful protesters horrified U.S. officials and sank the negotiations. It is not clear, however, that the process, which was shot through with flaws, would have succeeded in any event. U.S. President Barack Obama's National Security Council seems to have mistaken Israeli-Palestinian negotiations for a comprehensive settlement to the

region's troubles, and neglected the Syrian track. Syria appears to have entertained the discussions largely to improve relations with the United States. And the Israeli government was alternately tempted by and skeptical about the prospects for a separate peace. Hof himself concedes that it was "an American-facilitated beating of Iran and Hezbollah," Syria's principal allies, that motivated his "interest in mediating peace." In the event, no party got what it hoped for. The U.S. administration came away looking indecisive and ineffectual, and Hof was disappointed and chastened. Refreshingly self-critical, Hof faults himself for not understanding the ways of Washington, torn between its self-appointed roles as honest broker and global hegemon.

All Necessary Measures? The United Nations and International Intervention in Libya

BY IAN MARTIN. Hurst, 2022, 224 pp.

Martin, a UN Special Representative to Libya from 2011 to 2012, has produced a judicious, thoughtful analysis of international involvement in Libya during and immediately after the 2011 uprising against Libyan President Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya. This book combines the perspective of an insider with the acuity of a seasoned practitioner and analyst. Martin painstakingly weighs the pros and cons of the NATO intervention in 2011, concluding that "a smooth path to a modern democratic state" was not possible. At the same time, he argues that outside powers must bear much of the blame for the country's

collapse into civil war: the United States advocated for and supported the NATO operation but refused to take responsibility for it; European countries worked at cross-purposes; and the UN was hamstrung by coordination challenges. Martin acknowledges but plays down one of the most destructive features of the international involvement: within days of the imposition of an international arms embargo on Libya, at least half a dozen countries began sending arms and military personnel to aid an uprising they did not understand. This support continued long after Tripoli fell and contributed mightily to the country's plunge into civil war.

Asia and Pacific

ANDREW J. NATHAN

Line of Advantage: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzo

BY MICHAEL J. GREEN. Columbia University Press, 2022, 328 pp.

Green knows Japanese foreign policy like few others. He argues that Shinzo Abe, who served as Japan's prime minister from 2006 to 2007 and again from 2012 to 2020, reoriented Tokyo's strategy in a way that will persist, despite his tragic assassination in July 2022. Proactive rather than reactive, he created the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" that became part of American thinking; strengthened military cooperation between the two allies; consolidated the quasi-alliance of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States known

as the Quad; and resuscitated Washington's abandoned trans-Pacific trade pact in the form of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (which the United States has yet to rejoin). These initiatives reflected a "maritime and cosmopolitan" approach that aims to secure Japan's access to the surrounding oceans on the basis of rule of law and free commercial transit. In Southeast Asia, Abe advanced a "values-oriented diplomacy" and positioned Japan as a trusted partner of countries seeking to hedge against China. At home, he embedded his vision in a strengthened security establishment. Despite its failure to bridge intractable differences with South Korea, Japan today "arguably has the clearest conceptualization, consensus, and implementation of a grand strategy of any of the democracies confronting Chinese hegemonic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific."

Spies and Lies: How China's Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World

BY ALEX JOSKE. Hardie Grant, 2022, 272 pp.

America Second: How America's Elites Are Making China Stronger

BY ISAAC STONE FISH. Knopf, 2022, 288 pp.

Two books consider the subtle and covert ways Beijing is seeking to spread its influence abroad. China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) engages in traditional spycraft, but unlike most countries' intelligence agencies it also has a large portfolio of campaigns designed to influence opinion in the

West and among Chinese overseas communities. With prodigious digging on the Internet, Joske has been able to expose many of the ministry's senior operatives and their achievements. A vice minister who worked under the pseudonym Yu Enguang charmed Westerners while serving as a journalist in London and Washington, created the China International Culture Exchange Center (whose mission was to "use culture to make friends" abroad), and infiltrated George Soros's China Fund, which attempted to promote liberal reforms in China in the year and a half before the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. Zheng Bijian, known for the emollient concept of "China's peaceful rise" (which he described in an article for this magazine), was not an mss employee but chaired an mss-created think tank called the China Reform Forum, which encouraged Western academics and officials to support engagement with China. The ministry's Tenth Bureau infiltrates overseas student and dissident groups; the Eleventh Bureau runs a foreign policy think tank that engages Western diplomats; the Twelfth Bureau manages front organizations designed to sway unwitting Western targets of influence—many of whom Joske identifies by name.

