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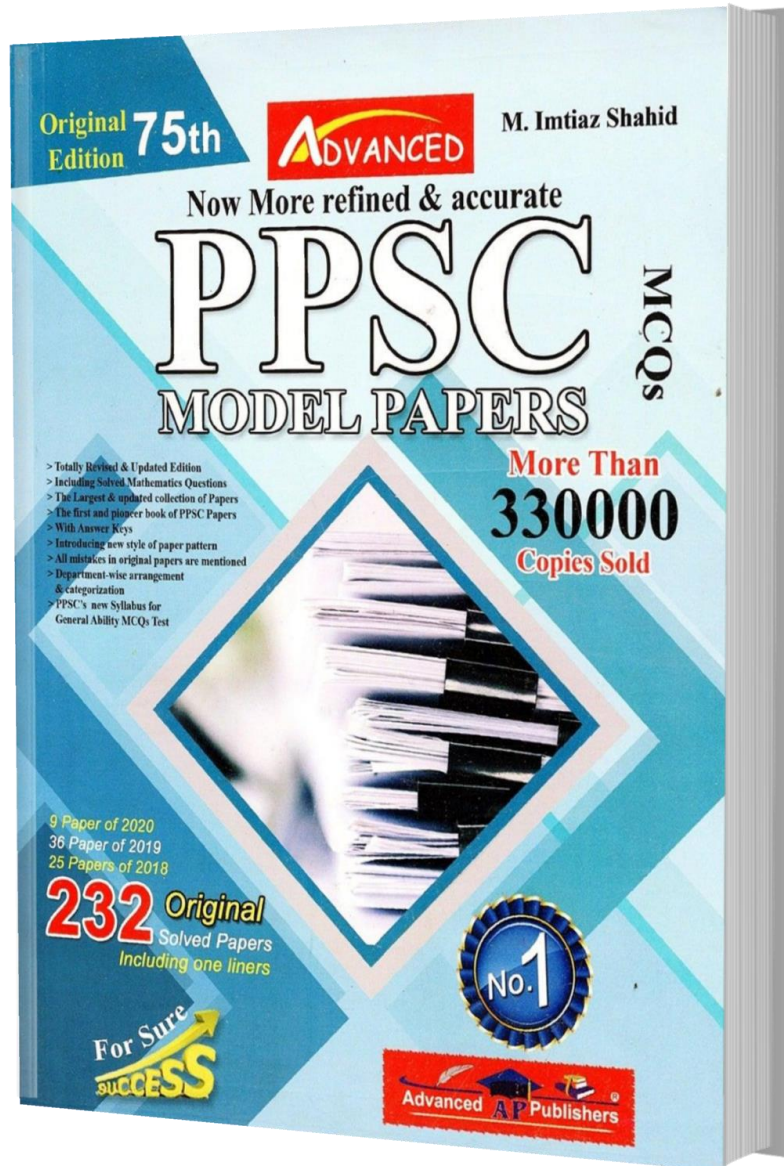
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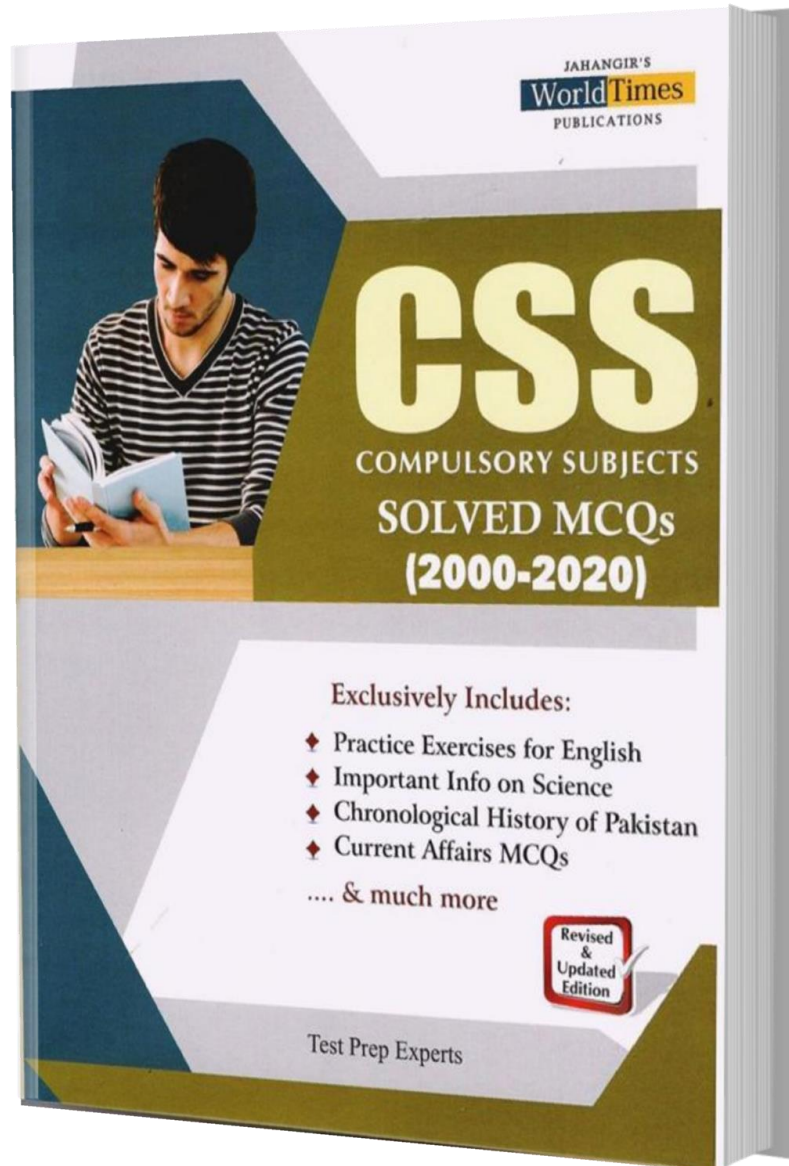
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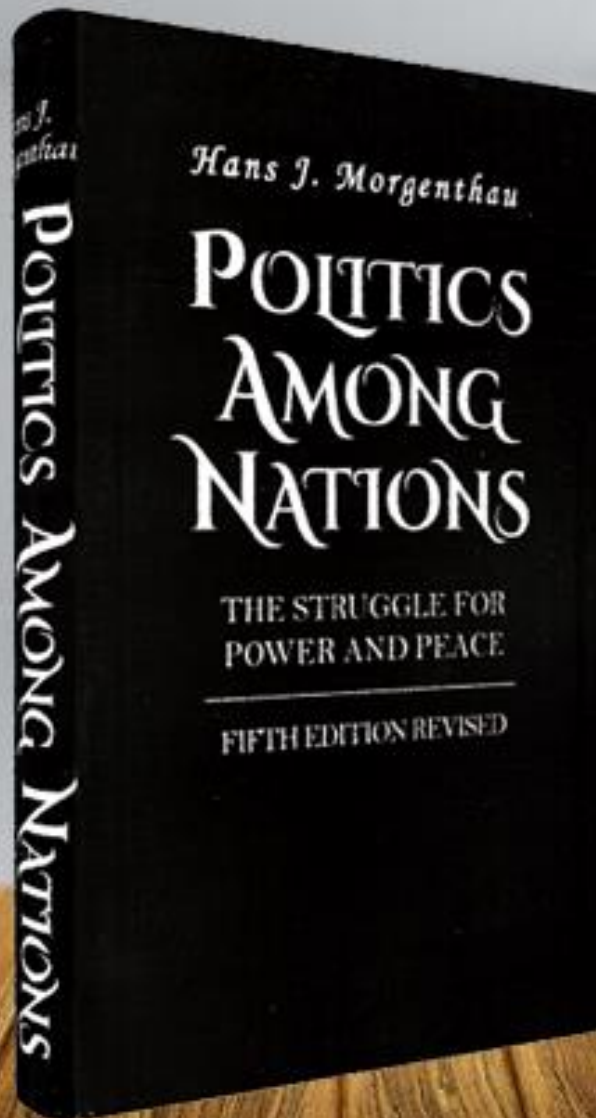
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Archibald Cary Coolidge, Founding Editor
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CONTRIBUTORS

ELKE WEBER has dedicated her career to studying how people make decisions in moments of uncertainty. A professor of psychology at Princeton University, she founded the Behavioral Science for Policy Lab there, which looks at how decision-makers think about energy and the environment. In April, in recognition of her groundbreaking work on climate change and risk-taking, Weber was elected to the National Academy of Sciences. In “Heads in the Sand” (page 20), Weber explores the psychological biases that make humans particularly bad at responding to crises.



Deemed “the world’s scariest economist” by *The Times* of London for her bold reimagining of capitalism, **MARIANA MAZZUCATO** has advised politicians and governments around the world, including U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the EU. Mazzucato is the founding director of the University College London Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, and in “Capitalism After the Pandemic” (page 50), she argues that the COVID-19 crisis offers a chance to reconstruct the relationship between the state and the private sector.



In 2018, **MICHAEL BECKLEY** published a book that cut against the conventional wisdom about the growing power balance between Washington and Beijing, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World’s Sole Superpower*. A political scientist at Tufts University, Beckley argues in “Rogue Superpower” (page 73) that although the United States is becoming more powerful, it is also likely to become less liberal.



HILLARY CLINTON has held some of the most visible positions in American political life: first lady, senator, secretary of state, and Democratic nominee for president. In “A National Security Reckoning” (page 88), Clinton argues that administrations of both parties have thought in overly narrow terms about U.S. national security, failed to modernize the military, and let the domestic foundations of American power erode.



WHAT ARE WE MISSING?

Responsible policymakers try to plan ahead. But how can they know what the next crisis will be, let alone prepare for it while still grappling with current ones? People are notoriously bad at anticipating the future, and countries aren't much better. Our lead package this issue explores whether they can improve.

Peter Scoblic and Philip Tetlock kick things off by pulling together decades of research on forecasting world politics. They argue that people and governments can indeed train themselves to make better predictions. The catch is that it requires robust discourse and intellectual accountability—a flock of open minds asking lots of sharp questions and following the answers wherever they lead.

Next, Elke Weber shows how psychology works to undermine reason, both individually and collectively. Cognitive biases, emotional reactions, and mental shortcuts result in poor decisions and bad policy—but they wouldn't have to, if we could somehow corral our minds and our decision-making processes.


Finally, top experts explore three issues on which today's complacency could easily lead to tomorrow's disaster: Marietje Schaake on cybersecurity, Michael Oppenheimer on climate change, and Christopher Layne on U.S.-Chinese relations.

Pessimists don't expect much, and they are rarely disappointed. Certainly, the world's pitiful performance in handling the coronavirus pandemic gives little reason to believe that future threats will be called earlier or dealt with better. But optimists can point to the obvious, easy gains that would demonstrably flow from individual and organizational self-discipline and hope that future generations are wise enough to recognize and seize them.

U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower liked to say that “plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” What he meant was that the process of planning forced policymakers and institutions to anticipate, prepare for, and train for a range of possible scenarios that might emerge—and thus develop the skills and muscle memory to respond calmly, flexibly, and sensibly to whatever challenge actually appeared.

At some point, there will be another catastrophe. It will probably involve something we already worry about now but don't take seriously enough or consider to be urgent enough to address. When the crisis hits, people will do what they can and say, “It is what it is.” But it doesn't have to be that way. Unless the next crisis really does involve a stray meteorite, the fault for screwing it up will lie not in the stars but in ourselves.

—Gideon Rose, *Editor*



*Policymakers often assume
that tomorrow's dangers
will look like yesterday's.
– Peter Scoblic and
Philip Tetlock*

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A Better Crystal Ball

The Right Way to Think About the Future

J. Peter Scoblic and Philip E. Tetlock

Every policy is a prediction. Tax cuts will boost the economy. Sanctions will slow Iran's nuclear program. Travel bans will limit the spread of COVID-19. These claims all posit a causal relationship between means and ends. Regardless of party, ideology, or motive, no policymaker wants his or her recommended course of action to produce unanticipated consequences. This makes every policymaker a forecaster. But forecasting is difficult, particularly when it comes to geopolitics—a domain in which the rules of the game are poorly understood, information is invariably incomplete, and expertise often confers surprisingly little advantage in predicting future events.

These challenges present practical problems for decision-makers in the U.S. government. On the one hand, the limits of imagination create blind spots that policymakers tend to fill in with

past experience. They often assume that tomorrow's dangers will look like yesterday's, retaining the same mental map even as the territory around them changes dramatically. On the other hand, if policymakers addressed all imaginable threats, the United States would need so large and expensive a national security establishment that the country could do little else. By many measures, it is nearing this point already. The United States has military bases in more than 70 countries and territories, boasts more than four million federal employees with security clearances, and fields 1.3 million active-duty troops, with another million in reserve. According to one estimate, the United States spends \$1.25 trillion annually on national security. When it comes to anticipating the future, then, the United States is getting the worst of both worlds. It spends untold sums of money preparing yet still finds itself the victim of surprise—fundamentally ill equipped for defining events, such as the emergence of COVID-19.

There is a better way, one that would allow the United States to make decisions based not on simplistic extrapolations of the past but on smart estimates of the future. It involves reconciling two approaches often seen to be at philosophical loggerheads: scenario planning and probabilistic forecasting. Each approach has a fundamentally different assumption about the future. Scenario planners maintain that there are so many possible futures that one can imagine them only in terms of plausibility, not probability. By contrast, forecasters believe it is possible to calculate the odds of possible outcomes, thereby transforming amorphous uncertainty

J. PETER SCOBLIC is Co-Founder of Event Horizon Strategies, a Senior Fellow in the International Security Program at New America, and a Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School.

PHILIP E. TETLOCK is Leonore Annenberg University Professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Co-Founder of Good Judgment, and a co-author of *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*.



into quantifiable risk. Because each method has its strengths, the optimal approach is to combine them. This holistic method would provide policymakers with both a range of conceivable futures and regular updates as to which one is likely to emerge. For once, they could make shrewd bets about tomorrow, today.

PLANNING FOR UNCERTAINTY

Although widely used in business today, the first element of this duo—scenario planning—grew out of post–World War II national security concerns, specifically the overwhelming uncertainty of the nuclear revolution. Previously, martial experience was thought to offer some guidance through the fog of war. Nuclear weapons, however, presented a novel problem. With the newfound ability to destroy each other as functioning societies in a matter of minutes or hours, the United States and the Soviet Union faced an unprecedented situation. And unprecedented situations are, by definition, uncertain. They lack any analogy to the past that would allow decision-makers to calculate the odds of possible outcomes.

Still, early U.S. efforts at nuclear-war planning sought to turn that problem into a calculable one. During World War II, the Allies had great success with the new field of operations research, the application of statistical methods to improve the outcome of tactical engagements. After the war, the RAND Corporation—a “think factory” that the U.S. Air Force established as a repository for leading researchers—hoped to parlay this success into a new, more rational approach to war, based less on the intuition of generals and more on the quantification afforded by models and data.

Unfortunately, methods that worked at the tactical level proved nearly farcical at the strategic level. As the historian David Jardini has chronicled, RAND’s first attempt to model a nuclear strategy ignored so many key variables that it nonsensically called for deploying a fleet of aging turboprop bombers that carried no bombs because the United States did not have enough fissile material to arm them; the goal was simply to overwhelm Soviet air defenses, with no regard for the lives of the pilots. In the wake of such failures, it became clear that analysts could not entirely banish uncertainty. In 1960, even Charles Hitch, a man predisposed to calculation by dint of being RAND’s top economist and president of what was then the Operations Research Society of America, cautioned, “No other characteristic of decision-making is as pervasive as uncertainty.”

That, of course, raised the question of how to formulate sensible strategy. Unexpectedly, it was a RAND mathematician and physicist, Herman Kahn, who offered an answer. If the lived past could not shape strategy, perhaps the imagined future could. Frustrated with RAND’s attempts to scientize war, Kahn devoted himself to crafting scenarios in the pursuit of “ersatz experience” that would prepare the United States for the future through what were essentially thought experiments. Policymakers could use these scenarios as “artificial ‘case histories’ and ‘historical anecdotes,’” Kahn wrote, thus making up for a lack of actual examples or meaningful data. They would provide analogies where there were none.

Early methods of generating scenarios were often freewheeling and discursive.

But after scenario planning migrated to the business world, it took on more structured forms. The most recognizable is a two-by-two matrix in which planners identify two critical uncertainties and, taking the extreme values of each, construct four possible future worlds. Regardless of the specific shape they take, rigorous scenario-planning exercises all involve identifying key uncertainties and then imagining how different combinations could yield situations that are vastly different from what mere extrapolation of the present would suggest. By then “backcasting”—taking one of these imagined futures as a given and asking what conditions produced it—scenario planners derive both a story and a system. They come up with a plausible narrative of how a future happened and an internal logic that describes how it operates. Scenarios are not supposed to be predictive. They are meant to be provocative, challenging planners’ assumptions, shaking up their mental models of how the world works, and giving them the cognitive flexibility to better sense, shape, and adapt to the emerging future.

The pandemic has occasioned a renaissance in the use of scenarios, as organizations from think tanks to technology companies grapple with the question of what a “new normal” might look like and how soon it might arrive. But the national security community has long used scenarios to address some of its most wicked problems—particularly high-stakes issues that are in flux, such as the U.S.-Chinese relationship. This past summer, RAND released a report on Chinese grand strategy. It concluded with four scenarios that offered brief vignettes of China’s possible place in the

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world 30 years from now. “Triumphant China” dominates the world stage in most domains, with a modern military and an innovative economy. “Ascendant China” is the preeminent power not only in Asia but in other regions, as well. “Stagnant China” has suffered from low growth and faces social unrest. And “Imploding China” experiences a crisis of existential proportions, in which domestic instability undercuts the country’s international influence.

Although comprehensive, the wide range of these scenarios highlights the chief challenge of the method: If China’s potential futures encompass rise, fall, and everything in between, how can they aid in the formulation of strategy and policy? Although this cornucopia of scenarios could lead policymakers to develop strategies that would improve the United States’ position no matter which future comes to pass, in practice, having too many different versions of the future can make it nearly impossible to act. Good scenario planning puts boundaries on the future, but those limits are often not enough for decision-makers to work with. They need to know which future is most likely.

TURNING UNCERTAINTY INTO RISK

Probabilistic forecasting—the second element of the duo—tries to address that shortcoming. Forecasters see scenario planning as maddeningly vague or, worse, dangerously misleading. They not only point to the lack of consistent evidence to support the alleged benefits of scenario planning; they also argue that the compelling nature of a good story can trigger a host of biases. Such biases fuel irrationality, in part by tricking decision-makers into making

basic statistical errors. For example, even though a detailed narrative may seem more plausible than a sparse one, every contingent event decreases the likelihood that a given scenario will actually transpire. Nevertheless, people frequently confuse plausibility for probability, assigning greater likelihood to specific stories that have the ring of truth. They might, illogically, consider a war with China triggered by a clash in the Taiwan Strait more likely than a war with China triggered by any possible cause.

In contrast to scenario planning’s emphasis on imagination, forecasting tends to rely on calculation. Deductive approaches use models or laws that describe the behavior of a system to predict its future state, much like Newtonian mechanics allows astronomers to anticipate the position of the planets. Inductive approaches do not require such understanding, merely enough data and the assumption that the future will in some way reflect the past. This is how Netflix anticipates what you might like to watch or Amazon what you might want to buy, based purely on your previous actions. Increasingly, thanks to advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning, analysts use hybrid approaches. Meteorology is a good example, in which researchers combine sophisticated models and big data collection, which feed into each other and enable ever-better weather forecasts.

International politics poses a challenge for these methods because the laws governing the system are elusive or highly debatable, relevant data points are often unavailable or unprecedented, and thousands of variables interact in countless ways. History functions as a

series of unfolding events, with highly contingent branching paths sometimes separated by mere happenstance. Tectonic shifts can hinge on seemingly mundane occurrences. That makes it hard to deduce future events from theoretical principles or to induce them from past experience.

As a result, historians and foreign policy experts are often bad forecasters. In 2005, one of us, Philip Tetlock, published a study demonstrating that seasoned political experts had trouble outperforming “dart-tossing chimpanzees”—random guesses—when it came to predicting global events. The experts fared even worse against amateur news junkies. Overconfidence was the norm, not the exception. When experts expressed 100 percent certainty that events would occur, those events materialized only 80 percent of the time. Yet there were pockets of excellence amid this unimpressive performance. Those who were surest that they understood the forces driving the political system (“hedgehogs,” in the philosopher Isaiah Berlin’s terminology) fared significantly worse than their humbler colleagues, who did not shy from complexity, approaching problems with greater curiosity and open-mindedness (“foxes”).

This distinction caught the eye of the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity, which set up a geopolitical “forecasting tournament,” in which Tetlock participated. He recruited a team of volunteers to provide probabilistic answers to sharply defined questions, such as “Will the euro fall below \$1.20 in the next year?” or “Will the president of Tunisia flee to exile in the next six months?” By measuring the difference

between estimates and the actual occurrence of events, Tetlock and his colleagues could calculate a score showing how “well-calibrated” the expectations of any given forecaster were with reality. By analyzing these data, Tetlock discovered that the key to more accurate geopolitical forecasting was to take people who were naturally numerate and open-minded, train them to think probabilistically and avoid common biases, and then group them so they could leverage the “wisdom of the crowd.” The best forecasters would approach seemingly intractable questions by decomposing them into parts, researching the past frequency of similar (if not precisely analogous) events, adjusting the odds based the uniqueness of the situation, and continually updating their estimates as new information emerged. By the end of the tournament, Tetlock’s top performers had achieved scores that were 30 percent better than those of career CIA analysts with access to classified information. Somehow, they had transmuted uncertainty into measurable risk.

The advantages of being able to put realistic odds on possible futures are obvious. It gives you a peek into the future. But even the best forecasters have their limits. If asked to predict events three to five years out, their performance becomes increasingly indistinguishable from random guessing. Still, many critical policy questions are short term: perhaps the most famous recent example concerned whether Osama bin Laden was in the Abbottabad compound in May 2011. Highly consequential short-term questions now include when a COVID-19 vaccine will be widely available.

As of this writing, the smart money (68 percent probability) is on or before March 31, 2021.

But to the extent that leaders need to make consequential, difficult-to-reverse decisions that will play out over the long run—the strategic choices that will give the United States an advantage over time—it becomes more difficult to link forecasts to policymaking. Well-calibrated forecasters, for instance, can estimate the likelihood that a skirmish with the Chinese navy in the South China Sea will result in at least two American deaths by December 31. But what policymakers really want to know is the extent to which China will threaten U.S. interests in the coming years and decades.

Answers to that type of inquiry are beyond the reach of forecasters because it is impossible to define precisely what constitutes an interest or a threat. To provide forecasts, questions must pass the “clairvoyance test,” which is to say that were it possible to pose the question to a genuine clairvoyant, that omniscient seer must be able to answer it without having to ask for clarification. “Will I fall in love?” is not a forecasting question. “Will I marry Jane Smith by this time next year?” is.

From a policy perspective, then, the greatest challenge to forecasts is that although they can clarify slices of the future, they do not necessarily provide enough information to inform decision-making. Indeed, making a decision based on one specific forecast would be a mistake: the estimated probability of an event is a poor proxy for the significance of that event. “Will Vladimir Putin relinquish power within the next two years?” is a far

different question from “What would Vladimir Putin’s abdication of power mean for U.S.-Russian relations?” The problem with forecasting is thus the exact opposite of the problem with scenarios: if the latter often provide too panoramic a view of the future to be useful, the former provides too narrow a glimpse.

AN ANSWER FOR THE FUTURE

How should these different approaches to anticipating the future be linked? The answer lies in developing clusters of questions that give early, forecastable indications of which envisioned future is likely to emerge, thus allowing policymakers to place smarter bets sooner. Instead of evaluating the likelihood of a long-term scenario as a whole, question clusters allow analysts to break down potential futures into a series of clear and forecastable signposts that are observable in the short run. Questions should be chosen not only for their individual diagnostic value but also for their diversity as a set, so that each cluster provides the greatest amount of information about which imagined future is emerging—or which elements of which envisioned futures are emerging. As a result, the seductiveness of a particular narrative will not tempt decision-makers into mistaking plausibility for probability. Instead, preliminary answers to specific questions can provide a simple metric for judging in advance how the future is most likely to unfold—a metric that analysts can then refine once the event in question takes place or not.

Consider the scenarios RAND produced as part of its analysis of China’s grand strategy. The four scenarios

envisioned for 2050 —“Triumphant China,” “Ascendant China,” “Stagnant China,” and “Imploding China”—can be roughly placed on a classic two-by-two matrix, with the strength of China’s political leadership on one axis and the strength of China’s economy on the other. A cluster of questions that would give a heads-up that history is on a “Triumphant China” trajectory might include “On December 31, 2020, will China exercise de facto control over Itu Aba (or Taiping Island) in the South China Sea (which is currently under the de facto control of Taiwan)?” “Will China’s GDP growth in 2023 exceed ten percent?” and “Among African audiences, when will the China Global Television Network have a higher weekly viewership than Voice of America?”

These questions are useful both individually and collectively. Knowing that top forecasters see an increased chance of China controlling the island (from, say, a ten percent probability to a 20 percent probability), for instance, would provide immediate tactical value to the U.S. Navy. It should not necessarily tip the balance in the debate over whether China will be “triumphant,” but if all the forecasts resulting from the question cluster are trending in the same direction, the United States may want to recalibrate its strategy. As forecasts change and individual questions are answered by the course of events, the view of the far-off future becomes a little bit clearer. Analysts can then update their scenarios and generate new clusters of questions. They can thus develop a continually evolving sense of plausible futures, as well as a probabilistic estimate of which policies will yield the most bang for the buck today.

This method resembles the U.S. defense and intelligence community’s use of indications and warnings. In the early 1960s, for example, the National Intelligence Council developed a list of actions—large troop maneuvers, for instance—that might precede an attack by the Sino-Soviet bloc. The idea was that tactical changes might provide an early warning of future strategic shifts. Indications and warnings have come to play an important role in many national security scenarios. Unfortunately, there are potential problems with scouring today’s environment for hints of tomorrow. For one thing, as psychological research shows, having envisioned a particular scenario, humans are not only inclined to consider it more likely; they are also more prone to see evidence of its emergence—a form of confirmation bias that U.S. intelligence has battled for decades. For another, analysts are not particularly good at discerning in real time which events matter—which signposts are actually indicative of a particular future. Developments initially considered to be earthshattering may turn out to be significantly less important, whereas a story buried well beneath the day’s headlines can end up changing the course of history. In a statistical analysis of nearly two million State Department cables sent in the 1970s, for instance, one recent study demonstrated that U.S. diplomats were often bad at estimating the historical importance of contemporaneous events.

Linking scenarios to clusters of forecasting questions mitigates these problems. First, because the questions must be precise enough to pass the clairvoyance test, there is no wiggle room about what constitutes, say, large

troop maneuvers. Second, because questions that disprove hypotheses often yield the greatest information, selecting questions for their diagnostic value decreases forecasters' susceptibility to confirmation bias. Third, much as diversified stock portfolios spread risk through multiple, uncorrelated investments, the diversity of question clusters prevents forecasters from overweighting a potentially unimportant signpost and mistakenly concluding that a particular scenario is coming to pass. Finally, and most important, because question clusters yield forecasts, one can attach meaningful probabilities to the likelihood that particular events will occur in the future. This provides a sort of advance early warning system. An event does not need to actually transpire for the United States to have actionable information. That, more than anything else, gives question clusters an advantage over traditional indications and warnings.

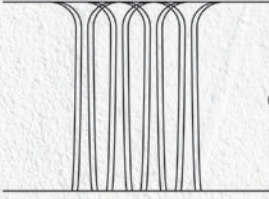
PLANNING IN PRACTICE

To be useful, any vision of the future must be connected to decisions in the present. Scholars and practitioners often claim that scenario planning and probabilistic forecasting are incompatible given their different assumptions and goals. In fact, they mesh well. A scenario planner's conviction that the future is uncertain need not clash with a forecaster's quest to translate uncertainty into risk. Rather, the challenge lies in understanding the limits of each method. Question clusters make it possible to leverage the strength of each approach, transforming the abstract long term into the concrete short term so that leaders can understand the

future quickly and act to stave off danger, seize opportunity, and strengthen national security.

The greatest barrier to a clearer vision of the future is not philosophical but organizational: the potential of combining scenario planning with probabilistic forecasting means nothing if it is not implemented. On occasion, the intelligence community has used forecasting tournaments to inform its estimates, but that is only a first step. Policymakers and consumers of intelligence are the ones who must understand the importance of forecasts and incorporate them into their decisions. Too often, operational demands—the daily business of organizations, from weighty decisions to the mundane—fix attention on the current moment.

Overcoming the tyranny of the present requires high-level action and broad, sustained effort. Leaders across the U.S. government must cultivate the cognitive habits of top forecasters throughout their organizations, while also institutionalizing the imaginative processes of scenario planners. The country's prosperity, its security, and, ultimately, its power all depend on policymakers' ability to envision long-term futures, anticipate short-term developments, and use both projections to inform everything from the budget to grand strategy. Giving the future short shrift only shortchanges the United States. 🌐



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Heads in the Sand

Why We Fail to Foresee and Contain Catastrophe

Elke U. Weber

We are living in a time of crisis. From the immediate challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic to the looming existential threat of climate change, the world is grappling with massive global dangers—to say nothing of countless problems within countries, such as inequality, cyberattacks, unemployment, systemic racism, and obesity. In any given crisis, the right response is often clear. Wear a mask and keep away from other people. Burn less fossil fuel. Redistribute income. Protect digital infrastructure. The answers are out there. What's lacking are governments that can translate them into actual policy. As a result, the crises continue. The death toll from the pandemic skyrockets, and the world makes dangerously slow progress on climate change, and so on.

It's no secret how governments should react in times of crisis. First, they need to be nimble. Nimble means moving quickly, because problems often grow at exponential rates: a contagious virus, for example, or greenhouse gas emissions. That makes early action crucial and procrastination disastrous. Nimble also means adaptive. Policymakers need to continuously adjust their responses to

crises as they learn from their own experience and from the work of scientists. Second, governments need to act wisely. That means incorporating the full range of scientific knowledge available about the problem at hand. It means embracing uncertainty, rather than willfully ignoring it. And it means thinking in terms of a long time horizon, rather than merely until the next election. But so often, policymakers are anything but nimble and wise. They are slow, inflexible, uninformed, overconfident, and myopic.

Why is everyone doing so badly? Part of the explanation lies in the inherent qualities of crises. Crises typically require navigating between risks. In the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers want to save lives and jobs. With climate change, they seek a balance between avoiding extreme weather and allowing economic growth. Such tradeoffs are hard as it is, and they are further complicated by the fact that costs and benefits are not evenly distributed among stakeholders, making conflict a seemingly unavoidable part of any policy choice. Vested interests attempt to forestall needed action, using their money to influence decision-makers and the media. To make matters worse, policymakers must pay sustained attention to multiple issues and multiple constituencies over time. They must accept large amounts of uncertainty. Often, then, the easiest response is to stick with the status quo. But that can be a singularly dangerous response to many new hazards. After all, with the pandemic, business as usual would mean no social distancing. With climate change, it would mean continuing to burn fossil fuels.

But the explanation for humanity's woeful response to crises goes beyond politics and incentives. To truly under-

ELKE U. WEBER is Gerhard R. Andlinger Professor in Energy and the Environment and Professor of Psychology and Public Affairs at Princeton University.



stand the failure to act, one must turn to human psychology. It is there that one can grasp the full impediments to proper decision-making—the cognitive biases, emotional reactions, and suboptimal shortcuts that hold policymakers back—and the tools to overcome them.

AVOIDING THE UNCOMFORTABLE

People are singularly bad at predicting and preparing for catastrophes. Many of these events are “black swans,” rare and unpredictable occurrences that most people find difficult to imagine, seemingly falling into the realm of science fiction. Others are “gray rhinos,” large and not uncommon threats that are still neglected until they stare you in the face (such as a coronavirus outbreak). Then there are “invisible gorillas,” threats in full view that should be noticed but aren’t—so named for a psychological experiment in which subjects watching a clip of a basketball game were so fixated on the players that they missed a person in a gorilla costume walking through the frame. Even professional forecasters, including security analysts, have a poor track record when it comes to accurately anticipating events. The COVID-19 crisis, in which a dystopic science-fiction narrative came to life and took everyone by surprise, serves as a cautionary tale about humans’ inability to foresee important events.

Not only do humans fail to anticipate crises; they also fail to respond rationally to them. At best, people display “bounded rationality,” the idea that instead of carefully considering their options and making perfectly rational decisions that optimize their preferences, humans in the real world

act quickly and imperfectly, limited as they are by time and cognitive capacity. Add in the stress generated by crises, and their performance gets even worse.

Because humans don’t have enough time, information, or processing power to deliberate rationally, they have evolved easier ways of making decisions. They rely on their emotions, which serve as an early warning system of sorts: alerting people that they are in a positive context that can be explored and exploited or in a negative context where fight or flight is the appropriate response. They also rely on rules. To simplify decision-making, they might follow standard operating procedures or abide by some sort of moral code. They might decide to imitate the action taken by other people whom they trust or admire. They might follow what they perceive to be widespread norms. Out of habit, they might continue to do what they have been doing unless there is overwhelming evidence against it.

Humans evolved these shortcuts because they require little effort and work well in a broad range of situations. Without access to a real-time map of prey in different hunting grounds, for example, a prehistoric hunter might have resorted to a simple rule of thumb: look for animals where his fellow tribesmen found them yesterday. But in times of crisis, emotions and rules are not always helpful drivers of decision-making. High stakes, uncertainty, tradeoffs, and conflict—all elicit negative emotions, which can impede wise responses. Uncertainty is scary, as it signals an inability to predict what will happen, and what cannot be predicted might be deadly. The vast majority of people are already risk averse under

normal circumstances. Under stress, they become even more so, and they retreat to the familiar comfort of the status quo. From gun laws to fossil fuel subsidies, once a piece of legislation is in place, it is hard to dislodge it, even when cost-benefit analysis argues for change.

Another psychological impediment to effective decision-making is people's natural aversion to tradeoffs. They serve as a reminder that we cannot have it all, that concessions need to be made in some areas to gain in others. For that reason, people often employ decision rules that are far from optimal but minimize their awareness of the need for tradeoffs. They might successively eliminate options that do not meet certain criteria—for example, a user of a dating app might screen people based on height and then miss someone who would have been the love of his or her life but was half an inch too short. Tradeoffs between parties make for conflict, and people dislike conflict, too. They see it not as an opportunity to negotiate joint gains but as a stressful confrontation. Years of teaching negotiation have shown me that although everybody understands that negotiations are about distributing a finite pie (with unavoidable conflict), it is much harder to get across the concept that they are also often about creating solutions that make all sides better off.

BELIEVING IS SEEING

A further hindrance to crisis response is the lack of an easily identified culprit. Some crises, such as military standoffs during the Cold War or, more recently, terrorist attacks, have clear causes that can be blamed and villains who can be fought. But many others—the pan-


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demic and climate change being prime examples—do not. They are more ambiguous, as they are caused by a range of factors, some proximate, others not. They become catastrophes not because of any particular trigger or evildoer but because of the action or inaction of policymakers and the public. When it isn't clear who is friend and who is foe, it's difficult to see a clear and simple path of action.

Psychologists speak of the “single-action bias,” the human tendency to consider a problem solved with a single action, at which point the sense that something is awry diminishes. For example, one study found that radiologists will stop scrutinizing an x-ray for evidence of pathology after they have identified one problem, even though multiple problems may exist. This bias suggests that humans' preferred way of dealing with risks evolved during simpler times. To avoid being killed by lions at the watering hole, there was an easy, one-step solution: stay away from the lions. But today, many crises have no culprit. The enemy is human behavior itself, whether that be the burning of fossil fuels, the consumption of virus-infected animals, or the failure to wear masks or abide by social-distancing rules.

The solutions to these problems are often inconvenient, unpopular, and initially expensive. They involve making uncomfortable changes. When that is the case, people tend to exploit any ambiguity in the cause of the problem to support alternative explanations. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, for instance, some embraced a conspiracy theory that falsely claimed that the virus was the intentional product of a Chinese lab. For many, that idea was

easier to swallow than the scientific consensus that the virus emerged from bats. Indeed, in a survey of Americans that my colleagues and I conducted in April, a mind-boggling 29 percent of respondents held this view.

Another psychological barrier to effective governance in times of crisis relates to how people learn and revise their beliefs. If people followed the Bayesian method of inference, they would update their beliefs in the face of new information. Over time, as more and more information became available, a consensus would emerge—for example, that climate change is caused by human activity. But not everyone sees and acknowledges the same new information and integrates it in the same rational way. In practice, they give more weight to concrete personal experience than abstract statistical information. The death of a single close friend from COVID-19 is much more of a wake-up call than a news report about high infection rates. Someone who loses a house in a wildfire will grasp the risk of climate change more than someone who looks at a graph of rising temperatures. Personal experience is a powerful teacher, far more convincing than pallid statistics provided by scientific experts, even if the latter carry far greater evidentiary value.

People vastly underestimate the likelihood of low-probability events, until they personally experience one. At that point, they react, and perhaps even overreact, for a short while, until the perceived threat recedes again. After an official is the victim of an email hack, for example, he or she may take greater cybersecurity precautions for a while but will likely become less vigilant as the months go on.

The value of personal experience is reflected in the phrase “seeing is believing.” But the opposite can also be the case: sometimes, believing is seeing. In other words, people who are committed to their beliefs, especially when those beliefs are shared by ideological allies, will pay selective attention to information that confirms their preexisting notions and fail to see evidence that contradicts them. That’s why it is often the case that people are increasingly divided, rather than united, over time about the causes of and solutions to crises. Beliefs about COVID-19 and climate change have gotten more polarized over time, with Democrats more likely to subscribe to science-based explanations of both crises and express greater concern and Republicans more likely to agree with conspiracy theories that downplay the risks.

THE SELF-AWARE POLICYMAKER

One response to all these psychological biases is for officials to change their ways and embrace more rational decision-making processes, which would lead to better policies. They would need to acknowledge the true extent of their ignorance about future events and creatively guard against probable and unpredictable high-impact surprises. (With the COVID-19 crisis, for example, they would plan for the possibility that a vaccine cannot be identified or proves to be short lived.) Policymakers would seek to guide and educate the public rather than follow it. Some might view this approach as paternalistic, but it need not be, provided that it is implemented with input from groups across society. Indeed, people regularly delegate decision-making to those with greater expertise—

going to a doctor for a diagnosis, for instance, or letting a lawyer handle legal issues. In principle, at least, elected officials are supposed to take care of the big-picture strategic planning that individuals don’t have the time, attention, or foresight to do themselves.

It might seem as if the politician who deviates from public opinion to think about more long-term problems is the politician who fails to get reelected. But public opinion is malleable, and initially unpopular changes can gain support over time. In 2003, for example, New York City banned smoking in restaurants and bars. After an initial outcry and a drop in Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s popularity, the city came to see that the new policy was not as detrimental as originally thought, support for the ban rose, and Bloomberg won reelection twice. In 2008, the Canadian province of British Columbia also instituted an unpopular policy: a carbon tax on fossil fuels. Again, disapproval was followed by acceptance, and the province’s premier, Gordon Campbell, won an election the next year. Some reforms don’t poll well at first, but it would be a mistake to see failure as a foregone conclusion. Passing initially unpopular reforms may require creative policies and charismatic politicians, but eventually, the public can come around.

Another approach to improving crisis decision-making would be to work with, rather than against, psychological barriers. In 2017, the Behavioral Science and Policy Association published a report that identified four categories of policy problems with which the insights of psychology could help: “getting people’s attention; engaging people’s desire to contribute to the social good;

making complex information more accessible; and facilitating accurate assessment of risks, costs, and benefits.” The experts behind the report came up with a variety of tools to meet these objectives. One recommendation was that policymakers should set the proper default—say, automatically enrolling households in energy-reduction programs or requiring that new appliances be shipped with the energy-saving settings turned on. Another was that they should communicate risks using a more intuitive time frame, such as speaking about the probability of a flood over the course of a 30-year mortgage rather than within 100 years.

In the same spirit, the cognitive scientist Steven Sloman and I put together a special issue of the journal *Cognition* in 2019 to examine the thought processes that shape the beliefs behind political behavior. The authors identified problems, such as people’s tendency to consume news that confirms their existing beliefs and to let their partisan identities overpower their ability to evaluate probabilities rationally. But they also identified solutions, such as training people to better understand the uncertainty of their own forecasts. Policymakers need not take public opinion as an immutable barrier to progress. The more one understands how people think, feel, and react, the more one can use that information to formulate and implement better policy.

The field of psychology has identified countless human biases, but it has also come up with ways of countering their effects. Psychologists have developed the concept of choice architecture, whereby decisions are structured in such a way to nudge people toward good choices and

away from bad choices. When companies automatically enroll their employees in retirement plans (while allowing them to opt out), the employees are more likely to save. When governments do the same with organ donation, people are more likely to donate. Psychologists also know that although playing on negative emotions, such as fear or guilt, can have undesirable consequences, eliciting positive emotions is a good way to motivate behavior. Pride, in particular, is a powerful motivator, and campaigns that appeal to it have proved effective at convincing households to recycle and coastal communities to practice sustainable fishing. All these techniques are a form of psychological jujitsu that turns vulnerabilities into strengths.

Effective public leaders understand and use the richness of human behavior. German Chancellor Angela Merkel comes to mind. Combining the rationality of the scientist she was with the human touch of the politician she is, she has proved adept at managing emergencies, from Europe’s currency crisis to its migration crisis to the current pandemic. Such leaders are evidence-based, analytic problem solvers, but they also acknowledge public fears, empathize with loss and pain, and reassure people in the face of uncertainty. They are not prisoners of psychology but masters of it. 🌍

The Lawless Realm

Countering the Real Cyberthreat

Marietje Schaake

This past summer, a host of public organizations as varied as the Norwegian parliament, the New Zealand stock exchange, and the Vatican all came under attack. No shots were fired, no doors knocked down, no bombs exploded. Instead, the attackers managed to intrude into these institutions' internal networks in attempts to commit espionage, disrupt daily affairs, or ransom or blackmail victims. Incidents of this kind are just the tip of the iceberg. Cyberattacks are constantly taking place, and many intrusions go unnoticed and unreported. In democratic countries, only intelligence agencies and private companies can reach a detailed understanding of cyberattacks and the risks they pose. Everyone else must scramble for information about what actually happens below the surface of the digital world.

For years, policymakers who pay attention to new threats have pointed to the possibility of a "cyber-Pearl Harbor," a devastating attack on a country's critical digital infrastructure. But the more immediate risk comes from attacks below that threshold, intrusions that can still

cause grave damage. In 2017, hackers exploited a vulnerability in the Microsoft Windows operating system to infect over 300,000 computer systems in 150 countries with a malicious virus. The virus, called WannaCry, affected individuals, companies, and state agencies, including the National Health Service in the United Kingdom, where it led to the cancellation of over 19,000 appointments and the loss of around \$100 million in damages. Experts estimated that all told, the cost of the global disruption caused by WannaCry reached some \$4 billion. American and British investigators eventually traced the source of the malware to operatives in North Korea.

