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Does America Need a New Foreign Policy?

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Archibald Cary Coolidge, Founding Editor
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A Foreign Policy for the World as It Is

Biden and the Search for a New American Strategy

BEN RHODES

"America is back." In the early days of his presidency, Joe Biden repeated those words as a starting point for his foreign policy. The phrase offered a bumper-sticker slogan to pivot away from Donald Trump's chaotic leadership. It also suggested that the United States could reclaim its self-conception as a virtuous hegemon, that it could make the rules-based international order great again. Yet even though a return to competent normalcy was in order, the Biden administration's mindset of restoration has occasionally struggled against the currents of our disordered times. An updated conception of U.S. leadership—one tailored to a world that has moved on from American primacy and the eccentricities of American politics—is necessary to minimize enormous risks and pursue new opportunities.

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To be sure, Biden's initial pledge was a balm to many after Trump's presidency ended in the dual catastrophes of COVID-19 and the January 6 insurrection. Yet two challenges largely beyond the Biden administration's control shadowed the message of superpower restoration. First was the specter of Trump's return. Allies watched nervously as the former president maintained his grip on the Republican Party and Washington remained mired in dysfunction. Autocratic adversaries, most notably Russian President Vladimir Putin, bet on Washington's lack of staying power. New multilateral agreements akin to the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris agreement on climate change, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership were impossible, given the vertiginous swings in U.S. foreign policy.

Gaza should shock Washington out of the muscle memory that guides too many of its actions.

Second, the old rules-based international order doesn't really exist anymore. Sure, the laws, structures, and summits remain in place. But core institutions such as the UN Security Council and the World Trade Organization are tied in knots by disagreements among their members. Russia is committed to disrupting U.S.-fortified norms. China is committed to building its own alternative order. On trade and industrial policy, even Washington is moving away from core tenets of post–Cold War globalization. Regional powers such as Brazil, India, Turkey, and the Gulf states pick and choose which partner to plug into depending on the issue. Even the high-water mark for multilateral action in the Biden years—support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia—remains a largely Western initiative. As the old order unravels, these overlapping blocs are competing over what will replace it.

A Biden victory in this fall's election would offer reassurance that the particular risk of another Trump presidency has passed, but that will not vanquish the forces of disorder. To date, Washington has failed to do the necessary audit of the ways its post–Cold War foreign policy discredited U.S. leadership. The "war on terror" emboldened autocrats, misallocated resources, fueled a global migration crisis, and contributed to an arc of instability from South Asia through North Africa. The free-market prescriptions of the so-called Washington consensus ended in a financial crisis that opened the door to populists railing against out-of-touch elites. The overuse of sanctions led to increased workarounds and global fatigue with Washington's weaponization of

the dollar's dominance. Over the last two decades, American lectures on democracy have increasingly been tuned out.

Indeed, after Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel and the Israeli military campaign in Gaza, American rhetoric about the rules-based international order has been seen around the world on a split screen of hypocrisy, as Washington has supplied the Israeli government with weapons used to bombard Palestinian civilians with impunity. The war has created a policy challenge for an administration that criticizes Russia for the same indiscriminate tactics that Israel has used in Gaza, a political challenge for a Democratic Party with core constituencies who don't understand why the president has supported a far-right government that ignores the United States' advice, and a moral crisis for a country whose foreign policy purports to be driven by universal values. Put simply: Gaza should shock Washington out of the muscle memory that guides too many of its actions.

If Biden does win a second term, he should use it to build on those of his policies that have accounted for shifting global realities, while pivoting away from the political considerations, maximalism, and Western-centric view that have caused his administration to make some of the same mistakes as its predecessors. The stakes are high. Whoever is president in the coming years will have to avoid global war, respond to the escalating climate crisis, and grapple with the rise of new technologies such as artificial intelligence. Meeting the moment requires abandoning a mindset of American primacy and recognizing that the world will be a turbulent place for years to come. Above all, it requires building a bridge to the future—not the past.

THE TRUMP THREAT

One of Biden's mantras is "Don't compare me to the Almighty; compare me to the alternative." As the presidential campaign heats up, it is worth heeding this advice. But to properly outline the dangers of a second Trump term, it is necessary to take Trump's arguments seriously, despite the unserious form they often take. Much of what Trump says resonates broadly. Americans are tired of wars; indeed, his takeover of the Republican Party would have been impossible without the Iraq war, which discredited the GOP establishment. Americans also no longer trust their elites. Although Trump's rhetoric about a "deep state" moves quickly into baseless conspiracy theory, it strikes a chord with voters who wonder why so many of the politicians

who promised victories in Afghanistan and Iraq were never held to account. And although Trump's willingness to cut off assistance to Ukraine is abhorrent to many, there is a potent populism to it. How long will the United States spend tens of billions of dollars helping a country whose stated aim—the recapture of all Ukrainian territory—seems unachievable?

Trump has also harnessed a populist backlash to globalization from both the right and the left. Particularly since the 2008 financial crisis, large swaths of the public in democracies have simmered with discontent over widening inequality, deindustrialization, and a perceived loss of control and lack of meaning. It is no wonder that the exemplars of post–Cold War globalization—free trade agreements, the U.S.-Chinese relationship, and the instruments of international economic cooperation itself—have become ripe targets for Trump. When Trump's more punitive approaches to rivals, such as his trade war with China, didn't precipitate all the calamities that some had predicted, his taboo-breaking approach appeared to be validated. The United States, it turned out, did have leverage.

But offering a potent critique of problems should not be confused with having the right solutions to them. To begin with, Trump's own presidency seeded much of the chaos that Biden has faced. Time and again, Trump pursued politically motivated shortcuts that made things worse. To end the war in Afghanistan, he cut a deal with the Taliban over the heads of the Afghan people, setting a timeline for withdrawal that was shorter than the one Biden eventually adopted. Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal despite Iranian compliance, unshackling the country's nuclear program, escalating a proxy war across the Middle East, and sowing doubt across the world about whether the United States keeps its word. By moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognizing the annexation of the Golan Heights, and pursuing the Abraham Accords, he cut the Palestinians out of Arab-Israeli normalization and emboldened Israel's far right, lighting a fuse that detonated in the current war.

Although Trump's tougher line with China demonstrated the United States' leverage, it was episodic and uncoordinated with allies. As a result, Beijing was able to cast itself as a more predictable partner to much of the world, while the supply chain disruptions caused by trade disputes and decoupling created new inefficiencies—and drove up costs—in the global economy. Trump's lurch from confronting to

embracing Kim Jong Un enabled the North Korean leader to advance his nuclear and missile programs under reduced pressure. Closer to home, Trump's recognition of an alternative Venezuelan government under the opposition leader Juan Guaidó managed to strengthen the incumbent Nicolás Maduro's hold on power. The "maximum pressure" policy toward Venezuela and Cuba, which sought to promote regime change through crippling sanctions and diplomatic isolation, fueled humanitarian crises that have sent hundreds of thousands of people to the United States' southern border.

A second Trump term would start amid a more volatile global environment than his first, and there would be fewer guardrails constraining a president who would be in command of his party, surrounded by loyalists, and freed from ever having to face voters again. Although there are many risks, three stand out. First, Trump's blend of strongman nationalism and isolationism could create a permission structure for aggression. A withdrawal of U.S. support for Ukraine—and, perhaps, for NATO itself—would embolden Putin to push deeper into the country. Were Washington to abandon its European allies and promote right-wing nationalism, it could exacerbate political fissures within Europe, emboldening Russian-aligned nationalists in such places as Hungary and Serbia who have echoed Putin in seeking to reunite ethnic populations in neighboring states.

Despite U.S.-Chinese tensions, East Asia has avoided the outright conflict of Europe and the Middle East. But consider the opportunity that a Trump victory would present to North Korea. Fortified by increased Russian technological assistance, Kim could ratchet up military provocations on the Korean Peninsula, believing that he has a friend in the White House. Meanwhile, according to U.S. assessments, China's military will be ready for an invasion of Taiwan by 2027. If Chinese leader Xi Jinping truly wishes to forcibly bring Taiwan under Beijing's sovereignty, the twilight of a Trump presidency—by which point the United States would likely be alienated from its traditional allies—could present an opening.

Second, if given the chance, Trump has made it clear that he would almost certainly roll back American democracy, a move that would reverberate globally. If his first election represented a one-off disruption to the democratic world, his second would more definitively validate an international trend toward ethnonationalism and authoritarian populism. Momentum could swing further in the direction of

far-right parties in Europe, performative populists in the Americas, and nepotistic and transactional corruption in Asia and Africa. Consider for a moment the aging roster of strongmen who will likely still be leading other powers—not just Xi and Putin but also Narendra Modi in India, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, Ali Khamenei in Iran, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey. To say the least, this cast of characters is unlikely to promote respect for democratic norms within borders or conciliation beyond them.

This leads to the third danger. In the coming years, leaders will increasingly be confronted with global problems that can be managed or solved only through cooperation. As the climate crisis worsens, a Trump presidency would make a coordinated international response much harder and validate the backlash against environmental policies that has been building within advanced economies. At the same time, artificial intelligence is poised to take off, creating both valuable opportunities and enormous risks. At a moment when the United States should be turning to diplomacy to avoid wars, establish new norms, and promote greater international cooperation, the country would be led by an "America first" strongman.

A TIME TO HEAL

In any administration, national security policy is a peculiar mix of long-standing commitments, old political interests, new presidential initiatives, and improvised responses to sudden crises. Navigating the rough currents of the world, the Biden administration has often seemed to embody the contradictions of this dynamic, with one foot in the past, yearning nostalgically for American primacy, and one foot in the future, adjusting to the emerging world as it is.

Through its affirmative agenda, the administration has reacted well to changing realities. Biden linked domestic and foreign policy through his legislative agenda. The CHIPS Act made substantial investments in science and innovation, including the domestic manufacturing of semiconductors. The act worked in parallel with ramped-up export and investment controls on China's high-tech sector, which have buttressed the United States' lead in the development of new technologies such as AI and quantum computing. Although this story is more complicated to tell than one about a tariff-based trade war, Biden's policy is in fact more coherent: revitalize U.S. innovation and advanced manufacturing, disentangle critical supply chains from China,

and maintain a lead for U.S. companies in developing new and potentially transformative technologies.

Biden's most significant piece of legislation, the Inflation Reduction Act, made enormous investments in clean energy technology. These investments will allow the United States to raise its ambition in meeting climate goals by pushing domestic industry and global markets to shift away from fossil fuels faster. Although this breakthrough enhanced U.S. credibility on climate change, it also created new challenges, as even allies have complained that Washington resorted to subsidies instead of pursuing coordinated cross-border approaches to reduce emissions. In this respect, however, the Biden administration was dealing with the world as it is. Congress cannot pass complex reforms such as putting a price on carbon; what it can do is pass large spending bills that invest in the United States.

On several issues, the Biden administration has preemptively deferred to hard-liners.

Despite tensions over U.S. industrial policy, the Biden administration has effectively reinvested in alliances that frayed under Trump. That effort has tacitly acknowledged that the world now features competing blocs, which makes it harder for the United States to pursue major initiatives by working through large international institutions or with other members of the great-power club. Instead, Washington has prioritized groupings of like-minded countries that are, to use a catch phrase, "fit for purpose." Collaboration with the United Kingdom and Australia on nuclear submarine technology. New infrastructure and AI initiatives through the G-7. Structured efforts to create more consultation among U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific. This approach involves a dizzying number of parts; one can lose track of the number of regional consultative groups that now exist. But in the context of an unraveled international order, it makes sense to thread together cooperation where possible, while trying to turn new habits of cooperation into enduring arrangements.

Most notably, Biden's reinvestment in European alliances paid off when Washington was able to swiftly mobilize support for Ukraine in 2022. This task was made easier by the administration's innovative release of intelligence on Russia's intentions to invade, an overdue reform of the way that Washington manages information. Although the war has

reached a tenuous stalemate, the effort to fortify transatlantic institutions continues to advance. NATO has grown in size, relevance, and resourcing. European Union institutions have taken a more proactive role in foreign policy, most notably in coordinating support for Ukraine and accelerating its candidacy for EU membership. For all the understandable consternation about Washington's struggle to pass a recent aid bill for Ukraine, Europe's focus on its own institutions and capabilities was long overdue.

SLOW TO CHANGE

Yet there are three important ways in which the Biden administration has yet to recalibrate its approach to the world of post-American primacy. The first has to do with American politics. On several issues that engender controversy in Congress, the administration has constrained or distorted its options by preemptively deferring to outdated hard-liners. Even as Trump has demonstrated how the left-right axis has been scrambled on foreign policy, Biden at times feels trapped in the national security politics of the immediate post-9/11 era. Yet what once allowed a politician to appear tough to appease hawks in Washington was rarely good policy; now, it is no longer necessarily good politics.

In Latin America, the Biden administration was slow to pivot away from Trump's "maximum pressure" campaigns on Venezuela and Cuba. Biden maintained, for example, the avalanche of sanctions that Trump imposed on Cuba, including the cynical return of that country to the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism just before leaving office, in January 2021. The result has been an acute humanitarian crisis in which U.S. sanctions exacerbated shortages of basic staples such as food and fuel, contributing to widespread suffering and migration. In the Middle East, the administration failed to move swiftly to reenter the politically contested Iran nuclear deal, opting instead to pursue what Biden called a "longer and stronger" agreement, even though Trump was the one who violated the deal's terms. Instead, the administration embraced Trump's Abraham Accords as central to its Middle East policy while reverting to confrontation with Iran. This effectively embraced Netanyahu's preferred course: a shift away from pursuing a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and toward an open-ended proxy war with Tehran.

Anyone who has worked at the nexus of U.S. politics and national security knows that avoiding friction with anti-Cuban and pro-Israeli

hard-liners in Congress can feel like the path of least resistance. But that logic has turned into a trap. After October 7, Biden decided to pursue a strategy of fully embracing Netanyahu—insisting (for a time) that any criticism would be issued in private and that U.S. military assistance would not be conditioned on the actions of the Israeli government. This engendered immediate goodwill in Israel, but it preemptively eliminated U.S. leverage. It also overlooked the far-right nature of Netanyahu's governing coalition, which offered warning signs about the indiscriminate way in which it planned to prosecute its military campaign, as Israeli officials cut off food and water flowing into Gaza within days of Hamas's attack. In the months that followed, the administration has been trying to catch up to a deteriorating situation, evolving from a strategy of embracing Netanyahu, to one of issuing rhetorical demands that were largely ignored, to one of partial restrictions on offensive military assistance. Ironically, by being mindful of the political risks of breaking with Netanyahu, Biden invited greater political risks from within the Democratic coalition and around the world.

The temptation to succumb to Washington's outdated instincts has contributed to a second liability: the pursuit of maximalist objectives. The administration has shown some prudence in this area. Even as competition ramped up with China, Biden has worked over the last year to rebuild lines of communication with Beijing and has largely avoided provocative pronouncements on Taiwan. And even as he committed the United States to helping Ukraine defend itself, Biden set the objective of avoiding a direct war between the United States and Russia (although his rhetoric did drift into endorsing regime change in Moscow). The bigger challenge has at times come from outside the administration, as some supporters of Ukraine indulged in a premature triumphalism that raised impossible expectations for last year's Ukrainian counteroffensive. Paradoxically, this impulse ended up hurting Ukraine: when the campaign inevitably came up short, it made the broader U.S. policy toward Ukraine look like a failure. Sustaining support for Ukraine will require greater transparency about what is achievable in the near term and an openness to negotiations in the medium term.

Gaza also showcases the danger of maximalist aims. Israel's stated objective of destroying Hamas has never been achievable. Since Hamas would never announce its own surrender, pursuing this goal would require a perpetual Israeli occupation of Gaza or the mass displacement of its people. That outcome may be what some Israeli officials

really want, as evidenced by right-wing ministers' own statements. It is certainly what many people around the world, horrified by the campaign in Gaza, believe the Israeli government really wants. These critics wonder why Washington would support such a campaign, even as its own rhetoric opposes it. Instead of seeking to moderate Israel's unsustainable course, Washington needs to use its leverage to press for negotiated agreements, Palestinian state building, and a conception of Israeli security that is not beholden to expansionism or permanent occupation.

Indeed, too many prescriptions sound good in Washington but fail to account for simple realities. Even with the United States' military advantage, China will develop advanced technologies and maintain its claim over Taiwan. Even with sustained U.S. support, Ukraine will have to live next to a large, nationalist, nuclear-armed Russia. Even with its military dominance, Israel cannot eliminate the Palestinian demand for self-determination. If Washington allows foreign policy to be driven by zero-sum maximalist demands, it risks a choice between open-ended conflict and embarrassment.

This leads to the third way in which Washington must change its approach. Too often, the United States has appeared unable or unwilling to see itself through the eyes of most of the world's population, particularly people in the global South who feel that the international order is not designed for their benefit. The Biden administration has made laudable efforts to change this perception—for instance, delivering COVID-19 vaccines across the developing world, mediating conflicts from Ethiopia to Sudan, and sending food aid to places hit hard by shortages exacerbated by the war in Ukraine. Yet the overuse of sanctions, along with the prioritization of Ukraine and other U.S. geopolitical interests, misreads the room. To build better ties with developing countries, Washington needs to consistently prioritize the issues they care about: investment, technology, and clean energy.

Once again, Gaza interacts with this challenge. To be blunt: for much of the world, it appears that Washington doesn't value the lives of Palestinian children as much as it values the lives of Israelis or Ukrainians. Unconditional military aid to Israel, questioning the Palestinian death toll, vetoing cease-fire resolutions at the UN Security Council, and criticizing investigations into alleged Israeli war crimes may all feel like autopilot in Washington—but that's precisely the problem. Much of the world now hears U.S. rhetoric about human rights and the rule of law as cynical rather than aspirational, particularly when

it fails to wrestle with double standards. Total consistency is unattainable in foreign policy. But by listening and responding to more diverse voices from around the world, Washington could begin to build a reservoir of goodwill.

A FAREWELL TO PRIMACY

In its more affirmative agenda, the Biden administration is repositioning the United States for a changing world by focusing on the resilience of its own democracy and economy while rebooting alliances in Europe and Asia. To extend that regeneration into something more global and lasting, it should abandon the pursuit of primacy while embracing an agenda that can resonate with more of the world's governments and people.

As was the case in the Cold War, the most important foreign policy achievement will simply be avoiding World War III. Washington must recognize that all three fault lines of global conflict today—Russia-Ukraine, Iran-Israel, and China-Taiwan—run across territories just beyond the reach of U.S. treaty obligations. In other words, these are not areas where the American people have been prepared to go to war directly. With little public support and no legal obligation to do that, Washington should not count on bluffing or military buildups alone to resolve these issues; instead, it will have to focus relentlessly on diplomacy, buttressed by reassurance to frontline partners that there are alternative pathways to achieving security.

In Ukraine, the United States and Europe should focus on protecting and investing in the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government—drawing Ukraine into European institutions, sustaining its economy, and fortifying it for lengthy negotiations with Moscow so that time works in Kyiv's favor. In the Middle East, Washington should join with Arab and European partners to work directly with Palestinians on the development of new leadership and toward the recognition of a Palestinian state, while supporting Israel's security. Regional de-escalation with Iran should, as it did during the Obama administration, begin with negotiated restrictions on its nuclear program. In Taiwan, the United States should try to preserve the status quo by investing in Taiwanese military capabilities while avoiding saber rattling, by structuring engagement with Beijing to avoid miscalculation, and by mobilizing international support for a negotiated, peaceful resolution to Taiwan's status.

Hawks will inevitably attack diplomacy on each of these issues with tired charges of appeasement, but consider the alternative of seeking the total defeat of Russia, regime change in Iran, and Taiwanese independence. Can Washington, or the world, risk a drift into global conflagration? Moreover, the reality is that sanctions and military aid alone will not stop war from spreading or somehow cause the governments of Russia, Iran, and China to collapse. Better outcomes, including within those countries, will be more attainable if Washington takes a longer view. Ultimately, the health of the United States' own political model and society is a more powerful force for change than purely punitive measures. Indeed, one lesson that is lost on today's hawks is that the civil rights movement did far more to win the Cold War than the war in Vietnam did.

Avoiding friction with anti-Cuban and pro-Israeli hard-liners in Congress can feel like the path of least resistance.

None of this will be easy, and success is not preordained, since unreliable adversaries also have agency. But given the stakes, it is worth exploring how a world of competing superpower blocs could be knitted into coexistence and negotiation on issues that cannot be dealt with in isolation. For instance, AI presents one area in which nascent dialogue between Washington and Beijing should evolve into the pursuit of shared international norms. Laudable U.S. efforts to pursue collaborative research on AI safety with like-minded countries will inevitably have to expand to further include China in higher-level and more consequential talks. These efforts should seek agreement on the mitigation of extreme harms, from the use of AI in developing nuclear and biological weapons to the arrival of artificial general intelligence, an advanced form of AI that risks surpassing human capacities and controls. At the same time, as AI moves out into the world, the United States can use its leadership to work with countries that are eager to harness the technology for positive ends, particularly in the developing world. The United States could offer incentives for countries to cooperate with Washington on both AI safety and affirmative uses of new technologies.

A similar dynamic is required on clean energy. If there is a second Biden administration, most of its efforts to combat climate change will likely shift from domestic action to international cooperation, particularly if there is divided government in Washington. As the United States

works to secure supply chains for critical minerals used for clean energy, it will need to avoid constantly working at cross-purposes with Beijing. At the same time, it has an opportunity—through "de-risking" supply chains, forging public-private partnerships, and starting multilateral initiatives—to invest more in parts of Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia that have not always been an attractive destination for American capital. In a sense, the Inflation Reduction Act has to be globalized.

Finally, the United States should focus its support for democracy on the health of existing open societies and offering lifelines to besieged civil society groups around the world. As someone who has made the case for putting support for democracy at the center of U.S. foreign policy, I must acknowledge that the calcification of the democratic recession in much of the world requires Washington to recalibrate. Instead of framing the battle between democracy and autocracy as a confrontation with a handful of geopolitical adversaries, policymakers in democracies must recognize that it is first and foremost a clash of values that must be won within their own societies. From that self-corrective vantage point, the United States should methodically invest in the building blocks of democratic ecosystems: anticorruption and accountability initiatives, independent journalism, civil society, digital literacy campaigns, and counter-disinformation efforts. The willingness to share sensitive information, on display in the run-up to war in Ukraine, should be applied to other cases where human rights can be defended through transparency. Outside government, democratic movements and political parties across the world should become more invested in one another's success, mirroring what the far right has done over the last decade by sharing best practices, holding regular meetings, and forming transnational coalitions.

Ultimately, the most important thing that America can do in the world is detoxify its own democracy, which is the main reason a Trump victory would be so dangerous. In the United States, as elsewhere, people are craving a renewed sense of belonging, meaning, and solidarity. These are not concepts that usually find their way into foreign policy discussions, but if officials do not take that longing seriously, they risk fueling the brand of nationalism that leads to autocracy and conflict. The simple and repeated affirmation that all human life matters equally, and that people everywhere are entitled to live with dignity, should be America's basic proposition to the world—a story it must commit to in word and deed.

The Return of Peace Through Strength

Making the Case for Trump's Foreign Policy

ROBERT C. O'BRIEN

Si vis pacem, para bellum is a Latin phrase that emerged in the fourth century that means "If you want peace, prepare for war." The concept's origin dates back even further, to the second-century Roman emperor Hadrian, to whom is attributed the axiom, "Peace through strength—or, failing that, peace through threat."

U.S. President George Washington understood this well. "If we desire to secure peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our rising prosperity, it must be known, that we are at all times ready for war," he told Congress in 1793. The idea was echoed in President Theodore Roosevelt's famous dictum: "Speak softly, and carry a big stick." And as a candidate for president, Ronald Reagan borrowed directly from Hadrian when he promised to achieve "peace through strength"—and later delivered on that promise.

In 2017, President Donald Trump brought this ethos back to the White House after the Obama era, during which the United States

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had a president who felt it necessary to apologize for the alleged sins of American foreign policy and sapped the strength of the U.S. military. That ended when Trump took office. As he proclaimed to the UN General Assembly in September 2020, the United States was "fulfilling its destiny as peacemaker, but it is peace through strength."

And Trump was a peacemaker—a fact obscured by false portrayals of him but perfectly clear when one looks at the record. Just in the final 16 months of his administration, the United States facilitated the Abraham Accords, bringing peace to Israel and three of its neighbors in the Middle East plus Sudan; Serbia and Kosovo agreed to U.S.-brokered economic normalization; Washington successfully pushed Egypt and key Gulf states to settle their rift with Qatar and end their blockade of the emirate; and the United States entered into an agreement with the Taliban that prevented any American combat deaths in Afghanistan for nearly the entire final year of the Trump administration.

Trump was determined to avoid new wars and endless counterinsurgency operations, and his presidency was the first since that of Jimmy Carter in which the United States did not enter a new war or expand an existing conflict. Trump also ended one war with a rare U.S. victory, wiping out the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) as an organized military force and eliminating its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

But unlike during Carter's term, under Trump, U.S. adversaries did not exploit Americans' preference for peace. In the Trump years, Russia did not press further forward after its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Iran did not dare to directly attack Israel, and North Korea stopped testing nuclear weapons after a combination of diplomatic outreach and a U.S. military show of force. And although China maintained an aggressive posture during Trump's time in office, its leadership surely noted Trump's determination to enforce redlines when, for example, he ordered a limited but effective air attack on Syria in 2017, after Bashar al-Assad's regime used chemical weapons against its own people.

Trump has never aspired to promulgate a "Trump Doctrine" for the benefit of the Washington foreign policy establishment. He adheres not to dogma but to his own instincts and to traditional American principles that run deeper than the globalist orthodoxies of recent decades. "America first is not America alone" is a mantra often repeated by Trump administration officials, and for good reason:

Trump recognizes that a successful foreign policy requires joining forces with friendly governments and people elsewhere. The fact that Trump took a new look at which countries and groups were most pertinent does not make him purely transactional or an isolationist hostile to alliances, as his critics claim. NATO and U.S. cooperation with Japan, Israel, and the Arab Gulf states were all militarily strengthened when Trump was president.

Trump's foreign policy and trade policy can be accurately understood as a reaction to the shortcomings of neoliberal internationalism, or globalism, as practiced from the early 1990s until 2017. Like many American voters, Trump grasped that "free trade" has been nothing of the sort in practice and in many instances involved foreign governments using high tariffs, barriers to trade, and the theft of intellectual property to harm U.S. economic and security interests. And despite hefty military spending, Washington's national security apparatus enjoyed few victories after the 1991 Gulf War while suffering a number of notable failures in places such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria.

Trump thinks highly of his predecessor Andrew Jackson and Jackson's approach to foreign policy: be focused and forceful when compelled to action but wary of overreach. A second Trump term would see the return of realism with a Jacksonian flavor. Washington's friends would be more secure and more self-reliant, and its foes would once again fear American power. The United States would be strong, and there would be peace.

WHAT HAPPENED?

In the early 1990s, the world seemed to be on the cusp of a second "American century." The Iron Curtain had fallen, and the countries of Eastern Europe had cashiered communism and abandoned the Warsaw Pact, lining up to join Western Europe and the rest of the free world. The Soviet Union passed into history in 1991. Holdouts to the tide of freedom, such as China, seemed set to liberalize, at least economically, and posed no imminent threat to the United States. The Gulf War vindicated the previous decade's U.S. military buildup and helped confirm that the world had just one superpower.

Contrast that situation to today. China has become a formidable military and economic adversary. It routinely threatens democratic Taiwan. Its coast guard and de facto maritime militia are in a prolonged state of low-intensity conflict with the Philippines, a treaty

ally of the United States, which could spark a wider war in the South China Sea. Beijing is now Washington's foremost foe in cyberspace, regularly attacking U.S. business and government networks. China's unfair trade and business practices have harmed the American economy and made the United States dependent on China for manufactured goods and even some essential pharmaceuticals. And although China's model has nothing like the ideological appeal to Third World revolutionaries and Western radicals that Soviet communism held in the mid-twentieth century, China's political leadership under Xi Jinping nonetheless has had enough confidence to reverse economic reforms, crush freedom in Hong Kong, and pick fights with Washington and many of its partners. Xi is China's most dangerous leader since the murderous Mao Zedong. And China has yet to be held to account for the COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in Wuhan.

A second Trump term would see the return of realism with a Jacksonian flavor.

China now has a committed and useful junior partner in Moscow, as well. In 2018, a year after leaving office as vice president, Joe Biden co-authored an article in these pages titled "How to Stand Up to the Kremlin." But Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 demonstrated that Moscow was hardly deterred by his tough talk. The war has also exposed the shameful truth that NATO's European members are unprepared for a new combat environment that combines innovative technologies such as artificial intelligence with low-tech but lethal drones and century-old artillery.

Joining China and Russia in an emerging axis of anti-American autocracies is Iran. Like the regimes in Beijing and Moscow, the theocracy in Tehran has grown bolder. With seeming impunity, its leaders frequently threaten the United States and its allies. Iran has now amassed enough enriched uranium to build a basic nuclear weapon in less than two weeks, if it chose to do so, according to the most authoritative estimates. Iran's proxies, including Hamas, kidnap and kill Americans. And in April, for the first time, Iran attacked Washington's closest ally in the Middle East, Israel, directly from Iranian territory, firing hundreds of drones and missiles.

The picture closer to home is hardly any better. In Mexico, drug cartels form a parallel government in some areas and traffic people and illegal drugs into the United States. Venezuela is a belligerent basket

case. And the Biden administration's inability to secure the southern U.S. border is perhaps its biggest and most embarrassing failure.

CLARITY ON CHINA

This morass of American weakness and failure cries out for a Trumpian restoration of peace through strength. Nowhere is that need more urgent than in the contest with China.

From the beginning of his presidential term, Biden has sent mixed messages about the threat posed by Beijing. Although Biden has retained tariffs and export controls enacted by Trump, he has also sent cabinet-level officials on a series of visits to Beijing, where they have delivered firm warnings about trade and security but also extended an olive branch, promising to restore some forms of the cooperation with China that existed before the Trump administration. This is a policy of pageantry over substance. Meetings and summits are activities, not achievements.

Meanwhile, Beijing pays close attention to what the president and his top advisers say in public. Biden has referred to China's economy as a "ticking time bomb" but also stated plainly, "I don't want to contain China" and "We're not looking to hurt China—sincerely. We're all better off if China does well." To believe such pablum is to believe that China is not truly an adversary.

The Chinese Communist Party seeks to expand its power and security by supplanting the United States as the global leader in technological development and innovation in critical areas such as electric vehicles, solar power, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. To do so, Beijing relies on enormous subsidies, intellectual property theft, and unfair trade practices. In the automotive industry, for example, Beijing has backed national champions such as BYD, which it has showered with subsidies and encouraged to dump millions of cheap electric vehicles into markets in the United States and allied countries, with the goal of bankrupting automakers from Seoul to Tokyo to Detroit to Bavaria.

To maintain its competitive edge in the face of this onslaught, the United States must remain the best place in the world to invest, innovate, and do business. But the increasing authority of the U.S. regulatory state, including overaggressive antitrust enforcement, threatens to destroy the American system of free enterprise. Even as Chinese companies receive unfair support from Beijing to put

Profiles in power: Trump with Xi in Beijing, November, 2017

American companies out of business, the governments of the United States and its European allies are making it harder for those same American companies to compete. This is a recipe for national decline; Western governments should abandon these unnecessary regulations.

As China seeks to undermine American economic and military strength, Washington should return the favor—just as it did during the Cold War, when it worked to weaken the Soviet economy. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has said that a "full economic separation [from China] is neither practical nor desirable" and that the United States "reject[s] the idea that we should decouple our economy from China." But Washington should, in fact, seek to decouple its economy from China's. Without describing it as such, Trump began a de facto policy of decoupling by enacting higher tariffs on about half of Chinese exports to America, leaving Beijing the option to resume normal trade if it changed its conduct—an opportunity it did not take. Now is the time to press even further, with a 60 percent tariff on Chinese goods, as Trump has advocated, and tougher export controls on any technology that might be of use to China.

Of course, Washington should keep open lines of communication with Beijing, but the United States should focus its Pacific diplomacy on allies such as Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea,

DAMIR SAGOLJ / REUTERS

traditional partners such as Singapore, and emerging ones such as Indonesia and Vietnam. Critics suggest that Trump's calls for U.S. allies in Asia to contribute more to their own defense might worry them. On the contrary: my discussions with officials in the region have revealed that they would welcome more of Trump's plain talk about the need for alliances to be two-way relationships and that they believe his approach would enhance security.

Joint military exercises with such countries are essential. Trump disinvited China from the annual Rim of the Pacific war games in 2018: a good defensive team does not invite its most likely opponent to witness planning and practice. (China, naturally, sent spy ships to observe.) Congress indicated in 2022 that the United States should invite Taiwan to join the exercises. But Biden has refused to do so—a mistake that must be remedied.

The true source of tumult in the Middle East is Iran's theocratic regime.

Taiwan spends around $19 billion annually on its defense, which amounts to just under three percent of its annual economic output. Although that is better than most U.S. allies and partners, it is still too little. Other countries in this increasingly dangerous region also need to spend more. And Taiwan's shortcoming is not solely its own fault: past U.S. administrations have sent mixed signals about Washington's willingness to supply Taiwan with arms and help defend it. The next administration should make clear that along with a continued U.S. commitment comes an expectation that Taiwan spend more on defense and take other steps, as well, such as expanding military conscription.

Meanwhile, Congress should help build up the armed forces of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam by extending to them the kinds of grants, loans, and weapons transfers that the United States has long offered Israel. The Philippines, in particular, needs rapid support in its standoff with Chinese forces in the South China Sea. The navy should undertake a crash program to refurbish decommissioned ships and then donate them to the Philippines, including frigates and amphibious assault ships sitting in reserve in Philadelphia and Hawaii.

The navy should also move one of its aircraft carriers from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the Pentagon should consider deploying the entire Marine Corps to the Pacific, relieving it in particular of

missions in the Middle East and North Africa. U.S. bases in the Pacific often lack adequate missile defenses and fighter jet protection—a scandalous deficiency that the Defense Department should fix by quickly shifting resources from elsewhere.

THE RETURN OF MAXIMUM PRESSURE

Another region where the Biden administration has demonstrated little strength and thus brought little peace is the Middle East. Biden entered office determined to ostracize Saudi Arabia for human rights violations—but also to resume the Obama-era policy of negotiating with Iran, a far worse violator of human rights. This approach alienated Saudi Arabia, an important partner and energy exporter, and did nothing to tame Iran, which has become demonstrably more violent in the past four years. Allies in the Middle East and beyond saw these actions as evidence of American weakness and unreliability and have pursued foreign policies more independent of Washington. Iran itself has felt free to attack Israel, U.S. forces, and American partners through proxies and directly.

In contrast, the Trump administration carried out a campaign of maximum pressure on Iran, including by insisting that European countries comply with U.S. and UN sanctions on the Islamic Republic. This show of resolve rallied important U.S. partners such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and paved the way for the Abraham Accords. When U.S. allies see renewed American determination to contain the Islamist regime in Tehran, they will join with Washington and help bring peace to a region that is crucial to energy markets and global capital markets.

Unfortunately, the opposite has occurred during the Biden administration, which has failed to enforce existing sanctions on Iranian oil exports. In recent months, those exports reached a six-year high, exceeding 1.5 million barrels per day. The easing of sanctions enforcement has been a bonanza for Iran's government and its military, netting them tens of billions of dollars a year. Restoring the Trump crackdown will curtail Iran's ability to fund terrorist proxy forces in the Middle East and beyond.

Biden's problems began in the Middle East when he tried to reenter the Obama-era Iran nuclear deal that Trump pulled out of in 2018, having recognized it as a failure. Far from eliminating or even freezing Iran's nuclear program, the deal had sanctified it, allowing Iran to

retain centrifuges that it has used to amass nearly enough uranium for a bomb. A return to Trump's policy of maximum pressure would include the full enforcement of U.S. sanctions on Iran's energy sector, applying them not only to Iran but also to governments and organizations that buy Iranian oil and gas. Maximum pressure would also mean deploying more maritime and aviation assets to the Middle East, making it clear not only to Tehran but also to American allies that the U.S. military's focus in the region was on deterring Iran, finally moving past the counterinsurgency orientation of the past two decades.

A stronger policy to counter Iran would also lead to a more productive approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is once again roiling the region. For decades, the conventional wisdom held that resolving that dispute was the key to improving security in the Middle East. But the conflict has become more of a symptom than a cause of tumult in the region, the true source of which is Iran's revolutionary, theocratic regime. Tehran provides critical funding, arms, intelligence, and strategic guidance to an array of groups that threaten Israel's security—not just Hamas, which sparked the current war in Gaza with its barbaric October 7 attack on Israel, but also the Lebanese terrorist organization Hezbollah and the Houthi militia in Yemen. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be solved until Iran is contained—and until Palestinian extremists stop trying to eliminate the Jewish state.

In the meantime, the United States should continue to back Israel as it seeks to eliminate Hamas in Gaza. The long-term governance and status of the territory are not for Washington to dictate; the United States should support Israel, Egypt, and U.S. allies in the Gulf as they grapple with that problem. But Washington should not pressure Israel to return to negotiations over a long-term solution to the broader conflict with the Palestinians. The focus of U.S. policy in the Middle East should remain the malevolent actor that is ultimately most responsible for the turmoil and killing: the Iranian regime.

FROM KABUL TO KYIV

Biden also drastically weakened American statecraft through his catastrophic mismanagement of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Trump administration negotiated the deal that brought an end to U.S. involvement in the war, but Trump would never have allowed for such a chaotic and embarrassing retreat**.** One can draw a direct line from the

fecklessness of the pullout in the summer of 2021 to the decision by Russian President Vladimir Putin to attack Ukraine six months later. After Russia brushed off Biden's warnings about the consequences of invading Ukraine and attacked anyway, Biden offered Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky the means to leave Kyiv, which would have repeated Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's ignominious flight from Kabul the summer before. Fortunately, Zelensky declined the offer.

The Biden administration has since provided significant military aid to Ukraine but has often dragged its feet in sending Kyiv the kinds of weapons it needs to succeed. The $61 billion Congress recently appropriated for Ukraine—on top of the $113 billion already approved—is probably sufficient to prevent Ukraine from losing, but not enough to enable it to win. Meanwhile, Biden does not seem to have a plan to end the war.