Stone Fish looks at Chinese influence operations from the side of the targets, naming numerous American consultants, chief executives, Hollywood big shots, and academics who have said and done things that China wants said or done, either for the sake of access or out of an idealistic sense of "friendship" cultivated by warm treatment from Chinese officials.

He focuses especially on Henry Kissinger, whom Stone Fish accuses of "monetizing" his relationship with China by charging business executives for introductions to Chinese leaders after he left government service. Other major figures Stone Fish criticizes for falling victim to Chinese blandishments include members of the Bush family, executives of the Disney corporation, sports figures, and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Hollywood has bowed to tacit Chinese censorship to avoid being excluded from the enormous Chinese market. Many academics have steered clear of sensitive topics or softened their language to avoid visa denials for themselves or trouble for their students. But it is hard to find purely disinterested discussions of China: those who have something valuable to say usually also have interests or need access. Many Westerners named in both these books could plausibly argue that influence goes in both directions and that their contacts with China make their understanding of the country more, not less, well informed.

Ultimate Economic Conflict Between China and Democratic Countries: An Institutional Analysis

BY C. Y. C. CHU, P. C. LEE, C. C. LIN, AND C. F. LO. Routledge, 2022, 204 pp.

Four prominent legal and trade specialists from Taiwan argue that China should be seen not as a market economy that gets away with transgressing international norms but as a different type of system that prospers under different rules. The authors use case studies of Chinese e-commerce

platforms, social media companies, corporate governance structures, anti-trust legislation, and inbound and outbound investment practices to show that the Chinese system works through direct and indirect mechanisms of state guidance, subsidization, protection, and data control. These practices apply to both state and nominally private large enterprises. Such a complex and well-functioning system could not be taken apart and reassembled into a Western-style market economy even if Chinese leaders wanted to—and they like their economic model the way it is. The authors suggest that instead of complaining about inequitable trading practices, market economies should create a separate trading community outside the WTO that implements market principles among themselves. But they acknowledge that this will be difficult, given the huge stakes that key Western companies have in China.

Coalitions of the Weak: Elite Politics in China from Mao's Stratagem to the Rise of Xi

BY VICTOR C. SHIH. Cambridge University Press, 2022, 232 pp.

In the last ten years of his life, Mao Zedong purged his senior colleagues and installed in high positions very young officials or those with checkered records. Shih is the first scholar to draw theoretical insight from this curious fact. He suggests that at moments of vulnerability, dictators may surround themselves with “coalitions of the weak” to prevent challenges from powerful rivals. Mao’s successor, Deng Xiaoping, and his fellow elders fol-

lowed a similar strategy near the end of their lives, putting a weak group of leaders in place. Shih bases his narrative of intricate factional strife on the biographies of Chinese elites, enabling him to assess who was strong and who was weak partly on the basis of how many connections each politician had generated with other ranking actors on his path to high office. Xi Jinping, who came to power with a strong personal network, was able to step into the post-Deng power vacuum and start a new cycle of one-man control, backed by his own coalition of the weak.

We Uyghurs Have No Say: An Imprisoned Writer Speaks

BY ILHAM TOHTI. TRANSLATED BY YAXUE CAO, CINDY CARTER, AND MATTHEW ROBERTSON. Verso, 2022, 192 pp.

Tohti is the most famous of the hundreds of Uyghur intellectuals imprisoned by the Chinese state in its effort to destroy Uyghur culture and identity. In 2014, he was a professor at the Chinese government’s special university for the study of ethnic minority issues when he was arrested and given a life sentence on the charge of “separatism.” This selection of his writings shows what this separatism consisted of: bracingly honest analyses of the racism, discrimination, marginalization, and coercive policies that shape Beijing’s treatment of the country’s 55 recognized “national minorities”; nuanced analyses of the social tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese; and thoughtful recommendations for how to realize the promises of equal

citizenship and minority cultural self-rule laid out in the Chinese constitution and the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law. Describing himself as a “Chinese patriot,” Tohti warned for years against a rising tide of “totalitarian ethnonationalism,” until that tide swept him away.

Poverty and Pacification: The Chinese State Abandons the Old Working Class
BY DOROTHY J. SOLINGER. Rowman & Littlefield, 2022, 332 pp.