WannaCry was a rare and well-publicized episode of a more widespread, subtle, and poorly understood problem: the ease with which malign actors with geopolitical or criminal goals can take advantage of vulnerabilities across the digital world. Most attacks and intrusions remain invisible and consist of a series of steady punches rather than one major blow. Instead of fixating on highly visible and dramatic events, policymakers should focus on reviving the role of democratic institutions in ensuring the safety of the public in cyberspace.

To do that, governments must recognize that the private sector wields outsize power in the digital world. Democratic states have ceded too much ground to corporations. Public authorities are largely at the mercy of private companies; they cannot look under the hoods of the companies that, for instance, supply software to hospitals, electricity networks, or smart devices. Legislatures and city councils are not privy to the security stress tests such systems undergo. This imbalance has given private companies a

MARIETJE SCHAAKE is President of the CyberPeace Institute and International Policy Director at the Cyber Policy Center at Stanford University.

dominant position that governments could only dream of: government agencies responsible for national security are now often in the awkward position of relying on commercial data to fulfill their own mandates. Governments face a steep learning curve in understanding conflict and risk in the digital domain, but it's well past time that they take a more concerted approach to taming this lawless realm.

THE WEAKENED STATE

For centuries, states enjoyed a monopoly on the use of force. Thanks to the asymmetric power facilitated by digitization and the proliferation of cyberweapons, that monopoly has slipped out of their grasp. Yes, many democratic countries—including the United States—have developed powerful tools to deploy in cyberspace, setting up sophisticated surveillance systems and launching attacks on adversaries. At the same time, developed countries wrestle with a private sector that exercises disproportionate power in the technological sphere, gobbling up data and taking on some key functions of the state, such as the protection of critical infrastructure.

Private companies both build the architecture of the digital world and largely govern its flows of data. They are often the victims of cyberattacks. But they are complicit in these attacks when they fail to protect databases and lose the personal information of their customers and clients. Worse, some companies are even developing and selling new technologies to adversaries around the world. Authoritarian (and several democratic) governments hire the services of hackers and buy commercially sold systems of digital surveillance and control. For instance, a U.S. company called

Sandvine is alleged to have supplied the government of Belarus with the technology it used this past summer to shut down its citizens' access to much of the Internet during antigovernment protests. Nonstate actors, such as militias or criminal gangs, can wreak disproportionate havoc through cyberattacks, hurting much more powerful states, companies, and international organizations.

Authorities often have a tough time understanding cyberattacks and identifying their perpetrators. As a result, attackers frequently act with impunity, using clever tactics and benefiting from a legal vacuum: there are few mechanisms that guarantee international cooperation and coordination in discovering and bringing to justice cyberattackers. "False flag" operations—in which actors conceal their identities and try to pin the blame on others—are common in the digital world. An intrusion directed from the other side of the world can be executed in milliseconds, almost invisibly. The speed of digital innovation outstrips the ability of states to prevent cyberattacks, hold perpetrators to account, and pass the necessary laws on encryption standards, data protection, and product liability (to hold manufacturers or sellers responsible for the goods they make or trade).

States are also unable to control private companies whose actions may imperil public safety; indeed, in some cases, a state finds itself dependent on just such a company. Earlier this year, a breach of a database belonging to the facial recognition company Clearview AI revealed that the firm was selling its technology and databases not just to vetted law enforcement agencies but also to a host of private companies. The



Geek squad: U.S. soldiers training in Pensacola, Florida, May 2015

breach showed how a private company can secretly share information about citizens without their consent and without transparency, as well as how such a company can be susceptible to hostile actors. And yet law enforcement agencies are increasingly reliant on the work of technology firms such as Clearview AI.

Society's growing reliance on digitally connected devices creates more general vulnerabilities. A canny and willing attacker can exploit a software-powered fridge in a home or a street lined with data-collecting sensors in a smart city, finding multiple entry points to bring down a broader system. It is enough of a challenge for defense departments and intelligence services to man the ramparts and keep a lookout for such sophisticated adversaries. But the frontlines are now ubiquitous thanks to the pervasiveness of digital technology, and so doctors in hospitals, professors in university labs, and human rights activists in repressive countries—all must now contend with cyberthreats.

Such civilian targets are not always well prepared for this fight. Public institutions often employ poorly protected digital systems even when they process sensitive information. A clinic, for example, cannot be blamed for hiring an additional surgeon instead of a cybersecurity expert. A public university might choose to invest in computers for students but not acquire the more expensive protections to ensure that those new computer systems are safe. And an election board might decide to modernize electoral processes by installing voting machines and dispensing with paper ballots, without knowing the proper safeguards or having the means to invest in the requisite protections. Such well-intentioned efforts are understandable on their face, but they conspire to make societies vulnerable.

AIDING AUTHORITARIANS

The imbalance between the public and the private sector in democratic countries is obvious in another dangerous arena: the

sale of cyberweapons to authoritarian regimes. Few laws limit how companies can trade in digital surveillance, blocking, and intrusion systems. Syria is a troubling case in point. As it wages civil war, the government of Bashar al-Assad has used operations in cyberspace to hit both adversaries abroad and opponents within the country. Hackers belonging to the so-called Syrian Electronic Army (which claimed to be acting independently of the Syrian government) gained visibility around the world for defacing the websites of Western media companies, such as *The New York Times* and the BBC, and for hacking the website of the U.S. Marine Corps. These brief propaganda victories were far less significant than the government's digitally enabled attacks on domestic opposition figures and human rights defenders during the peaceful protests of 2011. That year, the Syrian government used sophisticated digital technology to collect communications between dissidents, which it then exploited to incriminate and detain the activists.

That one of the most violent regimes in the world engaged in such repression is not surprising; what is shocking is that European companies helped. The Assad government depended on technology and expertise from AREA, an Italian company. AREA sold technology to Syrian authorities that allowed them to monitor communications across the country, collecting and scanning Facebook posts, Google searches, text messages, and phone calls for key words or connections between particular individuals. The ensuing roundup of dissenting civilians led to torture and deaths.

Syria is not alone in receiving technological support from abroad for the purpose of domestic repression. Over

the past few decades, companies based in Western countries have designed, marketed, and sold similar technology to a number of other authoritarian governments, including those of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. When democratic countries fail to curb the sale of aggressive hacking systems by companies within their own borders to illiberal governments, they are undermining the worthy ambitions of their foreign policies. But the problem doesn't seem to be going away. Some estimates predict that annual global sales of these systems will rise to hundreds of billions of dollars by 2021. China is now aggressively entering this market, too; it already is the global driver in developing and exporting technologies that enable repression, including facial recognition technology and predictive policing systems.

These technologies in the hands of nonstate actors is also a concern: such actors can cripple far more powerful states, organizations, and companies through cyberattacks. In 2015, a hack of JPMorgan Chase compromised 83 million accounts; four individuals were eventually arrested. In 2017, "Rasputin," a hacker who appeared to be operating alone, broke into databases of U.S. universities and government institutions, apparently hoping to sell access to the information. Earlier this year, a 17-year-old from Florida and two other hackers managed to take over 130 prominent Twitter accounts, including those of former U.S. President Barack Obama and former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, and posted messages that convinced people to send money to a particular Bitcoin account. The hackers could have used that account access for

far more sinister goals, including attempting to escalate geopolitical conflict or crash stock markets.

Some individuals with such exceptional skills sell their talents to the highest bidder. Among the most notorious companies hiring hackers is DarkMatter. This cybersecurity company, based in the United Arab Emirates, has hired former intelligence officials from the U.S. National Security Agency and the Israel Defense Forces, creating what amounts to a private intelligence service and blurring the lines of agency between companies and states. Such companies with top-grade skills may attract unsavory clients, including authoritarian regimes and even terrorist groups.

Democratic states have struggled to regulate the digital world and the market for cyberweapons, but some technology companies are beginning to take action. WhatsApp, through its parent company, Facebook, filed a lawsuit last spring against the NSO Group, an Israeli mobile surveillance company. The suit alleges that NSO covertly exploited a vulnerability in WhatsApp to illegally extract information from the phones of users. Facebook argues that NSO's actions were unlawful. NSO is also the target of a lawsuit filed in Israel in 2018 by a Saudi dissident who claims that Saudi authorities used the company's technology to spy on his communications, including those with Jamal Khashoggi, the journalist who was murdered in Turkey by Saudi operatives that same year. Forty-five countries are thought to be using the same NSO product, including democracies such as Mexico and Spain.

MAKING THE RULES

It shouldn't be left to private companies and courts to determine the legitimacy of

products and services that have the potential to compete with state intelligence services. Democratic countries must extend norms and rules to ensure safety in the digital world. Just as nations agreed to international laws governing the conduct of war and nuclear weapons, so, too, must they establish agreements to fend off threats in cyberspace. Perpetrators of cyberattacks have remained unaccountable for too long. Democratic governments especially need to take a number of steps to rebalance the power between states and private companies, which play too large a role in the digital world.

Policymakers should start by clearly identifying which digitized systems are vital for the public interest, public safety, and the functioning of society. Officials must designate relevant systems, such as those for voting, as critical infrastructure, setting a specific set of criteria and regulations for these systems, even for those largely in private hands. Most countries are far behind on this front. It took until January 2017 for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to designate election infrastructure as critical.

Too often, officials do not have access to information about risks to public services. They should be informed, for instance, about the results of stress tests that assess the resilience to cyberattacks of clinics, polling centers, tax authorities, and other important institutions. Additionally, governments should put in place stringent guidelines for how officials at the local and national level should procure digital systems and liability regimes that would hold private companies to account for the consequences of their products. Policymakers must also be more deliberate about deciding when state functions and vital systems can and cannot be

outsourced to private firms. A company such as Clearview AI should not be allowed to simply scrape the Internet to build databases of faces to sell to law enforcement agencies. It becomes harder to ensure that the police will act in accordance with the law when so much power is granted to a poorly audited and monitored private firm such as Clearview AI.

Trade secrets and nondisclosure agreements often prevent information on the functioning of such private technology companies from becoming known to the public. As a result, governments struggle to get a handle on the real threats and risks already out there. Such legal shields for private companies also prevent independent research into the intended and unintended effects of these companies' products. This inscrutability blocks a well-informed public debate about digitization and security and inhibits evidence-based policymaking. Governments should institute standards and regulations to ensure that private companies provide meaningful access to information.

Everyone knows that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. But it has nevertheless been tempting for democratic governments to deploy their own covert offensive cyberweapons in an attempt to deter adversaries. Such actions should have clear rules of engagement. Both offensive and defensive actions in cyberspace should be subject to legislative and democratic oversight, even if those oversight sessions have to be confidential.

In recent years, U.S. covert operations have targeted China and Russia since the authorization of a national security presidential memorandum, signed by U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018, that sought to loosen restrictions on the use of

digital weapons. Members of Congress complained that the Trump administration never shared the memorandum with Congress. That lack of democratic oversight is troubling. The increase in the use of offensive and defensive cybercapabilities, even by democratic states that normally act within the rule of law, should not happen without a legitimate mandate and proper independent oversight.

In addition to ensuring that military uses of cybertechnology receive sufficient oversight, governments must cut the close ties between the private sector and intelligence agencies. That revolving door encourages the development, production, and sale of digital arms. Governments should rein in the commercial surveillance and hacking market by imposing licensing requirements and restricting exports to adversaries and repressive regimes. Companies should act in line with the universal principles of human rights. Steep fines, criminal liability, or even bans on digital products that have pernicious uses are steps that would immediately have a positive effect. Excluding companies that cater to dictatorships from government contracts should force them to make a choice and prevent adverse flows of information. Surveillance, covert hacking, and data theft should not be considered legitimate commercial services. Governments should additionally put in place rules that stop intelligence officers from serving the nation one day and building military-grade commercial hacking systems the next.

At the same time, governments must exercise greater control over their necessary cooperation with the private sector. Public agencies frequently rely on private companies to protect critical infrastructure or monitor risks in digital systems.

When that is the case, authorities need to ensure that clear chains of responsibility and accountability are in place. And government agencies in democracies also need to better coordinate with one another as they evolve to meet the challenges of the digital age. A whole-of-government approach will help identify conflicting objectives and bridge gaps in awareness and responsibility between different parts of the same government.

Democratic societies can do more to make the damage caused by cyberattacks—and the fact that these attacks have real victims—clear to the public, which often perceives these incidents as incomprehensible and launched by faceless hackers in military facilities. That narrative has to change. Cyberattacks have real consequences that reach far beyond defense departments and intelligence services to private houses, nursing homes, college campuses, and doctors' offices. Demystifying and humanizing the threat should help encourage more people to take cybersecurity and their own use of digital technology more seriously. If governments ensure that companies are more transparent, then the media can scrutinize the conduct of the private sector, which in turn would allow consumers to be better informed. That public engagement should help sustain the necessary political agenda for reform.

Leaders have to muster the requisite political will to update norms, guidelines, regulations, and laws at the international level, because aggressors in cyberspace do not respect national borders. The European Union offers a template of what broader coordination among like-minded countries can look like. Its members have agreed on a number of regulations pertaining to cybersecurity, including

data protection and the screening of foreign investment in European technology firms for potential security risks. Member states are in the process of updating their export controls for commercially sold hacking systems. EU member states have also agreed to collectively level sanctions against those found to be responsible for cyberattacks.

In the same spirit, countries around the world need to agree on new norms: What level of cyberattack amounts to an act of war, for example, and what measures would serve as an appropriate response to such an attack? A cyberattack on critical infrastructure that results in real devastation and harm to human life should rightfully be compared to a conventional attack on such infrastructure. It's time for democratic governments to begin to take seriously the changing face of conflict in the twenty-first century.

Perpetual intrusions and cyberattacks suggest that in the battle between hackers and governments, democratic governments are losing. If they fail to do better, the balance of power will tip even more in favor of harmful actors, private companies, and authoritarian regimes. But if they succeed, then a new raft of democratically mandated measures could tame the lawlessness in cyberspace. That, in turn, would restore confidence that a liberal, rules-based order can prove its relevance in the digital age. 🌐

As the World Burns

Climate Change's Dangerous Next Phase

Michael Oppenheimer

In late August, more than 600 separate wildfires ravaged California, killing seven people. Meanwhile, two tropical cyclones struck the Gulf Coast only days apart: first Tropical Storm Marco and then Hurricane Laura, the latter of which killed 26 people in the United States and tied the record for the strongest storm to hit Louisiana. Extreme events such as these signal a worrying trend. In the coming decades, as temperatures continue to climb, seemingly isolated climate disasters will begin to overlap, their impacts becoming more than additive. Scientists expect to see more intense tropical cyclones and more heat waves. Each disaster could compound the damage of the next, with less and less time for people to recover in between.

Many observers assess the threat of climate change in terms of the frequency or severity of extreme events. They have viewed each crisis—be it a Texas hurricane or a California wildfire—as distinct from others. But consider how people feel on the fourth day of a heat wave as opposed to the

first. Their resilience begins to drain away. Viewing weather events as independent occurrences is like trying to understand a movie by looking at a series of brief clips; they are important plot points, but not the whole story. In fact, viewing climate change as the accumulation of individual events underestimates the threat, because such events do not take place in a vacuum. As recent research shows, features of the climate interact with one another—interactions that exacerbate the impact on people and ecosystems.

Two interactions are particularly worrisome. First, as extreme events become more intense and more frequent, they will increasingly occur close together in time and location, worsening the overall impact. Alone, a single extreme event—such as a hurricane or a wildfire—can devastate wide areas. But back-to-back climate catastrophes compound the misery of each. The second type of interaction is longer term. It happens when one of the earth's mechanisms for regulating the climate—systems involving air, the ocean, land, or ice—runs amok, setting off a chain reaction involving other such mechanisms.

These new risks to the planet should challenge the conventional wisdom on fighting climate change. In the United States and other wealthy countries, efforts to adapt to global warming have always played second fiddle to efforts to reduce carbon emissions. This emphasis is understandable, since if greenhouse gas emissions are not restrained, successfully adapting to climate change will be impossible for most of humanity: countries will suffer major damage, and lives will be lost. Adaptation has also

MICHAEL OPPENHEIMER is Albert G. Milbank Professor of Geosciences and International Affairs at Princeton University.



seemed less attractive because it involves no global silver bullets. But policymakers no longer have the luxury of downgrading adaptation, because climate change's devastating effects are no longer in the future; they are occurring now.

A CONFLUENCE OF CRISES

Extreme events can wreak havoc on society. In 1953, a powerful storm in the North Sea killed more than 2,000 people in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In 2003, a searing heat wave gripped western Europe, contributing to somewhere between 35,000 and 70,000 deaths. In 2012, Superstorm Sandy struck the northeastern coast of the United States, causing nearly \$80 billion in damage. These episodes unleashed cataclysmic consequences, but few communities had to face them more than once over several generations. Such events occur worldwide multiple times per year but rarely in the same place. The North Sea storm, for instance, appears to have been a once-in-a-century event for its region; the 2003 heat wave, a once-in-500-year event; and Sandy's flooding of New York City, a once-in-250-year event.

But soon, some once-in-a-lifetime catastrophes will become annual debacles. As temperatures rise, the odds that such events will occur at any specific location in a given year are growing quickly, particularly in coastal areas. By 2050, many such areas around the world will face flood levels every year that only recently occurred once per century.

When extreme events strike the same location more frequently, the confluence can be more devastating than the sum of its parts. Consider a string of extremely hot days in one particular place—the

odds of which, computer climate models confirm, are growing rapidly. A few consecutive days of unusually hot weather is manageable, but a week or two, far less so. As a heat wave goes on, the electrical grid struggles to supply enough power for all the air conditioning being used. Blackouts are triggered. With no air conditioning, the human body's own system for mitigating heat breaks down, too. Some die of heat stroke and respiratory disease. For those who lack air conditioning (which is a majority of the world's population), many of whom live in aging, urban apartments that are slow to cool naturally, the risk is greatest. As hot days bunch together, such households will see long stretches without relief, since the indoor temperature lags a day or two behind the outdoor temperature.

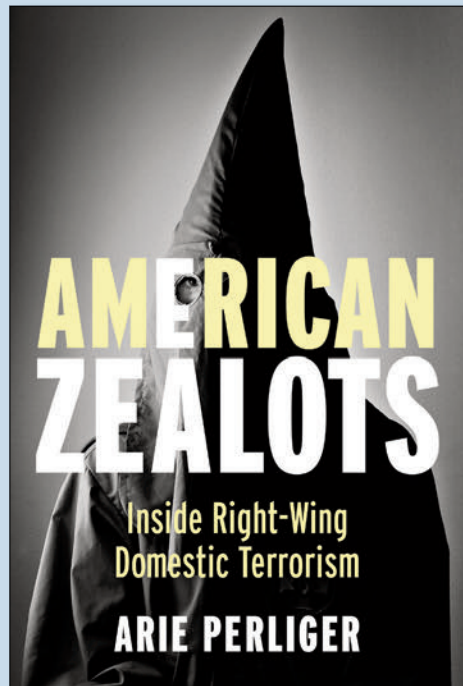
Another scientific finding suggests that the problem does not stop there: in many locations in the future, episodes of high humidity will be more likely to accompany hot days than they are now. Heat plus humidity equals more human misery than heat alone or humidity alone—and more than the sum of the two. Above a certain threshold, the human body can no longer dissipate its own metabolic heat through perspiration. More and more often, in an expanding area of the world, outdoor activity involving any significant effort—farm labor, construction work, or even a soccer game—will be life threatening.

The devastation caused by multiple extreme events is not hypothetical, as the 2017 hurricane season showed. In August of that year, Hurricane Harvey struck the Gulf Coast of the United States, deluging parts of the areas around Houston, Texas, with more than four feet of rainfall and causing over

\$90 billion in damage. A couple of weeks later, Hurricane Irma flattened parts of the Leeward Islands, in the Caribbean, while striking a glancing blow to Puerto Rico. Just two weeks after that, Hurricane Maria made a direct hit on Puerto Rico, destroying its infrastructure and causing about 3,000 deaths. At some point in their paths of destruction, each storm was classified as Category 4 or 5, the highest levels of intensity.

Like heat waves, consecutive hurricanes of this magnitude can exacerbate misery. The link in this case was not necessarily geographic or temporal. Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico 26 days after and over 2,000 miles away from Hurricane Harvey's strike on Texas. But these two events connected at a distance. The damage in Puerto Rico was made worse because the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency had exhausted its financial and personnel resources on the previous two storms, especially Harvey. Add to that the island's financial troubles, its lack of representation in Congress, and the Trump administration's hostility—perhaps not surprising, given the island's overwhelmingly Hispanic population—and the result was gross mismanagement that worsened the disaster.

Even extreme events scattered across the world can compound one another. Consider crop failures. About 15 percent of the world's grain is consumed not in the country where it was grown but after being exported. The biggest exporters of grain—Argentina, Australia, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States—are spread out around the world. That is a good thing from the perspective of food security, because it minimizes the chances of simultaneous crop



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failures. But global warming is increasing those odds. Yields of corn, soybeans, and other key crops fall sharply as temperatures rise and the amount of water they receive falls. As a result, there is now a growing possibility of simultaneous crop failures in two far-apart breadbaskets—something that could disrupt the global food supply and lead to malnutrition and, in some places, widespread starvation.

THE TIPPING POINTS

Beyond the prospect of extreme events coinciding or connecting, another sort of interaction is just as worrying: those among the various systems that drive the climate. Scientists have long worried about tipping points—thresholds beyond which small changes in the global temperature can lead to rapid, disruptive effects. For example, if large portions of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets melt and disintegrate, a process already underway along their fringes, the global sea level will rise much more rapidly than it has for thousands of years. As Arctic permafrost across North America and Eurasia melts, it will release large amounts of methane and carbon dioxide, further increasing the rate of global warming. If a key ocean current in the North Atlantic slows down as a result of global warming, climate at the high latitudes will be disrupted. Although scientists have looked at these possibilities with a wary eye for decades, they have been unable to nail down the exact temperature at which these rapid responses would occur—or to determine if precise tipping points even exist.

But if such thresholds exist and were crossed at relatively low temperatures,

the result would be disastrous: the widespread dislocation of ecosystems and societies with little window of opportunity to adapt. Even worse, there's evidence to suggest that several of these phenomena would interact. If a threshold in one system were crossed, there might be a ripple effect, causing thresholds in others to be crossed, too. For example, a rapid loss of Greenland ice would pour water into the surrounding sea, slowing ocean circulation. Because this current normally channels warm water northward, its slowing would create something akin to a series of rear-end collisions in a traffic jam, causing a warming of Antarctic waters on the other side of the world. That, in turn, would have another knock-on effect, speeding the breakup of parts of the Antarctic ice sheet. The global sea level would surge even higher.

When these building blocks of the climate are examined individually, the chances of crossing multiple thresholds more or less simultaneously appears small. Some of these phenomena are unlikely to occur in this century or even the next without a major trigger. But that is precisely what the interaction of these various systems might create: one system may go haywire, triggering the disruption of others. At this juncture, there is still a great deal of uncertainty about how high that probability is. But the potential for such interactions adds another reason to be extremely cautious about venturing beyond the targets set in the 2015 Paris climate agreement—keeping warming to well below two degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels and trying to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Exceeding those targets would mean entering a climatic *terra incognita*.

UNPREPARED FOR UNKNOWNNS

The interaction of extreme events creates risks of an entirely new type and magnitude. Using computers to predict when and where such events may occur is of little immediate help, since modeling of those events is in its early stages. Nor can one extrapolate from past experience, since the climate is evolving well outside of what humans have lived through. It's not that a confluence of risky climate events at a particular place and time is entirely new. But what is new is that the likelihood of some confluences is increasing rapidly and globally.

Further complicating predictions is the question of how people and governments will respond. People who are not directly involved in an extreme event tend not to remember the lessons learned from such past events long enough to prepare for the next. Some studies suggest that it takes multiple similar incidents to leave a deep enough impression to convince them to learn from their experience and adapt accordingly. Only then will they think ahead and act to protect lives and property or get out of harm's way by relocating to safer terrain.

Even highly developed countries are underprepared for climate risks, especially in certain geographic areas, economic sectors, or demographic segments. Before Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, New Orleans had an emergency escape plan, but it didn't consider poorer people who didn't have cars, most of whom were Black. As a result, many stayed in their houses and drowned or wound up in New Orleans's Superdome, which had been set up as a shelter. Other countries may be able to handle one threat but completely overlook another. Japan, for example, has millennia of experience

dealing with earthquakes, floods, and typhoons, and its disaster-risk-management system is the envy of the world. Yet the country failed to prepare for a new type of disaster that arose in 2011: an earthquake triggering a tsunami, which flooded a nuclear reactor.

As these examples suggest, although governments can learn through experience with individual disasters, they are almost never ready for new combinations of them. That does not offer much reason for optimism when it comes to preparations for climate change. Indeed, in a world where climate risks rarely interact, governments are already inadequately planning for potential disasters. As those risks increasingly compound one another, governments will lag even further behind the threat.

THE ADAPTATION IMPERATIVE

Nearly all accounts of the climate problem from scientists and other experts end with a plea for rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. But governments should emphasize adaptation equally. That means developing forward-looking policies to protect people, infrastructure, ecosystems, and society. It means restructuring or replacing perverse incentives that encourage people and industries to settle in exposed areas. It means giving more resources to international agencies to help the least developed countries. Most of all, it means thinking many years ahead to gather extensive resources and political will for often unpopular policies. Very little of this job can be done quickly. Adaptation should have begun in earnest decades ago.

Emphasizing emission reductions but not adaptation to climate change is misguided, because no matter what

happens to emissions over the next 30 years, the planet will get significantly hotter. Trapped heat that has been absorbed by the oceans over decades is bound to emerge, warming the earth. Years of emissions have accumulated in the atmosphere and will have a lagged effect on the climate. Although the world may be capable of meeting the targets set in the Paris agreement, it is more likely than not that it will fail to do so. Ever since international climate change negotiations began in 1991, countries have talked the talk more than they have walked the walk. If the targets aren't met, climate change will produce more events that a greater number of governments will either have to learn to adapt to at a very high price or altogether fail to manage.

Even achieving the Paris targets would not be a free pass to avoid adaptation. Attaining those goals would give the world some welcome breathing room. But the resulting warming would still create serious consequences, such as a hundredfold uptick in the frequency of floods along large swaths of the world's coasts. It is true that no amount of adaptation will be enough if emissions remain unconstrained, because that would lead to warming that would go far beyond what humans have ever experienced. But it is also true that no amount of emission reduction will be enough to spare communities that do not also adapt.

Governments must also remember that the ability of people and places to adapt to climate change is highly unequal, largely because of unfair arrangements determined too often by racial, gender, ethnic, age, or other differences. Many of the interactions

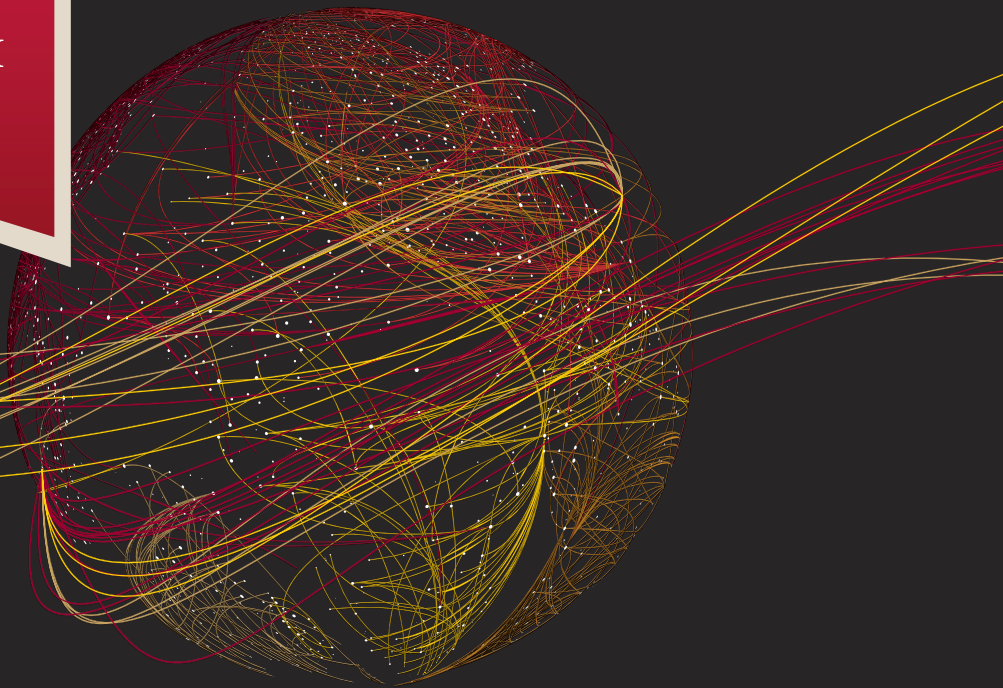
between extreme events will become apparent only suddenly, so accommodating them will require extra flexibility to respond rapidly—a capacity that much of the population in less developed countries and major segments of wealthy countries have long been deprived of.

The bottom line is that few if any countries are sufficiently prepared to deal with what is in store. A yawning gap has opened up between what they know about the risks of climate change and what they are doing to reduce them. In the riskier new era of climate change, the longer countries take to close that gap, the more painful and deadly the outcomes. 🌍



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Coming Storms

The Return of Great-Power War

Christopher Layne

Since the closing days of the Cold War, U.S. policymakers, pundits, international relations scholars, and policy analysts have argued that great-power war is a relic of a bygone age. In 1986, the historian John Lewis Gaddis termed the post–World War II era a “Long Peace” because the Soviet Union and the United States had not come to blows. A few years later, the political scientist John Mueller suggested that changing norms had made great-power conflict obsolete. By 2011, the psychologist Steven Pinker was arguing that the Long Peace had morphed into a “New Peace,” marked by a generalized decrease of violence in human affairs.

Of course, as evidenced by ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen, to name a few, there is currently no shortage of organized armed violence involving smaller countries. Still, given the blood-drenched course of politics since the start of the modern international system in the sixteenth century, the absence of war among great powers since 1945 is striking. That does not

mean, however, that these kinds of conflicts are off the table. In fact, despite attempts by academics and politicians to write off great-power war as a real threat, the conditions that make it possible still exist. Tensions persist among today’s great powers—above all the United States and China—and any number of flash points could trigger a conflict between them. These two countries are on a collision course fueled by the dynamics of a power transition and their competition for status and prestige, and without a change in direction, war between them in the coming decades is not only possible but probable.

MISPLACED OPTIMISM

Even as geopolitical competition between the United States and China intensifies, most Americans who think seriously about foreign policy and grand strategy refuse to believe that war is likely. This optimism is primarily rooted in several prominent theories of state behavior. The first is that a high level of economic interdependence between two countries reduces the risk of violent conflict. But history provides many examples to counter this hypothesis. The countries of Europe were never more interdependent—both economically and culturally—than they were just before the outbreak of World War I, and the economies of two of that conflict’s main belligerents, the United Kingdom and Germany, were closely linked. And even if the interdependence of the United States and China might theoretically reduce the risk of war between them, their economic ties have begun to unravel in recent years, as each begins to decouple from the other’s economy.

CHRISTOPHER LAYNE is University Distinguished Professor of International Affairs and Robert M. Gates Chair in National Security at Texas A&M University and the author of the forthcoming book *After the Fall: International Politics, U.S. Grand Strategy, and the End of the Pax Americana*.

Skepticism about the prospect of a great-power war also stems from faith in the strength of nuclear deterrence. The risk of mutual assured destruction from a nuclear war surely played a role in preventing the Cold War from turning hot. In recent decades, however, technological advances have weakened this deterrent. The combination of miniaturized, low-yield nuclear warheads and highly accurate delivery systems has made thinkable what once was unthinkable: a “limited” nuclear war, which would not result in apocalyptic destruction.

Finally, other scholars have argued that the so-called liberal international order will preserve peace. In this view, U.S. leadership—through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund—and the spread of the principles of peaceful cooperation now provide regularity and predictability in international conduct. Some, such as the political scientist G. John Ikenberry, optimistically forecast that this order can survive for many decades into the future, notwithstanding China’s rise and the eventual end of U.S. predominance. This assumption, however, is problematic. The order is being challenged not only by changing international dynamics but also by political developments in the countries that have traditionally defended it. In the United States and Europe, the rise of populism and illiberal democracy is a backlash against the current order and the elites who champion and profit from it. As domestic support for the order decreases and the balance of power shifts toward other countries, the system will inevitably become less

effective at mediating conflict. Rising powers may also see an opening to revise the structure entirely, raising the likelihood of war.

HISTORY LESSONS

Beyond theory, history also demonstrates that the constraints on great-power war are weaker than they often appear. In particular, the course of the British-German rivalry that culminated in war in 1914 shows how two great powers can be drawn inexorably toward a conflict that seemed highly unlikely—right up until the moment it began. And the parallels to today’s contest between the United States and China could hardly be clearer.

In the early years of the twentieth century, imperial Germany’s fast-growing economic, technological, and naval power began to pose a challenge to the existing British-led international order. Despite close trade ties between the two countries, British elites began to see Germany’s growing economic power as a menace. Moreover, they resented Germany’s economic success because it was the result of trade and industrial policies they deemed unfair: German prosperity, they felt, derived from state intervention rather than the liberal, laissez-faire approach that governed the United Kingdom’s political economy. British elites also harbored a deep antipathy toward Germany because they saw its political culture—which privileged the military and its values—as fundamentally antithetical to liberal values. Simply put, they believed Germany was an irredeemably bad actor. It is no wonder that once war began, the British quickly came to understand the conflict as an ideological crusade pitting liberalism against Prussian autocracy and militarism.

The British and the Germans were competing for prestige as well as power. Germany's *Weltpolitik* strategy—building a big navy and seeking colonies—provoked the United Kingdom, which, as a trading nation with a sprawling overseas empire, could not ignore the emergence of a rival naval power just across the North Sea. In reality, however, Germany's battleship-building program was driven less by economic or military considerations than by a hunger for status. Germany's goal was not necessarily to challenge the United Kingdom but to be acknowledged as its great-power equal.

Despite these sources of potential conflict, the outbreak of war between the two states in August 1914 hardly was inevitable. As the historians Zara Steiner and Keith Neilson pointed out, “there was no direct clash over territory, thrones, or borders” between the two. In fact, there were important factors that might have fostered peace: trade, cultural bonds, and interconnected elites and royal families, to name a few.

So why did they go to war? The historian Margaret MacMillan's answer is that the conflict was “the result of the clash between a major global power feeling its advantage slip away and a rising challenger.” As she writes:

Such transitions are rarely managed peacefully. The established power is too often arrogant, lecturing the rest of the world about how to manage its affairs, and too often insensitive to the fears and concerns of lesser powers. Such a power, as Britain was then, and the United States is today, inevitably resists its own intimations of mortality and the rising one is impatient to get its fair share of

whatever is on offer, whether colonies, trade, resources or influence.

The parallels between the pre-1914 British-German antagonism and contemporary U.S.-Chinese relations are both striking and cautionary. The United States finds itself in the place of the United Kingdom, an incumbent hegemon whose relative power is gradually waning. Washington, like London before it, resents its adversary's rise, which it attributes to unfair trade and economic policies, and views its rival as a bad actor whose values are antithetical to liberalism. For its part, like Germany prior to World War I, today's fast-rising China wants to be acknowledged as an equal on the international stage and seeks hegemony in its own region. The United Kingdom's inability to adjust peacefully to Germany's rise helped lead to World War I. Whether the United States follows that British precedent will determine whether U.S.-Chinese competition ends in war.

A BATTLE OF IDEAS?

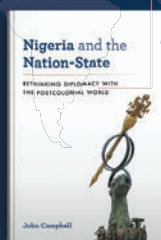
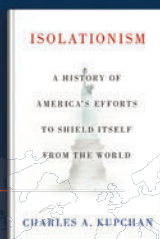
For Chinese leaders, their own country's history provides a cautionary tale about what happens to major countries that fail to make the jump to great-power status. As scholars have noted, China's defeat by the British and the French in the two Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century stemmed from its inability to adapt to the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Because of a weak response on the part of Chinese leaders, stronger imperialist powers were able to dominate the country's affairs; the Chinese refer to the subsequent era, in which Western

powers and Japan kept China down, as “the century of humiliation.”

China’s current rise is driven by a desire to avenge the humiliation it suffered and to restore its pre-nineteenth-century status as East Asia’s dominant power. Deng Xiaoping’s “reform and opening” program was the first step in this process. To spur its economic growth and modernization, China integrated into the U.S.-led world order. As Deng himself put it in 1992, “Those who are backward get beaten.” Beijing’s long-term goal was not simply to get rich. It aimed to become wealthy enough to acquire the military and technological capabilities needed to wrest regional hegemony in East Asia away from the United States. China joined the system not to help preserve it but to challenge it from within.

That strategy has succeeded. China is rapidly approaching the United States on every important measure of power. In 2014, the International Monetary Fund announced that, when measured in terms of purchasing power parity, China had passed the United States as the world’s largest economy. Measured by market exchange rate, China’s GDP is now nearly 70 percent of the United States’. And as China continues to recover rapidly from the pandemic-induced economic downturn, it will likely pass the United States as the world’s number one economy by any measure before the end of this decade. In military terms, the story is similar. In 2015, a study by the RAND Corporation, *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard*, noted that the gap between U.S. and Chinese military power in East Asia was closing rapidly. The U.S. fleet and U.S. bases in the region were now

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under threat from improved Chinese capabilities. The study's authors themselves expressed surprise at this shift. "Even for many of the contributors to this report, who track developments in the Asian military situation on an ongoing basis, the speed of change . . . was striking," they noted.

U.S. policymakers increasingly see the U.S.-Chinese rivalry not as a traditional great-power competition but as a struggle pitting democracy against communism. In July, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a speech whose main purpose was to cast U.S.-Chinese hostility in ideological terms. "We have to keep in mind that the [Chinese Communist Party] regime is a Marxist-Leninist regime," he said.

General Secretary Xi Jinping is a true believer in a bankrupt totalitarian ideology . . . that informs his decades-long desire for global hegemony of Chinese communism. America can no longer ignore the fundamental political and ideological differences between our countries, just as the CCP has never ignored them.

Such rhetoric aims to lay the groundwork for a more intense phase of U.S.-Chinese friction by echoing Cold War depictions of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," delegitimizing China's government in the eyes of the American public, and portraying China as a bad actor in international politics.

It is not only hawks such as Pompeo who have come to view China through an ideological prism. A wide swath of establishment figures in Washington have come to believe that the real threat to the United States is not China's growing military and economic power

but Beijing's challenge to the U.S. model of political and economic development. As Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan wrote in these pages in 2019, "China may ultimately present a stronger ideological challenge than the Soviet Union did"; its "rise to superpower status will exert a pull toward autocracy."

This ideological turn in U.S. China policy is unwise. It creates a febrile mood in Washington and makes war more likely. The United States would be better advised to take ideology out of the equation and conduct its relationship with China as a traditional great-power rivalry, in which diplomacy aims to manage competition through compromise, conciliation, and the search for common ground. Ideological contests, on the other hand, are zero-sum in nature. If your rival is evil, compromise—indeed, negotiation itself—becomes appeasement.

DANGER AHEAD

Today, the U.S.-Chinese relationship is in free fall. Economic relations are on the rocks due to the Trump administration's trade war, and U.S. technology policy aims to put Chinese firms such as Huawei out of business. It is easy to see how any number of flash points could trigger a war in the coming years.

Events on the Korean Peninsula could draw in the United States and China, and both countries' military maneuvers have raised tensions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait. Washington is also challenging long-established understandings about Taiwan's status by edging closer to recognizing the island's independence from China and openly acknowledging the United States' military commitment to defend Taiwan. The United States has also reacted



I've got the power: Chinese soldiers in Nanjing, China, January 2013

strongly to Beijing's repression of China's Uighur Muslim minority and to its imposition of a harsh new security law on Hong Kong. In both cases, a bipartisan array of U.S. officials have condemned China, and both Congress and the Trump administration have imposed retaliatory sanctions.

Despite such pushback, however, China is unlikely to abandon its goal of becoming a regional hegemon in East Asia. Beijing will also continue pressing the United States to accord it respect as a great-power equal. Avoiding war by accommodating China's desires would require the United States to retract its security guarantee to Taiwan and recognize Beijing's claims on the island. Washington would also need to accept the reality that its liberal values are not universal and thus stop interfering in

China's internal affairs by condemning Beijing's policies in Hong Kong and Xinjiang and issuing thinly veiled calls for regime change.

There is little chance that the United States will take those steps. Doing so would mean acknowledging the end of U.S. primacy. This makes the prospect of a hot war ever more likely. Unlike during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union generally accepted each other's European spheres of influence, today, Washington and Beijing have starkly different views of who should enjoy preeminence in the East China and South China Seas and Taiwan.

U.S. public opinion is also unlikely to act as a check on this potential march to war. Historically, the country's foreign policy establishment has not been particularly responsive to public

opinion, and many American voters know little about U.S. overseas military commitments and their implications. In the event of a Chinese attack, especially on Taiwan, the “rally around the flag” effect and the U.S. government’s ability to manipulate public opinion would likely neuter public opposition to war. U.S. leaders would condemn Beijing as a ruthless, aggressive, and expansionist communist dictatorship aiming to suppress the freedom-loving people of a democratic territory. The U.S. public would be told that war was necessary to uphold the United States’ universal values. Of course, as was the case with World War I, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq war, public disillusionment would set in if the war went badly. By then, however, it would be too late.

Over the past few years, multiple observers—including leading China analysts in the United States, such as Robert Kagan and Evan Osnos—have suggested that the United States and China might be, like the United Kingdom and Germany in 1914, “sleepwalking” into war. Although the march toward conflict continues, everyone’s eyes are now wide open. The trouble is that although supporters of increased confrontation are making their case loudly and clearly, opposition to such policies has been surprisingly muted within the foreign policy establishment. One reason is that many who typically advocate policies of strategic self-discipline and restraint in U.S. foreign policy have, in recent years, become far more hawkish when it comes to China. Among scholars and analysts who generally agree that the United States should disengage from the Middle East (and, some say, even from Europe), few support similar

strategic adjustments in East Asia. Instead, some in this camp—notably the distinguished realist scholar John Mearsheimer—now claim that the United States must oppose China’s drive for regional hegemony. But this argument is based on the geopolitical nightmare that obsessed the British strategic thinker Sir Halford Mackinder at the beginning of the twentieth century: if a single power dominated the Eurasian heartland, it could attain global hegemony. Mackinder’s argument has many weaknesses. It is the product of an era that equated military power with population size and coal and steel production. The Eurasian threat was overhyped in Mackinder’s day, and it still is. Chinese regional hegemony is not something worth going to war over.

Whether the United States can, or will, peacefully cede its dominance in East Asia and acknowledge China’s standing as its great-power equal is an open question. If Washington does not do so, however, it is on the fast track to war—one that might make the military disasters of Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq pale in comparison. 🌐

ESSAYS



As countries climb out of the current crisis, they can do more than spur economic growth; they can steer the direction of that growth to build a better economy.