Trump, for his part, has made clear that he would like to see a negotiated settlement to the war that ends the killing and preserves the security of Ukraine. Trump's approach would be to continue to provide lethal aid to Ukraine, financed by European countries, while keeping the door open to diplomacy with Russia—and keeping Moscow off balance with a degree of unpredictability. He would also push NATO to rotate ground and air forces to Poland to augment its capabilities closer to Russia's border and to make unmistakably clear that the alliance will defend all its territory from foreign aggression.

Washington should make sure that its European allies understand that the continued American defense of Europe is contingent on Europe doing its part—including in Ukraine. If Europe wants to show that it is serious about defending Ukraine, it should admit the country to the European Union immediately, waiving the usual bureaucratic accession protocol. Such a move would send a strong message to Putin that the West will not cede Ukraine to Moscow. It would also give hope to the Ukrainian people that better days lie ahead.

A MILITARY IN DECLINE

As China has risen, the Middle East has burned, and Russia has rampaged in Ukraine, the U.S. military has resumed a gradual decline that began during the Obama administration before pausing during Trump's time in office. Last year, only the Marine Corps and the Space Force met their recruiting goals. The army fell an astounding 10,000 recruits short of its modest goal of adding 65,000 soldiers to maintain

International community: Trump with fellow G-20 leaders, Hamburg, Germany, July 2017

its current size. The deficiency is not just a personnel problem; it speaks to a lack of confidence that young Americans and their families have in the purpose and mission of the military.

Meanwhile, the military increasingly lacks the tools it needs to defend the United States and its interests. The navy now has fewer than 300 ships, compared with 592 at the end of the Reagan administration. That is not enough to maintain conventional deterrence through naval presence in the 18 maritime regions of the world that U.S. combatant commanders have identified as strategically important. Congress and the executive branch should recommit to the goal of having a 355-ship navy by 2032, which Trump set in 2017. This modestly larger navy must include more stealthy Virginia-class attack submarines. Also crucial are more Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines, which form one part of the so-called nuclear triad—the equipment and systems that allow Washington to deploy nuclear weapons from the air, land, and sea.

Other parts of the triad need improvement, as well. For example, Congress must appropriate funds for all 100 planned units of the B-21 stealth bomber that is under development, to replace the aging B-2 bomber. In fact, some analysts have argued that the air force needs no fewer than 256 of these penetrating strike bombers to carry out

CARLOS BARRIA / REUTERS

a sustainable campaign against a peer competitor. To avoid the procurement problems experienced with the B-2, which left the air force with a fleet of just 21 aircraft instead of the 132 originally planned, both the air force and the appropriate congressional committees must work to ensure a stable production process.

The triad has become more important in recent years as China and Russia have modernized their nuclear arsenals. China has doubled the size of its arsenal since 2020: a massive, unexplained, and unwarranted expansion. The United States has to maintain technical and numerical superiority to the combined Chinese and Russian nuclear stockpiles. To do so, Washington must test new nuclear weapons for reliability and safety in the real world for the first time since 1992—not just by using computer models. If China and Russia continue to refuse to engage in good-faith arms control talks, the United States should also resume production of uranium-235 and plutonium-239, the primary fissile isotopes of nuclear weapons.

The U.S. conventional arsenal also needs to be transformed. The Trump administration revived the development of hypersonic missiles, funding for which President Barack Obama drastically reduced in 2011, leaving China and Russia far ahead of the United States in acquiring these important new weapons that travel at more than five times the speed of sound and can maneuver within the earth's atmosphere. A second Trump term would see massive investments in this critical technology.

Restoring the military will take the energetic involvement of the president and congressional leadership because civilian and uniformed personnel are incapable of fixing the Pentagon themselves. (Trump often pushed for innovation in the face of bureaucratic inertia fostered by senior-level civilian officials at the Defense Department.) But fundamental change must account for the reality of limited budgets. Thanks to unsustainable levels of borrowing, the federal budget will have to decline, and large increases to defense expenditures are unlikely regardless of which party controls the White House and Congress. Spending smarter will have to substitute for spending more in a contemporary strategy of peace through strength.

Fixing the military requires major reforms to the armed forces' acquisition processes, both for itself and for allied militaries. In recent decades, important projects such as the Zumwalt destroyer, the Littoral Combat Ship, the F-35 fighter, and the KC-46 tanker aircraft

arrived years late and vastly over budget. In the 1950s, in contrast, Lockheed delivered the first U-2 spy aircraft less than a year and a half after getting the contract—and completed it under budget. Such an accomplishment would be inconceivable today because of status quo attitudes in most of the services, congressional dysfunction that makes budgeting and planning difficult, and a lack of vision on the part of the secretaries of the armed forces.

Another fundamental problem with military procurement is the Pentagon's irrational system of developing requirements for new weapons. Requirements are easy to add and hard to remove. The result is highly sophisticated weapons, but ones that are expensive and take years to field. For example, in the early and mid-1990s, when the navy was designing its current class of aircraft carriers, it added a requirement for an electromagnetic aircraft launch system—a technology that did not exist at the time. The decision, which Trump criticized in 2017, added significant costs and delays. The senior civilian leadership in the Pentagon must reform the process by establishing a new rule that any significant alteration in design that may add cost or time to the development of essential systems must be authorized by them and them alone.

The United States should take inspiration from procurement systems in allies such as Australia, where a lean bureaucracy has developed the Ghost Bat unmanned aerial combat vehicle and the Ghost Shark unmanned underwater vehicle at low cost and without the massive delays that hold back U.S. procurement. Nimble newer defense suppliers such as Anduril and Palantir—companies rooted in the innovative tech sector—could also help the Pentagon develop procurement processes better suited to the twenty-first century.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY—AND YOUR FRIENDS

A more efficient military alone, however, will not be enough to thwart and deter the new Beijing-Moscow-Tehran axis. Doing so will also require strong alliances among the free countries of the world. Building alliances will be just as important in a second Trump term as it was in the first one. Although critics often depicted Trump as hostile to traditional alliances, in reality, he enhanced most of them. Trump never canceled or postponed a single deployment to NATO. His pressure on NATO governments to spend more on defense made the alliance stronger.

Biden administration officials like to pay lip service to the importance of alliances, and Biden says that he believes the United States is engaged in a contest pitting allied democracies against rival autocracies. But the administration undermines its own putative mission when it questions the democratic bona fides of conservative elected leaders in countries allied with the United States, including the former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Polish President Andrzej Duda. In fact, these leaders are responsive to the desires of their people and seek to defend democracy, but through policies different from those espoused by the kind of people who like to hobnob in Davos. The Biden administration, however, seems less interested in fostering good relations with real-world democratic allies than in defending fictional abstractions such as "the rules-based international order." Such rhetoric reflects a globalist, liberal elitism that masquerades as support for democratic ideals.

Trump's pressure on NATO governments to spend more on defense made the alliance stronger.

Criticism of those democratic leaders is all the more galling when compared with how little attention Biden officials pay to dissidents in authoritarian states. The president and his top aides seldom follow the approach of former presidents who spotlighted detained dissidents to illustrate authoritarian abuses and highlight the superiority of the free world's model of inalienable individual rights and the rule of law. Carter personally wrote to the Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov. Reagan met with the Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky in the Oval Office and met with others in the U.S. embassy in Moscow. In contrast, Biden has rarely spoken publicly about individual dissidents—people such as Jimmy Lai, the Hong Kong publisher and democracy advocate whom Chinese officials have imprisoned on sham charges. Although the State Department has issued protestations about China's treatment of its citizens, they have come against a backdrop of high-level, unconditional engagement with China that features no serious human rights component.

Trump, for his part, preferred to focus more on Americans unjustly detained abroad than on dissidents, in an effort to build relationships with foreign leaders and give dictators such as North Korea's Kim

Jong Un a chance to come in from the cold. But he did pay attention to opposition forces in authoritarian states that are U.S. rivals. In January 2020, after I publicly expressed hope that the people of Iran would someday be able to choose their own leaders, Trump followed up on social media: "Don't kill your protestors," he admonished the theocrats in Tehran. A second Trump term would see stepped-up presidential-level attention to dissidents and political forces that can challenge U.S. adversaries. This effort would build on past actions, such as when Trump's secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, and other senior officials met with activists seeking freedom in China and when Deputy National Security Adviser Matt Pottinger addressed the Chinese people in Mandarin from the White House and gave voice to many of their concerns about the repressive rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

Some might say that it is hypocritical for the United States to condemn some repressive governments, such as those in China and Iran, while partnering with others, such as Arab nondemocracies. But it is important to consider countries' capacities to change. Most Arab monarchies today are more open and liberal than they were ten or 20 years ago—partly because of engagement with the United States. The same cannot be said of the Chinese or Iranian governments, which have become more repressive and aggressive toward their neighbors.

The United States is not perfect, and its security does not require every nation on earth to resemble it politically. Throughout much of U.S. history, most Americans believed it was sufficient to stand as a model to others rather than to attempt to impose a political system on others. But Americans should not underestimate what their country has achieved or downplay the success of the American experiment in lifting people at home and abroad out of repression, poverty, and insecurity.

Can an American revival occur today in a divided nation, when polls indicate that a vast majority of citizens believe their country is on the wrong track? As Reagan's election in 1980 demonstrated, the United States can always turn things around. In November, the American people will have the opportunity to return to office a president who restored peace through strength—and who can do it again. If they do, the country has the resources, the ingenuity, and the courage to rebuild its national power, securing its freedom and once again becoming the last best hope for humankind.

America Is Losing the Arab World

And China Is Reaping the Benefits

MICHAEL ROBBINS, AMANEY A. JAMAL, AND MARK TESSLER

October 7, 2023, was a watershed moment not just for Israel but for the Arab world. Hamas's horrific attack occurred just as a new order appeared to be emerging in the region. Three years earlier, four members of the Arab League—Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—had launched processes to normalize their diplomatic relations with Israel. As the summer of 2023 drew to a close, the most important Arab country that still did not recognize Israel, Saudi Arabia, looked poised to do so, too.

Hamas's assault and Israel's subsequent devastating military operation in Gaza have curtailed this march toward normalization. Saudi Arabia

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has stated that it will not proceed with a normalization deal until Israel takes clear steps to facilitate the establishment of a Palestinian state. Jordan recalled its ambassador to Israel in November 2023, and a visit to Morocco by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu planned for late 2023 never materialized. Arab leaders have watched warily as their citizens have grown vocally opposed to the war in Gaza. In many Arab countries, thousands have turned out to protest Israel's war and the humanitarian crisis it has produced. Protesters in Jordan and Morocco have also called for an end to their countries' respective peace treaties with Israel, voicing frustration that their governments are not listening to the people.

Since October 7, Arab public opinion has turned sharply against the United States.

October 7 may turn out to be a watershed moment for the United States, too. Because of the war in Gaza, Arab public opinion has turned sharply against Israel's staunchest ally, the United States—a development that could confound U.S. efforts not only to help resolve the crisis in Gaza but also to contain Iran and push back against China's growing influence in the Middle East. Since 2006, Arab Barometer, the nonpartisan research organization we run, has conducted biannual nationally representative opinion surveys in 16 Arab countries, capturing ordinary citizens' views in a region that has little opinion polling. After the United States' 2003 invasion of Iraq, other polls consistently found that few ordinary Arab citizens held positive views of the United States. By 2022, however, their attitudes had improved somewhat, with at least a third of respondents in nearly all countries Arab Barometer surveyed affirming that they held "a very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" opinion of the United States.

But surveys we conducted in five countries in late 2023 and early 2024 show that the United States' standing among Arab citizens has declined dramatically. A poll in Tunisia conducted partially before and partially after October 7 strongly suggested that this shift occurred in response to the events in Gaza. Perhaps even more surprising, the surveys also made it clear that the United States' loss has been China's gain. Arab citizens' views of China have warmed in our recent surveys, reversing a half-decade trend of weakening support for China in the Arab world. When asked if China has undertaken serious efforts to protect Palestinian rights, however,

few respondents agreed. This result suggests that Arab views reflect a profound dissatisfaction with the United States rather than specific support for Chinese policies toward Gaza.

In the coming months and years, U.S. leaders will seek to end the conflict in Gaza and initiate negotiations toward a permanent settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States also hopes to safeguard the international economy by protecting the Red Sea from attacks by Iranian proxies and to cement a regional alliance that contains Iranian aggression and limits Chinese engagement in the region. To achieve any of these goals, however, Washington needs the partnership of Arab states, something that will be harder to get if Arab populations remain so skeptical of U.S. aims in the Middle East.

U.S. analysts and politicians often imply that what they sometimes dismissively call "the Arab street" should be of little concern to American foreign policy. Because most Arab leaders are authoritarian, the argument goes, they do not care much about public opinion, and U.S. policymakers should therefore prioritize making deals with powerbrokers over winning the hearts and minds of Arab citizens. In general, however, the notion that Arab leaders are not constrained by public opinion is a myth. The Arab Spring uprisings toppled governments in four countries, and widespread protests in 2019 led to changes in leadership in four other Arab countries. Authoritarians, too, must consider the views of the people they govern. Few Arab leaders now want to be seen openly cooperating with Washington, given the sharp rise in anti-American sentiment among the populations they rule. Arab citizens' anger at U.S. foreign policy could also have serious direct consequences for the United States. Our prior research based on data from opinion surveys in Algeria and Jordan has demonstrated that anger at U.S. foreign policy can cause citizens to have greater sympathy for acts of terror directed at the United States.

Some Arab Barometer findings, however, also reveal that Arabs' growing skepticism about the United States' role in the Middle East is not irreversible. Variations in opinion between publics in countries that the United States has treated differently indicate that the United States can change the way it is perceived in the Arab world by changing its policies. The survey results also suggest specific shifts in approach that would likely improve Arabs' perceptions of the United States, including pushing harder for a cease-fire in Gaza, increasing U.S. humanitarian assistance to the territory and the rest of the

region, and, in the longer term, working for a two-state solution. Ultimately, to win the trust of Arab citizens in the Middle East, the United States must show the same care for the suffering of the Palestinians that it does for that of the Israelis.

POLL VAULT

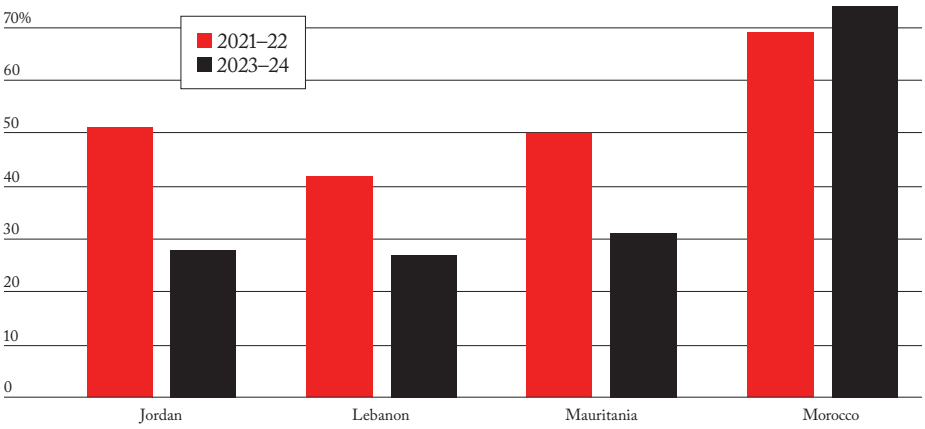
Each Arab Barometer survey polls over 1,200 respondents and is conducted in person in the respondent's place of residence. These surveys question respondents on their views on a wide array of topics, including economic and religious issues, views of their governments, political participation, women's rights, the environment, and international affairs. Since October 7, Arab Barometer has completed surveys in five diverse Arab countries: Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, and Morocco.

Because Arab Barometer's previous round of surveys in these countries was conducted between 2021 and 2022, factors other than the war in Gaza may have contributed to changes in public opinion between then and now. One additional poll, however, happened to provide an invaluable benchmark, allowing us to deduce that certain key shifts in opinion probably occurred much more recently. Between September 13 and November 4, 2023, we conducted a scheduled survey in Tunisia involving 2,406 interviews. About half these interviews were conducted before October 7 and about half afterward. To understand how Tunisians' views changed after October 7, we calculated the average responses during the three weeks before Hamas's attack and then tracked daily changes in the weeks that followed—finding a swift, sharp drop in the percentage of respondents who held favorable views of the United States. The results in most other countries we surveyed in 2021–22 and after October 7 followed a similar pattern: in all but one, views of the United States also declined markedly.

Despite the horror of Hamas's attack, few Arab Barometer respondents agreed that it ought to be called a "terrorist act." By contrast, the vast majority agreed that Israel's campaign in Gaza ought to be classified as terrorism. For the most part, Arab citizens surveyed after October 7 assessed the situation in Gaza as dire. When asked which of seven words, including "war," "hostilities," "massacre," and "genocide," best described the ongoing events in Gaza, the most common term respondents chose in all but one country was "genocide." Only in Morocco did a substantial number of respondents—24 percent—call those events a "war," about the same percentage of Moroccans that

OUT OF FAVOR

Respondents holding a favorable view of the United States



Sources: Arab Barometer, Wave VII (2021–22) and Wave VIII (2023–24).

called it a "massacre." Everywhere else, less than 15 percent of respondents chose "war" to characterize what was happening in Gaza.

Furthermore, Arab Barometer surveys found that Arab citizens do not believe that Western actors are standing up for Gazans. Our survey asked, "Among the following parties, which do you believe is committed to defending Palestinian rights?" and allowed respondents to select all that applied from a list of ten countries, the European Union, and the United Nations. No more than 17 percent of respondents in any country agreed that the United Nations is standing up for Palestinian rights. The European Union fared worse, but the United States received the lowest marks: eight percent of respondents in Kuwait, six percent in Morocco and Lebanon, five percent in Mauritania, and two percent in Jordan agreed that it stood up for Palestinians. The results for the United States diverged even more from those of other Western and global actors on the question of protecting Israel. When asked whether the United States was protecting Israeli rights, more than 60 percent of respondents in all five countries agreed that it was doing so. These percentages far exceed the percentages of respondents who agreed that the European Union or the United Nations is protecting Israel.

These perceptions in the Arab world about Israel's military campaign in Gaza, and about the United States' approach to it, appear to

have had major consequences for the United States' overall reputation. In nine of the ten countries in which Arab Barometer asked about U.S. favorability in 2021, at least a third of all respondents said that they held a favorable view of the United States. In four out of the five countries surveyed between December 2023 and March 2024, however, fewer than a third viewed the United States favorably. In Jordan, the percentage of respondents that viewed the United States favorably dropped dramatically, from 51 percent in 2022 to 28 percent in a poll conducted in the winter of 2023–24. In Mauritania, the percentage of respondents that viewed the United States favorably fell from 50 percent in a survey conducted in the winter of 2021–22 to 31 percent in the survey conducted in the winter of 2023–24, and in Lebanon, it fell from 42 percent in the winter of 2021–22 to 27 percent in early 2024. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who agreed that U.S. President Joe Biden's foreign policies were "good" or "very good" dropped by 12 points in Lebanon and nine points in Jordan over the same period.

The timing of our survey in Tunisia strongly suggests that Israel's military campaign in Gaza drove this overall decline. In the three weeks before October 7, 40 percent of Tunisians said they had a favorable view of the United States. By October 27, not quite three weeks after the start of Israel's military operations in Gaza, just ten percent of Tunisians said the same.

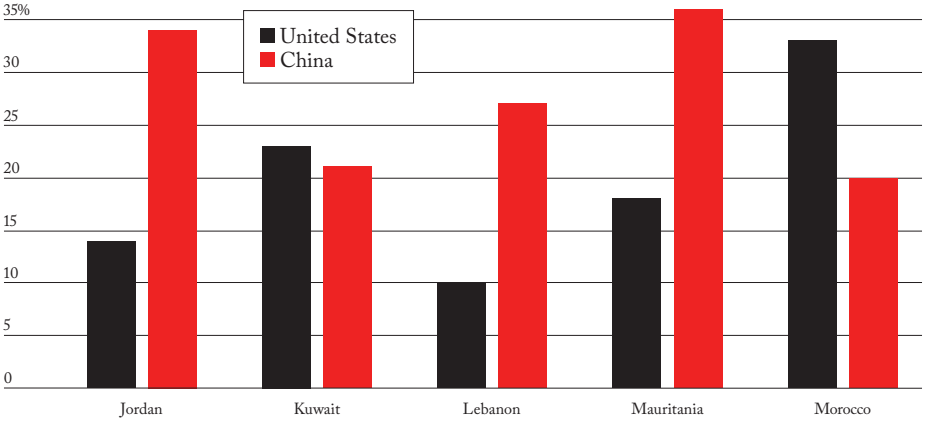
Although Arabs' opinion of the United States and Biden declined after October 7, views on different aspects of the United States' engagement with the Middle East did not all fall equally. Our respondents were just as likely to agree that U.S. foreign aid to their country strengthens education initiatives or that it strengthens civil society as they were before October 7. In fact, respondents in Jordan, Mauritania, and Morocco in our winter of 2023–24 survey were slightly more likely to agree that U.S. foreign aid strengthens civil society than they were in 2021 and 2022. These findings suggest that disagreement with the U.S. government's policy toward Israel and the war in Gaza, not other elements of U.S. foreign policy, are driving the decline in the United States' regional reputation.

FRINGE BENEFIT

Despite offering limited material and rhetorical support for Gaza, China has been the primary beneficiary of the United States' decline in reputation among Arab publics. In its 2021–22 surveys, Arab Barometer demonstrated that Arabs' support for China was declining. But in recent

CHINA'S GAIN

Which country has better policies for maintaining security in your region?



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave VIII (2023–24).

months, this trend has reversed. In all the countries Arab Barometer surveyed after October 7, at least half the respondents said they held favorable views of China. In both Jordan and Morocco, key U.S. allies, China has benefited from at least a 15-point increase in its favorability ratings.

When asked whether U.S. or Chinese policies are better for their region's security, respondents in three of the five countries we surveyed after October 7 said they preferred China's approach. China's actual presence in the region has, in fact, been minimal, with its engagement focused mostly on economic deals through its Belt and Road Initiative. Arab publics in the Middle East appear to understand that China has played a limited role in the events in Gaza: only 14 percent of Lebanese respondents, 13 percent of Moroccans, nine percent of Kuwaitis, seven percent of Jordanians, and a vanishingly small three percent of Mauritanians agreed that China is committed to defending the rights of Palestinians.

It is likely, then, that respondents' increasingly favorable views of China reflect their dissatisfaction with U.S. and Western policies. When asked more specific policy questions, our respondents gave more ambivalent answers. Asked if they thought Chinese policies are better at "protecting freedoms and rights," American policies are

better, Chinese and American policies are equally good, or Chinese and American policies are equally bad, a plurality of Kuwaitis, Mauritanians, and Moroccans said U.S. policies are better than Chinese policies. Respondents in two countries that border Israel, however, felt the opposite: in Arab Barometer surveys in Jordan and Lebanon after October 7, substantially more respondents agreed that China's policies are better than the United States' at protecting rights and freedoms.

China's record on protecting rights and freedoms at home and abroad is poor, but the Lebanese and Jordanian populations now consider the United States' record to be even worse. This finding reflects a larger trend in Arab Barometer's data: geography matters. People who live closest to the conflict in Gaza and whose countries have historically accommodated large numbers of Palestinian refugees expressed the lowest confidence in specific U.S. Middle East policies.

MINORITY REPORT

Our surveys suggest that the slump in Arab support for the United States is not inevitable and that Arab publics respond sensitively to differences in U.S. policy toward issues key to the region. This indication emerges most powerfully from results in Morocco—the one country in the region that has bucked the trend of growing skepticism about U.S. policy. In 2022, 69 percent of Moroccans held a positive view of the United States, by far the greatest support in the Arab world. This already strong support has actually increased: Arab Barometer's winter of 2023–24 survey found that 74 percent of Moroccans now view the United States positively. Morocco is also the only country whose population clearly preferred the United States' Middle East security policies over those of China, by 13 percentage points.

The role the United States has played in supporting Morocco in a territorial dispute is almost certainly the reason Moroccan opinion is an outlier. For decades, the Moroccan government has administered much of Western Sahara, where a movement backed by Algeria seeks to establish an independent state. Until 2020, no UN member state recognized Morocco's sovereignty. That year, the United States recognized Morocco's claim over Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco's formalizing diplomatic ties with Israel. Particularly in the second half of 2023, the Biden administration strongly reaffirmed this policy. Our survey of Moroccan opinion coincided with a heavily publicized visit by Joshua Harris, a senior U.S. diplomat, to both Algiers and Rabat to underscore this policy position.

It appears that its policy on Western Sahara largely immunized the United States from the decline in support that it has suffered in other Arab countries. Other Western countries that did not follow the United States' lead in recognizing Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara have not retained the Moroccan people's support. Between 2022 and the winter of 2023–24, the percentage of Moroccans who said they held a favorable view of the United Kingdom fell from 68 percent to 30 percent, a larger decline than that for other countries we surveyed. Moroccans' opinions of France soured, too, falling by ten points.

In every country we surveyed, respondents indicated that they believe that states in the Middle East and North Africa, and not global actors, are most committed to protecting Palestinians' rights. Yet this opinion does not translate into a desire to see the United States adopt neutrality or exit the Middle East. Despite their anger at the United States' policies toward Gaza, Arab publics made it clear that they want the United States to be involved in solving the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

China has benefited from the United States' decline in reputation among Arab publics.

One Arab Barometer survey question asked respondents which issue should top the Biden administration's agenda in the Middle East and North Africa, offering seven options: economic development, education, human rights, infrastructure, stability, combating terrorism, and the Palestinian issue. In three of the four countries where this question was asked in surveys after October 7, a plurality of respondents agreed that Biden should prioritize the Palestinian issue, even over other key concerns facing their countries. In fact, the proportion of Arab citizens who responded that the Biden administration's top priority in the region should be the Palestinian issue has risen dramatically over the past two years—by 21 points in Jordan, 18 points in Mauritania and Morocco, and 17 points in Lebanon. And our Tunisian data suggest that this rise occurred almost immediately following the start of Israel's military campaign in Gaza.

The war in Gaza has reduced Arabs' support for normalizing ties with Israel from an already low level. Yet this does not mean that the Arab world is turning against a peaceful settlement between Israelis and Palestinians. Our research in Tunisia initially suggested that the outbreak of war in Gaza might drive a decline in support for a two-state solution.

In fact, in polls conducted between December 2023 and March 2024 in Jordan, Mauritania, and Morocco, greater percentages of respondents indicated their support for a two-state solution over a one-state solution, a confederation, or an open-ended "other" approach than had supported these options in 2022.

FACE LIFT

Before the events of October 7, it appeared that a new regional order was emerging in the Middle East. As some Arab governments sought to normalize ties with Israel—the first such agreements in nearly 30 years—it seemed that the primary divide in the region might not run between Israel and the Arab states but rather between Tehran and the countries that seek to contain the Islamic Republic's aggression abroad. A new coalition to contain Iran, including Israel and key Arab states, would have been immensely beneficial for limiting Iran's influence in the region.

It might still be possible for the United States to midwife such a coalition: the help Jordan gave Israel in repelling Iran's April 13 drone and missile attack, and decisions by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to give the United States intelligence ahead of that attack, suggested that key Arab leaders still believe that a regional realignment is in their interest. The surveys we conducted after October 7 found that approval of Iran remains low among Arab publics. Thirty-six percent of Lebanese, 25 percent of Jordanians, and only 15 percent of Kuwaitis expressed a favorable view of Iran.

But efforts toward a full realignment will struggle as long as the decline in regional support for the United States persists. Cold peace accords, like those forged between Israel and Egypt and Jordan, are always at risk of rupture. The United States is irreplaceable as a broker for normalization deals. The Egyptian-Israeli and Israeli-Jordanian peace accords were largely held in place by the enormous amount of assistance the United States gave to both Arab countries. The last half decade's normalization deals have hinged on promises by the United States to address Arab countries' concerns, including recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, removing Sudan from its list of state sponsors of terror, and selling F-35 fighter jets to the UAE.

In the post–October 7 context, losing the support of Arab citizens means not only risking the support of Arab leaders but also jeopardizing

the domestic stability of the United States' key Arab allies. Anger about the suffering of Palestinians has already spilled onto the streets. In Jordan, protests have already derailed Project Prosperity, a UAE- and U.S.-backed agreement between Jordan and Israel on water and energy. After cooperating with Israel and the United States to counter Iran's strike, Arab regimes have remained quiet about their role out of fear of further inflaming the anger of their citizens. The United States needs to try to ease the general pressure Arab governments feel not to work with Israel to counter Iranian influence.

The region is at a pivot point—and the United States is theoretically well positioned to apply the necessary leverage to help secure a cease-fire in Gaza and help move the Israelis and Palestinians toward peace. To restore its regional credibility, however, the United States must lay out concrete, pragmatic steps toward a two-state solution, identifying what effective postwar governance in Gaza will look like and what Israelis and Palestinians must do to ensure that progress is made toward peace. Holding both Israeli and Palestinian leaders accountable is long overdue. The United States must not only sponsor peace talks but also insist on an end to the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

For too long, Arabs have perceived the United States as working to secure its own interests and those of allied Arab leaders ahead of the interests of ordinary citizens—even as Arab citizens seek greater support for democratization and anticorruption efforts. In addition, another Iranian-Israeli confrontation might not be as performative as the one that occurred in April 2024. It might be devastating. The United States must work to win the trust of Arab publics to contain Iran, not only covertly but with public, courageous, and effective policies.

The present situation offers the United States both dangers and opportunities. There is no straightforward equivalent to Morocco's Western Sahara issue in most Arab countries. But the case of Morocco makes clear that when Arab citizens feel that the United States stands up for their interests, they judge it more favorably. The dangers of failing to address declining Arab support for the United States go beyond Gaza. Without a significant shift in U.S. support for Israel's war, and without smart changes to U.S. policy to blunt growing Arab anti-Americanism in the longer term, other actors—including China—will continue to try to crowd the United States out of a leadership role in the Middle East.

How Hamas Ends

A Strategy for Letting the Group Defeat Itself

AUDREY KURTH CRONIN

The war in Gaza has settled into a mind-numbing pattern of violence, bloodshed, and death. And everyone is losing—except Hamas. When Israel invaded the territory last fall, its stated military objective was to destroy the terrorist group so that it could never again commit acts of barbarity like the ones it carried out during its October 7 attack. But although the war has culled Hamas's ranks, it has also vastly increased support for the group—among Palestinians, throughout the Middle East, and even globally. And even though Israel was fully justified in taking military action after the attack, the way in which it has done so has caused immense damage to its own global standing and put intense strain on Israel's relationship with the United States, its most important partner.

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Israel's overwhelming, unfocused military response has killed tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians, mainly women and children, even as Israelis taken hostage on October 7 languish or die in the custody of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian groups. By limiting the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, Israel has produced near-famine conditions in parts of the territory. Late last year, South Africa, with the eventual support of dozens of other countries, filed a complaint at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of carrying out a genocide in Gaza. In May, the Biden administration halted some U.S. arms shipments to Israel, signaling its displeasure with Israeli plans to invade the southern Gazan city of Rafah, where more than a million civilians had taken refuge.

The Israeli war in Gaza has been a strategic disaster.

Worse yet, although Israel claims to have killed thousands of Hamas fighters, there is little evidence to suggest that the group's ability to threaten Israel has been significantly compromised. In some respects, Israel's response has even helped Hamas. A March 2024 opinion poll by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research showed support for Hamas among Gazans topping 50 percent, a 14-point rise since December 2023. It's upsetting to see that the slaughter of Israeli civilians—including children and elderly people—could indirectly build sympathy for Hamas. As a nonstate actor that deliberately targets civilians with violence for symbolic and political ends, Hamas meets all the criteria for being considered a terrorist organization. The group is composed of self-serving, violent extremists who prioritize armed struggle over effective governance and the welfare of Palestinians. There is no question that eliminating Hamas would be good for Palestinians, Israel, the Middle East, and the United States.

But the Israeli government's highly lethal response to the October 7 attack and seeming indifference to the death and suffering of Palestinian civilians has played into Hamas's hands. Among the audiences that the group most wants to reach, including Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, Arab populations throughout the region, and young people in the West, the heinous deeds of October 7 have receded from view, replaced by images that support the Hamas narrative, in which Israel is the criminal aggressor and Hamas is the defender of innocent Palestinians.

Simply put, despite some tactical victories, the Israeli war in Gaza has been a strategic disaster. For Israel to defeat Hamas, it needs a better

strategy, one informed by a deeper understanding of how terrorist groups generally end. Fortunately, history provides ample evidence on that subject. Over the course of decades of research, I have assembled a dataset of 457 terrorist campaigns and organizations, stretching back 100 years, and have identified six primary ways in which terrorist groups end. These pathways are not mutually exclusive: frequently, more than one dynamic is at work, and multiple factors play a role in the termination of a terrorist group. But Israel should pay close attention to one route in particular: groups that end not through military defeat, but through strategic failure. Since October 7, Israel has been trying to crush or repress Hamas out of existence, to little avail. A smarter strategy would be to figure out how to chip away at the group's support and hasten its collapse.

RETURN OF THE REPRESSED

The least common pathway to termination is success; a small number of groups cease to exist because they achieve their goals. One familiar example is uMkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the African National Congress in South Africa, which carried out attacks on civilians early in its campaign to end apartheid. Another is the Irgun, the Jewish militant group that employed terrorism in an effort to push the British out of Palestine, force many Arab communities to flee, and help lay the groundwork for the establishment of Israel.

But it is exceedingly rare for a terrorist group to achieve its core objectives: in the past century, only about five percent have done so. And Hamas is not likely to join that list. Israel is much stronger than Hamas in every military and economic dimension, and it has the support of the United States. The only way Hamas could succeed in achieving its goal of "the complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" would be if Israel so undermined its own unity and integrity that it destroyed itself.

A second way a terrorist group can end is by transforming into something else: a criminal network or an insurgency. Criminality and terrorism overlap, so that particular shift is more like moving along a spectrum than like morphing into something new as a group stops trying to catalyze political change in favor of exploiting the status quo for monetary gain. A shift to insurgency happens when a group mobilizes enough of the population that it can challenge the state for control of territory and resources. That, unfortunately, is a possible outcome in Gaza—and perhaps the West Bank and even Israel proper—if Israel maintains its current strategy.

A third way terrorist groups end is through successful military repression on the part of a state. That is the ending that Israel's current campaign against Hamas hopes to bring about. Repression can succeed, although at enormous costs. Take, for example, Russia's second campaign against separatists in Chechnya, which began in 1999 and continued for nearly a decade. Accurate figures are hard to come by, since Russian authorities prevented journalists from reporting on the conflict (and even targeted some who tried), but most independent sources have estimated that at least 25,000 civilians were killed and that hundreds of thousands were displaced. The bloodshed was massive and the destruction epic, but Russia did wipe out the main separatist groups, depopulating the region and paving the way for a pro-Russian government.

Similarly, in 2008–9, the Sri Lankan government set out to annihilate the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam by trapping the group on a small strip of land in the northeastern region of the island country. The resulting operation killed tens of thousands of civilians, according to the United Nations. But it also eliminated the LTTE leadership, effectively ending the group and the broader civil war that had raged in Sri Lanka for nearly three decades.

Overall, however, military repression has a poor track record as a form of counterterrorism. It is difficult and costly to sustain and tends to work best when members of a terrorist group can be separated from the general population, a condition that is hard to create in most places. Repressive campaigns erode civil liberties and strain the fabric of the state. Scorched-earth tactics change the character of society and raise the question of what, precisely, the government is defending.

Consider, for example, Uruguay in the early 1960s. At the time, the country had a robust party system, an educated urban population, and an established liberal democratic tradition. But when the Tupamaros, a Marxist-Leninist group, carried out a series of assassinations, bank robberies, and kidnappings, the government unleashed the armed forces. By 1972, the military had eradicated the group. Even though the attacks had ended, the army then launched a coup, suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and established a military dictatorship that ruled the country until 1985. In their short campaign, the Tupamaros had carried out 13 bombings (with an unknown number of casualties), executed one hostage, and assassinated fewer than ten officials. The military regime, however, killed, maimed, or displaced thousands. The Tupamaros were gone, but ordinary Uruguayans remained the victims

of violence, only now at the hands of the state, as the military government destroyed the country's democracy.

In explaining their repressive approach in Gaza, Israeli leaders have argued that Hamas is similar to the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) and can be defeated in a similar way. It is true that, by 2017, a U.S.-led coalition had reconquered territory that ISIS seized in Iraq and Syria in 2014, reducing the group's presence in those places. Yet ISIS has not ended. Instead, it has splintered into nine groups it calls "provinces," which are based all over the world and still plot and sometimes successfully carry out bloody attacks. This past March, ISIS-K—the group's "Khorasan province," based in Afghanistan—attacked a concert hall near Moscow, killing more than 140 people. Moreover, unlike ISIS, which is an explicitly transnational movement, Hamas is an exclusively Palestinian group, focused on winning control of contested territory. Military force can degrade Hamas's hold on Gaza, but without a political solution to the underlying territorial dispute, the group would soon reemerge in some form and resume targeting Israeli military forces and civilians.

Counterterrorism that is purely military rarely works.

Some might argue that the real trouble is not that Israel is relying on the wrong strategy but that it doesn't have the right target. In this view, it is Iran, and not Hamas, that is the heart of the problem, since the theocratic regime in Tehran supports, arms, and funds the terrorist group. But any government that launches an attack against the state sponsor of a terrorist group risks getting itself into an even bigger mess. This past April, Israel and Iran engaged in an unprecedented series of tit-for-tat attacks that could have escalated into a full-blown war. But both countries eventually stepped back from the brink, and for now, Israel remains rightly focused on dealing with Hamas directly.

Ultimately, Israel's lack of success in Gaza so far should come as no surprise: counterterrorism that is purely military rarely works and is especially difficult for a democracy to pull off. For one thing, it requires suppressing media coverage to a degree that is difficult to achieve in today's global digital media landscape (although the Committee to Protect Journalists reports that more than 100 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza since the war began). Also, compared with other governments that have relied on military repression in fighting terrorists, many of which are authoritarian, Israel is somewhat more

hemmed in by its own laws and policies and because it relies heavily on a patron—the United States—that criticizes the use of excessive force, opposes the commission of war crimes, and at least putatively conditions its military aid on lawful conduct.

