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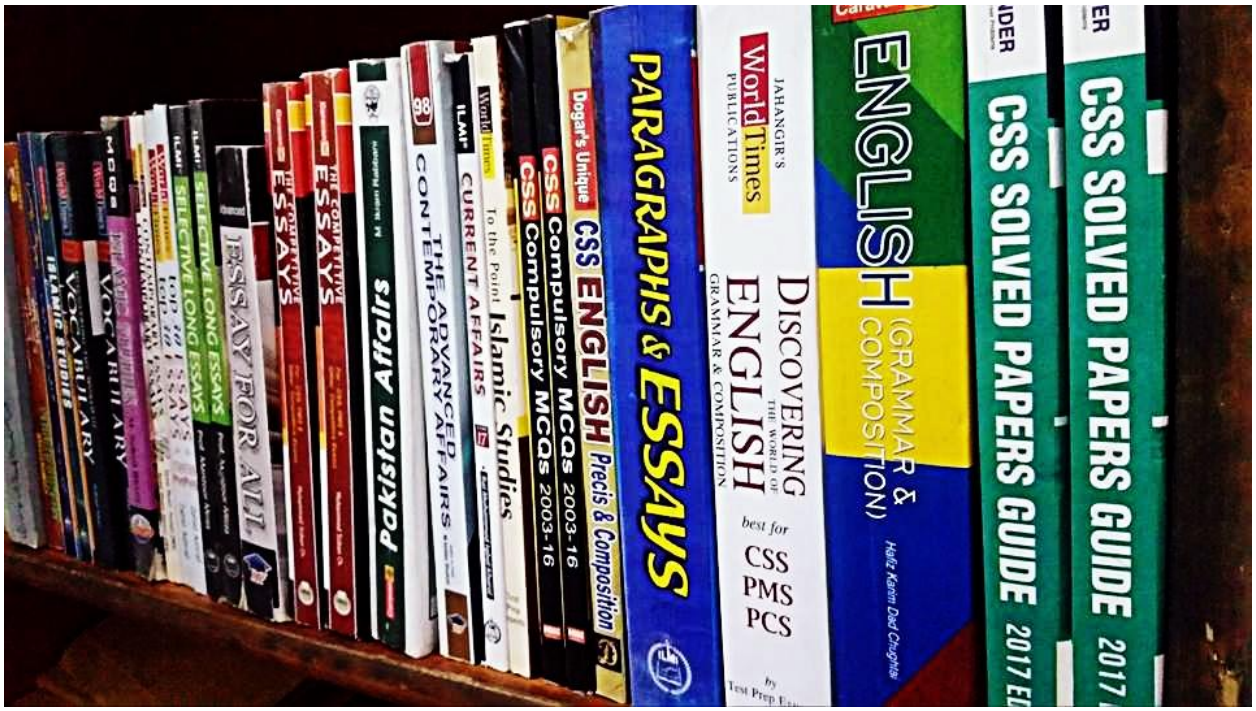

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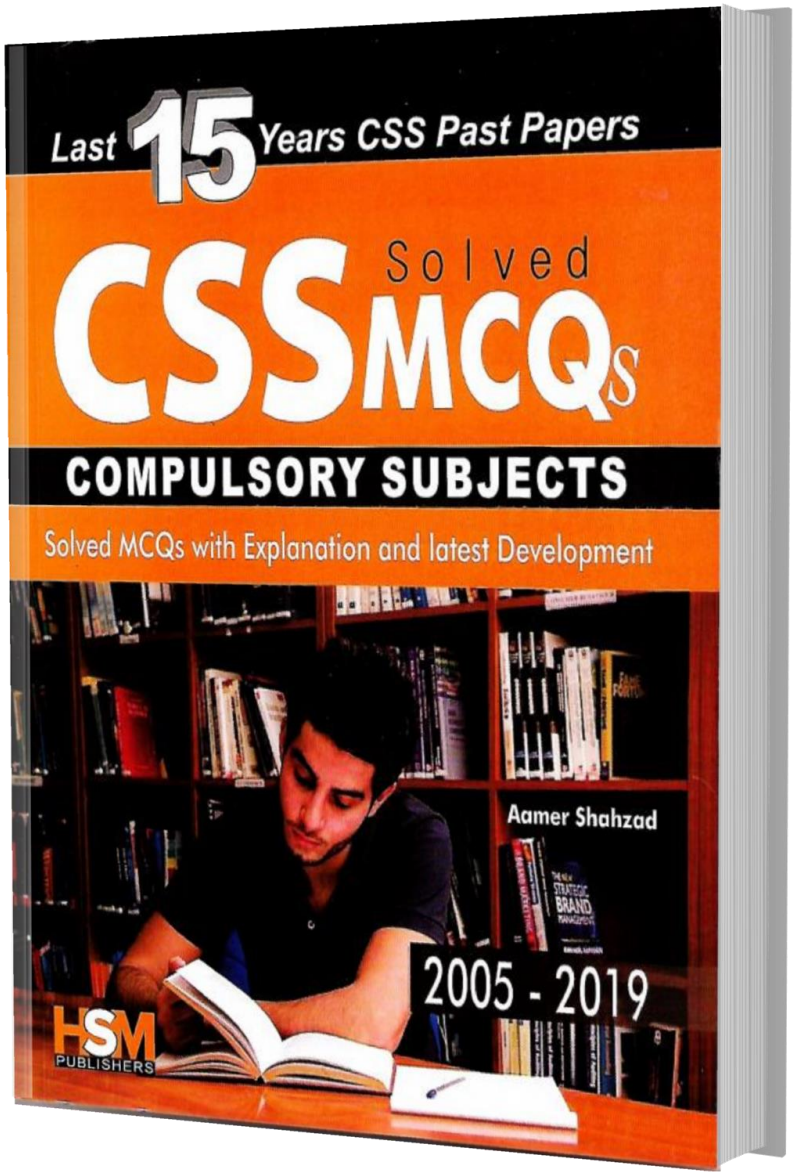

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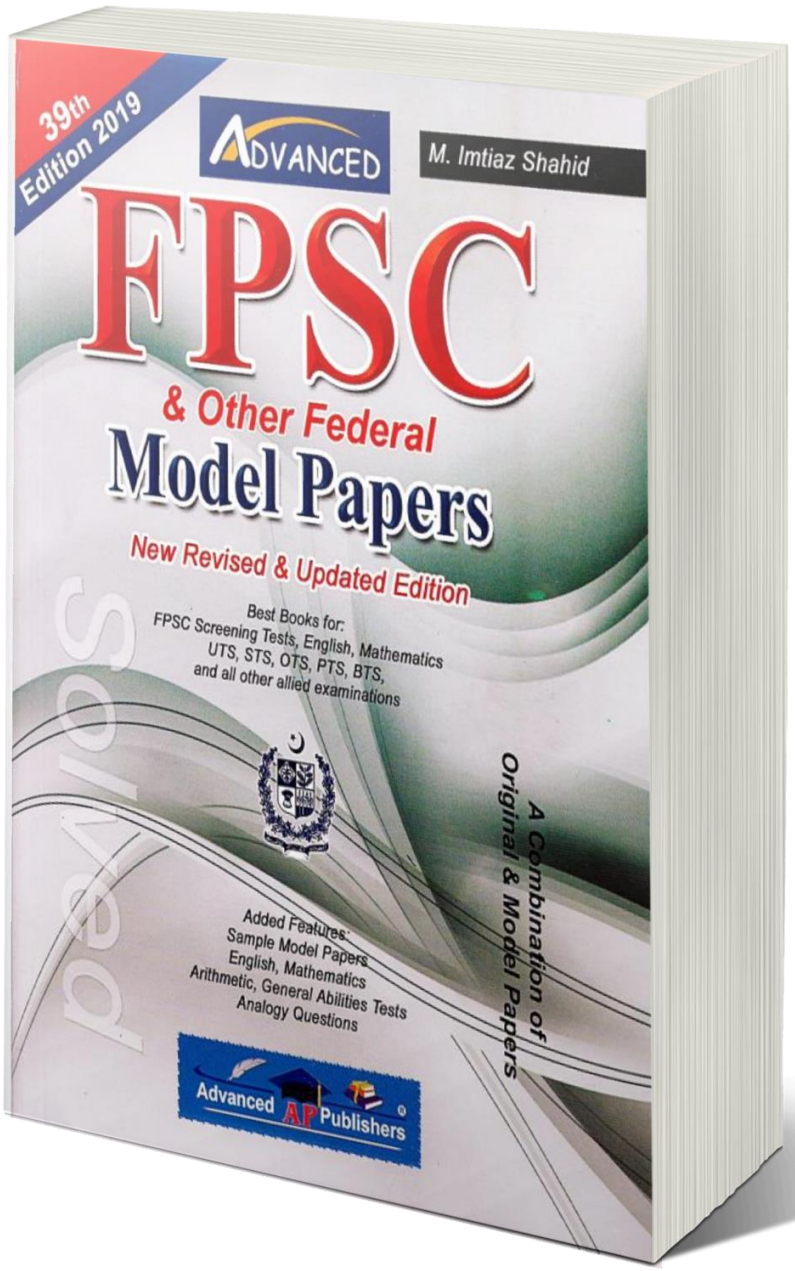

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Best of 2018

THE BEST OF PRINT

January/February

America's Original Sin

Slavery and the Legacy of White Supremacy

Annette Gordon-Reed

March/April

The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony

Trump's Surprising Grand Strategy

Barry R. Posen

March/April

The China Reckoning

How Beijing Defied American Expectations

Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner

May/June

Autocracy With Chinese Characteristics

Beijing's Behind-the-Scenes Reforms

Yuen Yuen Ang

May/June
The End of the Democratic Century
Autocracy's Global Ascendance
Yascha Mounk and Roberto Stefan Foa

May/June
Perception and Misperception on the Korean Peninsula
How Unwanted Wars Begin
Robert Jervis and Mira Rapp-Hooper

July/August
The Myth of the Liberal Order
From Historical Accident to Conventional Wisdom
Graham Allison

September/October
When China Rules the Web
Technology in Service of the State
Adam Segal

September/October
The New Arab Order
Power and Violence in Today's Middle East
Marc Lynch

November/December
Venezuela's Suicide
Lessons From a Failed State
Moisés Naím and Francisco Toro

THE BEST OF THE WEB

January 18

Is Trump a Normal Foreign-Policy President?
What We Know After One Year
Elizabeth N. Saunders

January 24

How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power
The Right and Wrong Ways to Respond to Authoritarian Influence
Joseph S. Nye Jr.

January 29

The Remarkable Scale of Turkey's "Global Purge"
How It Became a Threat to the Rule of Law Everywhere
Tom Nichols

March 27

Has a New Cold War Really Begun?
Why the Term Shouldn't Apply to Today's Great-Power Tensions
Odd Arne Westad

May 2

The Pentagon's Transparency Problem
Why Accurate Troop Levels Are So Hard to Find
Loren DeJonge Schulman and Alice Friend

June 20

Reeducation Returns to China
Will the Repression in Xinjiang Influence Beijing's Social Credit System?
Adrian Zenz

July 10

How Artificial Intelligence Will Reshape the Global Order

The Coming Competition Between Digital Authoritarianism and Liberal Democracy

Nicholas Wright

August 20

The United States' Perpetual War in Afghanistan

Why Long Wars No Longer Generate a Backlash at Home

Tanisha M. Fazal and Sarah Kreps

September 21

Stop Obsessing About China

Why Beijing Will Not Imperil U.S. Hegemony

Michael Beckley

October 17

Is Going It Alone the Best Way Forward for Europe?

Why Strategic Autonomy Should Be the Continent's Goal

Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polyakova

January/February 2018

America’s Original Sin

Slavery and the Legacy of White Supremacy

Annette Gordon-Reed

JOSHUA ROBERTS / REUTERS

White supremacists gather under a statue of Robert E. Lee during a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, August 2017.

The documents most closely associated with the creation of the United States—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—present a problem with which Americans have been contending from the country’s beginning: how to reconcile the values espoused in those texts with the United States’ original sin of slavery, the flaw that marred the country’s creation, warped its prospects, and eventually plunged it into civil war. The Declaration of Independence had a specific purpose: to cut the ties between the American

colonies and Great Britain and establish a new country that would take its place among the nations of the world. But thanks to the vaulting language of its famous preamble, the document instantly came to mean more than that. Its confident statement that “all men are created equal,” with “unalienable Rights” to “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” put notions of freedom and equality at the heart of the American experiment. Yet it was written by a slave owner, Thomas Jefferson, and released into 13 colonies that all, to one degree or another, allowed slavery.

The Constitution, which united the colonies turned states, was no less tainted. It came into existence only after a heated argument over—and fateful compromise on—the institution of slavery. Members of the revolutionary generation often cast that institution as a necessary evil that would eventually die of its own accord, and they made their peace with it to hold together the new nation. The document they fought over and signed in 1787, revered almost as a sacred text by many Americans, directly protected slavery. It gave slave owners the right to capture fugitive slaves who crossed state lines, counted each enslaved person as three-fifths of a free person for the purpose of apportioning members of the House of Representatives, and prohibited the abolition of the slave trade before 1808.

As citizens of a young country, Americans have a close enough connection to the founding generation that they look to the founders as objects of praise. There might well have been no United States without George Washington, behind whom 13 fractious colonies united. Jefferson’s language in the Declaration of Independence has been taken up by every marginalized group seeking an equal place in American society. It has influenced people searching for freedom in other parts of the world, as well.

American slavery was tied inexorably to white dominance.

Yet the founders are increasingly objects of condemnation, too. Both Washington and Jefferson owned slaves. They, along with James Madison, James Monroe, and Andrew Jackson, the other three slave-owning presidents of the early republic, shaped the first decades of the United States. Any desire to celebrate the country's beginning quickly runs into the tragic aspects of that moment. Those who wish to revel without reservation in good feelings about their country feel threatened by those who note the tragedies and oppression that lay at the heart of this period. Those descended from people who were cast as inferior beings, whose labor and lives were taken for the enrichment of others, and those with empathy for the enslaved feel insulted by unreflective celebration. Learning how to strike the right balance has proved one of the most difficult problems for American society.

WHY SLAVERY'S LEGACY ENDURES

The issue, however, goes far beyond the ways Americans think and talk about their history. The most significant fact about American slavery, one it did not share with other prominent ancient slave systems, was its basis in race. Slavery in the United States created a defined, recognizable group of people and placed them outside society. And unlike the indentured servitude of European immigrants to North America, slavery was an inherited condition.

As a result, American slavery was tied inexorably to white dominance. Even people of African descent who were freed for one reason or another suffered under the weight of the white supremacy that racially based slavery entrenched in American society. In the few places where free blacks had some form of state citizenship, their rights were

circumscribed in ways that emphasized their inferior status—to them and to all observers. State laws in both the so-called Free States and the slave states served as blueprints for a system of white supremacy. Just as blackness was associated with inferiority and a lack of freedom—in some jurisdictions, black skin created the legal presumption of an enslaved status—whiteness was associated with superiority and freedom.

The historian Edmund Morgan explained what this meant for the development of American attitudes about slavery, freedom, and race—indeed, for American culture overall. Morgan argued that racially based slavery, rather than being a contradiction in a country that prided itself on freedom, made the freedom of white people possible. The system that put black people at the bottom of the social heap tamped down class divisions among whites. Without a large group of people who would always rank below the level of even the poorest, most disaffected white person, white unity could not have persisted. Grappling with the legacy of slavery, therefore, requires grappling with the white supremacy that preceded the founding of the United States and persisted after the end of legalized slavery.

> *Racially based slavery, rather than being a contradiction in a country that prided itself on freedom, made the freedom of white people possible.*

Consider, by contrast, what might have happened had there been Irish chattel slavery in North America. The Irish suffered pervasive discrimination and were subjected to crude and cruel stereotypes about their alleged inferiority, but they were never kept as slaves. Had they been enslaved and then freed, there is every reason to believe that they would have had an easier time assimilating into American culture than have African Americans. Their enslavement would be a major

historical fact, but it would likely not have created a legacy so firmly tying the past to the present as did African chattel slavery. Indeed, the descendants of white indentured servants blended into society and today suffer no stigma because of their ancestors' social condition.

That is because the ability to append enslaved status to a set of generally identifiable physical characteristics—skin color, hair, facial features—made it easy to tell who was eligible for slavery and to maintain a system of social control over the enslaved. It also made it easy to continue organized oppression after the 13th Amendment ended legal slavery in 1865. There was no incentive for whites to change their attitudes about race even when slavery no longer existed. Whiteness still amounted to a value, unmoored from economic or social status. Blackness still had to be devalued to ensure white superiority. This calculus operated in Northern states as well as Southern ones.

STRINGER / REUTERS

White nationalists carry torches on the grounds of the University of Virginia, on

the eve of a planned rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, August 2017.

CONFEDERATE IDEOLOGY

The framers of the Confederate States of America understood this well. Race played a specific and pivotal role in their conception of the society they wished to create. If members of the revolutionary generation presented themselves as opponents of a doomed system and, in Jefferson's case, cast baleful views of race as mere "suspicions," their Confederate grandchildren voiced their full-throated support for slavery as a perpetual institution, based on their openly expressed belief in black inferiority. The founding documents of the Confederacy, under which the purported citizens of that entity lived, just as Americans live under the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, announced that African slavery would form the "cornerstone" of the country they would create after winning the Civil War. In 1861, a few weeks before the war began, Alexander Stephens, the vice president of the Confederacy, put things plainly:

> *The new constitution has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution—African slavery as it exists amongst us—the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson in his forecast had anticipated this as the "rock upon which the old Union would split." He was right. . . . The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. . . . Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an*

> *error.*
>
> *Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery—subordination to the superior race—is his natural and normal condition.*

Despite the clarity of Stephens' words, millions of Americans today are unaware of—or perhaps unwilling to learn about—the aims of those who rallied to the Confederate cause. That ignorance has led many to fall prey to the romantic notion of "the rebels," ignoring that these rebels had a cause. Modern Americans may fret about the hypocrisy and weakness of the founding generation, but there was no such hesitancy among the leading Confederates on matters of slavery and race. That they were not successful on the battlefield does not mean that their philosophy should be ignored in favor of abstract notions of "duty," "honor," and "nobility"; Americans should not engage in the debate that the former Confederates chose after the war ended and slavery, finally, acquired a bad name.

It has taken until well into the twenty-first century for many Americans to begin to reject the idea of erecting statues of men who fought to construct an explicitly white supremacist society. For too long, the United States has postponed a reckoning with the corrosive ideas about race that have destroyed the lives and wasted the talents of millions of people who could have contributed to their country. To confront the legacy of slavery without openly challenging the racial attitudes that created and shaped the institution is to leave the most important variable out of the equation. And yet discussions of race, particularly of one's own racial attitudes, are among the hardest conversations Americans are called on to have.

> *For too long, the United States has postponed a reckoning with corrosive ideas about race.*

This issue of the Confederacy's legacy was made tragically prominent in 2015, when the white supremacist Dylann Roof shot 12 black parishioners in a church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine of them. History had given the worshipers in Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church every reason to be suspicious of the young man who appeared at their doorstep that day, yet they invited him in to their prayer meeting. Although they had, Roof said, been "nice" to him, they had to die because they (as representatives of the black race) were, in his words, raping "our women" and "taking over our country." Their openness and faith were set against the images, later revealed, of Roof posing with what has come to be known as the Confederate flag and other white supremacist iconography. The core meaning of the Confederacy was made heartbreakingly vivid. From that moment on, inaction on the question of the display of the Confederate flag was, for many, no longer an option. Bree Newsome, the activist who, ten days after the shooting, scaled the flagpole in front of the South Carolina State House and removed the Confederate flag that flew there, represented the new spirit: displaying symbols of white supremacy in public spaces was no longer tolerable.