– Mariana Mazzucato

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Capitalism After the Pandemic

Getting the Recovery Right

Mariana Mazzucato

After the 2008 financial crisis, governments across the world injected over \$3 trillion into the financial system. The goal was to unfreeze credit markets and get the global economy working again. But instead of supporting the real economy—the part that involves the production of actual goods and services—the bulk of the aid ended up in the financial sector. Governments bailed out the big investment banks that had directly contributed to the crisis, and when the economy got going again, it was those companies that reaped the rewards of the recovery. Taxpayers, for their part, were left with a global economy that was just as broken, unequal, and carbon-intensive as before. “Never let a good crisis go to waste,” goes a popular policymaking maxim. But that is exactly what happened.

Now, as countries are reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, they must avoid making the same mistake. In the months after the virus first surfaced, governments stepped in to address the concomitant economic and health crises, rolling out stimulus packages to protect jobs, issuing rules to slow the spread of the disease, and investing in the research and development of treatments and vaccines. These rescue efforts are necessary. But it is not enough for governments to simply intervene as the spender of last resort when markets fail or crises occur. They should actively shape markets so that they deliver the kind of long-term outcomes that benefit everyone.

The world missed the opportunity to do that back in 2008, but fate has handed it another chance. As countries climb out of the current crisis, they can do more than spur economic growth; they can

MARIANA MAZZUCATO is a Professor at University College London and the author of *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy*.

steer the direction of that growth to build a better economy. Instead of handing out no-strings-attached assistance to corporations, they can condition their bailouts on policies that protect the public interest and tackle societal problems. They can require COVID-19 vaccines receiving public support to be made universally accessible. They can refuse to bail out companies that won't curb their carbon emissions or won't stop hiding their profits in tax havens.

For too long, governments have socialized risks but privatized rewards: the public has paid the price for cleaning up messes, but the benefits of those cleanups have accrued largely to companies and their investors. In times of need, many businesses are quick to ask for government help, yet in good times, they demand that the government step away. The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to right this imbalance through a new style of dealmaking that forces bailed-out companies to act more in the public interest and allows taxpayers to share in the benefits of successes traditionally credited to the private sector alone. But if governments instead focus only on ending the immediate pain, without rewriting the rules of the game, then the economic growth that follows the crisis will be neither inclusive nor sustainable. Nor will it serve businesses interested in long-term growth opportunities. The intervention will have been a waste, and the missed opportunity will merely fuel a new crisis.

THE ROT IN THE SYSTEM

Advanced economies had been suffering from major structural flaws well before COVID-19 hit. For one thing, finance is financing itself, thus eroding the foundation of long-term growth. Most of the financial sector's profits are reinvested back into finance—banks, insurance companies, and real estate—rather than put toward productive uses such as infrastructure or innovation. Only ten percent of all British bank lending, for example, supports nonfinancial firms, with the rest going to real estate and financial assets. In advanced economies, real estate lending constituted about 35 percent of all bank lending in 1970; by 2007, it had risen to about 60 percent. The current structure of finance thus fuels a debt-driven system and speculative bubbles, which, when they burst, bring banks and others begging for government bailouts.

Another problem is that many large businesses neglect long-term investments in favor of short-term gains. Obsessed with quarterly returns and stock prices, CEOs and corporate boards have rewarded

shareholders by buying back stocks, increasing the value of the remaining shares and hence of the stock options that form part of most executive pay packages. In the last decade, Fortune 500 companies have repurchased more than \$3 trillion worth of their own shares. These buybacks come at the expense of investment in wages, worker training, and research and development.

Then there is the hollowing out of government capacity. Only after an explicit market failure do governments usually step in, and the policies they put forward are too little, too late. When the state is viewed not as a partner in creating value but as just a fixer, publicly funded resources are starved. Social programs, education, and health care all go underfunded.

These failures have added up to mega-crises, both economic and planetary. The financial crisis was to a large extent caused by excessive credit flowing into the real estate and financial sectors, inflating asset bubbles and household debt rather than supporting the real economy and generating sustainable growth. Meanwhile, the lack of long-term investments in green energy has hastened global warming, to the point where the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that the world has just ten years left to avoid its irreversible effects. And yet the U.S. government subsidizes fossil fuel companies to the tune of some \$20 billion a year, largely through preferential tax exemptions. The EU's subsidies total around \$65 billion per year. At best, policymakers trying to deal with climate change are considering incentives, such as carbon taxes and official lists of which investments count as green. They have stopped short of issuing the type of mandatory regulations that are required to avert disaster by 2030.

The COVID-19 crisis has only worsened all these problems. For the moment, the world's attention is focused on surviving the immediate health crisis, not on preventing the coming climate crisis or the next financial crisis. The lockdowns have devastated people who work in the perilous gig economy. Many of them lack both the savings and the employer benefits—namely, health care and sick leave—needed to ride out the storm. Corporate debt, a key cause of the previous financial crisis, is only climbing higher as companies take on hefty new loans to weather the collapse in demand. And many companies' obsession with pleasing the short-term interests of their shareholders has left them with no long-term strategy to see them through the crisis.

The pandemic has also revealed how imbalanced the relationship between the public and the private sector has become. In the United States, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) invests some \$40 billion a year on medical research and has been a key funder of the research and development of COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. But pharmaceutical companies are under no obligation to make the final products affordable to Americans, whose tax money is subsidizing them in the first place. The California-based company Gilead developed its COVID-19 drug, remdesivir, with \$70.5 million in support from the federal government. In June, the company announced the price it would charge Americans for a treatment course: \$3,120.

The relationship between the public and the private sector is broken.

It was a typical move for Big Pharma. One study looked at the 210 drugs approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration from 2010 to 2016 and found that “NIH funding contributed to every one.” Even so, U.S. drug prices are the highest in the world. Pharmaceutical companies also act against the public interest by abusing the patent process. To ward off competition, they file patents that are very broad and hard to license. Some of them are too upstream in the development process, allowing companies to privatize not only the fruits of research but also the very tools for conducting it.

Equally bad deals have been made with Big Tech. In many ways, Silicon Valley is a product of the U.S. government’s investments in the development of high-risk technologies. The National Science Foundation funded the research behind the search algorithm that made Google famous. The U.S. Navy did the same for the GPS technology that Uber depends on. And the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, part of the Pentagon, backed the development of the Internet, touchscreen technology, Siri, and every other key component in the iPhone. Taxpayers took risks when they invested in these technologies, yet most of the technology companies that have benefited fail to pay their fair share of taxes. Then they have the audacity to fight against regulations that would protect the privacy rights of the public. And although many have pointed to the power of artificial intelligence and other technologies being developed in Silicon Valley, a closer look shows that in these cases, too, it was high-risk public investments that laid the foundations. Without govern-

ment action, the gains from those investments could once again flow largely to private hands. Publicly funded technology needs to be better governed by the state—and in some cases owned by the state—in order to ensure that the public benefits from its own investments. As the mass closure of schools during the pandemic has made clear, only some students have access to the technology needed for at-home schooling, a disparity that only furthers inequality. Access to the Internet should be a right, not a privilege.

RETHINKING VALUE

All of this suggests that the relationship between the public and the private sector is broken. Fixing it requires first addressing an underlying problem in economics: the field has gotten the concept of value wrong. Modern economists understand value as interchangeable with price. This view would be anathema to earlier theorists such as François Quesnay, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx, who saw products as having intrinsic value related to the dynamics of production, value that wasn't necessarily related to their price.

The contemporary concept of value has enormous implications for the way economies are structured. It affects how organizations are run, how activities are accounted for, how sectors are prioritized, how the government is viewed, and how national wealth is measured. The value of public education, for example, does not figure into a country's GDP because it is free—but the cost of teachers' salaries does. It is only natural, then, that so many people talk about public "spending" rather than public "investment." This logic also explains why Goldman Sachs's then CEO, Lloyd Blankfein, could claim in 2009, just a year after his company received a \$10 billion bailout, that its workers were "among the most productive in the world." After all, if value is price, and if Goldman Sachs's income per employee is among the highest in the world, then of course its workers must be among the most productive in the world.

Changing the status quo requires coming up with a new answer to the question, What is value? Here, it is essential to recognize the investments and creativity provided by a vast array of actors across the economy—not only businesses but also workers and public institutions. For too long, people have acted as if the private sector were the primary driver of innovation and value creation and therefore were entitled to the resulting profits. But this is simply not true. Pharma-

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ceutical drugs, the Internet, nanotechnology, nuclear power, renewable energy—all were developed with an enormous amount of government investment and risk taking, on the backs of countless workers, and thanks to public infrastructure and institutions. Appreciating the contribution of this collective effort would make it easier to ensure that all efforts were properly remunerated and that the economic rewards of innovation were distributed more equitably. The road to a more symbiotic partnership between public and private institutions begins with the recognition that value is created collectively.

BAD BAILOUTS

Beyond rethinking value, societies need to prioritize the long-term interests of stakeholders rather than the short-term interests of shareholders. In the current crisis, that should mean developing a “people’s vaccine” for COVID-19, one that is accessible to everyone on the planet. The drug-innovation process should be governed in a way that fosters collaboration and solidarity among countries, both during the research-and-development phase and when it comes time to distribute the vaccine. Patents should be pooled among universities, government labs, and private companies, allowing knowledge, data, and technology to flow freely around the world. Without these steps, a COVID-19 vaccine risks becoming an expensive product sold by a monopoly, a luxury good that only the richest countries and citizens can afford.

More generally, countries must also structure public investments less like handouts and more like attempts to shape the market to the public’s benefit, which means attaching strings to government assistance. During the pandemic, those conditions should promote three particular objectives: First, maintain employment to protect the productivity of businesses and the income security of households. Second, improve working conditions by providing adequate safety, decent wages, sufficient levels of sick pay, and a greater say in decision-making. Third, advance long-term missions such as reducing carbon emissions and applying the benefits of digitization to public services, from transport to health.

The United States’ main response to COVID-19—the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act, passed by Congress in March—illustrates these points in reverse. Rather than put in place effective payroll supports, as most other advanced countries did, the United States offered enhanced temporary unemployment benefits.

This choice led to over 30 million workers being laid off, causing the United States to have one of the highest rates of pandemic-related unemployment in the developed world. Because the government offered trillions of dollars in both direct and indirect support to large corporations without meaningful conditions, many companies were free to take actions that could spread the virus, such as denying paid sick days to their employees and operating unsafe workplaces.

The CARES Act also established the Paycheck Protection Program, under which businesses received loans that would be forgiven if employees were kept on the payroll. But the PPP ended up serving more as a massive cash grant

When rescuing businesses, the government should impose conditions.

to corporate treasuries than as an effective method of saving jobs. Any small business, not just those in need, could receive a loan, and Congress quickly loosened the rules regarding how much a firm needed to spend on payroll to have the loan forgiven. As a result, the program put a pitifully small dent in unemployment. An MIT team concluded that the PPP handed out \$500 billion in loans yet saved only 2.3 million jobs over roughly six months. Assuming that most of the loans are ultimately forgiven, the annualized cost of the program comes out to roughly \$500,000 per job. Over the summer, both the PPP and the expanded unemployment benefits ran out, and the U.S. unemployment rate still exceeded ten percent.

Congress has so far authorized over \$3 trillion in spending in response to the pandemic, and the Federal Reserve injected an additional \$4 trillion or so into the economy—together totaling more than 30 percent of U.S. GDP. Yet these vast expenditures have achieved nothing in terms of addressing urgent, long-term issues, from climate change to inequality. When Senator Elizabeth Warren, Democrat of Massachusetts, proposed attaching conditions to the bailouts—to ensure higher wages and greater decision-making power for workers and to restrict dividends, stock buybacks, and executive bonuses—she could not get the votes.

The point of the government's intervention was to prevent the collapse of the labor market and to maintain firms as productive organizations—essentially, to act as a catastrophic risk insurer. But this approach cannot be allowed to impoverish government, nor should the funds be permitted to bankroll destructive business strategies. In the case of in-

solvencies, the government might consider demanding equity positions in the companies it is rescuing, as happened in 2008 when the U.S. Treasury took ownership stakes in General Motors and other troubled firms. And when rescuing businesses, the government should impose conditions that prohibit all sorts of bad behavior: handing out untimely CEO bonuses, issuing excessive dividends, conducting share buybacks, taking on unnecessary debt, diverting profits to tax havens, engaging in problematic political lobbying. They should also stop firms from price gouging, especially in the case of COVID-19 treatments and vaccines.

Other countries show what a proper response to the crisis looks like. When Denmark offered to pay 75 percent of firms' payroll costs at the start of the pandemic, it did so on the condition that firms could not make layoffs for economic reasons. The Danish government also refused to bail out companies that were registered in tax havens and barred the use of relief funds for dividends and share buybacks. In Austria and France, airlines were saved on the condition that they reduce their carbon footprint.

The British government, by contrast, gave easyJet access to more than \$750 million in liquidity in April, even though the airline had paid out nearly \$230 million in dividends to shareholders a month earlier. The United Kingdom declined to attach conditions to its bailout of easyJet and other troubled firms in the name of market neutrality, the idea that it is not the government's job to tell private companies how to spend their money. But a bailout can never be neutral: by definition, a bailout involves the government choosing to spare one company, and not another, from disaster. Without conditions, government assistance runs the risk of subsidizing bad business practices, from environmentally unsustainable business models to the use of tax havens. The United Kingdom's furlough scheme, whereby the government paid up to 80 percent of furloughed employees' wages, should have in the very least been conditioned on workers not being fired as soon as the program ended. But it wasn't.

THE VENTURE CAPITALIST MENTALITY

The state cannot just invest; it must strike the right deal. To do so, it needs to start thinking like what I have called an "entrepreneurial state"—making sure that as it invests, it is not just derisking the downside but also getting a share of the upside. One way to do that is to take an equity stake in the deals it makes.

Consider the solar company Solyndra, which received a \$535 million guaranteed loan from the U.S. Department of Energy before going bust in 2011 and becoming a conservative byword for the government's inability to pick winners. Around the same time, the Department of Energy gave a \$465 million guaranteed loan to Tesla, which went on to experience explosive growth. Taxpayers paid for the failure of Solyndra, but they were never rewarded for the success of Tesla. No self-respecting venture capitalist would structure investments like that. Worse, the Department of Energy structured Tesla's loan so that it would get three million shares in the company if Tesla was unable to repay the loan, an arrangement designed to not leave taxpayers empty-handed. But why would the government want a stake in a failing company? A smarter strategy would have been to do the opposite and ask Tesla to pay three million shares if it was able to repay the loan. Had the government done that, it would have earned tens of billions of dollars as Tesla's share price grew over the course of the loan—money that could have covered the cost of the Solyndra failure with plenty left over for the next round of investments.

But the point is to worry not just about the monetary reward of public investments. The government should also attach strong conditions to its deals to ensure they serve the public interest. Medicines developed with government help should be priced to take that investment into account. The patents that the government issues should be narrow and easily licensable, so as to foster innovation, promote entrepreneurship, and discourage rent seeking.

Governments also need to consider how to use the returns on their investments to promote a more equitable distribution of income. This is not about socialism; it is about understanding the source of capitalistic profits. The current crisis has led to renewed discussions about a universal basic income, whereby all citizens receive an equal regular payment from the government, regardless of whether they work. The idea behind this policy is a good one, but the narrative would be problematic. Since a universal basic income is seen as a handout, it perpetuates the false notion that the private sector is the sole creator, not a co-creator, of wealth in the economy and that the public sector is merely a toll collector, siphoning off profits and distributing them as charity.

A better alternative is a citizen's dividend. Under this policy, the government takes a percentage of the wealth created with government investments, puts that money in a fund, and then shares the

proceeds with the people. The idea is to directly reward citizens with a share of the wealth they have created. Alaska, for example, has distributed oil revenues to residents through an annual dividend from its Permanent Fund since 1982. Norway does something similar with its Government Pension Fund. California, which hosts some of the richest companies in the world, might consider doing something similar. When Apple, headquartered in Cupertino, California, set up a subsidiary in Reno, Nevada, to take advantage of that state's zero percent corporate tax rate, California lost an enormous amount of tax revenue. Not only should such tax gimmicks be blocked, but California should also fight back by creating a state wealth fund, which would offer a way besides taxation to directly capture a share of the value created by the technology and companies it fostered.

A citizen's dividend allows the proceeds of co-created wealth to be shared with the larger community—whether that wealth comes from natural resources that are part of the common good or from a process, such as public investments in medicines or digital technologies, that has involved a collective effort. Such a policy should not serve as a substitute for getting the tax system to work right. Nor should the state use the lack of such funds as an excuse to not finance key public goods. But a public fund can change the narrative by explicitly recognizing the public contribution to wealth creation—key in the political power play between forces.

THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN ECONOMY

When the public and private sectors come together in pursuit of a common mission, they can do extraordinary things. This is how the United States got to the moon and back in 1969. For eight years, NASA and private companies in sectors as varied as aerospace, textiles, and electronics collaborated on the Apollo program, investing and innovating together. Through boldness and experimentation, they achieved what President John F. Kennedy called “the most hazardous and dangerous and greatest adventure on which man has ever embarked.” The point was not to commercialize certain technologies or even to boost economic growth; it was to get something done together.

More than 50 years later, in the midst of a global pandemic, the world has a chance to attempt an even more ambitious moonshot: the creation of a better economy. This economy would be more inclusive and sustainable. It would emit less carbon, generate less inequality,

build modern public transport, provide digital access for all, and offer universal health care. More immediately, it would make a COVID-19 vaccine available to everyone. Creating this type of economy will require a type of public-private collaboration that hasn't been seen in decades.

Some who talk about recovering from the pandemic cite an appealing goal: a return to normalcy. But that is the wrong target; normal is broken. Rather, the goal should be, as many have put it, to "build back better." Twelve years ago, the financial crisis offered a rare opportunity to change capitalism, but it was squandered. Now, another crisis has presented another chance for renewal. This time, the world cannot afford to let it go to waste. 🌍

China Thinks America Is Losing

Washington Must Show Beijing It's Wrong

Julian Gewirtz

The consequences of the presidency of Donald Trump will be debated for decades to come—but for the Chinese leadership, its meaning is already clear. China's rulers believe that the past four years have shown that the United States is rapidly declining and that this deterioration has caused Washington to frantically try to suppress China's rise. Trump's trade war, technology bans, and determination to blame China for his own mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic have all confirmed the perception of Chinese policy elites that the United States is bent on keeping their country down.

To be sure, the idea that the United States seeks to stymie and contain China was widespread among Chinese officials long before Trump came to power. What many Americans see as disruptive effects attributable only to Trump's presidency are, to China's current rulers, a profound vindication of their darkest earlier assessments of U.S. policy.

But Trump has turned what Beijing perceived as a long-term risk into an immediate crisis that demands the urgent mobilization of the Chinese system. The Trump administration has sought to weaken the grip of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on society, force the liberalization of the state-dominated Chinese economic system, and block China's drive to technological supremacy. Nearly four years into this gambit, however, Trump's policies appear to have produced the opposite result in each domain.

Washington needs a China strategy that not only assesses Chinese capabilities and aims but also takes full account of the way China's

JULIAN GEWIRTZ is Senior Fellow for China Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, a Fellow in the Columbia-Harvard China and the World Program, and Lecturer in History at Columbia University.

leaders understand the United States and have reacted to Trump's presidency. This strategy must also reject the faddish but inaccurate notion that China is somehow an impervious force, advancing on an immutable course and unresponsive to external pressure and incentives. The United States can craft a strategy that much more effectively deters China's most problematic behavior. But to do so, Washington must endeavor to upend Chinese leaders' assumption that the United States is inexorably declining.

"THE WOLF IS COMING"

Chinese leaders and policymakers have believed for decades that U.S. power is waning and that the United States seeks to impede China's rise. Mao Zedong was fond of predicting the decline of the capitalist world led by the United States, comparing it to "a dying person who is sinking fast." He regularly attacked Western attempts to subvert China's communist revolution, denouncing "reactionaries trying to hold back the wheel of history." These ideas outlived Mao, although they were shaken as the CCP embraced market reforms and as the United States emerged as the sole superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the 2008 financial crisis, which left China relatively unscathed, caused the country's leaders to wonder whether the ruinous decline of capitalism that Mao had predicted had in fact arrived. And with their Marxist-inflected view of historical forces, they expected that this prospect would lead, as night follows day, to the flailing of Mao's hopeless "reactionaries"—American leaders who would try in vain to hold China down.

These ideas shaped the worldview of Chinese President Xi Jinping. When he came to power in 2012, he spoke of historical patterns of conflict between rising and fading hegemonic powers, warned about the U.S. role in hastening the collapse of the Soviet Union, and promoted such figures as Wang Huning, a former law professor and long-time government adviser whose best-known book, *America Against America*, highlighted how far the United States fell short of its ideals. But Xi and his lieutenants were initially more focused on addressing the political and ideological fragility of the system they inherited; they expected the decay of the United States to be gradual.

Many Chinese elites now think that Trump's presidency has pushed that slow process into a new phase of sharp and irreversible deterioration. They took measure of the president's withdrawal from

international agreements and institutions and his disdain for traditional alliances. They saw how U.S. domestic policies were exacerbating inequality and polarization, keeping out immigrants, and cutting federal funding for research and development. Wu Xinbo, the dean of Fudan University's Institute for International Studies, argued in 2018 that the "unwise policies" of the Trump administration were "accelerating and intensifying [U.S.] decline" and "have greatly weakened [the United States'] international status and influence." A commentary in the Beijing-backed newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* earlier this year held that "America is moving from 'declining' to 'declining faster.'" This belief has become a central premise of China's evolving strategy toward the United States.

CCP leaders connect this rapid American decline to intensified U.S. efforts to contain China; the United States under Trump has gone from being a latent, long-term menace to the source of concerted efforts to, in the favored phrase of Chinese officialdom, "comprehensively suppress" China. In 2018, Trump slapped tariffs on tens of billions of dollars' worth of Chinese goods and issued bans on the Chinese telecommunications firms Huawei and ZTE. (Although Trump eventually reversed his ZTE decision as a favor to Xi, the threat to the company—which relied on the United States for approximately one-quarter of the components in its equipment—was existential; analysts have described more recent measures against Huawei, similarly, as a "death sentence.") The rhetoric of past and present Trump advisers, such as Peter Navarro (whose books include *The Coming China Wars* and *Death by China*) and Steve Bannon (who called for "regime change in Beijing"), helps vindicate the darkest, most conspiratorial notions among the Chinese leadership.

Trump's actions and rhetoric have solidified Beijing's assessment that there is now a durable American effort underway to quickly suppress China, and Chinese leaders see that effort as bipartisan, too, with near-unanimous congressional votes on legislation related to China and criticisms of China coming from prominent Democrats, such as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. An editorial from this past July in the Chinese state-run newspaper *Global Times* stated, "China must accept the reality that America's attitude toward China has fundamentally changed." The shift in elite opinion in China is clear. According to Wei Jianguo, a former top Chinese trade official, the prevailing view in Beijing is that "the essence of the trade war is that the United States wants



Separate ways: Trump and Xi in Osaka, Japan, June 2019

to destroy China.” Fu Ying, a senior diplomat, declared in June that the United States’ goal for China is now clearly “to slow it down through suppression,” a fight that the declining superpower “can’t afford to lose.” The Foreign Ministry’s spokesperson, Zhao Lijian, declared in August that the United States is “a far cry from the major power it used to be,” with its leaders bent on “working to suppress China because they fear China’s growth.” These ideas are remarkably widespread in the statements of Chinese officials and experts, the pages of CCP magazines and newspapers, and across Chinese social media.

Chinese leaders have long thought that this confrontation might arrive someday, but it has come much quicker than they expected. “People in the United States and China have for years said the wolf is coming, the wolf is coming, but the wolf hasn’t come,” Shi Yinhong, a leading international relations scholar, told *The New York Times*. “This time, the wolf is coming.”

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

With such perceptions entrenched, it should come as no surprise that China has reacted in ways that are leading to further conflict between the already divergent U.S. and Chinese systems. Since Xi’s ascent, China’s ever more authoritarian and domineering turn has alarmed govern-

ments around the world. In 2018, Xi removed term limits on his office. Under his watch, the CCP has more openly embraced its illiberal identity, pairing repression at home—most gruesomely in Xinjiang, where internment camps hold more than one million Uighurs and members of other minority ethnic groups—with loud criticism of democracies abroad. Despite U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s call to “engage and empower the Chinese people” against the CCP—an appeal widely

Chinese leaders have believed for decades that the United States is a waning power.

interpreted in China as a bid for regime change—the party’s hold over society remains strong. It rolled out new ideological and political campaigns this past summer. The clampdown that accompanied China’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has further bolstered Beijing’s surveillance and social control systems.

Some top U.S. officials have maintained that the goal of Trump’s policy is to force the liberalization of China’s state-dominated economic system, but from the outset of the trade war in 2018, the Chinese government judged that Trump’s goals were mercantilist—he cared only about getting a so-called good deal for the United States. In response, China’s rulers have redoubled their reliance on the state sector to deal with the instability resulting from conflict with the United States. Since the early years of Xi’s tenure, state-owned enterprises have benefited from increasingly favorable government policies and preferential bank lending, often at the expense of private firms. One economist with strong links to the CCP elite told me that he and many of his colleagues initially believed that Trump’s trade war was a positive development because they thought it would reverse this trend and revive market reform. But the trade war has had the opposite effect: Xi has doubled down on building “stronger, better, and larger” state-owned enterprises and rejecting the deeper economic liberalization that officials around the world have long sought in China.

In trade negotiations that reached a limited “Phase 1” agreement in January of this year, Beijing agreed to a series of pledges to buy U.S. goods, rather than to any significant new commitments to reform. Chinese state media reports even floated upgrading the state-dominated economic model to the status of one of China’s “core interests”—a sacrosanct category usually reserved for territorial and sovereignty claims. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored to many in

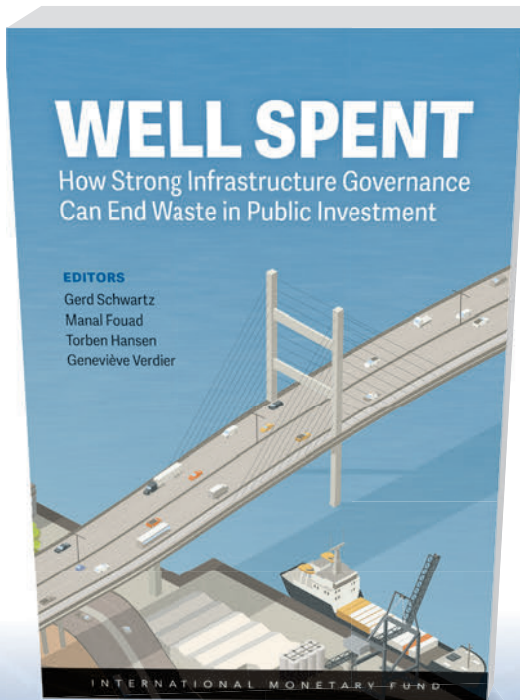
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INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

China the advantages of this model, with the Xinhua News Agency announcing that state-owned enterprises “have been a vital force and the main force” in responding to the pandemic.

Far from curbing China’s push for technological supremacy, Trump’s actions have encouraged its leaders to accelerate their drive to reduce their country’s dependence on the United States. For many years, China has tried to balance between reaping the benefits of interdependence and insulating itself from the risks of being the weaker partner in its relationship with the world’s most powerful country. After Xi came to power, he made it a priority to address the dangers of interdependence, including through the “Made in China 2025” initiative, which aims to make China 70 percent self-sufficient in ten core technologies by the year 2025. Xi has proved willing to sacrifice economic growth in the name of national autonomy, and a range of cosmopolitan officials and government-linked experts who once supported greater integration have come to agree with him. Li Qingsi, the executive director of the Center for American Studies at Renmin University of China, wrote that the ZTE case in 2018 “disillusion[ed] those who advocate relying on the United States to develop our own economy” and drove home the lesson that “China must carry forward the tradition of self-reliance and reduce external dependence.”

Beijing is finding it hard to speed up its self-sufficiency drive, but the direction is clear. A world in which China truly becomes self-reliant is a world in which the United States has much less leverage over China than it does at present. China is still dependent on foreign firms for many foundational technologies, including the cutting-edge semiconductors needed for everything from personal computers and smartphones to artificial intelligence systems. In 2019, Chinese leaders stopped talking publicly about Made in China 2025 to reduce tensions during negotiations with the United States, but the policy endures in substance, and one anonymous senior official told an American journalist that the CCP “will never give an inch” on the scheme’s broader goals. Earlier this year, Xi pledged a further \$1.4 trillion to invest in the development and deployment of advanced technological infrastructure such as 5G wireless networks, enhanced sensors and cameras, and automation.

Chinese concerns about dependency on the United States also extend more widely. Tensions have recently become especially high around U.S. dominance of international finance, from the use of the

dollar to interbank payment systems. Even internationalist officials, such as the former finance minister Lou Jiwei, have started warning about the risk of a “financial war” and about the United States doing “everything in its power to use bullying measures [and] long-arm jurisdiction” against China.

Chinese elites describe the COVID-19 pandemic as proof that the United States will lash out at China as it plunges into decline. Trump’s failure to control the disease, with around six million cases and nearly 200,000 deaths in the United States by the end of August, reflects what Chinese commentators see as the parlous state of the country. They have called the pandemic “Waterloo for America’s leadership” and “the end of the American century.” They believe that Trump launched his election-season push against China—he has called COVID-19 “the plague from China” and issued new sanctions and other measures targeting Chinese entities—to distract from the failings of his administration. But many leading Chinese voices are convinced that whatever the result of the U.S. presidential election, the trajectory of U.S.-Chinese relations is now set by the inexorable forces of American decline and hostility to China. “Even if Biden wins,” Yuan Peng, the influential president of the Ministry of State Security’s China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, recently wrote, “. . . America will have a hard time reassuming its role as a world leader . . . and America’s China policy will only get increasingly hyper-sensitive, unyielding, and arrogant as they double down on containment and suppression.”

Leaders in Beijing believe that a declining United States will seek to suppress China’s rise.

Xi is rolling out new policies that are based on these expectations. Beginning this past spring, he unveiled an agenda for the economy that aims to reorient China’s economic development inward, relying much more on China’s enormous domestic market and less on the “more unstable and uncertain world.” Fostering domestic demand has long been a talking point of Chinese leaders, but Xi has pledged to make achieving greater domestic consumption a centerpiece of the upcoming five-year plan for 2021–25. This shift is clearly driven by the assumption that the United States will continue working against China. As one state media outlet declared pointedly in late July, “No country and no individual can stop the historic pace of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”

To be sure, Xi would like to de-escalate the trade and technology conflicts with the United States to buy time. He also wants China to strengthen and diversify its ties to other economies around the world, including through the Belt and Road Initiative, an international network of infrastructure projects that aims to increase China's geopolitical influence. China is not deglobalizing as much as it is de-Americanizing.

China's conviction that the United States is a diminishing and hostile power has emboldened its leaders to pursue long-standing objectives with new vigor. Their view of U.S. decline makes them see fewer risks in taking highly aggressive positions, and their sense of U.S. hostility, among other factors, increases their willingness to incur international opprobrium: imposing a new national security law on Hong Kong; committing atrocities in Xinjiang; bullying Australia, India, and the Philippines; threatening Taiwan; forging new partnerships with Iran and Russia; and letting Chinese diplomats spread conspiracy theories about the origins of COVID-19. With the United States withdrawing from multilateralism and international institutions, China has tried to reshape global bodies, such as the UN Human Rights Council, in its favor. China's behavior in these areas is often at odds with U.S. interests and a rules-based order, with Beijing flouting rules it dislikes and undermining liberal norms and values.

A BETTER CHINA STRATEGY

How should U.S. strategy toward China grapple with these changes? Given the dismal track record of the past several years, some may be tempted to try to undo these shifts by reassuring Beijing that the United States does not in fact intend to keep China down. This path is highly unlikely to succeed. China's ambitions conflict with U.S. interests in many areas—and with Trump confirming so much of Beijing's view of the United States, no amount of diplomatic reassurance can convince China's leaders to give up their quest for security through strengthening their control over society, shoring up the statist economic system, and reducing China's dependence on the United States. Attempting to persuade them otherwise at this point would seem only to be cheap talk, at odds with their perception of "the wheel of history" turning faster toward American decline. U.S. strategy must seek to move forward, not backward, from the current predicament.

But that does not mean Beijing's entire agenda is immutable. This view is much in vogue today, casting China not as a country that re-

sponds to pressure and incentives but as an adamant force incapable of reacting to external stimuli. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that the unsuccessful policies of the past several years mean that the United States is somehow helpless in the face of a more powerful China, only able to pull up the drawbridge, prepare for conflict, and hope that the CCP collapses. A different approach—neither a nostalgic “reset” nor that fearful and fatalistic vision—is needed.

The best path forward is to craft a strategy premised on a more realistic assessment of both U.S. and Chinese interests. Beijing sees the world in harshly competitive and ideological terms, but Washington can still advance its interests with respect to China. The most ambitious—and most important—aspect of this strategy must be showing China and the rest of the world that the United States remains strong and can reliably revive the sources of its power and leadership. China’s rulers have built their strategy on a profound underestimation of the United States. By upending the exaggerated reports of its demise, the United States could change China’s calculus and find a way toward sustainable coexistence on favorable terms.

Nothing is as important to competing effectively with China as what the United States does at home, revitalizing its economic fundamentals, technological edge, and democratic system. All these initiatives would be important even in the absence of competition with China, but the rivalry with Beijing adds to their urgency. Policymakers must get the COVID-19 crisis under control, implement economic policies that benefit all Americans, welcome immigrants who enrich U.S. society, pursue racial justice to show the world that U.S. democracy can remain a beacon of freedom and equality, make smart investments in U.S. defense capabilities, and scale up federal funding for research and development. This ambitious agenda for national renewal and resilience would profoundly shake the foundations of the CCP’s strategy. U.S. leaders should also not shy away from publicly pointing out authoritarian China’s many weaknesses, including the country’s aging population, ecological crises, numerous border disputes, and declining international popularity.

The United States must also band together with allies and partners in Asia and Europe to push back against problematic Chinese behavior. That effort should include using joint economic leverage to punish firms and groups that steal intellectual property and engage in other unfair and illegal conduct; strengthening military capabilities and showing increased resolve in the face of Chinese aggression; and sanctioning

institutions and officials that are aiding repression in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. They should also work to revitalize the international institutions and those elements of the rules-based order that can limit the competition between states. Playing defense, the United States and its partners need to take steps to maintain their leverage in key areas of international trade while disentangling themselves entirely from supply chains that create unacceptable vulnerabilities to China (such as the production of critical medical supplies) and diversifying away from those for which the danger is less serious. Not all risks are equally significant, however, and the United States and its democratic allies are open societies that still stand to gain from economic, scientific, and people-to-people exchanges with countries around the world, including China, even as they do more to guard against coercion and espionage from foreign rivals.

The United States and China also have important shared interests and should strive to prevent the worst outcomes of their competition. Both countries must confront profound challenges such as climate change, pandemic disease, and nuclear proliferation, which cannot be met without coordination and joint action. U.S. and Chinese leaders should also work to head off foreseeable disasters, such as the looming risk of cyberwar and the prospect of a conflict in the contested South China Sea. In these most volatile and dangerous areas, they should negotiate redlines and effective mechanisms for crisis management and de-escalation. By working with China on these issues when necessary, even in the context of an intensely competitive relationship, the United States would show Beijing that it does not fear or seek to contain a prosperous China that takes on a major global role and plays by the rules. Over time, such steps could also eventually create space for China's leaders to decide that addressing these urgent shared problems is more important than believing their own paranoid visions of the United States.

But all these efforts will pay off fully only if the United States can demonstrate how mistaken the CCP is about the notion of inexorable U.S. decline. Achieving clarity about the task ahead would itself be a reason for optimism. The Chinese leadership's dark view of the prospects for the United States is wrong. The United States is not trapped by old ways of addressing problems or borne along by historical forces beyond its power to shape. Much of what the United States must do to compete effectively with China is within its control—and there is still time to act. 🌐

Rogue Superpower

Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century

Michael Beckley

President Donald Trump came into office promising to overhaul U.S. foreign policy. Since then, he has scorned allies, withdrawn the United States from international agreements, and slapped tariffs on friends and foes alike. Many experts bemoan the damage Trump’s “America first” policy has done to the so-called liberal international order—the set of institutions and norms that have governed world politics since the end of World War II. They hope that once Trump has left the Oval Office, the United States will resume its role as leader of a liberalizing world.

Don’t count on it. The era of liberal U.S. hegemony is an artifact of the Cold War’s immediate afterglow. Trump’s transactional approach to foreign policy, by contrast, has been the norm for most of U.S. history. As a result, Trump’s imprint could endure long after Trump himself is gone.

Trump’s approach already appeals to many Americans today. That appeal will grow even stronger in the years ahead as two global trends—rapid population aging and the rise of automation—accelerate, remaking international power dynamics in ways that favor the United States. By 2040, the United States will be the only country with a large, growing market and the fiscal capacity to sustain a global military presence. Meanwhile, new technologies will reduce U.S. dependence on foreign labor and resources and will equip the U.S. military with new tools to contain the territorial expansion of the country’s great-power rivals. As long as the United States does not squander those advantages, it will remain the world’s dominant economic and military power.

MICHAEL BECKLEY is Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University, Jeane Kirkpatrick Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and the author of *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World’s Sole Superpower*.

Remaining the most powerful country, however, is not the same thing as remaining the guarantor of a liberal international order. Somewhat paradoxically, the same trends that will reinforce U.S. economic and military might will also make it harder to play that role—and make Trump’s approach more attractive. Since the end of World War II, the United States has seen itself as the chief defender of a democratic capitalist way of life and the champion of a rules-based international system built on liberal values. Washington has provided dozens of countries with military protection, secure shipping routes, and easy access to U.S. dollars and markets. In exchange, those countries have offered their loyalty and, in many cases, have liberalized their own economies and governments.

In the coming decades, however, rapid population aging and the rise of automation will dampen faith in democratic capitalism and fracture the so-called free world at its core. The burdens of caring for older populations and the job losses resulting from new technologies will spur competition for resources and markets. Aging and automation will also lay bare the flaws of the international institutions that governments rely on to tackle common problems, and Americans will feel less dependent on foreign partners than they have in generations. In response, the United States might become a rogue superpower. Like the twentieth century, the twenty-first century will be dominated by the United States. But whereas the previous “American century” was built on a liberal vision of the U.S. role in the world, what we might be witnessing today is the dawn of an illiberal American century.

AMERICA THE ALOOF

Trump’s “America first” approach to foreign policy has deep roots in U.S. history. Before 1945, the United States defined its interests narrowly, mostly in terms of money and physical security, and pursued them aggressively, with little regard for the effects on the rest of the world. It espoused liberal values such as freedom and liberty but applied them selectively, both at home and abroad. It formed no alliances besides the one it signed with France during the Revolutionary War. Its tariffs ranked among the highest in the world. It shunned international institutions. The United States was not isolationist; in fact, its rampant territorial expansion inspired the envy of Adolf Hitler. But it was often aloof.



Senior moment: at an elder-care center in Shanghai, China, April 2012

The United States could afford to pursue its goals alone because it, unlike other powerful countries, was self-sufficient. By the 1880s, the United States was the world's richest country, largest consumer market, and leading manufacturer and energy producer, with vast natural resources and no major threats. With so much going for it at home, the United States had little interest in forging alliances abroad.

That changed during the Cold War, when the Soviet military occupied large swaths of Eurasia and communism attracted hundreds of millions of followers worldwide. By the early 1950s, Moscow had twice the military might of continental Western Europe, and communists ruled over 35 percent of the world's industrial resources. The United States needed strong partners to contain these threats, so it bankrolled an alliance, providing dozens of countries with security guarantees and easy access to American markets.

But when the Cold War ended, Americans increasingly did not see the point of U.S. global leadership and became ever more wary of overseas entanglements. In the decades that followed, U.S. presidents often took office having pledged to do less abroad and more at home. Despite such promises, the post-Cold War era saw Washington launch numerous military interventions (in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya) and wit-

nessed the further expansion of the U.S.-led liberal order, as China joined the World Trade Organization, the European Union solidified, NATO expanded, and the global economy relied ever more on U.S. institutions.

That trend is one reason why many American elites, who mostly welcomed the spread of U.S. liberal hegemony, were shocked by Trump's election on an "America first" platform. It would be comforting to blame the country's current nationalist posture on Trump alone, but Americans' support for the postwar liberal order has been shaky for decades. Surveys now show that more than 60 percent of Americans want the United States simply to look after itself. When pollsters ask Americans what ought to be the priorities of U.S. foreign policy, few cite promoting democracy, trade, and human rights—the core activities of liberal international leadership. Instead, they point to preventing terrorist attacks, protecting U.S. jobs, and reducing illegal immigration. Roughly half of those surveyed say they oppose sending U.S. troops to defend allies under attack, and nearly 80 percent favor the use of tariffs to prevent job losses from trade. Trump's approach is no aberration; it taps into a current that has always run through American political culture.

AN AGING WORLD

In the years ahead, Americans' support for the liberal order may decline further still thanks to demographic and technological changes that will increase the United States' economic and military lead and make the country less dependent on others. First, most countries' populations are growing older, many at extremely fast rates. By 2070, the median age of the world's population will have doubled compared with 100 years earlier, from 20 years old to 40 years old, and the share of people aged 65 and older in the global population will have nearly quadrupled, from five percent to 19 percent. For millennia, young people have vastly outnumbered the elderly. But in 2018, for the first time ever, there were more people over the age of 64 than under six.

The United States will soon be the only country with a large, growing market. Among the world's 20 largest economies, only Australia, Canada, and the United States will have growing populations of adults aged 20 to 49 throughout the next 50 years. The other large economies will suffer, on average, a 16 percent decline in that critical age group, with most of the demographic decline concentrated among the world's most powerful economic players. China, for example, will lose 225 million young workers and consumers aged 20 to 49, a whopping

36 percent of its current total. Japan's population of 20- to 49-year-olds will shrink by 42 percent, Russia's by 23 percent, and Germany's by 17 percent. India's will grow until 2040 and then decline rapidly. Meanwhile, the United States' will expand by ten percent. The American market is already as large as that of the next five countries combined, and the United States depends less on foreign trade and investment than almost any other country. As other major economies shrivel, the United States will become even more central to global growth and even less reliant on international commerce.

The United States will also have less need for staunch allies, because rapid aging will hobble the military expansion of its great-power adversaries. By 2050, Russia's spending on pensions and medical care for the elderly will increase by nearly 50 percent as a share of its GDP, and China's will nearly triple, whereas in the United States, such spending will increase by only 35 percent. Russia and China will soon face severe choices between buying guns for their militaries and buying canes for their ballooning elderly populations, and history suggests they will prioritize the latter to prevent domestic unrest. Even if Russia and China do not cut their military spending, they will struggle to modernize their militaries because of the rapid aging of their troops. Personnel costs already consume 46 percent of Russia's military budget (compared with 25 percent of the U.S. military budget) and likely will exceed 50 percent this decade as a wave of older troops retire and draw pensions. China's personnel costs are officially listed at 31 percent of its military budget, but independent estimates suggest they consume nearly half of China's defense spending and will rise in the years ahead.