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS

A fourth way that terrorist groups end is through decapitation: the arrest or killing of leaders. Direct Action, a radical left-wing French group, carried out a campaign of assassinations and bombings in the 1980s but ceased operations after the arrest of its principal leaders in 1987. In 1992, Abimael Guzmán, the leader of the far-left Peruvian terrorist militia the Shining Path, was arrested; violence immediately declined, the militants accepted a government amnesty, and the group fragmented into much smaller narco-criminal gangs over the next ten years. Aum Shinrikyo, a Japanese terrorist doomsday cult, changed its name and eventually renounced violence after its leader, Shoko Asahara, was arrested in 1995.

Groups that end through decapitation tend to be small, hierarchically structured, and characterized by a cult of personality, and they usually lack a viable succession plan. On average, they have been operating for less than ten years. Older, highly networked groups can reorganize and survive.

Hamas, then, is not a good candidate for a decapitation strategy. It is a highly networked organization that is almost 40 years old. If killing Hamas leaders could end the group, it would have happened long ago—and the Israelis have certainly tried. In 1996, Israeli security forces set off an explosive device inside a mobile phone used by Yahya Ayyash, a senior figure in Hamas and the group's chief bomb maker; he died instantly. With the outbreak of the second intifada a few years later, the assassinations ramped up, and in 2004, Israel killed Hamas's founder, Ahmed Yassin.

A 2006 study by the scholars Mohammed Hafez and Joseph Hatfield examined rates of Hamas violence before and after such assassinations and concluded that their impact was negligible. Subsequent studies have reached similar conclusions. Targeted killings have barely affected the group's capabilities or intentions. Yet in the wake of October 7, the Israeli government reached for the tactic again. A few weeks after the attack, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told reporters that Israel would "assassinate all the leaders of Hamas, wherever they are." Ronen Bar, the chief of Israel's internal intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, told members of the Israeli parliament that Israel would kill Hamas leaders "in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Lebanon, in Turkey,

in Qatar, everywhere." Since last October, Israel has reported killing over 100 Hamas leaders, including some senior commanders in the group's military wing.

But these assassinations, although degrading Hamas's military strength in Gaza, have not affected the group's long-term capabilities; over the decades, it has demonstrated an ability to replace key leaders. And in addition to yielding few tactical gains, this approach has created strategic costs. When killing a leader may prevent an imminent attack, it is justified self-defense. But endless targeted killings not publicly connected to specific operations lead many observers to see a state's actions as morally equivalent to those of the terrorist group itself. That is especially true the wider the list of targets grows: consider, for example, an Israeli airstrike in Gaza in April that killed three sons and four grandchildren of the Qatar-based Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, which allowed him to portray himself not as a terrorist mastermind but as a grieving father and grandfather.

THE TALKING CURE

Instead of trying to kill Hamas leaders, Israel might try negotiating with them on a long-term political solution. That idea would be anathema to most Israelis, of course. And no one familiar with the long history of failed negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians—not to mention the profound anger that both groups currently feel—would be foolish enough to recommend peace talks now.

But negotiation does represent a fifth way that terrorism can end. Think, for example, of Northern Ireland, where the 1998 Good Friday Agreement ended the Provisional Irish Republican Army's decades-long campaign of terrorism. In 2016, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia entered into a complex agreement with the government and agreed to disarm and operate as a normal political party. Like Hamas, those groups had enthusiastically murdered civilians. Talking to them was difficult for officials, and accepting former members back into society was hard for the public, especially the group's victims and their families. But the bloodshed stopped, and in the end, states gave up relatively little.

Negotiations are risky for terrorist groups because showing up at the bargaining table gives away useful intelligence and undercuts the narrative that there is no alternative but to engage in violence. Only about 18 percent of terrorist groups ever negotiate at all, and talks

usually drag on while violence continues, just at a lower level. Groups that have been around a long time are more likely to negotiate; the average lifespan of a terrorist group is eight to ten years, but groups that negotiate tend to have been around for 20 to 25 years.

Of course, there must be something tangible to negotiate over, and the most successful negotiations with terrorist groups involve conflicts over territory as opposed to religion or ideology. But even in the absence of an agreement, serious talks can cause divides within terrorist groups, splitting those who seek a political settlement from those still wedded to fighting. (On the other hand, negotiations sometimes prove futile: before moving to wipe out the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government spent more than five years negotiating with the group in talks brokered by Norway.)

Negotiations may not seem a likely way for Hamas to end. For one thing, the group has a long history of scorning talks with Israel. In the 1990s, it would engage in spoiler attacks when it believed the peace process was making progress. And today, Hamas is more committed than ever to pursuing a variant of the so-called one-state solution that would involve obliterating the other side, as are some Israeli extremists.

Still, Hamas and Israel have conducted negotiations in the past, generally through intermediaries such as Qatar—including talks that led to a short cease-fire and an exchange of hostages and prisoners last November. It seems possible that external actors such as the United States, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia might eventually find a way to push Israel and the Palestinians into a renewed diplomatic process aimed at creating a two-state solution. And it is possible to imagine Hamas, or at least some faction or remnant of the group, being involved in some way. Such negotiations would be long, fraught, and hamstrung by extremists on both sides. But merely announcing a process would have salutary effects. Indeed, it could even create the conditions for what might be the most likely way for Hamas's terrorism to end: self-defeat.

THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES

Most terrorist groups end in a sixth way: because they fail, either by collapsing in on themselves or by losing support. Groups that implode sometimes die out during generational shifts (the far-left Weather Underground in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s), disintegrate into factions (remnants of the IRA after the Good

Friday Agreement), break down over operational disagreements (the Front de Libération du Québec, a Canadian separatist group, in the early 1970s), or fracture over ideological differences (the communist Japanese Red Army in 2001).

Groups also fail because they lose popular support. Sometimes, that is because governments offer members a better alternative, such as amnesty or jobs. But by far the most important reason terrorist groups fail is that they miscalculate, especially by making targeting errors that stir revulsion among important constituencies. The Real IRA's August 1998 bombing of Omagh, a small market town in Northern Ireland, killed 29 people, including a number of children. Widespread disgust at the attack unified disparate parts of society and solidified support for the Good Friday Agreement. Chechen separatists made a similar mistake in 2004 when they seized a school in Beslan, Russia, leading to the deaths of more than 300 people, including almost 200 children, and sparking a near-total collapse of support for the separatist cause inside Chechnya and throughout Europe. The following year, suicide bombers belonging to al Qaeda in Iraq (the forerunner of ISIS) attacked three hotels in Amman, Jordan, killing around 60 people. Opinion polls later showed that, in the aftermath, 65 percent of Jordanians changed their view of al Qaeda from positive to negative. (Historically, at least a third of al Qaeda's victims have been Muslims, which is the main reason that the group has not become the popular movement that Osama bin Laden hoped it would be.)

Hamas has all the ingredients of a group that can fail. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that it is not popular. Shortly after the group took control of Gaza in 2007, Palestinian support for Hamas began to deteriorate. According to polling by the Pew Research Center, 62 percent of people in the Palestinian territories had a favorable view of Hamas in 2007. By 2014, only a third did. Khalil Shikaki, a Palestinian political scientist and pollster, has found that support for Hamas generally spikes during confrontations with Israel but then dissipates when the group fails to deliver positive change.

Israel's excessive use of military force, however, has strengthened Hamas's hold and aided the group's propaganda about what happened on October 7. According to a poll that Shikaki conducted in March, 90 percent of Palestinians dismiss the idea that Hamas engaged in war crimes that day. Any revulsion that ordinary Gazans might have felt about what Hamas did in their name was likely overwhelmed by their horror over what Israel has done to their loved ones, homes, and cities.

Still, Hamas has fissures that could widen and even lead to its collapse. Its military and political leadership are not always in sync: according to *The New York Times,* the group's Gaza-based military leader, Yahya Sinwar, launched the October 7 attacks with a handful of military commanders, keeping Hamas's political leader, Haniyeh, in the dark until just a few hours before the operation began. Reporting by Reuters revealed that some Hamas leaders seemed shocked by the timing and scale of the attacks. The group also faces pressure and competition from Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which is smaller than Hamas but more closely aligned with Iran. And with much of Hamas's organization in Gaza destroyed, other power structures, including clans and even criminal networks, could vie for control and undercut the group.

Hamas has all the ingredients of a group that can fail.

But the far more likely way that Hamas could fail is through popular backlash. Hamas rules Gaza through oppression, using arrests and torture to suppress dissent. Gazans widely loathe its internal General Security Service, which surveils and keeps files on people, stamps out protests, intimidates journalists, and tracks people accused of "immoral acts." Since October 7, many Palestinians have expressed anger at Hamas for having misjudged the consequences of the attack—a serious targeting error that has indirectly led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Gazans. And suffering Palestinians are well aware that Hamas built an elaborate tunnel system to protect its leaders and fighters but did nothing to protect civilians.

To help Hamas fail, Israel should be doing everything in its power to give Palestinians in Gaza a sense that there is an alternative to Hamas and that a more hopeful future is possible. Instead of restricting humanitarian aid to a trickle, Israel should be providing it in massive quantities. Instead of merely destroying infrastructure and homes, Israel should also be sharing plans for rebuilding the territory in a post-Hamas future. Instead of carrying out collective punishment and hoping that Palestinians will eventually blame Hamas, Israel should be conveying that it sees a distinction between Hamas fighters and the vast majority of Gazans, who have nothing to do with the group and are themselves victims of its thuggish rule and reckless violence.

After decades of struggling with Hamas and months of fighting a massive, brutal war against it, Israel still seems unlikely to defeat the group. But it can still win—by helping Hamas defeat itself.

Green Peace

How the Fight Against Climate Change Can Overcome Geopolitical Discord

MEGHAN L. O'SULLIVAN AND JASON BORDOFF

The clean energy transition has reached adolescence. Its future direction is not yet set, and in the meantime, its internal paradoxes make for a volatile mix. Political leaders fret that ambitious steps to address climate change will aggravate geopolitical problems in a world already troubled by wars and humanitarian crises. Governments worried about energy security after Russia's invasion of Ukraine have advocated for strategies that embrace both fossil fuels and clean alternatives, lest dependence on imported oil give way to reliance on imported lithium. Rising inflation and economic slowdowns, too,

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are exacerbating concerns that the energy transition will lead to job losses and price hikes. The warnings are coming in quick succession. In March, BlackRock CEO Larry Fink championed "energy pragmatism" in his most recent annual letter, and a few weeks later, a JPMorgan Chase report called for a "reality check" about the transition away from fossil fuels. In April, Haitham al-Ghais, the secretary-general of OPEC, wrote that the energy transition would require "realistic policies" that acknowledge rising demand for oil and gas.

Focusing only on net-zero emissions would be aiming too low.

The challenges facing the clean energy transition are real, but the impulse to pull back is misguided. Now is the time for more ambition, not less. As carbon emissions continue to rise, mitigating the dire threat of climate change requires much faster decarbonization than is currently underway. But this is not the only reason to hasten the transition. Poorly implemented half measures are part of the problem; they are worsening the same geopolitical tensions and economic fragmentation that make political leaders wary of stronger climate action. Well-designed and far-reaching policies, however, could help overcome this hurdle. An accelerated transition to clean energy can reinvigorate economies, curb protectionist forces, and calm great-power tensions, ameliorating the very anxieties that today are driving calls to slow down.

Forward-thinking leaders should embrace the transition away from carbon-intensive energy as a means to resolve pressing global problems rather than as just an end in itself. Focusing only on the target of net-zero emissions by midcentury, as stipulated in the Paris Agreement of 2015, would be aiming too low. The energy system is deeply entwined with geopolitics, and the effort to overhaul it is a chance to address more than just climate change.

In accepting this challenge, policymakers can take inspiration from the Marshall Plan. After World War II, the United States not only rebuilt a war-ravaged Europe but through this initiative integrated the continent economically, promoted fiscal and monetary stability, countered Soviet influence, and even advanced U.S. business interests. Now, a similarly ambitious effort to propel the global energy transition can also reduce inequalities, diversify and strengthen supply chains, create export markets for U.S. firms, and lessen dependence on China.

To fail to combine climate goals with geopolitical ones would be to miss a historic opportunity. Replacing the sources of the fuel used to power the entire global economy while also ramping up energy supplies to ensure that billions of people can lead more prosperous lives is already among the most monumental endeavors that humanity has ever undertaken. To make the most of this epochal change, policymakers must prioritize measures that will break the negative cycle between current climate action and geopolitical fragmentation—and in doing so, realize a future that is both cleaner and more harmonious.

STUCK IN A LOOP

The past decade has already been transformational. The pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, dramatic advances in technology, and the war in Gaza have changed the course of international politics. Many of the institutions that buttressed the global order for the past 80 years have weakened, the norms and values underpinning them are under assault, and globalizing trends have stalled or reversed. The movement toward economic fragmentation, political polarization, authoritarianism, and conflict signals further trouble in the years ahead.

As we have written in these pages before, many of these trends are complicating the already difficult task of moving from a carbon-intensive energy system to one of net-zero emissions. Competition between great powers, a defining feature of the emerging global order, now risks slowing the transition. China is a critical trading partner of the United States and the world's main producer of clean energy, yet Washington now sees Beijing primarily as a military danger, a technological threat, and an economic rival. As relations between China and the West deteriorate, Chinese companies offering cheap clean energy products, from electric vehicles, solar panels, and batteries to the metals and minerals that compose them, increasingly face market restrictions abroad. The United States already limits imports of Chinese solar panels, and in May, the Biden administration announced its intention to raise tariffs on several other Chinese clean energy products. The tariff on Chinese electric vehicles, for example, would quadruple under this plan. The European Commission is also considering higher tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles. As more and more trade restrictions on critical metals and minerals are introduced, the measures will raise the costs and slow the pace of the energy transition.

The disorderly and uneven energy transition is creating friction between the developed and developing worlds, as well. Many countries

will need to dramatically increase their energy use in order to deliver prosperity to their citizens. In an interview with the BBC in March, Guyanese President Mohamed Irfaan Ali gave voice to developing countries' frustration with the way the clean energy transition is unfolding. As he railed against the hypocrisy of rich governments that "lecture us on climate change," Ali articulated the widespread perception that the countries that caused the problem are now failing to adequately help those bearing its costs. Such resentments are rising to the surface as conflict and economic hardship drain the resources and political will necessary to sustain climate-friendly policies.

Badly designed clean energy policies also impose unnecessarily high costs on consumers and put energy reliability at risk. In the United States, for example, regional and federal grid operators and regulators are warning that the electrical system is not prepared for the combined strain of increased use of intermittent power sources, specifically solar and wind; shuttered fossil fuel and nuclear plants; and rising electricity demand from electric cars, data centers, and artificial intelligence. Around the world, high energy costs are feeding populist forces that bring right-wing and often climate-skeptical parties to power. These parties' appeals to economic nationalism further erode popular support for climate action. In Europe, polls indicate that right-wing parties, which often oppose stronger climate policies, are gaining support. Across the Atlantic, only 38 percent of Americans said in a 2023 survey that they would be willing to pay $1 per month to address climate change—a 14 percentage point decline since 2021. As economic anxiety rises, the political will to support climate action wavers, and minimizing the costs of the clean energy transition becomes even more important.

Efforts to address urgent transnational issues, including climate change, will also be more complicated than in previous decades. Middle powers such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia may not yet have vast influence on their own, but when they act together, they can shape global events. These countries and the coalitions they create are more pragmatic, nimble, and powerful than the Non-Aligned Movement was during the Cold War. They are intent on keeping their diplomatic options open, resisting the pull of both the U.S. and Chinese orbits. In an international landscape where alignments are fluid, trust in multilateral institutions is weak, and resources are widely dispersed, securing the cooperation of a broad swath of countries to address climate change becomes more challenging.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

Geopolitical strife is not going away, but the future need not be as volatile and fragmented as current trends would suggest. Great-power competition will persist, but the risk of conflict could be diminished. And competition need not become an obstacle to progress. Great powers that compete economically and politically could maintain educational, scientific, and even some commercial links, enabling collaboration to provide global goods and tackle global challenges. Genuine multilateralism that gives more countries a seat at the table can help the world develop more sustainable and equitable solutions to shared problems. Hyperglobalization may be over, but economic integration is still possible, and the triumph of populism is far from assured. And making energy more accessible and more affordable in developing and emerging markets could reduce tensions between rich and poor countries.

To create that better future, policymakers must break the pernicious feedback loop that now binds geopolitical conflict and fragmentation with the uneven transition to clean energy. A downward spiral is neither inevitable nor irreversible, as long as political leaders seize the opportunity before them. An overhaul of the global energy system, if designed properly, could forge a path to global stability.

The concept behind the proposed Green New Deal in the United States is instructive, even if the plan itself lacked key details that made its implementation impractical. The proponents of the policy emphasized that the enormity of the challenge to decarbonize the American economy presented tremendous opportunities for "co-benefits"—that the imperative to reach net zero could be a means to address other domestic ills. Advocates argued that if the United States is going to make a herculean effort to transform its energy, housing, industrial, and transportation sectors, then it should do so in ways that would distribute economic benefits more equitably, diffuse harms more evenly, ensure consistent energy supplies for all, and improve the energy security of the country as a whole. In short, the energy transition would lead to both a net-zero economy and a more just society in the United States.

Scaling this thinking to the international level is not difficult. Strategies to decarbonize the global energy system can and should be crafted with geopolitics in mind, bringing in not just officials responsible for climate change and energy but also those who deal with economics, development, diplomacy, and national security. Broadening the pursuit of net zero in this way would build a coalition for climate action

that is politically durable. As they move beyond treating the emissions target as solely a climate issue, governments would pursue the energy transition in tandem with efforts to curb great-power rivalry, global poverty, protectionism, and conflict.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Diminishing the divide between rich and poor countries is one of the main ways the pursuit of a clean energy economy could foster geopolitical stability. After decades of progress toward global equality, the trend has reversed in the past few years, compounding resentments in the developing world about the rollout of the energy transition. Assistance from the developed world has been slow in coming. Rich countries collectively committed $100 billion in climate financing in 2009, but 13 years passed before they delivered on the promise in 2022. In 2023, governments pledged only $800 million to a new global fund and other arrangements to help low-income countries cope with the effects of climate change. Low-income countries did not cause the climate crisis, and they will be forced to endure its worst effects. What's more, these countries use only a fraction of the energy wealthy countries take for granted. Their energy needs are rising, however, and the refusal of institutions such as the European Investment Bank to finance fossil fuel projects—even those involving natural gas, which is less carbon-intensive than coal or oil—smacks of hypocrisy to much of the developing world. These countries have watched in disbelief as Europe has advanced plans for at least 17 new liquefied natural gas import terminals of its own since Russia started cutting pipeline supplies in 2021.

Yet the energy transition also presents an enormous opportunity for lower-income countries. Clean energy will be a multitrillion-dollar industry, and rather than being left behind or remaining dependent on Western climate finance, developing countries could claim central roles in this new global economy. Consider the scale of the capital flows that will accompany the transition. Building renewable and other clean energy projects, improving energy efficiency, and upgrading infrastructure all require funds. According to estimates from the International Energy Agency and the International Monetary Fund, emerging and developing economies (excluding China) will collectively need investment worth $1.5 trillion to $2 trillion each year by 2030—a dramatic increase from current levels, which totaled just $270 billion in 2023—if the world is to get on track for net-zero emissions by 2050. Even partial

progress toward the target figures would represent a level of investment that could transform lower-income economies.

Most of that capital will come not from public sources but from private ones, including multinational companies, infrastructure firms, and institutional investment funds. But wealthy governments and multilateral institutions can encourage larger private capital outlays by mitigating risks for investors. They can assuage the concerns of companies that might, for instance, hesitate to invest in dollars or euros in a country where fluctuations in the local currency could prevent them from earning a return on that investment. Domestic programs such as the U.S. Department of Energy's Loan Programs Office, which fills financing gaps for clean energy technologies that are moving toward commercial viability, and private funds such as Breakthrough Energy Ventures, which was established by Bill Gates and other wealthy investors to back high-risk clean energy enterprises, can serve as models for similar efforts around the world. With more resources from Congress and more flexible budgetary rules, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation can more aggressively use the tools at its disposal to invest in the next generation of clean energy technologies in emerging economies. And by investing in local currencies, it can help countries with higher risk profiles obtain additional funding from other countries, multilateral development banks, and the private sector. The World Bank can also adopt reforms that would make more financing available for clean energy and climate adaptation.

Governments and international bodies must not let clean energy investments cause further tensions between the developed and developing worlds. Multinational corporations and major mining companies are already making investments to extract and process minerals and metals needed for clean energy products in places such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia. There is a risk that such investment could re-create the problems that historically accompanied the transfer of oil and other commodities from lower-income countries to wealthier ones: the extraction delivered only modest economic benefits to local communities, while large government revenues encouraged corruption, lowered currency values, and weakened governance institutions, resulting in slow overall growth. But this phenomenon, the resource curse, is not inevitable. Governments can prevent negative outcomes by shielding currencies from appreciation and investing in other sectors of the economy. Together with

multilateral institutions, they can ensure that investments help local communities by enforcing regulations that require investor compliance with environmental and social standards.

Policies that support clean energy investments in lower-income countries can be designed to boost local manufacturing and economic growth, as well as improve energy access and energy security. Foreign investment that supports a transition away from fossil fuels should also include funds for job training and other forms of social assistance. Local communities should participate in the planning and implementation of new clean energy and infrastructure development projects in order to maximize economic and social benefits and mitigate secondary harms. An inclusive approach could avoid problems such as those the Just Energy Transition Partnership encountered in South Africa, for example. The program, which is funded primarily by developed countries to facilitate South Africa's shift from coal to cleaner energy sources, faced a domestic backlash over its failure to offset job losses in the coal industry, which has a high rate of Black employment, with other economic opportunities.

The energy system is deeply entwined with geopolitics.

There is no question that low-income countries will struggle to reconcile economic and climate imperatives. Many of them have large coal endowments, and for others, coal remains vital to their energy security and economic growth. But some developing regions have comparative advantages that will also attract investment in clean energy production. North Africa, for instance, has access to cheap solar power, with which it can make green hydrogen. This fuel can then be used to produce low-carbon steel, among other things, but it is difficult and costly to transport. Rather than import North African hydrogen to European steel factories, therefore, firms may eventually relocate steel plants to that low-income region. Large deposits of natural hydrogen have also been found in countries such as Albania and Mali, which can reap economic benefits if they develop this resource.

Still other countries may be suitable sites for technologies that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Because this technology will have the same effect on global climate change no matter where it is deployed, concentrating the infrastructure in lower-income countries such as Kenya, which has cheap electricity and natural caverns that can

be used for storage, can both reduce the overall costs of carbon removal and boost the host countries' economies.

At least in theory, developing countries could collect the remaining economic benefits of oil and gas production. As consumers reduce their use of oil and gas, the question becomes which countries should cease production first. If market forces were left to determine this outcome, Saudi Arabia and Qatar would likely be the last producers standing because of their low production costs. High-cost producers, such as Algeria and Canada, would be forced to shut their taps. The International Energy Agency has explored a more equitable approach that would allow lower-income countries that have contributed only minimally to global carbon emissions, such as Mozambique and Nigeria, to continue extracting fossil fuels after rich countries cease production. There is little incentive, admittedly, for large low-cost producers to go along with such a plan.

Prioritizing economic development in lower-income countries may seem to conflict with the push for industrial policy and job creation in the developed world. Yet the enormous scale of the energy transition makes it possible to pursue two goals at once. Low-carbon industries and the supply chains that support them require such large investment that their growth can benefit poorer countries across the world, as well as companies in richer countries that export technologies and services.

A CENTRIPETAL FORCE

A thoughtful pursuit of net zero can also slow economic fragmentation and make the global trading system more resilient. Right now, the energy transition is exacerbating trade tensions as governments turn to industrial policy and border fees as tools for climate action. Many political leaders recognize the urgency of fighting climate change, but they also face imperatives to create jobs, make supply chains more resilient, and reduce dependence on China. Some of the resulting policies have further imperiled global support for free trade. The U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), for instance, privileges American industry in ways that have angered European countries, South Korea, and other U.S. partners, and proposals for a carbon tariff could steer the United States toward stricter protectionism. The European Union's programs to subsidize clean energy and the bloc's carbon border adjustment mechanism, meanwhile, could further fracture the global market for clean energy technologies by putting external suppliers at a disadvantage.

The use of subsidies and tariffs in support of the energy transition is increasing the ire of developing countries. Many of their leaders bemoan that the clean energy tax credits made available in the IRA will lure investment away from their shores and back to the wealthier United States. They object to import duties on carbon-intensive products that harm countries that don't have the resources or technical capacity to decarbonize their manufacturing sector. Governments in many emerging and developing markets, which cannot subsidize clean energy on the same scale as the United States, resort to protecting themselves with export restrictions—as Indonesia has done with its nickel exports—or with tariffs of their own.

As protective measures are put in place around the world, they raise the cost and slow the pace of the clean energy transition. According to a study cited by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the current fragmentation of international trade could make the average prices of solar panel components in 2030 at least 20 to 30 percent higher than they would be in a world of more integrated supply chains. European import duties on Chinese electric vehicles, which are expected to be in the range of 15 to 30 percent, will also raise the cost to consumers and, at least in the near term, potentially lead to fewer such vehicles on the road.

The tightening of U.S. restrictions on Chinese exports continues. In an April speech, White House climate adviser John Podesta emphasized the Biden administration's preference for trade policies that deny a competitive advantage to countries whose companies produce low-cost carbon-intensive goods—a nod to China. Washington is right to avoid excessive dependence on Chinese exports and to leverage the United States' comparatively low-emissions manufacturing sector. But raising trade barriers is not without cost, and it is unrealistic for U.S. policymakers to believe they can decarbonize by 2050 if clean energy supply chains rely only on the domestic market and a few friendly countries.

If policymakers recognize this reality and commit to rapidly expanding clean energy supply chains, however, they can prevent further splintering of the global economy. The United States and other countries seeking to "friend shore" manufacturing should widen their circles of friends: building high-quality, reliable supply chains at the necessary scale will require many new trade agreements and economic partnerships beyond Washington's typical allies. Only a small number of adversaries—such as those the U.S. government designates "foreign

entities of concern," a list that includes China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia—should be excluded.

The United States will have to strengthen its economic ties across Africa, the Persian Gulf, Latin America, and Southeast Asia if it is to have any prospect of meeting its clean energy goals, especially with steep limits on Chinese imports in place. At a time of flagging support for free trade, the demands of the energy transition can provide its proponents a boost. It would not be economically or politically sustainable for Chinese firms to displace American manufacturing jobs in key sectors, manipulate prices in clean energy technology and commodity markets, or claim the majority of U.S. clean energy subsidies. Embracing trade with a larger pool of partners would be a way to avoid those risks and thus make the transition more durable.

The energy transition presents an enormous opportunity for lower-income countries.

Similarly, although carbon border adjustment tariffs for now seem to encourage protectionism, a more thoughtfully constructed system could instead be an antidote to fragmentation. If the United States were to pair duties on carbon-intensive imports with a domestic carbon tax—as Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democratic senator from Rhode Island, has proposed—it could create incentives for other nations to follow suit. The EU has already adopted such a combination of import tariffs and a domestic tax to level the playing field between imported goods (which may not be subject to a carbon price where they are manufactured) and European ones; in response, Australia and Canada are considering similar border measures, and the United Kingdom has announced a tariff that will be implemented by 2027. The key now is for all these systems to be compatible; the EU's early, unilateral design has elicited criticism of protectionism. If countries develop their policies in tandem, however, the establishment of multiple carbon border mechanisms could create a kind of "climate club" that encourages its members to enact ambitious climate measures without worrying about carbon leakage, whereby emissions-intensive activities shift from countries with strong climate policies to those with weak ones.

WTO reform could further align the pursuit of net zero with an effort to combat protectionism. Developed and developing countries can work together to improve WTO rules regarding subsidies, product standards, and process and production methods with the aim of pro-

moting trade in clean energy technologies, preventing exporters from profiting from cheap emissions-intensive manufacturing, and giving national governments greater latitude to pursue green industrial policies that still comply with international trade law.

CALMING RIVALRIES

Right now, the energy transition is sharpening great-power competition by creating new avenues for countries to compete. China's dominant position in the production of solar panels, batteries, and electric vehicles, as well as in the refining and processing of critical minerals, has raised economic and security concerns in the United States and Europe, prompting them to restrict Chinese access to their markets. And even before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, poorly coordinated energy and climate policies contributed to an energy crisis in Europe, handing Moscow an easy opportunity to put pressure on European countries by sharply restricting its gas exports.

The wave of great-power competition is not all bad for the energy transition. In fact, interstate rivalry has motivated notable climate action in recent years. The IRA—the largest climate legislation ever passed in the United States—would have been inconceivable in the absence of U.S.-Chinese competition. American lawmakers came to appreciate that if they relied entirely on market forces to advance climate innovation, not only would their climate goals remain unmet, but China would amass geopolitical and technological benefits from its aggressive clean energy industrial policy.

As long as the United States is worried about Chinese dominance of global clean energy markets and the influence that dominance brings, Washington will have an incentive to make faster progress toward its climate goals. This national security imperative to quickly scale up clean energy supply chains—both within the United States and across partner countries—broadens the potential base of bipartisan support for climate-friendly policies. Building global markets for American clean energy technologies would bolster U.S. credibility among an expanding pool of allies, strengthening the United States' position relative to China. Investing in adaptation measures in developing countries at high risk of climate disruption and disaster can also enhance American soft power.

Even if competition yields certain benefits, there is reason to defuse tensions between the United States and China. A rivalry between two countries that together account for 43 percent of global GDP

and nearly half of global military spending poses grave dangers for the world. But the transition to clean energy can reduce great-power friction by providing avenues and imperatives for engagement. Washington and Beijing have already benefited from coordination on environmental protection, nuclear safety, and other issues under the 1979 U.S.-China Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement. They should make sure that the ill will between them does not derail the current negotiations for its renewal and extension. Collaboration on conservation in the Arctic and climate assistance for poor countries could also help stabilize the broader U.S.-Chinese relationship. Washington and Beijing have demonstrated that bilateral climate diplomacy remains possible: they agreed last year to reduce methane emissions and increase renewable electricity generation capacity, paving the way for a similar multilateral agreement a few weeks later at COP28, the UN's annual forum on climate change.

Another forum for great-power exchange is the Arctic Council, in which Americans, Europeans, and Russians both in and out of government have managed to maintain relationships even when Russia's relationship with the West is at its most frigid. The body's scientific collaboration and joint contingency planning are valuable in their own right, as is keeping open channels of communication that can help de-escalate a future crisis. Sustained scientific engagement between the United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War, after all, incubated relationships that facilitated broader cooperation on nuclear disarmament, technology transfers, and political integration with Soviet successor states when the Soviet empire collapsed.

The energy transition will also make it necessary for Western leaders to engage China and Russia, even if they are not otherwise inclined to do so. U.S. policymakers in particular must recognize that cutting China out is not a feasible way to achieve energy security. Diversification is surely necessary, but clean energy supply chains can't be scaled up with sufficient speed if China is removed from the equation altogether. Setting up new mining and manufacturing projects takes time, and permitting constraints and environmental considerations will cause delays, especially in the United States. Transportation and equipment limitations will further slow the growth of supply chains. Even with intensive government efforts to ramp up clean energy manufacturing and mining outside China, Beijing will dominate this sector for at least the next decade.

A less single-minded focus on finding alternatives to Chinese clean energy products and technologies can create an opening to advance other strategies for boosting energy security and resilience, which in turn may assuage some of the fears about dependence on China. The risk of relying too heavily on one supplier can be mitigated, for example, by developing stockpiles of clean energy components, similar to what the United States did when it created the Strategic Petroleum Reserve after the shock of the 1973 Arab oil embargo. Government regulation and multilateral coordination can also improve data transparency with respect to commodity supply, demand, and inventories, which would help market forces more effectively address supply disruptions. Interconnected energy markets can more easily accommodate disruptions, too, as Europe's experience over the past few years has shown; the integration of the continent's gas pipeline network made it possible for supplies to move more seamlessly between countries and replace Russian natural gas. Efforts to increase energy efficiency and lower consumption can also build resilience to shocks. Improvements to battery chemistry and recycling, for example, could significantly reduce the projected growth in critical minerals demand.

A TIME FOR AMBITION

With the world staggering under the weight of geopolitical challenges, it may seem an odd time to argue for greater ambition in the clean energy transition. Yet that is exactly what the moment calls for. The threat of climate change demands a rewiring of global energy networks on a massive scale, and it would be shortsighted not to recognize the opportunity in such an endeavor.

Imagining a clean energy transition that helps reverse today's troubling geopolitical trends is not merely an academic exercise, nor is it a fanciful one. It is a generational undertaking that should bring together broad constituencies, from environmentalists to national security hawks. It should inspire people across the world not only to avert disaster but also to realize a positive vision of the future. It should challenge policymakers to rise above partisan debates and short-term considerations. Arresting the downward spiral of environmental crisis and geopolitical strain serves the interests of everyone. Uniting behind a well-conceived and well-executed clean energy transition can bring about not only a more sustainable global economy but also a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Sleepwalking Toward War

Will America and China Heed the Warnings of Twentieth-Century Catastrophe?

ODD ARNE WESTAD

In *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914*, the British historian Paul Kennedy explained how two traditionally friendly peoples ended up in a downward spiral of mutual hostility that led to World War I. Major structural forces drove the competition between Germany and Britain: economic imperatives, geography, and ideology. Germany's rapid economic rise shifted the balance of power and enabled Berlin to expand its strategic reach. Some of this expansion—especially at sea—took place in areas in which Britain had profound and established strategic interests. The two powers increasingly viewed each other as ideological opposites, wildly exaggerating their differences. The Germans caricatured the British as moneygrubbing exploiters of the world, and the British portrayed the Germans as authoritarian malefactors bent on expansion and repression.

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The two countries appeared to be on a collision course, destined for war. But it wasn't structural pressures, important as they were, that sparked World War I. War broke out thanks to the contingent decisions of individuals and a profound lack of imagination on both sides. To be sure, war was always likely. But it was unavoidable only if one subscribes to the deeply ahistorical view that compromise between Germany and Britain was impossible.

The war might not have come to pass had Germany's leaders after Chancellor Otto von Bismarck not been so brazen about altering the naval balance of power. Germany celebrated its dominance in Europe and insisted on its rights as a great power, dismissing concerns about rules and norms of international behavior. That posture alarmed other countries, not just Britain. And it was difficult for Germany to claim, as it did, that it wanted to make a new, more just and inclusive world order while it threatened its neighbors and allied with a decaying Austro-Hungarian Empire that was hard at work denying the national aspirations of the peoples on its borders.

Germany and Britain were on a collision course—but World War I was not inevitable.

A similar tunnel vision prevailed on the other side. Winston Churchill, the British naval chief, concluded in 1913 that Britain's preeminent global position "often seems less reasonable to others than to us." British views of others tended to lack that self-awareness. Officials and commentators spewed vitriol about Germany, inveighing particularly against unfair German trade practices. London eyed Berlin warily, interpreting all its actions as evidence of aggressive intentions and failing to understand Germany's fears for its own security on a continent where it was surrounded by potential foes. British hostility, of course, only deepened German fears and stoked German ambitions. "Few seem to have possessed the generosity or the perspicacity to seek a large-scale improvement in Anglo-German relations," Kennedy lamented.

Such generosity or perspicacity is also sorely missing in relations between China and the United States today. Like Germany and Britain before World War I, China and the United States seem to be locked in a downward spiral, one that may end in disaster for both countries and for the world at large. Similar to the situation a century ago, profound structural factors fuel the antagonism. Economic competition, geopolitical fears, and deep mistrust work to make conflict more likely.

But structure is not destiny. The decisions that leaders make can prevent war and better manage the tensions that invariably rise from great-power competition. As with Germany and Britain, structural forces may push events to a head, but it takes human avarice and ineptitude on a colossal scale for disaster to ensue. Likewise, sound judgment and competence can prevent the worst-case scenarios.

THE LINES ARE DRAWN

Much like the hostility between Germany and Britain over a century ago, the antagonism between China and the United States has deep structural roots. It can be traced to the end of the Cold War. In the latter stages of that great conflict, Beijing and Washington had been allies of sorts, since both feared the power of the Soviet Union more than they feared each other. But the collapse of the Soviet state, their common enemy, almost immediately meant that policymakers fixated more on what separated Beijing and Washington than what united them. The United States increasingly deplored China's repressive government. China resented the United States' meddlesome global hegemony.

But this sharpening of views did not lead to an immediate decline in U.S.-Chinese relations. In the decade and a half that followed the end of the Cold War, successive U.S. administrations believed they had a lot to gain from facilitating China's modernization and economic growth. Much like the British, who had initially embraced the unification of Germany in 1870 and German economic expansion after that, the Americans were motivated by self-interest to abet Beijing's rise. China was an enormous market for U.S. goods and capital, and, moreover, it seemed intent on doing business the American way, importing American consumer habits and ideas about how markets should function as readily as it embraced American styles and brands.

At the level of geopolitics, however, China was considerably more wary of the United States. The collapse of the Soviet Union shocked China's leaders, and the U.S. military success in the 1991 Gulf War brought home to them that China now existed in a unipolar world in which the United States could deploy its power almost at will. In Washington, many were repelled by China's use of force against its own population at Tiananmen Square in 1989 and elsewhere. Much like Germany and Britain in the 1880s and 1890s, China and the United States began to view each other with greater hostility even as their economic exchanges expanded.

What really changed the dynamic between the two countries was China's unrivaled economic success. As late as 1995, China's GDP was around ten percent of U.S. GDP. By 2021, it had grown to around 75 percent of U.S. GDP. In 1995, the United States produced around 25 percent of the world's manufacturing output, and China produced less than five percent. But now China has surged past the United States. Last year, China produced close to 30 percent of the world's manufacturing output, and the United States produced just 17 percent. These are not the only figures that reflect a country's economic importance, but they give a sense of a country's heft in the world and indicate where the capacity to make things, including military hardware, resides.