And those symbols went far beyond flags. Monuments to people who, in one way or another, promoted the idea of white supremacy are scattered across the country. Statues of Confederate officials and generals dot parks and public buildings. Yet proposals to take them down have drawn sharp opposition. Few who resist the removal of the statues openly praise the aims of the Confederacy, whatever their private thoughts on the matter. Instead, they raise the specter of a slippery slope: today, Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee; tomorrow, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Yet

dealing with such slopes is part of everyday life. The problem with the Confederacy is not just that its leaders owned slaves. The problem is that they tried to destroy the Union and did so in adherence to an explicit doctrine of slavery and white supremacy. By contrast, the founding generation, for all its faults, left behind them principles and documents that have allowed American society to expand in directions opposite to the values of the South's slave society and the Confederacy.

It is not surprising that colleges and universities, ideally the site of inquiry and intellectual contest, have grappled most prominently with this new national discussion. Many of the most prestigious American universities have benefited from the institution of slavery or have buildings named after people who promoted white supremacy. Brown, Georgetown, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale have, by starting conversations on campus, carrying out programs of historical self-study, and setting up commissions, contributed to greater public understanding of the past and of how the country might move ahead. Their work serves as a template for the ways in which other institutions should engage with these issues in a serious fashion.

CARLO ALLEGRI / REUTERS

People pray outside Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, June 2015.

RECONSTRUCTION DELAYED

For all the criticism that has been leveled at him for the insufficient radicalism of his racial politics, Abraham Lincoln understood that the central question for the United States after the Civil War was whether blacks could be fully incorporated into American society. Attempting to go forward after the carnage, he returned to first principles. In the Gettysburg Address, he used the words of the Declaration of Independence as an argument for the emancipation of blacks and their inclusion in the country's "new birth of freedom." What Lincoln meant by this, how far he was prepared to take matters, will remain unknown. What is clear is that Reconstruction, the brief period of hope among four million emancipated African Americans, when black men were given

the right to vote, when the freedmen married, sought education, and became elected officials in the South, was seen as a nightmare by many white Southerners. Most of them had not owned slaves. But slavery was only part of the wider picture. They continued to rely on the racial hierarchy that had obtained since the early 1600s, when the first Africans arrived in North America's British colonies. Rather than bring free blacks into society, with the hope of moving the entire region forward, they chose to move backward, to a situation as close to slavery as legally possible. Northern whites, tired of "the Negro problem," abandoned Reconstruction and left black people to the mercy of those who had before the war seen them as property and after it as lost possessions.

The historian David Blight has described how the post–Civil War desire for reconciliation between white Northerners and white Southerners left African Americans behind, in ways that continue to shape American society. The South had no monopoly on adherents to the doctrine of white supremacy. Despite all that had happened, the racial hierarchy took precedence over the ambitious plan to bring black Americans into full citizenship expressed in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. In a reversal of the maxim that history is written by the victors, the losing side in the Civil War got to tell the story of their slave society in ways favorable to them, through books, movies, and other popular entertainment. American culture accepted the story that apologists for the Confederacy told about Southern whites and Southern blacks.

That did not begin to change until the second half of the twentieth century. It took the development of modern scholarship on slavery and Reconstruction and a civil rights movement composed of blacks, whites, and other groups from across the country to begin moving the needle on the question of white supremacy's role in American society.

Since then, black Americans have made many social and economic gains, but there is still far to go. De jure segregation is dead, but de facto segregation is firmly in place in much of the country. The United States twice elected a black president and had a black first family, but the next presidential election expressed, in part, a backlash. African Americans are present in all walks of life, up and down the economic scale. But overall, black wealth is a mere fraction of white wealth. Police brutality and racialized law enforcement tactics have shown that the Fourth Amendment does not apply with equal force to black Americans. And the killing of armed black men in open-carry states by police has called into question black rights under the Second Amendment. To understand these problems, look not only to slavery itself but also to its most lasting legacy: the maintenance of white supremacy. Americans must come to grips with both if they are to make their country live up to its founding creed.

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March/April 2018

The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony

Trump’s Surprising Grand Strategy

Barry R. Posen

OMAR SO BHANI / REUTERS

No retreat: U.S. marines in Afghanistan, July 2017

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump vowed to put an end to nation building abroad and mocked U.S. allies as free riders. “‘America first’ will be the major and overriding theme of my administration,” he declared in a foreign policy speech in April 2016, echoing the language of pre–World War II isolationists. “The countries we are defending must pay for

the cost of this defense, and if not, the U.S. must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves," he said—an apparent reference to his earlier suggestion that U.S. allies without nuclear weapons be allowed to acquire them.

Such statements, coupled with his mistrust of free trade and the treaties and institutions that facilitate it, prompted worries from across the political spectrum that under Trump, the United States would turn inward and abandon the leadership role it has played since the end of World War II. "The US is, for now, out of the world order business," the columnist Robert Kagan wrote days after the election. Since Trump took office, his critics have appeared to feel vindicated. They have seized on his continued complaints about allies and skepticism of unfettered trade to claim that the administration has effectively withdrawn from the world and even adopted a grand strategy of restraint. Some have gone so far as to apply to Trump the most feared epithet in the U.S. foreign policy establishment: "isolationist."

In fact, Trump is anything but. Although he has indeed laced his speeches with skepticism about Washington's global role, worries that Trump is an isolationist are out of place against the backdrop of the administration's accelerating drumbeat for war with North Korea, its growing confrontation with Iran, and its uptick in combat operations worldwide. Indeed, across the portfolio of hard power, the Trump administration's policies seem, if anything, more ambitious than those of Barack Obama.

Yet Trump has deviated from traditional U.S. grand strategy in one important respect. Since at least the end of the Cold War, Democratic and Republican administrations alike have pursued a grand strategy that scholars have called "liberal hegemony." It was hegemonic in that the United States aimed to be the most powerful state in the world by a wide margin, and it was liberal in that the United States sought to

transform the international system into a rules-based order regulated by multilateral institutions and transform other states into market-oriented democracies freely trading with one another. Breaking with his predecessors, Trump has taken much of the “liberal” out of “liberal hegemony.” He still seeks to retain the United States’ superior economic and military capability and role as security arbiter for most regions of the world, but he has chosen to forgo the export of democracy and abstain from many multilateral trade agreements. In other words, Trump has ushered in an entirely new U.S. grand strategy: illiberal hegemony.

NO DOVE

Grand strategy is a slippery concept, and for those attempting to divine the Trump administration’s, its National Security Strategy—a word salad of a document—yields little insight. The better way to understand Trump’s approach to the world is to look at a year’s worth of actual policies. For all the talk of avoiding foreign adventurism and entanglements, in practice, his administration has remained committed to geopolitical competition with the world’s greatest military powers and to the formal and informal alliances it inherited. It has threatened new wars to hinder the emergence of new nuclear weapons states, as did its predecessors; it has pursued ongoing wars against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic State (or ISIS) in Iraq and Syria with more resources and more violence than its predecessors. It has also announced plans to invest even more money in the Department of Defense, the budget of which still outstrips that of all of the United States’ competitors’ militaries combined.

> *Across the portfolio of hard power, the Trump administration’s policies seem, if anything, more ambitious than those of Barack Obama.*

When it comes to alliances, it may at first glance seem as if Trump has deviated from tradition. As a candidate, he regularly complained about the failure of U.S. allies, especially those in NATO, to share the burden of collective defense. However uninformed these objections were, they were entirely fair; for two decades, the defense contributions of the European states in NATO have fallen short of the alliance's own guidelines. Alliance partisans on both sides of the Atlantic find complaints about burden sharing irksome not only because they ring true but also because they secretly find them unimportant. The actual production of combat power pales in comparison to the political goal of gluing the United States to Europe, no matter what. Thus the handwringing when Trump attended the May 2017 NATO summit and pointedly failed to mention Article 5, the treaty's mutual-defense provision, an omission that suggested that the United States might not remain the final arbiter of all strategic disputes across Europe.

But Trump backtracked within weeks, and all the while, the United States has continued to go about its ally-reassurance business as if nothing has changed. Few Americans have heard of the European Reassurance Initiative. One would be forgiven for thinking that the nearly 100,000 U.S. troops that remained deployed in Europe after the end of the Cold War would have provided enough reassurance, but after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the allies clamored for still more reassurance, and so was born this new initiative. The ERI is funded not in the regular U.S. defense budget but in the Overseas Contingency Operations appropriation—the "spend whatever it takes without much oversight" fund originally approved by Congress for the global war on terrorism. The ERI has paid for increased U.S. military exercises in eastern Europe, improved military infrastructure across that region, outright gifts of equipment to Ukraine, and new stockpiles of U.S. equipment in Europe adequate to

equip a U.S. armored division in case of emergency. At the end of 2017, Washington announced that for the first time, it would sell particularly lethal antitank guided missiles to Ukraine. So far, the U.S. government has spent or planned to spend $10 billion on the ERI, and in its budget for the 2018 fiscal year, the Trump administration increased the funding by nearly $1.5 billion. Meanwhile, all the planned new exercises and deployments in eastern Europe are proceeding apace. The U.S. military commitment to NATO remains strong, and the allies are adding just enough new money to their own defense plans to placate the president. In other words, it's business as usual.

In Asia, the United States appears, if anything, to be more militarily active than it was during the Obama administration, which announced a "pivot" to the region. Trump's main preoccupation is with the maturation of North Korea's nuclear weapons program—a focus at odds with his campaign musings about independent nuclear forces for Japan and South Korea. In an effort to freeze and ultimately reverse North Korea's program, he has threatened the use of military force, saying last September, for example, "The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea." Although it is difficult to tell if Pyongyang takes such threats seriously, Washington's foreign policy elite certainly does, and many fear that war by accident or design is now much more likely. The Pentagon has backed up these threats with more frequent military maneuvers, including sending long-range strategic bombers on sorties over the Korean Peninsula. At the same time, the administration has tried to put economic pressure on North Korea, attempting to convince China to cut off the flow of critical materials to the country, especially oil.

KIM HONG-JI / REUTERS

South Korean and U.S. Marines taking part in a military drill in Pyeongchang, December 2017

Across the Pacific, the U.S. Navy continues to sustain a frenetic pace of operations—about 160 bilateral and multilateral exercises per year. In July, the United States conducted the annual Malabar exercise with India and Japan, bringing together aircraft carriers from all three countries for the first time. In November, it assembled an unusual flotilla of three aircraft carriers off the Korean Peninsula during Trump's visit to Asia. Beginning in May 2017, the navy increased the frequency of its freedom-of-navigation operations, or FONOPs, in which its ships patrol parts of the South China Sea claimed by China. So busy is the U.S. Navy, in fact, that in 2017 alone, its Seventh Fleet, based in Japan, experienced an unprecedented four ship collisions, one grounding, and one airplane crash.

During his trip to Asia in November, Trump dutifully renewed U.S. security commitments, and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of

Japan seems to have decided to allow no daylight between him and the president, including on North Korea. Given Trump's litany of complaints about the unfairness of U.S. trade relationships in Asia and his effective ceding of the economic ground rules to China, one might be surprised that U.S. allies in the region are hugging this president so closely. But free security provided by a military superpower is a difficult thing to replace, and managing relations with one that sees the world in more zero-sum economic terms than usual is a small price to pay.

The Trump administration has increased its military activities across the Middle East, too, in ways that should please the critics who lambasted Obama for his arm's-length approach to the region. Trump wasted no time demonstrating his intent to reverse the mistakes of the past. In April 2017, in response to evidence that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons, the U.S. Navy launched 59 cruise missiles at the air base where the attack originated. Ironically, Trump was punishing Syria for violating a redline that Obama had drawn and a chemical weapons disarmament agreement that Obama had struck with Syria, both of which Trump pilloried his predecessor for having done. Nevertheless, the point was made: there's a new sheriff in town.

The Trump administration has also accelerated the war against ISIS. This Pentagon does not like to share information about its activities, but according to its own figures, it appears that the United States sent more troops into Iraq and Syria, and dropped more bombs on those countries, in 2017 than in 2016. In Afghanistan, Trump, despite having mused about the mistakes of nation building during the campaign, has indulged the inexplicable compulsion of U.S. military leaders ("my generals," in his words) to not only remain in the country but also escalate the war. Thousands of additional U.S. troops have been sent to the country, and U.S. air strikes there have increased to a level not seen since 2012.

Finally, the administration has signaled that it plans to confront Iran more aggressively across the Middle East. Trump himself opposed the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, and his advisers appear eager to push back against the country, as well. In December, for example, Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, stood in front of debris from what she claimed was an Iranian missile and alleged that Tehran was arming rebels in Yemen, where Iran and Saudi Arabia are engaged in a proxy war. Behind the scenes, the Trump administration seems to have been at least as supportive of the Saudi intervention in Yemen as was its predecessor. The Obama administration lent its support to the Saudis in order to buy their cooperation on the Iran deal, and given that Trump despises that agreement, his backing of the Saudis can be understood only as an anti-Iran effort. Barring a war with North Korea—and the vortex of policy attention and military resources that conflict would create—it seems likely that more confrontation with Iran is in the United States' future.

The Trump administration's defense budget also suggests a continued commitment to the idea of the United States as the world's policeman. Trump ran for office on the proposition that, as he put it on Twitter, "I will make our Military so big, powerful & strong that no one will mess with us." Once in office, he rolled out a defense budget that comes in at roughly 20 percent more than the 2017 one; about half the increase was requested by the administration, and the other half was added by Congress. (The fate of this budget is unclear: under the Budget Control Act, these increases require the support of the Democrats, which the Republicans will need to buy with increased spending on domestic programs.) To take but one small example of its appetite for new spending, the administration has ramped up the acquisition of precision-guided munitions by more than 40 percent from 2016, a move that is consistent with the president's oft-stated intention to wage current military campaigns more intensively (as well as

with an expectation of imminent future wars).

Trump also remains committed to the trillion-dollar nuclear modernization program begun by the Obama administration. This program renews every leg of the nuclear triad—missiles, bombers, and submarines. It is based on the Cold War–era assumption that in order to credibly deter attacks against allies, U.S. nuclear forces must have the ability to limit the damage of a full-scale nuclear attack, meaning the United States needs to be able to shoot first and destroy an adversary's entire nuclear arsenal before its missiles launch. Although efforts at damage limitation are seductive, against peer nuclear powers, they are futile, since only a few of an enemy's nuclear weapons need to survive in order to do egregious damage to the United States in retaliation. In the best case, the modernization program is merely a waste of money, since all it does is compel U.S. competitors to modernize their own forces to ensure their ability to retaliate; in the worst case, it causes adversaries to develop itchy trigger fingers themselves, raising the risk that a crisis will escalate to nuclear war. If Trump were truly committed to America first, he would think a bit harder about the costs and risks of this strategy.

Nobuhiro Kubo / Reuters
The Malabar exercises, Okinawa, June 2016

PRIMACY WITHOUT A PURPOSE

Hegemony is always difficult to achieve, because most states jealously guard their sovereignty and resist being told what to do. But since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. foreign policy elite has reached the consensus that liberal hegemony is different. This type of dominance, they argue, is, with the right combination of hard and soft power, both achievable and sustainable. International security and economic institutions, free trade, human rights, and the spread of democracy are not only values in their own right, the logic goes; they also serve to lure others to the cause. If realized, these goals would do more than legitimate the project of a U.S.-led liberal world order; they would produce a world so consonant with U.S. values and interests that the United States would not even need to work that hard to ensure its security.

> *Hegemony is always difficult to achieve, because most states jealously guard their sovereignty and resist being told what to do.*

Trump has abandoned this well-worn path. He has denigrated international economic institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, which make nice scapegoats for the disruptive economic changes that have energized his political base. He has abandoned the Paris climate agreement, partly because he says it disadvantages the United States economically. Not confident that Washington can sufficiently dominate international institutions to ensure its interests, the president has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, launched a combative renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and let the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership wither on the vine. In lieu of such agreements, Trump has declared a preference for bilateral trade arrangements, which he contends are easier to audit and enforce.

Pointing out that recent U.S. efforts to build democracy abroad have been costly and unsuccessful, Trump has also jettisoned democracy promotion as a foreign policy goal, aside from some stray tweets in support of anti-regime protesters in Iran. So far as one can tell, he cares not one whit about the liberal transformation of other societies. In Afghanistan, for example, his strategy counts not on perfecting the Afghan government but on bludgeoning the Taliban into negotiating (leaving vague what exactly the Taliban would negotiate). More generally, Trump has often praised foreign dictators, from Vladimir Putin of Russia to Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines. His plans for more restrictive immigration and refugee policies, motivated in part by fears about terrorism, have skated uncomfortably close to outright bigotry. His grand strategy is primacy without a purpose.

Such lack of concern for the kinder, gentler part of the American hegemonic project infuriates its latter-day defenders. Commenting on the absence of liberal elements in Trump's National Security Strategy, Susan Rice, who was

national security adviser in the Obama administration, wrote in December, “These omissions undercut global perceptions of American leadership; worse, they hinder our ability to rally the world to our cause when we blithely dismiss the aspirations of others.”

But whether that view is correct or not should be a matter of debate, not a matter of faith. States have long sought to legitimate their foreign policies, because even grudging cooperation from others is less costly than mild resistance. But in the case of the United States, the liberal gloss does not appear to have made hegemony all that easy to achieve or sustain. For nearly 30 years, the United States tested the hypothesis that the liberal character of its hegemonic project made it uniquely achievable. The results suggest that the experiment failed.

Neither China nor Russia has become a democracy, nor do they show any sign of moving in that direction. Both are building the military power necessary to compete with the United States, and both have neglected to sign up for the U.S.-led liberal world order. At great cost, Washington has failed to build stable democratic governments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Within NATO, a supposed guardian of democracy, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey are turning increasingly authoritarian. The European Union, the principal liberal institutional progeny of the U.S. victory in the Cold War, has suffered the loss of the United Kingdom, and other member states flaunt its rules, as Poland has done regarding its standards on the independence of the judiciary. A new wave of identity politics—nationalist, sectarian, racist, or otherwise—has swept not only the developing world but also the developed world, including the United States. Internationally and domestically, liberal hegemony has failed to deliver.

WHAT RESTRAINT LOOKS LIKE

None of this should be taken as an endorsement of Trump's national security policy. The administration is overcommitted militarily; it is cavalier about the threat of force; it has no strategic priorities whatsoever; it has no actual plan to ensure more equitable burden sharing among U.S. allies; under the guise of counterterrorism, it intends to remain deeply involved militarily in the internal affairs of other countries; and it is dropping too many bombs, in too many places, on too many people. These errors will likely produce the same pattern of poor results at home and abroad that the United States has experienced since the end of the Cold War.

If Trump really wanted to follow through on some of his campaign musings, he would pursue a much more focused engagement with the world's security problems. A grand strategy of restraint, as I and other scholars have called this approach, starts from the premise that the United States is a very secure country and asks what few things could jeopardize that security. It then recommends narrow policies to address those potential threats.