AUTOMATION ADVANTAGE

Rapid aging around the world will accelerate the United States' economic and military lead over its great-power rivals and will take place alongside a similarly advantageous trend: the growth of automation. Machines are becoming exponentially faster, smaller, and cheaper. Even more important, they are developing the ability to adapt to new information—a process sometimes called “machine learning,” a type of artificial intelligence. As a result, new machines combine the number-crunching capabilities of computers, the brute strength of industrial machinery, and some of the intuition, situational awareness, and dexterity that were previously the preserve of humans. Thanks to these innovations, nearly half of the jobs in today's economy could be automated by the 2030s.

Like global aging, the widespread adoption of smart machines will reduce the United States' economic dependence on other countries. The United States already enjoys a substantial lead in the industries driving the automation trend. For instance, it has nearly five times as many artificial intelligence companies and experts as China, the second-place country, and its shares of the world's artificial intelligence software and hardware markets are several times as large as China's. U.S. firms can leverage this technological lead by using advanced automation to replace sprawling global supply chains with vertically integrated factories in the United States. Service industries will follow suit as artificial intelligence takes over more tasks. Call centers, for example, are already moving from foreign countries to the United States. For decades, the United States has chased cheap labor and resources abroad. Now those days look to be numbered, as automation allows the United States to rely more on itself.

The rise of smart machines will also help Washington contain the military rise of its rivals. Instead of waiting for crises to break out, the United States will be able to preposition armed drones and missile launchers in potential conflict zones. These drones and missiles will act as high-tech minefields, capable of annihilating enemy invasion forces. They are also difficult to eliminate and cheap to purchase. For the price of one aircraft carrier, for example, the United States could buy 6,500 XQ-58A stealth drones or 8,500 loitering cruise missiles. By deploying such weapons, the United States will be able to capitalize on a fundamental asymmetry in war aims: whereas U.S. rivals such as China and Russia need to seize and control territory (Taiwan, the Baltics) to achieve their goal of regional hegemony, the United States needs only to deny them that control, a mission that networks of smart drones and missiles are well suited to perform.

THE SAGGING LIBERAL ORDER

Aging and automation will likely make the United States stronger—but they are unlikely to shore up the sagging U.S.-led liberal order. In liberal democracies across the world, public support for that order has long rested on rising incomes for the working class, which in turn were largely the result of growing populations and job-creating technologies. The postwar baby boom produced scores of young workers and consumers, and the assembly line provided them with stable jobs. But today, populations across the democratic world are aging and shrinking, and machines are eliminating jobs. The basic bargain—work hard, support the liberal

system, and trust that a rising economic tide will lift all boats—has broken down. Nationalism and xenophobia are filling the void.

The outlook is more dire than many people realize. Over the next 30 years, the working-age populations of the United States' democratic allies will shrink by 12 percent, on average, making sustained economic growth almost impossible. Meanwhile, the senior populations of these countries will expand by 57 percent, on average, and their average spending on pensions and health care will double as a share of GDP. These countries will not be able to borrow their way out of the resulting fiscal mess, because they already carried debts equal to 270 percent of GDP, on average,

Rapid automation will intensify the economic turmoil.

before the COVID-19 pandemic plunged their balance sheets further into the red. Instead, they will have to cut entitlements for the elderly, slash social spending for the young, raise taxes, or increase immigration—all of which would likely produce political backlashes.

Rapid automation will intensify the economic turmoil. History has shown that technological revolutions create prosperity in the long run but force some workers into lower-wage jobs or unemployment in the short run—and the short run can last generations. For the first 70 years of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, from 1770 to 1840, average wages stagnated and living standards declined, even as output per worker grew by nearly 50 percent. The gains from mass mechanization during this time were captured by tycoons, whose profit rates doubled. Across the developed world today, machines are once again eliminating jobs faster than displaced workers can retrain for new ones, wages for low- and middle-skill workers are stagnating, and millions of people—especially men without college degrees—are dropping out of the workforce. Many economists expect these trends to persist for several decades as labor-replacing technologies currently in development—such as robotic cars, stores, warehouses, and kitchens—are widely adopted.

Sluggish growth, enormous debts, stagnant wages, chronic unemployment, and extreme inequality are bound to breed nationalism and extremism. In the 1930s, economic frustrations caused many people to reject democracy and international cooperation and to embrace fascism or communism. Today, ultranationalists are ascendant across the democratic world—and not just in fledgling democracies in eastern Europe. In Germany, for example, a right-wing nationalist party, Al-

ternative for Germany, now holds the third-largest number of seats in the parliament, and cases of neo-Nazi infiltration in the military and the police have multiplied alarmingly. The United States' task of leading the liberal world order will grow harder as nationalists gain power and raise tariffs, close borders, and abandon international institutions.

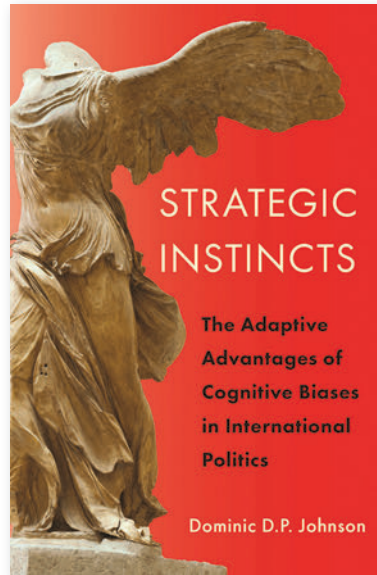
A ROGUE SUPERPOWER

Faced with flailing allies and a divided and apathetic public, the United States might start acting less like the head of a grand coalition and more like a rogue superpower—an economic and military colossus lacking moral commitments, neither isolationist nor internationalist, but aggressive, heavily armed, and entirely out for itself. In fact, under Trump, it already seems to be headed in that direction. During Trump's time in office, some U.S. security guarantees have started to look like protection rackets, with the president musing that allies should pay the costs of hosting U.S. troops plus a 50 percent premium. The Trump administration has taken to enforcing trade deals with unilateral tariffs rather than working through the World Trade Organization. Trump has largely abandoned the goal of democracy promotion and has downgraded diplomacy, gutting the State Department and handing ever more responsibility to the Pentagon. The U.S. military is changing, too. Increasingly, it is a force geared for punishment rather than protection. The Trump administration has downsized permanent U.S. deployments on allied territory, replacing them with roving expeditionary units that can steam overseas, smash targets, and then slink back over the horizon.

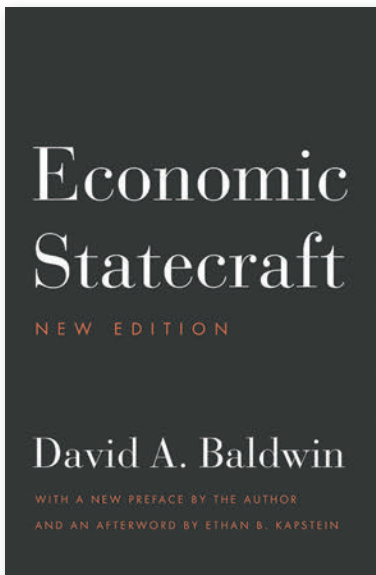
Many of Trump's critics decry these changes as not just unwise but also somehow un-American. But Trump's approach appeals to many Americans today and aligns with their preferences regarding the United States' role in the world. If these conditions persist, the best-case scenario for American leadership may involve Washington adopting a more nationalist version of liberal internationalism. The United States could retain allies but make them pay more for protection. It could sign trade agreements, but only with countries that adopt U.S. regulatory standards; participate in international institutions but threaten to leave them when they act against U.S. interests; and promote democracy and human rights, but mainly to destabilize geopolitical rivals.



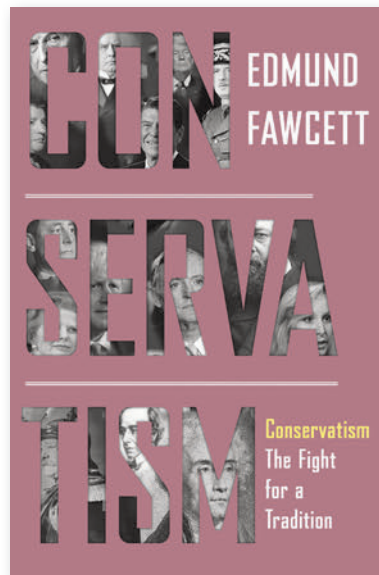
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“A companion to his well-received *Liberalism* (2014), Fawcett’s latest is as readable and comprehensive as its predecessor. . . . An immensely stimulating canter though a major segment of Western political tradition.”
 —*Kirkus*, Starred Review

Alternatively, the United States might exit the global order business altogether. Instead of trying to reassure weaker nations by supporting international rules and institutions, the United States would deploy every tool in its coercive arsenal—tariffs, financial sanctions, visa restrictions, cyber-espionage, and drone strikes—to wring the best deal possible out of both allies and adversaries. There would be no enduring partnerships based on common values—just transactions. U.S. leaders would judge other countries not by their willingness to help solve global problems or whether they were democracies or autocracies but only by their ability to create American jobs or eliminate threats to the U.S. homeland. Most countries, according to these criteria, would be irrelevant.

American commerce could steadily shift to the Western Hemisphere and especially to North America, which already accounts for a third of U.S. trade and a third of global GDP. At a time when other regions face setbacks from aging populations and rising automation, North America is the only region with all the ingredients necessary for sustained economic growth: a huge and growing market of wealthy consumers, abundant raw materials, a mix of high-skill and low-cost labor, advanced technology, and peaceful international relations.

U.S. strategic alliances, meanwhile, might still exist on paper, but most would be dead letters. Washington might retain only two sets of regular partners. The first would include Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom. These countries are strategically arrayed across the globe, and their militaries and intelligence agencies are already integrated with Washington's. All but Japan boast growing working-age populations, unlike most other U.S. allies, and thus have the potential tax bases to contribute to U.S. missions. The second group would consist of places such as the Baltic states, the Gulf Arab monarchies, and Taiwan, which share borders with or sit in close proximity to U.S. adversaries. The United States would continue to arm these partners but would no longer plan to defend them. Instead, Washington would essentially use them as buffers to check Chinese, Iranian, and Russian expansion without direct U.S. intervention.

Outside of those partnerships, all of Washington's alliances and relationships—including NATO and its connections with longtime allies such as South Korea—would be negotiable. The United States would no longer woo countries to participate in multilateral alliances.

Instead, other countries would have to bargain on a bilateral basis for U.S. protection and market access. Countries with little to offer would have to find new partners or fend for themselves.

What would happen to the world if the United States fully embraced this kind of “America first” vision? Some analysts paint catastrophic pictures. Robert Kagan foresees a return to the despotism, protectionism, and strife of the 1930s, with China and Russia reprising the roles of imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. Peter Zeihan predicts a violent scramble for security and resources, in which Russia invades its neighbors and East

*A nationalist mood
has taken hold in the
United States.*

Asia descends into naval warfare. These forecasts may be extreme, but they reflect an essential truth: the postwar order, although flawed and incomplete in many ways, has fostered the most peaceful and prosperous period in human history, and its absence would make the world a more dangerous place.

Thanks to the U.S.-led order, for decades, most countries have not had to fight for market access, guard their supply chains, or even seriously defend their borders. The U.S. Navy has kept international waterways open, the U.S. market has provided reliable consumer demand and capital for dozens of countries, and U.S. security guarantees have covered nearly 70 nations. Such assurances have benefited everyone: not just Washington’s allies and partners but also its adversaries. U.S. security guarantees had the effect of neutering Germany and Japan, the main regional rivals of Russia and China, respectively. In turn, Moscow and Beijing could focus on forging ties with the rest of the world rather than fighting their historical enemies. Without U.S. patronage and protection, countries would have to get back in the business of securing themselves and their economic lifelines.

Such a world would see the return of great-power mercantilism and new forms of imperialism. Powerful countries would once again try to reduce their economic insecurity by establishing exclusive economic zones, where their firms could enjoy cheap and secure access to raw materials and large captive consumer markets. Today, China is already starting to do this with its Belt and Road Initiative, a network of infrastructure projects around the world; its “Made in China 2025” policy, to stimulate domestic production and consumption;

and its attempts to create a closed-off, parallel Internet. If the United States follows suit, other countries will have to attach themselves to an American or a Chinese bloc—or forge blocs of their own. France might seek to restore its grip on its former African colonies. Russia might accelerate its efforts to corral former Soviet states into a regional trade union. Germany increasingly would have to look beyond Europe’s shrinking populations to find buyers for its exports—and it would have to develop the military capacity to secure those new far-flung markets and supply lines, too.

As great powers competed for economic spheres, global governance would erode. Geopolitical conflict would paralyze the UN, as was the case during the Cold War. NATO might dissolve as the United States cherry-picked partners. And the unraveling of the U.S. security blanket over Europe could mean the end of the European Union, too, which already suffers from deep divisions. The few arms control treaties that remain in force today might fall by the wayside as countries militarized to defend themselves. Efforts to combat transnational problems—such as climate change, financial crises, or pandemics—would mimic the world’s shambolic response to COVID-19, when countries hoarded supplies, the World Health Organization parroted Chinese misinformation, and the United States withdrew into itself.

The resulting disorder would jeopardize the very survival of some states. Since 1945, the number of countries in the world has tripled, from 46 to nearly 200. Most of these new states, however, are weak and lack energy, resources, food, domestic markets, advanced technology, military power, or defensible borders. According to research by the political scientist Arjun Chowdhury, two-thirds of all countries today cannot provide basic services to their people without international help. In short, most countries depend critically on the postwar order, which has offered historically unprecedented access to international aid, markets, shipping, and protection. Without such support, some countries would collapse or be conquered. Fragile, aid-dependent states such as Afghanistan, Haiti, and Liberia are only some of the most obvious high-risk cases. Less obvious ones are capable but trade-dependent countries such as Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and South Korea, whose economic systems would struggle to function in a world of closed markets and militarized sea-lanes.

A PATH FORWARD

None of these grim outcomes is inevitable. And in the long run, aging populations and automation could make the world more peaceful and prosperous than it has ever been. Ultimately, older societies tend to be less belligerent than younger ones, and technological revolutions usually boost productivity and free workers from drudgery.

But the path to an older and more automated future will be tumultuous. To keep the current liberal order together, the United States would need to take an unusually generous view of its interests. It would need to subordinate the pursuit of national wealth and power to a common aspiration for international order. It would also need to redistribute wealth domestically to maintain political support for liberal leadership abroad.

As the world enters a period of demographic and technological disruption, however, such a path will become increasingly hard to follow. As a result, there may be little hope that the United States will protect partners, patrol sea-lanes, or promote democracy and free trade while asking for little in exchange. A nationalist mood has taken hold in the United States, and for the foreseeable future, it will be the shape of things to come. It is not an anomaly produced by the Trump administration; rather, it is a deeply rooted trend that threatens the rebirth of an older approach to U.S. foreign policy—one that prevailed during the darkest decades of the past century.

The best hope for the liberal world order is that future U.S. administrations find ways to channel growing nationalist impulses in internationalist directions. The United States has occasionally undertaken liberal campaigns for selfish reasons. It opposed European colonialism in part to open markets for U.S. goods, for example, and it nurtured and protected a community of capitalist democracies to crush Soviet communism and establish its global dominance. These campaigns garnered public support because they linked liberal ideals to vital U.S. interests. A similar approach could work today.

Americans may not want to fight and die to defend their country's far-flung allies, but they do want to prevent authoritarian powers, such as China and Russia, from becoming regional hegemony. The United States could therefore replace some of its most vulnerable bases on allied territories with diffuse networks of missile launchers and drones, thereby containing Chinese and Russian expansion while reducing the number of American lives on the line. Americans would

also stand for protecting U.S. workers and businesses. Although the American public opposes trade deals that spur outsourcing, strong support exists for deals that create a level playing field for U.S. businesses. The United States could therefore use its enormous economic clout to compel trading partners to adopt American standards on labor, the environment, and intellectual property protection. Americans are unenthusiastic about promoting democracy overseas but willing to partner with allies to defend U.S. institutions from foreign meddling. Thus, the United States could forge a coalition of democracies to coordinate collective sanctions against foreign powers that interfere in democratic elections. Eventually, the coalition could become a liberal bloc that excludes countries that do not respect open commerce and freedom of expression and navigation.

Compared with leading a global liberal order, this more nationalist version of U.S. engagement may seem stingy and uninspiring. But it would be more realistic—and ultimately more effective at holding the free world together during a period of unprecedented demographic and technological change. 🌐

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A National Security Reckoning

How Washington Should Think About Power

Hillary Clinton

In a year marked by plague and protest, Americans are reckoning with long-overdue questions about racial justice, economic inequality, and disparities in health care. The current crisis should also prompt a reckoning about the United States' national security priorities. The country is dangerously unprepared for a range of threats, not just future pandemics but also an escalating climate crisis and multidimensional challenges from China and Russia. Its industrial and technological strength has atrophied, its vital supply chains are vulnerable, its alliances are frayed, and its government is hollowed out. In the past, it sometimes has taken a dramatic shock—Pearl Harbor, Sputnik, 9/11—to wake up the United States to a new threat and prompt a major pivot. The COVID-19 crisis should be a big enough jolt to rouse the country from its sleep, so that it can summon its strength and meet the challenges ahead.

Among the highest priorities must be to modernize the United States' defense capabilities—in particular, moving away from costly legacy weapons systems built for a world that no longer exists. Another is to renew the domestic foundations of its national power—supporting American innovation and bolstering strategically important industries and supply chains. These twin projects are mutually reinforcing. Modernizing the military would free up billions of dollars that could be invested at home in advanced manufacturing and R & D. That would not only help the United States compete with its rivals

HILLARY CLINTON was U.S. Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013 and the Democratic Party's presidential nominee in 2016.

and prepare for nontraditional threats such as climate change and future pandemics; it would also blunt some of the economic pain caused by budget cuts at the Pentagon. Integrating foreign and domestic policy in this way would make both more effective. And it would help the United States regain its footing in an uncertain world.

SHORTSIGHTED

For decades, policymakers have thought too narrowly about national security and failed to internalize—or fund—a broader approach that encompasses threats not just from intercontinental ballistic missiles and insurgencies but also from cyberattacks, viruses, carbon emissions, online propaganda, and shifting supply chains. There is no more poignant example than the current administration's failure to grasp that a tourist carrying home a virus can be as dangerous as a terrorist planting a pathogen. President Barack Obama's national security staff left a 69-page playbook for responding to pandemics, but President Donald Trump's team ignored it, focusing instead on the threat of bioterrorism. They dismantled the National Security Council's pandemic directorate, folding it into the office responsible for weapons of mass destruction, and filled a national medical stockpile with drugs for anthrax and smallpox while neglecting the personal protective equipment needed for a pandemic. The Trump administration also shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development program created during my time as secretary of state to detect viral threats around the world, and it has repeatedly tried to slash funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The costs of this misjudgment have been astronomical.

The Trump administration has taken a similarly misguided approach to other nontraditional threats. It omitted any reference to climate change in its 2017 National Security Strategy and attempted to block Rod Schoonover, a senior intelligence official, from briefing Congress about it. The administration also deprioritized cyberespionage in its trade negotiations with China and failed to confront Russia over its interference in U.S. elections. Unsurprisingly, both countries are at it again.

The problem runs much deeper than Trump, however. Administrations of both parties have long underappreciated the security implications of economic policies that weakened strategically important industries and sent vital supply chains overseas. The foreign policy community understandably focused on how new trade agreements would

cement alliances and extend American influence in developing countries. Democrats should have been more willing to hit the brakes on new trade agreements when Republicans obstructed efforts to support workers, create jobs, and invest in hard-hit communities at home. When Republicans failed to use trade-enforcement tools to protect American workers—such as the safeguards against unfair surges of Chinese imports that my husband, President Bill Clinton, negotiated but the Bush administration refused to invoke even a single time—and blocked domestic investments in basic research, infrastructure, and clean energy, Democrats should have more forcefully called their intransigence what it was: not just bad economic policy but a national security liability.

Myopia about national security also manifests in the simplistic frames applied to complex challenges, such as insisting on seeing competition with China through the lens of the Cold War. In a speech in July, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo offered this pearl of wisdom: “I grew up and served my time in the army during the Cold War. And if there is one thing I learned, Communists almost always lie.” That’s a remarkably unhelpful way of approaching the challenge. Huffing and puffing about Communists may rile up the Fox News audience, but it obscures the fact that China—along with Russia—poses an altogether different threat from the one the Soviet Union did. Today’s competition is not a traditional global military contest of force and firepower. Dusting off the Cold War playbook will do little to prepare the United States for adversaries that use new tools to fight in the gray zone between war and peace, exploit its open Internet and economy to undermine American democracy, and expose the vulnerability of many of its legacy weapons systems. Nor will such an anachronistic approach build the global cooperation needed to take on shared challenges such as climate change and pandemics.

Meanwhile, the United States’ deep domestic fractures have hamstrung its ability to protect itself and its allies. Consider what happened after the Obama administration painstakingly built an international coalition to force Iran to the negotiating table, including winning the reluctant participation of China and Russia, and then secured a historic agreement to stop Iran’s nuclear program. Trump abruptly renounced the agreement. Now, predictably, Iranian centrifuges are spinning, Tehran is exploring a new alliance with Beijing, and the international sanctions regime is shattered. It’s a frustrating, self-inflicted wound and a reminder of the costs of inconstancy.



Clinton with U.S. soldiers in Kabul, Afghanistan, November 2009

The problem is not always too much change; in some areas, it's too little. The overmilitarization of U.S. foreign policy is a bad habit that goes all the way back to the days when President Dwight Eisenhower warned of "the military-industrial complex." Many generals understand what James Mattis told Congress when he led U.S. Central Command: "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately." But many politicians are too afraid of being attacked as soft on defense to listen. So they pile mission after mission on the Pentagon and authorize ballooning military budgets while starving civilian agencies. And, it's important to emphasize, for decades, right-wing ideological resistance has blocked crucial investments in American diplomacy and development abroad and American innovation at home—from foreign aid budgets to domestic infrastructure and R & D spending.

THE OBSTACLES TO MODERNIZATION

Like the broader government, the military itself can be slow to adapt to new threats. After the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, there were fatal delays in getting up-armored Humvees and lifesaving

body armor to troops in the field. Now, the Pentagon is again at risk of being caught unprepared for the very different demands of competing with China. I saw how hard it can be to move a bureaucracy as sprawling as the Pentagon when, in 2004, I was asked to be the only U.S. senator on the Joint Forces Command's Transformation Advisory Group, which was charged with helping the military re-imagine itself for the twenty-first century. The Defense Department had assembled an impressive team of military and civilian experts from a range of disciplines and told them to think as big and boldly as possible, yet our efforts to recommend reforms ran into some of the same obstacles that remain today. Powerful players in the Pentagon, Congress, and the private sector have built careers—and, in some cases, fortunes—doing things a certain way. They have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

To be sure, when lives are on the line, it can be more prudent to rely on proven practices than untested innovations. And decisions about military posture and procurement have profound economic and political implications that should not be overlooked. As a senator, I represented many New York communities dependent on defense jobs, and I did everything I could to keep bases open and factories humming, whether it was funding the production of new howitzer tubes at the Watervliet Arsenal and the development of advanced radar systems on Long Island or bolstering the 10th Mountain Division at Fort Drum. I knew how much the jobs meant for my constituents, and I was convinced that each of the appropriations had national security merit. Yet multiply that dynamic across 50 states and 435 congressional districts, and it becomes clear why it's so hard to retire aging weapons systems or close bases that have outlived their usefulness.

Today, the poster child for this political reality is the F-35 fighter. Development of the plane ran way behind schedule and over budget, and it is estimated to cost \$1 trillion over its lifespan, yet it is considered untouchable. The air force sank so much time and money into the project that turning back became unthinkable, especially since the F-35 is the only fifth-generation aircraft currently being manufactured in the United States. And because the plane directly and indirectly supports hundreds of thousands of jobs across hundreds of congressional districts in nearly every state, it has legions of defenders in Congress.

A SMARTER DEFENSE BUDGET

These obstacles to reforming the military are not new, but they are newly urgent. The Pentagon must adapt to a strategic landscape far different from the one it faced during the Cold War or the war on terrorism. New technologies such as artificial intelligence are rendering old systems obsolete and creating opportunities that no country has yet mastered but many are seeking. Then there are the particularly thorny challenges in East Asia. While the American military was fighting costly land wars in the Middle East, China was investing in relatively cheap anti-access/area-denial weapons, such as antiship ballistic missiles, which pose credible threats to the United States' expensive aircraft carriers.

No one should make the mistake of believing that the People's Liberation Army is ten feet tall or that the competition with China is primarily a military contest. China has relied on financial coercion and economic statecraft to gain influence as it builds infrastructure around the world. In recent years, while the Trump administration was gutting the State Department and undermining U.S. alliances in Asia and Europe, China was doubling its diplomacy budget and pouring untold billions into developing countries, now outstripping American aid. China today has more diplomatic posts around the world than the United States does.

That said, the military challenge from China is real. The United States should not be lulled into a false sense of security by its continuing firepower advantage or the fact that its defense budget remains orders of magnitude larger than Beijing's. China's advances mean that the United States' air and sea superiority in the region is no longer ensured. This isn't competition from a military equal but a new kind of asymmetric threat. Americans learned in the sands of Afghanistan and Iraq that asymmetry can be deadly, and the same is true in the skies and seas of East Asia. To make matters worse, the United States must meet this challenge with a military that has been damaged by Trump's mismanagement. He has degraded civilian oversight of the Pentagon by leaving scores of key posts vacant. At the same time, he has attempted to turn the military into part of his political machine—pardoning war criminals over the objections of military leaders and deploying National Guard troops in Lafayette Square so that he could stage a photo op.

Modernizing and refocusing the military will take both vision and backbone. A big part of the effort will have to involve overhauling the

defense budget. Deep savings—potentially hundreds of billions of dollars over the next decade—can and should be found by retiring legacy weapons systems. But choices about where to cut and where to spend must be driven by a clear-eyed analysis of national security needs, not politics. The United States can't afford to repeat the mistakes of the 2013 budget sequestration, when Congress forced the Pentagon to slash

There is a growing consensus among economists that Washington need not be paralyzed by fears of debt.

budgets indiscriminately, with no overarching strategy. This work is going to require a president and a secretary of defense who are rigorous in their analysis and comfortable consulting with Congress and the military brass but prepared to make difficult decisions about which missions to prioritize and which to de-emphasize or eliminate. To

insulate these decisions from political pressure, Congress should agree to take an up-or-down vote on a comprehensive package of defense reforms—a process that has been used in the past for closing military bases—rather than haggling over each adjustment.

Changes to the budget should aim to prepare the United States for asymmetric conflict with technologically advanced adversaries. For example, aircraft carriers still play an important role in U.S. power projection around the world but are vulnerable to Chinese antiship missiles, which cost a fraction of the price. In addition, only a handful of the U.S. Navy's 11 aircraft carriers are usually operational and at sea at any given time, with onerous maintenance keeping others in port. Instead of continuing to expand the fleet of vulnerable surface ships, the navy should invest in accelerated maintenance and next-generation submarines. Similarly, as anti-access/area-denial weapons force U.S. aircraft carriers and guided-missile cruisers to stay farther away from potential targets, the U.S. Air Force will have to focus less on short-range tactical fighter planes and more on long-range capabilities. That means it won't need nearly as many F-35s as planned, but it should welcome the arrival of the B-21 Raider, a long-range bomber under development that is designed to thwart advanced air defenses. These capabilities must be accompanied by mechanisms that allow for consultation with China and Russia to reduce the chances that a long-range conventional attack is mistaken for a nuclear strike, which could lead to disastrous escalation.

As the United States leaves behind a period dominated by land wars and looks ahead to potential air, sea, and space conflicts, the army should accept the risks that come with a smaller active-duty ground force. A force with fewer soldiers and heavy tanks would match the strategic moment and cost far less. Maintaining fewer active-component armored brigade combat teams, for example, could save tens of billions of dollars over the next decade. Instead of heavy tanks, the military should be investing in tools that will give troops an edge in the conflicts of the future, including upgraded communications and intelligence systems.

Perhaps most important, the United States needs a new approach to nuclear weapons. For starters, it should not be deploying low-yield nuclear warheads on submarines or nuclear-armed cruise missiles, which expand the range of scenarios for the use of nuclear weapons and increase the risk of a misunderstanding escalating quickly into a full-blown nuclear exchange. Nor should the United States spend \$1 trillion over the next 30 years on its nuclear arsenal, as is currently planned. Instead, it should significantly reduce its reliance on old intercontinental ballistic missiles, pursue a “newer and fewer” approach to modernization, and revive the arms control diplomacy that the Trump administration scrapped. A top priority should be to extend the New START treaty with Russia, which Ellen Tauscher, the State Department’s top arms control official, and I helped negotiate at the beginning of the Obama administration. It will also be important to persuade China to join nuclear negotiations.

A renewed commitment to diplomacy would strengthen the United States’ military position. U.S. alliances are an asset that neither China nor Russia can match, allowing Washington to project force around the world. When I was secretary of state, for example, we secured an agreement to base 2,500 U.S. marines in northern Australia, near the contested sea-lanes of the South China Sea. Yet Trump treats the U.S. alliance system as nothing more than a protection racket—for example, warning NATO partners that they must “either pay the United States for its great military protection, or protect themselves.” Although it’s appropriate to emphasize the need for burden sharing, it is more constructive to think of a division of labor. As the United States focuses on modernizing its air and sea capabilities, it will make sense for other NATO members to concentrate on strengthening their conventional ground forces so that they can deter incursions in eastern Europe or lead counterterrorism missions in Africa.

REBUILDING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

That is how the United States should modernize its approach to defense—one of the three Ds, along with diplomacy and development, that for more than a decade I have said should be integrated as part of a “smart power” strategy. Now, it’s time to add a fourth D: domestic renewal, the rebuilding of the country’s industrial and technological strength.

The United States’ dwindling industrial capacity and inadequate investment in scientific research leave the country dangerously dependent on China and unprepared for future crises. The problem goes back decades. When the USS *Cole* was bombed in 2000, I was shocked to learn that there was only one American company left that manufactured the specialized steel needed to repair the ship’s hull. Twenty years later, the pandemic has underscored how much the United States relies on China and other countries for vital imports—not just lifesaving medical supplies but also raw materials such as rare-earth minerals and electronic equipment that powers everything from telecommunications to weapons systems.

The United States should pursue a plan like the one proposed by former Vice President Joe Biden to invest \$700 billion in innovation and manufacturing and impose stronger “Buy American” provisions, with the goal of jump-starting domestic production in key sectors—from steel to robotics to biotechnology—reshoring sensitive supply chains, and expanding strategic stockpiles of essential goods. It’s time for ambitious industrial policies. China does whatever it can to gain an advantage, including conducting industrial espionage on a massive scale, pursuing a range of unfair trade practices, and providing virtually unlimited resources to state-owned and state-backed enterprises. The United States doesn’t need to cheat or steal, but it can’t afford to compete with one hand tied behind its back.

Although it is a mistake to use national security as a catchall justification for blanket protectionist trade policies, as Trump has done, policymakers should widen the range of industries and resources deemed vital to it. It’s not enough anymore to prioritize materials and technologies used for weapons systems and semiconductors; the United States’ security also depends on the control of pharmaceuticals, clean energy, 5G networks, and artificial intelligence. That’s one reason it’s crucial to reverse the long-term decline in the federal share of spending on R & D. Another reason is that investments in basic

science and medical research can yield huge economic gains: economists at MIT have estimated that increasing federal funding for research in the United States by 0.5 percent of GDP, or about \$100 billion per year, would create some four million jobs.

Massive new investments in advanced manufacturing and R & D will be expensive, but they are necessary for the United States' long-term economic and security interests and will pay off for years to come. Critics will no doubt warn that running up the national debt is itself a national security risk. But at a time of historically low real interest rates and historically high unemployment, the country should not shy away from bold investments. There is a growing consensus among economists that Washington need not be paralyzed by fears of debt and that it can afford to spend heavily on critical national investments that bring high returns, especially during a crisis. Indeed, what the United States cannot afford is to defer these investments any longer.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

These two agendas—military modernization and domestic renewal—should be integrated. Moving away from outdated weapons systems will cause economic disruption and real hardship. That's why it should be done in tandem with targeted investments in economically struggling communities, bringing advanced manufacturing and R & D to the places most affected by defense cuts. In fact, as a study by economists at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has found, \$1 billion spent on clean energy, health care, or education creates, on average, far more jobs than the same amount of military spending.

I'm not suggesting telling laid-off factory workers to reinvent themselves as coders; that's fanciful and condescending. Previous pledges to support workers who lost their jobs because of defense cuts or trade policies have often fallen abysmally short. But the U.S. government can do more to help displaced workers and those leaving the military transition to the millions of new jobs that could be created through major new domestic investments. In 2008, when the U.S. Air Force retired the F-16s based at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base, in Syracuse, New York, I helped secure funding to turn the base into one of the military's first major drone bases, saving hundreds of jobs. American history is full of examples of factories, communities, and entire industries pivoting when they had to. Dur-

ing World War II, the auto industry shifted gears with incredible speed to make tanks and bombers. At the beginning of the pandemic, it shifted swiftly again, to produce desperately needed ventilators and personal protective equipment. With the right long-term investments, communities can reinvent themselves successfully. Pittsburgh, once a center of steel production, has become a hub for health care, robotics, and research on autonomous vehicles.

Many legacy weapons systems are built or based in communities with skilled workforces that can and should be the backbone of the country's renewed self-sufficiency. Think of Syracuse, which has long been a center of defense manufacturing, a bright spot in an otherwise difficult economic picture. In 2017, the Brookings Institution ranked Syracuse dead last for economic growth out of 100 U.S. metro areas, so it could ill afford to lose any of the defense jobs keeping the region afloat. Yet a 2019 ranking by a pair of MIT economists put the city as the third most promising technology hub in the country, thanks to its skilled workers and low cost of living. It's exactly the kind of place where significant public investments in advanced manufacturing, clean energy, and R & D could create good jobs and help the United States outcompete China.

So is Lima, Ohio. Hundreds of people work at the city's Abrams tank factory. Even though General Ray Odierno, then chief of staff of the U.S. Army, told legislators in 2012, "We don't need the tanks," Congress kept the factory open. It's true that the plant's workers and their community have devoted themselves to protecting the United States, and the country absolutely must keep faith with them. It's also true that the military still doesn't need the tanks. But if the United States is to get serious about climate change, what it does need are more factories to churn out clean electric vehicles. The Pentagon alone should replace most of its fleet of 200,000 nontactical vehicles with electric. Some of those new vehicles could be built in Lima, which is already home to a large Ford engine factory. And that's just one possibility. If Washington decides to boost domestic production of next-generation electric batteries, wind turbines, and other strategically significant products, Northwest Ohio is a natural place to do it.

No one should pretend that every defense job can be saved or replaced. Cutting hundreds of billions of dollars in military spending over the next decade will inevitably inflict a painful toll on families and communities across the country. But if the government can pair

these cuts with major new investments in affected communities, it can minimize the economic damage and maximize the United States' ability to compete with China and prepare for future challenges.

All of this requires leadership from the top. Having a commander in chief with no experience—and no empathy or vision—has been a disaster. But it's hard to imagine a man better suited to lead the work ahead than Biden, a former chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who has deep expertise in national security policy, a military father who knows how much the country owes its men and women in uniform and their families, and a champion of working people who fought to save the auto industry when others would have let it go bankrupt.

In the throes of a crisis as dire as any the United States has seen in many decades, it can be difficult to imagine what the world will look like in four months, let alone four years. But the country needs to be thinking now about the threats it will face in a post-pandemic future, as well as the opportunities it must seize. As former Secretary of State Dean Acheson recounted in his memoirs, when George Marshall led the State Department, he urged his team to look ahead, “not into the distant future, but beyond the vision of the operating officers caught in the smoke and crises of current battle; far enough ahead to see the emerging form of things to come.” The United States should endeavor to do the same today. To look beyond the current battle and prepare to lead the post-COVID world, it must broaden its approach to national security and renew the foundations of its national power. 🌐

The Transformation of Diplomacy

How to Save the State Department

*William J. Burns and
Linda Thomas-Greenfield*

We joined the U.S. Foreign Service nearly 40 years ago in the same entering class, but we took very different paths to get there. One of us grew up amid hardship and segregation in the Deep South, the first in her family to graduate from high school, a Black woman joining a profession that was still very male and very pale. The other was the product of an itinerant military childhood that took his family from one end of the United States to the other, with a dozen moves and three high schools by the time he was 17.

There were 32 of us in the Foreign Service's class of January 1982. It was an eclectic group that included former Peace Corps volunteers, military veterans, a failed rock musician, and an ex-Catholic priest. None of us retained much from the procession of enervating speakers describing their particular islands in the great archipelago of U.S. foreign policy. What we did learn early on, and what stayed true throughout our careers, is that smart and sustained investment in people is the key to good diplomacy. Well-intentioned reform efforts over the years were crippled by faddishness, budgetary pressures, the overmilitarization of foreign policy, the State Department's lumbering bureaucracy, a fixation on structure, and—most of all—inattention to people.

WILLIAM J. BURNS is President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was U.S. Deputy Secretary of State from 2011 to 2014.

LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD is Senior Vice President at the Albright Stonebridge Group. She was U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs from 2013 to 2017.

They served as Co-Chairs of the Council on Foreign Relations Study Group on Revitalizing the State Department and American Diplomacy.

The Trump administration also learned early on that people matter, and so it made them the primary target of what the White House aide Steve Bannon termed “the deconstruction of the administrative state.” That is what has made the administration’s demolition of the State Department and so many other government institutions so effective and ruinous. Tapping into popular distrust of expertise and public institutions, President Donald Trump has made career public servants—government meteorologists, public health specialists, law enforcement professionals, career diplomats—convenient targets in the culture wars. Taking aim at an imaginary “deep state,” he has instead created a weak state, an existential threat to the country’s democracy and the interests of its citizens.

The wreckage at the State Department runs deep. Career diplomats have been systematically sidelined and excluded from senior Washington jobs on an unprecedented scale. The picture overseas is just as grim, with the record quantity of political appointees serving as ambassadors matched by their often dismal quality. The most recent ambassador in Berlin, Richard Grenell, seemed intent on antagonizing as many Germans as he could—not only with ornery lectures but also through his support for far-right political parties. The ambassador in Budapest, David Cornstein, has developed a terminal case of “clientitis,” calling Hungary’s authoritarian, civil-liberties-bashing leader “the perfect partner.” And the U.S. ambassador to Iceland, Jeffrey Ross Gunter, has churned through career deputies at a stunning pace, going through no fewer than seven in less than two years at his post.

In Washington, career public servants who worked on controversial issues during the Obama administration, such as the Iran nuclear negotiations, have been smeared and attacked, their careers derailed. Colleagues who upheld their constitutional oaths during the Ukraine impeachment saga were maligned and abandoned by their own leadership. In May, the State Department’s independent inspector general, Steve Linick, was fired after doing what his job required him to do: opening an investigation into Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s alleged personal use of government resources. Battered and belittled, too many career officials have been tempted to go along to get along. That undercuts not only morale but also a policy process that depends on apolitical experts airing contrary views, however inconvenient they may be to the politically appointed leadership.

Not surprisingly, the Foreign Service has experienced the biggest drop in applications in more than a decade. Painfully slow progress on recruiting a more diverse workforce has slid into reverse. It is a depressing fact that today only four of the 189 U.S. ambassadors abroad are Black—hardly a convincing recruiting pitch for woefully underrepresented communities.

No amount of empty rhetoric about ethos and swagger can conceal the institutional damage. After four years of relentless attacks by the Trump administration and decades of neglect, political paralysis, and organizational drift, U.S. diplomacy is badly broken. But it is not beyond repair, at least not yet. What is needed now is a great renewal of diplomatic capacity, an effort that balances ambition with the limits of the possible at a moment of growing difficulties at home and abroad. The aim should be not to restore the power and purpose of U.S. diplomacy as it once was but to reinvent it for a new era. Accomplishing that transformation demands a focused, disciplined reform effort—one that is rooted in the people who animate U.S. diplomacy.

REFORM AND RENEWAL

The State Department is capable of reform. The challenge has always been to link that reform to wise statecraft and adequate funding. After 9/11, with uncommon speed and few additional resources, the department managed to retrofit itself to help prosecute the war on terrorism and take on the new imperatives of stabilization and reconstruction in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with smaller but still complex missions from sub-Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia. New training and incentives were put into play, and a generation of career Foreign Service officers was shaped by tours in conflict zones. Diplomats quickly became secondary players to the military, preoccupied with the kind of nation-building activities that were beyond the capacity of Americans to accomplish. It was easy to lose sight of the distinctive role of the U.S. Foreign Service—the classic, head-banging work of persuading senior national leaders to bridge sectarian divides and pursue a more inclusive political order while standing up for human rights.

Although the transformation of the State Department into a more expeditionary and agile institution was healthy in many respects, it was also distorting. It was tethered to a fundamentally flawed strategy—one that was too narrowly focused on terrorism and too wrapped up in magical thinking about the United States' supposed power to transform



Fortress America: guarding the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, January 2020

regions and societies. It paid too little attention to a rapidly changing international landscape in which geopolitical competition with a rising China and a resurgent Russia was accelerating and mammoth global challenges, such as climate change, were looming. It also neglected what was happening at home—the powerful storms of globalization that had left many communities and parts of the economy underwater and would soon overwhelm the United States’ political levees.

The contours of a new agenda for diplomatic reform have to flow from a sensible reinvention of the United States’ role in the world. The restoration of American hegemony is not in the cards, given China’s rise and the diffusion of global power. Retrenchment is similarly illusory, since the United States cannot insulate itself from outside challenges that matter enormously to its domestic health and security.

Instead, U.S. diplomacy has to accept the country’s diminished, but still pivotal, role in global affairs. It has to apply greater restraint and discipline; it must develop a greater awareness of the United States’ position and more humility about the wilting power of the American example. It has to reflect the overriding priority of accelerating domestic renewal and strengthening the American middle class, at a time of heightened focus on racial injustice and economic inequality. And it has to take aim at other crucial priorities. One is to

SGT. KYLE TABOT / THE NEW YORK TIMES / REDUX

mobilize coalitions to deal with transnational challenges and ensure greater resilience in American society to the inevitable shocks of climate change, cyberthreats, and pandemics. Another is to organize wisely for geopolitical competition with China.