At the geopolitical level, China's view of the United States began to darken in 2003 with the invasion and occupation of Iraq. China opposed the U.S.-led attack, even if Beijing cared little for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's regime. More than the United States' devastating military capabilities, what really shocked leaders in Beijing was the ease with which Washington could dismiss matters of sovereignty and nonintervention, notions that were staples of the very international order the Americans had coaxed China to join. Chinese policymakers worried that if the United States could so readily flout the same norms it expected others to uphold, little would constrain its future behavior. China's military budget doubled from 2000 to 2005 and then doubled again by 2009. Beijing also launched programs to better train its military, improve its efficiency, and invest in new technology. It revolutionized its naval and missile forces. Sometime between 2015 and 2020, the number of ships in the Chinese navy surpassed that in the U.S. Navy.

Some argue that China would have dramatically expanded its military capabilities no matter what the United States did two decades ago. After all, that is what major rising powers do as their economic clout increases. That may be true, but the specific timing of Beijing's expansion was clearly linked to its fear that the global hegemon had both the will and the capacity to contain China's rise if it so chose. Iraq's yesterday could be China's tomorrow, as one Chinese military planner put it, somewhat melodramatically, in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion. Just as Germany began fearing that it would be hemmed in both economically and strategically in the 1890s and the early 1900s—exactly when Germany's economy was growing at its fastest clip—China began fearing it would be contained by the United States just as its own economy was soaring.

BEFORE THE FALL

If there was ever an example of hubris and fear coexisting within the same leadership, it was provided by Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II. Germany believed both that it was ineluctably on the rise and that Britain represented an existential threat to its ascent. German newspapers were full of postulations about their country's economic, technological, and military advances, prophesying a future when Germany would overtake everyone else. According to many Germans (and some non-Germans, too), their model of government, with its efficient mix of democracy and authoritarianism, was the envy of the world. Britain was not really a European power, they claimed, insisting that Germany was now the strongest power on the continent and that it should be left free to rationally reorder the region according to the reality of its might. And indeed, it would be able to do just that if not for British meddling and the possibility that Britain could team up with France and Russia to contain Germany's success.

Nationalist passions surged in both countries from the 1890s onward, as did darker notions of the malevolence of the other. The fear grew in Berlin that its neighbors and Britain were set on derailing Germany's natural development on its own continent and preventing its future predominance. Mostly oblivious to how their own aggressive rhetoric affected others, German leaders began viewing British interference as the root cause of their country's problems, both at home and abroad. They saw British rearmament and more restrictive trade policies as signs of aggressive intent. "So the celebrated encirclement of Germany has finally become an accomplished fact," Wilhelm sighed, as war was brewing in 1914. "The net has suddenly been closed over our head, and the purely anti-German policy which England has been scornfully pursuing all over the world has won the most spectacular victory." On their side, British leaders imagined that Germany was largely responsible for the relative decline of the British Empire, even though many other powers were rising at Britain's expense.

China today shows many of the same signs of hubris and fear that Germany exhibited after the 1890s. Leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took immense pride in navigating their country through the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath more adeptly than did their Western counterparts. Many Chinese officials saw the global recession of that era not only as a calamity

made in the United States but also as a symbol of the transition of the world economy from American to Chinese leadership. Chinese leaders, including those in the business sector, spent a great deal of time explaining to others that China's inexorable rise had become the defining trend in international affairs. In its regional policies, China started behaving more assertively toward its neighbors. It also crushed movements for self-determination in Tibet and Xinjiang and undermined Hong Kong's autonomy. And in recent years, it has more frequently insisted on its right to take over Taiwan, by force if necessary, and has begun to intensify its preparations for such a conquest.

Beijing accuses Washington of maintaining a world order that is inherently unjust.

Together, growing Chinese hubris and rising nationalism in the United States helped hand the presidency to Donald Trump in 2016, after he appealed to voters by conjuring China as a malign force on the international stage. In office, Trump began a military buildup directed against China and launched a trade war to reinforce U.S. commercial supremacy, marking a clear break from the less hostile policies pursued by his predecessor, Barack Obama. When Joe Biden replaced Trump in 2021, he maintained many of Trump's policies that targeted China—buoyed by a bipartisan consensus that sees China as a major threat to U.S. interests—and has since imposed further trade restrictions intended to make it more difficult for Chinese firms to acquire sophisticated technology.

Beijing has responded to this hard-line shift in Washington by showing as much ambition as insecurity in its dealings with others. Some of its complaints about American behavior are strikingly similar to those that Germany lodged against Britain in the early twentieth century. Beijing has accused Washington of trying to maintain a world order that is inherently unjust—the same accusation Berlin leveled at London. "What the United States has constantly vowed to preserve is a so-called international order designed to serve the United States' own interests and perpetuate its hegemony," a white paper published by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared in June 2022. "The United States itself is the largest source of disruption to the actual world order."

The United States, meanwhile, has been trying to develop a China policy that combines deterrence with limited cooperation, similar to

what Britain did when developing policy toward Germany in the early twentieth century. According to the Biden administration's October 2022 National Security Strategy, "The People's Republic of China harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favor of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit." Although opposed to such a reshaping, the administration stressed that it will "always be willing to work with the PRC where our interests align." To reinforce the point, the administration declared, "We can't let the disagreements that divide us stop us from moving forward on the priorities that demand that we work together." The problem now is—as it was in the years before 1914—that any opening for cooperation, even on key issues, gets lost in mutual recriminations, petty irritations, and deepening strategic mistrust.

In the British-German relationship, three main conditions led from rising antagonism to war. The first was that the Germans became increasingly convinced that Britain would not allow Germany to rise under any circumstances. At the same time, German leaders seemed incapable of defining to the British or anyone else how, in concrete terms, their country's rise would or would not remake the world. The second was that both sides feared a weakening of their future positions. This view, ironically, encouraged some leaders to believe that they should fight a war sooner rather than later. The third was an almost total lack of strategic communication. In 1905, Alfred von Schlieffen, chief of the German general staff, proposed a battle plan that would secure a swift victory on the continent, where Germany had to reckon with both France and Russia. Crucially, the plan involved the invasion of Belgium, an act that gave Britain an immediate cause to join the war against Germany. As Kennedy put it, "The antagonism between the two countries had emerged well before the Schlieffen Plan was made the only German military strategy; but it took the sublime genius of the Prussian General Staff to provide the occasion for turning that antagonism into war."

All these conditions now seem to be in place in the U.S.-Chinese relationship. Chinese President Xi Jinping and the CCP leadership are convinced the United States' main objective is to prevent China's rise no matter what. China's own statements regarding its international ambitions are so bland as to be next to meaningless. Internally, Chinese leaders are seriously concerned about the country's slowing economy and about the loyalty of their own people. Meanwhile,

the United States is so politically divided that effective long-term governance is becoming almost impossible. The potential for strategic miscommunication between China and the United States is rife because of the limited interaction between the two sides. All current evidence points toward China making military plans to one day invade Taiwan, producing a war between China and the United States just as the Schlieffen Plan helped produce a war between Germany and Britain.

A NEW SCRIPT

The striking similarities with the early twentieth century, a period that witnessed the ultimate disaster, point to a gloomy future of escalating confrontation. But conflict can be avoided. If the United States wants to prevent a war, it has to convince Chinese leaders that it is not hell-bent on preventing China's future economic development. China is an enormous country. It has industries that are on par with those in the United States. But like Germany in 1900, it also has regions that are poor and undeveloped. The United States cannot, through its words or actions, repeat to the Chinese what the Germans understood the British to be telling them a century ago: if you only stopped growing, there would not be a problem.

At the same time, China's industries cannot keep growing unrestricted at the expense of everyone else. The smartest move China could make on trade is to agree to regulate its exports in such a way that they do not make it impossible for other countries' domestic industries to compete in important areas such as electric vehicles or solar panels and other equipment necessary for decarbonization. If China continues to flood other markets with its cheap versions of these products, a lot of countries, including some that have not been overly concerned by China's growth, will begin to unilaterally restrict market access to Chinese goods.

Unrestricted trade wars are not in anyone's interest. Countries are increasingly imposing higher tariffs on imports and limiting trade and the movement of capital. But if this trend turns into a deluge of tariffs, then the world is in trouble, in economic as well as political terms. Ironically, China and the United States would probably both be net losers if protectionist policies took hold everywhere. As a German trade association warned in 1903, the domestic gains of protectionist policies "would be of no account in comparison with the incalculable

harm which such a tariff war would cause to the economical interests of both countries." The trade wars also contributed significantly to the outbreak of a real war in 1914.

Containing trade wars is a start, but Beijing and Washington should also work to end or at least contain hot wars that could trigger a much wider conflagration. During intense great-power competition, even small conflicts could easily have disastrous consequences, as the lead-up to World War I showed. Take, for instance, Russia's current war of aggression against Ukraine. Last year's offensives and counteroffensives did not change the frontlines a great deal; Western countries hope to work toward a cease-fire in Ukraine under the best conditions that Ukrainian valor and Western weapons can achieve. For now, a Ukrainian victory would consist of the repulsion of the initial all-out 2022 Russian offensive as well as terms that end the killing of Ukrainians, fast-track the country's accession into the EU, and obtain Kyiv security guarantees from the West in case of Russian cease-fire violations. Many in the Western camp hope that China could play a constructive role in such negotiations, since Beijing has stressed "respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries." China should remember that one of Germany's major mistakes before World War I was to stand by as Austria-Hungary harassed its neighbors in the Balkans even as German leaders appealed to the high principles of international justice. This hypocrisy helped produce war in 1914. Right now, China is repeating that mistake with its treatment of Russia.

Unrestricted trade wars are not in anyone's interest.

Although the war in Ukraine is now causing the most tension, it is Taiwan that could be the Balkans of the 2020s. Both China and the United States seem to be sleepwalking toward a cross-strait confrontation at some point within the next decade. An increasing number of China's foreign policy experts now think that war over Taiwan is more likely than not, and U.S. policymakers are preoccupied with the question of how best to support the island. What is remarkable about the Taiwan situation is that it is clear to all involved—except, perhaps, to the Taiwanese most fixed on achieving formal independence—that only one possible compromise can likely help avoid disaster. In the Shanghai Communique of 1972, the United States acknowledged that there is only one China and that Taiwan is part of China. Beijing has

repeatedly stated that it seeks an eventual peaceful unification with Taiwan. A restatement of these principles today would help prevent a conflict: Washington could say that it will under no circumstances support Taiwan's independence, and Beijing could declare that it will not use force unless Taiwan formally takes steps toward becoming independent. Such a compromise would not make all the problems related to Taiwan go away. But it would make a great-power war over Taiwan much less likely.

Reining in economic confrontation and dampening potential regional flash points are essential for avoiding a repeat of the British-German scenario, but the rise of hostility between China and the United States has also made many other issues urgent. There is a desperate need for arms control initiatives and for dealing with other conflicts, such as that between the Israelis and the Palestinians. There is a demand for signs of mutual respect. When, in 1972, Soviet and U.S. leaders agreed to a set of "Basic Principles of Relations Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," the joint declaration achieved almost nothing concrete. But it built a modicum of trust between both sides and helped convince Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev that the Americans were not out to get him. If Xi, like Brezhnev, intends to remain leader for life, that is an investment worth making.

The rise of great-power tensions also creates the need to maintain believable deterrence. There is a persistent myth that alliance systems led to war in 1914 and that a web of mutual defense treaties ensnared governments in a conflict that became impossible to contain. In fact, what made war almost a certainty after the European powers started mobilizing against one another in July 1914 was Germany's ill-considered hope that Britain might not, after all, come to the assistance of its friends and allies. For the United States, it is essential not to provide any cause for such mistakes in the decade ahead. It should concentrate its military power in the Indo-Pacific, making that force an effective deterrent against Chinese aggression. And it should reinvigorate NATO, with Europe carrying a much greater share of the burden of its own defense.

Leaders can learn from the past in both positive and negative ways, about what to do and what not to do. But they have to learn the big lessons first, and the most important of all is how to avoid horrendous wars that reduce generations of achievements to rubble.

The Progressive Case for American Power

Retrenchment Would Do More Harm Than Good

MEGAN A. STEWART, JONATHAN B. PETKUN, AND MARA R. REVKIN

After more than 20 years of costly military adventures, the United States has failed to root out extremism or bring liberal democracy to the oppressed. Thousands of American soldiers have lost their lives in the failed wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond—and the death toll among civilians is in the millions. In the wake of these calamities, progressives have united around an overriding foreign policy prescription: the United States should jettison its world-dominating ambitions, restrain itself from taking on new commitments, and retrench from the world, shrinking the U.S. military's footprint. In think tanks and universities, progressives are calling on Washington to avoid what they view as belligerent policies

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toward China and Russia. In Congress, the Progressive Caucus—the most left-leaning faction of the Democratic Party—has hesitated over U.S. support for Ukraine and opposed a U.S. military presence in Syria.

The trouble with this new consensus, however, is that Washington is not operating in a vacuum. An undeviating policy of U.S. restraint risks giving free rein to decidedly regressive forces in the world—such as China's authoritarian influence across the global South, Iran's financing of terrorism in the Middle East, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Progressives are right to have a healthy skepticism of using military force and coercive power. But the reality today is that there are authoritarian powers that are repressing their own populations, bullying neighboring states, and wielding economic influence and military force in other ways that are antithetical to progressive values. If the United States retrenched, the world would surely see more such behavior, not less.

Today's progressives need to get comfortable with American power, which, for all its flaws, has a crucial role to play. That doesn't mean condoning illiberal actions to achieve just ends or cynically invoking progressive ideals to justify military adventurism. But it does mean seeking to harness power to advance the values progressives cherish—and accepting that might sometimes makes right.

PILLARS OF PROGRESSIVISM

A progressive foreign policy shares some features with other approaches but stands apart in key ways. Liberal internationalism, a foreign policy that aims to spread and protect liberal economic and political values, seeks to promote democracy and undermine authoritarianism. So does conservative primacy, which calls for the United States to maintain the preponderance of global power. But compared with progressivism, these doctrines are more optimistic about the ability of military force to achieve its goals, and they are less committed to opposing imperialism and encouraging self-determination.

Progressive foreign policy also has some similarities to deep engagement, an approach that demands the buildup of a military arsenal sufficient to deter attacks against not only the United States but also its allies. Proponents of both progressivism and deep engagement want Washington to work with allies through multilateral institutions such as the UN. But progressives go further, championing significant changes to these institutions, with an eye to making them more

equitable rather than necessarily U.S.-led. Progressives are also more willing to hold back military aid from allies—as when the Biden administration paused a shipment of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel in May over growing concerns about the civilian death toll in Gaza.

On domestic policy, progressives mostly agree on specific priorities: higher taxes for the rich, more spending on social programs, legal protections for abortion, reforms to address the legacy of racism, and so on. But there is far less consensus on foreign policy; instead, there is a more general agreement on certain values that should inform U.S. foreign policy.

Restraint risks giving free rein to decidedly regressive forces in the world.

The first is political and economic egalitarianism. This value can be furthered through policies that promote equal political rights and economic opportunities for women and other marginalized people, enforce strong labor and environmental protections in trade agreements, and condition military aid on human rights conditions. Just as progressives support domestic policies that advance such goals at home, they champion similar policies abroad. The platform of Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders, for example, calls for "a foreign policy which focuses on democracy, human rights, diplomacy and peace, and economic fairness."

The second principle fundamental to progressive thought is opposition to needless war and excessive militarism, a tenet often described as restraint. Progressives generally want Washington to avoid the use of force and instead resolve disputes through talks. They are skeptical of military alliances, which they argue can antagonize rivals and imperil other states. "There are significant drawbacks to NATO's continuing existence," the progressive historian Daniel Bessner has argued. "For this reason, one of the major goals of the anti-imperialist left should be to dismantle NATO." Some progressive advocates of restraint, such as the economist Jeffrey Sachs and the historian Stephen Wertheim, view NATO enlargement as one of the primary causes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The third principle is anti-imperialism, which emerged as a pillar of leftist and progressive thought in the late nineteenth century as a reaction against European empire building. To be sure, not every progressive saw colonialism as problematic—U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt chief among them. But by the turn of the twentieth

century, many progressives had begun to criticize the colonial projects of France, the United Kingdom, and other European countries. Later, as anticolonial movements took root beginning in the postwar era, Western anti-imperialist activists, including many in the civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid movement, often supported independence struggles by sending financial resources to national liberation movements and publicizing their struggles.

Even today, Western commentators sometimes invoke anti-imperialism in their calls for international solidarity, as when they argue in favor of supporting Ukrainians' effort to resist Russia's imperialist aggression. More often, however, contemporary anti-imperialism in the West is inwardly focused, manifested in calls to combat Western policies and practices that perpetuate systems of domination and exploitation over poor countries. Progressives worry about Western companies' behavior in the developing world, such as their use of cheap labor, land expropriation, and environmental degradation. They worry, too, about Western governments' imperialist treatment of other countries, as with the imposition of "Washington consensus" economic reforms in Latin America.

WHO'S TO BLAME?

For many progressives, these three principles are best pursued through a foreign policy of retrenchment and restraint, since, in their view, it is the United States that is to blame for much of what ails the world today. The political scientist Van Jackson describes "anti-hegemonism" as a branch of progressive grand strategy that "prioritizes restraining U.S. military and economic power because it is the only adequate response to the perceived root cause of global insecurity." Bessner would also like to see Washington "restrain and reduce" its power. In this vision, the United States would have fewer military bases, less influence on global economic markets, and fewer and weaker military alliances. It would shy away from getting involved in foreign crises, especially those requiring military commitments, such as the war in Ukraine.

A United States like that, the logic goes, would no longer entangle itself in conflicts akin to the "forever wars" that followed 9/11. By shrinking its global military footprint, moreover, the country would not be able to spread democracy at gunpoint or forcibly promote its particular version of hard-edged capitalism, creating more space for political and economic self-determination and progress toward

political and economic egalitarianism. And because the United States is an empire, its pulling back would be anti-imperialist almost by definition. Progressives take it as a given that retrenchment would not undermine their foreign policy goals.

UNRESOLVABLE TENSIONS

Progressive foreign policy principles—anti-militarism, anti-imperialism, and egalitarianism—often conflict. Sometimes, the pursuit of one undermines the others. Perhaps nowhere is this clearer than in Ukraine. In October 2022, the Congressional Progressive Caucus called on the Biden administration to negotiate with Russia to end the war, only to drop the position under pressure from other Democrats who concluded that opposition to imperialism should take precedence over opposition to war. Not all progressives agreed with the caucus's about-face. The historian Samuel Moyn has described support for Ukraine as an aspect of "the militarization of the globe under U.S. auspices." Days after the invasion, the Democratic Socialists of America, the country's largest socialist organization, called on the United States "to withdraw from NATO and to end the imperialist expansionism that set the stage for this conflict." But if Washington discontinued its military support for Ukraine, progressive aims and values in Europe and beyond would almost certainly be set back. A strict antimilitarist policy would not serve the cause of Ukrainian liberals, who would face a direct threat of repression, detention, or even death under Moscow's ruthless rule.

Retrenchment cannot resolve this tension between, on the one hand, opposing war and, on the other, defending egalitarianism and resisting imperialism. In fact, abandoning Ukraine wouldn't necessarily result in less war; it could very well embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin to intensify his efforts to subjugate the Ukrainian people. And even if reducing military aid to Ukraine hastened a formal end to the war through peace negotiations, as some progressives hope, violence against Ukrainian civilians by Russian forces in occupied territories would probably continue apace. It might even escalate.

A similar tension arises in Syria policy. Some progressive Democrats in the House of Representatives, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Becca Balint, have joined isolationist Republicans in calling on Washington to bring home the 900 U.S. troops still deployed in Syria. These troops work alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces, a pre-

dominantly Kurdish alliance of rebel groups opposed to the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, helping combat the remnants of the Islamic State, or ISIS. The SDF was a crucial ally in the U.S.-led coalition to defeat ISIS; it governs part of northeast Syria as a de facto state with a constitution-like charter that reflects a commitment to democracy, human rights, and gender equality.

The presence of U.S. troops is crucial to the SDF's efforts to maintain security in northeast Syria, and the SDF has in fact repeatedly expressed concerns that an American withdrawal would be catastrophic. By dialing back its modest support of the relatively progressive SDF, the United States would enable Iran, Russia, and ISIS to expand their influence in Syria and foil one of the region's few democratic independence movements. A complete withdrawal from Syria would be even worse, creating a security vacuum in which these forces could pursue their violent, antidemocratic agendas. The same goes for Iraq, which still hosts 2,500 U.S. troops.

American power has sometimes advanced progressive aims.

Some progressives have decried military intervention as a thinly veiled imperialist tool. In a 2020 interview, Matt Duss, then a foreign policy adviser to Sanders, described U.S. forces around the world as part of an "empire that we have created." In many cases, such as the U.S. interventions in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011, these arguments have proved to be well founded. But in some instances, military action has saved many lives. The British military intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000, for example, was essential to sustaining UN peacekeeping forces there, ending the war, and fostering a peace that has lasted for more than 20 years.

Outside of war, retrenchment can similarly undermine progressive goals. Consider the extensive role Washington played in preventing a coup in Brazil. From 2021 to 2022, the Biden administration worked with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the democratically elected president of Brazil, to prevent supporters of the defeated incumbent, Jair Bolsonaro, from illegally seizing power. The administration publicly supported Lula's victory, encouraged U.S. allies to take the same position, and communicated to the Brazilian military that a coup would leave the country isolated and result in a downgrading of U.S. security cooperation. The result: violence was avoided, and a popularly elected,

politically progressive president survived an antidemocratic challenge from his authoritarian rival. Washington has been complicit in a long history of abuses in South America. But on this occasion, it used its diplomatic influence to preserve democratic institutions. Had the United States instead stayed out of the dispute, Brazil would probably have ended up with more violence and less democracy.

Retrenchment from global markets, such as withdrawing from trade agreements or international economic institutions, can likewise create vacuums for bad actors to exploit. Consider the vacuum left behind by the failure of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the trade deal proposed by the Obama administration that would have strengthened economic ties between the United States and 11 other economies. When U.S. President Donald Trump killed the TPP in 2017, progressives such as Sanders, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and Representative Keith Ellison applauded. Progressives can debate what effect the TPP would have had on American jobs, and they can argue that the proposed agreement did not go far enough to uphold human rights and environmental or labor standards abroad. But the TPP's failure did not ameliorate such abuses; it exacerbated them. The United States' trading partners went on to look elsewhere for international economic leadership, and they found it in China. In 2020, 15 countries, including China, signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, creating the largest economic bloc in history in a deal that includes none of the labor, human rights, or environmental protections envisioned in the TPP. The interests of American workers should always be considered, but progressive advocates of protectionism must also grapple with how their policies affect workers in developing countries.

Progressives who push for restraint and retrenchment generally have little to say about how the United States should address its own security threats. Some advocates of restraint argue for "offshore balancing," whereby Washington pulls back and relies instead on regional allies to keep challengers in check. Although this approach would reduce the direct role of the U.S. military in international conflicts, it still allows for the United States to exercise its influence in proxy wars that can be just as inimical to peace and security, if not more so. Today, autocratic countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia benefit from U.S. arms sales, joint military training exercises, and other security cooperation. Doling out military aid may keep U.S. troops out of harm's way, but it does not necessarily reduce armed conflict.

Often, it merely renders the United States complicit in violations of human rights and the laws of war, as in Israel's war in Gaza and Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen.

Progressives' mistrust of U.S. foreign policy and intervention is understandable, given Washington's long history of harmful military, political, and economic interference abroad. American power has often hindered progressive aims. But it has sometimes advanced them. A rigid commitment to restraint, no matter the circumstances and whatever the cost, is the stuff of ideological zealotry, not judicious policymaking.

WHEN RETRENCHMENT IS BEST

There are still areas in which Washington should pull back. The United States maintains territorial holdings around the world. To be consistent with the principles of anti-imperialism, Washington should start an ethical self-determination process for Guam, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories, which must include an option for statehood if those territories choose to remain in the United States.

In other parts of the world, many peoples have been subjugated by powerful states, repressed through violence, and denied their political rights. Those who have organized in opposition to these conditions, such as the Sahrawis in Western Sahara and the Palestinians, should have the opportunity to seek self-determination, which can take the form of more autonomy, expanded domestic political rights and recognition, or recognition as an independent state. So long as self-determination does not lead to greater oppression and violence, the United States should support it.

At the UN, the United States should support reform efforts aimed at reducing the organization's imperialist legacy. Reform is particularly urgent at the Security Council, where the permanent five members have too much sway and all other nations far too little. The United States should support a restructuring of the body with an eye to making it more representative of the distribution of global power and the countries most affected by UN intervention—for example, by advocating permanent UN Security Council representation for the powerful regional actors Brazil, Japan, and India. Although it is unlikely that either China or Russia would ever agree to give up its veto power entirely, a progressive case can also be made for changing the rules so that no country could use a veto in certain cases, such as to shield a state perpetrating mass atrocities.

Good soldiers: U.S. troops taking part in a NATO exercise in Bulgaria, September 2023

NIKOLAY DOYCHINOV / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

The United States should also consider how its treaties perpetuate forms of domination and subjugation. The Pentagon's basing agreements, for example, should be reassessed to take into account the costs and benefits for the host country. Progressives have long argued for the closing of the notorious U.S. military base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba—which Havana, with good reason, says is under U.S. "occupation." Shutting it down would be a welcome step. There is nothing inherently wrong about U.S. military bases on foreign soil, as long as the host countries consent and as long as the presence of U.S. troops does not add to their burden. In the same spirit, the United States should overcome its concerns about potential prosecutions of its own military personnel and join the International Criminal Court.

U.S. trade and foreign investment should also be conducted in a manner that is consistent with labor protections, human rights, and environmental standards. The federal government already holds U.S. companies to certain baseline standards; the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, for example, prohibits Americans from paying bribes to foreign governments. But Washington must do more to ensure that U.S. corporations operating abroad live up to the highest ideals. And if the host country's environmental or labor practices surpass

those of the United States, then it is incumbent on American firms to improve their own operations accordingly.

A FORCE FOR GOOD

Progressives are rightly skeptical about the ability of military force to achieve political goals. But there are scenarios in which the use of force aligns with progressive principles: military support for anti-imperialist efforts, limited humanitarian interventions, and defensive wars of necessity. Washington should rarely resort to military solutions to international problems, but it must retain the capacity—and the will—to wield force or support its use by others in ways that align with progressive principles.

Military, economic, and humanitarian support to anti-imperialist combatants is consistent with progressive principles, as long as the recipients comply with international humanitarian law and norms regarding the use of force. Countries with long traditions of progressivism have historically supported anti-imperialist actions around the world; Sweden, for example, supplied humanitarian aid to national liberation movements in Mozambique and Guinea Bissau in the 1960s and 1970s.

Even direct military involvement can be consistent with progressive values. Many humanitarian interventions have intensified violence and prolonged wars—as in Libya, where the NATO coalition overstepped its narrow mandate of protecting civilians and ended up facilitating regime change. But there are notable exceptions, such as when the United States and its coalition partners expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait in the Gulf War. There have also been countless humanitarian crises, such as in Rwanda in 1994, in Srebrenica in 1995, and in Sri Lanka in 2009, in which the United States failed to intervene—and in which even a modest military intervention would likely have reduced human suffering without exacerbating violence. The political scientist Alan Kuperman has estimated that a "minimum intervention" to stop the Rwandan genocide could have saved about 75,000 lives.

Finally, wars for defensive purposes, whether in defense of the United States or U.S. allies, are generally consistent with progressive values, so long as they are fought in ways that align with international humanitarian law and the laws of war. No mainstream progressive has called for surrendering the country's right to national self-defense. But many

of them advocate policies that could gut the United States' defensive capabilities, capabilities that deter aggression by making war less desirable for would-be aggressors. For this reason, although progressives are right to call for cuts to the U.S. defense budget—which, at nearly $900 billion a year, remains the world's largest—a progressive national security policy must prioritize the maintenance of an adequate defense base.

Allies also form part of the broader U.S. defense apparatus. Too often, however, Washington acts as if it is not morally complicit in violence carried out by partners that receive its equipment and training, such as Israel, Niger, and Saudi Arabia. The United States does condition military aid and arms sales on assurances from recipients that the support will not be used to commit human rights abuses or contravene international law. But it must strengthen and consistently enforce those standards and better monitor allies' use of American weapons. And if there are violations, it should work with the communities affected by the violence to find just solutions for harm done—by offering reparations, rebuilding housing, and providing food and medicine, for example.

In its response to Israel's war in Gaza, the Biden administration has fallen short.

Solidarity with the oppressed lies at the heart of progressive politics, but any attempt to promote egalitarianism abroad must be done in collaboration with the people on the receiving end. The United States should think twice before imposing harsh economic penalties on a country to achieve greater political and economic justice there. The strict limits that the U.S. government imposed on aid to Taliban-run Afghanistan, for instance, have exacerbated the risk of famine and deprived civilians of funds they need to buy fuel to heat their homes.

The United States' broader involvement in Afghanistan illustrates that no single progressive solution can solve all foreign policy problems. And any solution will almost always require tradeoffs. The thorniest tradeoffs were those that arose with the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021. The United States' sudden departure was deeply unfair to its Afghan partners and damaging to its credibility with allies across the globe. The Taliban takeover has been devastating for many Afghans, especially women and girls. At the same time, it's not clear whether the U.S. presence in

Afghanistan could ever have helped the country achieve political and economic stability, and continuing to fight the Taliban would likely have claimed many more civilian lives. Good progressive arguments can be made in either direction. At the time, however, the near-universal consensus among progressives was that withdrawal was an easy call. A more informed progressive foreign policy would grapple with the inevitable tradeoffs and try to minimize their ill effects.

A WORLD OF TRADEOFFS

Although U.S. President Joe Biden has distinguished himself as one of the most progressive presidents in recent memory on domestic policy, his foreign policy record is more ambiguous. His administration was quick to condemn threats to democracy in Brazil and has supplied an enormous amount of military assistance to Ukraine. But in its response to Israel's war in Gaza, it has fallen short. Although Biden has pressured Israel to exercise more restraint in its campaign, as of this writing in May, he has declined to publicly condemn Israel's obstruction of humanitarian aid. The weapons pause was a welcome step, but the United States must do much more to enforce laws prohibiting military support to any country that commits gross violations of international law.

Even as the Biden administration has called for sustained support for Ukraine, it has overlooked crises elsewhere. In Sudan, for example, civil war has claimed 15,000 lives in the last year, and more than eight million civilians have been displaced. Yet Washington has failed to supply adequate emergency aid or even to exert pressure on the United Arab Emirates, a close U.S. ally, to stop fueling the conflict through illicit arms sales. The United States, one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gas, has also neglected the victims of climate change, allocating only meager resources for climate adaptation in low- and middle-income countries.

Progressive critics of U.S. foreign policy are right: for too long, Washington has wielded power recklessly, dismissed concerns about justice and equality, and has done nothing to check imperialism. But retrenchment is not the answer. Turning inward may in fact exacerbate some of the problems progressives care about most. Rather than retreat from the global stage, the United States should use its power to respond ethically, humanely, and justly to a world of tradeoffs.

Top Dollar

Why the Dominance of America's Currency Is Harder Than Ever to Overturn

ESWAR PRASAD

The U.S. dollar is the most easily recognized, widely accepted, and ardently desired currency in the world. It is also much reviled for the power it gives the United States over international affairs. Washington wields the dollar as a weapon against its rivals by imposing sanctions and freezing assets. Even U.S. allies chafe at their dependence on the dollar, which exposes their economies and financial systems to the vagaries of U.S. policies. The country's rivals and allies alike thus want to end the dollar's dominance. They are eager to promote alternatives, including their own currencies. And the United States is doing all it can to help them.

The U.S. economy is no longer the colossus it once was. Its public debt is gargantuan and rising, and policymaking in Washington is erratic and unpredictable. Persistent threats of debt defaults undercut

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the perception that U.S. government bonds are safe. Worse still, the bedrock elements of the dollar's strength—the rule of law, an independent Federal Reserve, a system of checks and balances—have been undermined in recent years by populist politicians who have chipped away at the country's democratic institutions.

It would be no surprise, then, if the dollar were rapidly losing its power. But in fact the opposite is happening: the trends that would be expected to weaken the dollar, many of them driven by U.S. policy, are only strengthening its global dominance. The dollar remains on top in part because of the U.S. economy's size and dynamism relative to other major economies. But more than that, although American institutions are fraying, those in other parts of the world are in no better shape, with populism and authoritarianism on the rise. Moreover, economic and geopolitical turmoil serves only to intensify the quest for safe investments, usually leading investors back to the dollar, which remains the most trusted currency. The United States' financial markets are much larger than those of other countries, making dollar assets easier and cheaper to buy and sell.

The dollar is not fully immune to shifts in global economic and geopolitical power. But even as the dollar has lost some ground, the gap between it and any putative rival has only grown and shows no signs of stopping. China and India have become major economic powers, but their currencies have not picked up steam outside their countries. Although the global hierarchy of international currencies is shifting, many of these changes are improving the dollar's relative standing by hurting its rivals even more. Turbulence in the world economy or global affairs—even if triggered or exacerbated by the United States' own policy blunders—only enhances the dollar's strength vis-à-vis alternative currencies. Almost nothing could change this any time soon.

WORTH THE RISK

Since the end of World War II, the dollar has been the leading international currency in every respect—as a unit of account, a medium of exchange, and a store of value. Even by conservative estimates, at least half of all international trade is denominated in dollars, far more than in any other currency and much greater than the U.S. share of world trade, which is roughly 11 percent. It is the main invoicing currency and the top payment currency; roughly half of all international

payments are settled in dollars. When a Chinese company imports iron ore from Brazil or a Brazilian firm purchases semiconductors from China, those transactions are almost always invoiced and paid for in dollars rather than in Brazilian reais or Chinese renminbi.

The dollar is also the principal global reserve currency; 59 percent of foreign exchange reserves in the world's central banks are held in dollar-denominated assets, or assets whose face value and prices are all stated in dollars. There's a reason the share is so large. Foreign exchange reserves act as a central bank's rainy-day funds. They can be used to pay for imports or prop up the domestic currency when its value falls. Central banks in emerging-market countries have learned that large stocks of foreign exchange reserves help insulate their economies from volatile capital flows, and they try to keep reserves in assets that are safe and liquid. As a result, they buy dollar-denominated assets, which are available in large quantities and are always in demand and can therefore be bought and sold with minimal transaction costs.

And the greenback remains a key funding currency in global debt markets. When firms or governments in developing countries try to raise money in those markets, they are routinely forced to borrow in foreign currencies. This is usually because foreign investors lack confidence in the value of those countries' domestic currencies and

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prefer to be repaid in dollars. Even some European companies and banks prefer to raise capital in dollars because the profusion of dollars makes that cheaper and easier. Two-thirds of securities issued by corporations outside their home countries are denominated in dollars.

These preferences reinforce one another. Foreign central banks' demand for U.S. Treasury securities helps finance U.S. government borrowing, keeping U.S. interest rates relatively low. This in turn incentivizes foreign governments, corporations, and financial institutions to borrow in dollars. The widespread use of dollars in international trade encourages both developing and developed countries to hold reserves in dollars. During the 2008 global financial crisis, even the Bank of England and the European Central Bank borrowed dollars from the U.S. Federal Reserve.

At least half of all international trade is denominated in dollars.

But since that crisis, dollars have become an increasingly risky asset. The United States remains a dynamic and resilient economy, yet gross federal public debt is likely to exceed $35 trillion—roughly 125 percent of annual GDP—by the end of 2024, and Congress shows little inclination to curb spending or raise taxes. No one expects the U.S. government to walk away from its debt obligations. Still, the threat of even short-lived defaults, on top of the sheer and rising magnitude of debt, has caused rating agencies such as S&P and Fitch to downgrade U.S. government bonds.

The dollar is hostage to politics in more ways than one. During former U.S. President Donald Trump's term in office, the rule of law and the Federal Reserve's independence—bulwarks of foreign investors' belief in the stable long-term value of the dollar—took a beating. The U.S. system of checks and balances proved far too fragile and dependent on unwritten norms to maintain these investors' confidence, prompting them to reevaluate their trust in the dollar and look for alternatives.

Washington has further jeopardized the dollar's status by barring Iran, North Korea, and Russia from trading in dollars and thereby from accessing the international financial system. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the United States even froze Moscow's foreign exchange reserves held in dollars. Whether or not this move was justified by Russia's gross violation of international law, it

undoubtedly left other central banks wondering whether their own dollar-denominated rainy-day funds would be locked up should their governments run afoul of Washington.

FALSE PROPHETS

But predictions of the dollar's demise have greatly exaggerated the currency's weakness—a fact made clear by its remarkable endurance. Analysts have warned for years that the dollar will lose out to other currencies, and yet none of them has displaced it. Consider the euro, whose inauguration in 1999 seemed to herald the end of the dollar's unrivaled power. The eurozone was, after all, an economic area that stood toe to toe with the United States in terms of economic and financial market size. It had an independent central bank, and its members generally followed the rule of law.

At first, the euro did bite into the dollar's shares as a payment and reserve currency. By 2009, the euro's share of global foreign exchange reserves had risen to 28 percent, up from 18 percent in 2000, and the dollar's share fell by a corresponding amount. But by the end of that year the euro's progress had stalled. European governments lacked the political will to transform their monetary union into a broader economic and financial union, which would have required them to cede more power to eurozone institutions and exercise greater discipline in their own policies. The 2009 eurozone debt crisis laid bare the economic and political weaknesses of the monetary union. The euro's share of global foreign exchange reserves eroded and has now fallen below 20 percent.

The Chinese renminbi has followed a similar trajectory. In 2010, Beijing began to actively promote the "internationalization" of its currency. With China's rising clout in the world economy, this campaign quickly took off. By 2015, about three percent of global payment transactions were being conducted in renminbi—up from essentially zero just five years earlier. Chinese firms issued renminbi-denominated debt in Hong Kong and other financial markets, establishing it as a major currency on track to one day challenge the dollar.

Then the renminbi, too, stalled. China's economy and stock market hit a rough patch in 2014 and 2015. Capital flight surged, and the currency lost value. Beijing responded by making it harder to take capital out of the country, spooking foreign investors. Since that period, the

use of the renminbi in global trade transactions has increased slightly, but only for trade in which China is directly involved. The share of global foreign exchange reserves held in renminbi has stagnated, staying under three percent. And as China's economy stumbles, with its leader, Xi Jinping, tightening his control and avoiding significant economic reforms, it is unlikely that foreign central banks and investors will trust renminbi-denominated assets.