Although the Chinese Communist Party has received much credit for “lifting millions out of poverty,” Solinger delves into how the party’s economic reforms have also left millions behind. Scholars have fixated on the lot of poor peasants, but she focuses on the urban poor created by the shuttering and privatizing of state-owned enterprise in the late 1990s. Solinger argues that *dibao*, China’s social assistance program for the urban poor, is shaped by political motivations. It is designed to pacify its recipients rather than to lift them up. Based on outdated benchmarks, the minimum income guarantees condemn the urban poor to being a permanent underclass, offering a sufficient threshold to both keep them silent and prevent them from becoming upwardly mobile. The book obviously benefits from Solinger’s decades of experience studying this issue, evidenced in copious firsthand interview notes and government statistics, but it buries some of its key insights in the latter half. Solinger compares the Chinese case with those of other

countries to reveal the irony of China’s avowed “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” which, by neglecting the plight of the proletariat, shows that there is really nothing socialist about the party any longer.

LYNETTE ONG

Africa

NICOLAS VAN DE WALLE

To Catch a Dictator: The Pursuit and Trial of Hissène Habré

BY REED BRODY. Columbia University Press, 2022, 296 pp.

Hissène Habré’s tenure as president of Chad lasted from 1982 to 1990 and was marked by large-scale human rights abuses. But well over a decade after he was deposed in a coup and exiled to Senegal, it seemed likely he would escape responsibility for his record in office. Brody, a longtime lawyer with Human Rights Watch, tells the story of how a broad coalition of human rights activists, lawyers, and victims of Habré’s violence conducted a 25-year campaign to bring the dictator to justice. The book makes for great reading. Brody provides just enough detail of Habré’s grisly rule to sketch the extent of his human rights abuses but moves quickly to an engrossing blow-by-blow account of the international campaign that began in 2000 and would end in a courtroom in Dakar in May 2016, when Habré was found guilty of rape, sexual slavery, and the

killing of over 40,000 citizens. He was sentenced to life in prison. Brody provides fascinating insights into the nature of such an international legal coalition, the larger-than-life personalities involved, and their inevitable arguments over tactics.

Multiethnic Democracy: The Logic of Elections and Policymaking in Kenya
BY JEREMY HOROWITZ. Oxford University Press, 2022, 224 pp.

Conventional wisdom has it that in African countries such as Kenya, where the political salience of ethnicity is very strong, politicians will focus their campaigns on narrow promises of material benefits to their co-ethnic voters. This generalization is misleading on at least two counts, as Horowitz demonstrates in an original study of the role of ethnicity in recent Kenyan elections. Appealing only to one's co-ethnics will not generate a majority vote in Kenya, as no ethnic group can claim more than a fifth of the population; politicians have to appeal to other groups to win national and many subnational elections. In addition, plenty of evidence suggests that ethnic attachment is not the only motivation for voters, who are often driven more by economic considerations than by the bonds of identity. Using carefully collected data on voters and on the dominant discourse in recent campaigns, Horowitz shows that Kenyan elections are fought over swing voters, who are typically not co-ethnics of any of the major candidates. Kenyan political leaders design their campaigns around broad, inclusive policy goals that will expressly appeal to all groups.

Sharia, Inshallah: Finding God in Somali Legal Politics

BY MARK FATHI MASSOUD.
Cambridge University Press, 2021,
372 pp.

Responding to those who claim that sharia fuels much of Somalia's violence and political instability, Massoud argues that Islamic law instead holds the key to rebuilding the political order in the country. He points out that sharia is invoked to justify misogyny and human rights abuses but that it has also been used to advocate for gender equity and democracy. He argues that it is not sharia but struggles over the legal system that have been the main source of contention and conflict going back to the beginning of the colonial era. Two noteworthy chapters discuss this history in which successive national states grappled with how to integrate Western jurisprudence and both customary law and sharia. Massoud views the conflicts that led to the collapse of the central state in 1991 as the logical continuation of these earlier debates about the legal underpinnings of the Somali state. The book is vague on how the principles of sharia can in practice reconstruct an organic and stable legal order, although Massoud appears to view the breakaway state of Somaliland as a potential model of how the right kind of sharia could emerge.

The Inheritors: An Intimate Portrait of South Africa's Racial Reckoning

BY EVE FAIRBANKS. Simon & Schuster, 2022, 416 pp.