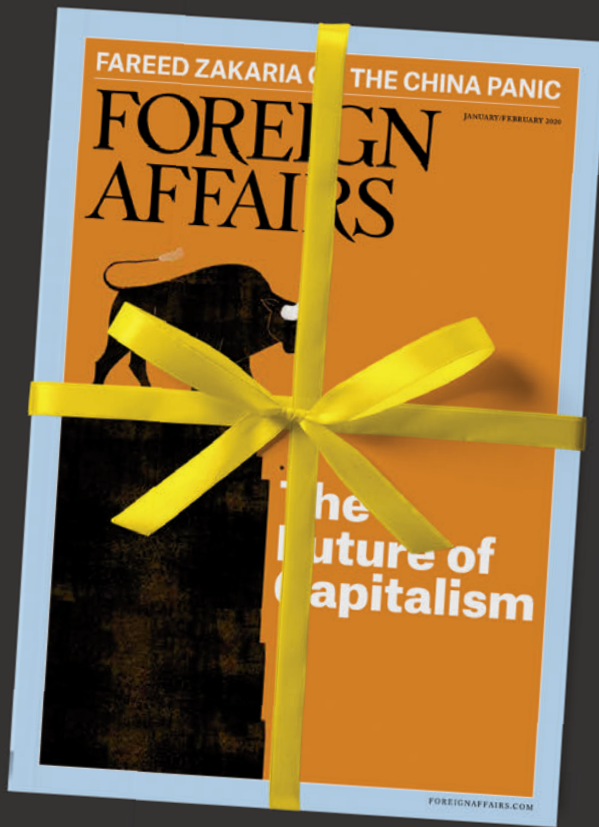
INVESTING IN PEOPLE

The ultimate measure of any reform effort is whether it attracts, unlocks, retains, and invests in talent. The last thing the State Department needs is another armada of consultants descending on Foggy Bottom with fancy slide decks full of new ideas about how the department should look. It's time to focus on—and listen to—the people who drive U.S. diplomacy: the Foreign Service professionals who rotate through posts around the world, the civil service employees whose expertise anchors the department at home, and the foreign-national staff who drive so much of the work of U.S. embassies and consulates.

To start, the United States needs a top-to-bottom diplomatic surge. The Trump administration's unilateral diplomatic disarmament is a reminder that it is much easier to break than to build. The country doesn't have the luxury of waiting for a generational replenishment, marking time as new recruits slowly work their way up the ranks. Since 2017, nearly a quarter of the senior Foreign Service has left. That includes the departure of 60 percent of career ambassadors, the equivalent of four-star generals in the military. In the junior and midcareer ranks, the picture is also bleak. According to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, as many as a third of current employees in some parts of the State Department are considering leaving—more than double the share in 2016.

A diplomatic surge will have to incorporate ideas that in the past have seemed heretical to the department and its career staff but that today are inescapable. These include bringing back select personnel with critical expertise who were forced out over the past four years; creating midcareer pathways into the Foreign Service, including lateral entry from the civil service; and offering opportunities for Americans with unique skills (in new technologies or global health, for example) to serve their country through fixed-term appointments. Another useful initiative would be to create a “diplomatic reserve corps” made up of former Foreign Service and civil service midlevel officers and spouses with professional experience who could take on shorter or fixed-term assignments abroad and in Washing-

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ton. Still another idea would be to create an ROTC-like program for college students, an initiative that would broaden understanding of the diplomatic profession across society and provide financial support to those preparing for diplomatic careers.

All these ideas would have landed in the “too hard” pile when we were serving. But the reality today is that the State Department simply cannot afford to continue its bad habits of offering inflexible career

The top four ranks of the Foreign Service are whiter today than they were two decades ago.

tracks, imposing self-defeating hiring constraints, and encouraging tribal inbreeding among its cloistered ranks.

Another major priority is the need to treat the lack of diversity in the diplomatic corps as a national security crisis.

It not only undermines the power of the United States’ example; it also suffocates the potential of the country’s diplomacy. Study after study has shown that more diverse organizations are more effective and innovative organizations. At the very moment when American diplomacy could benefit most from fresh perspectives and a closer connection to the American people, the diplomatic corps is becoming increasingly homogeneous and detached, undercutting the promotion of American interests and values.

The top four ranks of the Foreign Service are whiter today than they were two decades ago; only ten percent are people of color. Just seven percent of the overall Foreign Service is made up of Black people, and just seven percent are Hispanic—well below each group’s representation in the U.S. labor force. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has reversed a more than quarter-century-long push to appoint more female ambassadors. Overall female representation in the Foreign Service remains roughly the same today as it was in 2000—still 25 percent below female representation in the wider U.S. labor force. These trends have effectively undone much of the progress made following the settlement of two class-action discrimination suits shortly after we entered the Foreign Service.

The State Department should make an unambiguous commitment that by 2030, America’s diplomats will, at long last, resemble the country they represent. Achieving this goal will require making diversity a key feature of the diplomatic surge at every point along the career pipeline. It will demand an unshakable commitment to diverse candidates and gender parity in senior appointments. And it will require the State

Department's leadership to hold itself accountable by not only getting departmental data in order and making the information accessible to the public but acting on it, as well, with clear annual benchmarks for progress. Lower promotion rates for racial and ethnic minorities and the precipitous drop-off in the number of women and minorities in the senior ranks are flashing red warning lights of structural discrimination.

The State Department ought to invest much more in mentorship, coaching, and diversity and inclusion training. It has to make its career track more responsive to the expectations of today's workforce for a work-life balance rather than perpetuate the imbalance that has prevented too many talented Americans—disproportionally those from underrepresented groups—from serving their country. The department has to pay more attention to the particular hazards facing minorities serving overseas, including LGBTQ employees. And it has to revise its promotion criteria to require personnel to foster diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplaces.

To succeed in both a serious diplomatic surge and a historic new campaign for diversity and inclusion, the department must commit to winning the war for talent. The entrance exams to the Foreign Service are designed to weed out candidates rather than recruit the most talented ones. Too much of a premium is placed on written and oral examinations and too little on a candidate's résumé, academic performance, skills, expertise, and life experiences. The whole process can seem interminable—taking as long as two years from start to finish and inadvertently benefiting candidates who have the means to hold out. After hiring their diplomats, the most effective diplomatic services spend up to three years training them. The Foreign Service Institute still spends only six weeks testing the mettle of its recruits; the only real difference from our experience many years ago is that the tedious lectures now feature PowerPoint presentations.

Once on assignment, there is no rigorous, doctrinal approach to the art of diplomacy and no system for after-action reviews. The personnel evaluation process consumes three months of an officer's time, with no commensurate accountability for, let alone improvement in, individual or collective performance. Opportunities for midcareer graduate or professional education are scarce and carry little weight with promotion panels. The effect is often to penalize employees who receive extra training or undertake assignments to other agencies or to Congress. They should be rewarded instead.

Senior leadership positions are increasingly out of reach for career personnel. Over the past few decades, the proportion of political appointees to career appointees at the State Department, reaching down to the deputy assistant secretary level, has grown far higher than at any other national security agency. That worrisome trend—like so many others during the Trump era—has worsened dramatically. Today, only one of the 28 positions at the assistant secretary level at the State Department is filled by an active-duty career officer confirmed by the U.S. Senate—the lowest number ever. A record share of ambassadors are also political appointees as opposed to professional diplomats, a significant blow to morale and to diplomatic effectiveness. In a reformed State Department, at least half the assistant secretary jobs and three-quarters of the ambassadorial appointments should be held by well-qualified career officers. The remaining political appointments should be driven by substantive qualifications and diversity considerations, not campaign donations.

To unlock its potential, the State Department must increase its staffing pipelines to deepen its officers' command of core diplomatic skills and fluency in areas of growing importance, such as climate change, technology, public health, and humanitarian diplomacy. In the traditional area of economics, the State Department must strengthen its capabilities significantly—working closely with the Commerce and Treasury Departments—and promote the interests of American workers with the same zeal with which it has promoted the interests of corporate America.

The State Department also needs to rethink how and where it invests in language studies. One out of every four positions designated as requiring foreign-language skills is filled by an officer who does not in fact meet the minimum language requirements. The State Department trains nearly twice as many Portuguese speakers as it does Arabic or Chinese speakers. It should expand opportunities for midcareer graduate studies and incentivize continuous learning as a requirement for promotion. It should also streamline the evaluation process by determining personnel assignments on the basis of performance, expertise, and leadership development rather than through a process of competitive, careerist bidding built on connections and “corridor,” or word-of-mouth, reputations.

A NEW CULTURE

Part of investing in people means investing in the technology that allows them to realize their full potential. A more digital, agile, collaborative, and data-centric diplomatic corps depends on more ro-

bust and secure communications tools. Today, too many diplomats lack access to classified systems and technology, especially on the road. That leaves them more vulnerable to foreign intelligence and unable to keep up with other U.S. national security agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need to reimagine how to conduct diplomacy remotely or virtually.

Technology can no longer be seen as a luxury good for diplomacy. The last big technological push at the State Department came during Colin Powell's tenure as secretary of state, nearly two decades ago, when the department began to set aside its mini-fridge-sized desktop computers and move cautiously into the modern age. It is long past time for another major effort. To enhance the department's technological platforms, the State Department should appoint a chief technology officer reporting directly to the secretary of state. That official should work with the U.S. Digital Service—an information technology consulting group within the executive branch that was created in 2014—to make internal systems, foreign aid, and public diplomacy more effective. Just as the department's chief economist helps diplomats understand the impact of global economic trends on U.S. interests, the chief technology officer should help diplomats grapple with disruptive technologies and leverage private-sector talent.

But technology is not the only—or the most important—aspect of the State Department's culture that must change. A systemic reluctance to tolerate physical risk has led to the proliferation of fortress-style embassies that can trap personnel behind chancery walls and isolate them from the people they should be meeting, not only foreign officials but also members of civil society. This has also led to an ever-growing number of posts where officers can't be joined by family members, shorter tours, misaligned assignment incentives, lower morale, and less effective diplomacy.

A torpid bureaucratic culture is no less significant. Policy information and recommendations often amass 15 or more sign-offs before reaching the secretary of state's office, suffocating initiative and stifling debate. Unstaffed Foreign Service positions create an imbalance between Washington and the field that prevents decentralized decision-making. And a rigid promotion structure incentivizes careerism over political or moral bravery.

A seismic cultural shift is needed to create a more upstanding, courageous, and agile institution, with greater tolerance for risk and a

simplified, decentralized decision-making process. The State Department must get out of its own way—delegating responsibility downward in Washington and outward to qualified chiefs of mission overseas and reducing the number of undersecretaries and top-level staff members to avoid duplicative authority and inefficiencies. Initiative should be prized, and the passive-aggressive habit of waiting for guidance from above should be discouraged.

The department ought to discard the current cumbersome process for clearing papers and policy recommendations and start from scratch. A new, more flexible framework would allow expertise in Washington and in the field to be quickly distilled into cogent policy proposals and would grant embassies in the field more autonomy to implement the resulting decisions. The State Department's leaders must also offer political top cover for constructive dissent, supplanting the corrosive "keep your head down" culture with an "I have your back" mentality—in other words, the exact opposite of how the State Department treated its diplomats during the 2019 impeachment hearings.

CHANGE THAT LASTS

Any effort to reform the State Department should start from within. It should focus in the first year of a new administration or a new term on what can be accomplished under existing authorities and without significant new appropriations. That is the moment of greatest opportunity to set a new direction—and the moment of greatest vulnerability to the habitual traps of bureaucratic inertia, overly elaborate and time-consuming restructuring plans, partisan bickering, and distracting forays into the capillaries of reform rather than its arteries.

If the department can take the initiative and demonstrate progress on its own, that would be the best advertisement for sustained congressional support and White House backing for a new emphasis on diplomacy. It would be the best way to show that U.S. diplomats are ready to earn their way back to a more central role. It could help generate momentum for a rebalancing of national security budget priorities at a moment when U.S. rivals are not standing still; in recent years, the Chinese have doubled their spending on diplomacy and greatly expanded their presence overseas.

With a sturdy foundation of reforms laid, the next step would be to codify them in the first major congressional legislation on U.S. diplomacy in 40 years. The last Foreign Service Act, passed in 1980, mod-

ernized the mission and structure of the State Department, building on acts from 1924 and 1946. A new act would be crucial to making reforms durable. It would also help shape a style of diplomacy that is fit for an increasingly competitive international landscape and better equipped to serve the priority of domestic renewal. Serious, lasting transformation of U.S. diplomacy will be very hard. But it matters enormously to the future of American democracy in an unforgiving world.

We both bear the professional scars, and have enjoyed the rewards, of many eventful years as career diplomats. We saw plenty of examples of skill and bravery among our colleagues in hard situations around the world—from the horrific genocidal violence of Rwanda and the epic turmoil of post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s to the later challenges of ambassadorial postings in Liberia after its civil war and in Jordan in the midst of a once-in-a-half-century royal succession. We saw how U.S. diplomats can produce tangible results, whether by holding secret talks with adversaries, mobilizing other countries to ease the plight of refugees, or promoting American jobs and economic opportunities.

Through it all, however, we still remember vividly the sense of possibility and shared commitment to public service that drew the two of us and 30 other proud Americans to our Foreign Service entering class all those years ago. Today, there is a new generation of diplomats capable of taking up that challenge—if only they are given a State Department and a mission worthy of their ambitions and of the country they will represent. 🌍

Uniting the Techno-Democracies

How to Build Digital Cooperation

Jared Cohen and Richard Fontaine

At the outset of the digital age, democracies seemed ascendant. The United States and like-minded countries were at the cutting edge of technological development. Policymakers were pointing to the inherently liberalizing effect of the Internet, which seemed a threat to dictators everywhere. The United States' technological advantage made its military more potent, its economy more prosperous, and its democracy, at least in theory, more vibrant.

Since then, autocratic states have caught up. China is at the forefront, no longer a mere rising power in technology and now an American peer. In multiple areas—including facial and voice recognition, 5G technology, digital payments, quantum communications, and the commercial drone market—it has surpassed the United States. Leaders in Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Venezuela, and elsewhere are increasingly using technology for illiberal ends, following China's example. And despite the United States' remaining advantage in some technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and semiconductor production, it has fallen behind China in formulating an overall strategy for their use.

Almost in parallel, the United States and its allies have stepped away from their tradition of collaboration. Instead of working together on issues of common interest, they have been pulled apart by diverging national interests and have responded incoherently to autocratic

JARED COHEN is a former member of the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff. He currently serves as CEO of Jigsaw and is an Adjunct Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

RICHARD FONTAINE is CEO of the Center for a New American Security. He has worked at the U.S. Department of State, on the National Security Council, and as a foreign policy adviser to U.S. Senator John McCain.

states' co-optation of new technologies. Although officials in most democratic capitals now acknowledge the profound ways in which new technologies are shaping the world, they remain strangely disconnected from one another when it comes to managing them. Coordination, when it occurs, is sporadic, reactive, and ad hoc.

The liberal democracies are running out of time to get their act together: whoever shapes the use of emerging technologies such as AI, quantum computing, biotechnology, and next-generation telecommunications will have an economic, military, and political advantage for decades to come. But the world's advanced democracies have something the autocracies don't: a long history of multilateral cooperation for the benefit of all.

Because the issues are so diverse, what's needed now is not more piecemeal solutions but an overarching forum in which like-minded countries can come together to hammer out joint responses. This new grouping of leading "techno-democracies"—call it the T-12, given the logical list of members—would help democracies regain the initiative in global technology competition. It would allow them to promote their preferred norms and values around the use of emerging technologies and preserve their competitive advantage in key areas. Above all, it would help coordinate a unified response to a chief threat to the global order.

AUTOCRACIES IN THE LEAD

Washington has struggled to develop a coherent vision to guide its global technological role, but many autocracies have not. China, in particular, has recognized that the existing rules of the international order were largely written in a predigital age and that it has an opportunity to write fresh ones. Already, Beijing is pursuing this goal by quickly building top-notch capabilities and deploying them throughout the global market, especially in areas where the U.S. presence is weak or virtually nonexistent. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the Chinese AI company Cloud-Walk is helping develop a national facial recognition system, giving the local government a powerful new tool for political control.

But forward-looking efforts such as these are not solely unilateral. China, Russia, and other autocracies are already coordinating around a self-interested global vision. They are shaping standards for the use of new technologies in exclusive groups such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, whose members have agreed to collaborate on in-

formation security, robotics, and e-commerce, among other areas. They also work through global forums such as the International Telecommunication Union, where some of the same countries have supported international standards that facilitate unaccountable surveillance. Unlike many liberal democracies, quite a few autocracies have realized that technology, including the power to innovate, set norms for its use, and shape the institutions that decide how it will be employed, is not simply a niche functional issue buried in a crowded foreign policy agenda; it is a central element of modern geopolitical competition.

The United States, on the other hand, has been mostly reactive. China's rapid progress in 5G, AI, and quantum communications has stumped multiple U.S. administrations. Washington has no easy answer to China's so-called Digital Silk Road, an array of technological infrastructure projects to accompany the construction projects of its Belt and Road Initiative, nor does it have an answer to the country's campaign to establish a digital currency. The United States and its allies have consistently struggled to define the rules of engagement around cyberattacks and have responded inadequately to the use of technologies by autocracies to oppress their people. U.S. officials often complain about Beijing's dominance in technical standard setting and allies' deferential attitude toward Chinese infrastructure. But they have had a difficult time changing the nature of the game.

This is a multinational failure. Liberal democracies around the world simply do not work together on many of the issues that should unite them. Their responses to autocracies' abuse of technology tend to be fragmented. National interests diverge, disagreements among states arise, and nothing gets done. Within countries, paralysis often occurs as domestic authorities clash with their national security counterparts over how to deal with election meddling, disinformation, and hacking. Instead of pursuing broad collaboration, the liberal democracies have come up with a patchwork of discrete responses: Canada and France's collaboration on an expert panel tasked with monitoring developments in AI policy, for example, or NATO's pursuit of a cyber-deterrence doctrine.

The dispute over the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei's 5G capabilities is perhaps the best example of democracies' inconsistent response. Following Australia's initial lead, the United States took a hard line against the company, banning Huawei components from its national 5G network and forbidding U.S. entities from doing business of any sort with it. The United States proceeded to insist



I'll be watching you: facial recognition software at work in Beijing, October 2018

that other democracies follow suit, even threatening to withhold critical intelligence from allies if they adopted Huawei products. Still, Washington remains relatively isolated in its opposition. Many governments continue to resist U.S. pressure, pointing out that there is no low-cost, one-stop-shop alternative to Huawei's technology. Even Canada and South Korea, close U.S. allies, have defied Washington and are considering Huawei equipment for their 5G infrastructure.

The democracies have come up with a similarly disjointed response to Russia's election meddling. Although the Kremlin has interfered in the elections of multiple countries, the problem has largely been treated as a national one, deserving of only a unilateral response from any given target. When Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, only the United States responded with punitive measures. Likewise, Russia's reported meddling in this year's U.S. presidential election has so far not produced any unified reaction. Compare that to the response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its poisoning of a former intelligence officer and his daughter in the United Kingdom. In those cases, the major democracies coordinated a joint response, imposing new sanctions and expelling Russian diplomats.

FROM MANY, ONE

Although the democracies currently suffer from a deficit of cooperation, their capacity to work together endures. Here, history offers useful guidance. In 1973, U.S. Treasury Secretary George Shultz convened

the finance ministers of France, the United Kingdom, and West Germany in the White House library for informal talks. This “Library Group” quickly added Japan to become the G-5 and later included first Italy and then Canada to become the G-7. In the decades that followed, this informal group of advanced liberal democracies, which for 16 years included Russia as the G-8, would emerge as a powerful international force. Among other issues, the group coordinated its members’ responses to 9/11 and to the 2008 global financial crisis.

Just as the G-7 came to guide multilateral action among the world’s leading economies, a set of techno-democracies—countries with top technology sectors, advanced economies, and a commitment to liberal democracy—must take action on contemporary digital issues. So far, these leading states have acted independently, but their combined market power and national strength would make them a potent unified force.

For now, 12 countries stand out for inclusion in such a group. The United States is arguably still the world’s leading technological power, and France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom all have large economies and impressive technology sectors. Australia, Canada, and South Korea have smaller economies, but they are also important players in technology. The same is true of Finland and Sweden, which are telecommunications and engineering powerhouses. India and Israel are also logical candidates for membership, owing to the global reach of their flourishing technology and startup sectors.

Given the deep need for coordination among like-minded states, this “T-12” group of techno-democracies would fill a yawning gap in modern technological and geopolitical competition. The T-12’s members would undoubtedly disagree on many issues, but the group could provide a critical venue for them to air their grievances. The United States, in particular, should welcome the participation of others, since their presence at the negotiating table would not only improve its digital advantage but also reduce the sense among these countries that they are merely pawns, rather than partners, in a U.S.-Chinese superpower competition.

The most logical structure for the T-12 is an informal group of states, not a secretariat-laden international organization or an alliance with a mutual defense agreement. Although critics often dismiss gatherings such as the G-20 and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation as once-a-year opportunities for heads of state to gather for a few hours,

don an ethnically unique shirt, jawbone, and take a group photo, this is a misleading stereotype. Such groupings have in fact been highly effective at marshaling multilateral action.

In the wake of 9/11, for instance, G-8 summits produced specific commitments to prevent a repeat attack. It is thanks to the actions taken then that modern commercial aircraft have hardened cockpit doors, major international ports screen cargo containers for dangerous materials, and nations restrict the export of portable surface-to-air missiles. The G-8 was also at the forefront of public health efforts. In 2001, the group established the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, which has saved millions of lives through investments in research and global health programs. And after the 2008 financial crisis, the G-20 committed to a \$5 trillion stimulus package and proposed new financial regulations, helping contain the subsequent recession's damage and prevent another crash.

The government leaders or ministers who meet as the T-12 would also have a unique opportunity to enlist the private sector and international organizations in their work. Annual meetings could serve as an arena for business leaders to join government officials in coordinating responses to emerging issues such as the need to improve remote-learning technology in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future of counterterrorism might look like. The format for these meetings could include issue-based sessions, in which governments invite leading private-sector figures for focused discussions, or standing forums akin to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's Business Advisory Council, which provides advice to Pacific Rim leaders on concerns facing businesses throughout the region. The T-12 could also develop working groups and committees on the multistakeholder model, which brings together representatives from business, civil society, government, and research institutions. These groups would then pass recommendations up to ministers and principals. Simultaneously, leaders could collaborate with other multilateral organizations—working with NATO on AI security, for instance, or with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on the industrial implications of disruptive technologies.

The T-12 would help democracies regain the initiative in global technology competition.

AN INITIAL AGENDA

The success of the T-12 will inevitably hinge on its ability to translate its conceptual appeal into the nuts and bolts of executing a real agenda. One task its members could start with is information sharing. Within the T-12, governments could update one another on the security of supply chains, particularly in critical sectors such as semiconductors, where China aims to dramatically reduce the portion of the market currently controlled by American, Dutch, and Japanese firms. They could conduct audits of supply chains that cross international boundaries, especially those that include Chinese-made components or software. Members could compare their assessments of the risks of China's 5G technology, examine advances in quantum computing, investigate AI safety, and share strategies for preventing the theft of intellectual property. In a more ambitious step, they could exchange information about online propaganda, disinformation, the integrity of academic research, and specific ways in which autocratic regimes employ technology to erode liberal democracy.

Setting standards for the use of emerging technologies would be another crucial job for the T-12. The countries and companies producing the most advanced technology have a valuable first-mover advantage: they can set guidelines for how they expect their products to be used. Facial recognition software would be a good test case for the T-12's potential on this front. This technology is already being used for surveillance purposes, including by the Chinese government to monitor Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang and by Moscow to link photographs with social media accounts. The leading democracies have yet to agree on rules for using facial recognition technology, including its proper role in the criminal justice system, or the protocols that should govern data collection. The T-12 could address this by exploring how such technology could be used to secure large events or assist in law enforcement investigations, but not as a means of social control or mass intimidation.

Beyond helping the democracies get on the same page as they compete with China, the T-12 could also serve as a way for members to air differences within the group itself. Europeans might object, for instance, to the fact that Israel's NSO Group, a controversial technology firm known for its spyware products, sells smartphone surveillance tools to autocracies, and the Americans may disagree with the EU's focus on privacy when it infringes on free expression. The democracies have

varied approaches to data protection, privacy, and free speech. The T-12 would allow them to explore these differences, with the ultimate aim of establishing broad principles, understanding disagreements, and narrowing the gaps between participants.

Coordinating investments would represent another natural function of the T-12. Members could rationalize their allocation of resources to innovation and R & D and to securing supply chains. They could even make concrete financial commitments to counter China's Digital Silk Road and 5G capabilities and launch joint projects in such areas as quantum computing, cybersecurity, and tools for detecting AI-generated counterfeit images or videos known as "deepfakes." In the realm of more speculative technologies, it could examine advances in 3-D printing, potentially unbreakable encryption methods based on quantum mechanics, and microscopic sensing technology. More ambitious still, it might launch a joint fund to extend loans and loan guarantees to developing nations that seek trusted 5G equipment and other technology that accords with liberal values.

Finally, the T-12 could serve as a forum for coordinating policy. Members might harmonize their export controls on cyber-surveillance tools; regulate the use of blockchain, a digital ledger of global transactions, to ensure the integrity of supply chains when it comes to sectors such as defense manufacturing and medical equipment; generate common standards for a variety of 3-D printing methods; and even coordinate their education and immigration policies to develop and retain top technology talent. More broadly, the T-12 should articulate a vision of the future based on innovation, freedom, democratic collaboration, and liberal values.

BIGGER AND BOLDER

Over time, the T-12 could expand and transform, just as the G-5 became the G-7 and then, temporarily, the G-8. Starting with the initial 12, the T-12 should aim for around 20 members within five years. Additional individual European states, such as Italy and the Netherlands, could be asked to join, without the complexity of including the European Union itself as a member. In Latin America, Brazil and Chile would make obvious candidates, and in Africa, members could include Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Taiwan would also be a useful participant, even if creative diplomacy might be required to deal with the island's nonstate status.

The T-12's agenda should similarly grow in ambition. Moving beyond its initial objectives, the group could branch out into securing the supply chains for semiconductors. Doing so would involve multilateral export controls on semiconductor manufacturing equipment and technology, an area in which the techno-democracies have a significant lead

In today's competitive global environment, technology is too important to be left to the technologists.

over China and others. As part of this effort, they could create an international chip fabrication consortium to move semiconductor production out of China and into a T-12 country and provide shared financing for the billions of dollars such a move would require. And as the world faces diminishing returns in

the growth of computing power due to the physical limits of existing materials, the group could launch joint R & D projects devoted to a new generation of microelectronics that might jump-start an increase in computing power again.

As its portfolio grows, the T-12 should also take a multinational approach to 5G networks. The current telecommunications equipment sector is a Huawei-dominated oligopoly. This presents a major supply chain and security risk, yet China's state subsidies make it difficult for others to enter the market. The T-12 could support non-Huawei companies, such as Ericsson, Nokia, and Samsung, as they transition to using an open radio access network, or O-RAN, which relies on open interfaces rather than proprietary equipment. This would allow multiple vendors to supply the market with interchangeable telecommunications components. In the future, it could collaborate on 6G alternatives to Chinese hardware well before they are necessary, helping avoid the very dilemma many economies are now facing with 5G.

The T-12 could also develop the framework for a digital currency that preserves the central role of the U.S. dollar in the global financial system. That role is under threat. China's central bank is already piloting a digital currency program. If the effort succeeds, China is likely to extend its use to countries that participate in its Belt and Road Initiative, expanding the renminbi's reach as an international medium of exchange and possibly threatening the dollar's preeminent status. Pursuing a secure digital dollar-based platform would level this playing field, making it faster and easier to accomplish tasks such as moving money between banks, trading oil futures, and tracking money laundering.

Beyond this, the T-12's members could develop and adopt a cyber-deterrence doctrine. The world faces a perpetual threat from cyberattacks, given the low barriers to entry and the difficulty of attributing an attack to a defined actor. To tackle the threat, the T-12 could lay out uniform standards for appropriate behavior in cyberspace and define what constitutes a proportionate response to a cyberattack. Members could cooperate in detecting and measuring attacks by increasing information sharing and establishing early warning mechanisms, then work together to attribute violations to a particular aggressor. And once a culprit is identified, the T-12 could coordinate a joint response.

ADDRESSING THE SKEPTICS

Objections to a T-12 are easy to imagine. The most obvious would be general opposition to any new international grouping, which would join a raft of existing multilateral organizations, some of which are obsolete. Yet the T-12's novelty is what makes it relevant. There is no group of advanced democracies to coordinate technology policy: the G-7 leaves out important technology leaders, and the G-20 includes the illiberal states of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. NATO is a military alliance focused first and foremost on European security. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, with 37 member states, is too large and lacks the track record to break ground on technological issues. The T-12, by contrast, would bring together the right members while elevating technology to a level commensurate with such issues as European security and global economic policy.

The private sector's role in a potential T-12 raises another question: Why would any business participate in a government-driven process? The answer is that it would make economic sense. Consider the inevitable restructuring and geographic diversification of supply chains that will almost certainly follow the coronavirus pandemic. Already, governments and firms are considering reshoring pharmaceutical and medical device production, and firms that are facing factory shutdowns due to the pandemic are rediscovering the merits of diverse supply chains. Multilateral coordination among national governments would make this process less disruptive, costly, and lengthy than it would otherwise be.

Then there is the likely reaction of China and Russia. Wouldn't a new group of techno-democracies merely provoke them? Indeed, they probably would treat it as a threat, but the cost of forgoing cooperation among liberal democracies is far higher than the consequences of any

pushback. As the COVID-19 pandemic has proved, when liberal democracies fail to work together, whether, in this case, in harmonizing travel restrictions, employing disease-mitigation measures, or assisting poorer nations, China benefits. The T-12 should not ignore illiberal states, and it can try to work with them on issues such as AI safety or technological responses to climate change. But it should tread carefully and limit their involvement. Ultimately, the world will be safer, more stable, and freer if liberal democracies stick together.

A final objection would be based on realism. Cooperation in other fields—global health, say, or economic policy—is hard enough, and the likelihood of building a successful body focused on technological collaboration may be low. Indeed, one should not overstate the degree of like-mindedness among any group of sovereign states, democracies or not. But that is a reason to experiment with new structures to deal with tough problems, rather than rely on either outdated mechanisms or an every-country-for-itself approach. The status quo is not sustainable. If the democracies fail to act, technology will help shift the balance of economic, military, and political power in favor of autocracies.

TIME FOR ACTION

In July 1944, delegates of the Allied countries came together in New Hampshire for what became known as the Bretton Woods conference. After discussions of various technical issues and sweeping foreign policy debates, the conference produced a blueprint for governing the postwar international monetary and financial order. The Allies agreed on a system of fixed but adjustable exchange rates, laid the groundwork for the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and embraced an open international economic system. The framework designed then largely remains in place today.

Some of the most pressing technological issues facing the world's democracies now may ultimately rival in importance the economic issues considered by the Bretton Woods delegates. Just as in 1944, when the United States and like-minded countries recognized that they could no longer make economic policy in a vacuum, today they must recognize that the time has passed when they can deal with the profound effects of technology on their own. For too long, national approaches to technological questions have been ad hoc, poorly coordinated, and left to technology experts to sort out. But in today's competitive global environment, technology is too important to be left to the technologists. 🌐

The Underappreciated Power

Japan After Abe

Mireya Solís

In an era of renewed great-power competition that Washington has framed as an all-out, zero-sum battle between “the free world” and a menacing China, East Asia’s other great power, Japan, has gotten short shrift. Japan does not aspire to superpower status, and its limitations are well known: demographic decline, a deflationary economy, and self-imposed restrictions on the use of force abroad. But it would be a mistake to write off Japan as a has-been. It boasts a resilient democracy and a successful track record of adjusting to economic globalization. For decades, Japan has been a leader in infrastructure finance in developing countries. And it has acquired sterling credentials as a leader on free trade. When it comes to the use of economic engagement as a diplomatic tool, Japan—not the United States—is China’s peer competitor.

Today, Japan’s leaders are facing a number of tests. Can they safeguard public health, recover from the worst recession of the postwar era, and remain steadfast in defending a rules-based order? Among Japanese citizens, concern is growing that their country depends too much on China for its prosperity and too much on the United States for its security. The sudden resignation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in September has introduced new worries that stable domestic leadership and a proactive foreign policy may come to an end. In the whirlwind of today’s geopolitical rivalries and the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it might be tempting to yet again dismiss Japan’s potential. But the country’s strategic choices are by no means foreordained, and they will affect not only its own future but also the course of the raging great-power competition now playing out between China and the United States.

MIREYA SOLÍS is Director of the Center for East Asia Policy Studies and Philip Knight Chair in Japan Studies at the Brookings Institution.

ISLAND OF STABILITY

Recent calls for a coalition of democracies that can rise to the challenge posed by China run into an immediate obstacle: all is not well in the democracies of the West, which are witnessing a loss of faith in globalization and the growing appeal of populist leaders. The United States stands out as the most poignant case of hobbled international leadership. And its populist experiment has gone awry; the Trump era has shown that illiberalism and protectionism aggravate rather than solve domestic problems and make it harder to counter China.

In contrast, Japan's political waters appear to be much calmer. The country's relatively successful adjustment to globalization and its domestic stability have positioned it well for this moment. Over the past 30 years, Japan has weathered the two aspects of globalization that have proved to be the most destabilizing elsewhere: the offshoring of manufacturing and economic integration with China. In the mid-1980s, the sharp appreciation of the yen triggered a sustained wave of Japanese foreign direct investment in East Asia and across the world, with Japanese companies forging complex supply chains. Around half of all Japanese transportation equipment is now manufactured outside Japan, as are about 30 percent of all Japanese consumer electronics and general machinery. Japanese investment helped China become the world's factory and a top trading partner for Asian countries. Indeed, China plays a larger role in Japanese trade than it does in U.S. trade: in 2019, around 24 percent of Japan's imports came from China, and around 19 percent of its exports went there, whereas China accounted for only around 18 percent of U.S. imports and received around seven percent of U.S. exports.

Outsourcing and the loss of factory jobs attributed to Chinese imports have become political minefields in the United States. But the Japanese public has shown little buyer's remorse for economic globalization. On the contrary, in a 2018 survey, the political scientists Adam Liff and Kenneth McElwain found strong support for free trade among Japanese respondents, who saw it as contributing to Japan's economy, fostering post-Cold War peace and stability, and improving their daily lives.

One reason is that trade with China has had relatively benign effects on the Japanese labor market. The economist Mina Taniguchi has found job creation, not job destruction, in the regions of Japan most involved in the supply chains that shape the country's trade with



Your turn: Abe and Suga in Tokyo, September 2020

China. Another reason is that Japanese companies face steep legal hurdles to firing redundant workers, and so mass layoffs have been rare in Japan. What is more, employers are increasingly competing for new hires because, with an aging population, the supply of workers has decreased. In the past few years, Japan's unemployment rate has hovered around 2.4 percent, and even at times of profound economic dislocation, unemployment spikes have been modest: up to around five percent in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and up to 2.8 percent six months into the COVID-19 pandemic.

Make no mistake, corporate Japan's supposed solution to rigid labor markets—hiring nonregular employees, who lack job security and career opportunities—is a major driver of rising income inequality. And the Japanese public is frustrated by the inability of its political class to rekindle growth and address socioeconomic divides. Yet most Japanese citizens do not blame globalization or free trade for these troubles, and illiberalism has not found a foothold in Japan. The country is home to one of Asia's most durable democratic systems, boasting robust electoral institutions and strong protections for civil rights. Its politics have not been convulsed by anti-immigrant parties, despite a doubling in the number of foreign workers in Japan in less than a decade, or by demagogues attacking the institutions of liberal democracy.

EUGENE HOSHIKO / POOL / REUTERS

Disappointment with the main political parties has led voters to elect a number of maverick candidates over the years. But none were populists who claimed to represent “the will of the people” in a bid to undermine the courts, the legislative process, or the free press. Japanese politics have escaped the populist wave; if anything, the establishment looks stronger. Before his resignation, Abe had become the longest-serving prime minister in Japanese history. During his tenure, his Liberal Democratic Party triumphed in six national parliamentary elections, and Abe consolidated decision-making powers in the prime minister’s office and moved to control the appointment of senior civil servants to ensure bureaucratic compliance with his policy priorities.

Abe’s political longevity, despite a number of scandals that tarnished his administration, can be traced back to his pragmatism (downplaying his conservative agenda to emphasize pocketbook issues), his ability to portray himself as a steady hand in a turbulent world, and a weak and fragmented opposition. His track record on domestic economic reforms was uneven, and he failed to achieve some of his most ambitious goals (a revision of the constitution, the return of the Japanese abductees in North Korea, and a peace treaty with Russia). But more than any previous prime minister, Abe elevated Japan’s diplomatic standing. He transformed the country into a global leader on free trade (partly by outmaneuvering Japan’s powerful agricultural lobby), revamped the way Japan approaches foreign policy (with the establishment of the National Security Council in 2013), and supplied a vision for the region—the so-called Indo-Pacific strategy—that other Western powers, including the United States, are now trying to emulate. These are legacies that will serve Abe’s successors well.

A TRADE POWERHOUSE

The world largely stopped paying attention to Japan after the country’s mismanagement and dysfunction seemed to suddenly switch off an economic engine that had appeared poised to dominate world markets. First came the burst bubble of 1991, when stocks and real estate values dropped sharply; a period of protracted deflation followed. Tight budgets meant less funding for economic assistance programs, and Japan soon lost its place as a top foreign-aid donor. By 2010, Japan had been demoted to third place in global rankings of GDP, overtaken by China’s prodigious growth. Japan appeared to have lost its *mojo*.

But this familiar story is at best incomplete and at worst misleading. Over the years, as the corporate strategy expert Ulrike Schaeede has shown, the Japanese private sector has refocused on core competencies and captured niche segments in the global value chain. Japan's lead in producing high-tech components and advanced materials, Schaeede has observed, is usually invisible to the consumer but quite real: Japanese companies capture between 50 and 100 percent of the market share of more than half of all the high-tech products surveyed by the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry.

And far from retreating from the global economy, Japan rivals China in terms of investment and the financing of infrastructure projects abroad. In the decade after the global financial crisis, Japan's outward investment averaged \$122.4 billion per year; China's, meanwhile, averaged only \$109.5 billion per year, according to UN statistics. Japan even outranks China as a foreign investor in Southeast Asia, the region where China's economic influence and political designs are felt most acutely.

China's ambitions to finance foreign development are vast, as evidenced by the launch of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, with 109 members, and the promise to channel \$1 trillion to infrastructure projects through its landmark Belt and Road Initiative. Japan, cognizant of the limits of trying to compete with China dollar for dollar, has developed alternative strategies to ramp up its influence despite its more limited resources. In 2015, for example, the Abe government launched the \$200 billion Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, which offers transparent financing to promote long-term development without creating debt traps for recipients. Another example, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific initiative, seeks to link countries across a vast area stretching from East Africa to the South Pacific and involves a mixture of capital to finance physical infrastructure, trade rules to facilitate economic integration and the expansion of the digital economy, and assistance in building up coast guard capacity—all with the implicit aim of resisting Chinese pressure.

Tokyo cemented its lead in economic diplomacy when it filled the vacuum left by Washington's abandonment, in 2017, of the

The familiar story of Japanese decline is at best incomplete and at worst misleading.

Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). As the largest remaining economy in the pact, Japan deftly prevented the trade agreement from unraveling, preserving its ambitious requirements on tariff elimination and taking a surgical approach to suspending a number of rules that the United States had championed.

Japan's stepped-up game on trade negotiations has also been evident on other fronts. It has brokered two other huge trade deals, one with the EU and another, which is nearing completion, with 14 other Asia-

Thanks to Trump, Tokyo has nagging doubts about Washington's commitment to alliances.

Pacific economies. Japan has worked with the United States and the EU on modernizing the World Trade Organization's rules on subsidies, campaigned to set standards to help balance the free flow of data with privacy and cybersecurity safeguards, and helped stabi-

lize British trade policy by quickly conducting bilateral negotiations with the United Kingdom after it exited the EU and shepherding a future bid for British admission to the successor to the TPP.

Tokyo's free-trade credentials have suffered in other areas, however. In 2019, it caved to pressure from the Trump administration and assented to a narrow, bilateral U.S.-Japanese trade agreement that lacked any American commitments to eliminate tariffs on automobiles. Also last year, as Japanese-South Korean relations sharply deteriorated in the wake of a disagreement over compensating South Koreans who were forced to work by occupying Japanese forces during World War II, Tokyo abruptly tightened export controls on chemicals that are critical for South Korea's semiconductor industry—a stern rebuke of Seoul that sat uneasily with Japan's desire to be a champion of free trade. And during the pandemic, Japan has been missing in action when it comes to coordinating an international response to curb export protectionism when it comes to essential medical supplies.

Consolidating Japan's role as an international economic powerhouse will test the mettle of Abe's successors. Their success or failure will have broad implications: it will help settle the question of whether middle powers can shore up an open international economic system. The task is enormous, as the World Trade Organization nears irrelevancy, Beijing and Washington become further entrenched in a trade war, and a likely future of fragmented digital ecosystems approaches.

A TOUGH NEIGHBORHOOD

The security challenges facing Japan are also daunting. Recent years have witnessed North Korean missiles flying over Japanese territory, regular Chinese incursions into the waters surrounding the contested Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyu Islands), and Beijing's relentless pressure on democratic Taiwan. And Tokyo has nagging doubts about Washington's commitment to alliances thanks to the Trump administration's decision to withdraw troops from Germany and its over-the-top demands for South Korea to pay five times as much for U.S. military support as it currently does.

In navigating these choppy waters, some fundamental parameters of Japanese security policy will remain firmly in place: the reliance on the United States as security guarantor, the identification of China as Japan's largest security threat, and strong domestic opposition to acquiring offensive military capabilities and deploying Japanese troops to war zones. But Japan's relations with China and the United States have seen important adjustments in the past few years, and Tokyo has charted its own path in managing great-power competition.

In the short span of a decade, China and Japan moved from a sharp deterioration in bilateral ties, due to a flare-up of tensions in the East China Sea, to a pragmatic rapprochement that has enabled high-level official visits. Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to Japan, scheduled for this past spring, would have marked the culmination of such progress. But COVID-19 made the visit impossible, and the pandemic has halted the warming of ties, thanks to China's initial mismanagement of the crisis, the severe disruption to some Japanese industries caused by the Chinese economic lockdown, and an abrasive turn in Chinese foreign policy as Beijing has pushed back against criticism of its response to the outbreak. Two developments in particular proved to be too much for Tokyo: a record-breaking 100-plus consecutive days of Chinese naval incursions into the contiguous zone of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and China's imposition this past summer of a repressive national security law in Hong Kong that violates the "one country, two systems" arrangement that Beijing had promised to respect until 2047.

Top leaders in Japan now speak openly about the risks of relying too heavily on China to power Japan's economic growth. Last April, the Abe government launched a \$2.2 billion fund to restructure Japanese supply chains in sectors in which production is heavily concen-

trated in China. These subsidies are modest compared with the existing stock of Japanese investment in China; they are not meant to bring about decoupling. Rather, they represent an attempt to manage risks by reshoring some of the production of Japanese goods and relocating other parts of it to Southeast Asia.

China's military buildup and its coercive diplomacy have provided a strong incentive for Tokyo to reinvest in the U.S. alliance. In 2014, Abe's government officially reinterpreted the Japanese constitution

In Japan, the pandemic has produced hardly any political or social polarization.

to give Japan the right to use force alongside other countries in collective self-defense. The move was intended to make Japan a more valuable ally, one that could help the United States if it were under attack (albeit only if Japan itself also faced an existential threat

and no other alternative were available). The cultivation of Japan's security partnerships with Australia and India and the reactivation of the Quad—an informal group that includes those three countries and the United States—are designed to strengthen the alliance through defense and security cooperation with fellow democracies. But they also provide Japan with a diversification plan in case the United States continues its inward turn.