Other countries have not even come close to challenging the dollar's status. Economic and geopolitical forces have in recent years boosted some smaller reserve currencies, such as the Australian dollar, the Swedish kroner, and the Indian rupee, as has been observed by the economist Barry Eichengreen. But these currencies are still bit players in global finance, and their gains have come mainly at the expense of traditional reserve currencies such as the euro, the British pound sterling, and the Japanese yen. The dollar remains firmly on its pedestal, well above the fray.

NEW MONEY

Some politicians and analysts have suggested that countries should look beyond fiat currencies and toward gold and even cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, which they claim can serve as alternative "safe assets." Both gold and cryptocurrencies are in scarce supply and therefore should hold value better than traditional currencies, which can be produced in infinite quantities. But scarcity alone does not ensure durable value. Although some central banks have been accumulating gold, its volatile value and the difficulty of converting large amounts of it into usable currency have rendered it largely unviable as a safe asset. And no central bank wants to take risks on cryptocurrencies, which remain entirely speculative.

Perhaps technology will do what governments cannot: undercut the dollar. Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies have emerged as a libertarian alternative to official currencies issued and managed by central banks. Some governments are embracing digital currencies, as well. China, India, and Japan are already testing digital versions of their official currencies, and a digital euro is in the offing.

But with its highly volatile value, high transaction fees, and limited capacity for handling large volumes of transactions, Bitcoin has proved to be terrible for payments. New cryptocurrencies such as stablecoins, which get their stable value from backing by fiat currency reserves, are

becoming more popular in both domestic and cross-border payments. But stablecoins backed by dollars are the only ones getting any real traction. Ironically, they are only making the dollar more prominent as a payment currency.

Fears that the introduction of digital renminbi could turbocharge the Chinese currency's rise are unfounded. Most international payments are already digital, and the Chinese government has shown no indication of allowing its currency, in any form, to be freely available for use outside its national borders, since doing so would make it harder to control the renminbi's value in foreign exchange markets. If Beijing did relax such controls, it would need to implement major political reforms—namely, instituting the rule of law and a system of checks and balances among different arms of government—before foreign investors began widely using its currency and investing in it. But such changes are unlikely.

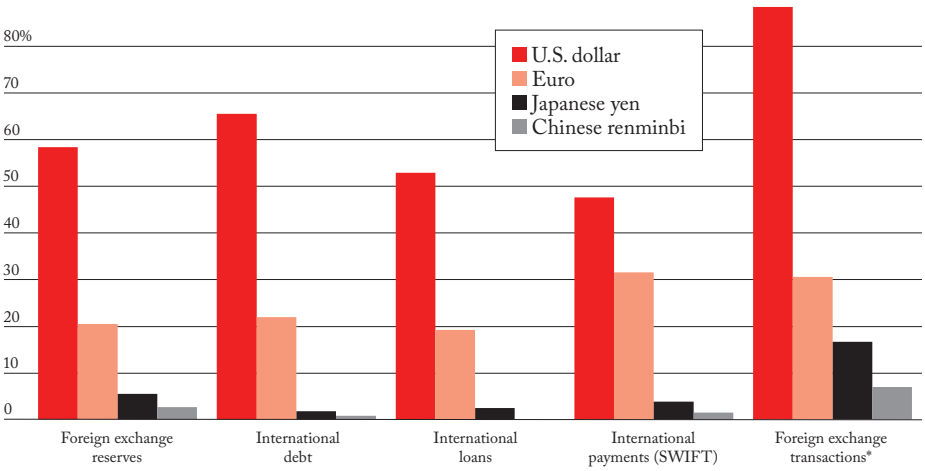
STAYING POWER

Dollar doomsayers still believe the currency is on the brink of decline. They point to the cautionary tale of how quickly the dollar replaced the pound sterling as the dominant reserve currency after World War II. But that situation is not comparable to today's. The United States has no serious rival that can match the combination of its economic and financial market size. Its institutions have deteriorated, but those of other major economies are in even worse shape.

Other quirks also make drastic changes unlikely. The turmoil unleashed by the global financial crisis led central banks and investors around the world to seek safety in the dollar, further strengthening its position. Foreign investors hold more financial assets in the United States than American investors hold abroad, meaning the United States is a net debtor to the rest of the world. U.S. liabilities to the rest of the world are denominated in dollars, with many foreign investors willing to accept low returns in exchange for the safety of the dollar. American investors, by contrast, have been willing to bet on foreign assets that are mostly denominated in foreign currencies because those assets yield higher returns even if they are riskier. If the world turned away from the dollar and sent its value plummeting relative to other currencies, U.S. assets abroad would be worth more in dollars, since each unit of foreign currency would also be worth more dollars. Conversely, foreigners would take a beating on

STILL NUMBER ONE

Currency shares in the global economy



*Sources: Bank for International Settlements, International Monetary Fund, Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, and European Central Bank calculations. Note: Foreign exchange reserve, international debt, and international loan data are for the fourth quarter of 2022. SWIFT data are for December 2022. Foreign exchange transaction data are as of April 2022. *Each foreign exchange transaction involves two currencies, so the individual currency shares sum to 200 percent.*

the value of their dollar-denominated assets when converted back to their home currencies. In other words, a plunge in the value of the dollar would result in a huge financial gift from the rest of the world to the United States.

In light of this scary scenario, countries around the world should surely have reduced their exposure to the "dollar trap." But they have done just the opposite. From 2014 to the beginning of 2024, U.S. foreign liabilities grew from $30 trillion to more than $51 trillion, while U.S. assets grew from $24 trillion to just $33 trillion. In other words, the United States was a net debtor to the rest of the world to the tune of $6 trillion in 2014—and that amount has tripled over the last decade. The United States now has the rest of the world in an even tighter chokehold.

Another example of how the dollar is waxing, not waning, comes from the determination of the value of Special Drawing Rights, an artificial currency created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1969 that serves as a supplemental reserve for member countries. From 1999 to 2015, the value of the SDR was tied to that of four major

currencies: the dollar, the euro, the British pound sterling, and the Japanese yen, with each currency having a particular weight in determining that value. The weights of the currencies in the SDR "basket" are based on a formula that takes account of a country's GDP, its share of world trade, and the share of global foreign exchange reserves held in that currency. The weights sum to 100.

In a bow to China's rising economic power, the IMF added the Chinese renminbi to the SDR basket in 2016. Based on the formula, the renminbi was assigned a weight of 10.9 percent in the basket, a share that would have to come from the shares of the other currencies. But virtually all of it came from the euro, the pound, and the yen; the dollar's share was barely affected. The euro was the biggest loser, with its share in the basket shrinking from 37 percent to 31 percent.

The IMF adjusts the weights every five years to reflect changes in the variables that go into the formula. The latest revision, which took effect in 2022, bumped up the weight of the renminbi to 12.3 percent as the Chinese economy continued its progress, despite the hit from the COVID-19 pandemic. But once again, the dollar did not suffer. In fact, its weight increased by nearly two percentage points to 43 percent. Again, the other three currencies lost ground, with the euro's share shrinking to 29 percent.

SAFETY AMID CHAOS

Economic and geopolitical factors are still intensifying central banks' desires to diversify their foreign exchange reserves. But the reality is that the dollar remains too powerful and too ingrained in the global economy for states to consider switching to other currencies, because their status as payment and reserve currencies has eroded. And the United States boasts an economy that remains larger and more dynamic than that of almost every other country. Even if China were to someday rival the economic might of the United States, it does not have the strong institutional framework needed to compete with Washington.

Washington could overplay its hand, damaging the dollar's standing. There might be a tipping point at which markets decide that the level and trajectory of U.S. public debt are unsustainable. Fearing a surge in inflation, which helps a government reduce the value of its debt obligations, domestic and foreign investors could dump U.S. Treasury securities. Further damage to American democratic institutions and

the independence of the Federal Reserve, both potential outcomes if Trump were to be reelected, would reduce trust in U.S. financial markets and the dollar.

Paradoxically, however, chaos has proved favorable for the dollar. Any economic and geopolitical turmoil, even if unleashed by the United States, tends to lead investors worldwide to search for safety. And U.S. financial markets are the only ones large enough to meet their demands.

Rather than counting on economic and institutional frailties in other countries, U.S. politicians could reinforce the dollar's dominance simply by playing their cards right. Economic policies that promote growth and financial stability, including through disciplined fiscal policy that reins in government debt, would help. Ensuring the Federal Reserve's independence and more judicious use of financial sanctions would preserve trust in the dollar.

The story of the dollar is, ultimately, less about the United States' strength than about the rest of the world's weaknesses. Until that disparity changes, and seemingly no matter how badly the United States plays its cards, don't expect the dollar to decline.

INTRODUCTION

The Real Rules of International Relations

"Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist," wrote John Maynard Keynes nearly a century ago. "Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back."

Keynes was speaking of economics, but the same can be said of foreign policy. Practical people in decision-making roles may dismiss the theoretical arguments that consume international relations scholars—about war and peace, order and disorder, interdependence and insecurity—as irrelevant to actual statecraft. But they, too, are hearing voices in the air; their policies and strategies reflect judgments that in fact come straight out of theoretical arguments about international relations. Often enough, those policies and strategies rest on defunct theories and outdated assumptions: about when a leader's credibility does or does not matter, about when a show of force induces restraint or reaction, about what kinds of interdependence promote peace or war, and more.

The essays that follow trace the history of, and explain the latest thinking on, the ideas most central to current geopolitical debates. They are an attempt to understand the rules that govern international relations and where, how, and why they differ from the often unstated assumptions that shape foreign policy today.

The Credibility Trap

Is Reputation Worth Fighting For?

KEREN YARHI-MILO

Does a reputation for weakness invite aggression? Many analysts have suggested that Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine in 2022 after inferring that the United States and the rest of NATO lacked resolve. The West had imposed only weak sanctions on the Kremlin in response to its 2014 annexation of Crimea and its 2018 poisoning of a former Russian spy in the United Kingdom. Then came the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, a chaotic evacuation that seemed to demonstrate Washington's lack of commitment.

On the day Russia invaded, U.S. President Joe Biden declared that Putin launched his attack to "test the resolve of the West." Now, many believe that the United States must incur significant costs—sending billions of dollars in military aid to Ukraine and risking nuclear escalation—in part to prove to Putin that it is resolute. But the audience Washington is performing for goes well beyond Putin. Across the world, it can seem as if American credibility is constantly being questioned, with the United States' adversaries challenging U.S. hegemony, and its allies worrying whether Washington will come to their aid. The potential for another Trump presidency and a more isolationist approach to foreign policy only adds to these allies' concerns. In the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly scorned Washington's requests for restraint in his assault on the Palestinian militant group Hamas after its terror attack on his country last year, while Iran's proxies are brazenly attacking U.S. targets. In the global South, the United States is struggling to convince countries to take its side in the emerging struggle between democracies and autocracies. "Nobody seems to be afraid of us," former Defense Secretary Robert Gates lamented in a February interview with *Foreign Affairs*.

Many analysts suggest that these developments are the United States' fault—that it has lost its once unquestioned reputation for strength and resolve. Regaining that reputation depends on the extent to which the United States is willing to support friends such as Israel and Ukraine. The rest of the world is watching closely, and if Washington goes soft,

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the argument runs, adversaries will feel emboldened and allies abandoned. China, for instance, might infer that it can invade Taiwan without serious consequences.

Leaders have long obsessed over credibility, the perceived likelihood that a nation will follow through on its word, especially a threat to use military force. Washington has even gone to war—in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq—to protect its credibility. Behind this consensus that credibility is important, however, lies a great deal of uncertainty about how it is established, how much it drives relations between states, and how it can be maintained or regained without instigating escalation or unwanted wars.

Over the past decade, a new wave of research has produced fresh insights into credibility, particularly about what creates a reputation for resolve. The latest thinking shows that all else being equal, maintaining a reputation for resolve is important to deter adversaries and reassure allies. But it also suggests that leaders have far less influence over their country's credibility than they might wish. Credibility is in the eye of the beholder, after all. It depends on the complex psychological calculations of one's adversaries. Reputations are beliefs about beliefs, which makes them almost impossible to control. The implication for the United States should give policymakers pause: its efforts to rebuild credibility are costly, easily misread, and can even backfire.

FACE OFF

The word "credibility" entered the international relations lexicon after the 1938 Munich agreement between fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, referring to what the leaders who appeased Hitler lacked. Resolve—a state's willingness to stand firm in a crisis—is only one component of credibility; material capabilities and perceived interests are also essential. But maintaining a reputation for resolve became much more central to American statecraft with the advent of the Cold War. Considering the United States' new commitments at that time to defend distant allies, the global struggle between competing power blocs, and the existential risk of nuclear conflict, theorists such as Thomas Schelling contended that credibility was one of the key factors in deterring and prevailing against the Soviet Union. "Face is one of the few things worth fighting over," he wrote in 1966.

Schelling, whose pioneering work shaped the rationalist thinking of many Cold War–era U.S. presidents, emphasized that a state's response to any given crisis would prove relevant in future crises, even very different kinds of crises, because adversaries would presume that the state would behave similarly. This hypothesis suggested that deterrence depended on sending clear messages to adversaries and sticking to prior commitments. And it helped motivate the United States' containment policies during the Cold War, leading to a focus on peripheral regions such as Indochina. Although the United States had few direct interests in Vietnam, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson felt that the United States' reputation for resolve was being tested, and so they were steadily drawn into a war to defend South Vietnam from the communist north.

After the Cold War, a second wave of scholars questioned whether a state's reputation for resolve mattered at all. Because most international relations dilemmas incorporate new considerations and unique sets of stakes, Daryl Press has argued that, when predicting a state's future actions, analyzing its "current calculus" of interests and capabilities is far more useful than scrutinizing its past behavior. Jonathan Mercer has argued that reputations for resolve are hard to build. Moreover, they are subjective: leaders are more likely to believe their adversaries are resolute and their allies are weak-willed.

This post–Cold War school of thought contended that because states judge other states' reputations subjectively and reputation does not appear to predict current behavior, reputation may not be worth fighting for. This view became more influential among U.S. policymakers over the course of the United States' long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as some began to question whether Washington was mainly staying the course for reputation's sake—and if it was really gaining anything by the effort to sustain its reputation for resolve. President Barack Obama defended his decision not to attack Syria after Bashar al-Assad's regime used chemical weapons in 2013, crossing a redline he himself had set, by saying in 2016, "Dropping bombs on someone to prove that you're willing to drop bombs on someone is just about the worst reason to use force."

THE SCIENCE OF RESOLVE

Over the last decade, a new generation of scholars has employed fresh statistical methods, textual analyses of newly declassified government records, and survey-based experiments to bring an even more nuanced examination to how reputation shapes international relations, charting a middle path between those who think credibility is the be-all and end-all in foreign affairs and those who think it does not matter. All else being equal, it is becoming clearer that if a state has a reputation for resolve, that does change its adversaries' behavior. For example, Alex Weisiger and I found in a 2015 study that countries that had backed down in a crisis were more than twice as likely to face challenges the following year than countries that had stood firm.

Yet signaling resolve can be harder than it seems. Repeated demonstrations of resolve can become rote over time and lose their force—or even be counterproductive. The United States prosecuted the Vietnam War in part to show its resolve to contain communism. But by making subsequent presidents wary of entangling Washington in far-flung conflicts, the war may have dampened that resolve and made future interventions much less likely—an aversion that came to be known as "Vietnam syndrome."

Van Jackson's research has also demonstrated that because a state's commitments are multifaceted, an effort to prove one form of determination may weaken a reputation for other kinds. For instance, North Korea's frequent threats over the course of its crises with the United States helped it establish a reputation for resolve. But when it failed to follow through, the same threats gave it a reputation for inconsistency and dishonesty.

In seeking to show toughness, North Korea proved its fickleness.

The greatest paradox the new wave of research identified, however, is that a state's reputation is not in its own hands. Reputations depend on who is assessing them. My own research has found that leaders display selective attention, giving information that stands out to them—such as their personal impressions of their counterparts—greater weight than other indicators that may be equally or more relevant. In a similar 2022 study, Don Casler also found that policymakers adjudicate credibility differently depending on their experiences and roles. Intelligence and military officials, for instance, tend to focus on a state's current capabilities, whereas diplomats focus more on the consistency (or lack thereof) of its leaders' behavior.

Beliefs matter, too. The recent scholarship on credibility suggests that one actor's assessment of another is profoundly shaped by irrational forces such as confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and ideological predisposition. For instance, a 2018 study by Joshua Kertzer, Jonathan Renshon, and I found that hawkish policymakers perceive public threats as less credible than their dovish counterparts do and are more inclined to view actions such as military mobilizations as credible signals of resolve. A similar study by Kertzer, Brian Rathbun, and Nina Srinivasan Rathbun found that hawks are more likely than doves to view their adversaries' promises to comply with agreements as lacking credibility, suggesting that existing beliefs color assessments. As former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said of the Iranians as Trump prepared to withdraw from Obama's nuclear deal, "We know they're cheating. . . . We're just not seeing it."

Or consider the United States' pullout from Afghanistan in 2021. Those who cared about the overall reputation of the United States might have concluded that the withdrawal and its chaotic execution showed adversaries that the country lacks resolve. But those more

concerned about the consistency of its promises and its actions—maintaining what is known as a strong "signaling reputation"—would say the withdrawal revealed high credibility. Biden, after all, followed through on a campaign promise to pull U.S. forces out of Afghanistan, signaling that he keeps his word.

Adding to the complexity, observers do not judge resolve based only on what a leader does; they also judge it based on what they think the leader thinks about what he does. In 1969, after North Korea shot down a U.S. reconnaissance aircraft, killing 31 Americans, the United States chose not to retaliate.

U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers attempted to frame this nonresponse as a sign of American strength: "The weak can be rash. The powerful must be more restrained." If observers thought Rogers truly meant what he said, then the decision not to retaliate could have bolstered the United States' reputation for resolve. But if observers believed Rogers was trying to dress up weakness with powerful rhetoric, or that the United States had chosen not to retaliate purely to send a signal about its reputation, they may have discounted the statement entirely. This is what the scholar Robert Jervis called "the reputation paradox." Ultimately, how people calculate someone's intentions reflects their own biases.

SIGNAL OR NOISE?

Debates about credibility, or more specifically reputations for resolve, are now playing a major role in the latest outbreak of violence in the Middle East. One reading of that conflict suggests that the decline of American credibility in the region—thanks to the bungled Iraq war, the failure to follow through on the redline with Syria, and the rushed withdrawal from Afghanistan—directly contributed to a credibility deficit that may have emboldened Iran and its proxies, including Hamas. A converse theory suggests that Iran and its proxies rated U.S. credibility highly and hoped that if they attacked a U.S. ally, Washington would be forced to respond and get dragged into a costly war.

These narratives may have elements of truth. But they assume qualities about the United States' adversaries that are almost impossible to know, such as which dots Iranian or Hamas leaders connected to form their assessments of U.S. resolve. After Israel scored a decisive win in its 2006 war with Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, acknowledged that had he known Israel would respond with so much force, he would never have kidnapped the two Israeli soldiers whose capture triggered the war. It is unlikely the leaders of Hamas or Iran will make a similar declaration—and if they did, it might not accurately reflect whether the United States' credibility deficit factored into their calculus. Even if these leaders plainly and publicly declared how their perception of U.S. resolve influenced their decision-making, such statements may be merely performative. Policymakers must apply great caution when concluding, first, that they understand how adversaries perceive their country and, second, that this perception clearly motivated a certain action.

In fact, Hamas's October 7 attack may have had nothing to do with Washington's reputation. It could simply be explained by the failure of Israeli deterrence attributable to local factors such as the prospect of an Israeli-Saudi normalization deal and turmoil in Israel's domestic politics. Likewise, Putin's decision to invade Ukraine may have had everything to do with his psychology—his megalomania, his aspiration to restore Russia's lost grandeur. By blaming so much global disorder on a U.S. credibility gap, analysts can easily overstate Washington's ability to shape world events.

The American credibility deficit is also frequently invoked to account for China's growing belligerence. A common argument is that a U.S. failure to

support Ukraine will signal to Chinese leader Xi Jinping that the United States' commitment to supporting smaller allies is fundamentally softening, thus making China's invasion of Taiwan more likely. But only Xi fully knows how much the war in Ukraine factors into his calculations. Actions don't always speak for themselves, as Jervis has noted.

REPUTATIONAL RISKS

It is essential for U.S. leaders to avoid being trapped by their anxieties about credibility. In the end, it matters little how the United States assesses its own reputation for resolve. What matters far more is how observers—its adversaries and allies—judge it, which is hard for the United States to control. The current obsession with fixing the United States' credibility deficit may not only be fruitless; it also carries substantial risk. If Americans come to the consensus that a credibility crisis is to blame for the world's disorder, they are likely to conclude that their opponents will be more willing to challenge U.S. interests, which invites more hawkish U.S. policy and costlier signaling. This signaling, in turn, could provoke unnecessary crises, arms races, and even wars.

Of course, Washington must make its threats as credible as possible, reassure its allies, and demonstrate that contested areas—such as Israel, Taiwan, and Ukraine—are of vital concern. But states and leaders have a wider menu of options to build credibility than some policymakers recognize: public methods, private methods, and a combination of the two. Sending military aid or moving aircraft carriers can signal resolve. So can taking steps to avoid undermining American credibility, such as not publicly broadcasting the United States' intent to "pivot" away from a region or publicly delineating redlines it will be unwilling to enforce. In general, those who suggest the United States faces a credibility deficit tend to put far too much emphasis on the country's past actions. The past matters, but what matters more is the credibility of the signals Washington is sending right now.

U.S. policymakers also sometimes excessively globalize credibility by presuming that every country around the world perceives the United States' actions in the same way and takes a single message from U.S. foreign policy, even policies the United States has applied in a completely different region. In truth, the vantage points from which other countries form their perceptions of the United States vary widely, depending on those countries' local situations and their leaders' psychologies. Policymakers must carefully analyze the psychologies of the United States' diverse adversaries—otherwise, even costly signaling may not have the desired effect. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to signaling resolve or maintaining deterrence.

Adversaries may not even pay the most attention to what the United States does overseas. They may more closely follow its domestic politics. More than any action the United States did or did not undertake abroad, it may well have been American political polarization that most encouraged Putin to test Washington's resolve to defend Kyiv. Recent research suggests that when presidents show resolve in

domestic crises, they can build their reputations internationally. Soviet leaders' opinion of President Ronald Reagan's resolve was bolstered by a domestic act—his firing of air traffic controllers for going on strike in 1981. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs that he was impressed by Kennedy's resolve to seek a negotiated settlement to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. But what impressed him was not how the president behaved toward Moscow but his willingness to overrule the advice of his own military leaders to avert a catastrophe.

A reputation for resolve is one of the hardest things for leaders or states to control. Any assessment of U.S. adversaries that does not carefully examine their psychology—the different ways they come to conclusions about the United States—is doomed to be inadequate. And ultimately, to regain credibility abroad, the United States may first need to tackle an even more complicated task: restoring unity at home.

Fear Factor

How to Know When You're in a Security Dilemma

CHARLES L. GLASER

Great-power competition is back. With the post–Cold War unipolar moment over, the United States and China now jostle over trade and technology, compete in a conventional and nuclear arms race, and seek to counter the other in various hot spots. So far, China's aggressive posture has yet to trigger a full-blown war, but the same cannot be said of Russia. Its invasion of Ukraine has confounded policymakers in the West and raised the specter of an increasingly dangerous, conflict-prone world.

What explains this turn for the worse? Political scientists tend to understand the behavior of challengers such as China and Russia in two ways. One camp views them as revisionist, expansionist, or "greedy" states: China and Russia want to revise the geopolitical status quo in pursuit of nationalist aims, great-power status, ideological dominance, or the ambitions of their authoritarian leaders. The second sees China and Russia as fundamentally insecure. To protect themselves against an external threat, insecure states may build up their military forces, seize territory that

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could form a buffer zone, or conquer a threatening adversary. In this view, competition is driven not by greed on the part of specific states but by the international system itself—and the insecurity it can create.

The debate is more than academic; each description leads to a very different policy. When a country faces a greedy state, the standard policy prescription is to deter it. In the case of China and Russia, then, the United States should strengthen its military advantages, communicate its resolve, and pursue economic and political policies to weaken these adversaries. When a country faces an insecure state, by contrast, the solution is not so simple. In that case, policymakers must reckon with a key concept in international relations theory: the security dilemma.

A security dilemma arises when an insecure state that seeks to protect itself acts in a way that unintentionally makes another state feel threatened and insecure. Tensions can escalate and lead to war, even though both sides merely want to live in peace. When it faces a security dilemma, the United States will be inclined to improve its deterrent capabilities. But it has to do so in a way that does not make its adversaries feel less secure, while convincing them that it desires only security. That can be a difficult needle to thread: after all, when a state builds stronger deterrent capabilities, an adversary can feel threatened. In grappling with the security dilemma, a state may be left with only bad options.

Finding the right option becomes even tougher when analysts think too rigidly about the nature of states, assuming countries belong to one of the two categories: either greedy expansionists or security seekers. Policymakers must aim to deter the former while waltzing through the security dilemma with the latter. But that binary distinction overlooks the fact that many states are mixed; they can be greedy and insecure at the same time and, therefore, especially hard to manage. Indeed, that is likely the case with the United States' principal rivals today.

CRUEL INTENTIONS

The security dilemma has long been a fixture of international relations theory. The term was coined in 1950 by John Herz, who argued that states pursuing security in an anarchic international system "are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others." He went on: "This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst." Anarchy in international relations does not refer to chaos but instead describes the lack of an authority that can protect states from one another and enforce international agreements.

In the 1970s, Robert Jervis advanced the field's understanding of the security dilemma by explaining that it became more or less acute depending on the relative might of offensive and defensive military capabilities, what scholars termed the "offense-defense balance." In a 1978 essay, he explored the implications of changes in this balance. When states can build offensive forces more easily than they can build the requisite defenses to stave off attack, they will all seek to bolster their offensive capacities. As a result, they will feel more insecure, and competition will invariably intensify. By contrast, when defensive

capabilities have the edge, states tend to be more secure and compete less.

Misjudging this balance can lead to catastrophe. In 1984, Stephen Van Evera argued that World War I resulted from the mistaken belief in the strength of offensive forces over defensive ones. Many European governments assumed that conquests would be easy, a belief that encouraged them to go to war. That

conviction came apart in the bloody years that followed, as machine-gun and trench warfare made mincemeat of visions of easy conquest.

Studying the security dilemma helped scholars in the following decades transform realist understandings of international relations that saw competition and conflict as inevitable. Theorists such as Kenneth Waltz argued that in an anarchic world, states tend not to cooperate because they fear that others will take advantage of them—by cheating on agreements, for example. But in "Realists as Optimists," an essay published in 1995, I showed how melding Waltz's view of the international system with insights from studies of the security dilemma might point the way toward escaping the insecurity that the system generated. Cooperation and unilateral restraint, rather than competition and aggression, could in fact be the best options for a state in an insecure world. Take the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1972. The treaty essentially banned missile defense systems that would have threatened the adversary's ability to retaliate for a nuclear strike—in other words, its capacity for deterrence. The treaty aimed to spare the superpowers an intensifying nuclear arms race that could have strained their relations and encouraged either of them to attack in a moment of crisis. Under the theory that scholars called "defensive realism," states can be very secure when the security dilemma is mild—that is, when they find defense easier than offense and when a defensive strategy does not simultaneously provide a state with a more potent capacity to attack.

Other research of mine and by Andrew Kydd explored how competition driven by the security dilemma could lead states to see their adversaries as motivated by greed when they actually sought only security. A country could, for example, build up its army to provide itself with an extra margin of protection. But a rival might perceive that move as excessive and a sign of greed. The United States' so-called pivot to Asia generated this type of dynamic. With China's conventional military capabilities growing, the United States under President Barack Obama decided to give greater priority to East Asia, including by shifting

more U.S. forces to the region. China believed that U.S. capabilities in the region were already extensive and sufficient for their stated purposes, however, so it perceived the change in U.S. policy as an act of hostility and aggression.

Scholars have explored the security dilemma's reach in other arenas. Glenn Snyder explained that security-dilemma logic applies to alliance formation, as well as to military buildups. Much like the development of weapons that are good for both offense and defense, a new alliance can unsettle a rival, making that adversary wonder whether the pact is defensive or a precursor to future aggression. Barry Posen extended the security dilemma to ethnic conflicts that can erupt when imperial orders dissolve. In new conditions of anarchy, groups can see other groups as threatening even as each only seeks to defend itself. William Wohlforth applied the logic of the security dilemma to competition for status. A state's anxiety about whether a peer recognizes its status can generate unnecessary competition. Scholars today apply this model even more widely—using it, for example, to examine how a conventional war might spiral into nuclear war.

As studies of the security dilemma demonstrate, governments have to worry about implementing policies that make other states feel less safe, because the heightened insecurity of others can be dangerous. During the second half of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union chose to deploy multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, or MIRVs, missiles loaded with several nuclear warheads. Both countries were ostensibly searching for greater security. But as a result of the deployment, the U.S. land-based ballistic missile force became more vulnerable and the United States worried intensely about the adequacy of its strategic nuclear forces. The arms competition also strained the superpowers' diplomatic relationship, which made the new vulnerability of their nuclear forces seem all the more perilous. Both Washington and Moscow would have been more secure if neither country had deployed MIRVs.

The thorny dynamics of the security dilemma offer governments a variety of policy insights. Recognizing how its actions might make an adversary feel less safe, a state should lean toward defensive strategies, unilateral restraint, and negotiated agreements that limit the size and offensive attributes of its forces. Such policies can moderate the negative signals that military buildups can send to adversaries. An arms control agreement in the 1970s to ban MIRVs would have made the United States safer and eased Cold War tensions. States can sometimes become more secure by doing less.

BEYOND THE BINARY

Analysts have used the security dilemma framework to look at relations between states that seek security in an anarchic system. By contrast, they have recommended deterrence as the best policy option for dealing with expansionist states that are driven by greed. This binary framing neglects the fact that some states are mixed, both insecure and greedy.

These mixed states will never be satisfied with the status quo. Even if they are certain that their adversary merely seeks security, they will still

be prone to behaving aggressively. Yet they are also likely to act aggressively if they feel insecure. Russia today may be a prime example of a country with mixed motives: it pursues aggressive policies in Ukraine both because it believes Ukraine should be part of Russia and because it feels threatened by NATO expansion.

Dealing with such an adversary is doubly difficult. A state would need to maintain a strong deterrent to ward off its adversary's expansionist impulses. But maintaining a stronger deterrent makes it harder to forgo policies that decrease the adversary's security, which could be self-defeating: feeling threatened, the adversary could become harder to deter. The difficult tradeoff created by the security dilemma would then intensify. Simply exercising restraint—with the hope of demonstrating one's own peaceful motives—would likely be too risky. Any sign of weakness would tempt the adversary, now less deterred, to take aggressive actions.

The mixed motives of states increase the chances of confusion and misperception, greatly exacerbating the effects of the security dilemma. If a state fails to appreciate that its adversary faces such a dilemma, it will reach unduly negative conclusions. All threatening actions will be interpreted incorrectly as reflecting greedy motives—and confrontation and conflict will become more likely.

STARVED FOR CHOICE

The security dilemma can help analysts understand the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the military competition in East Asia between China and the United States. Neither case, however, reflects a pure security dilemma. And some interpretations depend on contested assessments of events on the ground.

At the risk of oversimplification, the debate over the causes of Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be divided between those who emphasize the Kremlin's greed and those who dwell on its sense of insecurity. The first perspective holds that the sources of the war are internal to Russia, including Putin's particular beliefs about Ukraine's history and a strain of imperial nationalism that has infected much of the Russian public. For analysts in this camp, Russia's claims that it is threatened by the expansion of NATO are clearly disingenuous. This assessment of Russia—that it is greedy and secure—suggests that the best option for dealing with the Kremlin is deterrence and competitive policies; the United States should push for the expansion of NATO and strengthen its ability to attack or coerce Russia.

The other perspective holds that NATO's eastward expansion—along with the promise officials made in 2008 that Ukraine would eventually become a member and the growing political and military relationship between the treaty organization and Ukraine since then—created genuine Russian insecurity. To prevent NATO from encroaching farther into the former Soviet Union, the argument runs, Russia invaded Ukraine. These analysts see the security dilemma in action, with NATO's search for security making Moscow feel threatened and insecure. Alternatively, it could be argued that NATO was a greedy actor with expansionist goals that had nothing to do with its own security: it wanted to spread democracy, expand the liberal international order, and

enlarge the reach of the West. In this view, the alliance did not face a security dilemma but instead adopted greedy policies that made Russia insecure and provoked it to invade.

This polarized debate largely overlooks the possibility that instead of being either greedy or insecure, Russia is both. In this reading, Russia had designs on Ukraine well before NATO moved toward including Ukraine in the alliance. Then, NATO's looming expansion made Russia feel insecure, which in turn made the Kremlin more likely to act in expansionist ways. An invasion of Ukraine became Russia's best option.

If Russia is indeed a mixed state, then the West probably never had good options to prevent the invasion. Giving up on NATO expansion might have delayed it but would not have stopped it. As Russia became more powerful, the Kremlin might have invaded just to satisfy its greedy motives no matter what NATO did. And because Ukraine was not in the alliance, NATO could not pursue a purely defensive strategy in deterring a Russian attack. Had NATO been more aggressive and decided to accept Ukraine as a member, it would have unavoidably decreased Russian security. But the slow process of the alliance's expansion—raising the possibility of Ukraine's inclusion but still excluding it—appears to have been the worst of both worlds. It may have made Russia feel insecure without sufficiently deterring a Russian invasion.

The security dilemma also looms large over the rivalry between the United States and China. In some respects, there should be little cause for military tension. The vastness of the Pacific Ocean makes invasion of each other's homeland virtually impossible. That both countries are large and of roughly equal power also makes invasion less likely. In addition, both can deploy nuclear forces that can endure nuclear strikes, providing highly effective deterrents. Distance, the ocean, and nuclear weapons strongly favor defense. As a result, the security dilemma here is so mild that China and the United States should have little difficulty avoiding security competition.

But zoom in on East Asia, and the dynamic changes entirely. The security dilemma in this region and specifically over Taiwan is complex and dangerous. China considers Taiwan part of its homeland and wants to achieve unification with the island. It sees its efforts to prevent Taiwan from declaring formal independence as geared toward preserving its own territorial integrity and thus its national security. Chinese officials consider the possibility of using force to achieve unification a matter of security, not greedy expansion.

The United States does not take an official position on the outcome of Taiwan's status, but it rejects the use of force as a legitimate means for resolving the dispute and is committed to maintaining the United States' ability to defend the island. The situation is therefore not, strictly speaking, a security dilemma but a dispute over the political status quo and the acceptable means for that dispute's resolution.

The dynamics of a security dilemma nevertheless intensify the competition over Taiwan. Even purely defensive capabilities deployed by Taiwan and the United States would appear threatening to China because they could increase

Taiwan's willingness to declare independence and reduce China's ability to coerce or invade the island. Consequently, even if the conditions that would usually blunt a security dilemma were available—such as highly effective defense capabilities that do not double as offensive capacities—they would do little to reduce competition and China's insecurity. Instead, China would see the United States as a threat and respond in ways that then threaten Taiwan. As China's power and military potential increase, so will military competition and political tensions.

The United States is therefore left with only bad options. It can toughen Taiwanese defenses and its own commitment to safeguarding the island but will thereby continue to threaten China's security and risk a major war. It can implement that policy in a variety of ways, but not in one that solves the fundamental problem: that China sees Taiwan as a vital interest. Alternatively, the United States can end its commitment to using force to defend Taiwan, potentially inviting a Chinese invasion and the forcible unification of the island with the mainland. There are no options in between.

Although it is not applicable in every situation, the security dilemma helps explain much of great-power competition. But as these cases show, even the strongest theory cannot be easily applied in all situations. Categorizing states as greedy or insecure may help conceptual models function, but it flattens the drivers of state behavior in the real world. As ever, some of the hardest problems for policymakers and analysts lie in the gray areas that resist easy solutions.

The Most Dangerous Game

Do Power Transitions Always Lead to War?

MANJARI CHATTERJEE MILLER

At first, many in Washington assumed that China's rise could be managed. In response to the inexorable logic of modernization and some coaxing, China would become, as U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick put it in 2005, a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system. For a time, Beijing did seem to be tamed, as it appeared to embrace Western norms and international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Today, however, that hope is dying. On issue after issue, Beijing seems to

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be rejecting rather than accepting the U.S.-led global order, putting it on a collision course with Washington and prompting endless discussion about how to solve the "China challenge." But for all the specificity of the debate—how to deter an invasion of Taiwan, what to do about Beijing's expansionist claims in the South China Sea, and whether the West should economically and technologically decouple from China—at the heart of the matter lies a much bigger and older conundrum in international relations. How does a status quo power handle a rising power, and do moments of transition inexorably lead to war?

The political scientist Graham Allison has called the seemingly inevitable clash between the United States and China "the Thucydides trap." The phrase refers to the pattern first laid out by the fifth-century Greek historian in his study of the conflict between Sparta, then the dominant power in ancient Greece, and Athens, its rising challenger. In *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, he famously concluded that "what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta." In the modern era, international relations scholars have come up with a name for this dynamic: power transition theory.

Pointing to history, the theory holds that ascendant powers routinely emerge to challenge the dominant power and the international order established by it, eventually leading to conflict. Far from remaining confined to the ivory tower, this conceptual framework has long guided official thinking. After World War II, for example, policymakers in Washington and Moscow worried that the Cold War between the established American power and the rising Soviet one might turn hot.

But power transition theory offers another implicit, and often overlooked, truth: that the way the established power manages the international order can matter as much as, if not more than, the ambitions of the challenger. Precisely because they are still rising, challengers generally have to act within the existing laws, norms, and institutions that govern international relations, even when they disagree with them. By contrast, established powers have the ability to adjust those rules and institutions in ways that sustain or enhance their own position. In other words, for a long-dominant hegemon, the best response to a threatening upstart may not be to confront or try to defeat it but to use the international order to contain it.

HOME-FIELD ADVANTAGE

Modern power transition theory originated with the political scientist A. F. K. Organski, who gave a general theoretical foundation to the problem first articulated by Thucydides. In 1958, Organski identified what he called a "recurring pattern" in international relations: in every era of history, he argued, there is a status quo power that eventually faces a challenger. During the Cold War, scholars such as Robert Gilpin, Jacek Kugler, and Ronald Tammen expanded on Organski's thesis, agreeing that a rising power tends to be "dissatisfied" with the way that the dominant power influences the distribution of goods in the international system, thus preventing the challenger from reaping equal benefits. And so it

rises to displace the status quo power, a confrontation that often leads to war.