In practice, restraint would mean pursuing a cautious balance-of-power strategy in Asia to ensure that China does not find a way to dominate the region—retaining command of the sea to keep China from coercing its neighbors or preventing Washington from reinforcing them, while acknowledging China's fears and, instead of surrounding it with U.S. forces, getting U.S. allies to do more for their own defense. It would mean sharing best practices with other nuclear powers across the globe to prevent their nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of nonstate actors. And it would mean cooperating with other countries, especially in the intelligence realm, to limit the ability of nihilistic terrorists to carry out spectacular acts of destruction. The United States still faces all these threats, only with the added complication of doing so in a world in which its relative power position has slipped. Thus, it is essential that U.S. allies,

especially rich ones such as those in Europe, share more of the burden, so that the United States can focus its own power on the main threats. For example, the Europeans should build most of the military power to deter Russia, so that the United States can better concentrate its resources to sustain command of the global commons—the sea, the air, and space.

Those who subscribe to restraint also believe that military power is expensive to maintain, more expensive to use, and generally delivers only crude results; thus, it should be used sparingly. They tend to favor free trade but reject the notion that U.S. trade would suffer mightily if the U.S. military were less active. They take seriously the problem of identity politics, especially nationalism, and therefore do not expect other peoples to welcome U.S. efforts to transform their societies, especially at gunpoint. Thus, other than those activities that aim to preserve the United States' command of the sea, restraint's advocates find little merit in Trump's foreign policy; it is decidedly unrestrained.

During the campaign, Trump tore into the United States' post–Cold War grand strategy. "As time went on, our foreign policy began to make less and less sense," he said. "Logic was replaced with foolishness and arrogance, which led to one foreign policy disaster after another." Many thought such criticisms might herald a new period of retrenchment. Although the Trump administration has pared or abandoned many of the pillars of liberal internationalism, its security policy has remained consistently hegemonic. Whether illiberal hegemony will prove any more or any less sustainable than its liberal cousin remains an open question. The foreign policy establishment continues to avoid the main question: Is U.S. hegemony of any kind sustainable, and if not, what policy should replace it? Trump turns out to be as good at avoiding that question as those he has condemned.

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The China Reckoning

How Beijing Defied American Expectations

Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner

DAMIR SAGOLJ / REUTERS

The era of good feelings: Xi and Obama in China, September 2016.

The United States has always had an outsize sense of its ability to determine China's course. Again and again, its ambitions have come up short. After World War II, George Marshall, the U.S. special envoy to China, hoped to broker a peace between the Nationalists and Communists in the Chinese Civil War. During the Korean War, the Truman administration thought it could dissuade Mao Zedong's troops from crossing the Yalu River. The Johnson administration believed Beijing would ultimately circumscribe its involvement in Vietnam. In each instance, Chinese realities

upset American expectations.

With U.S. President Richard Nixon's opening to China, Washington made its biggest and most optimistic bet yet. Both Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his national security adviser, assumed that rapprochement would drive a wedge between Beijing and Moscow and, in time, alter China's conception of its own interests as it drew closer to the United States. In the fall of 1967, Nixon wrote in this magazine, "The world cannot be safe until China changes. Thus our aim, to the extent that we can influence events, should be to induce change." Ever since, the assumption that deepening commercial, diplomatic, and cultural ties would transform China's internal development and external behavior has been a bedrock of U.S. strategy. Even those in U.S. policy circles who were skeptical of China's intentions still shared the underlying belief that U.S. power and hegemony could readily mold China to the United States' liking.

Nearly half a century since Nixon's first steps toward rapprochement, the record is increasingly clear that Washington once again put too much faith in its power to shape China's trajectory. All sides of the policy debate erred: free traders and financiers who foresaw inevitable and increasing openness in China, integrationists who argued that Beijing's ambitions would be tamed by greater interaction with the international community, and hawks who believed that China's power would be abated by perpetual American primacy.

Neither carrots nor sticks have swayed China as predicted. Diplomatic and commercial engagement have not brought political and economic openness. Neither U.S. military power nor regional balancing has stopped Beijing from seeking to

displace core components of the U.S.-led system. And the liberal international order has failed to lure or bind China as powerfully as expected. China has instead pursued its own course, belying a range of American expectations in the process.

That reality warrants a clear-eyed rethinking of the United States' approach to China. There are plenty of risks that come with such a reassessment; defenders of the current framework will warn against destabilizing the bilateral relationship or inviting a new Cold War. But building a stronger and more sustainable approach to, and relationship with, Beijing requires honesty about how many fundamental assumptions have turned out wrong. Across the ideological spectrum, we in the U.S. foreign policy community have remained deeply invested in expectations about China—about its approach to economics, domestic politics, security, and global order—even as evidence against them has accumulated. The policies built on such expectations have failed to change China in the ways we intended or hoped.

THE POWER OF THE MARKET

Greater commercial interaction with China was supposed to bring gradual but steady liberalization of the Chinese economy. U.S. President George H. W. Bush's 1990 National Security Strategy described enhanced ties with the world as "crucial to China's prospects for regaining the path of economic reform." This argument predominated for decades. It drove U.S. decisions to grant China most-favored-nation trading status in the 1990s, to support its accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001, to establish a high-level economic dialogue in 2006, and to negotiate a bilateral investment treaty under U.S. President Barack Obama.

Trade in goods between the United States and China exploded from less than $8 billion in 1986 to over $578 billion

in 2016: more than a 30-fold increase, adjusting for inflation. Since the early years of this century, however, China's economic liberalization has stalled. Contrary to Western expectations, Beijing has doubled down on its state capitalist model even as it has gotten richer. Rather than becoming a force for greater openness, consistent growth has served to legitimize the Chinese Communist Party and its state-led economic model.

> *Trade in goods between the United States and China exploded from less than $8 billion in 1986 to over $578 billion in 2016.*

U.S. officials believed that debt, inefficiency, and the demands of a more advanced economy would necessitate further reforms. And Chinese officials recognized the problems with their approach; in 2007, Premier Wen Jiabao called the Chinese economy "unstable, unbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable." But rather than opening the country up to greater competition, the Chinese Communist Party, intent on maintaining control of the economy, is instead consolidating state-owned enterprises and pursuing industrial policies (notably its "Made in China 2025" plan) that aim to promote national technology champions in critical sectors, including aerospace, biomedicine, and robotics. And despite repeated promises, Beijing has resisted pressure from Washington and elsewhere to level the playing field for foreign companies. It has restricted market access and forced non-Chinese firms to sign on to joint ventures and share technology, while funneling investment and subsidies to state-backed domestic players.

Until recently, U.S. policymakers and executives mostly acquiesced to such discrimination; the potential commercial benefits were so large that they considered it unwise to upend the relationship with protectionism or sanctions. Instead, they

fought tooth and nail for small, incremental concessions. But now, what were once seen as merely the short-term frustrations of doing business with China have come to seem more harmful and permanent. The American Chamber of Commerce reported last year that eight in ten U.S. companies felt less welcome in China than in years prior, and more than 60 percent had little or no confidence that China would open its markets further over the next three years. Cooperative and voluntary mechanisms to pry open China's economy have by and large failed, including the Trump administration's newly launched Comprehensive Economic Dialogue.

CARLOS BARRIA / REUTERS

Boom town: Shanghai's financial district, November 2013.

THE IMPERATIVE OF LIBERALIZATION

Growth was supposed to bring not just further economic opening but also political liberalization. Development would spark a virtuous cycle, the thinking went, with a burgeoning Chinese middle class demanding new rights and pragmatic officials embracing legal reforms that would be necessary for

further progress. This evolution seemed especially certain after the collapse of the Soviet Union and democratic transitions in South Korea and Taiwan. “No nation on Earth has discovered a way to import the world’s goods and services while stopping foreign ideas at the border,” George H. W. Bush proclaimed. U.S. policy aimed to facilitate this process by sharing technology, furthering trade and investment, promoting people-to-people exchanges, and admitting hundreds of thousands of Chinese students to American universities.

> *In China, communications technologies have strengthened the hand of the state.*

The crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1989 dimmed hopes for the emergence of electoral democracy in China. Yet many experts and policymakers in the United States still expected the Chinese government to permit greater press freedoms and allow for a stronger civil society, while gradually embracing more political competition both within the Communist Party and at local levels. They believed that the information technology revolution of the 1990s would encourage such trends by further exposing Chinese citizens to the world and enhancing the economic incentives for openness. As U.S. President Bill Clinton put it, “Without the full freedom to think, question, to create, China will be at a distinct disadvantage, competing with fully open societies in the information age where the greatest source of national wealth is what resides in the human mind.” Leaders in Beijing would come to realize that only by granting individual freedoms could China thrive in a high-tech future.

But the fear that greater openness would threaten both domestic stability and the regime’s survival drove China’s leaders to look for an alternative approach. They took both the shock of Tiananmen Square and the dissolution of the

Soviet Union as evidence of the dangers of democratization and political competition. So rather than embracing positive cycles of openness, Beijing responded to the forces of globalization by putting up walls and tightening state control, constricting, rather than reinforcing, the free flow of people, ideas, and commerce. Additional stresses on the regime in this century—including an economic slowdown, endemic corruption in the government and the military, and ominous examples of popular uprisings elsewhere in the world—have spurred more authoritarianism, not less.

Indeed, events of the last decade have dashed even modest hopes for political liberalization. In 2013, an internal Communist Party memo known as Document No. 9 explicitly warned against “Western constitutional democracy” and other “universal values” as stalking-horses meant to weaken, destabilize, and even break up China. This guidance demonstrated the widening gap between U.S. and Chinese expectations for the country’s political future. As Orville Schell, a leading American expert on China, put it: “China is sliding ineluctably backward into a political climate more reminiscent of Mao Zedong in the 1970s than Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s.” Today, an ongoing crackdown on journalists, religious leaders, academics, social activists, and human rights lawyers shows no sign of abating—more than 300 lawyers, legal assistants, and activists were detained in 2015 alone.

Rather than devolving power to the Chinese people, as many in the West predicted, communications technologies have strengthened the hand of the state, helping China’s authorities control information flows and monitor citizens’ behavior. Censorship, detentions, and a new cybersecurity law that grants broad government control over the Internet in China have stymied political activity inside China’s “Great Firewall.” China’s twenty-first-century authoritarianism now includes plans to launch a “social credit system,” fusing big

data and artificial intelligence to reward and punish Chinese citizens on the basis of their political, commercial, social, and online activity. Facial recognition software, combined with the ubiquity of surveillance cameras across China, has even made it possible for the state to physically locate people within minutes.

KIM KYUNG HOON / REUTERS

Security cameras in front of the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, November 2013.

THE DETERRENT OF PRIMACY

A combination of U.S. diplomacy and U.S. military power—carrots and sticks—was supposed to persuade Beijing that it was neither possible nor necessary to challenge the U.S.-led security order in Asia. Washington "strongly promot[ed] China's participation in regional security mechanisms to reassure its neighbors and assuage its own

security concerns," as the Clinton administration's 1995 National Security Strategy put it, buttressed by military-to-military relations and other confidence-building measures. These modes of engagement were coupled with a "hedge"—enhanced U.S. military power in the region, supported by capable allies and partners. The effect, the thinking went, would be to allay military competition in Asia and further limit China's desire to alter the regional order. Beijing would settle for military sufficiency, building armed forces for narrow regional contingencies while devoting most of its resources to domestic needs.

The logic was not simply that China would be focused on its self-described "strategic window of opportunity" for development at home, with plenty of economic and social challenges occupying the attention of China's senior leaders. American policymakers and academics also assumed that China had learned a valuable lesson from the Soviet Union about the crippling costs of getting into an arms race with the United States. Washington could thus not only deter Chinese aggression but also—to use the Pentagon's term of art—"dissuade" China from even trying to compete. Zalmay Khalilzad, an official in the Reagan and both Bush administrations, argued that a dominant United States could "convince the Chinese leadership that a challenge would be difficult to prepare and extremely risky to pursue." Moreover, it was unclear whether China could challenge U.S. primacy even if it wanted to. Into the late 1990s, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was considered decades behind the United States' military and those of its allies.

Against this backdrop, U.S. officials took considerable care not to stumble into a confrontation with China. The political scientist Joseph Nye explained the thinking when he led the Pentagon's Asia office during the Clinton administration: "If we treated China as an enemy, we were guaranteeing an enemy in the future. If we treated China as a friend, we could

not guarantee friendship, but we could at least keep open the possibility of more benign outcomes." Soon-to-be Secretary of State Colin Powell told Congress at his confirmation hearing in January 2001, "China is not an enemy, and our challenge is to keep it that way."

Even as it began investing more of its newfound wealth in military power, the Chinese government sought to put Washington at ease, signaling continued adherence to the cautious, moderate foreign policy path set out by Deng. In 2005, the senior Communist Party official Zheng Bijian wrote in this magazine that China would never seek regional hegemony and remained committed to "a peaceful rise." In 2011, after a lively debate among China's leaders about whether it was time to shift gears, State Councilor Dai Bingguo assured the world that "peaceful development is a strategic choice China has made." Starting in 2002, the U.S. Defense Department had been producing a congressionally mandated annual report on China's military, but the consensus among senior U.S. officials was that China remained a distant and manageable challenge.

> *For Beijing, the United States' alliances and military presence in Asia posed unacceptable threats to China's interests.*

That view, however, underestimated just how simultaneously insecure and ambitious China's leadership really was. For Beijing, the United States' alliances and military presence in Asia posed unacceptable threats to China's interests in Taiwan, on the Korean Peninsula, and in the East China and South China Seas. In the words of the Peking University professor Wang Jisi, "It is strongly believed in China that . . . Washington will attempt to prevent the emerging powers, in particular China, from achieving their goals and enhancing their stature." So China started to chip away at the U.S.-led

security order in Asia, developing the capabilities to deny the U.S. military access to the region and driving wedges between Washington and its allies.

Ultimately, neither U.S. military power nor American diplomatic engagement has dissuaded China from trying to build a world-class military of its own. High-tech displays of American power in Iraq and elsewhere only accelerated efforts to modernize the PLA. Chinese President Xi Jinping has launched military reforms that will make Chinese forces more lethal and more capable of projecting military power well beyond China's shores. With its third aircraft carrier reportedly under construction, advanced new military installations in the South China Sea, and its first overseas military base in Djibouti, China is on the path to becoming a military peer the likes of which the United States has not seen since the Soviet Union. China's leaders no longer repeat Deng's dictum that, to thrive, China will "hide [its] capabilities and bide [its] time." Xi declared in October 2017 that "the Chinese nation has gone from standing up, to becoming rich, to becoming strong."

THE CONSTRAINTS OF ORDER

At the end of World War II, the United States built institutions and rules that helped structure global politics and the regional dynamics in Asia. Widely accepted norms, such as the freedom of commerce and navigation, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and international cooperation on global challenges, superseded nineteenth-century spheres of influence. As a leading beneficiary of this liberal international order, the thinking went, Beijing would have a considerable stake in the order's preservation and come to see its continuation as essential to China's own progress. U.S. policy aimed to encourage Beijing's involvement by welcoming China into leading institutions and working with it on global governance and regional security.

As China joined multilateral institutions, U.S. policymakers hoped that it would learn to play by the rules and soon begin to contribute to their upkeep. In the George W. Bush administration, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick memorably called on Beijing to become “a responsible stakeholder” in the international system. From Washington’s perspective, with greater power came greater obligation, especially since China had profited so handsomely from the system. As Obama emphasized, “We expect China to help uphold the very rules that have made them successful.”

In certain venues, China appeared to be steadily, if unevenly, taking on this responsibility. It joined the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization in 1991, acceded to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1992, joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, and took part in major diplomatic efforts, including the six-party talks and the P5+1 negotiations to deal with nuclear weapons programs in North Korea and Iran, respectively. It also became a major contributor to UN counterpiracy and peacekeeping operations.

Yet Beijing remained threatened by other central elements of the U.S.-led order—and has increasingly sought to displace them. That has been especially true of what it sees as uninvited violations of national sovereignty by the United States and its partners, whether in the form of economic sanctions or military action. Liberal norms regarding the international community’s right or responsibility to intervene to protect people from human rights violations, for example, have run headlong into China’s paramount priority of defending its authoritarian system from foreign interference. With a few notable exceptions, China has been busy watering down multilateral sanctions, shielding regimes from Western opprobrium, and making common cause with Russia to block the UN Security Council from authorizing interventionist actions. A number of nondemocratic governments—in Sudan,

Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere—have benefited from such obstruction.

China has also set out to build its own set of regional and international institutions—with the United States on the outside looking in—rather than deepening its commitment to the existing ones. It has launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank (along with Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa), and, most notably, the Belt and Road Initiative, Xi's grandiose vision for building land and maritime routes to connect China to much of the world. These institutions and programs have given China agenda-setting and convening power of its own, while often departing from the standards and values upheld by existing international institutions. Beijing explicitly differentiates its approach to development by noting that, unlike the United States and European powers, it does not demand that countries accept governance reforms as a condition of receiving aid.

> *The assumptions driving U.S. China policy look increasingly tenuous.*

In its own region, meanwhile, Beijing has set out to change the security balance, incrementally altering the status quo with steps just small enough to avoid provoking a military response from the United States. In the South China Sea, one of the world's most important waterways, China has deftly used coast guard vessels, legal warfare, and economic coercion to advance its sovereignty claims. In some cases, it has simply seized contested territory or militarized artificial islands. While Beijing has occasionally shown restraint and tactical caution, the overall approach indicates its desire to create a modern maritime sphere of influence.

In the summer of 2016, China ignored a landmark ruling by a

tribunal under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which held that China's expansive claims in the South China Sea were illegal under international law. U.S. officials wrongly assumed that some combination of pressure, shame, and its own desire for a rules-based maritime order would cause Beijing, over time, to accept the judgment. Instead, China has rejected it outright. Speaking to a security forum in Aspen, Colorado, a year after the ruling, in July 2017, a senior analyst from the CIA concluded that the experience had taught China's leaders "that they can defy international law and get away with it." Countries in the region, swayed by both their economic dependence on China and growing concerns about the United States' commitment to Asia, have failed to push back against Chinese assertiveness as much as U.S. policymakers expected they would.

TAKING STOCK

As the assumptions driving U.S. China policy have started to look increasingly tenuous, and the gap between American expectations and Chinese realities has grown, Washington has been largely focused elsewhere. Since 2001, the fight against jihadist terrorism has consumed the U.S. national security apparatus, diverting attention from the changes in Asia at exactly the time China was making enormous military, diplomatic, and commercial strides. U.S. President George W. Bush initially referred to China as a "strategic competitor"; in the wake of the September 11 attacks, however, his 2002 National Security Strategy declared, "The world's great powers find ourselves on the same side—united by common dangers of terrorist violence and chaos." During the Obama administration, there was an effort to "pivot," or "rebalance," strategic attention to Asia. But at the end of Obama's time in office, budgets and personnel remained focused on other regions—there were, for example, three times as many National Security Council staffers working on the Middle East as on all of East and Southeast Asia.

This strategic distraction has given China the opportunity to press its advantages, further motivated by the increasingly prominent view in China that the United States (along with the West more broadly) is in inexorable and rapid decline. Chinese officials see a United States that has been hobbled for years by the global financial crisis, its costly war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and deepening dysfunction in Washington. Xi has called on China to become “a global leader in terms of comprehensive national strength and international influence” by midcentury. He touts China’s development model as a “new option for other countries.”