In this often moving but sometimes rambling narrative, Fairbanks assesses

the legacy of apartheid in South Africa through portraits of a handful of individuals and the people around them. She tells these stories ably, and a picture emerges of a South Africa battling various demons inherited from the institutionalized racism that benefited the white minority for a century. Blacks tend to be disappointed by the slow progress the country has made in eliminating social and economic inequalities, whereas whites are adjusting to their sense of their diminished status in a new order, rather oblivious to how they have retained much of their old privileges. Interestingly, Fairbanks argues that many whites feel a sense of guilt—and, in a curious way, a form of anger—over the fact that the Black majority has not exacted greater retribution for the crimes of the past. An underdeveloped

theme in the book is the similarity between the United States and South Africa in their wrestling with the legacies of racial injustice.

States, Markets, and Foreign Aid
 BY SIMONE DIETRICH. Cambridge University Press, 2021, 276 pp.

In this meticulously researched book, Dietrich explores why and how donor countries deliver aid to needy recipients. She argues that the various ways in which aid is delivered reflect differences in national administrative cultures and, in particular, ideological notions of what role states should play in development. More neoliberal countries, such as the United States, tend to deliver aid via organizations that bypass the central state in the

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—Stephanie Solomon, Chief Revenue Officer

recipient country, particularly when that state has serious governance deficiencies. On the other hand, Dietrich finds that the social democratic states of western Europe are more likely to deliver their aid directly to state bodies. The statistical evidence offered for this arresting hypothesis will not convince all readers, but two compelling chapters reinforce its plausibility through extensive interviews with officials in donor agencies. Unfortunately, Dietrich does not discuss the developmental implications of these differences in aid delivery, so the reader is left wondering how the choices donors make affect development in low-income countries.

FOR THE RECORD

The essay “The Beginning of History” (September/October 2022) incorrectly identified anthrax as a chemical weapon. It is a biological agent.

The review essay “Old World Order” (September/October 2022) incorrectly described Batu Khan as the

great-grandson of Genghis Khan. He was in fact Genghis’s grandson.

“The Weakness of Xi Jinping” (September/October 2022) contained several incorrect statements, some owing to errors in translation and editing. The National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party can grant Xi a third term as party leader, not president. Xi’s mother’s note was read aloud before a province’s Standing Committee, not its Politburo Standing Committee. The election that preceded his 1988 move was a municipal people’s congress election, not a local election, and after a poor showing, Xi became party chief of a prefecture, not a district. References to the “provincial ministerial level” should have read “provincial and ministerial level.” And Emperor Qianlong reigned during the eighteenth century, not the nineteenth century.

Because of an editing error, the article “The Fractured Superpower” (September/October 2022) incorrectly referred to the presence of the line-item veto at the federal level. In fact, the authors were referring to the veto’s absence. 🌐

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April 1963

“Threat and Opportunity in the Communist Schism”

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

In 1963, Zbigniew Brzezinski was a young academic, 14 years away from becoming U.S. national security adviser. In Foreign Affairs, he took note of China's growing frustration with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and called on the United States to exploit the widening Sino-Soviet split—an opportunity Washington would wait nearly a decade to seize. Today, the power dynamic between Moscow and Beijing has flipped, but the relationship between them—with conflicting signals of convergence and tension—is once again top of mind.

The Chinese have made it clear that they regard Khrushchev's Cuba misadventure as a negative confirmation of the soundness of their line. In their view, because he overestimates the importance of nuclear weapons and assumes that they have a decisive importance, he recklessly involved himself in the export of nuclear weapons to Cuba, i.e. he was tactically an adventurist. And again, because he attaches such importance to these weapons, he then allowed himself to be intimidated by U.S. nuclear power; he pulled back and settled for a “compromise,” i.e. he was strategically a “capitulationist.” In other words, Khrushchev's short-range gambles are reckless, while his long-range policy involves the abandonment of revolutionary struggles by the masses.

In contrast the Chinese presumably see their recent policy toward India as a positive confirmation of their strategy. By exercising restraint in capitalizing on their military advantage, they prevented direct Western involvement on India's behalf, thereby displaying “tactical” respect for imperialism. At the same time, the long-range effect of their military victory over India in their view showed the other nations of Asia that China is the number-one power in the region, that it cannot be defied effectively, that it has the ability “to slight imperialism strategically.” As the revolutionary Communism gains in strength, the Chinese may eventually expect to be able to “slight” imperialism tactically as well, thereby precipitating a major threat to peace. 🌐



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