In line with this thesis, most policymakers and analysts thinking about China today have been concerned almost exclusively with the direct threat posed by Beijing's rise. This is not surprising, since power transition theory's primary implication is that challenges by rising powers can lead to war. For this reason, the first generation of power transition theorists tended to focus on how the distribution of power affected the probability of war and peace: a concentration of power in a single hegemon could, in their view, stabilize the system until a challenger became sufficiently strong to contest that power. Applied to the United States and China today, this framing suggests a dire outcome. Even if a full power transition does not occur—that is, even if China eventually stagnates—Beijing might attain enough economic and military power to push back against Washington, raising the odds of war.

But the emphasis on China's trajectory ignores the theory's second implication—the part that attempts to explain why rising powers seek to challenge the great power in the first place. Power transition theorists argue that conflict emerges not simply as a consequence of a challenger's growing power but because of the challenger's relationship to the international order. Specifically, a rising power may be dissatisfied with existing international arrangements and may seek to gain sufficient power to eventually change them. Therefore, the way the status quo power manages the international order can determine whether rivalry turns into conflict.

To understand why, it is necessary to grasp exactly which aspects of the existing order rising powers wish to change and how. Most rising powers are not wholly revisionist. Rather, they tend to dislike some elements of the international order while accepting others. Thucydides himself implicitly made this point: in his view, it was not just Athens's rising power that led to the Peloponnesian War but also its dissatisfaction with some of the cultural and political norms that Sparta embraced. As Laurie Bagby has observed, Thucydides argued that the clash between the "national character" of Sparta (reticent, inward-looking) and that of Athens (daring and glory seeking) influenced how they approached the distribution of power and the international order. For example, Sparta was slow and hesitant to defend friendly states. This emboldened Athens to invade and annihilate a neutral state—the island of Melos—to demonstrate its strength and power. In his Melian Dialogue, Thucydides's dramatic narration of the negotiations between Athens and Melos, Athens declares, in a show of the cultural norms that drove it, that "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

Over the past decade or so, a new generation of power transition scholars has paid more attention to how rising powers, both past and present, interact with the international order. Stacie Goddard has studied the ways that rising powers justify their actions, showing, for example, that the long-dominant United Kingdom chose to accommodate the upstart United States in the 1820s because London recognized that Washington, through

the Monroe Doctrine, was upholding existing norms of free trade, international law, and noninterference. Xiaoyu Pu has explored how rising powers strategically frame their views of order to domestic and foreign audiences. China, for example, has engaged in "conspicuous giving" and charity through its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in an effort to convert economic power into diplomatic power. Rohan Mukherjee has looked at the tendency of challengers to sacrifice material interests in order to be accepted as a part of the great-power club. Japan, for instance, agreed to limit the size of its fleet at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22, notwithstanding its drive to become a major naval power, and China, despite its efforts to build a larger nuclear arsenal, agreed to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996.

Michelle Murray has shown how rising states seek to be recognized as full equals of established powers, as both the United States and imperial Germany did at the beginning of the twentieth century, and how denial of that recognition can fuel a "forceful contestation." Joshua Shifrinson has noted that, contrary to what one might expect, rising powers are often careful to avoid antagonizing a declining great power, as the United States did when it supported the United Kingdom at the start of the Cold War. By accommodating the incumbent, a rising power can more quickly expand its own capabilities. And Kristen Hopewell, Emma Mawdsley, and Khalid Nadvi have each sought to identify the ways in which rising powers want to change the international order and why, concluding that they often cooperate with each other to modify the existing structures of global governance.

This growing body of work has added important insights about how rising powers navigate the international order: rather than challenging it outright, they tend to accept many existing norms, cooperate to reject other aspects, and are sensitive to accusations of being overthrowers of

existing arrangements. In doing so, they are playing a long game aimed at two objectives: using the arrangements of the current order to bolster their own rise, and weakening the architect of that order until they can attain sufficient power to create a new one. Yet this research also offers insights into how the great power can avoid this outcome. Left untended, the international order may facilitate a challenger that seeks to manipulate existing norms to gain advantage or to draw other countries into its own orbit. But the great power also has the ability to change the order in ways that limit these dangers.

As Sevasti-Eleni Vezirgiannidou has pointed out, it matters not only how the great power manages its relations with the rising power but also whether the great power is prepared to rethink the order it built. She argues that the United States has avoided contemplating changes to the liberal international order that could help slow its decline. Rather than strengthening or even reforming existing international institutions, Washington has often turned to ad hoc informal institutions and diplomacy, making the international order more fragmented and contested than ever. For example, Vezirgiannidou notes that the United States has sanctioned Iran, a fellow member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, for its nuclear program yet sought to legitimize India, which is not a member of the treaty, as a nuclear weapons state—an approach that may ultimately weaken international arms control arrangements. Such erosion of international institutions could accelerate China's rise, making China more likely to challenge the existing order or even to precipitate a direct conflict with the United States.

By instead rethinking the formal institutions and existing practices of the international order, the United States can fortify its own position and diminish China's influence, thus reducing the chance of conflict. But Washington should act quickly. For now, Beijing is still a hegemon in the making and lacks the clout and capability to impose a new order: even as it seeks to get around some of them, it must generally play by established practices and norms. At some point, however, American leaders could find that it is China, not the United States, that is writing the rules of the game.

PLAYING TO WIN

To put the more recent insights of power transition theory into practice, it is important to identify the aspects of the liberal international order that China and other challengers accept, not only those that they reject. As my own research has shown, rising powers often have to embrace important elements of the international order to gain recognition as a future dominant power. At the end of the nineteenth century, both the United States and Meiji Japan understood that owning and administering colonies signified great-power status, even if, in the case of the United States, there was great debate about the moral, racial, and economic implications of doing so. Both rising powers accepted the need to become a colonizer to achieve status, with Japan acquiring a vast empire and the United States annexing Hawaii and the Philippines.

China's behavior today is analogous. Consider the Belt and Road Initiative, its vast infrastructure and investment program. Western analysts have criticized the BRI for "debt-trap diplomacy," arguing that Beijing extends loans to smaller countries in the global South as a way of gaining inordinate influence over their affairs. But it is hard to dispute that the initiative was built on the established multilateral principles underpinning the U.S.-led liberal international order—namely, facilitating global trade and economic growth through interconnectivity. Accusing China and the BRI of

wholesale revisionism not only leaves the United States open to charges of hypocrisy but also creates the perception that the United States is simply not able to compete with China in the global economy. A smarter approach would be to offer a better alternative to the BRI. So far, Washington has not done so. The West's supposed answer to the BRI—the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, a $600 billion initiative launched by the G-7—is hampered by its members' domestic political constraints and their limited ability to control private-sector investments.

Rather than seeking to confront China directly—a strategy that could itself lead to conflict—the United States should determine how to change the order to reinforce its own power. To begin with, this means recognizing that a challenger is far more likely to disrupt than disfigure the order. In Tanzania, for example, China has established an academy where young leaders from various African ruling parties are taught about the subordinate position of courts and the importance of rigid party discipline. But even this project seeks only to offer—rather than impose—China's authoritarian model of governance and development. And at any rate, Beijing's broader efforts to spread its ideology on the continent have had mixed success. The United States, by contrast, has the power and authority to press for changes in the order that could strengthen African support or existing institutions.

Yet Washington's management of the order has been underwhelming. The Biden administration's 2021 Summit for Democracy, for example, was intended to shore up liberalism. But the meeting included countries such as India and Nigeria that today are hardly considered paragons of democratic practice; it also largely sidelined civil society and had no concrete agenda or outcomes. On economics, the United States has to a significant degree abandoned its long-held belief in trade liberalization, yet it has not even bothered to frame its aggressive use of tariffs and industrial policy as part of a systematic rethinking of the global economic order.

MORE FRIENDS, MORE POWER

If recent power transition theory makes clear that the United States needs to rebuild the liberal order to sustain American power, it leaves open how. One promising approach is to address issues that are not yet governed by international norms. Take cybersecurity. To address the growing threat of Chinese and Russian hackers, the Biden administration has made cybersecurity a national priority, yet it has failed to establish broader international cooperation, including by setting down international regulations and penalties for cyberattacks. Other issues for which international standards are deficient or lacking include social media, cross-border data flows, food security, pandemic preparedness, and artificial intelligence.

To truly restructure the order, however, the United States also needs buy-in from its allies. An international order cannot be built or rebuilt by the hegemon alone; it takes a coalition of the willing. Consider the Cold War, which could be described as a successful case

of a power transition that did not end in direct conflict between the hegemons themselves: confronted by the rise of the Soviet Union, the United States was able to use its alliances to build a liberal international order in ways that strengthened the West and helped contain the Soviet challenge. Indeed, the communist threat gave Washington's allies and partners an unambiguous rationale for supporting such efforts. The new Western-led order was expressed both in military alliances such as NATO and in international institutions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the precursor to the WTO.

Today, the rationale for supporting U.S.-led innovations to the order is not as clear. Many countries are glad to do business with both China and the United States and want to preserve that flexibility. Nonetheless, the United States has an advantage. Building on its decades-old alliances and international relationships, it has introduced several new formal arrangements with other countries, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, with Australia, India, and Japan, and AUKUS, with Australia and the United Kingdom, which are both underpinned by the desire to contain China. By contrast, China has no special friendships or strategic partners, let alone formal military allies; its emerging partnership with Russia is still fragile. Not surprisingly, the international institutions that Beijing has spearheaded, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of Eurasian countries and the BRICS—the group founded by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—have limited influence.

Still, as power transition theory shows, Washington cannot rest on its laurels. For several decades, the center of gravity in world politics has been shifting away from the West. China and India have been vying to lead the developing world, and both have sought to highlight the divide between the global South and the West. The United States needs to show that its interests are not in opposition to non-Western countries. At the WTO, for example, Washington has wisely supported changes that aim to be inclusive but are also pragmatic and efficient. These include the increasing use of multilateral negotiations, or negotiations that are in principle open to all parties but are in fact mostly undertaken by only those members that are particularly interested in the issue at hand—an approach that is endorsed by most developing countries but opposed by India. Similarly, the Biden administration's promotion of "friend shoring," or bringing supply chains out of China and onto less hostile territory, holds tremendous potential for building more trade links with developing countries. But Washington needs to go further. With friend shoring, it needs to explain what its criteria for friendship are and what exactly its friends will get, beyond merely more bilateral trade.

By taking such steps, the United States can better respond to rising powers that may reject important elements of the international order yet still buy into much of it. India is the chief example here. Although it is one of Washington's strategic partners, New Delhi holds positions on trade and liberalism that depart significantly from the principles endorsed by the United States.

India has a lax approach to intellectual property rights, for instance, and under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, its government has been accused of dramatically eroding civil liberties. But given both countries' wariness about China, they need each other. By rebuilding the order to include new areas or issues in which India has a deep interest—technology and cyberspace, for example—the United States can induce more buy-in from India and set the norms for future cooperation or restraint.

For now, however, the main focus should be China. A power transition is coming: China is still rising and could soon have the capability to revise the international order, which could ultimately unseat the status quo great power. That is what challengers do once they have risen. If the United States hopes to avoid that outcome, it cannot simply rely on confronting China or complaining about how China is playing the game. It will need to change the game itself.

Why They Don't Fight

The Surprising Endurance of the Democratic Peace

MICHAEL DOYLE

Few hypotheses in international relations are more influential than democratic peace theory—the idea that democracies do not go to war with one another. The idea, the political scientist Jack Levy wrote, "comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations." It has motivated U.S. foreign policy for nearly a century. In the early 1900s, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson embraced democracy promotion as a means to peace. During the Cold War, successive administrations spoke of the standoff with the Soviet bloc using grand ideological terminology. No distillation was grander than President Ronald Reagan's address before the British Parliament in 1982, in which he claimed that the West exercised "consistent restraint and peaceful intentions" and then proceeded (seemingly without irony) to call for a "campaign for democracy" and a "crusade for freedom" around the world.

Democratic peace theory became especially influential once the Cold War ended, leaving the United States truly ascendant. In his 1994 State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton claimed that "the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a

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durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere." His administration then surged aid to nascent post-Soviet democracies. Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, was equally vocal about the need to advance liberalism in order to promote peace, telling the 2004 Republican National Convention, "As freedom advances, heart by heart, and nation by nation, America will be more secure and the world more peaceful." As president, Bush even used democratic peace theory as one of the justifications for invading Iraq. In a speech on the war in November 2003, he declared, "The advance of freedom leads to peace."

The idea that democracy breeds peace, however, is at best half true. The United States has repeatedly attacked other countries. Europe's major democracies also have a long history of intervening in other regions, such as the Sahel. And rather than marking the permanent triumph of liberal democracy, the post–Cold War period is now defined by growing divisions and conflict. As is now plain, the spread of liberalism does not by itself curtail fighting.

Yet the proliferation of wars carried out by democracies does not disprove democratic peace theory wholesale. Liberal states may not act peaceably toward everyone, but they act peaceably toward one another. There are no clear-cut cases of one democracy going to war against another, nor do any seem forthcoming. In fact, the global divisions emerging today confirm democratic peace theory: once again, the line runs between liberal states and authoritarian ones, with the United States and its mostly democratic allies on one side and autocracies, most notably China and Russia, on the other. The world, then, could be peaceful if all states became liberal democracies. But until that happens, the world will likely remain mired in a dangerous ideological standoff.

GREAT MINDS

Democratic peace theory has a long history. In 1776, the American revolutionary Thomas Paine argued that liberal states do not fight one another, writing that "the Republics of Europe are all (and we may say always) in peace." When Paine's country gained independence and then drafted its constitution, the document implicitly referred to the idea that democracies should be conflict-averse. It placed the authority to declare war in the legislature—the branch with members directly elected by the public—in part to prevent the country from entering unpopular conflicts.

Democratic peace theory had early proponents across the Atlantic, as well. Its most influential initial champion was the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. In 1795, Kant published *Perpetual Peace*, an essay that took the form of a hypothetical peace treaty and that established the concept's theoretical foundations. Representative republics, Kant explained, did not fight one another for a mix of institutional, ideological, and economic reasons.

Kant's writings called for states to adopt a representative republican form of government with an elected legislative body and a separation of powers among the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches—all guaranteed by constitutional law. Kant's republic was far from a modern democracy; only male property holders could vote and

become what he called "active citizens." Nonetheless, he argued that elected representation would inspire caution and that the separation of powers would produce careful deliberation. Although these forces would not guarantee peace, he admitted, they would select for rational and popular conflicts. If "the consent of the citizens is required to decide whether or not war is to be declared," Kant wrote, "it is very natural that they will have great hesitation in embarking on so dangerous an enterprise." For doing so, he continued,

> would mean calling down on themselves all the miseries of war, such as doing the fighting themselves, supplying the costs of the war from their own resources, painfully making good the ensuing devastation, and, as the crowning evil, having to take upon themselves a burden of debt which will embitter peace itself and which can never be paid off on account of the constant threat of new wars. But under a constitution in which the subject is not a citizen, and which is therefore not republican, it is the simplest thing in the world to go to war. For the head of state is not a fellow citizen, but the owner of the state, and a war will not force him to make the slightest sacrifice so far as his banquets, hunts, pleasure palaces and court festivals are concerned. He can thus decide on war, without any significant reason, as a kind of amusement, and unconcernedly leave it to the diplomatic corps (who are always ready for such purposes) to justify the war for the sake of propriety.

Kant also called for republics to make commitments to peace and universal hospitality. The former idea entailed a commitment to peaceful relations and collective self-defense, rather like NATO's. The latter meant treating all international visitors without hostility, offering asylum to people whose lives were at risk, and allowing visitors to share their ideas and propose commercial exchanges. This combination, Kant said, would build security, create mutual respect, and generate economic ties that lead to tranquility. And thus, republic by emerging republic, the combination would create peace.

Kant did not argue that his ideas would stop tension and conflict between republics and autocracies. In fact, he argued that representative republics might become suspicious of states not ruled by their citizens. But he did believe that liberal values such as human rights and respect for property would curb a country's desire for glory, fear of conquest, and need to plunder—three forces that drive states to war. He therefore thought that liberal republics would be respectful and restrained when addressing one another, even as they remained suspicious and fearful of nonrepublics.

Views similar to Kant's on liberty, republics, commerce, and peace spread

throughout nineteenth-century Europe and beyond. French Foreign Minister Francois Guizot, a conservative liberal who served from 1840 to 1848, spoke enthusiastically about mutual freedom as a foundation for an entente with the United Kingdom. British Prime Minister William Gladstone, who led his country for much of the latter half of the 1800s, was a proponent. And when U.S. President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, it helped tilt liberal opinion in Europe toward the Union and away from the Confederacy.

It was not, however, until World War I that the full democratic peace proposition became central to foreign policy. Wilson's war message in April 1917—in which he declared that the battle between autocracies and democracies would establish "the principles of peace and justice"—was the clarion call. The clash between democracy and autocracy continued to shape policy as the decades went on. The behavior of the United States during the Cold War, for example, was often motivated by a belief that spreading liberal values would yield peace. As Secretary of State John Foster Dulles declared in his 1953 Senate confirmation hearing, "We shall never have a secure peace or a happy world so long as Soviet communism dominates one-third of all the peoples that there are." President John F. Kennedy echoed that theme in his 1963 speech in West Berlin, declaring that "when all are free, then we can look forward to that day when this city will be joined as one and this country and this great Continent of Europe in a peaceful and hopeful globe."

But that same month, in a powerful address at American University, Kennedy warned of the complementary dangers of ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union. "Let us not be blind to our differences—but let us also direct attention to our common interests and the means by which those differences can be resolved," he said. "If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity."

TIME AFTER TIME

As liberalism endured and spread, intellectuals began empirically testing whether democratic peace theory actually held true. In 1939, the American journalist Clarence Streit published a qualitative historical analysis to see whether liberal democracies tended to maintain peace among themselves. Discerning that the answer was yes, he proposed that the decade's leading democracies form a federal union, which would help protect them from fascist powers. In 1972, Dean Babst, building on Quincy Wright's magisterial *A Study of War* from 30 years earlier, carried out a statistical analysis that also suggested a correlation between democracy and peace. In 1976, Melvin Small and J. David Singer confirmed this finding but demonstrated that democratic peace was limited to relations between democracies. Republics, they showed, were still prone to fight autocratic regimes.

In the decades since, international relations scholars have continued to study the democratic peace paradigm. They have shown that the relationship between democracy and peace is statistically significant even when

controlling for proximity, wealth, and trade. They have determined that the theory holds even when states attempt to constrain each other.

Academics have advanced a wide variety of explanations for why the concept is so sturdy. Some have argued that part of the reason lies in the disproportionate influence that international institutions have with liberal countries. Research shows that democracies tend to delegate a lot of policymaking to complex multilateral bodies, such as the European Union and the World Trade Organization, in part because their leaders can use these groups to entrench policies before cycling out of office. Other scholars have argued that liberal norms favoring peace, human rights, and respect for fellow democracies hold sway over policymakers and publics. And still others have pointed to the benefits of trade and economic interdependence associated with relations among capitalist democracies. States that frequently trade, after all, will lose wealth if they fight one another.

Still, democratic peace theory has attracted plenty of critics. Henry Farber and Joanne Gowa have pointed out that there are other forces at work in stopping wars between democracies. During the Cold War, for example, NATO's need to protect itself from the Soviet bloc ensured that Western Europe cooperated—although the region's post–Cold War peace suggests more than collaborative containment is at work. Other scholars have pointed out that none of the factors used to explain democratic peace theory can stop war on its own. States that are deeply involved in international institutions, after all, do launch invasions. Peaceful norms and ideas work only if democracies heed them in the policymaking process, yet they are often ignored. The shared decision-making powers of republics should encourage deliberation, but the division of powers and rotation of elites can also lead democracies to send mixed signals, putting other states on edge.

And economic benefits can be achieved through plunder, not just through trade. Powerful democratic states can have rational incentives to exploit wealthy, weak democracies, especially if the latter are endowed with natural resources or strategic assets such as shipping lanes. Rational material interest is not enough to explain why xenophobic democracies have not tried to conquer democracies of other ethnic groups.

But put all the explanatory factors together, and democratic peace theory coheres. When governments are constrained by international institutions, when political elites or the electorate are committed to norms of liberty, when the public's views are reflected through representative institutions, and when democracies trade and invest in one another, conflicts among republics are peacefully resolved.

RUN IT BACK

U.S. President Donald Trump subjected democratic peace theory to an intense test. He picked fights with European allies while praising Russian President Vladimir Putin and other dictators. Trump also cajoled and threatened liberal allies in other parts of the world, including East Asia. For a time, the United States seemed just

as hostile toward fellow democracies as it was toward autocracies.

But under President Joe Biden, democratic peace is back in vogue. Like many of his predecessors, Biden has made promoting freedom a hallmark of his foreign policy. He has routinely described global politics as a contest between democracies and autocracies, featuring the United States and its allies in one corner and China and Russia in the other. Speaking at the UN in 2021, Biden pledged not to enter a "new cold war," but he also announced that the world is at "an inflection point" and drew a sharp line between authoritarian and democratic regimes. "The future will belong to those who embrace human dignity, not trample it," Biden said.

The president clearly aims to mobilize democracies, especially liberal industrial democracies, against dictatorships. His broad ideological framing emphasizes the threats posed by Russia to Europe's democracies and by China to East Asia's, including Taiwan. He has invoked ideology when promoting the importance of NATO in Europe and the Quad (the U.S. partnership with Australia, India, and Japan) in Asia and invested new resources in both bodies. Whether Biden wants it or not, the world may succumb to a new cold war. Much like the last one, it will be categorized by a clash between different systems of government.

States are already taking sides, lining up according to regime type. Democratic Finland and Sweden, neutral during the first Cold War, have joined NATO. Ireland has moved closer to the alliance. China and Russia have recruited Iran and North Korea to their team, fellow autocracies that are providing arms for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russia has, in turn, used its UN Security Council seat to make it harder for the world to monitor North Korea's nuclear program. China is buying up Iranian oil.

This cold war—should the world indeed succumb to it—will be different from the first one. It pits democracies against autocracies, not capitalists against communists. Its geopolitics put a rising power (China) against an old hegemon (the United States), and an aggressive militarist (Putin) against an overstretched alliance (NATO). Every party sees itself on the defensive. The United States and its allies want a "world safe for democracy" in which national security is affordable, elections are secure, markets are free, and human rights remain an ideal. China, Russia, and their allies want a world safe for autocracy, where governments are free to skip elections and neglect human rights, where markets and information are subject to state direction, and where no one outside the government questions state policy. Both sides are threatened because those two visions are incompatible.

The divisions, of course, are not always so neat. As happened during the first Cold War, a number of developing countries, including some democracies, are seeking nonalignment. And as it did during the U.S.-Soviet standoff, Washington has autocratic partners, such as the Arab Gulf countries. But even within these relationships, ideology appears to be having an effect. The largest of the states in the neutral bloc, India, is partnering more closely with the United States as the two countries

compete with Beijing, and both have repeatedly praised the other for being a democracy (even if India's democracy is showing signs of distress). The United States and its liberal allies, meanwhile, are making authoritarian partners uneasy. Biden, for example, referred to Saudi Arabia as a "pariah" during his campaign, even though the United States has relied on Saudi oil production to help keep oil prices down.

The world's great powers can still prevent these democratic-autocratic tensions from hardening into a full-blown cold war. Through effective diplomacy, they might be able to construct a kind of cold peace, or a détente in which countries shun subversive transformation in favor of mutual survival and global prosperity. Pursuing such a world may, indeed, be an obligation for democracies. As Kant insisted and Kennedy pleaded, in a responsible representative government, leaders must strive to protect free republics but also avoid unnecessary conflict.

Yet a true cold peace would require settling the war over Ukraine, creating a new understanding with Beijing and Taipei about the status of Taiwan, and striking arms control agreements—tasks that are nearly impossible. Instead, the world's democratic powers appear to be girding themselves for a long twilight struggle with authoritarian regimes. This struggle may be scary, but it should not come as a surprise. It is, in fact, exactly what democratic peace theory predicts. Liberal states are being cooperative and peaceable toward fellow members of the club, working through institutions such as NATO and the Quad. But with respect to autocracies, they remain ready for war.

The Trade Truce?

When Economic Interdependence Does—and Doesn't—Promote Peace

STEPHEN G. BROOKS

It is a cherished truism among numerous Western officials: international commerce reduces the risk of war. This idea motivated the British parliamentarian Richard Cobden when he championed the repeal of tariffs on grain in 1846. In 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson called for "the removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and

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the establishment of an equality of trade conditions" as part of his blueprint for world peace. Cordell Hull, the longest-serving U.S. secretary of state, argued in 1948 that "unhampered trade dovetailed with peace."

Such thinking persisted during and after the Cold War. In the 1950s, France and Germany sought to mesh their economies, partly in hopes of preventing another disastrous conflict between them. After the Iron Curtain fell, many European politicians saw greater economic links with Russia as helpful for creating a cooperative diplomatic relationship. The United States and its allies worked to integrate China into the world economy for similar reasons. U.S. President Bill Clinton, for example, declared that admitting Beijing to the World Trade Organization would "plainly advance the cause of peace in Asia."

And yet scholarly research has not confirmed that such thinking is accurate. Before 1990, academics vigorously debated the question but largely in the abstract: there was a marked dearth of empirical research on the links between the global economy and conflict. The past three decades produced an explosion of empirical studies examining this relationship, but the findings were a mishmash.

Today, there is enough research to offer some answers, but they are hardly straightforward. The notion that more trade and globalization inherently curtail war turns out to be mistaken, yet so is the inverse. The relationship between the global economy and international security is, instead, mixed. Some factors matter, and others don't. The types of economic ties that are meaningful appear to have both stabilizing and destabilizing effects. Trade, for example, sometimes dampens conflict and sometimes fuels it. The globalization of production—that is, the dispersion of economic activity by global firms across borders—has a stabilizing effect among great powers, but it increases the likelihood of conflict among developing countries. International financial flows—the cross-border purchase of bonds, stocks, currencies, and so on—have no clear effect at all.

Washington does not seem to have digested this reality. American leaders once seemed to believe that a policy of economic engagement with China had only upsides for U.S. security; today's leaders seem to think this policy was an abject failure. But policymakers must understand that both views are wrong. If the United States wants to prevent war, it should adopt a nuanced, modulated approach to economic engagement with China—curtailing it only when significant risks exist. Commerce is not helpful for advancing peace, nor is it detrimental. It is both.

MIXED MESSAGES

Scholars have been thinking about the relationship between trade and peace for thousands of years. In AD 100, Plutarch argued that international commerce brought "cooperation and friendship." Enlightenment philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, Thomas Paine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Montesquieu all believed that international economic ties made war among states more costly and,

therefore, less likely. "The natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace," Montesquieu wrote in 1748. A century later, John Stuart Mill proclaimed, "It is commerce which is rapidly rendering war obsolete."

But other thinkers have strenuously disagreed. In 1787, the American statesman Alexander Hamilton rebuked the notion that the "spirit of commerce has a tendency to soften the manners of men," concluding that history had numerous cases of wars "founded upon commercial motives." The Austrian philosopher Friedrich List asserted in 1841 that reducing participation in international markets was the surest route to enhancing a country's productive power and thus its security. And in 1917, Vladimir Lenin famously wrote that the quest for foreign markets made war among capitalistic states inevitable.

During the Cold War, liberal scholars of international relations such as Richard Rosecrance declared that commerce promoted peace, whereas realists such as Kenneth Waltz argued the opposite. In Waltz's view, World War I, breaking out as it did among intertwined economies, falsified the notion that economic links can prevent war; instead, he claimed, greater ties created new areas for friction and contestation. Rosecrance, by contrast, believed that history was shifting in the direction of "trading states," which he maintained would have little reason to go to war because states could buy everything they needed and because conflict would mean lost wealth.

As it competed against the Soviets, the United States usually behaved as if economic integration promoted peace. Washington leveraged its leadership role to push for global economic openness, propelled partly by the widely held view that the protectionism of the 1930s had undermined economic stability and thereby helped spark World War II. But the U.S. push for integration had its limits. The Soviet Union had little appetite to participate in economic globalization, and Washington was happy to let Moscow largely isolate itself. The United States correctly saw increased integration with its allies as a means of outrunning the Soviet bloc in terms of growth and technological development.

After the Cold War, academics began conducting significant empirical research into economics and peace. By far the most prominent perspective that emerged from this literature was capitalist peace theory. The concept's lead proponent, Erik Gartzke, argued that free markets, free trade, and the free movement of global capital were all beneficial for peace.

For a quarter century after the Cold War ended, U.S. policy toward China matched this optimistic perspective. American officials, treating commerce with China as unambiguously good for security, eliminated tariffs on Chinese products and encouraged U.S. companies to set up shop in the country. But over the last ten years, the dominant view in Washington has shifted to the exact opposite: that pursuing economic engagement with China had been a mistake and had harmed U.S. security. Policymakers seem to believe there is a relationship between commerce and conflict. They just cannot settle on what it is.

KNOWN UNKNOWNS

There is a good reason for such confusion: on close inspection, the relationship between global economics and global stability turns out to be extremely multifaceted. Although there have been notable individual studies supporting the optimistic view that commerce promotes peace, they are just that—individual studies. A systematic examination of all the empirical research on commerce and conflict shows that the connection is far more complex.

Consider trade. In a forthcoming book, I have identified 57 empirical studies published since 2000 that examined the influence of trade on war and peace. Just 16 of the studies supported the optimistic perspective that trade universally promotes peace. One found that it promotes conflict, and nine found no effect. The remaining 31 concluded that trade has a mixed effect on the likelihood of war—sometimes preventing it, sometimes promoting it.

These mixed-effect findings would be useful if they yielded consistent, clear insights regarding the circumstances that lead to peace. But instead, the list that emerges from this scholarship is long, unwieldy, and sometimes contradictory. Recent studies, for example, have found that trade leads to peace only when it occurs among democracies, among rich states, among states that are members of the World Trade Organization, among states that mostly trade products from different industries, among states that mostly trade products from the same industries, among states that are members of common regional trade pacts, among states that trade with one another at very high levels, among states that trade with one another to a roughly equal extent, and among states that have low levels of protectionism. Small wonder, then, that policymakers have struggled to craft peace-enhancing trade agendas. The relationship between trade and conflict has so many asterisks that it simply cannot be boiled down into anything pithy for officials, students, or anyone else to follow.

The effect of international finance is even murkier. Many analysts have argued that international capital flows prevent war. The *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman, for example, once maintained that international investors will "not fund a country's regional war" and will "actually punish a country for fighting a war with its neighbors by withdrawing the only significant source of growth capital in the world today." But the literature does not show that investors consistently flee states that are at war. Moreover, of the four studies that looked directly at how flows of capital influence the likelihood of conflict, only one found a stabilizing effect. Two concluded there was no relationship, and one found that greater foreign ownership of government debt increased the likelihood of conflict.

When it comes to the globalization of production, the effects are clearer yet still cut both ways. In *Producing Security*, published in 2005, I concluded that by reducing the economic benefits of conquest among advanced countries and making it far harder for states to manufacture advanced weapons without international supply

chains, the globalization of production reduces the most dangerous form of great-power security behavior: applying lots of military power to fundamentally revise the territorial status quo. Great powers that launch wars of aggression, for example, could lose access to international supply chains. Subsequent research by Marc DeVore reaffirmed that cutting-edge defense production requires extensive integration into global supply chains. Andrew Coe and Jonathan Markowitz have also shown in greater detail that recent production changes have dramatically lowered the economic benefits of conquest.

To see why recent changes in production can curtail great-power conflict, look at World War II. When the Nazis took over the factories of Czechoslovakia's Skoda Works—one of the largest armaments manufacturers in Europe at the time—they were able to use them to churn out massive amounts of weaponry. After the war ended, the Soviet Union effectively plundered the eastern portion of Germany by disassembling thousands of factories and transferring their equipment to Soviet territory, where the plants were reconstituted and run by Soviet workers.

Because today's sophisticated industries are geographically dispersed across so many countries, replicating the Soviet Union's accomplishment would be much harder. Now, a state that conquers an advanced country will possess only a portion of the value chain—and perhaps a very small portion. Moreover, much of today's advanced production depends on highly skilled workers with specialized training and experience, and such workers may flee or not be innovative for an occupying force.

In addition, until the final decades of the twentieth century, great powers had also been able to make cutting-edge weapons essentially on their own. But because of the high complexity of advanced production today, no state, not even the largest ones, can remain on the cutting-edge

in defense-related production while relying just on its own companies. Although past great-power revisionists could sustain their capacity to produce weaponry even after extensive supply cutoffs were imposed on them by counterbalancing coalitions, the constraining effects of such cutoffs would be greatly magnified today.

When the economic benefits of conquering advanced countries are low and great powers cannot go it alone in production, it is harder for them to use force to overturn the fundamental international order. But the security benefits of globalized production do not extend to smaller revisions or to

actions taken by developing states. Poor countries, after all, are not positioned to conquer advanced ones, and so the kinds of military actions they undertake rarely prompt widespread economic restrictions.

For developing countries, the globalization of production actually seems to make conflict more likely, largely through the spread of weapons. By joining global defense manufacturing supply chains or by purchasing weapons from a state that did, developing countries can secure more advanced weaponry than they otherwise would have. Better armed, they can attack a greater number of states and employ greater force.

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

The ambiguous relationship between commerce and conflict is visible everywhere, but perhaps no country better exemplifies it than China. China would not have been able to rise so rapidly, becoming the world's second-largest economy, without globalization. (Its share of global GDP in 2021 hit 18 percent, up from just four percent in 2001.) Yet in its quest to quickly grow stronger, China now faces a truly dreadful dilemma, one no other rising power has had to confront: to remake the global order, Beijing will need to directly confront the United States and its allies; if it does that, however, it will be in danger of losing access to the economies that its growth depends on.

The United States has already shown it can leverage China's extensive reliance on foreign companies to great effect. Beginning in May 2019, Washington used export restrictions to decimate Huawei—once a leading telecommunications firm. Then, in 2022, the United States used such measures to hobble China's entire semiconductor sector. These targeted technology restrictions provide just a small taste of what the United States would likely do to China in a wartime situation. Should Beijing launch a conflict, Washington could implement a comprehensive economic cutoff, one that might devastate Beijing in a way that has not devastated Moscow. The Russian economy is largely dependent on oil and gas, and, as U.S. President Barack Obama dismissively quipped in 2014, Russia "doesn't make anything." China, by contrast, makes plenty, and it needs access to global firms for its economic survival.

Unlike past revisionist states, China cannot really augment economic power through conquest. Even if Beijing could take Taiwan, it would be unable to effectively exploit Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company—the crown jewel of the island's economy—because TSMC is so heavily dependent on access to tools and parts from companies throughout the world to make its chips. TSMC's production also relies on the very specific expertise of its employees, who could easily flee Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion. TSMC, in other words, is no Skoda.

But Washington has its own tradeoffs to make. It has leverage over Beijing, but if it drives too hard, that leverage could quickly be exhausted. Should the United States preemptively hit China with too many economic restrictions, Beijing might decide to attack Taiwan—not because it has much to gain but because it has little left to lose. The United States,

then, must walk a narrow path, constraining China when appropriate but not excessively pressuring its economy.

It will be hard to strike the right balance. The relationship between economics and conflict is simply too complex to offer clear, prescriptive guidance. U.S. officials need to recognize that engagement with China is not akin to a single light switch that should be turned on or off. Instead, they should treat the economic relationship as a series of dimmers, with some turned all the way down, some turned all the way up, and others set in between.

In 2022, the Biden administration completely turned off China's access to cutting-edge chips and the machines needed to make them. This decision was an easy call, given that these chips have immense significance for weaponry and for China's general technological competitiveness. Other sectors are trickier, such as rare-earth minerals—a group of difficult-to-extract metals critical to modern technology. Washington is right to be concerned that China accounts for roughly 80 percent of the world's production of rare earths. But it would be a mistake to try to restore the United States' past dominance of this sector, given how environmentally destructive it is. (Processing just one ton of rare earths produces 2,000 tons of toxic waste.) The best response is to instead build up large stockpiles of these minerals, which will require more trade with China, not less. Supplies of raw materials from many years ago, after all, are just as useful as supplies produced more recently. During the Cold War, the United States had a large stockpile of raw materials, and now it needs to create another one.

Key U.S. foreign policy officials recognize the value of being targeted in their restrictions. When announcing the semiconductor cutoff, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan noted that Washington was following a "small yard, high fence" approach. But following this guidance will clearly require immense effort. The political pressure to impose protectionist barriers on a wide variety of Chinese exports, including many that are not in strategic industries, is clearly strong, and deciding which restrictions are valuable and which aren't is especially difficult in an era in which new technologies keep sectors constantly in flux. To chart the right course, Washington will have to hire more economic strategists and do a better job of making sure those experts coordinate with one another. Currently, officials dealing with economic statecraft are scattered across six mostly siloed portions of the government: the State Department, the Commerce Department, the National Security Council, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Treasury Department.

But ultimately, the best way for Washington to make the right call is less about bureaucratic reforms and more about exercising basic modesty. The relationship between commerce and conflict is too complicated for anyone, anywhere, to nail down completely. Washington should be humble and skeptical. In evaluating the relationship between the global economy and security, easy answers are beguiling. But they are almost always wrong.

The Power of Principles

What Norms Are Still Good For

TANISHA M. FAZAL

For those who believe that might should not make right, the world today seems to offer little hope. Russia is still trying to seize territory from Ukraine in its illegal war of conquest, and U.S. support for Kyiv appears to be waning. China is asserting ownership of international waters. In the Middle East, Hamas murdered some 1,200 people in its October 7 attack on Israel, and Israel's response has destroyed hospitals and killed tens of thousands of civilians. In South America, Venezuela is laying claim to more than half the territory of Guyana, its much smaller neighbor. Across the global South, countries are calling on richer states to compensate them for the damage of climate change caused by centuries of industrialization in the North, but their requests have mostly been ignored.

In the age-old battle between power and principle, it would be easy to look at these examples and conclude that a much-vaunted constraint in international relations barely exists anymore: norms. International norms are guidelines that tell states which actions are and are not appropriate and provide metrics against which to judge others' conduct. For decades, especially after the Cold War, many—especially in the West—believed that governments should and would abide by such principles. But today, that view feels quaint. It often seems as if norms are simply a function of power. The strong do what they want.