Washington now faces its most dynamic and formidable competitor in modern history. Getting this challenge right will require doing away with the hopeful thinking that has long characterized the United States’ approach to China. The Trump administration’s first National Security Strategy took a step in the right direction by interrogating past assumptions in U.S. strategy. But many of Donald Trump’s policies—a narrow focus on bilateral trade deficits, the abandonment of multilateral trade deals, the questioning of the value of alliances, and the downgrading of human rights and diplomacy—have put Washington at risk of adopting an approach that is confrontational without being competitive; Beijing, meanwhile, has managed to be increasingly competitive without being confrontational.

The starting point for a better approach is a new degree of humility about the United States’ ability to change China. Neither seeking to isolate and weaken it nor trying to transform it for the better should be the lodestar of U.S. strategy in Asia. Washington should instead focus more on its own power and behavior, and the power and behavior of its allies and partners. Basing policy on a more realistic set of assumptions about China would better advance U.S. interests and put the bilateral relationship on a more sustainable footing. Getting there will take work, but the first step is

relatively straightforward: acknowledging just how much our policy has fallen short of our aspirations.

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Autocracy With Chinese Characteristics

Beijing's Behind-the-Scenes Reforms

Yuen Yuen Ang

CHANCE CHAN / REUTERS

Work in progress: repainting in Jiaxing, China, May 2014

Sooner or later this economy will slow," the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman declared of China in 1998. He continued: "That's when China will need a government that is legitimate. . . . When China's 900 million villagers get phones, and start calling each other, this will inevitably become a more open country." At the time, just a few years after the fall

of the Soviet Union, Friedman's certainty was broadly shared. China's economic ascent under authoritarian rule could not last; eventually, and inescapably, further economic development would bring about democratization.

Twenty years after Friedman's prophecy, China has morphed into the world's second-largest economy. Growth has slowed, but only because it leveled off when China reached middle-income status (not, as Friedman worried, because of a lack of "real regulatory systems"). Communications technology rapidly spread—today, 600 million Chinese citizens own smartphones and 750 million use the Internet—but the much-anticipated tsunami of political liberalization has not arrived. If anything, under the current regime of President Xi Jinping, the Chinese government appears more authoritarian, not less.

Most Western observers have long believed that democracy and capitalism go hand in hand, that economic liberalization both requires and propels political liberalization. China's apparent defiance of this logic has led to two opposite conclusions. One camp insists that China represents a temporary aberration and that liberalization will come soon. But this is mostly speculation; these analysts have been incorrectly predicting the imminent collapse of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for decades. The other camp sees China's success as proof that autocracies are just as good as democracies at promoting growth—if not better. As Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad put it in 1992, "authoritarian stability" has enabled prosperity, whereas democracy has brought "chaos and increased misery." But not all autocracies deliver economic success. In fact, some are utterly disastrous, including China under Mao.

Both of these explanations overlook a crucial reality: since opening its markets in 1978, China has in fact pursued significant political reforms—just not in the manner that Western observers expected. Instead of instituting multiparty

elections, establishing formal protections for individual rights, or allowing free expression, the CCP has made changes below the surface, reforming its vast bureaucracy to realize many of the benefits of democratization—in particular, accountability, competition, and partial limits on power—without giving up single-party control. Although these changes may appear dry and apolitical, in fact, they have created a unique hybrid: autocracy with democratic characteristics. In practice, tweaks to rules and incentives within China's public administration have quietly transformed an ossified communist bureaucracy into a highly adaptive capitalist machine. But bureaucratic reforms cannot substitute for political reforms forever. As prosperity continues to increase and demands on the bureaucracy grow, the limits of this approach are beginning to loom large.

> *Tweaks to rules and incentives within China's public administration have quietly transformed an ossified communist bureaucracy into a highly adaptive capitalist machine.*

CHINESE BUREAUCRACY 101

In the United States, politics are exciting and bureaucracy is boring. In China, the opposite is true. As a senior official once explained to me, "The bureaucracy is political, and politics are bureaucratized." In the Chinese communist regime, there is no separation between political power and public administration. Understanding Chinese politics, therefore, requires first and foremost an appreciation of China's bureaucracy. That bureaucracy is composed of two vertical hierarchies—the party and the state—replicated across the five levels of government: central, provincial, county, city, and township. These crisscrossing lines of authority produce what the China scholar Kenneth Lieberthal has termed a "matrix" structure. In formal organizational charts, the party and the

state are separate entities, with Xi leading the party and Premier Li Keqiang heading up the administration and its ministries. In practice, however, the two are intertwined. The premier is also a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the party's top body, which currently has seven members. And at the local level, officials often simultaneously hold positions in both hierarchies. For example, a mayor, who heads the administration of a municipality, is usually also the municipality's deputy chief of party. Moreover, officials frequently move between the party and the state. For instance, mayors may become party secretaries and vice versa.

The Chinese public administration is massive. The state and party organs alone (excluding the military and state-owned enterprises) consist of over 50 million people, roughly the size of South Korea's entire population. Among these, 20 percent are civil servants who perform management roles. The rest are street-level public employees who interact with citizens directly, such as inspectors, police officers, and health-care workers.

The top one percent of the bureaucracy—roughly 500,000 people—make up China's political elite. These individuals are directly appointed by the party, and they rotate through offices across the country. Notably, CCP membership is not a prerequisite for public employment, although elites tend to be CCP members.

Within each level of government, the bureaucracy is similarly disaggregated into the leading one percent and the remaining 99 percent. In the first category is the leadership, which comprises the party secretary (first in command), the chief of state (second in command), and members of an elite party committee, who simultaneously head key party or state offices that perform strategic functions such as appointing personnel and maintaining public security. In the second category are

civil servants and frontline workers who are permanently stationed in one location.

Managing a public administration the size of a midsize country is a gargantuan task. It is also a critical one, since the Chinese leadership relies on the bureaucracy to govern the country and run the economy. Not only do bureaucrats implement policies and laws; they also formulate them by tailoring central mandates for local implementation and by experimenting with local initiatives.

REFORM AT THE TOP

When Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, unleashed reforms, he maintained the CCP's monopoly on power. Instead of introducing Western-style democracy, he focused on transforming the Chinese bureaucracy into a driver of economic growth. To achieve this, he injected democratic characteristics into the bureaucracy, namely, accountability, competition, and partial limits on power.

Perhaps the most significant of Deng's reforms was a shift in the bureaucracy away from one-man rule toward collective leadership and the introduction of term limits and a mandatory retirement age for elite officials. These changes constrained the accumulation of personal power and rejuvenated the party-state with younger officials. Lower down, the reformist leadership changed the incentives of local leaders by updating the cadre evaluation system, which assesses local leaders according to performance targets. Since Chinese officials are appointed rather than popularly elected, these report cards serve an accountability function similar to elections in democracies. Changing the targets for evaluating cadres redefined the bureaucracy's goals, making clear to millions of officials what they were expected to deliver, as well as the accompanying rewards and penalties.

Breaking from Mao's fixation on class background and ideological fervor, Deng, ever the pragmatist, used this system to turn local leaders into more productive economic agents. From the 1980s onward, officials were assigned a narrow list of quantifiable deliverables, focused primarily on the economy and revenue generation. Tasks unrelated to the economy, such as environmental protection and poverty relief, were either relegated to a lower priority or not mentioned at all. Meanwhile, the goal of economic growth was always paired with an indispensable requisite: maintaining political stability. Failing this requirement (for instance, allowing a mass protest to break out) could cause leaders to flunk their entire test in a given year.

In short, during the early decades of reform, the new performance criteria instructed local leaders to achieve rapid economic growth without causing political instability. Reformers reinforced this stark redefinition of bureaucratic success with incentives. High scores improved the prospects of promotion, or at least the chances of being laterally transferred to a favorable office. Local leaders were also entitled to performance-based bonuses, with the highest performers sometimes receiving many times more than the lower performers. The government also began publicly ranking localities. Officials from the winning ones earned prestige and honorary titles; officials from those at the bottom lost face in their community. In this culture of hypercompetition, nobody wanted to be left behind.

Newly incentivized, local leaders dove headlong into promoting industrialization and growth. Along the way, they devised strategies and solutions that even party bosses in Beijing had not conceived. A famous example from the 1980s and 1990s are township and village enterprises, companies that circumvented restrictions on private ownership by operating as collectively owned enterprises. Another, more recent example is the creation of "land quota markets" in

Chengdu and Chongqing, which allow developers to buy quotas of land from villages for urban use.

Through these reforms, the CCP achieved some measure of accountability and competition within single-party rule. Although no ballots were cast, lower-level officials were held responsible for the economic development of their jurisdictions. To be sure, Deng's reforms emphasized brute capital accumulation rather than holistic development, which led to environmental degradation, inequality, and other social problems. Still, they undoubtedly kicked China's growth machine into gear by making the bureaucracy results-oriented, fiercely competitive, and responsive to business needs, qualities that are normally associated with democracies.

Jason Lee / Reuters
The closing session of the party conference, Beijing, March 2018

STREET-LEVEL REFORMS

Bureaucratic reforms among local leaders were critical but not sufficient. Below them are the street-level bureaucrats who run the daily machinery of governance. And in the

Chinese bureaucracy, these inspectors, officers, and even teachers are not merely providers of public services but also potential agents of economic change. For example, they might use personal connections to recruit investors to their locales or use their departments to provide commercial services as state-affiliated agencies.

Career incentives do not apply to rank-and-file public employees, as there is little chance of being promoted to the elite level; most civil servants do not dream of becoming mayors. Instead, the government has relied on financial incentives, through an uncodified system of internal profit sharing that links the bureaucracy's financial performance to individual remuneration. Although profit sharing is usually associated with capitalist corporations, it is not new to China's bureaucracy or, indeed, to any premodern state administration. As the sociologist Max Weber noted, before the onset of modernization, instead of receiving sufficient, stable salaries from state budgets, most public agents financed themselves through the prerogatives of office—for example, skimming off a share of fees and taxes for themselves. Modern observers may frown on such practices, considering them corrupt, but they do have some benefits.

Before Deng's reforms, the Chinese bureaucracy was far from modern or technocratic; it was a mishmash of traditional practices and personal relationships, inserted into a Leninist structure of top-down commands. So when Chinese markets opened up, bureaucratic agents naturally revived many traditional practices, but with a twentieth-century capitalist twist. Within the vast Chinese bureaucracy, formal salaries for officials and public employees were standardized at abysmally low rates. For instance, President Hu Jintao's official salary in 2012 was the equivalent of only about $1,000 a month. An entry-level civil servant received far less, about $150 a month. But in practice, these low salaries were supplemented by an array of additional perks, such as

allowances, bonuses, gifts, and free vacations and meals.

And unlike in other developing countries, supplemental compensation in China's bureaucracy was pegged to financial performance: the central government granted local authorities partial autonomy to spend the funds they earned. The more tax revenue a local government generated and the more nontax revenue (such as fees and profits) that party and state offices earned, the more compensation they could provide to their staff members.

What emerged was essentially a variant of profit sharing: public employees took a cut of the revenue produced by their organizations. These changes fueled a results-oriented culture in the bureaucracy, although results in the Chinese context were measured purely in economic terms. These strong incentives propelled the bureaucracy to help transition the economy toward capitalism.

A profit-oriented public bureaucracy has drawbacks, of course, and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese complained endlessly about arbitrary payments and profiteering. In response, from the late 1990s on, reformers rolled out a suite of measures aimed at combating petty corruption and the theft of public funds. Central authorities abolished cash payments of fees and fines and allowed citizens to make payments directly through banks. These technical reforms were not flashy, yet their impact was significant. Police officers, for example, are now far less likely to extort citizens and privately pocket fines. Over time, these reforms have made the Chinese people less vulnerable to petty abuses of power. In 2011, Transparency International found that only nine percent of Chinese citizens reported having paid a bribe in the past year, compared with 54 percent in India, 64 percent in Nigeria, and 84 percent in Cambodia. To be sure, China has a serious corruption problem, but the most significant issue is collusion among

political and business elites, not petty predation.

Although none of these bureaucratic reforms fits the bill of traditional political reforms, their effects are political. They have changed the priorities of government, introduced competition, and altered how citizens encounter the state. Above all, they have incentivized economic performance, allowing the CCP to enjoy the benefits of continued growth while evading the pressures of political liberalization.

Pool / Reuters
Xi in Shanghai, May 2014

THE LIMITS OF BUREAUCRATIC REFORM

Substituting bureaucratic reform for political reform has bought the CCP time. For the first few decades of China's market transition, the party's reliance on the bureaucracy to act as the agent of change paid off. But can this approach forestall pressure for individual rights and democratic freedoms forever? Today, there are increasing signs that the bureaucracy has come close to exhausting its entrepreneurial and adaptive functions. Since Xi took office in 2012, the limits of bureaucratic reform have become increasingly clear.

> *Substituting bureaucratic reform for political reform has bought the CCP time.*

The Xi era marks a new stage in the country's development. China is now a middle-income economy with an increasingly educated, connected, and demanding citizenry. And the political pressures that have come with prosperity are, in fact, beginning to undermine the reforms that propelled China's rapid growth.

The cadre evaluation system has come under particular stress. Over time, the targets assigned to local leaders have steadily crept upward. In the 1980s and 1990s, officials were evaluated like CEOs, on their economic performance alone. But today, in addition to economic growth, leaders must also maintain social harmony, protect the environment, supply public services, enforce party discipline, and even promote happiness. These changes have paralyzed local leaders. Whereas officials used to be empowered to do whatever it took to achieve rapid growth, they are now constrained by multiple constituents and competing demands, not unlike democratically elected politicians.

Xi's sweeping anticorruption campaign, which has led to the arrest of an unprecedented number of officials, has only made this worse. In past decades, assertive leadership and corruption were often two sides of the same coin. Consider the disgraced party secretary Bo Xilai, who was as ruthless and corrupt as he was bold in transforming the western backwater of Chongqing into a thriving industrial hub. Corrupt dealings aside, all innovative policies and unpopular decisions entail political risk. If Xi intends to impose strict discipline—in his eyes, necessary to contain the political threats to CCP rule—then he cannot expect the bureaucracy to innovate or accomplish as much as it has in the past.

Moreover, sustaining growth in a high-income economy requires more than merely constructing industrial parks and building roads. It demands fresh ideas, technology, services, and cutting-edge innovations. Government officials everywhere tend to have no idea how to drive such developments. To achieve this kind of growth, the government must release and channel the immense creative potential of civil society, which would necessitate greater freedom of expression, more public participation, and less state intervention.

Yet just as political freedoms have become imperative for continued economic growth, the Xi administration is backpedaling. Most worrying is the party leadership's decision to remove term limits among the top brass, a change that will allow Xi to stay in office for the rest of his life. So long as the CCP remains the only party in power, China will always be susceptible to what the political scientist Francis Fukuyama has called "the bad emperor problem"—that is, extreme sensitivity to leadership idiosyncrasies. This means that under a leader like Deng, pragmatic and committed to reform, China will prosper and rise. But a more absolutist and narcissistic leader could create a nationwide catastrophe.

Xi has been variously described as an aspiring reformer and an absolute dictator. But regardless of his predilections, Xi cannot force the genie of economic and social transformation back into the bottle. China today is no longer the impoverished, cloistered society of the 1970s. Further liberalization is both inevitable and necessary for China's continued prosperity and its desire to partake in global leadership. But contrary to Friedman's prediction, this need not take the form of multiparty elections. China still has tremendous untapped room for political liberalization on the margins. If the party loosens its grip on society and directs, rather than commands, bottom-up improvisation, this could be enough to drive innovation and growth for at least another

generation.

CHINA AND DEMOCRACY

What broader lessons on democracy can be drawn from China? One is the need to move beyond the narrow conception of democratization as the introduction of multiparty elections. As China has shown, some of the benefits of democratization can be achieved under single-party rule. Allowing bureaucratic reforms to unfold can work better than trying to impose political change from the outside, since over time, the economic improvements that the bureaucratic reforms generate should create internal pressure for meaningful political reform. This is not to say that states must delay democracy in order to experience economic growth. Rather, China's experience shows that democracy is best introduced by grafting reforms onto existing traditions and institutions—in China's case, a Leninist bureaucracy. Put simply, it is better to promote political change by building on what is already there than by trying to import something wholly foreign.

A second lesson is that the presumed dichotomy between the state and society is a false one. American observers, in particular, tend to assume that the state is a potential oppressor and so society must be empowered to combat it. This worldview arises from the United States' distinct political philosophy, but it is not shared in many other parts of the world.

In nondemocratic societies such as China, there has always been an intermediate layer of actors between the state and society. In ancient China, the educated, landholding elite filled this role. They had direct access to those in power but were still rooted in their communities. China's civil service occupies a similar position today. The country's bureaucratic reforms were successful because they freed up space for

these intermediate actors to try new initiatives.

Additionally, observers should drop the false dichotomy between the party and the state when reading China. The American notion of the separation of powers is premised on the assumption that officeholders possess only one identity, belonging either to one branch of government or another. But this doesn't hold in China or in most traditional societies, where fluid, overlapping identities are the norm. In these settings, whether officials are embedded in their networks or communities can sometimes matter more than formal checks and electoral competition in holding them accountable. For example, profit-sharing practices within China's bureaucracy gave its millions of public employees a personal stake in their country's capitalist success.

Challenging these unspoken assumptions sheds light on why China has repeatedly defied expectations. It should also prompt the United States to rethink its desire to export democracy around the world and its state-building efforts in traditional societies. Everyone everywhere wants the benefits of democracy, but policymakers would be dearly mistaken to think that these can be achieved only by transplanting the U.S. political system wholesale.

As for other authoritarian governments keen to emulate China, their leaders should not pick up the wrong lessons. China's economic success is not proof that relying on top-down commands and suppressing bottom-up initiative work. In fact, it's the exact opposite: the disastrous decades under Mao proved that this kind of leadership fails. In Deng's era, the CCP managed a capitalist revolution only insofar as it introduced democratizing reforms to ensure bureaucratic accountability, promote competition, and limit the power of individual leaders. The current Chinese leadership should heed this lesson, too.

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The End of the Democratic Century

Autocracy's Global Ascendance

Yascha Mounk and Roberto Stefan Foa

HAMIL ZHUMATOV / REUTERS

The dictator's dividend: a monument in Astana, Kazakhstan, September 2016.

At the height of World War II, Henry Luce, the founder of Time magazine, argued that the United States had amassed such wealth and power that the twentieth century would come to be known simply as "the American Century." His prediction proved prescient: despite being challenged for supremacy by Nazi Germany and, later, the Soviet Union, the

United States prevailed against its adversaries. By the turn of the millennium, its position as the most powerful and influential state in the world appeared unimpeachable. As a result, the twentieth century was marked by the dominance not just of a particular country but also of the political system it helped spread: liberal democracy.

As democracy flourished across the world, it was tempting to ascribe its dominance to its inherent appeal. If citizens in India, Italy, or Venezuela seemed loyal to their political system, it must have been because they had developed a deep commitment to both individual rights and collective self-determination. And if Poles and Filipinos began to make the transition from dictatorship to democracy, it must have been because they, too, shared in the universal human desire for liberal democracy.

But the events of the second half of the twentieth century can also be interpreted in a very different way. Citizens across the world were attracted to liberal democracy not simply because of its norms and values but also because it offered the most salient model of economic and geopolitical success. Civic ideals may have played their part in converting the citizens of formerly authoritarian regimes into convinced democrats, but the astounding economic growth of western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, the victory of democratic countries in the Cold War, and the defeat or collapse of democracy's most powerful autocratic rivals were just as important.