More recently, concerns about China's bid for technological hegemony have become a focal point for the allies. Aware of the cybersecurity risks, Japan has declined to use Chinese telecommunications equipment to build its 5G network and has tightened its screening criteria for foreign direct investment to make it harder for China to get its hands on critical technology. But Tokyo is not a believer in wholesale decoupling, does not support unilateral tariffs, and has worried about Japanese companies getting caught up in the American export controls intended to weaken China. Washington recently banned U.S. agencies from awarding contracts to any businesses that use products or services from five Chinese technology companies, a step that will reportedly compel hundreds of Japanese firms to replace equipment to avoid losing access to business from the U.S. federal government.

Among Japanese security analysts, there is palpable unease about the ability of the United States to devise an effective long-term China strategy. The disquiet precedes the Trump administration. President Barack Obama's "rebalance" to Asia was hobbled by domestic political

polarization that left the TPP unratified and defense spending capped by a budget sequester. The identification of China as a “strategic competitor” in the Trump administration’s 2017 National Security Strategy pleased Japanese security planners. Abe tried to appease a transactional U.S. president with promises of increased investment in the United States and weapons acquisitions. But Donald Trump’s “America first” approach to foreign policy weakened the alliance network, to Tokyo’s dismay. By demanding that partners pay far more for their own defense and imposing “national security” tariffs even on allies, Trump has scotched any hope for a coordinated effort to stand up to China.

At a more fundamental level, the Trump administration’s embrace of comprehensive competition with China presents a challenge to Japan’s grand strategy. Washington has been assertive in the South China Sea, has applied tariffs and sanctions to coerce Beijing into dropping what the Americans see as unfair trade and investment practices, and has defined the contest increasingly in ideological terms. Japan, meanwhile, favors selective competition that plays to its strengths in economic statecraft, hoping to reduce the risk of overreliance on China but without renouncing interdependence and still leaving room for selective cooperation with Beijing on climate change and regional trade. If former Vice President Joe Biden wins the U.S. presidential election and his administration continues with comprehensive competition—minus Trump’s harassment of allies—Tokyo may find its room to maneuver increasingly curtailed.

STAYING SAFE, STAYING STRONG

In the meantime, the botched U.S. response to the pandemic has profoundly shaken Tokyo’s confidence. American political dysfunction has led to an enormous loss of life, severe economic hardship, and an abdication of international leadership. In Japan, it has led to rising alarm about overdependence on a hapless United States and provoked a search for ways for Japan to do more to protect itself. Tokyo’s abrupt cancellation this past summer of the \$4.2 billion, U.S.-developed Aegis Ashore missile defense program could be a harbinger of things to come. To explain the decision, Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono cited technical flaws that would be too costly to fix. But the move came as a complete surprise to the Americans and was swiftly followed by deliberations in Tokyo on acquiring counterstrike capabilities that would give Japan, for the first time, the ability to strike an enemy base to preempt an imminent attack.

Japan's response to the pandemic will be a determining factor in its strategic future. So far, even without resorting to the mass testing and extensive lockdowns that other countries have used to combat the virus, the country has escaped an out-of-control outbreak, with 75,909 cases and 1,453 deaths as of mid-September. Health crises reveal not only the quality of governance but also the fabric of society. In this regard, the contrast with the United States is stark: in Japan, mask wearing is almost universal, and the pandemic has produced hardly any political or social polarization.

The economic fallout, however, has been devastating, with the Japanese economy shrinking by 7.8 percent in the second quarter of this year—the largest economic contraction of the postwar era. The government's fiscal response has been robust, centered on a \$298 billion supplementary budget. But the government has lacked a coordinated strategy and has at times appeared tone-deaf—for example, in picking a losing fight to extend the appointment of the public prosecutor in the middle of a pandemic.

In selecting Abe's chief cabinet secretary and right-hand man, Yoshihide Suga, as the next party leader and prime minister, the Liberal Democratic Party prioritized continuity. The public appeared to concur, responding to Suga's selection with high levels of support for his candidacy. No one expects radical departures in domestic or foreign policy in the Suga administration. Recovery from the economic crisis dictates loose monetary policy and spending, and Suga's signature priority for structural reform—digitizing more of the economy—is a natural outgrowth of the pandemic. With no diplomatic experience of his own, Suga will likely embrace the already well-institutionalized Indo-Pacific strategy. But Japan's new chapter will begin only when its leadership articulates a revitalization strategy that can deliver resilient and equitable growth and offers a vision of Japan's post-pandemic international role.

The eclipse of Japan that many predicted three decades ago never happened. Japan adjusted to globalization, achieved political stability, and engaged in robust economic statecraft. Whether the country can retain its position and prosperity in the years to come will depend on whether Japan's coming leaders can find a way to keep COVID-19 at bay, stay the course in providing public goods, and maintain Japan's enhanced role as a defender of the rules-based international system. It is a tall order, but past dismissals of Japan have proved premature. 🌐

No Exit

Why the Middle East Still Matters to America

Steven A. Cook

The record of American failure in the Middle East over the last two decades is long and dismaying. The most obvious catastrophe was the 2003 invasion of Iraq. But the trouble started long before that fiasco. The U.S. victory in the Cold War, the “third wave” of democratization around the world, and the wealth that globalization generated were positive developments, but they also produced a toxic mix of American arrogance and overambition. Across the political spectrum, officials and analysts came to believe that Middle Eastern societies needed Washington’s help and that the United States could use its power in constructive ways in the region. What followed were fruitless quests to transform Arab societies, resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stamp out jihadism, and end Iran’s development of nuclear technology. The fact that five Arab countries are now in various stages of collapse contributes to an overall sense within Washington that the U.S. approach requires a radical overhaul.

A new consensus has formed among U.S. foreign policy elites: it is time for Washington to acknowledge that it no longer has vital interests in the region and vastly reduce its ambitions accordingly, retrench its forces, and perhaps even end the era of “endless wars” by withdrawing from the Middle East altogether. After two difficult decades, such arguments might seem compelling. But leaving the Middle East is not a sound policy. Washington still has critical interests there that are worth protecting, even if political, technological, and social changes have made those interests less vital than they were decades ago. Instead of using U.S. power to remake the region,

STEVEN A. COOK is Eni Enrico Mattei Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

however, policymakers need to embrace the more realistic and realizable goal of establishing and preserving stability.

Unfortunately, all the loose talk in recent years about withdrawal has undermined Washington's influence. Thanks to a perception among Middle Eastern leaders that the United States intends to abdicate its leading role, China and Russia have emerged as alternative power brokers: a negative development not only for Washington but for the people of the region, as well. To prevent a worst-case scenario, in which regional actors take matters into their own hands, sowing more instability, more chaos, and more bloodshed, Washington needs to snap out of it, figure out its real interests in the Middle East, and craft a strategy to advance them.

GET OUT

Those calling for scaling back, retrenching, or withdrawing from the Middle East were once voices in the wilderness. Not anymore: what was once a fringe position has become the conventional wisdom. Take, for example, three places in the region that have bedeviled Washington over the last decade: Syria, Libya, and Iran. In 2011, only a few lonely voices argued for a U.S. military intervention after Syria's dictator, Bashar al-Assad, moved to crush a popular uprising. Meanwhile, opposition to the use of force in Congress, at the White House, in the Pentagon, and among the foreign policy commentariat was overwhelming. Similarly, that same year, when the Libyan strongman Muammar al-Qaddafi threatened to massacre his way out of a rebellion, most U.S. officials and analysts agreed that the American role should be limited to establishing a no-fly zone to prevent the regime from using airpower. The question of what to do about Iran's nuclear program generated more debate than did the conflicts in Syria and Libya, and a number of influential voices advocated U.S. military action. But the primary disagreement was not about whether to use force or pursue diplomacy but about whether the deal that the Obama administration eventually crafted represented the best possible diplomatic outcome.

Perhaps the most striking example of the shift in establishment views about using force in the Middle East was the U.S. reaction to the September 2019 attack on oil installations in Saudi Arabia, which most Western intelligence agencies believe was carried out by Iran. For the better part of the last 40 years, it has been a policy of the



Happy together? Trump in Riyadh, May 2017

United States to defend the oil fields of the Persian Gulf. Yet when an apparent Iranian attack temporarily took a significant portion of the world's oil supply off the market, American foreign policy specialists across the political spectrum raised alarms not about Iran's aggression but about the potentially grave consequences of a U.S. military response. Such restraint may have been appropriate, but the near-total absence of debate was remarkable. After all, the most important strategic rationale for the U.S. presence in the region—and the justification for spending billions of dollars over decades to ensure U.S. military predominance in the area—was the need to preserve the free flow of energy resources out of the Persian Gulf.

More than simply revealing a widespread reluctance to use force, the nondebate over whether to respond militarily to the attacks pointed to a deeper problem: the lack of a shared framework for

thinking through U.S. interests in the region. The set of interests that long shaped U.S. policy toward the Middle East has lost salience. Meanwhile, the always complex region has become even more complicated. Confronted with these new realities, a form of analytic exhaustion has set in among U.S. officials and analysts—a collective throwing up of the hands that partly explains the widespread appeal of retrenchment and withdrawal.

Throughout the Cold War and through the first decade of this century, ensuring cheap gasoline for U.S. consumers, supporting Israeli

A form of analytic exhaustion partly explains the widespread appeal of retrenchment and withdrawal.

security, fighting terrorists, and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction were all goals that Americans and their leaders demonstrated a willingness to spend resources on and even sacrifice lives for. All four remain important, but they have become less critical in recent years. The boom in hydraulic fracturing, or frack-

ing, has allowed the United States to become energy independent (or nearly so). This has raised questions among political leaders and analysts about whether protecting the free flow of fossil fuels from the Middle East is worth the investment to the United States.

Israel continues to enjoy significant U.S. support, but demographic and political changes in the United States will likely reduce Washington's largess in the coming decades. And it is increasingly hard to make the case that Israel still needs U.S. assistance. Israel is a rich country with an advanced economy that is well integrated with the rest of the world, especially in the information technology sector. Its per capita GDP is on par with those of France and the United Kingdom, and Israel's strategic position has never been better. Iran remains a challenge, but the Israel Defense Forces can deter Tehran and its allies, and the Israelis have a far more sophisticated military than any of their neighbors. Israel has developed its ties with Arab countries in the Persian Gulf, including normalizing relations with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates—even as it has tightened its half-century grip on the West Bank. Put simply, Israel is no longer an embattled ally.

At the same time, terrorism no longer exerts anything like the force it once did on U.S. foreign policy. The United States has not

suffered another mass-casualty assault on the scale of the 9/11 attacks, the Islamic State (or ISIS) has been all but wiped out in Iraq and Syria, and, in the age of COVID-19, Americans seem to have more to fear from the mundane tasks of daily life than from terrorism. What is more, advocates for withdrawal argue, terrorism is largely a function of the U.S. presence in the region, since extremists exploit it to validate their jihadi calls for resistance to a heretical oppressor. At the very least, the argument goes, with fewer U.S. forces in the region, the threat to Americans at home would lessen.

Finally, the cause of nonproliferation took a devastating hit from the ill-fated invasion of Iraq, which was sold principally as a mission to disarm Saddam Hussein's regime. This was an extraordinary blunder given that Iraq did not in fact possess weapons of mass destruction. To the extent that they care about the issue at all, most Americans, including many in the foreign policy community, now see nonproliferation as a problem best solved through diplomacy—or at least a problem that does not require the kind of military infrastructure the United States currently maintains in the region.

STAY PUT

If safeguarding the flow of oil, protecting Israel, fighting terrorism, and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction no longer make the Middle East a priority for American foreign policy or justify a significant U.S. military presence there, then what does? The answer is that, when managed properly, the U.S. presence in the region offers a degree of stability in a part of the world wracked by violence, collapsing states, and resurgent authoritarians. A Middle East shaped by a high degree of U.S. involvement is hardly a bastion of liberal democracy and prosperity. But a truly post-American Middle East would be even worse.

Start with Iran. The United States has been unable to coerce or cajole the Islamic Republic into abandoning its quest for nuclear weapons, ceasing its support for terrorist groups, or ending its brutal repression of its own citizens. At this point, Washington should dispense with those goals. Instead, it should pursue a more efficient and less dangerous policy: containment. This would mean taking regime change off the table but limiting the exercise of Iranian power around the region by establishing implicit rules about acceptable Iranian behavior. Containment is not just an exercise in diplo-

matic hardball, however; it requires the presence of military forces and the credible threat of their use.

Many in the U.S. foreign policy community hope that under a different presidential administration, the United States will reenter the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in which Iran agreed to verifiably limit its nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief, or negotiate a new agreement. But the regional dynamics do not lend themselves to such an outcome. No matter how well crafted a new deal might be, it would raise hackles in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Those countries would do everything they could to undermine any new agreement, no matter how much military hardware the United States offered them in return for their assent. And even if they did play along, all that hardware would make it a lot easier for them to try to undermine the deal by using those weapons against Iran or its proxies. In that way, an effort to stabilize the region through negotiations could very well have the opposite effect.

Containment, however, would hardly mean simply allowing the Iranians to develop nuclear weapons; the strategy would not preclude dialogue, sanctions, or the use of force to prevent that outcome. In fact, it would involve a mix of all three. Containment wouldn't be pretty, and no one who pursues it would win a Nobel Peace Prize. But it promises something that is at least achievable: a reduction of tensions in the Persian Gulf.

Iran is hardly the only source of such tensions. Although diminished, jihadi groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS still pose a serious threat. Those who advocate some form of withdrawal often argue that reducing the U.S. military presence in the Middle East might mitigate that danger. Yet it is wishful thinking to believe that jihadi terrorism would wither away after the last U.S. soldier departed; the ideologies that drive extremism are firmly entrenched in the region, and they call for violence against heretics regardless of whether they occupy any particular territory.

To combat this persistent threat, what Washington needs is not a "war on terror" built on visions of regime change, democracy promotion, and "winning hearts and minds" but a realistic approach focused on intelligence gathering, police work, multilateral cooperation, and the judicious application of violence when required. Setting aside its bombastic "America first" rhetoric, the Trump

administration's 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism offers a fairly good road map, dispensing with the false hope that Washington can fix the politics of the region while laying out an approach to counterterrorism that has a chance of reducing the problem to a manageable level.

Meanwhile, even in the age of fracking, Middle Eastern oil will remain important to the United States. But protecting the sea-lanes through which a significant percentage of the global oil supply travels requires a far smaller military footprint than the one Washington has established in the last two decades. A small group of U.S. Navy ships with a complement of fighter jets stationed on air bases in the region or on an aircraft carrier would suffice. Realigning U.S. resources in that way would have the added benefit of reducing the risk that future U.S. policymakers would be tempted to pursue projects that have little, if any, relationship to freedom of navigation, thus making overreach less likely.

Perhaps the greatest change to Washington's approach to the region should be in its relations with Israel. The United States should no longer be Israel's patron. This is not because Washington ought to punish Israel for its conduct in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which has made a two-state solution impossible. Rather, it is a reflection of the success of U.S. policy, which has sought to ensure Israeli security and sovereignty. Both have now been established beyond any doubt.

American leaders should want good relations with a strong and secure Israel. But the United States no longer needs to provide Israel with aid. Toward that end, the two countries should mutually agree to phase out U.S. military assistance over the next decade. Owing to demographic and political shifts in the United States, an end to such aid is likely to come in the not-too-distant future anyway. An agreement to phase it out in a planned and predictable way would give the Israelis some say in how the process unfolds and avoid an alternative scenario in which U.S. aid becomes conditional—a form of behavioral modification. Even without military aid, the U.S.-Israeli partnership would remain strong. The two countries would still mutually benefit from continued cooperation in the defense, security, and technology sectors. Israel's adversaries would struggle to put any daylight between Washington and Jerusalem.

*The United States should
no longer be Israel's patron.*

THE COSTS OF INACTION

This is what a realistic U.S. Middle East policy looks like: containing Iran, retooling the fight against terrorism to reduce its counterproductive side effects, reorganizing military deployments to emphasize the protection of sea-lanes, and downscaling the U.S.-Israeli relationship to reflect Israel's relative strength. Such an approach would leave unfulfilled the grand ambitions that Americans have pursued: the spread of democracy, the overthrow of Iran's theocracy, the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But it would also avoid the disasters that would ensue if the United States were to depart. To see what the region might look like in that scenario, one need only look at recent episodes in which U.S. inaction contributed to catastrophic outcomes.

Take, for example, the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, which began in March 2015. The costs of this misadventure have been high, especially for Yemeni civilians: untold numbers have been injured, and some 13,500 have died, according to some estimates, many owing to an outbreak of cholera made possible by the intense devastation caused by the Saudi bombardment. The war has also destabilized the Arabian Peninsula, making it harder for Washington to counter extremism and protect the free flow of energy. None of these outcomes was preordained, and some of them might have been mitigated or avoided altogether had the United States not signaled its desire to leave the Middle East.

The Saudis undertook the intervention after U.S. actions signaling a pullback bumped up against a crisis in the region. First, they watched as the United States withdrew from Iraq, paving the way for Iran to become the dominant force in Iraqi politics; allowed the Assad regime in Syria to squash a broad-based uprising, with help from its patrons in Tehran and Moscow; and negotiated a nuclear deal with Iran. This was deeply unsettling to the Saudis, fueling their fears that they were being left at the mercy of the Iranian regime and its drive for regional hegemony. Then, in 2014, a group called Ansar Allah (commonly known as the Houthis) overthrew the Yemeni government in Sanaa. The Saudis—faced with what they perceived to be Tehran's support for the Houthis and American indifference to Iran's growing power—felt compelled to go to war.

The Saudis' fears that they could no longer rely on their American protectors grew stronger after the Trump administration declined to

respond with force to a series of Iranian provocations in the summer of 2019, including the attack on Saudi oil facilities. Should Riyadh come to feel that Washington has truly cut it loose, it might take measures to protect itself that once seemed unthinkable, including developing its own nuclear weapons. If Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is as impetuous, strong-willed, and arrogant as is widely believed, he might decide that only a nuclear arsenal can provide Saudi Arabia with the security it needs and the room for maneuver it craves in its conflict with Iran. If the Saudis went down that path, the results would be disastrous.

There would be benefits to leaving the region, but they would be far outweighed by the costs.

Iraq is another place where a U.S. exit would do far more harm than good—even though, for withdrawal advocates, Iraq represents the original sin of Washington’s flawed Middle East policy of the last two decades and is thus one of the first places in the region from which the United States must withdraw. Today, Iraq is in terminal collapse and saddled with layers of complex political, economic, and social problems. The country’s political class and institutions are thoroughly corrupt. Even so, it would be a mistake to leave now. The 2003 invasion was a strategic blunder—but so would be leaving Iraqis to the predations of terrorists and the regime next door.

U.S. counterterrorism missions in Iraq offer a relatively inexpensive way to help the Iraqis keep ISIS and other extremists at bay and, in the process, to contribute to the development of military and security institutions that can bolster Iraq’s independence. Iraq will probably never be free of Iranian influence, but it need not be left so weak that Tehran can continue to use the country to advance its malign regional interests. To withdrawal advocates, this will sound like a slippery slope to an endless mission in Iraq. But past experience suggests that declaring victory and going home can have serious and negative consequences for Iraq and the region. Just consider what happened the last time Washington decided to do that, in 2011: one result was the rise of ISIS, which eventually dragged the United States back into Iraq anyway.

A final, and less familiar, area in which a U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East would make matters worse is the eastern Mediterranean, where tensions over the status of Cyprus, maritime boundaries,

and access to natural gas deposits pit a dizzying array of countries, including multiple NATO allies and various U.S. strategic partners, against one another. Not only have these complex and related disputes created a dangerous situation at sea, but they threaten to make worse the already grim situation in nearby Libya, where a civil war continues to rage and has drawn in a number of countries, including Egypt and Turkey, which nearly came to blows in recent months. The United States has been conspicuously absent from the scene except for a number of well-timed naval deployments over the summer, which seemed to cool tensions momentarily. But a lack of U.S. involvement in these brewing conflicts would increase the chances that they would spin out of control.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

It would be a blessing if the United States could simply end its “endless wars” and walk away from the Middle East. But doing so would be no way to conduct foreign policy. There would be benefits to leaving the region, but they would be far outweighed by the costs.

Washington got bogged down in the Middle East because it lost sight of what really matters in the region. The first two decades of this century were an era in which almost everything and anything was justified in terms of U.S. interests. The goal now should be to clarify what is important and match national resources to protecting those things. Declaring defeat and going home will solve nothing. 🌐

REVIEWS & RESPONSES

*Fear and power, hubris
and guilt, not naiveté
and dogmatism, inspired
the decision to invade Iraq.*

— Melvyn Leffler



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The Decider

Why Bush Chose War in Iraq

Melvyn P. Leffler

To Start a War: How the Bush Administration Took America Into Iraq
BY ROBERT DRAPER. Penguin Press, 2020, 480 pp.

“A man is not deceived by others; he deceives himself.” This quotation, from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, serves as the fitting epigraph to Robert Draper’s riveting new book on U.S. President George W. Bush’s decision to go to war in Iraq. In contrast to most accounts of the decision-making process that led to the invasion in March 2003, *To Start a War* stresses that the president himself was the decider—not Dick Cheney, the vice president; not Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense; not Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense; not Scooter Libby, the vice president’s chief of staff. Moreover, Draper clarifies that Iraq was not the administration’s obsessive preoccupation from the very beginning. The surprise attack on 9/11 changed the president’s calculus, creating a direct line from that tragic event to the even more tragic decision to invade Iraq. Bush frequently insisted that he had not yet made up his mind, but Draper claims that he was deceiving

MELVYN P. LEFFLER is Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia and the author of *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920–2015*.

himself. “In truth, Bush had stacked his own deck,” Draper writes. “Prizing loyalty above all else, he had surrounded himself with subordinates who believed that their job was to support the president’s value judgments rather than to question them.”

Bush’s vision, moreover, was clear, Draper argues: “to liberate a tormented people,” “to end a tyrant’s regime.” The president should have known that Saddam Hussein, Iraq’s dictator, had no weapons of mass destruction (WMD), no links to al Qaeda, and no responsibility for 9/11. According to Draper, Bush led the United States into a needless war. He did so because he believed deeply in the United States’ nobility and its mission to spread freedom—which Draper says the president considered “God’s gift to the world.” Not only was Saddam “the guy who tried to kill my dad,” as Bush once noted, referring to a failed plot to assassinate George H. W. Bush in 1993. Far worse, the president said, “he hates the fact, like al Qaeda does, that we love freedom.” These, according to Draper, were Bush’s animating impulses.

No policymaker comes off well in Draper’s account. From the moment he took office, Cheney worried about the United States’ vulnerability to terrorists armed with chemical or biological weapons. “After 9/11,” Draper writes, the Office of the Vice President “emerged as the Bush administration’s think tank of the unthinkable, where apocalyptic scenarios became objects of obsession, no matter how unlikely.” Whereas Cheney was quiet, thoughtful, and probing, Rumsfeld was an irascible, irresponsible bully. He schemed to get close to Bush, collaborated with Cheney, and sidelined civilian subordinates and

military officers who disagreed with him, thereby ensuring that “dissent on critical issues was close to nonexistent in the Pentagon.” Secretary of State Colin Powell, in Draper’s view, had deep-seated reservations about going to war but lacked the courage to voice his convictions and did not possess an alternative vision that he could sell to the president. He carefully guarded his doubts lest he become irrelevant.

George Tenet, the director of the CIA, prized the attention that Bush bestowed on his agency and massaged the information going to the president for fear that he would be perceived as soft.

Many of Tenet’s subordinates assumed that their boss did not want to antagonize “the First Customer,” the president, and hence hesitated to convey many of their reservations about the accuracy of their assessments of Iraq’s WMD programs. Among this set of feuding, distrustful advisers, all of whom had had years of experience in the highest echelons of past administrations, Condoleezza Rice, Bush’s national security adviser, was outmatched and unable to orchestrate the consensus recommendations for which she yearned.

If all of this sounds familiar, it is. But Draper develops his arguments with an astonishing amount of detail, stemming from extensive interviews he conducted with Wolfowitz, Powell, Rice, Richard Armitage (Powell’s deputy), Stephen Hadley (Rice’s deputy), Douglas Feith (the undersecretary of defense for policy), and Eric Edelman (an adviser to Libby)—along with many other key officials in the State Department, the Pentagon, and the White House. Even more illuminating is the information he gleaned from talking to

roughly 70 analysts, station chiefs, and middle- and upper-level managers in the CIA. From these interviews, Draper presents a devastating indictment of the way a key document making the case for war was created. The National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq’s WMD, designed in October 2002 to satisfy skeptics in Congress, drew on unreliable sources and came to exaggerated conclusions based on a “tissue-thin foundation of facts.” Draper offers an even more appalling account of the scripting of Powell’s address to the UN Security Council in early February 2003. The speech insisted that Iraq had failed to disarm, but the analysts and policymakers who contributed to it ignored mounting evidence that their information about Iraq’s weapons programs was flimsy at best. Perhaps even more consequential is Draper’s analysis of the inadequate and chaotic planning for the postwar occupation of Iraq. He claims, for example, that when Defense Department officials decided to disband the entire Iraqi army, they did so without the knowledge of the president. It was a disastrous decision: the demobilization alienated many Iraqi military officers and drove them toward the emerging insurgency.

To Start a War will go a long way to solidify prevailing views about the dysfunction, naiveté, and dogmatism of Bush and his advisers. Draper is an influential journalist, with a wide network of sources throughout the intelligence and policymaking communities, and his 2007 book on Bush’s White House years was well received. Readers will come away convinced that the Bush administration was led by a self-confident, simplistic, and incurious president and

advisers notable for their arrogance and irresponsibility. The hundreds and hundreds of footnotes Draper includes that cite his interviews and reference declassified documents convey an authenticity that must not be discounted. Yet one cannot help but wonder if his account is a simplification of reality.

SADDAM'S GAME

Most concerning is Draper's portrayal of Saddam. At the end of the book, Draper questions whether there was "a shred of evidence" that he intended to harm the United States. "The megalomaniacal madman of the Bush administration's collective imagination had . . . largely checked out of running Iraq's affairs." He was divorced from reality, delegating authority, writing fiction and poetry, and hoping to reconcile with the United States to fight Islamic extremists. As a source for this description of Saddam, Draper cites an interview he conducted with Charles Duelfer, the former arms inspector who led the Iraq Survey Group, the mission that was sent to Iraq after the invasion to look for WMD and came up empty. That team also interviewed former Iraqi officials, and Duelfer told Draper that Saddam had viewed the United States as a potential ally. But Draper does not mention the darker conclusion that Duelfer arrived at in his memoir: "I was sympathetic to the president's strategic decision that Iraq with Saddam was a threat to the United States and containment via sanctions was doomed." Nor does Draper dwell on the very long section in Duelfer's final report on Saddam's strategic intentions. That section begins with the categorical assertion: "Saddam Husayn so dominated the Iraqi regime

that its strategic intent was his alone. He wanted to end sanctions while preserving the capability to reconstitute his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) when sanctions were lifted."

Another team of interrogators (from the Iraqi Perspectives Project, a study run by U.S. Joint Forces Command) also went to Baghdad after the invasion and talked to dozens of Iraqi officials. They, too, concluded that Saddam had been "keeping a WMD program primed for quick re-start the moment the UN Security Council lifted sanctions." They also noted that Saddam was convinced that none of his opponents "possessed the ruthlessness, competence, or ability to thwart his aims over the long run."

Saddam was unmoored from reality, as Draper suggests, but he was not harmless and compliant. After the UN Security Council passed a resolution in November 2002 that condemned Iraq's noncompliance with weapons inspections, Saddam finally allowed inspectors to enter the country. At that point, according to Draper, Americans—*not* Saddam—obstructed the weapons inspectors. The CIA, he says, held back data on suspected weapons sites and provided confusing information about others. Draper selectively quotes from the memoir of Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, to highlight Blix's frustration with U.S. officials but conveys little sense of his discontent with Iraq's behavior. Blix deemed Iraq's initial declaration of its arms inventory to be woefully inadequate. As he writes in his memoir, "No significant disarmament issues were solved by the new declaration." When he and Mohamed ElBaradei, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, visited Bagh-



dad in January 2003, Saddam refused to meet with them. A month later, according to the British Parliament's official inquiry into the Iraq war, Blix told a group of European diplomats, "There had been no change in heart, just more activity. Iraq attempted to conceal things." Blix remonstrated against the American timeline, as Draper accurately notes, and he saw few signs of Iraqi WMD. But he was also frustrated by Saddam's grudging, belated cooperation and his persistent deviousness, which Draper disregards. Only after the war would it become known that Saddam's deception stemmed from his desire to deter adversaries, such as Iran, and intimidate domestic foes, such as the Kurds, against whom he previously had used chemical weapons.

Draper does not dwell on Saddam's behavior because he is convinced that Bush saw inspections as a ruse to go to war, and not as a possible, albeit unlikely, means to ensure Iraq's compliance with previous UN resolutions and avoid conflict. In a key passage, Draper writes, "The notion of leaving even a defanged Saddam Hussein in power was no longer among Bush's options." Yet there is now evidence in the voluminous records of the British parliamentary inquiry that Bush was in fact willing to accept that possibility. At the end of July 2002, when the British sensed that the White House was heading to war, David Manning, Prime Minister Tony Blair's foreign policy adviser, flew to Washington and talked to Rice. He explained that Blair wanted to be with Bush, no matter what, but that Blair could not go to war for regime change. Saddam's violations of UN resolutions could serve as a justification for military

action, but there had to be a sincere effort to get the inspectors back into Iraq. If Saddam complied, they had to take yes for an answer. Manning then met with Bush, and they arranged a phone conversation between the American and British leaders. Blair told Bush that he did not think Saddam would comply with a new resolution but that if he did, they could not invade. According to Jonathan Powell, Blair's chief of staff, "The Prime Minister said repeatedly to President Bush that if Saddam complied with the UN Resolutions, then there would not be any invasion and President Bush agreed with him on that." Blair writes in his memoir, "I knew at that moment that George had not decided."

Bush, however, did resolve to confront Saddam. In his own memoir, the president recalls saying at a September 7, 2002, National Security Council meeting, "Either he will come clean about his weapons, or there will be war." Saddam had agency; he had a chance to avoid war. As Blair explained to the British inquiry, "We were giving Saddam one final choice." If the Iraqi dictator welcomed the inspectors and complied, action would halt. "I made this clear to President Bush, and he agreed." The Americans understood, Manning said, that "we had given Saddam a get out of jail card if he chose to use it." But he didn't, as his behavior during the inspection process revealed.

FEAR FACTOR

Draper minimizes the ongoing sense of threat. Although he stresses the obsessive fear that racked the vice president's office, he understates the sense of vulnerability that permeated the entire government in the aftermath of 9/11.

All of Bush's advisers capture this anxiety in their memoirs. "It is difficult to put in words the number of reports, and the intensity of those reports, that came in every day," writes Tenet. An "atmosphere of uncertainty" gripped the White House, "a brooding sense of threat," remembers Michael Gerson, a speechwriter for Bush. "Every day for those first several days, we expected another strike," recounts Karen Hughes, Bush's communications director.

These fears persisted, an important point that Draper elides as he progresses in his narrative. They continued because terrorist attacks did not cease after 9/11. Readers are not told of the more than 700 people who were killed by terrorists during 2002, including 30 U.S. citizens. Draper does not discuss Richard Reid's attempt to use a bomb in his shoe to bring down an American Airlines flight in December 2001, or the beheading of the journalist Daniel Pearl in early 2002, or the assault on a synagogue in Tunisia in April 2002, or the arrest of Yemeni Americans near Buffalo in September 2002 for their links to al Qaeda, or the bombing of nightclubs in Bali in October 2002 that killed more than 200 people, or the murder of the American diplomat Laurence Foley in Jordan also in October 2002, or the scores of suicide attacks in Israel in 2001 and 2002. Nor does Draper seek to understand why a troubling trio of allegations—that Iraq supported terrorism, that it had WMD programs, and that al Qaeda was seeking WMD—raised concerns among U.S. officials that Iraqi chemical or biological weapons might find their way into terrorists' hands. Instead, Draper compellingly shows that such allegations were founded on falsehoods that should

have been appreciated by Bush's advisers; they were not appreciated, Draper argues, because Cheney, Libby, and Feith exerted relentless pressure on the analysts to come up with incriminating evidence and because Tenet was leery of disappointing the First Customer.

Employing vivid material from his interviews, Draper seems very convincing. He shows in great detail why intelligence collectors should have been suspicious of the reports emanating from an informant code-named "Curveball," an Iraqi defector living in Germany who was disseminating false information about Saddam's chemical weapons. He describes why analysts felt it was futile to voice their misgivings about the information they possessed regarding Iraqi WMD, given their belief that Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld had already made up their minds to use military force for regime change. But Draper does not reconcile his conclusions with the exhaustive reports of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the presidentially appointed Robb-Silberman Commission. These investigations emphasized that intelligence analysts were not bullied into manipulating their findings regarding WMD. However arresting Draper's evidence may be, he does not deal adequately with conflicting views, such as the one expressed by Richard Haass, who was then the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff (and is now the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, the publisher of *Foreign Affairs*). Haass writes in his memoir, "Not once in all my meetings in my years in government did an intelligence analyst or anyone else for that matter argue openly or take me

aside and say privately that Iraq possessed nothing in the way of weapons of mass destruction.”

In their memoirs, almost all of the administration's top officials—Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Tenet—emphasize that they went to war for reasons of security, for fear of another terrorist attack, this one conducted with WMD. Draper dismisses these fears and insists that Bush and his advisers invaded Iraq to promote freedom. In making this argument, Draper conflates motives and goals. Having decided to go to war, the president did want to promote democracy, but that was not what drove his decision. Bush went to war because he perceived Iraq as a threat, because he distrusted a dictator who had a track record of defiance, because he felt a sense of responsibility for having been in office on 9/11, and because he was determined to avoid another such calamity. Rice states this clearly: “We went to war because we saw a threat to our national security and that of our allies. But if we did have to overthrow Saddam, the United States had to have a view of what would come next.”

Unfortunately, as Draper vividly describes, Rice and her colleagues never did agree on what would come next, and the postwar phase was a disaster. But that failure raises the question of whether the decision to invade Iraq was unwise from its inception or was proved unwise because of deplorable execution. In Draper's account, the war was unnecessary. It happened because the president instinctively decided on war almost immediately after 9/11, deluded himself into thinking he was not committed, listened to advisers who fed him misinformation, and claimed an imminent threat when no such threat existed.

Draper powerfully argues that the war was needless, but a careful reading of the evidence suggests a more complex story. British records, made available in conjunction with the parliamentary inquiry, now reveal that almost all key leaders believed that Saddam would accept inspectors and abide by UN resolutions only when faced with military force. Not only did Bush and Blair think this; so did French President Jacques Chirac and Russian President Vladimir Putin, as well as Blix and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. Several of these officials most definitely did not want war, but they did seek Saddam's compliance and believed it would not be forthcoming unless he was threatened. In fact, Saddam did respond to the threat of force. He reacted slowly, grudgingly opening additional sites for inspection and instructing subordinates and scientists to cooperate. But he still hoped to divide the French and the Russians from the Americans and expected the Americans to back down. Saddam was playing a game of chicken, and he lost. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Rice felt that they had no choice but to go to war once deployments had occurred and they deemed American credibility to be at risk.

Should Bush and his advisers have gotten to this point? Draper argues no; it was foolish, naive, and unwarranted. According to Draper, the president internalized false claims from hawkish advisers that Iraq was linked to 9/11. Draper emphasizes the relentless efforts of Cheney, Wolfowitz, Libby, and Feith to persuade the president of the ongoing connections between Osama bin Laden and the Iraqi Intelligence Service.

But Bush said many times, publicly and privately, that he did not go to war

out of a belief that Iraq was responsible for 9/11. Michael Morell, his CIA briefer, told him categorically that there were no links between Saddam and 9/11. Nonetheless, Bush did believe that Saddam represented a looming threat, stemming from his alleged possession of WMD and the prospect that he might hand them over to terrorists, any terrorists. Bush worried about such matters because the international sanctions imposed on Iraq after the Gulf War were eroding, and most advisers and analysts anticipated that Saddam would use his growing revenues to build up his conventional capabilities, restart his WMD programs, and challenge or blackmail the United States or its allies. As the Iraq Survey Group's report made clear, between 1998 and 2002, Saddam had already been using illegal revenues from smuggling oil to augment his conventional arsenal. Although his military capabilities had been seriously degraded over the previous decade, they were certain to mount once Iraq was freed from sanctions, thereby empowering Saddam to resume his ambitions. And those ambitions were not benign. Captured Iraqi documents published by the Institute for Defense Analyses, a Pentagon research group, reveal that although Saddam had no operational links to al Qaeda, he did have ties to multiple terrorist groups, including the Palestine Liberation Front, Hamas, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and Afghanistan's Hezb-e-Islami. He was willing to work with Islamist jihadists. He did wish to challenge American interests and allies. He did seek to support terrorist activities in Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. He did want to harm Americans.

WHY IT HAPPENED

None of this means that Draper is wrong to condemn the decision to go to war. Although sanctions were eroding and Saddam was bound to become more challenging, he still posed no imminent threat to vital U.S. interests. One could argue—and some did—that Saddam could still be contained, that he could be kept, as Clinton administration officials were fond of putting it, “in his box.” Before Bush embarked on the course of coercive diplomacy, he should have initiated a systematic discussion of the costs and consequences of a military invasion. Instead, his advisers spent endless meetings discussing tactics and goals rather than examining the tradeoffs inherent in a preventive military action that could go terribly awry. For this failure, Draper is rightly critical of the president.

But Bush's motivations, perceptions, and actions were far more complicated than those portrayed in *To Start a War*. Bush decided to remove a looming threat, not an imminent threat (although he did conflate the two in his public rhetoric). Inspired by the successful quick overthrow of the Taliban in Afghanistan, he thought he had an opportunity to employ the United States' overwhelming power to confront a defiant, unrepentant dictator who had WMD and who was dealing with numerous terrorist groups that might inflict harm on the United States or its allies. Bush would not allow Saddam to blackmail the United States or discourage it from using its power to protect its interests in the region. The president wanted U.S. adversaries to know that the country was strong and decisive.

Fear and power, hubris and guilt, not naiveté and dogmatism, inspired the final decision to invade Iraq. The fears were real. The 9/11 attacks were a wrenching experience. Imagine what it was like to have nearly 3,000 people die in a surprise attack after you had been forewarned of al Qaeda's intention to inflict great harm on Americans. However vague the warnings, imagine the remorse, as well as the anger; imagine the guilt, as well as the lust for revenge. These emotions ooze from the pages of Bush administration officials' writings. When Robert Gates succeeded Rumsfeld as secretary of defense, he quickly came to realize that the president and his advisers felt, as he put it in his memoir, "a huge sense . . . of having let the country down, of having allowed a devastating attack on America [to] take place on their watch." Across the Potomac, Carl Ford, a top State Department official at the time, came to the same conclusion. The president and his advisers "were traumatized by 9/11," Ford later recalled in an essay. He went on: "It happened on their watch. They swore to protect the nation from all threats, foreign and domestic. They failed." The September 11 attacks, then, bequeathed more than a bloodlust; they bequeathed a sense of responsibility to prevent another calamity.

Draper thinks it was a contrived fantasy to imagine danger emanating from Saddam's Iraq. But it was not. To capture the context at the time, consider what was more reasonable: to think on September 10, 2001, that 19 men with knives and box cutters would hijack four planes and destroy the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon, or to think a year later that Iraq might hand over chemical or

biological weapons to some terrorist group that might use them against U.S. interests or allies. The latter fear was wrong-headed and exaggerated, but it was not imagined by foolish, ideological advisers and a willful, dogmatic, naive president. It was imagined by officials who had been ridiculed for lacking imagination before 9/11.

When studying the decision to go to war in Iraq, one would do well to consider a comment Haass makes near the end of his memoir. "Although I disagreed with U.S. policy, my disagreement was not fundamental," he writes. "Earlier, I described my position as being 60/40 against going to war. . . . Had I known then what I now know, that Iraq no longer possessed weapons of mass destruction, then it would have become a 90/10 decision against the war." In his memoir, Bush more or less acknowledges the same train of thought: that if he had known that Saddam had no WMD, he might have acted differently. Draper has the advantage of knowing what the president did not know, and his interviewees also now know that the war, whose outcome was unclear in early 2003, went terribly wrong. But to capture the true travail of decision-making, one should neither fault a president for lacking the wisdom of hindsight nor judge him on the basis of information he did not possess. Rather, one should illuminate his fears as well as his hubris, his concerns with the nation's vulnerabilities as well as its power, his remorse over 9/11 as well as his lust for revenge, and his belief that protecting the American people was as important as remaking the world. 🌐



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The Long Road to Suffrage

How Women Won the Right to Vote

Jean H. Baker

Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All

BY MARTHA S. JONES. Basic Books, 2020, 352 pp.

Suffrage: Women's Long Battle for the Vote

BY ELLEN CAROL DUBOIS. Simon & Schuster, 2020, 400 pp.

As Hillary Clinton proclaimed near the end of a fiery speech delivered to an international audience in Beijing in 1995, “Human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights.” Some officials at the U.S. State Department were nervous about her address, believing that even such a seemingly benign mention of human rights would irritate the Chinese hosts of the UN-sponsored Fourth World Conference on Women. But in the United States and elsewhere, the phrase resonated—and still does.

Yet the fact that it was necessary to make explicit such an anodyne sentiment spoke to the troubling reality that for decades, the conventional wisdom

held that women’s rights had nothing to do with human rights. They were instead relegated to what was known in the nineteenth century as “the woman question,” which was really a bundle of questions, the answers to which were generally no. Should women receive more than a primary education? Should they control their own wages? Should they enjoy guardianship rights with respect to their children? And of increasing concern, should they have the right to vote? Nearly two centuries later, a version of this discourse still exists in the United States, where Americans often speak of “women’s issues.” There is no corollary for men’s matters.

From the republic’s earliest days, women were constrained by a British inheritance: the common law, which dictated that women were essentially the charges of their husbands or, if unmarried, of their fathers or brothers. Women were “civilly dead,” in the words of the Declaration of Sentiments, the document that emerged from the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the first women’s rights convention in the United States. In a society that privileged religion, women were also casualties of biblical interpretations that emphasized their original sin: Eve over Deborah, Jezebel over Sarah. Meanwhile, powerful social norms and cultural traditions relegated women to the home and demanded that they be pious, subservient, and obedient, further removing them from the public sphere.

But women had voices and pens, and so they began a long crusade that ultimately focused on the right to vote. This year marks the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which extended

JEAN H. BAKER is Professor Emerita at Goucher College and the author of *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists*.

that right to women—or to most of them, at least. Two new books by first-rate scholars of the women's rights movement explore this complex history, revealing the ways in which progress rarely proceeds in a linear manner. They serve as timely reminders of the fact that freedoms as fundamental as the right to vote are hard won and remain under constant threat from antidemocratic, repressive forces.