Yet beneath the surface, norms in fact work as a powerful motivator and constraint. They lie at the heart of the biggest foreign policy debates in Washington. Whether to support Ukraine, what to do about China, how to handle Israel—plenty of the most contested questions are, at base, arguments over whether to promote certain principles. The idea that norms are purely a function of power, moreover, is mistaken. Why else, for example, would the United Kingdom send money to Kenya to make amends for colonial-era misdeeds? Sometimes, countries take costly steps that are arguably against their own interests, even though no superior power has pressured them to do so.

Norms are not entirely divorced from strength, of course. They are

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often launched with the support of powerful countries, and they require maintenance from those states. And yet time and again, norms have taken on a life of their own, exerting a powerful pull.

ROUGH IDEAS

Norms have existed since ancient times. In *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides reported that the Melians appealed to principles of fairness and justice in an effort to persuade the invading Athenians not to conquer their island and to respect their neutrality. In the Middle Ages, European royal families had a norm of holding each other's members hostage, treating them as guarantors to ensure compliance with interfamilial agreements. One family, for example, might take another family's daughter and hold her until they had passed safely through the other family's territory. During China's Ming and Qing dynasties, foreign envoys followed a norm of paying tribute to the royal court. And for centuries, European countries believed they had an obligation to "civilize" other races through colonization.

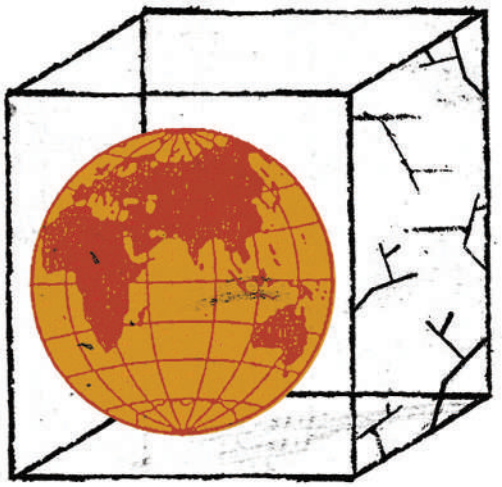
For most of this time, the effect of ideas on international relations went unexamined. Only in the early twentieth century did it become a serious subject for researchers. At that time, the field was dominated by lawyers who believed that rules were important and who thought they could use rules to constrain states' behavior. Thinkers such as the historian James Shotwell, the philosopher John Dewey, and the lawyer Salmon Levinson worked to construct the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact, in which over 60 countries (including the United States) condemned and renounced war "as an instrument of national policy." The pact, Shotwell argued, would eliminate violence. "The old predatory world of conquest and violence is no longer an ideal of governments," he declared.

Even before World War II proved such optimism misplaced, idealists were derided by realists, who argued that the world was shaped by power alone. Writing in 1939, before the outbreak of war, the British historian E. H. Carr criticized "the science of international politics" as "markedly and frankly utopian," arguing that "no political utopia will achieve even the most limited success unless it grows out of political reality." Black international relations scholars such as Merze Tate, who understood all too well the role of power in global politics, were similarly critical. As Tate wrote in *The Disarmament Illusion* in 1942, "The limitation of armaments is not a matter of mathematics nor of morals but of politics."

But when it came to policy, norms continued to shape history. Shaken by the horrors of World War II, states again embraced norms as a way to curtail conflict and protect populations. Dozens of countries, including the Soviet Union and the United States, agreed to rules that oblige occupying powers to protect civilian populations. In the late 1940s, Eleanor Roosevelt chaired a group of lawyers, representatives from nongovernmental organizations, and state bureaucrats from around the world who produced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the

foundation for today's human rights regime. Activists, lawyers, and politicians made a renewed push to establish a norm against territorial conquest.

These efforts, however, were largely ignored by mainstream international relations scholars. By the end of the 1970s, the field was dominated by debates between neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz and neoliberals such as Robert Keohane, both of whom constructed theories of global politics that left little room for the role of ideas. But norms did not disappear entirely from the discipline. Hedley Bull published *The Anarchical Society* in 1977, which argued that modern states "conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with each other, and share in the working of common institutions." In 1980, John Meyer pioneered "world-systems theory," arguing that global social forces, especially economic modernization, made states resemble one another. Three years later, John Ruggie argued that, unlike the overlapping sovereignties of the feudal system that preceded it, the modern state system rested on notions of private property and exclusive jurisdiction.



These theories continued to be tested in the real world. Moscow and Washington routinely intervened in the affairs of sovereign states, for example. Realists, accordingly, sidelined thinkers who highlighted the role of ideas. But the end of the Cold War—in which the Soviet Union collapsed without being defeated by the U.S. military (an outcome unpredicted by realism)—breathed new life into scholarship on norms. John Mueller argued that great-power war, like aristocratic dueling, had gone the way of the dodo. In *The Culture of National Security*, a group of scholars further demonstrated that states often behave in ways contrary to what realists predict. Richard Price, for example, illustrated that a stigma against chemical weapons was a necessary condition for states to refrain from using them in World War II. Similarly, Nina Tannenwald argued that a taboo against the first use of nuclear weapons helped explain why Washington never went nuclear in Vietnam.

Today, norms are a central part of international relations theory. Experts have examined how global social and legal norms in favor of racial equality helped topple South Africa's apartheid system. They have explored how international humanitarian norms have led rebel groups to produce manuals on the laws of war. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink have even given the word "norm" a canonical definition: "a standard of

appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity." Since then, scholars have focused not just on whether norms successfully constrain state behavior but also on the strength, substance, and cycles of norms. Norms, they argue, are about more than whether a state follows a specific rule. They are also about how states engage with that rule—including how they react when other states violate it, and how they behave when they themselves are running afoul of it.

This nuance has given the field a clearer idea of how norms shape international behavior. Consider the United States' covert interventions in countries such as Chile and Iran during the Cold War. In some ways, it might have been more effective for Washington to outright invade these countries and impose friendly regimes by force. But doing so would have violated norms of sovereignty. Partially as a result, it decided to operate covertly.

MIGHT AND RIGHT

Not all norms are based on how states interact. Some have to do with how countries should treat their own citizens (such as not disappearing people), and others with how corporations should interact with society (such as not using child labor). But one of the most consistent scholarly findings is that norms are most powerful when they align with the interests of governments rather than those of nonstate actors. There are many wartime norms that states observe, including offering medical care to enemy prisoners of war. But this norm does not constrain governments from detaining and torturing members of rebel groups. International humanitarian norms have been established in part by treaties, in which, historically, states are both the primary negotiators and the signatories. As Bridget Coggins has argued, even the norm of states being the primary actors in the international system—and related rules governing which polities are recognized as states—is a function of power. The state is a remarkably strong institution, one that won out over alternative forms of political organization, and today's states limit who can join their ranks. The unrecognized country of Somaliland, for example, has a much more effective government than Somalia (from which it has functionally seceded). But it is the latter that holds the seat at the UN, in part because many UN members have a vested interest in discouraging secessionism.

Norms have long served the interests of powerful countries. The rule against forcibly taking territory from other governments was conveniently championed by the United States after, not before, it had completed its westward expansion. The nuclear taboo serves powerful states just as it serves weaker ones, because it protects them, too, from annihilation.

Yet the fact that powerful actors can bend norms in their favor doesn't mean they are immune from norms. The norm against territorial conquest didn't stop Russia from invading Ukraine, but it does help explain why Moscow is paying such a high price for its land grab. The United States and its allies placed costly sanctions on the Russian economy, and many

of these countries have provided lethal aid to Kyiv. So flagrant was Russia's violation of the norm that even countries it has close relationships with, such as China and India, have avoided expressing public support for the invasion. Indeed, public statements by Chinese officials on the war generally mention the importance of territorial integrity.

Norms reflect power, but they are not just reflections of power. The emergence and acceptance of a norm generally requires at least the assent of powerful states, but it does not always further those states' immediate desires. China, for example, would certainly prefer not to be constrained by norms against territorial conquest when it comes to Taiwan. But on balance, Beijing benefits from the norm because it does not want other countries infringing on its own land. Countries will exercise self-restraint, accepting normative constraints to protect their greater interests.

States will sometimes be aggressive in the name of norms, championing such principles in an effort to expand their power. There are times when might makes right, but right can sometimes make might. When Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein tried to annex Kuwait, the United States headed a broad international coalition that forced him to withdraw, which increased Washington's global influence. By the same token, right can undermine might. The unprovoked invasion of Iraq by the United States 13 years later drew few partners and seriously damaged the country's reputation.

Governments understand this dynamic. That is why they rarely admit to violating norms, even when the transgression is utterly transparent. The United States claimed it needed to invade Iraq to protect the norm against using weapons of mass destruction. Putin has justified his invasion of Ukraine by denying that it had ever achieved "real statehood," casting it instead as a temporarily detached part of Russia that therefore had no sovereignty to violate. China makes a similar argument about Taiwan, claiming that the island is a renegade province. By invading Taiwan, according to this logic, China would not be violating norms but upholding them, with a long-overdue crackdown on a secessionist entity.

Beijing's claims about Taiwan illustrate that norms are often open to interpretation and abuse. They are not always codified in or coterminous with international law. There is no international norm against detaining migrants, for example, even though the Global Compact for Migration, which calls for states to avoid the practice, carries some international legal power as a resolution of the UN General Assembly. Too many countries lock up migrants to build a global consensus that detention is unacceptable.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Norms can have intrinsic strength. States abide by norms even when it is not in their immediate interest, and they are penalized when they violate those norms. But the power of norms is never guaranteed, and the world's current normative architecture is under threat. Some of the challenges are direct, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Others are oblique, such as

China's attempt to expand its territorial reach by building artificial islands in the South China Sea.

The global South can be used as a bellwether to assess the effects of these transgressions. Developing countries played a much smaller role in constructing the world's current normative architecture than richer powers did, so their behavior is a good indicator of whether the system of norms still holds. And unfortunately, their responses suggest that the challenges to current norms may succeed. Some developing countries have strongly condemned what Martin Kimani, Kenya's UN ambassador, called Moscow's "irredentism and expansionism." But the global South has not been uniformly critical. A consistent bloc of about 40 countries—all outside the West—has either abstained from or voted against UN resolutions condemning Russia's invasion.

These votes are partly a result of Moscow's politicking in the global South, but they are also the product of Western hypocrisy. People in developing countries have understandably wondered why Ukraine has received so much more U.S. humanitarian support than Congo, Honduras, and Sudan. They have questioned why Ukrainians fleeing conflict receive refuge in Western states when Syrians and Yemenis generally do not. And they have asked what the difference is between the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The technical answer to that last question is that Russia is demanding Ukrainian territory rather than just regime change. But to people in the global South, who have suffered

from decades of weak governance, corruption, and civil war (which are not clearly prohibited by current norms)—as well as interventions by major powers—that distinction seems rather thin. It suggests, again, that norms matter only when powerful countries say so.

Key international norms are on life support, and the potential demise of these norms should alarm U.S. policymakers. They should be concerned, in part, for human rights reasons. By preventing invasions, limiting war crimes, and constraining aggressive behavior, norms help protect hundreds of millions of people. But Washington should also be concerned for geopolitical reasons. The United States has benefited immensely from the system it helped build. The current normative architecture, for example, has helped the U.S. economy flourish by creating an international system conducive to trade. Washington could therefore lose influence if this system falls apart, giving China an opening to promote an alternative normative order that would be far less liberal.

To save the system, Washington must be proactive. Norms need maintenance—they must be cultivated, enforced, and sometimes adjusted—and maintenance requires long-term thinking and accepting some short-term costs. The United States, for example, could push to expand the number of permanent members on the UN Security Council to include representatives from Africa and Latin America. Doing so might dilute Washington's voice but would also earn it more support from the global South and prevent the council from sliding into irrelevance. The United States could also provide more financing to compensate poorer states for the damages wrought by climate change, a move that would cost money now but create buy-in for climate mitigation later.

It won't be easy for the United States to revive international norms, and it will be impossible to do so alone. The country badly damaged the norms regarding wartime conduct through its actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Its support for Israel's war on Hamas is further undermining norms meant to protect civilians. And political polarization has made it hard for the United States to convey strong support for even the most basic norms, such as the one against conquering entire states, without fierce partisan debate. With the Republican Party captured by former President Donald Trump, Washington appears to be at odds with itself: torn between people who believe current global norms are worth defending and those who do not.

Not all critics of today's norms are malicious, or even wrong. In a world in flux, it is worth asking what given international principles are good for, such as norms affecting trade that impose few constraints on multinational corporations—even if they may benefit the United States. But if the foundational norms of the post-1945 order erode, it will not be the result of a careful cost-benefit analysis. It will be because American politicians gave up on these ideals in a fit of pique. The result will be a world in which everyone is worse off.

REVIEW ESSAY

Why Would Anyone Want to Run the World?

The Warnings in Cold War History

JOHN LEWIS GADDIS

To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power. BY SERGEY RADCHENKO. Cambridge University Press, 2024, 768 pp.

Netflix viewers got an introduction, this spring, to a famous physics experiment: the three-body problem. A magnetized pendulum suspended above two fixed magnets will swing between them predictably. A third magnet, however, randomizes the motion, not because the laws of physics have been repealed, but because the forces involved are too intricate to measure. The only way to "model" them is to relate their history. That's what Netflix did in dramatizing the Chinese writer Liu Cixin's science-fiction classic, *The Three-Body Problem*: a planet light years from earth falls within the gravitational attraction of three suns. It's no spoiler to say that the results, for earth, are not auspicious.

Sergey Radchenko, a historian at Johns Hopkins University, comes from the East Asian island of Sakhalin, a good place from which to detect geopolitical gravitations. His first book bore the appropriate title *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962–1967*. His second, *Unwanted Visionaries: The Soviet Failure in Asia at the End of the Cold War*, extended his analysis through the 1980s. Now, with *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*, Radchenko seeks to refocus recent scholarship, which has sought to "decenter" the history of that conflict, back on the superpowers for which it was originally known.

Previous accounts of the Soviet Union's Cold War emphasized bipolarities: Marxist-Leninist ideology

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versus Russian nationalism in the "orthodox-revisionist" debates among historians half a century ago; then the revolution-versus-imperialism paradigm advanced by the expatriate scholars Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov in the 1990s. "Decenterists" have since added a third polarity, contrasting the relative stability of the superpowers' "long peace" with persistent violence among their surrogates elsewhere. Cold War history has therefore become, in this sense, its own three-body problem. How can we begin pulling it back together and, if possible, extract lessons for the future?

Theory, Radchenko acknowledges, won't help: it privileges parsimony as a path to predictability but too often confirms what's obvious while oversimplifying what's not. That leaves, as an alternative, narration. But narration requires archives for validation, and access to archives seems unlikely in Vladimir Putin's Russia, a regime not known for transparency.

History, however, is full of surprises. One is what Radchenko describes as a "deluge" of Cold War–era documents, released over the past decade, from Soviet government and Communist Party archives, as well as from the personal papers of Kremlin leaders. Radchenko doesn't try to explain why this has happened; he's content instead to make the most of the opportunity it presents to "know" Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev, and their associates at a "very personal level." It's like being a "psychological counselor," he writes, "in a session with a client who tells the same stories over and over again to reveal the underlying passions and fears."

HOME AND AWAY

So what, from that vantage point, can one learn? Radchenko's most significant finding is how great the gap was between the ideology on which the Soviet Union was founded, on the one hand, and the topography on which it sought to impose its authority, on the other. "What the Soviets saw as their 'legitimate' interests," he writes, "were often not seen as particularly 'legitimate' by anybody else, leading to a kind of ontological insecurity on the Soviet part that was compensated for by hubris and aggression."

Take, for example, Joseph Stalin's simultaneous commitment to world revolution and to securing the state he ran. The Soviet Union, he believed, deserved a place of honor in international affairs as the first nation to have aligned itself with the class struggle, the previously hidden driver of modern history. Its security, however, required brutalities: agricultural collectivization, indiscriminate purges, exorbitant wartime sacrifices. The difficulty here, Radchenko points out, is that unilateral imposition secures neither honor nor safety: respect, if genuine, can arise only by consent. That left Stalin seeking to enhance the Soviet Union's external reputation without compromising its internal safety while maintaining, in both domains, its and his own legitimacy. In short, a three-body problem.

Radchenko defines legitimacy as satisfaction with things as they are, and there are various ways of obtaining it. Marlon Brando, in *The Godfather*, spoke softly but left a horse head, when needed, on selected bedsheets: offers followed that recipients couldn't refuse. Stalin was capable of such

efficiencies, but only within realms he fully controlled. Beyond these, his preference was to convene bosses like mafia dons dividing up territories—hence his expectation at the World War II conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam that his U.S. and British counterparts would acknowledge Soviet authority over half of Europe. But Stalin saw this, Radchenko argues, as only a temporary arrangement. The Anglo-Americans, being predatory capitalists, would soon go to war with one another, Stalin believed, leaving Europeans not yet within the Soviet sphere to voluntarily choose communist parties to lead them, in close correspondence with Moscow's wishes.

When that didn't happen—when Moscow's legitimacy beyond Stalin's authority failed to take root—he had only improvisation to fall back on: indecisiveness in responding to the Marshall Plan, a Czechoslovak coup that alarmed more than intimidated those who witnessed it, an unsuccessful blockade of Berlin from which he had to back down, and a botched campaign to displace Tito's communist regime in Yugoslavia, the only one in Europe with homegrown legitimacy. That's how the Soviet leader earned an honor he wouldn't have wanted: he, more than anyone else, deserves recognition for having founded NATO in 1949. Legitimacy was the wild card, the disrupter, the third sun in the Stalinist Cold War firmament.

CALLING THEIR BLUFF

Stalin, a Europeanist, had no plans, Radchenko emphasizes, for "turning the world red." Nikita Khrushchev was more ambitious. "National liberation" movements in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East would, he thought, look to the Soviet Union for leadership, if it could free itself from Stalinist repression while achieving more rapid economic development than capitalism had so far accomplished. Meanwhile, Mao Zedong's establishment of a "people's republic" in China more than compensated for communism's setbacks in central and western Europe. Khrushchev wasn't content, however, with these favorable portents. He wanted to speed things up, and that made him personally, in pursuit of his particular vision of legitimacy, his own wild card.

Khrushchev began the process with his 1956 "secret speech" denouncing Stalin to the 20th Party Congress. Because he'd failed to prepare anyone for it, the address became a "wound-up spring"—Radchenko's apt characterization—which, when released, caused consternation at home; revolts in Poland and Hungary; disillusionment among French, Italian, and even Scandinavian communists; and deep distrust within the mind of Mao, who had only begun, with Stalin safely dead, to regard him as a role model. International communism did indeed go global, but in such a manner as to immediately fragment itself.

The successful Sputnik satellite launch of 1957 might have reversed these losses had Khrushchev not tried to make it a panacea. If the Soviet Union could send satellites into orbit, he reasoned, then why not refrigerators into kitchens? Why shouldn't a socialist planned economy outproduce capitalist rivals in all respects?

Few goods of any kind appeared in communist households, however,

a disappointment especially evident in East Germany, within which the postwar settlement had left the conspicuous capitalist enclave of West Berlin. Khrushchev tried resolving the situation with rockets: he would terminate Western rights in the city and enforce the restriction with threats of nuclear war. American spy planes and satellite photography, however, revealed that the Soviet military had not produced missiles "like sausages" as Khrushchev had unwisely bragged.

With his bluff called, Khrushchev allowed the East Germans the humiliation of a wall around West Berlin, then authorized the atmospheric test of an unusably gigantic thermonuclear bomb, and finally quietly—but not quietly enough—dispatched missiles armed with nuclear warheads to Fidel Castro's Cuba, the only communist outpost in the Western Hemisphere, all in an effort to regain global respect by threatening global annihilation. Fed up with such risk-taking, Khrushchev's Kremlin colleagues deposed him in October 1964, leaving Leonid Brezhnev to gradually consolidate the power he would hold longer than any Soviet leader apart from Stalin himself.

LEGITIMACY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Brezhnev was stolid, soothing, and, until his health began to fail in the mid-1970s, reassuringly steady. That has faded him for most historians, who prefer writing about more colorful characters, but hints of revisionism have begun to appear: Zubok's 2007 book, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev*, gives Brezhnev almost the status of U.S. President Richard Nixon, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and West German Chancellor Willy Brandt as an architect of détente. How, though, could such an implied acceptance of international stability coexist with the expectation, which Brezhnev never repudiated, that "proletarians" in all countries would eventually rise up?

Through sharing legitimacies, Radchenko suggests, the most important of which was that the superpowers both feared a nuclear apocalypse. The Cold War didn't end history, but it did remove whatever benefits might have remained in fighting another world war. Despite an overwhelming U.S. advantage in nuclear weapons at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, neither side was willing to risk using them against the other. Brezhnev's role, through the rest of the 1960s, was to replace Khrushchev's bluffs with actual capabilities, thereby creating a balance in strategic weaponry that made possible the arms limitation agreements of the 1970s. Quests for legitimacy, in this instance, converged compatibly.

A second convergence had to do with the demarcation of boundaries: Cold War competition would continue in some areas, but not in others. Brezhnev made it clear that the Soviet Union would still support "wars of national liberation" in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while the Americans, less explicitly, committed themselves to waging what might be called "wars of containment" in those same regions. Meanwhile, the status quo that divided Europe would remain in place.

A third priority, for Brezhnev, was personal diplomacy. Khrushchev relished the recognition that came with his 1959 visit to the United States, but neither he nor Stalin tried to build long-term relationships with American or other Western leaders. Brezhnev, however, pursued Nixon almost as relentlessly as a stalker does a star, even as the president escalated military operations in Vietnam in 1972 and then sank into the Watergate swamps of 1973–74. Images of the two relaxing at Nixon's San Clemente residence, admiring the Pacific while in shirtsleeves with feet propped up and drinks within reach, were a high point for Brezhnev, if not for the international proletarian revolution.

And yet legitimacies, Radchenko shows, could be a double-edged sword. Demarcations didn't always diminish temptations, as when Nixon and Kissinger forced the Soviets out of the Middle East after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, or when Brezhnev took advantage, two years later, of the Americans' defeat in Vietnam to expand Soviet activities in eastern and southern Africa. Third parties could upset equilibriums by switching sides, as the Chinese spectacularly did when they welcomed Nixon to Beijing in 1972, or by shaming superpower patrons for insufficient militancy, a proficiency the Cubans deployed against the Soviets in Africa in the years that followed.

Leadership, too, posed legitimacy problems. Presidential campaigns became permanent in the United States after Watergate, leaving little time and too much visibility for reflections, rectifications, and reassessments. Meanwhile, the absence of criticism and hence accountability in the Soviet Union required keeping Brezhnev in power until the day he died, a process hardly conducive to agility or adaptivity. These difficulties opened the way for Ronald Reagan,

HAROL BUSTOS

in his 1980 presidential campaign and during his first years in office, to question the legitimacy of the Cold War itself: if the purpose of détente had been not to end that conflict but to institutionalize it, was that the best that the competitors could do?

That brings Radchenko to the last Soviet leader, who so suspended himself between legitimacies that the end of his career coincided with the end of his country. Mikhail Gorbachev set out to reform his regime in such a way as to convince Europeans to welcome its membership among them, Americans to regard it as a partner in securing world order, and the world itself to acknowledge his own personal preeminence as, in Radchenko's words, "strategist-in-chief for change."

The first whiffs of perestroika, however, set off a "dash for the West" among former Soviet satellites, which saw far more clearly than Gorbachev that fulfilling his mission would mean their liberation. That withholding of legitimacy in his own neighborhood denied Gorbachev the much wider legitimacy he had hoped to obtain. Witnessing this, the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union saw no reason themselves to remain within it, as ultimately, under Boris Yeltsin, did the Russian republic itself. Having delegitimized himself on all fronts, Gorbachev wound up, Radchenko somewhat rudely reminds us, making a Pizza Hut commercial in 1997. To be fair, he was the only Nobel Peace Prize winner to do so.

DISTANT MIRRORS

So is *To Run the World*, as Radchenko acknowledges in his introduction, "dangerously thin on theory"? For anyone in search of clockwork predictability, the answer is surely yes. But if one seeks patterns—the recognition of similarities across time, space, and scale—then this book has the potential to significantly revise not only how historians think about the Soviet Union but also the much longer sweep of Russian history that has now unexpectedly produced, in Putin, a new tsar.

For what Putin appears to want is a new legitimacy based on much older ones: not the ideological rigidities of Marxism-Leninism, but the murkier and more malleable legacies of tsarist imperialism, Russian nationalism, and an almost medieval religious orthodoxy. Where the Soviet Union fits within this frame—a post-Soviet history that echoes pre-Soviet history—remains to be determined, but by emphasizing legitimacy, Radchenko has pointed the way. "The sources of Soviet ambitions," he concludes, "are not specifically Soviet but both precede and postdate the Soviet Union." Putin's ambitions aren't likely to be much different.

Radchenko's book challenges, as well, the study of grand strategy. That field has long loved binaries: ends versus means, aspirations versus capabilities, planning versus improvisation, hopes versus fears, even foxes versus hedgehogs. The unofficial motto of the Yale Grand Strategy program has long been F. Scott Fitzgerald's claim that the sign of a first-rate intelligence is "the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." But what if it's three?

REVIEW ESSAY

The Pivot That Wasn't

Did America Wait Too Long to Counter China?

ORIANA SKYLAR MASTRO

Lost Decade: The U.S. Pivot to Asia and the Rise of Chinese Power
BY ROBERT D. BLACKWILL AND RICHARD FONTAINE.
Oxford University Press, 2024, 480 pp.

During the past two decades, many American leaders have argued that U.S. foreign policy must focus more on Asia. In 2009, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said that "the center of gravity of international affairs is importantly shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific and Indian Oceans." In 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the United States would "pivot to Asia" after having devoted too many resources to other areas of the world, particularly Afghanistan and the Middle East. And in 2022, President Joe Biden said that "the future of the twenty-first-century economy is going to be largely written in the Indo-Pacific."

By any metric, Asia is the world's most strategically important region today. It is home to over half the world's population and boasts six of the world's 25 largest economies, 14 of its 25 biggest militaries, and four of the nine countries with nuclear weapons. Asian-Pacific states have been engines of worldwide growth, accounting for over 70 percent of the increase in global GDP over the last decade; China alone has contributed a staggering 31 percent. The region hosts 19 of the top 100 universities, according to the *Times Higher Education*'s ranking, and ten of the 25 countries that filed the most patents in 2021. If the United States wants to remain the planet's most powerful country, it will have to

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tap into Asia and prevent China from dominating it.

But as Robert Blackwill and Richard Fontaine demonstrate in their insightful new book, *Lost Decade,* the United States has repeatedly failed to achieve its promised shift. The efforts of successive administrations to complete the pivot, they write, have "foundered on the shoals of execution." The United States has continued to allocate more military resources and pay more attention to the Middle East and Europe. Despite its sporadic attempts to engage more deeply with Asian countries, Washington did not coherently respond to China's growing power in the second decade of this century. Blackwill and Fontaine soberly conclude that this is "perhaps the most consequential" U.S. policy failure since 1945.

The book helpfully describes the obstacles that lie ahead for any American president hoping to prioritize Asia. But the authors overlook some of the obstacles to their own recommendations and stop short of explaining what should happen once the United States does shift its resources to the region. Countering China requires more than just a pivot. Washington must mobilize, including by stocking more of the right weapons and gaining increased military access to China's neighbors. Only then will the United States be able to deter Chinese aggression, strengthen its presence in Asia, and safeguard its interests in the region.

SLOW TO SHIFT

When the Obama administration declared that it would pivot toward Asia, the idea was to draw down U.S. involvement in the Middle East and curtail defense spending in Europe so that Washington could focus on spurring economic growth in Asia and countering China's expanding influence. That would require the United States to spearhead the massive free-trade deal known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, move weapons and personnel to the Indo-Pacific, stock up on equipment suitable for a war with China, and intensify diplomacy in Asia. The pivot won bipartisan support and was embraced by successive administrations because there was already a consensus in Washington that the United States had misallocated its assets, favoring regions of waning importance.

And yet as *Lost Decade* illustrates, U.S. policymakers were slow to execute the shift and suffered the consequences of missteps in Asia policy that long predated the pivot. President Bill Clinton, for example, supported China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 based on the belief that economic interdependence would encourage China to liberalize and moderate its foreign policy ambitions. Yet that assumption proved faulty because China's views about how to build and exercise power were different than those of the United States. President George W. Bush strengthened security alliances in Asia by ramping up military cooperation with Singapore, relocating military bases in Japan to reduce political friction with Tokyo, and participating in the first quadrilateral military exercise with Australia, India, and Japan. But his administration was distracted by conflicts in the Middle East and

the "war on terror" and ultimately failed to devote more resources and attention to Asia.

President Barack Obama and his top advisers recognized these failures and announced a pivot to Asia in part to make up for lost time. But their goals lacked clarity, and they did not thoroughly plan new policies, analyze their costs and benefits, consider alternative scenarios, or consult with allies. The result was a strategy that often seemed contradictory, caught between the need to assert a strong presence in Asia and the obligation to respond to emerging threats, such as Russia's aggression toward its neighbors and instability in the Middle East. And even when Obama seemed to pivot, the effort fell short. For example, his administration announced in 2012 that it would base 60 percent of the U.S. naval fleet in the Asia-Pacific by 2020. But 60 percent was not enough to deter the growing Chinese navy, especially because many of those assigned vessels were to remain docked in California or Hawaii—far from the hot spots of potential conflict.

On the surface, Asia policy under President Donald Trump appeared more consistent, rooted firmly in competition rather than cooperation. Trump abandoned efforts to shape Chinese behavior and gave up on joining multilateral trade agreements, as with the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017. Instead, he adopted a confrontational stance toward Beijing; he sanctioned Chinese officials and companies and worked to shrink bilateral trade deficits. But Trump's approach was also riddled with contradictions. He threatened, for example, to withdraw troops from Japan and South Korea unless they paid more for U.S. military presence, undermining Washington's alliances with those countries by casting doubt on the depth of its commitment.

Such actions left U.S. allies uncertain about their standing with the United States. When Biden came into office in 2021, he tried to reassure these jittery partners while also maintaining his predecessor's assertive posture toward Beijing. He poured money into Taiwan's defense capabilities through the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act. And he increased cooperation with Australia, Japan, and the Philippines. But his attention has been diverted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war, further delaying investment in new defense capabilities suited for deterring China.

REASONS OR EXCUSES?

Blackwill and Fontaine offer a variety of explanations for why so many presidents have so thoroughly failed to carry out a proper pivot: redirecting attention to Asia would have yielded them "no domestic political benefit"; despite many proclamations about the importance of shifting attention to Asia, there was never a clear catalyst for doing so; U.S. policymakers did not have a common understanding of what the pivot would entail and underestimated the challenge posed by China's rise.

This analysis is mostly persuasive, but in many ways, the authors are too generous in their assessment

of Washington. They excuse inaction by arguing that passing the Trans-Pacific Partnership "would have put members of Congress in the crosshairs of anti-trade voters." They point out that moving military assets away from Europe and the Middle East could have undermined U.S. credibility in those regions. And they hold that Washington failed to give Asia its due because U.S. policymakers were "drawn to crises in other regions."

It is true that U.S. leaders have been overstretched. But they have also been either unable to think creatively about different approaches or unwilling to take the risks necessary to ensure the pivot succeeds. For example, individual officials have often appeared to be too focused on careerist objectives, such as advancing to a coveted job or getting reelected, to gamble on unconventional China policies; better to stick with the status quo, they often seem to conclude. U.S. administrations have also tended to focus their diplomatic efforts on the developed world instead of on poorer countries, leaving a vacuum for Beijing to fill. Take the Solomon Islands. The United States shuttered its embassy there between 1993 and 2023, allowing China to make inroads in one of the poorest countries in the Pacific. In 2022, China and the Solomon Islands signed a security pact, which—according to a leaked draft of the deal—lets Chinese naval vessels resupply on the islands.

An important obstacle to pivoting the authors gloss over is the internal disagreement among U.S. policymakers as to the nature and timing of China's threat and how to respond to it. Hawks, for example, see a Chinese invasion of Taiwan as imminent and favor a more proactive approach to defending the island, whereas doves discount that possibility and fear that an enhanced U.S. military presence might precipitate the very war it is trying to deter. Even Defense Department officials who agree that China poses a military threat disagree on whether the United States should prioritize near-term readiness or long-term modernization.

THE FULL 180

Blackwill and Fontaine offer a long to-do list for completing the shift to Asia. It includes continuing to strengthen U.S. alliances in the Indo-Pacific, joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (the trade deal that emerged after Washington pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership), "de-risking" economic ties with China, substantially increasing defense production, and moving U.S. military assets and personnel from Europe and the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. They want Washington to garner more European support in the fight against China—for example, by encouraging allies to create joint standards for technology, cybersecurity, and human rights. The authors also suggest that the United States build coalitions with allies centered on specific issues, such as preventing economic coercion and intellectual property theft. At the same time, Blackwill and Fontaine call for intensifying bilateral U.S.-Chinese diplomacy by

But they offer no hints as to how Washington could convince its European allies to prioritize strategic issues over economic ones—especially when those countries' views on China vary widely. (There is a reason why ideas like these have been on the United States' to-do list for almost two decades.) The authors' suggestions also sometimes conflict. The goal of supporting liberalism, for example, can work against the need to pursue issue-based coalitions, which often demands cooperating with autocracies.

The United States cannot compete with China simply by doing more of the same. Washington needs new ideas and strategies, and it can start by rethinking its alliances. For example, the United States might organize collective responses not only to military attacks but also to economic ones. And when dealing with countries governed by distasteful authoritarians, the United States should double down on diplomacy instead of disengaging. Washington should also spend more money in developing countries and attach fewer political conditions to such support. And it should cozy up to China's neighbors—particularly Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—by offering economic enticements and security guarantees in exchange for the right to build bases, access maritime routes, and fly over their territory.

It would also be prudent for the United States to get tougher in the South China Sea, where China has constructed and enlarged artificial islands to reinforce its territorial claims. The U.S. Navy should escort fishing and oil exploration vessels from allied countries when China threatens their operations and should extend similar support to nonallied Southeast Asian countries, such as Vietnam, in exchange for greater support of U.S. military operations in the region. If China escalates its aggression in the area, the United States should signal that it will reconsider its neutrality on the question of disputed territories, such as the Paracel and Spratly Islands. Washington must also try to build consensus among Southeast Asian claimants regarding the sovereignty of those islands. Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam squabble among themselves about maritime boundaries and natural resources—and China takes advantage of their disagreement. Getting allies on the same page would allow Washington to galvanize international support against Beijing's aggression and expansionism. If Beijing continues to violate maritime laws, the United States and its Southeast Asian partners could threaten to expel China from international organizations and impose sanctions or export restrictions.

The United States has wasted a great deal of time, but it isn't too late to deal with China's rise. Blackwill and Fontaine have done a service by identifying the pitfalls ahead and by suggesting corrective measures. But prioritizing Asia is just the first step in managing competition between the United States and China. The next phase requires national mobilization. And the clock is ticking.

REVIEW ESSAY

Secular Stagnation

How Religion Endures in a Godless Age

SHADI HAMID

The Divine Economy: How Religions Compete for Wealth, Power, and People
BY PAUL SEABRIGHT. Princeton University Press, 2024, 504 pp.

Until recently, it may have seemed as if religion were on the way out. As people grew richer and more educated, the thinking went, they would begin to rely less on the solace and meaning provided by faith. That is what happened in much of western Europe, where church membership rates have cratered over the last century. According to a 2018 Pew study, only 11 percent of people in western European countries say religion is a very important part of their lives. Proponents of so-called modernization theory see religion as a defense mechanism, a hedge against chaos and depredation; religions would invariably lose adherents in a safer, more ordered and comfortable world. As recently as 2020, the political scientist Ronald Inglehart claimed in these pages that religion was in global decline. "As societies develop, survival becomes more secure," he noted, adding, "And as this level of security rises, people tend to become less religious."

But a wider look at trends in religiosity reveals a more complex reality. The story of religion over the past century is not one of contraction but of continued growth and consolidation. That, at least, is the contention of the British economist Paul Seabright's new book, *The Divine Economy*, in which he insists that "the world is coming to be dominated by a handful of religions to an extent that has never been seen before." Chief among these expanding faiths are Islam and Christianity, now boasting around 2.0 billion and 2.6 billion adherents, respectively. Both are making impressive gains, finding new audiences and devotees in the world's fastest-growing populations, notably in Africa.

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And contrary to what modernization theory and its variants predict, prosperity and economic growth are hardly killing off religion. In China, Seabright claims, there are now probably "at least as many active Christians and Muslims as members of the Chinese Communist Party." In India, the fastest-growing economy in the G-20, religion plays an increasingly important role in public life. In the United States, church membership fell below 50 percent in 2020 after hovering at around 70 percent for the better part of the twentieth century. But according to a 2023 Pew poll, 88 percent of Americans still believe in the God of the Bible or some other higher power or spiritual force.

Those who imagined religion fading away before the advance of science and commercial prosperity misunderstood its full dimensions. It is not enough to see religion as a matter of personal, private belief; it is also a communal practice, reflected in public ritual, shared experience, and the formation of identity. Religion isn't just, or even primarily, about believing in a particular way. Many Catholics attend Mass and take Communion even if they have doubts that they are receiving the body and blood of Christ. At least according to some surveys, a surprisingly large number of evangelicals appear unsure about the divinity of Christ, which of course is a creedal requirement for being Christian. But as Seabright notes, the original Greek word for creed, *symbolon*, referred to "a mechanism for verifying someone's identity by matching two halves of a broken object." It was about deferring to the right authorities and signaling which group one belonged to, rather than "what piece of theology might be passing simultaneously through their mind as they were speaking."

To view religion as primarily social—as something that comes alive when it is done in the company of others or that springs from the knowledge that one is doing the same thing that others are doing—allows a shift away from a preoccupation with the interiority of individual belief. *The Divine Economy* is an ambitious work that attempts to think economically about something that so often seems beyond the grasp of the social sciences. Seabright argues that the most successful and enduring religious messages can be explained by cost and benefit, supply and demand, and rational self-interest. That approach to religion may feel crude to believers who see their personal faith as ineffable and not reducible to such grubby material terms. But Seabright's way of conceiving of religion helps explain why it remains so powerful in a supposedly secular world.