Taking the material foundations of democratic hegemony seriously casts the story of democracy's greatest successes in a different light, and it also changes how one thinks about its current crisis. As liberal democracies have become worse at improving their citizens' living standards, populist movements that disavow liberalism are emerging from Brussels to Brasília and from Warsaw to Washington. A striking number of citizens have started to ascribe less importance to living in

a democracy: whereas two-thirds of Americans above the age of 65 say it is absolutely important to them to live in a democracy, for example, less than one-third of those below the age of 35 say the same thing. A growing minority is even open to authoritarian alternatives: from 1995 to 2017, the share of French, Germans, and Italians who favored military rule more than tripled.

As recent elections around the world indicate, these opinions aren't just abstract preferences; they reflect a deep groundswell of antiestablishment sentiment that can be easily mobilized by extremist political parties and candidates. As a result, authoritarian populists who disrespect some of the most basic rules and norms of the democratic system have made rapid advances across western Europe and North America over the past two decades. Meanwhile, authoritarian strongmen are rolling back democratic advances across much of Asia and eastern Europe. Could the changing balance of economic and military power in the world help explain these unforeseen developments?

That question is all the more pressing today, as the long-standing dominance of a set of consolidated democracies with developed economies and a common alliance structure is coming to an end. Ever since the last decade of the nineteenth century, the democracies that formed the West's Cold War alliance against the Soviet Union—in North America, western Europe, Australasia, and postwar Japan—have commanded a majority of the world's income. In the late nineteenth century, established democracies such as the United Kingdom and the United States made up the bulk of global GDP. In the second half of the twentieth century, as the geographic span of both democratic rule and the alliance structure headed by the United States expanded to include Japan and Germany, the power of this liberal democratic alliance became even more crushing. But now, for the first time in over a hundred years, its share of global GDP has

fallen below half. According to forecasts by the International Monetary Fund, it will slump to a third within the next decade.

At the same time that the dominance of democracies has faded, the share of economic output coming from authoritarian states has grown rapidly. In 1990, countries rated “not free” by Freedom House (the lowest category, which excludes “partially free” countries such as Singapore) accounted for just 12 percent of global income. Now, they are responsible for 33 percent, matching the level they achieved in the early 1930s, during the rise of fascism in Europe, and surpassing the heights they reached in the Cold War when Soviet power was at its apex.

As a result, the world is now approaching a striking milestone: within the next five years, the share of global income held by countries considered “not free”—such as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia—will surpass the share held by Western liberal democracies. In the span of a quarter century, liberal democracies have gone from a position of unprecedented economic strength to a position of unprecedented economic weakness.

It is looking less and less likely that the countries in North America and western Europe that made up the traditional heartland of liberal democracy can regain their erstwhile supremacy, with their democratic systems embattled at home and their share of the world economy continuing to shrink. So the future promises two realistic scenarios: either some of the most powerful autocratic countries in the world will transition to liberal democracy, or the period of democratic dominance that was expected to last forever will prove no more than an interlude before a new era of struggle between mutually hostile political systems.

REUTERS

East Germans climb the Berlin Wall at the Brandenburg Gate to celebrate the opening of the border, November 1989.

THE WAGES OF WEALTH

Of all the ways in which economic prosperity buys a country power and influence, perhaps the most important is that it creates stability at home. As the political scientists Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi have shown, poor democracies often collapse. It is only rich democracies—those with a GDP per capita above $14,000 in today's terms, according to their findings—that are reliably secure. Since the formation of the postwar alliance binding the United States to its allies in western Europe, no affluent member has experienced a breakdown of democratic rule.

Beyond keeping democracies stable, economic might also endows them with a number of tools to influence the

development of other countries. Chief among these is cultural clout. During the apogee of Western liberal democracy, the United States—and, to a lesser extent, western Europe—was home to the most famous writers and musicians, the most watched television shows and movies, the most advanced industries, and the most prestigious universities. In the minds of many young people coming of age in Africa or Asia in the 1990s, all these things seemed to be of a piece: the desire to share in the unfathomable wealth of the West was also a desire to adopt its lifestyle, and the desire to adopt its lifestyle seemed to require emulating its political system.

This combination of economic power and cultural prestige facilitated a great degree of political influence. When the American soap opera Dallas began airing in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, for example, Soviet citizens naturally contrasted the impossible wealth of suburban America with their own material deprivation and wondered why their economic system had fallen so far behind. “We were directly or indirectly responsible for the fall of the [Soviet] empire,” Larry Hagman, one of its leading stars, boasted years later. It was, he claimed, not Soviet citizens’ idealism but rather “good old-fashioned greed” that “got them to question their authority.”

The economic prowess of Western democracies could also take on a harder edge. They could influence political events in other countries by promising to include them in the global economic system or threatening to exclude them from it. In the 1990s and the first decade of this century, the prospect of membership in organizations from the European Union to the World Trade Organization provided powerful incentives for democratic reforms in eastern Europe, Turkey, and parts of Asia, including Thailand and South Korea. Meanwhile, Western sanctions that prevented countries from participating in the global economy may have helped contain Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in the years following the

Gulf War, and they were arguably instrumental in bringing about the fall of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic after the war in Kosovo.

Finally, economic power could easily be converted into military might. This, too, did much to enhance the global standing of liberal democracies. It ensured that other countries could not topple democratic regimes by force and raised the domestic legitimacy of such regimes by making military humiliation a rarity. At the same time, it encouraged the spread of democracy though diplomatic leverage and the presence of boots on the ground. Countries that were physically located between a major democratic power and a major authoritarian power, such as Poland and Ukraine, were deeply influenced by the greater material and military benefits offered by an alliance with the West. Former colonies emulated the political systems of their erstwhile rulers when they gained independence, leaving parliamentary democracies from the islands of the Caribbean to the highlands of East Africa. And in at least two major cases—Germany and Japan—Western military occupation paved the way for the introduction of a model democratic constitution.

In short, it is impossible to understand the story of the democratic century without taking seriously the role that economic power played in spreading the ideals of liberal democracy around the world. This also means that it is impossible to make informed predictions about the future of liberal democracy without reflecting on the effects that the decline in the relative economic clout of the democratic alliance might have in the years and decades to come.

THE DANGERS OF DECLINE

At first glance, the conclusion that affluence breeds stability seems to bode well for the future of North America and

western Europe, where the institutions of liberal democracy have traditionally been most firmly established. After all, even if their relative power declines, the absolute level of wealth in Canada or France is very unlikely to fall below the threshold at which democracies tend to fail. But absolute levels of wealth may have been just one of many economic features that kept Western democracies stable after World War II. Indeed, the stable democracies of that period also shared three other economic attributes that can plausibly help explain their past success: relative equality, rapidly growing incomes for most citizens, and the fact that authoritarian rivals to democracy were much less wealthy.

All these factors have begun to erode in recent years. Consider what has happened in the United States. In the 1970s, the top one percent of income earners commanded eight percent of pretax income; now, they command over 20 percent. For much of the twentieth century, inflation-adjusted wages roughly doubled from generation to generation; for the past 30 years, they have essentially remained flat. And throughout the Cold War, the U.S. economy, as measured by GDP based on purchasing power parity, remained two to three times as large as the Soviet economy; today, it is one-sixth smaller than China's.

> *Of the 15 countries in the world with the highest per capita incomes, almost two-thirds are nondemocracies.*

The ability of autocratic regimes to compete with the economic performance of liberal democracies is a particularly important and novel development. At the height of its influence, communism managed to rival the ideological appeal of liberal democracy across large parts of the developing world. But even then, it offered a weak economic alternative to capitalism. Indeed, the share of global income produced by the Soviet Union and its satellite states peaked

at 13 percent in the mid-1950s. Over the following decades, it declined steadily, falling to ten percent by 1989. Communist countries also could not provide their citizens with a lifestyle that would rival the comfort of the capitalist West. From 1950 to 1989, per capita income in the Soviet Union fell from two-thirds to less than half of the western European level. As the German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger put it, playing off the title of an essay by Lenin, Soviet socialism proved to be "the highest stage of underdevelopment."

New forms of authoritarian capitalism may eventually suffer similar types of economic stagnation. So far, however, the form of authoritarian capitalism that has emerged in Arab Gulf states and East Asia—combining a strong state with relatively free markets and reasonably secure property rights—is having a good run. Of the 15 countries in the world with the highest per capita incomes, almost two-thirds are nondemocracies. Even comparatively unsuccessful authoritarian states, such as Iran, Kazakhstan, and Russia, can boast per capita incomes above $20,000. China, whose per capita income was vastly lower as recently as two decades ago, is rapidly starting to catch up. Although average incomes in its rural hinterlands remain low, the country has proved that it can offer a higher level of wealth in its more urban areas: the coastal region of China now comprises some 420 million people, with an average income of $23,000 and growing. In other words, hundreds of millions of people can now be said to live under conditions of "authoritarian modernity." In the eyes of their less affluent imitators around the world, their remarkable prosperity serves as a testament to the fact that the road to prosperity no longer needs to run through liberal democracy.

AUTHORITARIAN SOFT POWER

One of the results of this transformation has been a much greater degree of ideological self-confidence among

autocratic regimes—and, along with it, a willingness to meddle in Western democracies. Russia's attempts to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election have understandably drawn the most attention over the past two years. But the country has long had an even greater influence on politics across western Europe. In Italy and France, for example, Russia has helped finance extremist parties on both sides of the political divide for decades. In other European countries, Russia has enjoyed even more remarkable success in recruiting retired political leaders to lobby on its behalf, including former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and former Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer.

The big question now is whether Russia will remain alone in its attempt to influence the politics of liberal democracies. The answer is almost certainly no: its campaigns have proved that outside meddling by authoritarian powers in deeply divided democracies is relatively easy and strikingly effective, making it very tempting for Russia's authoritarian peers to follow suit. Indeed, China is already stepping up ideological pressure on its overseas residents and establishing influential Confucius Institutes in major centers of learning. And over the past two years, Saudi Arabia has dramatically upped its payments to registered U.S. lobbyists, increasing the number of registered foreign agents working on its behalf from 25 to 145.

If the changing balance of economic and technological power between Western democracies and authoritarian countries makes the former more susceptible to outside interference, it also makes it easier for the latter to spread their values. Indeed, the rise of authoritarian soft power is already apparent across a variety of domains, including academia, popular culture, foreign investment, and development aid. Until a few years ago, for example, all of the world's leading universities were situated in liberal democracies, but authoritarian countries are starting to close the gap.

According to the latest Times Higher Education survey, 16 of the world's top 250 institutions can be found in nondemocracies, including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore.

Perhaps the most important form of authoritarian soft power, however, may be the growing ability of dictatorial regimes to soften the hold that democracies once enjoyed over the reporting and dissemination of news. Whereas the Soviet mouthpiece Pravda could never have dreamed of attracting a mass readership in the United States, the clips produced today by state-funded news channels, including Qatar's Al Jazeera, China's CCTV, and Russia's RT, regularly find millions of American viewers. The result is the end of the West's monopoly over media narratives, as well as an end to its ability to maintain a civic space untainted by foreign governments.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END?

During the long period of democratic stability, the United States was the dominant superpower, both culturally and economically. Authoritarian competitors such as the Soviet Union quickly stagnated economically and became discredited ideologically. As a result, democracy seemed to promise not only a greater degree of individual freedom and collective self-determination but also the more prosaic prospect of a vastly wealthier life. As long as these background conditions held, there seemed to be good reason to assume that democracy would continue to be safe in its traditional strongholds. There were even plausible grounds to hope that an ever-growing number of autocratic countries would join the democratic column.

But the era in which Western liberal democracies were the world's top cultural and economic powers may now be drawing to a close. At the same time that liberal democracies

are showing strong signs of institutional decay, authoritarian populists are starting to develop an ideological alternative in the form of illiberal democracy, and outright autocrats are offering their citizens a standard of living that increasingly rivals that of the richest countries in the West.

FRANCOIS LENOIR / REUTERS

A demonstrator outside the European Parliament, in Brussels, April 2013.

It is tempting to hope that Western liberal democracies could regain their dominance. One path toward that end would be economic. The recent economic success of authoritarian countries could prove to be short lived. Russia and Saudi Arabia remain overly reliant on income from fossil fuels. China's recent growth has been fueled by a soaring debt bubble and favorable demographics, and it may end up being difficult to sustain once the country is forced to deleverage and the effects of an aging population hit home. At the same time, the economic performance of developed Western economies could improve. As the residual effects of the Great Recession wear off and European and North American

economies roar back to life, these bastions of liberal democracy could once again outpace the modernized autocracies.

Projections about the exact speed and degree of the shifting power balance between democratic and authoritarian countries should therefore be taken with a large grain of salt. And yet a cursory glance at Western GDP growth rates for the past three to four decades shows that, due to demographic decline and low productivity growth, Western economies were stagnating long before the financial crisis. Meanwhile, China and many other emerging economies have large hinterlands that have yet to experience catch-up development, which suggests that these countries can continue to make considerable gains by following their current growth model.

> *The era in which Western liberal democracies were the world's top cultural and economic powers may be drawing to a close.*

Another hope is that emerging democracies such as Brazil, India, and Indonesia may come to play a more active role in upholding an alliance of liberal democracies and diffusing their values around the world. But this would require a radical change in course. As the political scientist Marc Plattner has argued, these countries have not historically thought of "the defense of liberal democracy as a significant component of their foreign policies." Following the Russian annexation of Crimea, for example, Brazil, India, and South Africa abstained from voting on a resolution in the UN General Assembly that condemned the move. They have also opposed sanctions against Russia. And they have tended to side with autocratic regimes in seeking a greater role for states in regulating the Internet.

To make things worse, emerging democracies have

historically been much less stable than the supposedly consolidated democracies of North America, western Europe, and parts of East Asia. Indeed, recent democratic backsliding in Turkey, as well as signs of democratic slippage in Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, and the Philippines, raises the possibility that some of these countries may become flawed democracies—or revert to outright authoritarian rule—in the coming decades. Instead of shoring up the dwindling forces of democracy, some of these countries may choose to align with autocratic powers.

Hopes that the current set of democratic countries could somehow regain their erstwhile global position are probably vain. The most likely scenario, then, is that democracies will come to look less and less attractive as they cease to be associated with wealth and power and fail to address their own challenges.

It’s conceivable, however, that the animating principles of liberal democracy will prove deeply appealing to the inhabitants of authoritarian countries even once those peoples enjoy a comparable standard of living. If large authoritarian countries such as Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia undertook democratic reforms, the aggregate power of democracies would be boosted significantly. If China were to do so, it would end the era of authoritarian resurgence in a single stroke.

But that is just another way of saying that the long century during which Western liberal democracies dominated the globe has ended for good. The only remaining question now is whether democracy will transcend its once firm anchoring in the West, a shift that would create the conditions for a truly global democratic century—or whether democracy will become, at best, the lingering form of government in an economically and demographically declining corner of the world.

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Perception and Misperception on the Korean Peninsula

How Unwanted Wars Begin

Robert Jervis and Mira Rapp-Hooper

KCNA / REUTERS

Seeing like a state: Kim watching a military drill, Pyongyang, November 2014

North Korea has all but completed its quest for nuclear weapons. It has demonstrated its ability to produce boosted-fission bombs and may be able to make fusion ones, as well. It can likely miniaturize them to fit atop a missile. And it will soon be able to deliver this payload to the continental United

States. North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un, has declared his country's nuclear deterrent complete and, despite his willingness to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump, is unlikely to give it up. Yet Washington continues to demand that Pyongyang relinquish the nuclear weapons it already has, and the Trump administration has pledged that the North Korean regime will never acquire a nuclear missile that can hit the United States. The result is a new, more dangerous phase in the U.S.–North Korean relationship: a high-stakes nuclear standoff.

In March, U.S. and South Korean officials announced the possibility of a Kim-Trump meeting. But regardless of whether diplomacy proceeds or the United States turns its focus to other tools—sanctions, deterrence, even military force—the same underlying challenge will remain: the outcome of this standoff will be determined by whether and how each country can influence the other. That, in turn, will depend on the beliefs and perceptions each holds about the other. The problems of perception and misperception afflict all policymakers that deal with foreign adversaries. But when it comes to relations between Washington and Pyongyang, those problems are especially profound, and the consequences of a miscalculation are uniquely grave.

Any U.S. strategy toward North Korea involves using a combination of threats and promises to persuade Pyongyang to bend to Washington's will. But whether the United States can actually persuade Pyongyang depends not just on which tools it chooses to use but also, more fundamentally, on how it is viewed by North Korea. How do North Korean leaders interpret the signals Washington sends? Do they see Washington's threats and promises as credible? And how do U.S. policymakers perceive their counterparts in Pyongyang? How do they differentiate plausible threats from mere bluster? The American debate about whether Kim is "rational"—that is, capable of making means-ends

calculations and providing for his own survival—barely scratches the surface of necessary considerations.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of any threat or promise is in the eye of the target; the adversary has the final say in whether a particular approach succeeds. Analysts often compare international politics to chess, a bilateral contest in which players view the entire board and know all the possible moves. In this case especially, a more apt analogy is Rashomon—the Japanese film that depicts the same story from several vantage points, each character viewing what happened differently.

If any U.S. strategy toward North Korea is to have a chance of succeeding (or even of just averting catastrophe), it must be guided by an accurate sense of how Kim's regime thinks, what it values, and how it judges its options. Washington must understand not just North Korean objectives but also how North Korean officials understand U.S. objectives and whether they consider U.S. statements credible. If it fails to do so, perceptual pitfalls could all too easily provoke a downward spiral in relations and lead to the worst conflict since World War II.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT

It has long been clear what the United States wants from North Korea. For years, Washington has sought to denuclearize the country—that is, to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible disassembly of its nuclear arsenal—and to deter major military action on its part. More recently, Trump has added that North Korea cannot be allowed to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile, or ICBM, capable of reaching the continental United States. Washington has also long called for, but never actively pursued, the reunification of the Korean Peninsula under the democratic control of the South. Yet as North Korea has

moved toward a complete nuclear and ICBM capability, such goals have become harder to achieve. They no longer require simply preventing North Korea from taking certain steps. Now, they require persuading it to reverse course and give up capabilities it has already developed, even in the face of significant opposition, a much bigger concession.

Accordingly, the more urgent question today is less what the United States wants than what it can reasonably live with—that is, what it needs. As North Korea nears the end of its nuclear quest, concessions that would have once looked attractive, such as a freeze in further development, no longer look as desirable. What, then, would it take for the United States to live with a nuclear North Korea? If Washington can strengthen its alliances and military presence to effectively deter Pyongyang and prevent it from resorting to nuclear blackmail, would minimum American needs be met?

What North Korea wants from its nuclear and missile programs has also become fairly clear. Above all, the regime wants to ensure its survival and deter a U.S. attack. Beyond that, it also appears to consider nuclear weapons to be a source of prestige and thus wants acceptance as a de facto nuclear state, much as Pakistan has. Nuclear weapons also help advance other long-standing North Korean desires, such as reunification of the peninsula under Pyongyang’s control and the undermining of U.S. security guarantees for South Korea and Japan.

The harder question to answer is whether the Kim regime now sees a nuclear capability as inextricable from its own survival—that is, whether it thinks it needs to keep nuclear weapons under any circumstances. If it does, then there is no security assurance that Washington can offer Pyongyang that will convince it to give them up. The only steps that would work are ones that U.S. diplomats would almost certainly never take—say, renouncing the U.S. treaty with South Korea

and withdrawing all U.S. troops from the peninsula.