RIGHTS AND WRONGS

Black women in the United States have long faced a kind of triple jeopardy, suffering on account of not only their gender and their race but also their invisibility in the historical record. Before 1863, they were mostly enslaved, a dehumanizing condition that deprived them of liberty and also subjected them to constant sexual violence. "You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs," the Black poet, educator, and antislavery activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper tartly informed her colleagues in the American Equal Rights Association in 1866. The voices of Black women such as Harper have mostly been overlooked by historians in accounts of the battles over suffrage. As a result, one of the central developments in U.S. history has been rendered as a tale of persistent, courageous white women.

Thanks to Martha Jones's *Vanguard*, Black women's rightful place in this history has been restored. Jones, a professor of history at Johns Hopkins University, places Black women front, center, and in many instances ahead of white women in the fight for civil rights in the United States. "Black women built their own many-faceted and two-centuries-long women's

movement," she writes. What this work amounted to, Jones explains, was "a shared mission: winning women's power that would serve all humanity." Simply put, she writes, "Black women led American women, showing the way forward."

Although Jones is careful to credit her scholarly forebears, such as Paula Giddings and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *Vanguard* is unique: there is nothing like it in the historical literature. Jones reaches back to the period immediately following the American Revolution to unearth the stories of Black women who entered the public arena. Among those active in the early nineteenth century were Jarena Lee, a traveling minister, teacher, and abolitionist, and Maria Miller Stewart, who addressed so-called promiscuous audiences (those that included men and women) and wrote in newspapers encouraging "the daughters of Africa" to take on public roles. Sarah Mapps Douglass, the Black founder of Philadelphia's Female Literary Association in 1831, was lecturing on the sins of slavery well before two white sisters, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, took up the cause and became two of the earliest nationally known female abolitionists. In investigating a period for which limited historical sources exist to shed light on the thoughts and activities of such Black women, Jones is adept at using letters to the editors of newspapers, including the abolitionist weekly *The Liberator*, as one means of ferreting out their views on a wide range of issues. For example, Douglass, writing to *The Liberator* under the pen name Zillah, opposed efforts to persuade American Blacks to emigrate to Haiti; in another letter, she expressed her encouragement at the sight of Black and white Ameri-

cans in Philadelphia “mingling together . . . without a shadow of disgust.”

By the time of the Civil War, Black women had become a controversial presence at antislavery conventions, where their race and gender disqualified them from leadership positions. But many took another route to public life: through Black churches, where they persistently fought for and won the right to preach. Then, beginning in the late 1860s and early 1870s, after the 14th and 15th Amendments had opened some doors for African Americans, Black women joined the American Equal Rights Association, attended the Colored National Labor Union, and were present at meetings of the newly formed National Woman Suffrage Association—although the last proved a hostile environment, given the co-founder Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s blunt assertions of Black inferiority.

Characteristic of the fascinating but lesser-known figures from this era of Black female activism is Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a schoolteacher in Washington, D.C., who took direct action by joining white women in attempting to register to vote in 1871. Rebuffed, she sent messages to congressional committees about the need to revise the texts of existing laws by removing the word “male.” Shadd Cary, born in Delaware in 1823 to free parents, was “an upstart,” Jones writes. She emigrated to Canada, founded the weekly *Provincial Freeman*, and returned to the United States during the Civil War to help recruit Black soldiers for the Union. A more celebrated activist of this era is Mary Church Terrell, who was born in 1863 to freed slaves in Tennessee and went on to graduate from Oberlin College, serve as

the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, and travel to Berlin in 1904 to lecture (in German) on African American history. Terrell was a committed suffragist who saw the vote as an essential instrument to end lynching and the segregation of public accommodation and who deftly navigated the undercurrents of racism within the suffrage movement. In 1913, many white members of the movement’s most influential organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (which succeeded the National Woman Suffrage Association), objected to the participation of Black women in a parade that the group was planning to hold in Washington, D.C. The leader of the local NAWSA chapter, Alice Paul, considered excluding them, and some Black activists were also uneasy with the idea of marching. But Terrell, undaunted, joined a contingent of dozens of Black women who took part in the parade, which nearly devolved into a riot when, Jones writes, counter-protesters showed up and “jeered at, spit upon, and assaulted the women” while police officers looked on and let the marchers “fend for themselves.”

PAVING THE WAY

As Jones makes clear, for Black female activists of this generation, suffrage was only one of a number of goals. Their causes were, as the Black activist Anna Julia Cooper wrote in her 1892 manifesto, *A Voice From the South*, “the rights of humanity.” And for them, the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920 was hardly a watershed, since for decades after its passage, the vast majority of Black women (and men) in the South continued to be denied the right to vote



The work goes on (clockwise from top left): Jarena Lee, Mary Church Terrell, and Stacey Abrams

in which men almost always appear as the main protagonists. Jones seeks to redress this lack of attention, as well, by focusing on four female leaders in the movement: Diane Nash, who organized efforts to integrate lunch counters and interstate buses; Pauli Murray, a trail-blazing attorney; Rosa Parks, who became famous for her role in the 1955–56 bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama; and Fannie Lou Hamer, the celebrated voting-rights activist.

These Black women paved the way for others who would, in the decades that followed, gain political power through elective and appointive offices. Some of these women are familiar, such as Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to win election to the U.S. Congress, in 1968, and Barbara Jordan, the first Black woman from Texas to do so, in 1972. Others are less well known, including the lawyer Lani Guinier, who had earned

owing to disenfranchising tactics such as poll taxes and grandfather clauses.

For Black Americans, genuine democracy arrived only with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But just as histories of the women's suffrage movement have tended to overlook Black women, so, too, have many histories of the push for civil rights,

a great deal of respect as an official in the Justice Department but whose nomination for a higher position was withdrawn in 1993 by President Bill Clinton after critics attacked her for espousing views they considered radical. And finally, there is Stacey Abrams, the bold Black woman who nearly won the gubernatorial race in Georgia in 2018 and who this past spring refused to hide her ambitions for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination—in marked contrast to the eventual nominee, Kamala Harris.

Jones makes a vigorous case that Black women's roles as political actors have shaped events far more than most Americans realize. As she writes, "The story of the Vanguard is still being written. Black women continue to innovate, challenge, and lead American politics to its best ideals in our own moment." Sometimes, however, she veers into hagiography. And on occasion, one or two figures become "they," standing in for all Black women. For example, the assertion that "when they gathered, Black women did so to serve the needs of everyone" is overly broad; indeed, many of the figures Jones profiles neglected to press hard for the rights of working-class women of any race. And the evidence in Jones's book does not always back her contention that, collectively, female Black activists built a movement of their own. Some were soloists, and although Jones convincingly demonstrates the intergenerational and familial legacies among them, many operated within organizations run by men. These, however, are minor flaws in a book that takes a critical step forward in understanding U.S. history and that is a welcome corrective to the conventional narrative of women's rights.

A BALANCED VIEW

Jones's work stands out as particularly valuable because other, less nuanced attempts to correct the record in this centennial year have often missed the mark. The anniversary, in fact, has sparked something of a backlash, driven by complaints that celebrating the passage of the 19th Amendment and its best-known champions—all of whom are white—contributes to the erasure of nonwhite voices from the suffrage story. In the most reductive examples of this revisionism, the traditional heroes of the story—women such as Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—are cast as something closer to villains, worthy not of celebration for their work on suffrage but of condemnation for their white supremacy. In August, an editorial in *The New York Times* decried the mythologizing of the movement led by Stanton and Anthony, who "got a stranglehold on the historical record . . . [and] established an enduring, self-serving legacy."

It is certainly true that most white suffragists held views on race that are anathema today. But should their failure to live up to contemporary standards overshadow their contribution to civil rights? As Ellen Carol DuBois points out in *Suffrage*, her impressive new history of the movement, other white-dominated political movements of that era, including the labor movement and the Progressive movement, also "accommodated to insurgent white supremacy." Yet compared with those movements, the push for women's suffrage seems to take far more criticism for the racism in its ranks. Few other centennial celebrations of undeniable advances in human rights have elicited such fierce criticism.

It is, then, a considerable blessing that DuBois's book provides an informed, balanced history of the movement. DuBois, a professor emerita at the University of California, Los Angeles, is considered the dean of suffrage studies in the United States. Few scholars bothered with the subject before DuBois published *Feminism and Suffrage* in 1978, a trailblazing study in which she explained how allowing women to vote undermined the traditional American family system by giving women an independent voice. Her most recent contribution to the field is a readable narrative of the 72-year campaign for the enfranchisement of women. It is intended for a general audience, and scholars will not find much new material in it. But all will find a thoughtful history full of striking details.

DuBois begins with the Seneca Falls Convention, the iconic event in most origin stories of the movement. Like Jones, DuBois relies on capsule biographies to propel the story forward, and she narrates this phase of the movement through the lives of Stanton and Anthony, as well as those of some less familiar figures, such as Lucretia Mott and Lucy Stone. These activists believed that as long as women were denied the right to vote, the United States would fail to live up to its founding ideals, and they hoped for an alliance with like-minded men. DuBois quotes Harper, the poet, educator, and activist, who said in a speech in 1866, "Justice is not fulfilled as long as woman is unequal to man. We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity."

That generation's attempts failed, however, and the post-Reconstruction years represented something of a nadir for the movement; not until the twentieth century did its fortunes improve. As few

others have, DuBois credits Frances Willard, who served as president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, with helping revive the suffrage movement. The central mission of the WCTU, which specifically appealed to Christian women, was to promote temperance in drinking habits by challenging the liquor interests. Willard argued that temperance would provide protection for women by loosening the grip of alcohol on their family members, and she saw the right to vote as a crucial tool in spurring such change. Ballots in the hands of women would, in Willard's words, "converge on the rum shop" and destroy it. That message, DuBois shows, resonated more strongly with women in small towns and rural areas than did more abstract arguments about individual rights.

DuBois also pays close attention to Black women suffragists, especially Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, whose anti-lynching work should not obscure her contributions to the women's rights movement. DuBois also makes visible the contributions of working-class women, such as those who in 1917 stationed themselves on subway platforms in New York City carrying placards urging a yes vote on New York State's referendum on women's suffrage. She credits Harriot Stanton Blatch, the subject of her previous biography (and Stanton's daughter), with developing a strategy for political action that moved beyond petitioning and lecturing and that encouraged suffragists to engage in retail politics.

DuBois argues, however, that it was ultimately Paul, the NAWSA leader, trained in the radicalism of British suffragettes, who rejected such moderate measures and who helped push President Woodrow Wilson to support a national

amendment. Paul backed confrontational strategies of civil disobedience that had been rejected by the more conservative women of NAWSA. In 1917, members of Paul's National Woman's Party picketed the White House carrying signs challenging Wilson; others burned Wilson's effigy in nearby Lafayette Park. Arrested and jailed, Paul and her followers engaged in hunger strikes. The authorities retaliated by brutally force-feeding them—treatment that, when publicized, shocked the nation.

DuBois credits Paul with invigorating the movement but rejects the idea that her tactics alone produced the congressional victories in 1918 and 1919 that led to the passage of the 19th Amendment. *Suffrage* covers in dramatic detail the showdown that culminated in the amendment's adoption and the subsequent fight for ratification in the states. DuBois quotes a prominent suffragist, Maud Wood Park, who concluded that it was not the social change produced by World War I that led to the "simple justice of votes for women," or even the president's grudging support. Success came, rather, as the result of a "campaign carried on by two generations of suffrage workers."

THE PAST IS NEVER DEAD

Both these books illuminate the legacies of women who struggled, as Clinton put it in Beijing, "to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries." Their stories bear remembering as the United States finds itself in an election year in which voter suppression has become a Republican Party strategy. Today, as during the suffrage battles, powerful forces seek to divide groups that might otherwise find common ground. Today, as then, a

useful tactic in that effort is to limit voting. The present strongly echoes the past as President Donald Trump rails against mail-in ballots, uses Twitter to address "the Suburban Housewives of America" with barely veiled racist warnings about an invasion of "low income housing," and suggests that the only fair election is one that he wins.

Yet in a testament to the success of the suffragists, more women vote in the United States today than do men, a Black woman is the vice-presidential candidate of the Democratic Party, and more women than ever, especially Black women, are either in elected office or running for it. Like all social movements, the fight for women's suffrage was flawed and imperfect. But its history is mostly a tale of triumph. 🌍

Hocus-Pocus?

Debating the Age of Magic Money

New Magicians, Same Old Tricks

Raphaële Chappe and Mark Blyth

The COVID-19 recession has prompted states to offer vast amounts of financial support to firms and households. When combined with steps that central banks have taken in response to the financial crisis of 2008, the bailout is so large that it has ushered in what Sebastian Mallaby, writing in the July/August 2020 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, calls “the age of magic money.” The combination of negative interest rates and low inflation, Mallaby writes, has created a world in which “don’t tax, just spend” makes for a surprisingly sustainable fiscal policy.

The thrust of that description is accurate. But the world Mallaby describes is not a direct result of responses to the financial crisis and the pandemic, as he contends. Nor should it come as much of a surprise. In fact, the age of magic money has been more than two decades in the making.

The roots of the current moment lie in the late 1990s, when the U.S. Federal Reserve responded to the collapse of a major hedge fund by cutting interest rates in an effort to help financial markets

avoid more widespread losses. The practice of cutting rates whenever the economy hit a bump became widely known in the following decade as “the Greenspan put.” (In finance, a put option is a kind of contract that gives an investor the right to sell a stock at a predetermined price regardless of market conditions; it is a form of insurance against losses.) The Greenspan put served as an implicit guarantee to financial markets that the Fed would cut rates to accommodate shocks. The Fed made good on that pledge during the 2008 financial crisis, when large-scale asset purchases and quantitative easing expanded the central bank’s balance sheet to over \$4 trillion—a move that might be termed “the Bernanke put,” after the Fed chair at the time, Ben Bernanke. This year’s COVID-19 recession has prompted yet another put, this time with the Fed buying (or at least promising to buy) almost any debt security.

These interventions, each larger than the previous one, have transformed the structure of the U.S. economy in profound but barely recognized ways. They have created a substantial moral hazard by allowing holders of protected securities and debt issuers to take enormous risks without much fear of the consequences. In doing so, they have trapped the Fed in a cycle of responding to shocks, buying assets, cutting interest rates, and then buying more assets, driving up overall leverage and debt across the financial system with each intervention. Considering that history, the age of magic money does not seem new or extraordinary at all—it is a direct extension of the Fed’s past policy record.

MORAL HAZARD AS A BUSINESS MODEL

Under normal conditions, conventional monetary policy involves the Fed (and other central banks) directly influencing short-term interest rates by buying and selling short-term government securities through open-market operations. But in its efforts to contain the 2008 financial crisis and the present COVID-19 recession, the Fed has departed from that model. In 2008, the policy of quantitative easing extended these purchases to long-term government debt and toxic assets such as mortgage-backed securities. This past March, in response to the pandemic, the Fed publicly pledged to buy a much wider range of assets from a much wider range of sellers, including corporate bonds rated below investment grade. The idea behind the move was that investors would trade the securities on the Fed's "buy list" with the assumption that they were insulated from overall market conditions. This helped restore market confidence, prompting a stock market rally in spite of widespread economic devastation and massive unemployment.

Whereas the Greenspan and Bernanke puts targeted interest rates to deal with shocks, this time around, the Fed has effectively put a floor under the price of a wide range of high-risk assets. Their valuations are now based on that floor rather than on the actual state of the economy. Investors that hold such assets can use them as collateral, secure in the knowledge that the Fed will eventually buy them to safeguard financial stability. As a result, investors have an incentive to take on more debt at the first hint of a new Fed put.

This is moral hazard as a business model—and its logic is familiar. Consider the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, which resulted in part from innovations that allowed the so-called shadow banking system to extend private credit outside the formal banking system. When the credit bubble burst, those private liabilities threatened to derail the financial system unless states could absorb them by creating outside money—that is, money not generated by the assets that were now failing. The Fed stepped in and did exactly that. The Fed's put, however, fueled massive inflation in the price of financial assets, especially high-risk corporate debt products. The resulting borrowing spree, which companies used mostly to fund dividend payments and share buybacks, left corporate balance sheets increasingly fragile before the pandemic hit.

Now, the Fed has stepped in once again to exorcise financial demons that its own past rescue operations helped create. Its intervention may have saved the corporate bond market for the time being, but it has done so by engineering an even bigger debt bubble around the same assets that left companies vulnerable in the first place. In the months that followed the Fed's move in March, U.S. companies issued bonds at a dizzying speed, flooding the market with corporate debt priced well below the firms' risk profiles. Amazon, for example, raised \$10 billion in June in an offering that included a three-year bond with a 0.4 percent interest rate—what the *Financial Times* reported to be the lowest rate for any bond in U.S. corporate history.

The Fed's lending practices may even end up benefiting private equity firms, which can access Fed support even as

they use their large cash pools to buy up distressed assets. The net result—aside from turbocharged market concentration and increased economic inequality—is more debt, perpetuating the systemic fragility and overleveraging that will force the Fed to pick up the pieces when the next crisis inevitably hits.

BAILOUTS FOR ME, BUT NOT FOR THEE

In severing any remaining ties between financial markets and the real economy, policymakers seem to believe that the rising value of stocks and bonds will trickle down enough to produce GDP growth. But the belief that increased wealth can replace wage growth as the driving force in lifting aggregate demand ignores the fact that the vast majority of U.S. households are not able to build wealth in the first place. According to recent research by Goldman Sachs, the bottom 90 percent of Americans hold a mere 12 percent of the value of stocks owned by U.S. households. The U.S. economy has failed to deliver inclusive growth for decades, as real wages for many workers have been stagnant since the mid-1970s. The Fed itself determined last year that the majority of American adults would not be able to cover a hypothetical unexpected expense of \$400—a scenario that for millions of Americans became a reality when the pandemic forced the country to shut down. The only remaining recourse for typical consumers struggling to maintain their standard of living is to rely on ever more expensive credit.

In short, the United States seems to have stumbled into a monetary policy regime that has untethered the fate of economic elites, who derive most of

their income from state-protected financial assets, from that of ordinary people, who rely on low and precarious wages. Such a regime offers permanent protections to those with high incomes from financial assets; everyone else gets little more than temporary help in times of crisis. In a world of high inequality and intense polarization, this is a dangerous policy mix.

The numbers speak for themselves. By this past June, some 45.5 million Americans had filed for unemployment, and more than \$6.5 trillion in household wealth had vanished. Meanwhile, between March 18 and August 5, according to data from Forbes, the net worth of U.S. billionaires surged by over 20 percent, reaching a total of \$3.6 trillion. But this soaring wealth is so poorly distributed, it cannot increase aggregate demand enough to stimulate wage growth. As such, the gulf between those who live in the precarious real economy and those who live in the insured financial economy widens with each iteration of the game.

Curbing this inequality would require yet more quantitative easing and rock-bottom interest rates, particularly given the increased debt loads that U.S. states have taken on over the course of the pandemic. Pursuing those policies, as Philip Aldrick of *The Times* of London has noted, would only exacerbate “the rule of the markets, the rise of asset prices, the enrichment of the plutocratic elite and a growing sense of injustice that comes with widening inequality even if everyone is getting richer.” In other words, it would mean another round of puts, with the same payoffs and risk buildups as before.

One could argue that during the current crisis, the Fed’s promises have

been more effective than its purchases, and so the effect of the Fed put this time has been limited. The Fed has thus far used only \$100 billion of the \$2.6 trillion it said it would deploy; it still has plenty of firepower at its disposal. Yet since the start of the pandemic, the Fed's balance sheet has nonetheless increased dramatically, from \$4 trillion to \$7 trillion, and many on Wall Street anticipate that it could soon hit \$10 trillion. But this is a part of the problem, not the solution. Every time the Fed acts, more debt gets added to the system, which increases the size of the future shocks it will need to address. The cure feeds the disease. The only real question is how many more rounds the global economy can endure before it finally breaks.

The United States had an opportunity to break this cycle last spring. It could have done what many other countries have done, which was to bail out the labor market by giving direct payments to workers and by providing liquidity to solvent firms that could not access the public markets. Instead, Washington bailed out insolvent firms and, for the most part, let the labor market crash, spinning the wheel of moral hazard once again.

Washington can do better. But to do so, policymakers need to remember that in capitalism, firms are supposed to fail, and in a democracy, the state is supposed to protect its citizens. Twenty years of misguided Fed policy have upended those basic rules. It is time to put them back in place.

RAPHAËLE CHAPPE is Assistant Professor of Economics at Drew University and Economic Adviser at the Predistribution Initiative.

MARK BLYTH is William R. Rhodes '57 Professor of International Economics at the Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs at Brown University and a co-author of *Angrynomics*.

Mallaby Replies

I am glad that Raphaële Chappe and Mark Blyth agree that this is the age of magic money. But in seeking the roots of today's sorcery in 1998, they underplay both the novelty of the present and the relevance of more distant history. A different understanding of the long arc of monetary policy points to a more optimistic take on today's challenges.

Consider, first, the distinction between past responses to financial blowups and today's magic money. In 1998, when the U.S. Federal Reserve faced the failure of the hedge fund Long-Term Capital Management, its actions were both modest and temporary. The fire sale of LTCM's hugely leveraged portfolio created a danger that other financial institutions might collapse. The Fed delivered three small, quarter-point interest-rate cuts to protect the economy from the fallout.

In contrast to this year, in 1998, there was no expectation that the Fed would keep short-term interest rates low indefinitely. There was no thought of the Fed driving down long-term rates by buying bonds—the term “quantitative easing” had yet to be invented. Nor did the Fed effectively print money to finance a large federal budget deficit. In fact, Alan Greenspan, the Fed chair, was known then as a deficit hawk.

In 1998, the Fed still assumed that inflation was lurking over the horizon and therefore that easy-money firefighting would have to be limited. What is different, and extraordinary, about the

situation today is that this trepidation about inflation has all but vanished. In consequence, money can be conjured on a nearly open-ended basis, without fear of penalty or cost. Easy money has become magic money.

Now look further back in history. Chappe and Blyth are correct that the emergency interest-rate cuts of 1998 propped up financial markets, enriching the fortunate minority who own most of the country's financial assets. But long before this "Greenspan put" there was a "Volcker put," even if it wasn't called that. Paul Volcker, Greenspan's predecessor as Fed chair, was an austere public servant who frowned on extravagant bankers. Yet in 1982, he propped up those same bankers by abandoning the Fed's monetary targets to cushion the shock of a debt crisis in Latin American economies. In 1984, he rescued the eighth-largest U.S. lender, the Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust Company, setting the "too big to fail" precedent that came back with a vengeance in the 2008 financial crisis.

The lesson from the Volcker put is that financial rescues are not really a choice. Even a Fed chair who resembled an Old Testament scourge saw no good alternative to them. To allow financial institutions to go under is to court a repeat of the early 1930s, when contagious bank failures dragged the economy into the Great Depression. During the late nineteenth century, the United States had no central bank and therefore no central bank puts. For the rich, it was the Gilded Age; for the rest, there was a bruising run of boom-bust cycles.

Today's commentators should acknowledge that there is still no desirable substitute for central bank activism.



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One can quibble, to be sure: if Greenspan had undone those post-LTCM rate cuts faster in 1999, he might have dampened the destabilizing bubble in technology stocks. Equally, the post-2008 stimulus would have been more equitable if it had relied less on quantitative easing, which necessarily enriches holders of financial assets, and more on a budget stimulus, which can be targeted at the less fortunate. But the larger point is that we have reached the age of magic money not because of perverse choices by central bankers—the Greenspan put, “the Bernanke put,” and so on. Rather, we are where we are because central bank activism is preferable to Depression-style passivity.

Nevertheless, Chappé and Blyth are right that there are risks in today’s predicament. If magic money favors the rich and does nothing for the rest, it will be politically untenable. If it involves ever-larger financial backstops, encouraging investors to take ever-greater risks, it will become economically unstable. Although such outcomes are plausible, however, they are not preordained. They come down to political choices.

The policy response to COVID-19 points to the possibility of equitable magic money. The CARES Act, passed in March, extended unemployment benefits to almost 11 million American workers who would not otherwise have been eligible. A further 19 million received unusually generous benefits. As of May, families in the poorest quartile had 40 percent more liquid wealth than they had a year before, according to the JPMorgan Chase Institute. There is more to be done: at least nine million American children

live in households that cannot afford adequate food, and Chappé and Blyth are correct to conclude that “Washington can do better.” But in principle, by freeing governments to spend more, magic money opens the door to a reduction in inequality.

The same is true of the doom loop linking Fed activism to financial adventurism. Near-zero interest rates and quantitative easing encourage investors to invite risk, and if those risks turn sour, the Fed may have to provide even more easy money. But this danger can be mitigated by tough financial regulation. The striking sequel to the LTCM episode is that 22 years later, no other hedge fund has threatened financial stability: banks learned their lesson after 1998 and lent to hedge funds more cautiously. In the same vein, the post-2008 financial regulation has curtailed risks. Over the past decade, the Fed has grappled with chronically low inflation, and now there’s a pandemic that has consigned chunks of the economy to the deep freeze. It has not had to respond to a blowup on Wall Street.

Rather than criticizing the Greenspan put, commentators should make their peace with central bank activism and call for policies that contain its side effects. The age of magic money demands more redistributive budgets, since falling interest rates boost the wealth of the minority. The age of magic money demands regulatory vigilance, because when capital is cheap, it tends to be allocated carelessly. The age of magic money provides an opening, moreover, for public investments in education, climate policy, and basic science. It need not be a grim time. It could be an era of opportunity. 🌍

The Strategies Are Foreign, but the Corruption Is American

A Response to “The Rise of
Strategic Corruption”

Sarah Chayes

It is like watching some chemical experiment: dye billowing through a cloud of invisible gas and lighting it up. Organized corruption, which has been rocking the globe for more than a decade, is finally appearing in plain sight.

It is bracing to read Philip Zelikow, Eric Edelman, Kristofer Harrison, and Celeste Ward Gventer’s warnings about this peril and their forceful appeal for serious policy attention to it (“The Rise of Strategic Corruption,” July/August 2020). I agree with their assessment that certain countries, including China and Russia, have weaponized this phenomenon and that those efforts pose a threat to the United States. Yet their important article underestimates the problem. And it does so in ways that flatter American egos and therefore ill-serve the authors’ stated cause: defending American democracy.

“Graft is nothing new,” the article begins. “What is new,” the authors assert, “. . . is the transformation of corruption

into an instrument of national strategy.” But the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are littered with examples of colonial and postcolonial powers deliberately corrupting the leaders of lands they sought to dominate. The United Kingdom encouraged addiction to opium among the Chinese in the 1830s in order to undermine the Qing dynasty’s sovereignty. The French government’s long-standing practice of paying off dictators in France’s former African colonies (sometimes taking kickbacks from those despots in the form of campaign contributions) is so well known that much French media coverage evokes it with a one-word epithet: *Françafrique*.

Such imperialist tactics laid the groundwork for forms of strategic corruption that Washington itself has pursued, in which the U.S. private sector and federal government have cultivated kleptocratic networks overseas in pursuit of profits and political leverage. In the mid-twentieth century, for example, the United Fruit Company, backed by the U.S. government, directly corrupted or co-opted governments in a number of Central American countries. More recently, in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse, the Clinton administration and its allies in the business world and the nonprofit sector designed and presided over (and sometimes participated in) the transfer of untold Russian public wealth into private hands. That corrupt process gave rise to some of the very individuals, networks, and practices that Zelikow and his colleagues decry.

Strategic corruption, in other words, is hardly new. Perhaps what is new is that it is now being used so effectively against some of its original authors.

SARAH CHAYES is the author of *On Corruption in America—and What Is at Stake*.

TWO TO TANGO

Corruption is a constant in complex, organized societies. But outbreaks of networked, systemic, transnational corruption come in waves. The last time the world saw one as dangerous as today's was in the period between approximately 1870 and 1935—the Gilded Age and its aftermath, broadly speaking. During that time, rich and powerful countries deployed strategic corruption against weaker, poorer ones, even as widespread corruption took hold at home. Graft and bribery scandals plagued wealthy industrialized countries, including the United States, as interwoven networks of business magnates and public officials twisted political and economic systems to serve their own aims. Among the results were child labor and inhumane working conditions in mines, factories, and sweatshops; the relegation of hundreds of thousands of small farmers to peonage; the genocide of Native Americans; the near extinction of wolves and buffalo; and what amounted to the reenslavement of many Black Americans.

The grip of these kleptocratic networks was at last broken during the period that stretched from the launch of the New Deal until the end of World War II. In the decades that immediately followed the war, the United States enjoyed somewhat higher standards of public integrity—at least at the federal level. But beginning in the early 1980s, a broad array of social and political changes—including the frank embrace of excessive wealth, a shift in the tax burden away from capital and toward labor, and the deregulation of multiple industries, notably the financial sector—

allowed for new networks of wealthy elites to begin rigging the system again in their own favor.

In portraying the United States largely as a victim, Zelikow and his co-authors miss the degree to which American elites have corrupted their own country and made it that much more vulnerable to strategic corruption from overseas. The article singles out “political consultants and former U.S. officials who spend time in the large, lucrative, and lightly regulated marketplace of influence peddling” for the bulk of its criticism. But the disease has lodged itself more deeply in the body politic than this picture suggests. It is not just consultants, bankers, lawyers, real estate agents, and other service providers who are to blame. Rather, top corporate executives allied with or serving as top government officials have helped change rules, enforcement practices, and personnel in an effort to channel wealth into their own coffers and remove obstacles to its continuing flow. Leading Americans seeking to enrich themselves pushed to legalize the kinds of shell companies, “dark money” campaign contributions, and self-dealing contracts that foreign kleptocrats have exploited. The type of plots that Zelikow and his co-authors detail involved a collection of often dodgy and (relatively) low-rent enablers who were willing to skirt or break U.S. law on behalf of foreign clients. The greater danger, however, lies in the high-status elites who dismantled or deformed the regulations and agencies that protected Americans against such practices in earlier eras, making the U.S. political and economic systems more corrupt than they have been in a century.

It did not take a strategy cooked up in Moscow to get a network of American banking executives to persuade the Reagan administration to deregulate the U.S. savings and loan industry, allowing for a wave of fraud that brought the industry down. Instead of rebuilding the guardrails, President Bill Clinton, under the tutelage of a similar network, further gutted them, paving the way for the financial crisis of 2008, when millions of Americans lost their homes. In the wake of the crisis, vulture capitalists, enjoying privileged relationships with government officials, snapped up those properties and subjected renters to fraudulent fees and evictions. Some now hold top government positions.

Or consider the Defense Department procurement system, in which a handful of repeat violators of laws and regulations consistently win contracts in a market arranged by their former and future employees. Or consider the way in which the entire U.S. political system now runs according to pay-to-play rules, whereby the richest citizens are awarded the most political influence. These changes were not the work of foreign tyrants or Beltway hucksters: they were created by a coalition of American elites who continue to be richly rewarded and warmly embraced by both political parties and much of the news media. Thanks to them, legalized corruption has become business as usual in the United States.

FOREIGN INFLUENCE, DOMESTIC SOLUTIONS

So although Zelikow and his colleagues are right to identify corruption as a national security threat, they fail to see

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how deep its roots go right under their noses, in Washington and New York. The result is a crabbed and narrow set of recommendations. Tightening regulations on limited liability corporations, strengthening the Foreign Agents Registration Act, preventing the abuse of libel lawsuits, and stepping up counterintelligence efforts are all good ideas. But curbing corruption in the United States will require a far more sweeping set of reforms. To arrest the Gilded Age syndrome, it took the New Deal. Today's reformers should be thinking on that scale.

At the most basic level, Congress should enact new laws to repair the damage done by a series of Supreme Court decisions that have steadily narrowed the definition of corruption. But a far broader set of changes will be necessary to limit the role of money in politics. Doing so will eventually require a constitutional amendment or a Supreme Court ruling reversing the effect of the Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision, which opened the floodgates to dark money. In the meantime, Congress should eliminate the tax exemptions and nondisclosure provisions currently accorded to nonprofits that promote candidates or their platforms. Lawmakers should also bar lobbyists (or anyone paid to advocate for an individual's or a corporation's private benefit) from making large campaign contributions. And Congress should establish an annual tax on lobbying, at a rate equal to 100 percent of what a company or a special interest organization spends on it.

In place of weak and easily waived conflict-of-interest pledges, the United States needs far broader, harder-edged

laws to prohibit former top corporate executives from serving in government agencies that oversee their former industries and to bar former government officials for several years after leaving office from advocating on behalf of industries they oversaw. Government agencies must require officials to recuse themselves from proceedings or decisions in which they may have a personal interest. Lawmakers should beef up public-integrity units at the state and federal levels, foster a culture that honors the investigators and prosecutors who take on complex corruption cases, and stiffen sentences for those convicted of bribery or graft.

The list goes on: these are just some initial steps that would demonstrate that the United States is serious about protecting itself from strategic corruption—foreign and domestic. The vulnerability is home-grown, and fixating on the role of foreigners will only reduce the resolve and energy needed to repair the damage. 🌐

Recent Books

Political and Legal

G. John Ikenberry

Crippling Leviathan: How Foreign Subversion Weakens the State
BY MELISSA M. LEE. Cornell University Press, 2020, 264 pp.

In advanced countries, the state's capacity to govern sovereign territory within its borders is taken for granted. Yet as Lee shows in this path-breaking book, in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Ukraine, large swaths of territory remain outside the state's reach. Lee's book provides the best study yet of how these ungoverned spaces have become important in international conflict. Powerful states engage in "foreign subversion" against their weaker rivals, often employing proxy forces such as provincial warlords or nonstate militias. These proxy groups attack representatives of the state in outlying areas, create rival administrative structures, and win the loyalty of locals at the expense of the national government. In this way, the aggressor state avoids the costs and risks of an overt war. Russia's unofficial intervention in the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014 is an iconic recent case of foreign subversion. But Lee also looks at other instances, including Malaysia's subversive campaign against the Philippines in the late 1960s and 1970s and Thailand's subversion of Vietnamese-occupied Cambodia in the 1980s. The book challenges one of

the oldest insights in world politics, derived from the European state-building experience: that international conflict tends to strengthen the state.

The False Promise of Liberal Order: Nostalgia, Delusion, and the Rise of Trump
BY PATRICK PORTER. Polity, 2020, 224 pp.

An Open World: How America Can Win the Contest For Twenty-First-Century Order
BY REBECCA LISSNER AND MIRA RAPP-HOOPER. Yale University Press, 2020, 216 pp.

Can the U.S.-led liberal international order be saved—and should it? These two books offer sharply opposing views. Bringing the contrarian sensibilities of a classical realist to the debate, Porter argues that the liberal order never really was all that liberal, and that it is an exercise in nostalgia to long for a post-Trump return to the imagined golden era of the postwar decades of American primacy. In Porter's narrative, the postwar order was built more on old-fashioned coercion—and, at times, the brutal exercise of power—than on benign and enlightened U.S. leadership and cooperative rule-making. Porter sees military interventionism, covert action, and hegemonic bullying as a feature and not a flaw of the liberal order. In his view, the United States has rarely let rules and principles get in the way of the pursuit of its expansive geopolitical interests; the 2003 invasion of Iraq offers a particularly searing case in point. The danger of liberal internationalist thinking, Porter explains, is that it gets the United States in trouble by inspiring idealistic crusades to remake the world. He ends

his book worrying about China's revisionist challenges to the Western world. Ironically, a vigorous response to the rise of China would surely entail building on, rather than dismissing, the U.S.-led postwar coalition of democracies and multilateral frameworks of cooperation.

Lissner and Rapp-Hooper, who acknowledge that the liberal international order is fraying, make the case for renewed U.S. leadership. In their view, the postwar decades of U.S. hegemony were remarkably successful in generating prosperity and security across large parts of the global system. It was certainly not perfect. Wealth gains have been radically unequal within and across societies, and the underlying aspirations of liberal universalism have led to costly and failed military interventions. If those trends continue, the United States and other liberal democracies will find themselves in an increasingly fractured and closed world without the tools or the capacities to tackle twenty-first-century problems. But it is not too late. Lissner and Rapp-Hooper argue that the United States can still tip the balance in favor of an open and rules-based order. They advocate a U.S. strategy of building coalitions of like-minded states around core liberal principles: free access to the global commons, free trade, information flows, and security cooperation. Washington cannot re-create the old liberal order, but a chastened United States can reengage with the world, up its diplomatic game, and find a path to a new cooperative, U.S.-friendly international order.

The New Twenty Years' Crisis: A Critique of International Relations, 1999–2019

BY PHILIP CUNLIFFE. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020, 168 pp.

The historian E. H. Carr famously argued in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that Western peacemakers at Versailles built the post-World War I order on utopian illusions and liberal aspirations that led two decades later to economic upheaval, authoritarian nationalism, and great-power war. In this lively polemic, Cunliffe contends that in the aftermath of the Cold War, the United States and other democratic states did it again. Like liberal internationalists in U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's era, post-Cold War liberal thinkers misdiagnosed the global moment, overestimating the historical forces moving the world in a liberal democratic direction while failing to appreciate the forces of nationalism, mercantilism, and imperialism. Cunliffe asserts that this "liberal utopianism" pervades the thinking of Western political elites. Whereas Carr identified the fiction of a "harmony of interests" as the core premise of Wilson-era utopianism, today the liberal illusion is a belief in the "infinitely expanding market" as the foundation of a universal liberal world order. Cunliffe spends very little time looking for interesting world-historical parallels between the two eras and focuses instead on the blind spots of intellectuals and academic thinking. The book will inspire a useful debate.

A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order

BY G. JOHN IKENBERRY. Yale University Press, 2020, 432 pp.

In Ikenberry's splendid new book—his most impressive work to date—he defends liberal internationalism against realists who dismiss it as utopianism and radicals who deride it as window-dressing for capitalist imperialism. Ikenberry argues that liberal internationalism is in fact a pragmatic political project whose core purpose has always been to promote a cooperative world in which free societies can defend themselves and address shared problems. He traces the tradition's rich intellectual and diplomatic history, from its Enlightenment origins to its troubled path in the twenty-first century, identifying its enduring elements of open trade, international law and institutions, cooperative security, and progressive social aspirations. Liberal internationalism appears to be on the ropes today, pummeled by populists who reject globalization, nationalists who demand untrammelled sovereignty, and geopolitical rivals (led by China) who peddle competing global models. Many saw the 2016 election of U.S. President Donald Trump as a knockout blow. Appearances, however, can be deceiving. As Ikenberry reminds us, the liberal world order has suffered crises in the past, which challenged its champions to reimagine how a new world order might be constructed. In each case, they rose to the occasion. This book is a fitting capstone to an enviable career—although surely not Ikenberry's last word on the subject.

STEWART PATRICK

Military, Scientific, and Technological

Lawrence D. Freedman

Our Bodies, Their Battlefield: War Through the Lives of Women

BY CHRISTINA LAMB. Scribner, 2020, 384 pp.

In ancient times, victory in war frequently led to rape and plunder. Little has changed over the centuries. Soldiers rationalize rape as a form of punishment for those of the “wrong” nation or the “wrong” religion. Rape is often not the collateral damage of war but one of its instruments. It serves a strategic purpose: to coerce and humiliate. With extraordinary persistence, Lamb sought out contemporary victims and encouraged them to tell their stories about sexual slavery, routine abuse, trauma, and stigma. The book includes the accounts of “comfort women” taken by the Japanese from Korea before and during World War II, grandmothers in Argentina trying to locate the children of their daughters who were murdered by the ruling junta in the 1970s, Bengalis who were raped on an industrial scale by West Pakistani soldiers in 1971, Yazidis brutalized by the Islamic State (or ISIS) in 2014, Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014, and Rohingya women escaping to Bangladesh from Myanmar in 2017. This harrowing but important book is the work of an empathetic and tenacious chronicler.

Atomic Doctors: Conscience and Complicity at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age

BY JAMES L. NOLAN, JR. Harvard University Press, 2020, 304 pp.

The Great Secret: The Classified World War II Disaster That Launched the War on Cancer

BY JENNET CONANT. Norton, 2020, 400 pp.

Two books describe how American doctors became connected to troubling events during World War II that raised thorny moral issues around medicine and war. Nolan's grandfather, the doctor James Nolan, was an early recruit to the medical team at Los Alamos during the Manhattan Project. He accompanied the first atomic bomb in its transport to the Pacific for use against Japan and visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the war to prepare reports on the medical effects of the bombing. Although Nolan was distressed by what he saw in Japan, his grandson seems disappointed that there is little evidence of his grandfather opposing either the bomb's use or U.S. efforts to underplay the bomb's radiological effects. The book usefully dwells on the harm caused by the refusal to acknowledge these risks, regardless of who faced them. The U.S. Navy, for instance, too readily exposed American servicemen to harmful radiation after the Bikini Atoll nuclear tests of 1946.

Conant tells the tale of Stewart Alexander, a specialist in the effects of chemical weapons. Alexander was part of General Dwight Eisenhower's staff in Italy when he investigated in early 1943 the disturbing consequences of a German strike against Allied ships in the Italian port of Bari. Many of those rescued from

the stricken ships succumbed to an illness that Alexander determined was caused by mustard gas. The gas had come from the Allies' own munitions; it was being delivered to the front for potential use against the Germans. Alexander worked hard to establish the truth of the incident despite the attempts of political leaders, including British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, to keep it secret. Conant finds a silver lining in the story. Alexander's investigations led him to write a meticulous report on how the chemical effects of the poison could treat some cancers, which helped scientists develop more effective chemotherapy drugs.

The War for the Seas: A Maritime History of World War II

BY EVAN MAWDSLEY. Yale University Press, 2019, 600 pp.

Mawdsley presents a scrupulous and magisterial account of naval warfare from 1939 to 1945. Sea power could not win World War II on its own, but the Allies were able to win it on land only by gaining command of the sea. Mawdsley manages to cover a lot of ground, examining the navies of all the belligerents without letting the narrative flag. He develops his judgments of key operations with care and clarity. Without detracting from the bravery of the Royal Air Force fighter pilots who fought against the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, he shows that it was British naval superiority that forced Hitler to abandon plans to invade the United Kingdom. The famous code breakers of Bletchley Park have long received credit for winning the battle of the Atlantic, but Mawdsley points to the various technical and tactical advances in anti-

submarine warfare that helped Allied convoys cross the sea. His analysis of the role of carrier-based fighter-bombers in the Pacific and the U.S. victory at the Battle of Midway in 1942—from which the Japanese never fully recovered—is more familiar but still well done.

Strategic Instincts: The Adaptive Advantages of Cognitive Biases in International Politics

BY DOMINIC D. P. JOHNSON.
Princeton University Press, 2020, 392 pp.

It is now widely accepted that psychological biases affect decision-making in economics and politics, with the strong implication that individuals should train themselves to compensate for these biases and behave more like rational actors. In this rich book, full of insights, Johnson challenges the view that such corrections are either necessary or desirable. Ingrained biases, he argues, are really evolutionary adaptations to fast-moving, uncertain situations. They served a purpose, and perhaps they still do. In war, leaders who are more confident than situations warrant may inspire their followers to an improbable victory. A strong bias in favor of one's own group may reinforce solidarity in the face of an opponent trying to divide and rule. Johnson draws on examples from the American War of Independence, World War I, the Cuban missile crisis, and other conflicts to identify the circumstances in which biases helped produce positive outcomes.