DOES BELIEF MATTER?

It takes a leap of faith for people to believe in the unseen in a world that tells them that everything must be "rational." To be Christian, one must presumably believe in Christ. To be Muslim, one must—again, presumably—believe in the divinity of the Koran and the prophethood of Muhammad.

Historically, however, it has always been a bit more complicated. Since it was (and still is) impossible to know what people truly believe, religious leaders have been more than happy to accept outward professions of faith as sincere. After all, the more congregants, the better. Often, people had financial incentives to convert. Other incentives exist, as well. Under Islamic law, a Muslim woman can legally

marry any man who is willing to publicly profess the Islamic creed. This is all it takes to become Muslim, and for love, one might be willing to say something one does not, in fact, believe to be true.

Then there are cases of people who would like to believe but, for whatever reason, cannot. In such cases, ritual and participation can do a lot of the heavy lifting. Belonging may come before belief rather than vice versa. In a state of inner torment, the Christian philosopher John Ruskin wished for heavenly reward but was no longer certain that heaven existed. He wrote to his father in 1852 that he "would act as if the Bible were true." More recently, Honor Levy, an American podcaster, writer, and convert to Catholicism, explained, "You just do the rituals, and then it becomes real, even if you don't [initially] believe in it. That's what religion is." Through sheer force of will, one can resolve that God is real.

These might sound like spiritual acrobatics, but they are variations of the long-standing (and often misunderstood) argument known as Pascal's Wager. The seventeenth-century French mathematician Blaise Pascal posited that it was in one's self-interest to find a way to believe in God even if God might not actually exist. The potential benefit of such belief was eternal salvation, and even a small chance at something as consequential as eternity trumps any of the relatively minor inconveniences associated with belief. What is less well known, Seabright reminds readers, is that Pascal confessed in the same tract that this sort of internally compelled belief will "make you more stupid." But Pascal's broader insight is one that could easily be applied to most, if not all, areas of life: it can be rational to be irrational.

THINKING LIKE AN ECONOMIST

The mundane underpins the spiritual in the making of religious organizations. In *The Divine Economy*, Seabright analyzes religions as if they were corporations. Many faiths have fallen by the wayside over the millennia, unable to compete in the marketplace of piety. In looking at religion this way, Seabright joins an old tradition, going back at least as far as Adam Smith, of economists' trying to understand devotion in material terms. "The velvet glove of enchantment," Seabright writes, "clothes the iron fist of organization." Borrowing from Smith, he explores how market incentives shape the character and content of religious messages. New religious movements, if they wish to gain adherents, must be dynamic, flexible, and tolerant of diversity. Writing in the eighteenth century, Smith compared energetic and often sensationalist Methodist preachers with the more reserved and cerebral parsons of the Church of England. The former needed to attract new audiences to earn their keep and so preached more vigorously. The latter enjoyed reliable salaries, political patronage, and institutional privileges and so did not feel compelled to change their behavior.

These privileges were analogous to the subsidies that governments provide to some private-sector companies, which then have less incentive to innovate and take risks. Like firms, religions must compete for consumers. Sometimes, this means that they must accentuate what makes them different; other times, it means softening off-putting theological claims in order to reach a wider audience. But sometimes brute material forces determine success or failure. As

Mass appeal: a priest at a church service in Ugunja, Kenya, December 2023

Seabright puts it, "Without economic resources behind them, the most beautifully crafted messages will struggle to gain a hearing in the cacophony of life." It is rare and even refreshing to have a book about the rise of religion that concludes, in a sense, that it's the economy, stupid.

But that doesn't make such an explanation entirely convincing. At their advent, Christianity and Islam—effectively the Walmarts and Apples of today's religious marketplace—had comparatively few such resources. Before they were powerful, they were powerless, a powerlessness captured most evocatively in the crucifixion of Christ. Seabright doesn't venture into exactly why these two faiths appealed to people in ways that others did not. He does, however, persuasively argue that religions succeed and spread because they provide "goods" that humans need and want. The data bear this out: religious people tend, on average, to be happier, more fulfilled, and more connected with their fellow citizens than those who do not. Take Grace, a woman Seabright meets in Ghana who is struggling to make ends meet but still tithes a significant portion of her income to a pastor who seems to be very wealthy. According to Seabright, she does so because she has something to gain. She acts out of a form of emotional self-interest. Some of the benefits of piety are tangible. As a member of a church of like-minded individuals, Grace can meet men who have the self-discipline to wake up at 9 AM on a Sunday. They must also be willing to invest three hours of their time to listen to a long-winded sermon. Obviously, finding a life partner and a potentially good father to her still-hypothetical children is not something that she can put a price tag on.

And religion addresses a deeper need beyond the material. Humans are meaning-makers who seek, and are products of, an enchanted world. The secularization of societies cannot undo this. As long as people need meaning, religions

LUIS TATO / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

will remain uniquely suited to provide it. Humans are social animals, and religions provide community in a way that secular ideologies can only struggle to replicate.

In the modern era, political ideologies have attempted to mimic the certainty, conviction, and mass spectacle of religion. But when they manage to provide those things, the sensation is usually fleeting and almost always susceptible to the vicissitudes of politics. People judge ideologies by their worldly success or failure because this world alone is all they have to offer. But religions have a built-in advantage: they are concerned with ultimate meaning in a way that secular ideologies are not. Communism and fascism, for example, failed in a way that Christianity and Islam cannot.

That said, the monumental growth of Christianity and Islam in the last century has come not principally at the expense of secularism but rather of local and folk traditions—what scholars call "immanent religions"—around the world, particularly in Africa and parts of Latin America. In increasingly globalized societies, these local religions tend to lose out. The established, universalist faiths of Christianity and Islam provide the kinds of standardized ritual and support structures that soften the impact of rapid change and the upheaval of migrating from rural areas to rapidly expanding cities.

THE PARADOX OF SECULARIZATION

In the real world, the effects of losing the scaffolding that religion provides are clear enough. The rise of so-called deaths of despair in the United States has been most concentrated in the areas that have seen the largest decreases not in religious belief but in religious participation. In other words, most Americans still believe, but they have lost their ability to express that belief in a way that binds them to a wider community. So they channel it elsewhere—increasingly into partisan politics. It is well known that white Christians support Donald Trump in disproportionate numbers. Less well known is that "unchurched" Christians have proven particularly loyal to him. As *The New York Times* reported in January, church membership in Iowa's Calhoun County plummeted by almost a third from 2010 to 2020, yet the overwhelming majority of its residents continued to identify as Christian. Trump garnered over 70 percent of the vote in the county.

One might call this the paradox of secularization: that even if religion matters less for individuals, it can still matter more for society at large. Like love or friendship, religion can make its presence felt through its absence. The more secularized a society becomes, the more noticeable the holdouts, which is why outward displays of religiosity can seem so jarring in various European contexts. Across the globe, religion remains resonant in public life because it speaks to fundamental and foundational concerns that come to the fore in the messiness of political combat. For good or for ill, religion provides answers to the question of what it means to be a citizen. It can clarify the very purpose of politics. And it can offer citizens a deeper source and higher authority from which to derive their rights. If there were a world in which people cared only about calculating their economic self-interest, the power of religion would be significantly blunted. But the world does not quite work that way—and, if Seabright's analysis is any indication, it won't any time soon.

What Does America Want From China?

Debating Washington's Strategy—and the Endgame of Competition

The Biden Plan

RUSH DOSHI

In "No Substitute for Victory" (May/June 2024), Matt Pottinger and Mike Gallagher raise important concerns about the Biden administration's China policy. But their analysis misses the mark. Their review of key episodes in the administration's China policy is inaccurate, and they propose steps that the administration is already taking. But above all, they make a bad bet: they contend that the United States should forget about managing competition, embrace confrontation without limits, and then wait for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to collapse. This approach risks runaway escalation and could force a moment of reckoning before the United States has taken the very steps the authors recommend to strengthen its defense industrial base and improve its competitive position. Such a strategy would also mean losing support from U.S. allies and partners, who would see it as irresponsible.

The authors argue that their approach will work against China because it worked against the Soviet Union. But the Biden administration recognizes that this contest is different from that one. Its strategy, most recently articulated by National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in a speech this past January, is founded on realistic assumptions about the capacity of the United States to shape China's political system. It focuses not on the kind of bilateral relationship Washington wants with Beijing nor on the kind of government Americans want China to have but on straightforward and long-standing U.S. objectives: keeping the Indo-Pacific free from hegemony, sustaining American economic and technological leadership, and supporting regional democracies. It seeks to revitalize the sources of American strength by investing at home and aligning with allies and partners abroad. From that foundation, the United States can compete intensely by blunting Chinese activities that undermine U.S. interests and building a coalition of forces that will help the

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United States secure its priorities—all while managing the risks of escalation.

A BAD BET

One can share many of Pottinger and Gallagher's assumptions and yet reach different conclusions on overall strategy. The Biden administration's National Security Strategy recognizes China as the only state with the intent to reshape the international order and the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so. The administration takes seriously China's efforts to surpass the United States in technology, increase the world's dependence on China's supply chains, ramp up regional military operations, and align more closely with Iran, North Korea, and Russia.

But the administration does not share the authors' assumption that the contest with China can end as decisively and neatly as the Cold War did. Although Pottinger and Gallagher are careful not to call for forceful regime change, they define victory as "a China that is able to chart its own course free from communist dictatorship." A China that resembles Taiwan politically is "the only workable destination," they write.

But betting on a great power's collapse or liberalization is unwise. Despite its challenges, China is the first U.S. competitor in a century to surpass 60 percent of U.S. GDP. The country boasts considerably greater industrial and technological strength than the Soviet Union did and is deeply enmeshed in the global economy. It cannot be wished away.

Ironically, the authors resurrect the end goal of the engagement era: a more liberal China. They hope that this time, a vague toughness will succeed where commercial and people-to-people ties fell short. But if engagement risked complacency, their approach risks escalation. An explicit policy of seeking the end of CCP rule would turn the U.S.-Chinese rivalry into an existential one for China's leadership. If Beijing concluded that the United States sought total victory, it would have little reason to exercise restraint.

American objectives do not require China's political transformation, and there is no guarantee that the end of communist rule would produce a more restrained China. The end of communist Russia, after all, eventually gave way to Putin's Russia.

DIPLOMACY, NOT CAPITULATION

Because they are betting on China's collapse, the authors conclude that "the United States shouldn't manage the competition with China; it should win it." But the notion that two nuclear-armed strategic competitors should not try to manage their rivalry is unusual even among today's China hawks and was uncommon in the days of U.S. diplomat George Kennan and U.S. President Ronald Reagan that the authors praise.

That is because efforts to manage competition make the United States more competitive. Such actions show the American public and U.S. allies and partners that the United States is a responsible actor and that they can confidently buy into Washington's strategy. Excessively confrontational positions, in contrast, leave the United States standing alone with fewer tools. Beijing understands that, which is why it always tries to blame tensions on Washington. Pottinger

and Gallagher's approach would play into Beijing's designs.

Managing the competition is unlikely to achieve the kind of strategic reassurance with China that resolves fundamental disagreements. But Washington should have greater confidence in what can be called "tactical reassurance" that addresses specific issues. Better communication about what Washington is doing—and not doing—on issues ranging from technology to Taiwan can discourage dangerously fatalistic thinking from a paranoid great power whose dark view of the United States could get even darker. Making clear that Washington's goals are not limitless but tied to specific interests reduces the risk of runaway escalation. That requires face-to-face meetings so that misperceptions can be ironed out quickly, competitive steps by the United States can be explained directly, and both sides can find off-ramps. Far from capitulation, this is basic diplomacy. It complements intense competition by making it less risky and more sustainable. Pottinger and Gallagher argue that any such efforts should be taken from a strong U.S. position and should be a process, not an end goal. They are right. But that, in fact, describes the very approach that the Biden administration is taking.

A TIME TO REBUILD

When Joe Biden became president, Beijing was convinced that the United States was in decline. During the Trump administration, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled a phrase that encapsulated Beijing's growing confidence in this trend: the world was undergoing "great changes unseen in a century." Xi saw President Donald Trump's alienation of American allies and partners, erratic handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and disregard of democratic norms as proof that "the East is rising and the West is falling." Beijing did not see Trump as tough but as unpredictable and transactional. He was willing to compromise on autonomy in Hong Kong, human rights in Xinjiang, and even his own technology and tariff policies in exchange for concessions that would help him electorally, such as Chinese agricultural and energy purchases in U.S. states important to Trump's political standing. Beijing did not see this as strength.

When the Biden team entered office, they did not rush into diplomacy with Beijing, as the prior administration had done. They instead took a step back, reduced high-level meetings, and paused many dialogues that had not achieved results. With bipartisan support, they focused on replenishing American strengths. At home, the administration passed landmark legislation on pandemic recovery, infrastructure, semiconductors, and clean energy. That catalyzed $3.5 trillion in new public and private investment and propelled a post-COVID recovery with the highest growth, lowest inflation, and lowest unemployment of nearly any developed economy. Meanwhile, China's economy slowed, and its population shrank. Economists' predictions about when China would overtake the United States in nominal GDP went from years to decades.

Abroad, the administration brought U.S. allies and partners closer together through AUKUS, the trilateral security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the Quad (Quadrilateral Security

Dialogue), which comprises Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. It negotiated agreements to expand U.S. military access in Australia, Japan, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines. And it upgraded ties with India, Indonesia, and Vietnam; held unprecedented summits with ASEAN and Pacific Island leaders in Washington; and convened trilateral summits: one with Japan and the Philippines and another with Japan and South Korea. These efforts demonstrated that American decline was not as imminent as Beijing had hoped. From that position, the United States intensified diplomacy with China not as an end but as a means to achieve U.S. interests and mitigate the risk of escalatory spirals.

The administration achieved real gains. When Biden and Xi met in California last fall, they restored and even expanded some military ties to reduce conflict risk. Beijing took steps to reduce the flow of fentanyl precursors to the United States, going beyond its deal with the Trump administration.

Pottinger and Gallagher imply that diplomacy with China has meant scaling back tougher U.S. policies. On the contrary, the administration took more competitive steps while intensifying diplomacy. Over the last year, the administration upgraded semiconductor export controls on China, established the first-ever screening protocols on outbound investment to China, prohibited transfers of U.S. personal data to China, and signed legislation forcing China's ByteDance to divest from TikTok. The White House launched an investigation into the security risks of Chinese-made electric vehicles, levied new tariffs in strategic sectors and called for them in steel and shipbuilding, and put more of China's companies on export control lists than the Trump administration did. The administration also provided billions in new security assistance to Taiwan, including by providing materiel directly from U.S. stockpiles for the first time.

Despite this track record, Pottinger and Gallagher argue that in the interest of facilitating diplomacy, the Biden administration has been "downplaying affronts by Beijing." They claim the administration planned to let a Chinese spy balloon overfly the United States without notifying the public. But the administration immediately limited the balloon's ability to surveil sensitive sites and made plans to shoot it down safely while maximizing opportunities to collect information about the technology and what China was doing with it. The authors claim the Biden administration minimized press reports about China's pursuit of a base in Cuba. But in fact, the administration indicated that details were murky and revealed that it had been carrying out a whole-of-government strategy to counter China's overseas bases, including in Cuba, which it launched only weeks after Biden's inauguration. Finally, the authors imply that the administration has not firmly defended American values in its competition with China. But Biden has repeatedly framed the competition as one between democracy and autocracy, has plainly stated that China is a dictatorship, and has accused China of genocide in Xinjiang.

COMMON SENSE, COMMON GROUND

The authors rightly assume that China is preparing for a catastrophic conflict over Taiwan. Their concerns about the U.S. defense industrial base, shipbuilding

delays, and the retirement of older vessels and aircraft are widely shared. Many steps they propose are underway. These include expanding the U.S. military's footprint in the Indo-Pacific, investing in unmanned or containerized weapons systems and kits that can convert "dumb bombs" into guided munitions, hardening key military facilities, and pre-positioning supplies.

But the authors' proposal for a $20 billion annual deterrence fund that would "surge and disperse sufficient combat power in Asia" for five years is genuinely novel. It is also more achievable than their call to effectively double the defense budget. A deterrence fund could complement the Biden administration's new Replicator Initiative, which seeks to field thousands of unmanned autonomous systems within two years. It could also turbocharge U.S. investments in asymmetric capabilities, such as long-range missiles and advanced mines.

Pottinger and Gallagher also raise concerns about China's efforts to dominate new technologies, exploit U.S. dependencies, and export its excess industrial capacity to put competitors out of business. Yet here again, the Biden administration has already taken many of the steps they propose: new tariffs, coordination with allies and partners on economic and technological issues, investment restrictions, and export controls. Other steps the authors propose, such as preventing U.S. funds from enabling investment in blacklisted Chinese companies, are sound and should find bipartisan support. So, too, is the authors' call for Washington to recruit Americans, particularly Asia hands and technologists, into government and to make sure that Americans are informed about what's at stake in the competition with China.

Pottinger and Gallagher provide an important service to the China policy debate by presenting a good-faith critique of the current approach. But what is most useful about their argument is not the areas of difference with the Biden administration but the areas of overlap. U.S. policy toward China will need bipartisan foundations to succeed. Their essay shows that regardless of where one starts in the China debate, at the moment, most policymakers are arriving at a similar set of common-sense policies.

The Perils of Estrangement

JESSICA CHEN WEISS AND JAMES B. STEINBERG

The United States faces a major challenge in managing its relations with China, the world's second-largest economy and military power. The Chinese government does not share the United States'

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commitment to liberal democracy, is at odds with many of the United States' key international partners, and pursues economic policies that harm American workers and companies. Meeting that challenge requires a nuanced understanding of the forces driving China's external policies and a clear-eyed view of the sources of U.S. strength. The path forward suggested by Pottinger and Gallagher reflects neither. Instead, they offer an illusory appeal to victory, one that will harm the cause of freedom in China, damage Washington's relations with key U.S. allies, and risk a dangerous confrontation reminiscent of the worst days of the Cold War—a Cold War they enthusiastically embrace.

We share Pottinger and Gallagher's hope that the Chinese people will one day enjoy greater freedoms and civil liberties. But history has shown that U.S. efforts to bring about change through pressure are as likely to consolidate authoritarian rule as to undermine it. The authors say they are not calling for "forcible regime change, subversion, or war," because they know that such extreme efforts carry intolerable risks. But their proposed tactics, if taken up by Washington, would ensure the most undesirable outcome: a Chinese leadership unwilling to cooperate on shared concerns but domestically strengthened by appeals to nationalist sentiments in the face of a hostile adversary. Worse yet, the aggressive policies the authors prescribe would alienate important U.S. partners that have no interest in an "us versus them" approach.

Pottinger and Gallagher try to minimize the extraordinary risks their

recommendations present by characterizing them as nothing more than "greater friction," which would eventually compel Beijing to simply "give up." What gives them such confidence that China's nuclear-armed leaders would go down without a fight? This is wishful thinking, not strategy. They castigate the Biden administration's approach as a throwback to détente, which the United States used to manage risk with the Soviet Union during the 1970s, but theirs is a revival of the "rollback" of the 1950s, which pushed the rival superpowers to the precipice of nuclear Armageddon.

The Cold War is a chilling reminder of the perils of unconstrained rivalry. It is also at odds with what the American public wants. According to a 2023 survey commissioned by the nonprofits National Security Action and Foreign Policy for America, a bipartisan majority of voters—87 percent of Democrats and 68 percent of Republicans—believe that U.S. leaders should focus more on working to avoid a military conflict than preparing for one. Only 21 percent regard China as an "enemy"; 76 percent view it as a "competitor."

Chinese leader Xi Jinping's tightening grip at home and China's economic and military coercion abroad are cause for deep concern. Openly adopting a confrontational Cold War posture toward Beijing would only reinforce the Chinese leadership's embrace of tough, authoritarian policies designed to show resolve and insulate China from U.S. pressure. When China's efforts undermine the interests of the United States and its partners, Washington must take firm, measured steps to meet those specific challenges. But U.S. policymakers should keep in mind that China's aggressive tactics are self-undermining, dimming China's economic vitality and damaging its international appeal. Washington needs to play a long game, one that favors its natural strengths.

The economic headwinds that China is now encountering, combined with efforts by the United States to strengthen its economic and technological competitiveness, have created a window for the two countries to stabilize their relationship, which had veered dangerously close to conflict. It is in the interest of both Beijing and Washington to reduce the risk of war and cooperate on key issues of mutual concern, such as climate change, public health, and the management of potentially destabilizing new technologies. Xi's summit with Biden in California last fall was a step in the right direction, resulting in efforts to curb China's fentanyl-related exports and the restoration of military-to-military communications to reduce the risk of an unintended crisis.

Even when direct diplomacy fails to resolve key issues, Washington's openness to engage demonstrates to the world that the United States is acting responsibly. Moreover, such engagements provide opportunities to press the Chinese government to change its harmful policies, including support for Russia's war in Ukraine and other threatening actions.

Even as the United States works to counter Chinese cyberattacks, information operations, and unfair economic practices, it should also welcome Chinese tourists, businesspeople, and students. The policies Pottinger and

Gallagher advocate would only deepen the estrangement between Americans and the Chinese people. If the authors mean what they say about supporting the Chinese people, they must recognize the importance of these societal ties, especially if official relations remain tense.

Pottinger and Gallagher's nostalgia for the Cold War and their call for a new generation of cold warriors could be issued only by those who have no memory of how dangerous that war often was.

A Possible Partner

PAUL HEER

Pottinger and Gallagher offer the wrong diagnosis of the challenge that China poses to the United States and thus the wrong prescriptions for dealing with that challenge. The diagnosis is wrong because it greatly overstates the nature of China's strategy and the scope of its ambitions. The authors assert that "Beijing is pursuing a raft of global initiatives designed to disintegrate the West and usher in an antidemocratic order." Beijing is indeed pursuing a raft of global initiatives to maximize China's power, influence, and wealth relative to the United States—and is doing so ruthlessly and relentlessly. But its goals fall well short of hastening the disintegration of the West or establishing an antidemocratic order. CCP leaders are focused on winning hearts and minds in a multipolar world, especially outside the West, and they recognize that trying to establish Chinese global hegemony and impose their own system on the rest of the world would be counterproductive to that goal. They also recognize that it would be destabilizing, prohibitively expensive, and probably unachievable and unsustainable.

It is likewise wrong for Pottinger and Gallagher to assert that Chinese leader Xi Jinping has a "policy of fostering global chaos" and that CCP leaders believe "they can destabilize the world with impunity." On the contrary, one of Beijing's overriding objectives during the past several decades has been to seek a stable external environment that would allow the CCP to focus on its myriad domestic problems and priorities. The authors quote a 2021 speech by Xi, in which he says that the world is in "chaos" and that "this trend appears likely to continue," and they juxtapose this with Xi concluding that "the times and trends are on our side" and "the opportunities outweigh the challenges" for China. But it takes a highly selective reading of Xi's speech to extrapolate that he is reveling in global chaos. The broader context, and additional statements by Xi and other CCP leaders, make it clear that Beijing sees overall trends as favoring China not because of global disorder but in spite of it.

Pottinger and Gallagher also cite a remark Xi made to Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2023: "Right now, there are changes, the likes of which we haven't seen for 100

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years. And we are the ones driving these changes together." Although this is now routinely quoted in media reports as evidence of Xi and Putin's malign agenda, there is a "game of telephone" dynamic at work: the quote is an English translation of a Russian translation of an impromptu remark Xi made in Chinese. Much has been made of the remark, but it seems more like an offhand comment, or even a garbled translation, than a declaration of a grand scheme. Xi almost certainly did not intend to say what the translation attributed to him, because it is inconsistent with Beijing's long-standing narrative. The broader context and other speeches and documents issued by Xi and various Chinese officials make it clear that Beijing views many of these global "changes" as having been thrust upon China by historical forces and players, and as posing dangers and risks, as well as opportunities. It is more likely that Xi and Putin think they are trying to drive a response to those changes.

Pottinger and Gallagher note that "Xi and his inner circle see themselves as fighting an existential ideological campaign against the West." Of course they do, partly because Washington has also made it clear that it believes itself to be in a global contest between democracy and autocracy. Gallagher reinforced this view in a February 2023 hearing before the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party when he described the U.S.-Chinese competition as "an existential struggle over what life will look like in the 21st century." Similarly, although the authors quote Xi asserting in 2014 that China "must achieve total victory," they also declare that there is "no substitute for victory" for the United States.

Based on their diagnosis of China as an existential and incorrigible threat, Pottinger and Gallagher offer a package of prescriptions to gird for an inevitable cold war with China. They advocate enhancing U.S. military deterrence, eroding China's economic leverage, and recruiting a "broader coalition," both inside and outside the United States, to confront Beijing. There are a number of problems with this agenda, including its reliance on funding that may not materialize and the fact that extensive economic decoupling from China would be costly for the United States. It is also worth noting that the strategy aspires to "restore U.S. primacy in Asia," an improbably ambitious aim.

Moreover, many U.S. allies and partners are unlikely to adopt the goal of regime change in China that is inherent in Pottinger and Gallagher's argument. The authors avow that they are not advocating "forcible regime change" or "subversion." But their definition of victory includes "the Chinese people . . . find[ing] inspiration to explore new models of development and governance." This echoes a speech that Pottinger delivered in May 2020, as deputy national security adviser in the Trump administration, when he speculated "whether China today would benefit from a little less nationalism and a little more populism." He added, "When a privileged few grow too remote and self-interested, populism is what pulls them back or pitches them overboard. It has a kinetic energy." Not surprisingly, this was widely viewed at the time by

many China specialists—and probably CCP leaders, as well—as encouraging the Chinese people to overthrow their government. The same audiences will rightly interpret Pottinger and Gallagher's article the same way.

In outlining their prescriptions, the authors reject "the discredited détente policies" that Washington adopted toward the Soviet Union in the 1970s on the grounds that détente "failed to achieve its goals" and a similar approach today would "yield little cooperation from Chinese leaders." But as the historian Niall Ferguson has persuasively argued in these pages, détente didn't mean "embracing, trusting, or appeasing the Soviets." It meant "recognizing the limits of U.S. power" and "employing a combination of carrots and sticks, and buying time." As Ferguson concludes, "It worked." Pottinger and Gallagher prematurely reject the possibility that détente could similarly work with China. Instead, they dismiss it as appeasement. They also fail to recognize the limits of U.S. power.

Pottinger and Gallagher conclude that Beijing "will never be a reliable partner" because Xi "is not a leader with whom Americans can solve problems" and the CCP "has no desire to coexist indefinitely with great powers that promote liberal values." On the contrary, if one avoids ideological blinders and does not assume that all Chinese policy statements are disingenuous, there is ample evidence for recognizing that Xi and the CCP are in fact interested in constructive engagement and peaceful coexistence with the United States, especially if the alternative is a zero-sum struggle that neither side could sustainably win.

Pottinger and Gallagher reply:

Rush Doshi's critique of our article warrants special attention because Doshi is qualified to serve as a reliable surrogate for the Biden administration on China, given his recent role at the White House, and because his general assessment of the threat posed by the CCP—and his belief that Washington must take proactive steps to frustrate Xi's ambitions—has much in common with our own take.

Still, there remain essential differences between his views and ours about all that Washington should be doing to address the threat, which has quickly metastasized from a "pacing challenge," as the Biden team politely calls it, into something much scarier, as the CCP is now underwriting proxy wars in multiple theaters in order to undermine the security and credibility of United States and its partners. In short, global events driven by Xi and his "axis of chaos"—Russia, Iran (and its terrorist proxies), North Korea, and Venezuela—are simply overwhelming Biden's China policy. As the Biden team frets about admitting that the United States is now in a cold war, Beijing is leading it into the foothills of a hot one.

THE NEW COLD WAR

Before addressing some key differences with Doshi, let us look at the other critiques. Jessica Chen Weiss and James Steinberg argue against waging a cold war with Beijing because cold wars

are dangerous. We don't deny they are dangerous. The problem is that the United States is already in one—not because Americans desired or started it, but because Xi is laser-focused on prevailing in a global struggle in which "capitalism will inevitably perish and socialism will inevitably triumph," as he put it in a quintessential secret speech shortly after rising to power. Xi's internal speeches, edicts, and actions show that he is pursuing global, not just regional, initiatives to discredit and dissolve Western alliances, co-opting international bodies to advance illiberal and autocratic aims, and even undermining the centuries-old Westphalian system of sovereign nation-states. These policies first took shape during the Obama administration, when Washington was at pains to engage and reassure Beijing.

In another statement, Xi said, "Our struggle and contest with Western countries is irreconcilable, so it will inevitably be long, complicated, and sometimes even very sharp." Xi has clearly driven the contest into just such a "sharp" phase. In April, Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that China is "overwhelmingly the number one supplier" of Russia's war machine and that "Russia would struggle to sustain its assault on Ukraine without China's support." Beijing is following a similar playbook in the Middle East, making itself the primary consumer of sanctioned Iranian oil and providing strong diplomatic and propaganda support for Iran and some of its terrorist proxies in the wake of Hamas's October 7 rampage in southern Israel.

If Washington wants to achieve victory without war in competition with a capable, belligerent Leninist regime, history tells us that it should adapt and apply the best lessons of the Cold War, from the clear-eyed theoretical framing that Kennan provided in the late 1940s to the resolute yet flexible policies that Reagan put into practice in the 1980s—policies that steered the Cold War to a peaceful conclusion that favored free nations.

Nine successive U.S. presidents, from Harry Truman to George H. W. Bush, chose to employ Cold War strategies, albeit with varying approaches. Yet Chen Weiss and Steinberg's reflexive queasiness about borrowing from a half century of U.S. foreign policy causes them to retreat toward even more dangerous ground: indulging the tired notion, contradicted by years of frustrating experience, that a totalitarian Leninist dictatorship can be enticed to "cooperate on key issues of mutual concern" and make that the basis for a stable relationship. This view echoes the folly of the failed détente policies of the 1970s, when a conciliatory approach toward Moscow invited only greater Soviet aggression—aggression that abated only after the United States adopted a more confrontational approach near the end of the Carter administration and during the Reagan years that followed. The Biden administration is repeating the mistake of the 1970s.

We are reminded of what Doshi wrote in his book, *The Long Game:* "China has repeatedly reneged on its various tactical concessions or returned accommodation by others with eventual hostility or more expansive claims." Why, then, do our critics (including

Doshi himself) believe China's recent and minor tactical concessions will follow a different pattern?

VICTIMS OR PERPETRATORS?

The critique of our article by Paul Heer, who once served as the U.S. intelligence community's top Asia analyst, is the true outlier in this debate. Whereas Chen Weiss and Steinberg acknowledge (albeit with conspicuous understatement) that Beijing "is at odds with many of the United States' key international partners" and "pursues economic policies that harm American workers and companies," Heer sees an altogether different regime. In his telling, Beijing is "focused on winning hearts and minds in a multipolar world" and seeking to "maximize China's power, influence, and wealth relative to the United States"—although he grants that Beijing is doing this "ruthlessly and relentlessly."

Heer portrays Xi, and even Putin, as mainly reactive players—victims of changes thrust upon them by unnamed "historical forces and players." He depicts Xi almost as an amiable doofus: someone "interested in constructive engagement and peaceful coexistence with the United States" but who is misquoted, misunderstood, or incapable of expressing himself accurately. (Heer suggests that Xi's comment to Putin in March 2023 that the two leaders were driving changes unseen in a century was a mistranslation. We checked the recording and confirmed that the original Mandarin aligns with the meaning that we and many others—including the aide translating Xi's words to Russian in the moment—first ascribed to Xi's remark.)

Dismissing the goals, resourcefulness, and initiative of dictators is all too common in Washington. Even by that low standard, Heer's optimistic assessment reads like something that might have been written about China a quarter century ago. It would have been wrong back then, too, but it would have been easier to excuse, given Beijing's disciplined policy of strategic deception at the time.

Heer even suggests that the CCP may have been provoked into an existential ideological campaign, partly in response to American officials (singling out the two of us in particular) who have laid out the stakes of the competition in such stark terms. Heer ignores what Doshi rightly identified in his book as "the persistence of China's existential threat perception even as the United States pursued a largely benign and welcoming policy toward China under the policy of engagement." We recommend Heer focus more on what Xi says when he isn't addressing a Western audience.

WEAKNESS IS PROVOCATIVE

Doshi's own critique of our article, by contrast, is as striking for its areas of agreement with our point of view as it is for its differences. Unlike the other responses, Doshi's acknowledges Beijing's formidable ambitions and capabilities and how threatening they are to U.S. interests (as does the Biden administration's written strategies). It also defends the growing list of steps the Biden administration has taken to strengthen Pacific alliances and restrict Beijing's access to U.S. markets and technology. As Doshi rightly notes, "U.S. policy toward China will need bipartisan foundations to succeed."

Our disagreements, however, are also significant. For starters, Doshi suggests that the differences between the Soviet Union yesterday and China today are so great as to render our proposed cold war strategy moot. In fact, the Soviet and Chinese systems are far more alike than not, and so are the American strategies required to outcompete them. Even the two economies are more alike than many remember. China has the world's second-largest GDP today—and so did the Soviet Union for most of the Cold War. In the 1970s, by the CIA's estimate, the Soviet economy reached 57 percent of U.S. GNP—a share that is not far from the 65 percent of U.S. GDP that the Chinese economy is estimated to amount to today. The Chinese economy, like the Soviet economy, is almost certainly smaller than estimated, and it is going through a crisis reminiscent of the Soviet economic travails that became obvious by the early 1980s. We are the first to admit that reducing the West's economic dependence on China will be much tougher than reducing its dependence on the Soviet Union was, given Beijing's technological prowess. By the same token, the costs of failing to disentangle would also be far greater.

Another blind spot is Doshi's failure to address the cascading collapse of the ability of the United States and its allies to deter their enemies over the past three years—in Afghanistan, in Ukraine, and in the Middle East—and what it says about the shortcomings of the administration's foreign policy in general, including toward China. In March 2022, Biden drew a redline for Xi, warning him not to provide "material support" for Putin's war in Europe. And yet Xi went on to do just that, with only token pushback from Washington—a failure that will probably embolden Beijing to undertake far more dangerous steps, including with regard to Taiwan.

The facts call into serious question Doshi's claim that the Biden administration's "intensified diplomacy" with Beijing has helped "mitigate the risk of escalatory spirals." By our reckoning, there is a lot of spiraling going on—in Europe, in the Middle East, in the South China Sea—and Beijing is at the center of it. Had the Biden administration adopted at the outset a stronger and more resolute policy toward U.S. adversaries—including, crucially, a major increase in defense spending—it may well have prevented the darkening geopolitical landscape that developed over the past three years. The Biden administration, inexplicably and inexcusably, is, in inflation-adjusted terms, cutting U.S. defense spending, even as it has initiated trillions of dollars in new spending on pandemic relief and progressive domestic priorities and is attempting to spend hundreds of billions of dollars more on college debt relief.

THE SOURCES OF CHINESE CONDUCT

Perhaps our most important disagreement with Doshi concerns his suggestion that imposing greater costs on Beijing and deeper constraints on the Chinese economy would make Beijing more aggressive, rather than less. That view is mistaken. One of the paradoxes of Marxist-Leninist dictatorships is that the more comfortable they are, the more aggressive they become.

It works the other way, too. The historian Richard Pipes, who served on the National Security Council during the Reagan administration and played a key role in fashioning its successful Soviet policy, held as a "central thesis" that "the Soviet regime will become less aggressive only as a result of failures and worries about its ability to govern effectively and not from a sense of enhanced security and confidence." When he wrote those words, in his 1984 book, *Survival Is Not Enough*, he was predicting the internal forces that would ultimately unravel the Soviet Communist Party. Chen Weiss and Steinberg even allude to this dynamic, perhaps unwittingly, when they say that China's current "economic headwinds," combined with policies the United States is using to widen its economic and technological lead over China, "have created a window" for more stable bilateral relations.

It stands to reason—and Cold War history is replete with examples—that the weaker a communist dictatorship becomes, the more manageable a threat it becomes for Washington. Hence, the United States should first do nothing to strengthen the CCP's power and confidence, which are sources of its aggression. As we made clear in our article, this isn't the same as pursuing "regime change." It is merely realistic and strategic thinking. Our view is the same as Pipes's: "This is a call not for subverting Communism but for letting Communism subvert itself." Washington shouldn't be giving Beijing time—which the Biden administration's détente-like policy does—to worm its way out of the economic conundrum it created for itself. Chinese leaders have long believed that the United States is trying to suppress Chinese economic growth anyway (even though it did precisely the opposite for more than three decades).

Washington shouldn't be afraid to pursue peaceful victory in this competition. Beijing isn't afraid of pursuing victory by any means necessary. In a major address in 2020 about China's 1950 decision to fight the United States on the Korean Peninsula, Xi said, "War must be fought to deter aggression, force must be met with force, and victory is the best way to win peace and respect." As we wrote in our original article: "China isn't aiming for a stalemate. Neither should America."

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April 1967

"To Intervene or Not to Intervene"

HANS J. MORGENTHAU

In 1967, as the Vietnam War raged, the international relations theorist Hans Morgenthau considered the legitimacy and practicality of military intervention. Although he was a founding father of the realist school, Morgenthau acknowledged the importance of ideology in the interventions of the United States and the Soviet Union. The two superpower rivals were propelled not just by power politics but also by ideas, which could sometimes lead them astray. American policymakers, he argued, needed to embrace the cold calculus of national interest.

While contemporary interventions serving national power interests have sometimes been masked by the ideologies of communism and anti-communism, these ideologies have been an independent motivating force. . . . The United States and the Soviet Union face each other not only as two great powers which in the traditional ways compete for advantage. They also face each other as the fountainheads of two hostile and incompatible ideologies, systems of government and ways of life, each trying to expand the reach of its respective political values and institutions and to prevent the expansion of the other. Thus the cold war has not only been a conflict between two world powers but also a contest between two secular religions. And like the religious wars of the seventeenth century, the war between communism and democracy does not respect national boundaries. It finds enemies and allies in all countries, opposing the one and supporting the other regardless of the niceties of international law. Here is the dynamic force which has led the two superpowers to intervene all over the globe, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes openly, sometimes with the accepted methods of diplomatic pressure and propaganda, sometimes with the frowned-upon instruments of covert subversion and open force.