The needs and wants of other actors are also relevant. South Korea's objectives largely align with those of the United States. But because a conflict would inevitably spill onto its own soil, South Korea is more likely to privilege political solutions over military ones. Some differences in U.S. and South Korean positions can be managed, but if they diverge too much, North Korea may have reason to doubt Washington's security guarantee to Seoul. China, meanwhile, has traditionally preferred to have a stable, if irksome, North Korean buffer state along its border rather than to push for denuclearization at the risk of regime collapse. But Chinese–North Korean relations have been deteriorating for years, and it is now an open question how much Beijing values its client.

KCNA / REUTERS
Kim watching a missile launch, March 2018

CREDIBILITY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

No matter what strategy it is using at any given moment, the United States relies on a combination of threats and promises

to change North Korean behavior. Those threats and promises must go together: a threat only works if it is coupled with a promise not to carry out the threatened action if North Korea complies with a demand. And both the threat and the promise must be credible. Washington has to signal to Pyongyang what actions it can take to avoid punishment, as well as what actions it can take to produce better outcomes.

In discussions of international politics, credibility is often treated as a characteristic inherent to a given state and its signals. In fact, credibility is in the eye of the beholder: a threat or a promise is credible only if the target sees it as such. The target makes that determination by assessing its opponent's interests, its previous behavior, the nature of its regime, and whether its leaders have lived up to prior commitments. Accordingly, any U.S. attempt to exert influence over North Korea necessarily leaves the decision to comply in the hands of North Korean leaders. They, not officials in Washington, make the cost-benefit calculation of the value of compliance and noncompliance.

The question of how to establish credibility is especially fraught in this case. The United States and North Korea face major hurdles to persuading each other that their intentions are genuine. Because they do not have formal diplomatic relations, they are basing their views on an impoverished set of interactions and data points. In the last two decades, state-level exchanges have taken the form of nuclear negotiations. With the exception of those leading to the 1994 Agreed Framework, which stayed in place for six years, all these negotiations resulted in failure. As a result, each side distrusts the other.

Moreover, the two sides interpret history differently. Kim looks at past agreements with the United States that his father and grandfather struck and likely infers that Washington seeks to make Pyongyang less secure and will

renege on its commitments. He looks at the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Libya and likely concludes that nuclear weapons are a far stronger guarantor of survival than any U.S. promise. He sees Trump's threats to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal and likely worries that U.S. arms control agreements cannot be trusted. And when evaluating the prospect of U.S. military action, he may consider prior instances in which U.S. leaders have contemplated bombing nuclear sites in North Korea or elsewhere—and conclude that since the United States has always refrained from doing so in the past, it will again.

Making credibility even harder to establish, both states have bluffed in the past. Perhaps more than any other state, North Korea has a tendency to use incendiary rhetoric that does not result in action. It threatened to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire" in 1994, and it calls nearly every new round of international sanctions "a declaration of war." After the UN Security Council approved sanctions in 2013, a North Korean spokesperson said, "We will be exercising our right to preemptive nuclear attack against the headquarters of the aggressor."

Although Washington's bluffing has typically been less brazen, the effect is similar. Washington has called North Korea's nuclear development "unacceptable" but then gone on to accept it. It promised to hold Pyongyang accountable for proliferation but took no action when it sold a nuclear reactor to Syria in 2007. In August 2017, Trump threatened to unleash "fire and fury like the world has never seen" against North Korea if it made more threats, only to do nothing when the country conducted more missile tests. He even prides himself on his ability to backtrack. When The Wall Street Journal asked him about his combative tweets against Kim, he replied, "You see that a lot with me and then all of a sudden somebody's my best friend. I could give you 20 examples." Although no single bluff completely erodes a state's credibility, habitual empty threats degrade it over time.

North Korea may be more likely to treat a U.S. threat or promise as credible under certain conditions: when the United States has previously demonstrated the capability to act as it says it will, when the costs to the United States of action are low, when it has a significant incentive to act, and when there are not less costly ways of carrying out a threat. To increase the credibility of a threat, Washington can make it more specific, detailing which precise conditions would trigger which precise responses. Doing so might mean issuing an ultimatum, one of the strongest types of threats in international politics. In the case of military threats, Washington could send costly signals of imminent action, such as evacuating American personnel from Seoul or sharing prospective military plans with allies in the hope that they will leak them. Such moves, in addition to causing public alarm and giving up the advantage of a surprise attack, would make it harder for the United States to step back from the brink.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF DIPLOMACY

Pyongyang's perception of U.S. credibility will determine the success or failure of any U.S. strategy. Whether the Trump administration is relying on diplomacy, pressure, deterrence, or force, it and North Korean leaders will interpret the same actions differently, and neither will fully understand the other's view. Misperception afflicts all policy options, with different risks in each case.

> *Pyongyang's perception of U.S. credibility will determine the success or failure of any U.S. strategy.*

Diplomacy—whether a Kim-Trump summit or lower-level exchanges—presents its own difficulties and dangers. Each side views the other's behavior in a different light. The United States sees North Korea as an insincere actor that has reneged on countless commitments in the past, whereas

North Korea sees the United States as intent on threatening its existence. For both parties to come to the negotiating table, they must believe that the potential upsides of diplomacy outweigh the costs, including the likelihood that the other side will agree to and then scuttle a deal.

The United States faces what might be called a “time-technology dilemma” in diplomacy. North Korea is close to reaching its technical goals, making it all the more important for Washington to secure significant enough concessions quickly enough to make the gambit worthwhile. The more time that passes, the less the United States will be able to gain from negotiations, and the more North Korea will be able to secure for itself. Pyongyang may, for example, get away with making minor concessions in exchange for significant sanctions relief or security assurances, strengthening its hand without meaningfully improving the security situation for the United States and its allies.

Given these perceptual dynamics and the likelihood that they will cause diplomatic failure, why would the United States pursue diplomacy at all? After all, many argue that it can deter, contain, and manage the North Korean threat without talks. Any progress on constraining Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile programs, no matter how modest or unlikely, will require concessions that can be made only at a negotiating table. Just as important, engagement can reduce the risks of misperception and miscalculation in the bilateral relationship, which is especially important given how few other ties exist between Washington and Pyongyang. That said, ill-conceived diplomacy may lead each side to its worst-case assessment of the other. If it does, tensions will only spiral.

KCNA / REUTERS
ICBMs at a military parade in Pyongyang, February 2018

YOUR ECONOMY OR YOUR NUKES

Similar perceptual problems affect other U.S. policy options—including the tool of choice in recent years, financial sanctions. Whatever the economic impact of sanctions, their effectiveness in achieving a broader political objective still depends on North Korean perceptions of U.S. intentions. Sanctions are meant to decrease North Korea's ability to pursue its weapons programs and to inflict pain on the regime without raising the risk of direct military conflict. Because they are usually applied reactively and episodically, however, their influence is only incremental.

The United States and the UN tend to apply new sanctions after North Korea has taken a prohibited action. Because this has been the pattern for years, North Korea can anticipate new sanctions before it makes a given move and decide whether the benefits will outweigh the costs. Moreover, because sanctions are applied only after the fact, the regime has time to adjust to the new economic circumstances it will face after it takes the action. Indeed, because it chooses when next to conduct a nuclear test, it actually has some control

over whether and when it will get hit with another round of economic measures, even if the exact contents of the sanctions package are a surprise. In other words, what international actors view as resolute and punishing steps may not actually do much to affect Pyongyang's preferences.

The United States hopes that its sanctions will send a message that forces North Korea to choose between its economy and its nuclear weapons. But the incremental nature of the financial punishment may instead signal that it will continue but the pain will be tolerable, encouraging North Korea to hurry up and complete its nuclear program so that it can start negotiating the sanctions away. This represents another instance of the time-technology dilemma: North Korea has few technical hurdles left to cross, yet new sanctions take time to bite. Still, international financial pressure has inherent credibility, because multilateral sanctions include the participation of countries on which North Korea depends, such as China and Russia. Moreover, it is difficult to draw conclusions about how multilateral sanctions against Pyongyang are affecting its political behavior. Did Kim seek a summit with Trump because he is desperate for sanctions relief and willing to make concessions or because he seeks the prestige of a presidential summit and de facto recognition of North Korea as a nuclear power? American observers may assume the former, whereas Kim may believe the latter, leading to a yawning gap in diplomatic expectations.

MAKING DETERRENCE WORK

One of the foremost questions that has occupied U.S. policymakers is whether North Korea can be deterred. But the better question is what North Korea can be deterred from doing and what it can be compelled to do differently. It is one thing for the United States to deter the use of nuclear weapons or a major attack—since the end of the Korean War,

North Korea has not tried to invade the South because the U.S. threat to destroy the North Korean regime in such a circumstance is credible, thanks to U.S. conventional and nuclear military superiority. But it is another thing entirely to deter lower-level provocations. When North Korea makes such moves, as it did when it sank a South Korean warship in 2010, it presumably estimates how the United States will respond and then selects actions and targets that limit U.S. options. The United States and South Korea may be able to deter some North Korean provocations through their conventional force posture and military doctrine, but they are unlikely to be able to prevent them all.

Further complicating matters, U.S. goals have gone beyond deterrence to compellence—that is, seeking to change what the North is already doing. Coming only when deterrence has failed, compellence—in this case, getting North Korea to abandon a mature nuclear arsenal—is even harder to achieve. As behavioral economists have demonstrated, decision-makers are more willing to pay costs and run risks to avoid losing something they already possess than they are to get something they don't yet have. Even growing U.S. pressure is unlikely to alter this; it may just reinforce Kim's belief that he needs nuclear weapons to deter Washington. Similarly, it is possible that U.S. threats only heighten Kim's perceived need for a better deterrent—meaning that Washington's messaging around deterrence undermines its own objectives.

After all, deterrence goes both ways, and so U.S. policymakers must also consider what their messages tell Kim about his ability to deter an American attack. When Washington declares that a North Korean ICBM capability would pose an unacceptable threat to the United States, it is in effect admitting to Kim that the United States is easily deterred by such a capability. Similarly, drawing a sharp distinction between threats to the American homeland and threats to U.S. allies is deeply problematic, because extended

deterrence requires demonstrating that allies are as valuable, or nearly as valuable, as the homeland itself. Both South Korea and Japan should be concerned that Washington appears preoccupied with weapons aimed at it and relatively unconcerned about the weapons aimed at them. Understandably, they might worry that Trump's "America first" stance means a weaker nuclear umbrella.

THE FOG OF WAR

Of all the ways in which perceptual pitfalls could come into play on the Korean Peninsula, the most consequential would involve the use of military force. The United States is unlikely to wage a campaign of total destruction against North Korea now that Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal is advanced enough to stave off utter defeat. If war did break out, the United States would be more likely to use military force as a form of coercion. But even that would be unlikely to achieve denuclearization. The mere fact that the United States possesses superior military capabilities would not guarantee that it would prevail, since each country's resolve would help determine the outcome. That is why U.S. officials must consider North Korea's willingness to run risks and pay high costs.

After an attack, North Korea's perception of the initial military campaign would determine whether Pyongyang complied with U.S. wishes. For the United States to get its way, it would have to send signals that it would continue to use force if North Korea refused to comply, but also that it would cease to use violence if North Korea cooperated. In particular, the United States would have to indicate that the leadership in Pyongyang had a clear pathway to survival. If Kim believed that the United States was bent on his destruction no matter what, he would have no choice but to mount an all-out counterattack. The United States would find this balance difficult to achieve. If Kim anticipated some form

of U.S. military action but the strike was less destructive than feared, he might actually be bolstered in his refusal to comply with U.S. wishes. In either case—a devastating attack or an underwhelming one—the United States should expect to face significant retaliation, at least until Kim figured out whether compliance or resistance made more sense in the long term.

How third parties and domestic actors reacted to a strike could influence any additional U.S. efforts to use violence coercively. If the domestic audience vehemently supported a strike, the United States could more credibly claim that it would attack again if Pyongyang failed to cooperate. If international parties expressed outrage and condemned the strike, as seems plausible, the U.S. threat to launch a devastating follow-on strike would become less potent, and Pyongyang would have far less motivation to comply. U.S. leaders would also have to contemplate the signals they sent beyond the military strike itself. What message would Trump deliver to accompany the use of force? Would he demand full denuclearization? Throughout the history of warfare, once one side has resorted to violence, emotions play a larger role in leaders' calculations and states become prone to gamble, willing to accept greater risks and take bigger chances to prevent major losses. North Korea is unlikely to be an exception.

KCNA / REUTERS
Kim in Pyongyang, February 2018

A PERFECT STORM OF MISPERCEPTION

The greatest risk is that the perceptual challenges that afflict all these approaches could build into a perfect storm of misperception. It is all too easy to imagine how such a crisis might develop—no less amid a flurry of diplomacy than amid a volley of threats.

In fact, the prospect of an unprecedented meeting between Kim and Trump has raised hopes that, if dashed, could make war more likely. There is a real danger of a Rashomon situation: Washington might believe that sanctions and military threats made Kim realize that his nuclear program could lead to his demise, whereas Pyongyang might believe that Trump's willingness to meet without demanding substantive concessions indicates that the United States is finally ready to accept North Korea as a nuclear state. Even the same words may mean different things to the two sides. For the United States, "denuclearization" is the North giving up nuclear weapons; for North Korea, it may mean an arms control agreement in which the two sides bargain over each other's force levels. Well-intentioned mediation by South

Korea could postpone the day of reckoning but make it worse when it comes, by encouraging both Washington and Pyongyang to believe that the other is ready to make major concessions. If face-to-face talks reveal that neither is in fact willing to do so, the hostility will be magnified.

It is not difficult to imagine how this scenario could come to pass. Following North Korea's reasonably good behavior during the Winter Olympics, the United States' postponement of military exercises, and South Korean President Moon Jae-in's efforts at diplomacy with the North, a diplomatic window has opened. Imagine that Kim and Trump arrive at the summit only to discover that they hold radically different views of the commitment to "denuclearize": Trump believes that Kim is willing to negotiate away his arsenal for sanctions relief, whereas Kim believes that full denuclearization also requires the removal of U.S. troops from the Korean Peninsula and an end to the U.S.–South Korean alliance (a possibility that was reinforced by comments Trump made in March that appeared to threaten to withdraw U.S. troops from South Korea unless the U.S.–South Korean trade deal was renegotiated). After it becomes clear that Trump will not move forward on Kim's terms, Kim is outraged and renews his August 2017 pledge to test missiles over Guam.

Both Washington and Pyongyang now think the other is responsible for derailing diplomacy. Out of a desire to induce the United States to drop its denuclearization demands, Kim decides to show that his willingness to negotiate does not mean his will has been broken, and he proceeds with his missile launch. Much as the Japanese did before they attacked Pearl Harbor, he hopes that a missile test over Guam—a U.S. territory but not a state—will unnerve the United States enough to persuade it to accept his nuclear program, but not so much as to bring a full-scale war.

But then, one of his missiles expels debris over Guam.

Fragments from the reentry vehicle strike the island itself, killing a few residents—who are, after all, U.S. citizens. Trump declares this “an act of war” and gives Kim 48 hours to issue a formal apology and a pledge to denuclearize. Kim does not comply, and the United States dusts off one of its plans for a limited military strike. It attacks a known missile storage facility, believing the limited nature of the target will induce Kim’s cooperation and minimize the risk of retaliation. Instead, Kim views the strike as the beginning of a larger effort to disarm him and as a prelude to regime change. Following his conventional bombardment of Seoul, the United States begins to attack other known weapons sites and command-and-control facilities to neutralize the threat. Kim launches nuclear weapons the following day.

The purpose of this vignette is not to suggest that war on the Korean Peninsula is inevitable, likely, or totally beyond the control of the parties involved. Rather, it is to illustrate how the forms of misperception now ingrained in the U.S.–North Korean relationship may interact with a situation that is already unfolding to invite a catastrophe that neither side wants.

KNOW THYSELF

There is no set of policies that can eliminate these risks. But there are steps U.S. policymakers can take to sharpen their own perceptions of North Korea; better understand how U.S. actions and signals affect the perceptions of their North Korean counterparts; and, perhaps most important, recognize the assumptions behind American beliefs.

The Trump administration should start by deepening its assessment of Pyongyang’s aims and bottom line. There are a handful of former U.S. officials who have experience negotiating with the North Koreans and who could help current policymakers more accurately read North Korean

signals. Even if it has arrived at a diplomatic opening by accident, the administration must now work with these experts to devise a strategy for diplomacy, including coming up with objectives that are more limited than full denuclearization. U.S. policymakers should also press the intelligence agencies not only to offer their best assessments of North Korean intentions but also to be explicit about the gaps and shortcomings in them.

Policymakers should also work with the intelligence community to examine how existing U.S. policies may look from Pyongyang. They should consider how those perceptions (or misperceptions) serve to reinforce or undermine U.S. objectives and how future changes in policy may be viewed. There is an all-too-human tendency to assume that an action will be seen as it is intended to be seen; intelligence analysts should help policymakers actively counter this tendency, especially when it comes to potential military strikes.

In addition to trying to understand the assumptions of North Korean policymakers, U.S. policymakers must work to understand their own. They should go back and examine them, carefully mapping the causal logic of any move they might make. By recognizing the flaws or weaknesses in their own assumptions, they will be better prepared to react nimbly to unexpected North Korean concessions or to manage the situation if engagement abruptly fails. Diplomatic encounters are not likely to unfold according to script, and if the United States and North Korea are not willing to be surprised and learn, they can neither take advantage of opportunities nor avoid making worst-case inferences that would rule out further discussions.

The prospect of grave misperceptions should instill a degree of caution in U.S. officials and prompt them to insert the equivalent of speed bumps into the policy process, above all in a moment of crisis. If the U.S.–North Korean relationship

begins to deteriorate further and escalate toward conflict, they should pause to consider the problems of perception. Why did North Korea enter into direct talks if it didn't intend to denuclearize? What assumptions were made about the North that must now be interrogated? Such questions may seem basic, but they too often go unasked. Simply by considering them, U.S. policymakers can reduce the risk that flimsy credibility and hazardous misperceptions will bring about an unnecessary war.

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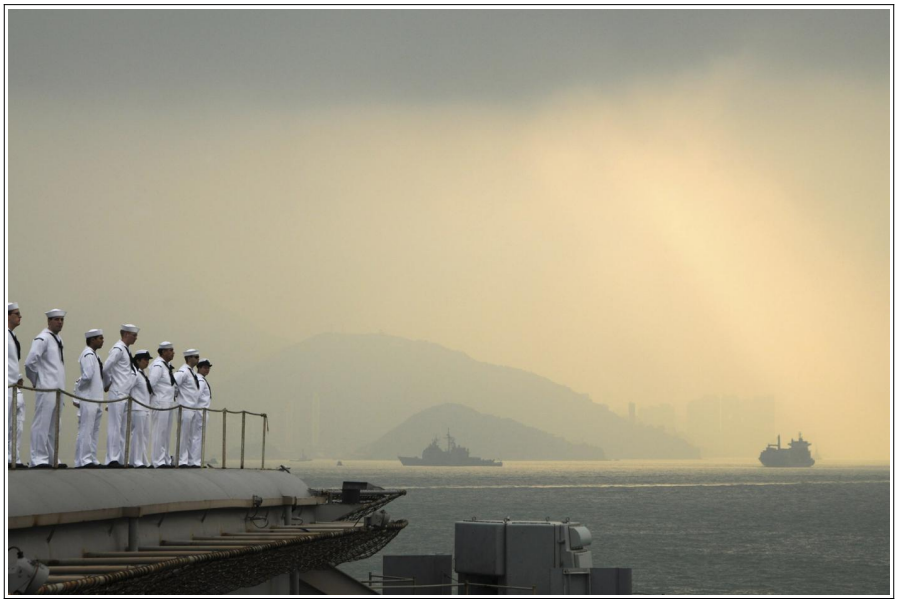
The Myth of the Liberal Order

From Historical Accident to Conventional Wisdom

Graham Allison



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Sailors aboard the USS George Washington in Hong Kong, January 2012.