The United States

Jessica T. Mathews

We Should Have Seen It Coming

BY GERALD F. SEIB. Random House, 2020, 304 pp.

It Was All a Lie: How the Republican Party Became Donald Trump

BY STUART STEVENS. Knopf, 2020, 256 pp.

The future of the Republican Party depends on how its members come to terms with its transformation under U.S. President Donald Trump. Judging from two early attempts to explain what has happened, the prospects for consensus appear remote. Seib began his career as an editor and columnist at *The Wall Street Journal* around the time of Ronald Reagan's election as president. Perhaps as a result, the narrative revolves around Reagan as he merged the traditional conservative movement and the Republican Party, creating "the most powerful force in American politics" for the ensuing 40 years. Nothing important happens, in this telling, before Reagan. Ultimately, as Seib sees it, Reagan's creation was the victim of its own success. The party gathered too many followers with widely different views (including both those who wanted to keep government out of the bedroom and those who wanted to ban abortion and gay marriage) and ignored the economic and demographic changes happening around it. Signs of trouble

included the populist campaigns of Pat Buchanan and Ross Perot in the 1990s; the anti-intellectual and antiestablishment politics of the 2008 GOP vice-presidential candidate, Sarah Palin; the Tea Party revolt; and the more recent heated rhetoric over immigration.

Stevens's searing mea culpa tells an entirely different story, in which race—or, more precisely, racism—is the centerpiece. His analysis begins with Richard Nixon's "Southern strategy." The strategy's seminal document, a memo written by Nixon's advisers Buchanan and Kevin Phillips in 1971, argued that since there was little Nixon could do to win Black support for his reelection, it made the most sense to use the fact of Black support for the Democrats to alienate white voters and lure them to the Republicans. "This was the Nixon strategy in 1972," Stevens writes. "It was the Trump strategy in 2016." Stevens traces a "direct line" connecting Nixon's strategy to Reagan's "more genteel prejudice" and Trump's "white nationalism." Reagan's imaginary welfare queen "weaponized race and deceit in exactly the same ways" that Trump has in recent years, Stevens argues. Stevens was a consultant for Republican candidates for decades, and he formulated the very strategies and campaign ads about which he writes. His analysis goes beyond race. One chapter argues that despite its reputation for sound economic management, the Republican Party is actually "addicted to debt." Not a single Republican voted for President Bill Clinton's 1993 package of spending cuts and tax increases that balanced the budget. The reason is simple: reducing deficits isn't popular with voters. "In my thirty-plus

years of . . . Republican campaigns, I can't think of a single instance where the message of cutting spending really moved numbers toward a Republican." Many will fiercely contest Stevens's views, but Republicans will have to grapple with this scathing message.

The Great Demographic Illusion: Majority, Minority, and the Expanding American Mainstream

BY RICHARD ALBA. Princeton University Press, 2020, 336 pp.

The United States is widely projected to become a "majority-minority" country within the next few decades, when nonwhite people will outnumber white people. But Alba, a noted demographer and social scientist, argues that this projection is misleading. More than ten percent of babies born in the United States now are of mixed parentage, far more than Asian-only children and not many fewer than babies of two Black parents. Data sources are beginning to count people of mixed origins in their own grouping—rather than allotting them to one or another ethnic or racial category—making visible the reality of current trends. The surge in mixed families presages a more fluid picture than the vision of a minority-white country divided by rigid racial categories with competing cultures and interests. Alba envisions a trajectory of assimilation in the twenty-first century in which mainstream culture expands, growing increasingly diverse. Alba writes with an admirable absence of jargon. His data-driven but fully accessible work advances an original and important idea that, if correct, will have major societal consequences.

Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself From the World

BY CHARLES A. KUPCHAN. Oxford University Press, 2020, 464 pp.

Most Americans think of isolationism in relation to the U.S. foreign policies of the 1920s and 1930s, which disastrously helped lead to World War II. But the country's association with isolationism, Kupchan argues, stretches back to its founding and forward to recent years. In this valuable volume, he reexamines the full sweep of U.S. history through this lens in a bid to "refurbish" this oft-maligned foreign policy tendency. In this comprehensive history of the subject, he shows that disengagement from the world served the country well through long periods of its early history. He compellingly demonstrates that the notion of American exceptionalism was as closely tied to isolationism—the "city on a hill," standing above and apart from a quarrelsome world—as it later would be to the country's postwar internationalism, when the United States saw itself as "the indispensable nation." Kupchan believes that a strategic pullback from the interventionist foreign policy of the past 80 years or so is inevitable. Indeed, he marshals evidence to argue that such a withdrawal is already well underway. He worries, however, that years of U.S. strategic overreach could give way to the obverse: a retreat that is too rapid, too sweeping, and not thought through. He offers some common-sense guidelines to achieving a more balanced middle ground.

The Last Brahmin: Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. and the Making of the Cold War

BY LUKE A. NICHTER. Yale University Press, 2020, 544 pp.

Through a long, extraordinary career, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., advised five U.S. presidents of both political parties. The first to see the political potential of Dwight Eisenhower, Lodge entered him in the New Hampshire primary without his knowledge and then managed his winning presidential campaign. Lodge served as ambassador to the United Nations from 1953 to 1960, when that position wielded enormous influence, and twice served as ambassador to Vietnam (first in the Kennedy administration and then in the Johnson administration), the toughest job in U.S. foreign policy at the time. Later, under President Richard Nixon, he chaired the Paris peace talks that brought the Vietnam War to an end in 1973. Pointed from childhood toward a career of public service, Lodge embodied the Eastern Establishment. He abhorred memoirs and never wrote his own, although it would have made an important contribution to history, especially regarding Vietnam. Characteristically, he thought he might write an account for posthumous publication "as a matter of duty" but later chose not to. Nichter's biography goes a long way to correcting Lodge's omission, filling in the blanks on the life of this fascinating man who played a central role in U.S. foreign policy for more than three decades.

Western Europe

Andrew Moravcsik

World in Danger: Germany and Europe in an Uncertain Time

BY WOLFGANG ISCHINGER.

Brookings Institution Press, 2020, 320 pp.

As a former German ambassador to the United States and the current head of the Munich Security Conference, Ischinger has earned a reputation as a prudent diplomat and a card-carrying member of the post-Cold War global establishment. Yet this book, from its first page (which cites COVID-19 as the greatest international security threat since World War II) to its last (which cites climate change as the major security threat of the future), distinguishes itself as an uncommonly original, thoughtful, and forward-looking analysis of world politics. It represents the view not from Beijing, Moscow, or Washington but from Berlin. Today, with Brazil, India, the United Kingdom, and the United States running off the rails, France often contributing more style than substance, Japan remaining insular, and China and Russia tightening their authoritarian rule, Germany is the only major country that consistently articulates and often acts on a genuinely progressive vision of global multilateral order. German leaders view many policies adopted by today's great powers as shortsighted, overmilitarized, and dangerously ideological—even if their country's unique history obliges them

to speak softly on such matters. They are convinced that regional integration, patient diplomacy, economic assistance, trade agreements, international law, democracy promotion, and other nonmilitary tools of statecraft can make the world a better place. No clearer statement of this pragmatically optimistic outlook can be found than the one elaborated in this important book.

We Are the People: The Rise of the AfD in Germany

BY PENNY BOCHUM. Haus, 2020, 90 pp.

Recent years have seen a flood of books and articles on extreme-right parties—a torrent out of proportion to the meager influence these parties wield. Bochum, a German political researcher, argues that the future dangers posed by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) demand serious attention. But it is hard to see why. In this slim volume, she reports that other parties perpetually exclude the AfD from participating in the German federal government. Brexit has been such an embarrassment that extreme-right parties of reasonable size in Germany—including the AfD—no longer advocate leaving the EU. The AfD's other policy aims have met with equally little success, except, at first glance, the imposition of greater restrictions on immigration. Yet even there, Bochum might have added, these measures passed not because of extreme-right pressure but because most Germans favor strict controls on immigration. Riven by factionalism and scandals, the AfD is now, in the author's words, "self-destructing." It may be admirable to sound the alarm about the rise of the far right in Germany, but is it still necessary?

Ruin and Renewal: Civilizing Europe After World War II

BY PAUL BETTS. Basic Books, 2020, 544 pp.

For Europeans, the end of World War II—“zero hour” (*Stunde Null*), the Germans called it—was a new beginning. Many historians have told the story of how European countries, ravaged by war, depression, and tyranny, were transformed after 1945 into models of tolerance and concern for their citizens’ welfare. Most such histories, notably the works of the late historian Tony Judt, stress the consolidation of democracy, the rebuilding of economic production, the construction of the welfare state, and the integration of Europe. Betts argues instead that what Europe really did was reconstruct a civilization: a set of basic secular and religious values that Europeans share. In this account, the postwar period marked the moment when Europeans discovered—or perhaps rediscovered—humanitarianism, universal human rights, ecumenical Christianity, the appreciation of diverse cultures, a respect for science, and a broadly accessible consumer culture. At times, one wishes for more depth and subtlety, as well as more attention to the often dark ways in which colonialism, anticommunism, and simple wealth accumulation actually drove the process. Yet this book succeeds in casting new light on a critical European legacy of liberal and moderate values, one that may again be in danger today.

Forging Global Fordism: Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, and the Contest Over the Industrial Order

BY STEFAN J. LINK. Princeton University Press, 2020, 328 pp.

The great industrial innovation of the first half of the twentieth century was Henry Ford’s system for organizing mass industrial production. In this “Fordist” model, very large and specialized factories employing relatively well-paid workers efficiently produce an abundance of consumer goods. This method—combined with the Great Depression—sharpened global competition among democratic capitalist, fascist, and communist political systems, each trying to employ Fordist means of production to achieve different ends. This book traces the calculated way in which Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union studied the success of Fordism in the United States as at once a model of modernization to emulate and an ideological threat to fight. Later, in the Cold War, newly moderate Western Europeans came to view the United States as a potential partner, not just in the ideological crusade against communism but also in realizing Ford’s vision of an affluent, mass-production-focused society. This period’s lessons resonate today as new technologies threaten to disrupt production systems once again.

Wine Economics

BY STEFANO CASTRIOTA.
TRANSLATED BY JUDITH
TURNBULL. MIT Press, 2020, 320 pp.

Drinkers in China, Russia, the United States, and elsewhere appreciate fine wine as one of European culture's great gifts to the world. Yet in recent decades, wine production has become a truly global industry, pitting producers of wine (fine and not so fine) nearly everywhere against one another in what this author calls a "wine war"—a ruthless battle to establish brand recognition and grab market share. Castriota, an Italian economist who doubles as a certified sommelier, offers the best introduction to the economics of wine currently available. Many factors, from cultural predispositions to the climate, shape the supply of and demand for wine and the profitability of the firms that make it. Various types of producers, from California conglomerates to Tuscan family farms, have found ways to prosper in the global wine economy. In the end, however, the most important factor determining success appears to be government regulation. In many countries, particularly within the European Union, tax advantages, classification systems, and trademark protection help keep production profitable, and states even directly subsidize small producers.

Western Hemisphere

Richard Feinberg

Dragonomics: How Latin America Is Maximizing (or Missing Out on) China's International Development Strategy

BY CAROL WISE. Yale University Press, 2020, 328 pp.

Dependency in the Twenty-first Century? The Political Economy of China–Latin America Relations

BY BARBARA STALLINGS. Cambridge University Press, 2020, 75 pp.

Two books explore the burgeoning ties between China and Latin America. Wise is largely optimistic about China's commercial presence in the region, whereas Stallings describes a relationship of growing, but not necessarily malign, dependency. Wise counters the claim, sometimes voiced by the Trump administration, that exploitative Chinese trade and investment practices endanger Latin American economies. She strenuously argues that closer commercial ties can benefit both China and Latin American countries. China has turned to resource-rich Latin America not because it harbors hegemonic ambitions but because it is heavily dependent on imported raw materials and foodstuffs. China's rise has improved the international economic environment for many Latin American countries and widened their room for maneuver. Positive outcomes, however, are not guaranteed. Wise convincingly demonstrates that Latin American countries must make

smart domestic choices to best take advantage of their ties with China. The larger economies (Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico) have mostly failed to build and maintain the governing institutions that could profitably channel Chinese commercial interests. In a particularly stimulating chapter, Wise points to three smaller, smarter states—Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru—that have benefited handsomely from their relations with China. Each of those countries boasts relatively strong regulatory oversight, an attractive investment climate, and sophisticated export-promotion policies.

Stallings's little gem of a monograph looks at China's recent encroachments into Latin America through the lens of dependency theory, which has traditionally been applied to understanding U.S.–Latin American relations. More powerful countries make weaker ones dependent by exerting three kinds of influence: market relations (trade, investment, and lending); linkages (among government officials, business executives, technocrats, and civil society); and diplomatic leverage (the power to advance interests). Traditionally, the United States has built its regional hegemony through command of all three arenas. In assessing China's relations with the region, Stallings divides Latin American countries into two categories: left-leaning ones, where China has a reasonable degree of diplomatic leverage but low levels of market relations and interpersonal linkages, and ones with higher standards of governance and transparency, such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico, where China has less diplomatic leverage but growing commercial ties and interpersonal connec-

tions. China is making inroads into Latin America but generally lacks the density of economic and political ties that the United States enjoys. Stallings's innovative study will stimulate a fresh debate about whether dependency theory remains relevant to understanding Latin American development in the twenty-first century.

Coffeeland: One Man's Dark Empire and the Making of Our Favorite Drug

BY AUGUSTINE SEDGEWICK.
Penguin Press, 2020, 448 pp.

In 1889, the teenage James Hill emigrated from the industrializing British city of Manchester to El Salvador, where he married the daughter of a rich coffee planter. He went on to apply modern methods of industrial organization, the latest agricultural innovations, and muscular brand-marketing strategies to the cultivation and sale of coffee. The Hill family prospered immensely, becoming prominent leaders of the local oligarchy. With government complicity, the planters dismantled indigenous communal farms to make way for their private enterprises, transforming, as the historian Sedgewick describes in this highly readable, provocative new book, “a relatively equal, peaceful place into one of the most unequal and violent countries in the history of the modern world.” Plantation owners paid their laborers near-starvation wages, which, Sedgewick contends, led to violent popular rebellions in 1932 and 1979. But Sedgewick provides little fresh quantitative evidence to support such polemic assertions. He briefly sketches an alternative system of “food

sovereignty,” which frames the local production and consumption of varied and healthy food as a human right.

Black Spartacus: The Epic Life of Toussaint Louverture

BY SUDHIR HAZAREESINGH. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020, 464 pp.

Hazareesingh likens the Haitian revolutionary hero Toussaint Louverture to his contemporary nemesis, Napoléon Bonaparte. Like the French emperor, Toussaint possessed superior leadership skills, a remarkable memory for places and faces, and indefatigable physical and mental energy. Both men were bold military strategists, prodigious lawmakers, prolific communicators, and micromanagers. In their younger years, both Toussaint and Napoléon espoused the egalitarian ideas of the European Enlightenment; once in power, the exigencies of their offices brought forth more autocratic impulses. Ultimately, an accumulation of errors and the treachery of trusted associates led to defeat and exile for both legendary figures. Hazareesingh defends Toussaint against critics from the left and the right, arguing that the charismatic Haitian battled courageously for an inclusive, multiracial society, proud of its Blackness but respectful of European civilization. In sharp contrast to his more radical, vengeful successors, Toussaint succeeded in achieving some degree of economic productivity and political order while ruling Haiti. In 1998, Toussaint was admitted into the Panthéon, the sacred Parisian abode of France’s most eminent leaders.

Eastern Europe and Former Soviet Republics

Maria Lipman

Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty

BY NORMAN M. NAIMARK. Belknap Press, 2019, 368 pp.

After the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, Communists grew in strength in many European countries. Stalin relentlessly tried to expand his control over parts of Europe, including in Albania, Austria, Finland, and even a Danish island. In this captivating historical account, Naimark picks several episodes from the early postwar period to show that some of Europe’s eventual Cold War divisions were not inevitable. Some European leaders were able to guide their countries out from under Soviet domination by drawing on their diplomatic savvy. Austria, for example, did not extract itself from Soviet occupation until 1955; Karl Renner, its first postwar leader, succeeded in building a broad antifascist coalition and maintaining a multiparty democratic system while still demonstrating loyalty to Stalin. In 1946, after careful bargaining, Denmark’s government managed to put an end to the occupation of the Danish island of Bornholm, which the Red Army had seized in 1945. Finland secured domestic independence by sacrificing military and diplomatic sovereignty to the Soviet Union. The Albanian leader Enver Hoxha took

advantage of the Soviet-Yugoslav split to free Albania from the hold of Tito's Yugoslavia, and later on, he broke with the Soviet leadership, too, to become his nation's sole ruler, unrestrained by foreign powers.

Agent Sonya: Moscow's Most Daring Wartime Spy

BY BEN MACINTYRE. Crown, 2020, 400 pp.

Macintyre's new page-turner is the true story of Ursula Kuczynski, a German Jew, a passionate Communist, and an amazingly efficient Soviet spy code-named "Sonya." The Soviet agent Richard Sorge recruited Kuczynski in Shanghai in the early 1930s; in the 1940s, she was the handler of the Manhattan Project physicist Klaus Fuchs, who slipped her documents providing the nuclear know-how that proved essential to the Soviet Union's development of an atomic bomb. Sonya lived a double life, running an extremely perilous spy operation while also being a housewife and a loving mother of three. Like many successful spies, she benefited from incredible luck. When Stalin executed most of his foreign intelligence agents, Sonya was miraculously spared. When her children's nanny denounced her to the British authorities, they dismissed the nanny's claims as far-fetched. In 1950, just as MI5 was about to arrest her, she managed to escape to East Germany. She told her Soviet minders there that she would like to end her spy career, and they accepted her decision: a unique case of a Soviet spy granted early retirement. She began a new life as a popular novelist and died in 2000 at the age of 93.

Young Heroes of the Soviet Union: A Memoir and a Reckoning

BY ALEX HALBERSTADT. Random House, 2020, 320 pp.

Halberstadt was a child when he immigrated to the United States from the Soviet Union with his Jewish mother. In a pattern common to young American writers of foreign descent, he began to feel the irresistible draw of "the old country" as he grew older. As an adult, he returned to Russia to search for his family roots and to repair ties with his father. Over the course of the journey, related in this memoir, he describes the barbarities of Stalin's bloody regime as well as the extermination of Jews by the Nazis and their enthusiastic collaborators in Lithuania and Ukraine, the two places his family came from. He meets his paternal grandfather, a member of Stalin's secret police and likely an executioner himself. To a Russian ear, Halberstadt's stories sound conventional and even a bit clichéd: his descriptions of Soviet poverty, humiliating shortages, pervasive censorship, ubiquitous lies, and the late Soviet infatuation with Western pop culture are all familiar. A Russian reader is sure to catch a few inaccuracies. In the end, during a quiet fishing trip in a faraway Russian province, the author develops a kind of awkward affection for his father. He does not become any more Russian, but he leaves Russia a wiser man.

Cold War Correspondents: Soviet and American Reporters on the Ideological Frontlines

BY DINA FAINBERG. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020, 376 pp.

In this extraordinarily thorough and insightful study, Fainberg identifies the similar approaches and practices used by Soviet and U.S. foreign correspondents reporting from each other's countries during the Cold War. Each side claimed to report the truth and condemned the other for spreading lies and propaganda. Both Soviet and U.S. coverage incessantly emphasized the respective systems' political and cultural superiority: Soviet reporters condemned the racism, unemployment, and disparity of incomes in the United States, and Americans exposed the lack of freedom and the squalor of everyday life in the Soviet Union. Their modes of operation were, indeed, different: Soviet journalists had to clear their writings through state censors, whereas the Americans cooperated with their government in a more informal, indirect way through their choice of topics or angles. U.S. reporters prided themselves on their journalistic objectivity even as they willingly passed information on to U.S. officials; meanwhile, their colleagues at home took critical stands against the government in covering the Watergate affair, the Pentagon Papers, and the Vietnam War.

Russia and America: The Asymmetric Rivalry

BY ANDREI P. TSYGANKOV. Polity, 2019, 272 pp.

Throughout his meticulously sourced and dispassionate analysis of U.S.-Russian relations, Tsygankov tries to focus on Russian interests—a rare approach in a time when so many observers commonly regard Russia as a malign actor. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States failed to understand that Russia, although dramatically weakened, would never accept being a junior partner on the international stage. Russia has grown stronger and more assertive in the last 15 years, leading Washington to increasingly treat Moscow as a rival and adversary. Despite its relative weakness, Russia has been able to remain competitive by engaging in “asymmetric rivalry” with the United States. In response to the upheaval in Ukraine in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin opted for covert military interventions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, while U.S. and European leaders failed to force Russia to conduct a restrained foreign policy. Russia has also exercised asymmetric power in the global information space, seeking to confuse and discredit its Western opponents. And as U.S. influence has been receding in Asia, Russia has strengthened its pivot to China and expanded its role in the Middle East. Tsygankov warns that further confrontation lies ahead: if the West continues to challenge Russia's status, Putin will fight back.

Middle East

Lisa Anderson

Re-engaging the Middle East: A New Vision for U.S. Policy

EDITED BY DAFNA H. RAND AND ANDREW MILLER. Brookings Institution Press, 2020, 330 pp.

Rand and Miller, both veterans of the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama and advisers to the current presidential campaign of former Vice President Joe Biden, use this edited volume to present a vision for future U.S. policy in the Middle East. Their contributors come largely from what they call “the emerging generation of Middle East experts,” and the results are mostly edifying: a collection of knowledgeable and restrained—albeit fairly predictable—treatments of U.S. interests and options in the Middle East. Although they strike a deliberate contrast to U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration in both tone and substance, the authors are also refreshingly candid about the failures of the Obama administration in the Middle East. But they continue to struggle with some of the same dilemmas: the United States is overcommitted in the region, but, as Trump also found, “rightsizing” is fraught with its own risks. The contributors invoke U.S. “moral leadership” and call for “humility,” but such talk can ring hollow in light of U.S. reluctance to defend the rights of Palestinians and human rights more

broadly in the region. Perhaps the most important blind spot is the frequent confusion of the interests of states with the calculus of regimes, a distinction U.S. policymakers will have to make if they want to navigate the challenges of the Middle East.

Hybrid Actors: Armed Groups and State Fragmentation in the Middle East

BY THANASSIS CAMBANIS, DINA ESFANDIARY, SIMA GHADDAR, MICHAEL WAHID HANNA, ARON LUND, AND RENAD MANSOUR. Century Foundation, 2019, 192 pp.

Cambanis and his colleagues at the Century Foundation have produced a timely and provocative discussion about a particularly challenging kind of armed nonstate actor in the Middle East. In addition to independent warlords and state proxies, they identify a third type of nonstate entity, the “hybrid actor,” who “sometimes operates in concert with the state and sometimes competes with it.” They provide a number of examples. Hezbollah of Lebanon is the archetype, but Iraqi Kurdish parties also qualify, as do the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq. All such actors are “both a symptom and a driver of state fragility, poor governance, and insecurity.” Iran has a comparative advantage in working with these hybrids since, like most of them, Tehran seeks to shift the status quo. By contrast, Western powers are flummoxed when dealing with government ministries controlled by groups designated in the West as terrorist organizations. But hybrid groups cannot be wished away, and policymakers must better understand this new feature of the regional landscape.

Escaping the Conflict Trap: Toward Ending Civil Wars in the Middle East
EDITED BY PAUL SALEM AND ROSS HARRISON. Middle East Institute, 2019, 213 pp.

Until recently, the case could be made that discord in the Middle East was as much bluster as bloodletting, certainly by the standards of warfare in twentieth-century Europe. During the past decade, however, violence in the region has intensified to an extraordinarily damaging, and apparently intractable, degree. This edited volume includes serviceable case studies of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen and several useful essays that explore the global and regional context and the historical record of efforts to end such conflicts. Two main questions arise: To what extent are these national conflicts the product of regional rivalries among larger powers, and would these civil wars persist without the interference of the Egyptian, Emirati, Iranian, Israeli, Qatari, Saudi, and Turkish governments? And why have international actors, notably Russia, the United States, and European countries, not used their leverage with regional allies and clients to help end these conflicts? One contributor, the former U.S. diplomat Chester Crocker, provides what must be the answer: "In the end, we face the sobering reminder that most armed actors have interests other than peace."

Fraternal Enemies: Israel and the Gulf Monarchies
BY CLIVE JONES AND YOEL GUZANSKY. Oxford University Press, 2020, 224 pp.

Although the United Arab Emirates didn't seem likely to be the first in line, the announcement in August that Israel would normalize relations with a Gulf country was not a surprise to most Middle East watchers. As Jones and Guzansky show, the deal was a long time in the making. This thorough, detailed, and timely look at the history of increasingly close, if discreet, trade ties and security cooperation between Israel and all the Gulf monarchies combines the scholarly perspective of Jones, a professor in the United Kingdom, and the experience of Guzansky, a former security adviser in the Israeli government. They argue that these relationships can be understood as a "tacit security regime" among regional states confronting similar challenges, notably the advance of Iran and the retreat of the United States. The book's real value is its fast-paced tour through decades of plausible deniability, profitable business deals, and increasing intelligence cooperation. It is well sourced; the authors refuse to indulge in speculation. But it remains an open question whether the policies of any of the players stem from the realpolitik of state interests or from the domestic political calculations and personal inclinations of particular rulers.

The Book Collectors: A Band of Syrian Rebels and the Stories That Carried Them Through a War

BY DELPHINE MINOUI.

TRANSLATED BY LARA

VERGNAUD. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020, 208 pp.

Originally published in French in 2017, this slim volume recounts the bond that Minoui, a reporter for the French newspaper *Le Figaro* who is based in Istanbul, developed with a small group of Syrian rebels in Daraya, a suburb of Damascus. Besieged for four years, these fighters won admiration in the West for their determination and their unusual deference to local civilian control. They made headlines, it must also be acknowledged, because they made themselves accessible to Western journalists. In the modern equivalent of an epistolary relationship, Minoui found them on Facebook and communicated with them through FaceTime, Skype, and WhatsApp. Much of what she recounts about the siege was reported at the time, but the book is nevertheless revealing. The rebels maintained a library, cobbled together from what was left in burned-out bookshops and demolished homes. It was an eclectic collection—including works by the medieval historian Ibn Khaldun, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, the Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho, and the American self-help guru Stephen Covey—and it evidently provided instruction, solace, and purpose to men (as they all were) under extraordinary duress. Just like prisons across the region, rebel strongholds are sometimes universities in exile; witnessing the unexpected joy of learning in such circumstances is both sobering and inspiring.

Asia and Pacific

Andrew J. Nathan

The Bhutto Dynasty: The Struggle for Power in Pakistan

BY OWEN BENNETT-JONES. Yale University Press, 2020, 320 pp.

The Iconoclast: Shinzo Abe and the New Japan

BY TOBIAS S. HARRIS. Hurst, 2020, 392 pp.

Man of Contradictions: Joko Widodo and the Struggle to Remake Indonesia

BY BEN BLAND. Penguin, 2020, 192 pp.

Three fascinating political biographies illustrate why it is so hard for even the most skillful leaders to carry out fundamental reforms in their societies. *The Bhutto Dynasty* is a complex Shakespearean tale of family loyalty and feuding, insecurity and arrogance, jealousy and solidarity. The Bhuttos' story is filled with dramatic contradictions that span three generations. It revolves around Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto, a Sindhi landowner and leader involved in South Asian politics from the 1920s until his death in 1957; his son Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who served as Pakistan's president and prime minister in the 1970s; Zulfikar's daughter Benazir Bhutto, who served twice as prime minister in the 1980s and 1990s; and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, who was president from 2008 to 2013. They were feudal landholders with leftist politics, westernized elites with anticolonial attitudes, secular

Muslims in a religious country, and a family that produced a rare female head of government from a lineage of playboy patriarchs. They were at once cynical and opportunistic in their political maneuvers and able to court and find martyrdom. Zulfikar was hanged after a military coup in 1979. Benazir was assassinated in 2007 by the Pakistani Taliban—probably with the connivance of the security forces—while running for a third term in office. It is hard to imagine a more intimate portrait both of the family and of Pakistani politics than this riveting narrative.

Shinzo Abe was Japan's longest-serving prime minister. Harris's superbly well-informed account of his career makes clear how he was able to be both a reformer and a conservative. He inherited from his grandfather Nobusuke Kishi (who served as prime minister from 1957 to 1960) the mission of increasing Japan's autonomy within the framework of the alliance with the United States; from his childhood in the booming 1960s, the desire to restore Japan's lost economic dynamism; and from his electoral district in the far west of the country, the ambitious spirit of the Meiji Restoration, which started there. A disastrous first stint as prime minister from 2006 to 2007 taught him the need to consolidate power over the fractious ruling party and government apparatus. After returning to office in 2012, Abe pushed through wide-ranging reforms in areas as disparate as corporate governance, agriculture, and guest-worker policies. He established a national security council, pursued closer ties with regional powers, concluded an economic partnership agreement with

the EU, revived the Trans-Pacific Partnership after the United States withdrew from it in 2017, and accepted greater responsibility for self-defense within the American alliance. Yet when he resigned from his third consecutive term in office for health reasons this past August, it remained unclear whether his economic policies and regional diplomacy would survive in the face of a global economic downturn and the rise of China.

Bland, who covered Indonesia for the *Financial Times*, offers a lively portrait of Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi), the president of Indonesia since 2014. Originally the owner of a small furniture factory, Jokowi rose to power as a person who, in his own words, is "simple, polite, and honest." But to keep his footing in the country's slippery politics, with its nine personality-driven parliamentary parties, 30 ministries, and nearly 550 directly elected local government leaders, he has formed a shifting series of alliances with political dynasts, tycoons, Islamists, and generals, accumulating power by tying himself to the status quo. Instead of expanding democracy, he has weakened the Corruption Eradication Commission; presided over rising violence toward religious minorities and LGBTQ people; appointed his longtime rival, the alleged human rights violator Prabowo Subianto, as defense minister; intensified violence against the Free Papua Movement; and censored social media. Although Jokowi has promoted some important infrastructure projects, he has undermined his own efforts to tap Indonesia's economic potential by adopting policies grounded in the country's historical fear of foreign influence.

The Private Sector in Public Office: Selective Property Rights in China
BY YUE HOU. Cambridge University Press, 2019, 204 pp.

Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for Its Rulers
BY JENNIFER PAN. Oxford University Press, 2020, 248 pp.

These empirically rich and methodologically sophisticated books explore two among the many kinds of negotiated interactions between citizens and the state that contribute to China's economic and political vitality. Hou describes how private entrepreneurs protect themselves from having to make involuntary philanthropic donations and avoid paying arbitrary fees, fines, taxes, and outright bribes by seeking office in local people's congresses. As representatives, they gain social prestige and cultivate relationships with senior officials, which deters lower-level officials from hassling them. The congresses have no real legislative function, but they serve the important political purpose of fostering cooperative relations between government officials and some of the most prominent people in local society.

Pan's study looks at the neighborhood administrators who are in charge of distributing welfare payments and other benefits to distressed local households. Most of this money goes to households that meet the financial qualifications for assistance, but a portion is allocated to so-called targeted populations: potential troublemakers of various kinds, including former prisoners, members of banned religious cults, and political dissidents. The state aims

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are leaders,
but all leaders
are readers.**

- Harry S. Truman

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to “stabilize their mental state” by placing them on the dole. At the same time, welfare payments create a pretext for officials to keep a close eye on their activities. Pan argues that this “repressive assistance” reduces the need for coercive repression, thus enabling local officials to report success in their mandated mission of maintaining social stability. The effort to preemptively control unruly elements has a long history in China; Pan suggests that the flood of information on individuals generated by digital technology is likely to intensify such measures in the future.

Taken together, the books counteract the oversimplified image of Chinese authoritarianism as a repressive apparatus perched atop a passive society. Instead, the system is more interactive, with local officials encouraged to apply the rules flexibly in order to win the cooperation of local populations.

China: The Bubble That Never Pops
BY THOMAS ORLIK. Oxford
University Press, 2020, 240 pp.

For years, pessimists have expected the Chinese economy to collapse under the load of debt that built up as the government pumped out money to soften the impact of the 2008 financial crisis. To get out of that hole, Beijing ordered state banks to lend to inefficient state enterprises, let local governments meet unfunded government mandates with borrowed funds, and sat by as real estate developers borrowed cash to build unneeded housing blocks. More recently, the government has taken similar actions to get the economy growing again after the COVID-19 shock earlier this year, again fostering concerns that it has taken on too

much debt. As Orlik skillfully explains, however, the government may manage its way out of its economic problems this time, just as it has done before. China benefits from a high savings rate, the limited convertibility of the renminbi, smart policymakers, and the government’s power to tell banks and firms what to do. China still faces plenty of risks, but Orlik warns against counting on financial troubles to derail its ambitions.

Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party Is Reshaping the World
BY CLIVE HAMILTON AND
MAREIKE OHLBERG. Oneworld,
2020, 432 pp.

Hidden Hand applies the same take-no-prisoners approach as Hamilton’s 2018 book, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia*. But it moves beyond Australia to expose Chinese influence operations in the United States and Europe. The Chinese might reasonably complain that a book like this overlooks their need to defend themselves against an onslaught of subversive Western culture and anti-China rhetoric. The trouble, as Hamilton and Ohlberg show, is that Chinese influence and Western influence work rather differently. Whereas Western cultural influence is largely open and works by attraction, Chinese efforts are often corrupting or coercive. Wall Street firms, British banks, American and European university deans, Hollywood movie producers, and other Westerners pursue relations with Chinese partners in an uncoordinated way, on the basis of their immediate interests. But Chinese institutions work in a coordinated fashion under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party’s

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—Stephanie Solomon, Chief Revenue Officer

United Front Work and Propaganda Departments, with long-term influence in mind. This well-substantiated account will add to the growing sense that China, in attempting to tell its side of the story, has gone too far in using methods unacceptable to the West.

Africa

Nicolas van de Walle

Travelling While Black: Essays Inspired by a Life on the Move

BY NANJALA NYABOLA. Hurst, 2020, 264 pp.

What unites these wide-ranging essays is a common concern with migration, racism, and the author's own identity as a Black, Western-educated Kenyan woman who travels constantly for professional and touristic reasons. Ultimately, she argues, it is by leaving home that people find their identity. She visits Haiti as a volunteer for a human rights group and ruminates on the fact that locals call her "white" because she is foreign and educated. Other essays explore her outrage at European immigration policy and its human cost and the question of whether mobility should be a human right and not just the purview of a small, usually Western and white elite. The book also features a lovely essay about the life and legacy of the South African author Bessie Head, who lived much of her life in exile in Botswana and died in relative poverty. The passion, erudition, and fluidity of Nyabola's

writing is attractive, even when the arguments occasionally fail to convince. Provocative and always willing to take on the conventional wisdom, Nyabola emerges with this book as an important observer of contemporary Africa and its position in the world.

Democracy in Ghana: Everyday Politics in Urban Africa

BY JEFFREY W. PALLER. Cambridge University Press, 2019, 328 pp.

Economies After Colonialism: Ghana and the Struggle for Power

BY LINDSAY WHITFIELD. Cambridge University Press, 2018, 378 pp.

Two complementary books astutely assess Ghana's uneven political and economic record. They share the view that a focus on formal institutions alone will not account for either political or economic outcomes. Studying the slums of Accra with the keen eye of an ethnographer, Paller argues that understanding local identity politics helps explain why Ghana's political system remains largely undemocratic, despite the façade of democratic institutions. Clientelistic relationships that follow complicated ethnic logics dominate everyday life and discourage the development of a broader civic culture. Paller supports his thesis with fascinating analyses of several communities within urban Accra and their ability to provide public goods to their members. He shows that the patterns of ethnic settlement in the city have led to different "politics of belonging." Communities made up mostly of newcomers are better able to generate local political systems that are more responsive to

citizens and deliver higher-quality social services. Paller finds that these communities may not benefit from as large budgetary allocations as the more established indigenous-dominated neighborhoods, but they manage their budgets better, with the garbage picked up more regularly and public toilets better maintained. As for the mixed communities, which include both indigenous people and immigrants, the local politics there tends to be harder-edged, and residents in such places receive fewer public goods.

Whitfield's study is perhaps the most comprehensive review of recent Ghanaian industrial policy and deserves to be read for its description of a succession of government initiatives since independence. Whitfield is a passionate advocate for a state-led economic growth strategy that would rely primarily on industrialization. Despite the healthy economic growth that Ghana has enjoyed since the mid-1990s, she criticizes the country for not moving sufficiently away from the commodities-based economy left by British colonialism and argues that its recent growth is not sustainable. The fault, the book argues, lies in Ghana's fractious elite politics and its pervasive "competitive clientelism." Ethnic divisions and diffuse power centers encourage redistribution instead of investment. Politicians need to placate their own bases to win and hold on to power, and so they think in short-term horizons that discourage the government from nurturing the kinds of firms that could transform the economy. If Paller views Ghana's democratization since the early 1990s as largely irrelevant to the day-to-day lives of Ghanaians, Whitfield appears to view it as an outright detriment to economic growth.

Riverblindness in Africa: Taming the Lion's Stare

BY BRUCE BENTON. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020, 328 pp.

River blindness, or onchocerciasis, is caused by a parasitic worm that is spread by the bites of a small black fly that is common around rivers in much of Africa. The disease still afflicts some 15 million to 20 million Africans, of whom around a million have suffered vision loss. Benton, who ran the World Bank's river blindness project for over 20 years, has written a very useful history of the efforts by African governments and a consortium of donors to control and eventually eradicate the disease. He ably documents the policy process, the bureaucratic politics, and the individual actions that such a complex effort required. No vaccine is available yet, and so policymakers have no alternative but to support the slow and laborious work of trying to eradicate the disease-carrying fly with insecticides. Also, since 1981, the drug ivermectin has been found to be effective in killing the larvae of the worms inside the human body. Campaigns to provide two injections of the drug a year to affected populations have played a key role in controlling the disease.

Party Proliferation and Political Contestation in Africa: Senegal in Comparative Perspective

BY CATHERINE LENA KELLY. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 268 pp.

In her well-informed study, Kelly examines recent electoral politics in Senegal through the prism of party competition. She starts with the puzzle that nearly 300

political parties are officially registered in Senegal even though only a handful have ever won seats in parliament in more than a single election. Why do so many parties compete in elections despite the fact that they are unlikely to win seats, and what does this profusion tell us about Senegal's politics? Kelly argues convincingly that unlike in older, more established democracies, most parties in Senegal do not exist for the purpose of winning elections. Instead, they are mostly the instruments through which individual politicians negotiate their access to the state and its resources. Her book documents this process carefully, following the creation of specific parties and the resulting paths of particular politicians. She shows how incumbents have resorted to extensive patronage to shore up their positions and weaken opposition parties. Senegal has had a longer tradition of multiparty electoral competition than most of its African neighbors, and so it may offer clues about long-term trends in the region.

“To Protect and to Serve” (September/October 2020) incorrectly indicated the statistic used to measure the rate at which people were killed by the police in various countries. The rate is expressed in killings per ten million residents, not per one million residents. 🌐

FOR THE RECORD

An article in the September/October 2020 issue (“Which Past Is Prologue?”) misidentified the waterway that Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser closed in 1967. It was the Strait of Tiran, not the Strait of Hormuz.

“Civil Rights International” (September/October 2020) misidentified the city where the Black Panther Party was established. The group was founded in Oakland, California, not Los Angeles.

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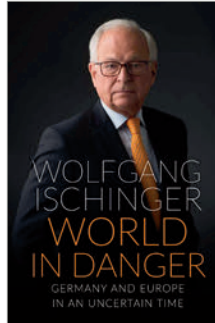
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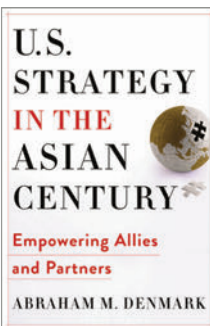
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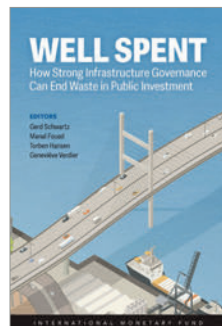
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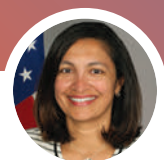
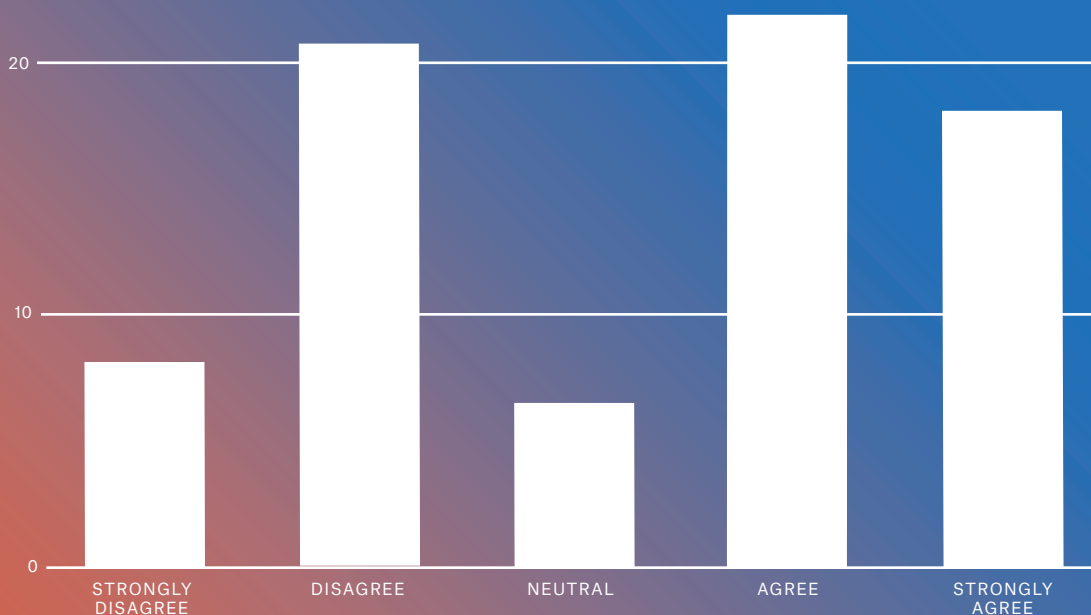
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International Monetary Fund

Should U.S. Foreign Policy Focus on Great-Power Competition?

Foreign Affairs Brain Trust

We asked dozens of experts whether they agreed or disagreed that great-power competition should be the central organizing principle of U.S. foreign policy. The results are below.



DISAGREE, CONFIDENCE LEVEL 10

Uzra Zeya

CEO and President, Alliance for Peacebuilding

“Great-power competition is a reductionist frame that elevates Russia and China to peer status, downplays the gravity of transnational threats like climate change and pandemic disease, and ignores the urgency of renewing U.S. leadership multilaterally and with allies and partners.”



STRONGLY AGREE, CONFIDENCE LEVEL 10

John Mearsheimer

R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science, University of Chicago

“Great-power competition is inextricably bound up with the survival of the state, and there is no more important goal than survival. If a state does not survive, it cannot pursue any of its other goals.”

→ See the full responses at ForeignAffairs.com/GreatPower

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