Among the debates that have swept the U.S. foreign policy community since the beginning of the Trump administration, alarm about the fate of the liberal international rules-based order has emerged as one of the few fixed points. From the international relations scholar G. John Ikenberry's claim that

"for seven decades the world has been dominated by a western liberal order" to U.S. Vice President Joe Biden's call in the final days of the Obama administration to "act urgently to defend the liberal international order," this banner waves atop most discussions of the United States' role in the world.

About this order, the reigning consensus makes three core claims. First, that the liberal order has been the principal cause of the so-called long peace among great powers for the past seven decades. Second, that constructing this order has been the main driver of U.S. engagement in the world over that period. And third, that U.S. President Donald Trump is the primary threat to the liberal order—and thus to world peace. The political scientist Joseph Nye, for example, has written, "The demonstrable success of the order in helping secure and stabilize the world over the past seven decades has led to a strong consensus that defending, deepening, and extending this system has been and continues to be the central task of U.S. foreign policy." Nye has gone so far as to assert: "I am not worried by the rise of China. I am more worried by the rise of Trump."

Although all these propositions contain some truth, each is more wrong than right. The "long peace" was not the result of a liberal order but the byproduct of the dangerous balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States during the four and a half decades of the Cold War and then of a brief period of U.S. dominance. U.S. engagement in the world has been driven not by the desire to advance liberalism abroad or to build an international order but by the need to do what was necessary to preserve liberal democracy at home. And although Trump is undermining key elements of the current order, he is far from the biggest threat to global stability.

These misconceptions about the liberal order's causes and consequences lead its advocates to call for the United States

to strengthen the order by clinging to pillars from the past and rolling back authoritarianism around the globe. Yet rather than seek to return to an imagined past in which the United States molded the world in its image, Washington should limit its efforts to ensuring sufficient order abroad to allow it to concentrate on reconstructing a viable liberal democracy at home.

FALEH KHEIBER / REUTERS

Illiberal disorder: a U.S. military police officer in Karbala, Iraq, July 2003.

CONCEPTUAL JELL-O

The ambiguity of each of the terms in the phrase "liberal international rules-based order" creates a slipperiness that allows the concept to be applied to almost any situation. When, in 2017, members of the World Economic Forum in Davos crowned Chinese President Xi Jinping the leader of the liberal economic order—even though he heads the most protectionist, mercantilist, and predatory major economy in

the world—they revealed that, at least in this context, the word “liberal” has come unhinged.

What is more, “rules-based order” is redundant. Order is a condition created by rules and regularity. What proponents of the liberal international rules-based order really mean is an order that embodies good rules, ones that are equal or fair. The United States is said to have designed an order that others willingly embrace and sustain.

Many forget, however, that even the UN Charter, which prohibits nations from using military force against other nations or intervening in their internal affairs, privileges the strong over the weak. Enforcement of the charter’s prohibitions is the preserve of the UN Security Council, on which each of the five great powers has a permanent seat—and a veto. As the Indian strategist C. Raja Mohan has observed, superpowers are “exceptional”; that is, when they decide it suits their purpose, they make exceptions for themselves. The fact that in the first 17 years of this century, the self-proclaimed leader of the liberal order invaded two countries, conducted air strikes and Special Forces raids to kill hundreds of people it unilaterally deemed to be terrorists, and subjected scores of others to “extraordinary rendition,” often without any international legal authority (and sometimes without even national legal authority), speaks for itself.

COLD WAR ORDER

The claim that the liberal order produced the last seven decades of peace overlooks a major fact: the first four of those decades were defined not by a liberal order but by a cold war between two polar opposites. As the historian who named this “long peace” has explained, the international system that prevented great-power war during that time was the unintended consequence of the struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States. In John Lewis Gaddis’ words,

“Without anyone’s having designed it, and without any attempt whatever to consider the requirements of justice, the nations of the postwar era lucked into a system of international relations that, because it has been based upon realities of power, has served the cause of order—if not justice—better than one might have expected.”

During the Cold War, both superpowers enlisted allies and clients around the globe, creating what came to be known as a bipolar world. Within each alliance or bloc, order was enforced by the superpower (as Hungarians and Czechs discovered when they tried to defect in 1956 and 1968, respectively, and as the British and French learned when they defied U.S. wishes in 1956, during the Suez crisis). Order emerged from a balance of power, which allowed the two superpowers to develop the constraints that preserved what U.S. President John F. Kennedy called, in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the “precarious status quo.”

What moved a country that had for almost two centuries assiduously avoided entangling military alliances, refused to maintain a large standing military during peacetime, left international economics to others, and rejected the League of Nations to use its soldiers, diplomats, and money to reshape half the world? In a word, fear. The strategists revered by modern U.S. scholars as “the wise men” believed that the Soviet Union posed a greater threat to the United States than Nazism had. As the diplomat George Kennan wrote in his legendary “Long Telegram,” the Soviet Union was “a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with US there can be no permanent modus vivendi.” Soviet Communists, Kennan wrote, believed it was necessary that “our society be disrupted, our traditional way of life be destroyed, the international authority of our state be broken, if Soviet power [was] to be secure.”

Before the nuclear age, such a threat would have required a

hot war as intense as the one the United States and its allies had just fought against Nazi Germany. But after the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb, in 1949, American statesmen began wrestling with the thought that total war as they had known it was becoming obsolete. In the greatest leap of strategic imagination in the history of U.S. foreign policy, they developed a strategy for a form of combat never previously seen, the conduct of war by every means short of physical conflict between the principal combatants.

To prevent a cold conflict from turning hot, they accepted—for the time being—many otherwise unacceptable facts, such as the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe. They modulated their competition with mutual constraints that included three noes: no use of nuclear weapons, no overt killing of each other's soldiers, and no military intervention in the other's recognized sphere of influence.

LIBOR HAJSKY / REUTERS

Soviet soldiers in Prague, May 1968.

American strategists incorporated Western Europe and Japan into this war effort because they saw them as centers of economic and strategic gravity. To this end, the United States launched the Marshall Plan to rebuild Western Europe, founded the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and negotiated the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to promote global prosperity. And to ensure that Western Europe and Japan remained in active cooperation with the United States, it established NATO and the U.S.-Japanese alliance.

Each initiative served as a building block in an order designed first and foremost to defeat the Soviet adversary. Had there been no Soviet threat, there would have been no Marshall Plan and no NATO. The United States has never promoted liberalism abroad when it believed that doing so would pose a significant threat to its vital interests at home. Nor has it ever refrained from using military force to protect its interests when the use of force violated international rules.

> *Had there been no Soviet threat, there would have been no Marshall Plan and no Nato.*

Nonetheless, when the United States has had the opportunity to advance freedom for others—again, with the important caveat that doing so would involve little risk to itself—it has acted. From the founding of the republic, the nation has embraced radical, universalistic ideals. In proclaiming that "all" people "are created equal," the Declaration of Independence did not mean just those living in the 13 colonies.

It was no accident that in reconstructing its defeated adversaries Germany and Japan and shoring up its allies in Western Europe, the United States sought to build liberal

democracies that would embrace shared values as well as shared interests. The ideological campaign against the Soviet Union hammered home fundamental, if exaggerated, differences between “the free world” and “the evil empire.” Moreover, American policymakers knew that in mobilizing and sustaining support in Congress and among the public, appeals to values are as persuasive as arguments about interests.

In his memoir, Present at the Creation, former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, an architect of the postwar effort, explained the thinking that motivated U.S. foreign policy. The prospect of Europe falling under Soviet control through a series of “‘settlements by default’ to Soviet pressure” required the “creation of strength throughout the free world” that would “show the Soviet leaders by successful containment that they could not hope to expand their influence throughout the world.” Persuading Congress and the American public to support this undertaking, Acheson acknowledged, sometimes required making the case “clearer than truth.”

UNIPOLAR ORDER

In the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s campaign to “bury communism,” Americans were understandably caught up in a surge of triumphalism. The adversary on which they had focused for over 40 years stood by as the Berlin Wall came tumbling down and Germany reunified. It then joined with the United States in a unanimous UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force to throw the Iraqi military out of Kuwait. As the iron fist of Soviet oppression withdrew, free people in Eastern Europe embraced market economies and democracy. U.S. President George H. W. Bush declared a “new world order.” Hereafter, under a banner of “engage and enlarge,” the United States would welcome a world clamoring to join a growing liberal order.

Writing about the power of ideas, the economist John Maynard Keynes noted, “Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.” In this case, American politicians were following a script offered by the political scientist Francis Fukuyama in his best-selling 1992 book, The End of History and the Last Man. Fukuyama argued that millennia of conflict among ideologies were over. From this point on, all nations would embrace free-market economics to make their citizens rich and democratic governments to make them free. “What we may be witnessing,” he wrote, “is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” In 1996, the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman went even further by proclaiming the “Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention”: “When a country reaches a certain level of economic development, when it has a middle class big enough to support a McDonald’s, it becomes a McDonald’s country, and people in McDonald’s countries don’t like to fight wars; they like to wait in line for burgers.”

This vision led to an odd coupling of neoconservative crusaders on the right and liberal interventionists on the left. Together, they persuaded a succession of U.S. presidents to try to advance the spread of capitalism and liberal democracy through the barrel of a gun. In 1999, Bill Clinton bombed Belgrade to force it to free Kosovo. In 2003, George W. Bush invaded Iraq to topple its president, Saddam Hussein. When his stated rationale for the invasion collapsed after U.S. forces were unable to find weapons of mass destruction, Bush declared a new mission: “to build a lasting democracy that is peaceful and prosperous.” In the words of Condoleezza Rice, his national security adviser at the time, “Iraq and

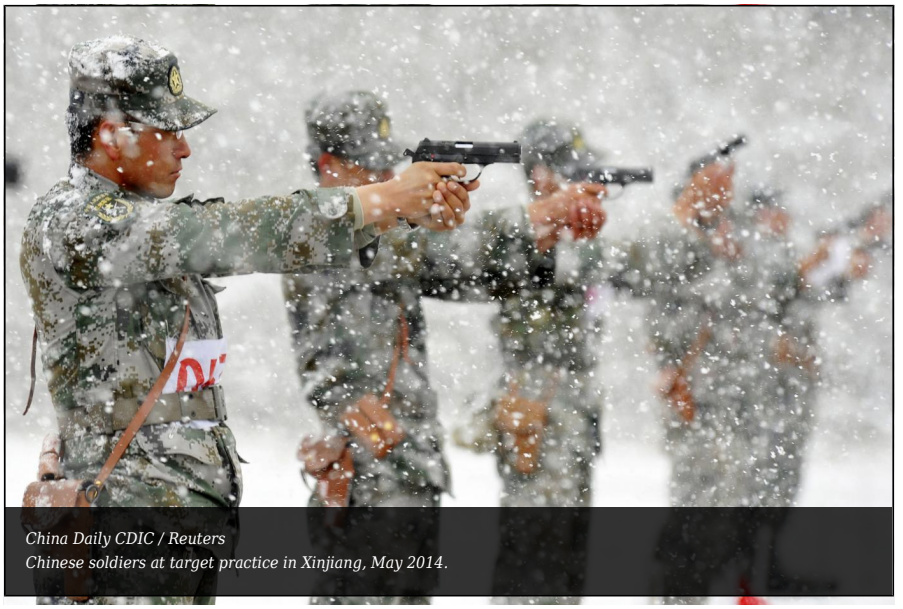
Afghanistan are vanguards of this effort to spread democracy and tolerance and freedom throughout the Greater Middle East." And in 2011, Barack Obama embraced the Arab Spring's promise to bring democracy to the nations of the Middle East and sought to advance it by bombing Libya and deposing its brutal leader, Muammar al-Qaddafi. Few in Washington paused to note that in each case, the unipolar power was using military force to impose liberalism on countries whose governments could not strike back. Since the world had entered a new chapter of history, lessons from the past about the likely consequences of such behavior were ignored.

> *The end of the Cold War produced a unipolar moment, not a unipolar era.*

As is now clear, the end of the Cold War produced a unipolar moment, not a unipolar era. Today, foreign policy elites have woken up to the meteoric rise of an authoritarian China, which now rivals or even surpasses the United States in many domains, and the resurgence of an assertive, illiberal Russian nuclear superpower, which is willing to use its military to change both borders in Europe and the balance of power in the Middle East. More slowly and more painfully, they are discovering that the United States' share of global power has shrunk. When measured by the yardstick of purchasing power parity, the U.S. economy, which accounted for half of the world's GDP after World War II, had fallen to less than a quarter of global GDP by the end of the Cold War and stands at just one-seventh today. For a nation whose core strategy has been to overwhelm challenges with resources, this decline calls into question the terms of U.S. leadership.

This rude awakening to the return of history jumps out in the Trump administration's National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, released at the end of last year and the beginning of this year, respectively. The NDS notes

that in the unipolar decades, “the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain.” As a consequence, “we could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted.” But today, as the NSS observes, China and Russia “are fielding military capabilities designed to deny America access in times of crisis and to contest our ability to operate freely.” Revisionist powers, it concludes, are “trying to change the international order in their favor.”



China Daily CDIC / Reuters
Chinese soldiers at target practice in Xinjiang, May 2014.

THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

During most of the nation’s 242 years, Americans have recognized the necessity to give priority to ensuring freedom at home over advancing aspirations abroad. The Founding Fathers were acutely aware that constructing a government in which free citizens would govern themselves was an uncertain, hazardous undertaking. Among the hardest questions they confronted was how to create a government powerful enough to ensure Americans’ rights at home and protect them from enemies abroad without making it so powerful that it would abuse its strength.

Their solution, as the presidential scholar Richard Neustadt wrote, was not just a “separation of powers” among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches but “separated institutions sharing power.” The Constitution was an “invitation to struggle.” And presidents, members of Congress, judges, and even journalists have been struggling ever since. The process was not meant to be pretty. As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis explained to those frustrated by the delays, gridlock, and even idiocy these checks and balances sometimes produce, the founders’ purpose was “not to promote efficiency but to preclude the exercise of arbitrary power.”

From this beginning, the American experiment in self-government has always been a work in progress. It has lurched toward failure on more than one occasion. When Abraham Lincoln asked “whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, . . . can long endure,” it was not a rhetorical question. But repeatedly and almost miraculously, it has demonstrated a capacity for renewal and reinvention. Throughout this ordeal, the recurring imperative for American leaders has been to show that liberalism can survive in at least one country.

For nearly two centuries, that meant warding off foreign intervention and leaving others to their fates. Individual Americans may have sympathized with French revolutionary cries of “Liberty, equality, fraternity!”; American traders may have spanned the globe; and American missionaries may have sought to win converts on all continents. But in choosing when and where to spend its blood and treasure, the U.S. government focused on the United States.

Only in the aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II did American strategists conclude that the United States’ survival required greater entanglement abroad. Only when they perceived a Soviet attempt to create an empire that

would pose an unacceptable threat did they develop and sustain the alliances and institutions that fought the Cold War. Throughout that effort, as NSC-68, a Truman administration national security policy paper that summarized U.S. Cold War strategy, stated, the mission was “to preserve the United States as a free nation with our fundamental institutions and values intact.”

SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY

Among the current, potentially mortal threats to the global order, Trump is one, but not the most important. His withdrawal from initiatives championed by earlier administrations aimed at constraining greenhouse gas emissions and promoting trade has been unsettling, and his misunderstanding of the strength that comes from unity with allies is troubling. Yet the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and the decline of the United States’ share of global power each present much larger challenges than Trump. Moreover, it is impossible to duck the question: Is Trump more a symptom or a cause?

While I was on a recent trip to Beijing, a high-level Chinese official posed an uncomfortable question to me. Imagine, he said, that as much of the American elite believes, Trump’s character and experience make him unfit to serve as the leader of a great nation. Who would be to blame for his being president? Trump, for his opportunism in seizing victory, or the political system that allowed him to do so?

No one denies that in its current form, the U.S. government is failing. Long before Trump, the political class that brought unending, unsuccessful wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, as well as the financial crisis and Great Recession, had discredited itself. These disasters have done more to diminish confidence in liberal self-government than Trump could do in his critics’ wildest imaginings, short of a mistake that leads to a catastrophic war. The overriding challenge for American

believers in democratic governance is thus nothing less than to reconstruct a working democracy at home.

Fortunately, that does not require converting the Chinese, the Russians, or anyone else to American beliefs about liberty. Nor does it necessitate changing foreign regimes into democracies. Instead, as Kennedy put it in his American University commencement speech, in 1963, it will be enough to sustain a world order “safe for diversity”—liberal and illiberal alike. That will mean adapting U.S. efforts abroad to the reality that other countries have contrary views about governance and seek to establish their own international orders governed by their own rules. Achieving even a minimal order that can accommodate that diversity will take a surge of strategic imagination as far beyond the current conventional wisdom as the Cold War strategy that emerged over the four years after Kennan’s Long Telegram was from the Washington consensus in 1946.

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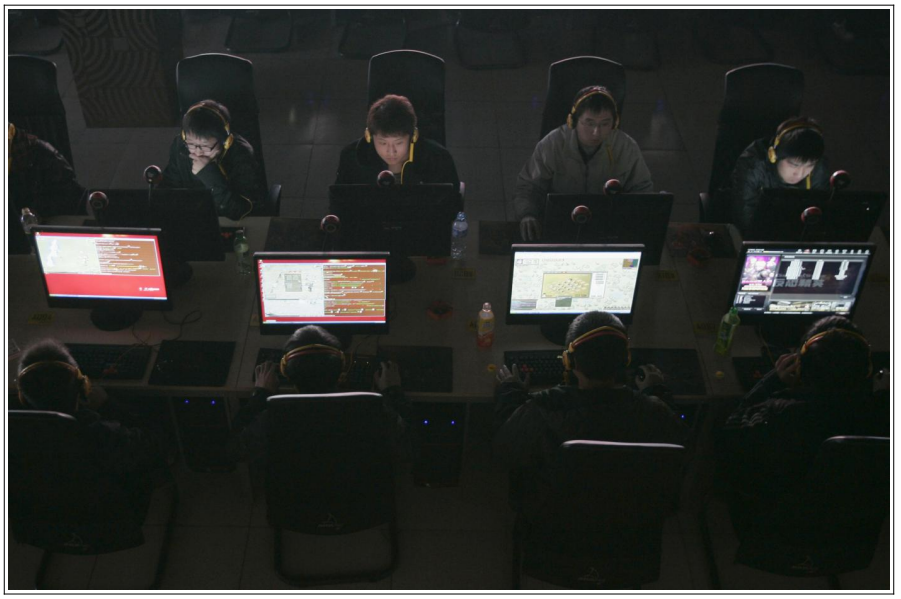
When China Rules the Web

Technology in Service of the State

Adam Segal



REUTERS

Customers at an Internet cafe in Shanxi province, March 2010.

For almost five decades, the United States has guided the growth of the Internet. From its origins as a small Pentagon program to its status as a global platform that connects more than half of the world's population and tens of billions of devices, the Internet has long been an American project. Yet today, the United States has ceded leadership in cyberspace to China. Chinese President Xi Jinping has outlined his plans to turn China into a "cyber-superpower." Already, more people in China have access to the Internet than in any other

country, but Xi has grander plans. Through domestic regulations, technological innovation, and foreign policy, China aims to build an “impregnable” cyberdefense system, give itself a greater voice in Internet governance, foster more world-class companies, and lead the globe in advanced technologies.

China’s continued rise as a cyber-superpower is not guaranteed. Top-down, state-led efforts at innovation in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, and other ambitious technologies may well fail. Chinese technology companies will face economic and political pressures as they globalize. Chinese citizens, although they appear to have little expectation of privacy from their government, may demand more from private firms. The United States may reenergize its own digital diplomacy, and the U.S. economy may rediscover the dynamism that allowed it create so much of the modern world’s technology.

But given China’s size and technological sophistication, Beijing has a good chance of succeeding—thereby remaking cyberspace in its own image. If this happens, the Internet will be less global and less open. A major part of it will run Chinese applications over Chinese-made hardware. And Beijing will reap the economic, diplomatic, national security, and intelligence benefits that once flowed to Washington.

XI’S VISION

Almost from the moment he took power in 2012, Xi made it clear just how big a role the Internet played in his vision for China. After years of inertia, during which cyber-policy was fragmented among a wide array of government departments, Xi announced that he would chair a so-called central leading group on Internet security and informatization and drive policy from the top. He established a new agency, the Cyberspace Administration of China, and gave it responsibility for controlling online content, bolstering

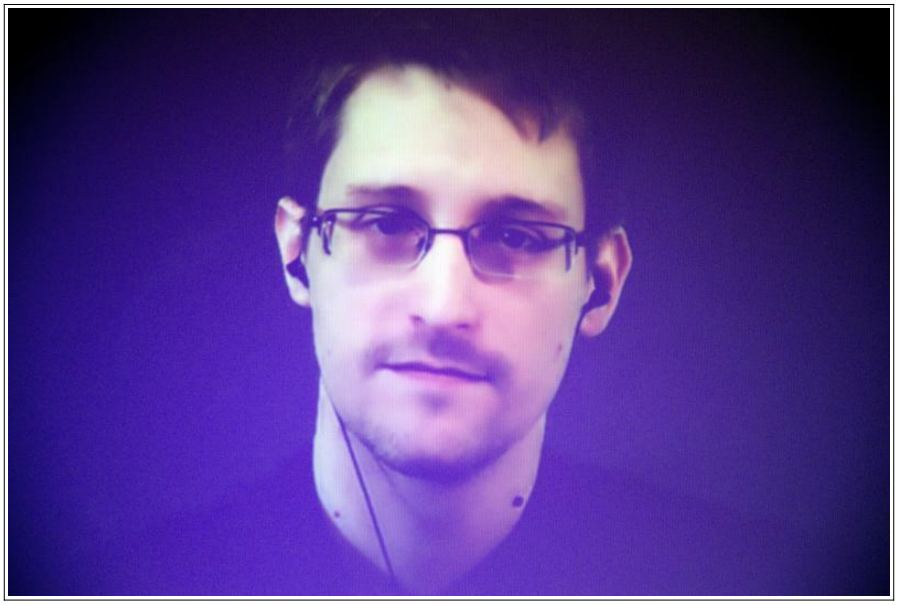
cybersecurity, and developing the digital economy.

Cyberpower sits at the intersection of four Chinese national priorities. First, Chinese leaders want to ensure a harmonious Internet. That means one that guides public opinion, supports good governance, and fosters economic growth but also is tightly controlled so as to stymie political mobilization and prevent the flow of information that could undermine the regime.

Second, China wants to reduce its dependence on foreign suppliers of digital and communications equipment. It hopes to eventually lead the world in advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and robotics. As Xi warned in May, “Initiatives of innovation and development must be securely kept in our own hands.”

> *Almost from the moment he took power, Xi made it clear just how big a role the Internet played in his vision for China.*

Third, Chinese policymakers, like their counterparts around the world, are increasingly wary of the risk of cyberattacks on governmental and private networks that could disrupt critical services, hurt economic growth, and even cause physical destruction. Accordingly, the People’s Liberation Army has announced plans to speed up the development of its cyber-forces and beef up China’s network defenses. This focus on cybersecurity overlaps with China’s techno-nationalism: Chinese policymakers believe they have to reduce China’s dependence on U.S. technology companies to ensure its national security, a belief that was strengthened in 2013, when Edward Snowden, a former contractor with the U.S. National Security Agency, revealed that U.S. intelligence services had accessed the data of millions of people that was held and transmitted by U.S. companies.



CHARLES PLATIAU / REUTERS

Edward Snowden speaks at a conference in Paris via video link from Moscow, December 2014.

Finally, China has promoted “cyber-sovereignty” as an organizing principle of Internet governance, in direct opposition to U.S. support for a global, open Internet. In Xi’s words, cyber-sovereignty represents “the right of individual countries to independently choose their own path of cyber development, model of cyber regulation and Internet public policies, and participate in international cyberspace governance on an equal footing.” China envisions a world of national Internets, with government control justified by the sovereign rights of states. It also wants to weaken the bottom-up, private-sector-led model of Internet governance championed by the United States and its allies, a model Beijing sees as dominated by Western technology companies and civil society organizations. Chinese policymakers believe they would have a larger say in regulating information technology and defining the global rules for cyberspace if the UN played a larger role in Internet governance. All four of

Beijing’s priorities require China to act aggressively to shape cyberspace at home and on the global stage.

THE END OF THE OPEN INTERNET

The Xi era will be remembered for putting an end to the West’s naive optimism about the liberalizing potential of the Internet. Over the last five years, Beijing has significantly tightened controls on websites and social media. In March 2017, for example, the government told Tencent, the second largest of China’s digital giants, and other Chinese technology companies to shut down websites they hosted that included discussions on history, international affairs, and the military. A few months later, Tencent, the search company Baidu, and the microblogging site Weibo were fined for hosting banned content in the run-up to the 19th Party Congress. Officials ordered telecommunications companies to block virtual private networks (VPNs), which are widely used by Chinese businesses, entrepreneurs, and academics to circumvent government censors. Even Western companies complied: Apple removed VPNs from the Chinese version of its App Store. Beijing also announced new regulations further limiting online anonymity and making the organizers of online forums personally accountable for the contributions of their members.

Chinese censors are now skilled at controlling conversations on social media. In 2017, as the dissident and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo became increasingly ill, censors revealed that they could delete his image from chats. In an even more Orwellian move, authorities have rolled out a sophisticated surveillance system based on a vast array of cameras and sensors, aided by facial and voice recognition software and artificial intelligence. The tool has been deployed most extensively in Xinjiang Province, in an effort to track the Muslim Uighur population there, but the government is working to scale it up nationwide.

In addition to employing censorship and surveillance, China has also created an interlocking framework of laws, regulations, and standards to increase cybersecurity and safeguard data in governmental and private systems. The government has enacted measures to protect important Internet infrastructure, it has mandated security reviews for network products and services, and it has required companies to store data within China, where the government will face few obstacles to accessing it. Beijing has also introduced new regulations concerning how government agencies respond to cybersecurity incidents, how and when the government discloses software vulnerabilities to the private sector, and how ministries and private companies share information about threats.

Different agencies and local governments could interpret and implement these policies in different ways, but at the least, the regulations will raise the cost and complexity of doing business in China for both domestic and foreign technology companies. Draft regulations published in July 2017 were particularly broad, defining “critical information infrastructure” to cover not only traditional categories such as communications, financial, and energy networks but also the news media, health-care companies, and cloud-computing providers. Baidu, Tencent, and Weibo have already been fined for violating the new cybersecurity laws. Foreign companies worry that an expansive interpretation of the requirements for inspections of equipment and storing data within China will raise costs and could allow the Chinese government to steal their intellectual property.

MADE IN CHINA

Chinese policymakers believe that to be truly secure, China must achieve technological self-sufficiency. Small wonder, then, that support for science and technology is front and center in the country’s most recent five-year plan, which began in 2016. China’s investment in research and

development has grown by an average of 20 percent a year since 1999. It now stands at approximately $233 billion, or 20 percent of total world R & D spending. More students graduate with science and engineering degrees in China than anywhere else in the world, and in 2018, China overtook the United States in terms of the total number of scientific publications. Western scientists have long ignored Chinese research, but they are now citing a growing number of Chinese publications.

Three technologies will matter most for China's ability to shape the future of cyberspace: semiconductors, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence. For years, Beijing has tried and failed to build an indigenous industry producing semiconductors, that is, the integrated circuits (or microchips) found in nearly every technological device. In 2016, China imported $228 billion worth of integrated circuits—more than it spent on imported oil—accounting for over 90 percent of its consumption, according to the consultancy McKinsey. The risk of relying on U.S. suppliers was brought home this April, when the Trump administration sanctioned ZTE, the world's fourth-largest maker of telecommunications gear. ZTE relies on U.S.-made components, including microchips to power its wireless stations. When the sanctions cut the company off from its supplies, it ceased major operations. In June, Trump reversed course on the sanctions, but the move did little to assuage Chinese concerns about dependence on foreign suppliers. Soon after the sanctions were announced, Xi called on a gathering of the country's top scientists to make breakthroughs on core technologies.

> *China is striving to define international standards for the next wave of innovation*

In 2015, China issued guidelines that aim to get Chinese firms

to produce 70 percent of the microchips used by Chinese industry by 2025. Since then, the government has subsidized domestic and foreign companies that move their operations to China and encouraged domestic consumers to buy from only Chinese suppliers. The government has committed $150 billion over the next decade to improve China's ability to design and manufacture advanced microprocessors. China has also acquired technologies abroad. According to the Rhodium Group, a research firm, from 2013 to 2016, Chinese companies made 27 attempted bids for U.S. semiconductor companies worth more than $37 billion in total, compared with six deals worth $214 million from 2000 to 2013. Yet these attempts have run into problems: many of the high-profile bids, including a $1.3 billion offer for Lattice Semiconductor and a $2.4 billion deal for Fairchild Semiconductor, were blocked by the U.S. government on national security grounds.

Then there is quantum computing, which uses the laws of quantum mechanics—essentially the ability of quantum bits, or "qubits," to perform several calculations at the same time—to solve certain problems that ordinary computers cannot. Advances in this area could allow Chinese intelligence services to create highly secure encrypted communications channels and break most conventional encryption. High-speed quantum computers could also have major economic benefits, remaking manufacturing, data analytics, and the process of developing drugs. In 2016, China launched the world's first satellite that can communicate using channels secured by quantum cryptography and constructed the world's longest quantum communications cable, connecting Beijing and Shanghai. It's not clear how much China spends on quantum computing, but the sums are certainly substantial. It is spending $1 billion alone on one quantum computing laboratory.

More than its investments in semiconductor research and

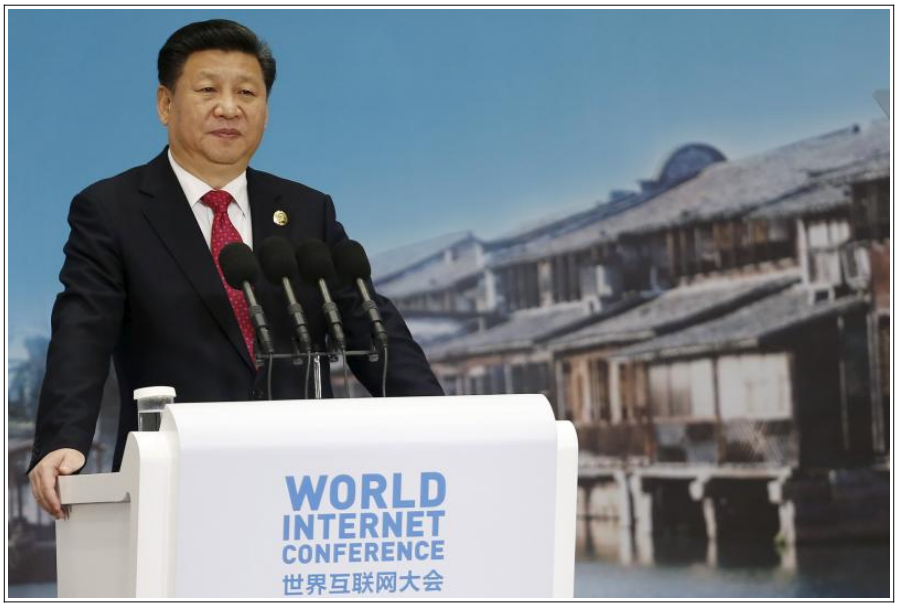
quantum computing, it is China's ambitious plans in artificial intelligence that have caused the most unease in the West. At an artificial intelligence summit last year, Eric Schmidt, the former chair of Google, said of the Chinese, "By 2020, they will have caught up. By 2025, they will be better than us. And by 2030, they will dominate the industries of AI." China is racing to harness artificial intelligence for military uses, including autonomous drone swarms, software that can defend itself against cyberattacks, and programs that mine social media to predict political movements.

In 2017, the Chinese government outlined its road map for turning itself into the "world's primary AI innovation center" by 2030. The plan is more a wish list than a concrete strategy, but it does provide direction to central ministries and local governments on how to invest to achieve breakthroughs by highlighting specific fields for research and development. The government has singled out Baidu, Tencent, the e-commerce giant Alibaba, and the voice recognition software company iFLYTEK as national champions in AI, identifying these companies as the first group to develop systems that can drive autonomous cars, diagnose diseases, act as intelligent voice assistants, and manage smart cities, that is, urban spaces that use a wide variety of sensors to collect data on how people live and then analyze that data to reduce cities' environmental impact, spur economic development, and improve people's quality of life.

China is also striving to define international standards for the next wave of innovation, especially in fifth-generation mobile network technology, or 5G, which will offer much faster Internet speeds to mobile users and enable new uses for Internet-connected devices. To many Chinese leaders, China's current place in the global division of labor looks like a trap: foreign firms reap high profits from the intellectual property they own, and Chinese companies survive on the thin margins they make by manufacturing and assembling physical

products. If China can control technology standards, it will ensure that its firms receive royalties and licensing profits as others develop products that plug into Chinese-owned platforms.

Over the last decade, Beijing has increased the skill, sophistication, and size of the delegations it sends to standards organizations. China was essentially absent for the discussions about third- and fourth-generation mobile network technologies, but things have changed. In 2016, Huawei, China's largest telecommunications company, sent twice as many representatives as any other company to the meeting in Vienna that defined the specifications for the coming fifth generation of mobile networks.



ALY SONG / REUTERS

Xi at the World Internet Conference, Wuzhen, December 2015.

GOVERNING THE INTERNET

Under Xi, China has also tried to shape the international institutions and norms that govern cyberspace. For much of

the last decade, Chinese hackers de facto set those norms by engaging in massive cyber-espionage campaigns designed to steal military, political, and, worst of all in the eyes of the United States, industrial secrets. The Obama administration pressed Beijing on the subject, publicly attributing attacks on U.S. companies to state-backed hackers and threatening to sanction senior officials. In 2015, the two sides agreed that neither would support digital theft for commercial advantage. China went on to sign similar agreements with Australia, Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom. There was a marked downturn in activity in the wake of these agreements, but the decline seems to have been as much a result of a reorganization within the Chinese military as of U.S. diplomatic efforts. Now that the People's Liberation Army has consolidated control over its cyber-forces, industrial espionage has shifted to more sophisticated hackers in China's intelligence agencies.

China's more visible efforts at writing the rules of the road for cyberspace have centered on the UN. Washington and its allies have promoted a distributed model of Internet governance that involves technical bodies, the private sector, civil society, and governments, whereas Beijing prefers a state-centric vision. In 2017, for example, China called for "a multilateral approach to governing cyberspace, with the United Nations taking a leading role in building international consensus on rules." Beijing believes a multilateral approach located at the UN has two immediate benefits. It would prioritize the interests of governments over those of technology companies and civil society groups. And it would allow China to mobilize the votes of developing countries, many of which would also like to control the Internet and the free flow of information.

Beijing has resisted U.S. efforts to apply international law, especially the laws of armed conflict, to cyberspace. A forum at the UN known as the Group of Governmental Experts has

identified some rules of behavior for states in a series of meetings and reports from 2004 to 2017. Although in the 2013 report, Chinese diplomats accepted that international law and the UN Charter apply to cyberspace, and in 2015, they agreed to four norms of state behavior, they dragged their feet on discussions of exactly how neutrality, proportionality, the right of self-defense, and other concepts from international law might be applied to conflict in cyberspace. They argued instead that discussing international law would lead to the militarization of cyberspace. Chinese diplomats, along with their Russian counterparts, stressed the need for the peaceful settlement of disputes.In 2017, the participating countries in the Group of Governmental Experts failed to issue a follow-on report in part because China and Russia opposed language endorsing the right of self-defense.

In addition to working through the UN, Chinese policymakers have created their own venue to showcase their vision for the Internet and strengthen their voice in its governance: the World Internet Conference, held annually in Wuzhen. In 2017, Tim Cook and Sundar Pichai, the chief executives of Apple and Google, respectively, attended for the first time. Cook, a vocal defender of privacy and free speech at home, stated that Apple shared China's vision for "developing a digital economy for openness and shared benefits." By echoing Chinese officials' language on openness despite the tight controls on the Internet in China, Cook was signaling Apple's willingness to play by Beijing's rules.

Beijing is likely to have its biggest impact on global Internet governance through its trade and investment policies, especially as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, a massive effort to build infrastructure connecting China to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and Europe. Along with the more than $50 billion that has flowed into railways, roads, pipelines, ports, mines, and utilities along the route, officials have stressed the need for Chinese companies to build a

“digital Silk Road”: fiber-optic cables, mobile networks, satellite relay stations, data centers, and smart cities.

Much of the activity along the nascent digital Silk Road has come from technology companies and industry alliances, not the Chinese government. Alibaba has framed its expansion into Southeast Asia as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. It has acquired the Pakistani e-commerce company Daraz and launched a digital free-trade zone with the support of the Malaysian and Thai governments, which will ease customs checks, provide logistical support for companies, and promote exports from small and medium-sized companies in Malaysia and Thailand to China. ZTE now operates in over 50 of the 64 countries on the route of the Belt and Road Initiative. As well as laying fiber-optic cables and setting up mobile networks, the company has been providing surveillance, mapping, cloud storage, and data analysis services to cities in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Laos, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Turkey.

The Chinese government hopes that these enterprises will give it political influence throughout the region. But private firms are focused on profit, and Beijing has not always succeeded in converting business relationships into political heft, even when the projects have involved state-run enterprises, since these firms also often pursue commercial interests that conflict with diplomatic goals. In the short term, however, the presence of Chinese engineers, managers, and diplomats will reinforce a tendency among developing countries, especially those with authoritarian governments, to embrace China’s closed conception of the Internet.

THE FUTURE IS CHINESE

Beijing’s vision of the Internet is ascendant. According to the think tank Freedom House, Internet freedom—how easily people can access the Internet and use it to speak their minds—has declined for the last seven years. More countries are pushing companies to store data on their citizens within

their borders (which companies resist because doing so raises costs and reduces their ability to protect the privacy of their users) and to allow the government to carry out security reviews of their network equipment. Each country pursues these policies in support of its own ends, but they all can turn to China for material, technical, and political support.

The United States' position at the center of the global Internet brought it major economic, military, and intelligence benefits. U.S. companies developed the routers and servers that carry the world's data, the phones and personal computers that people use to communicate, and the software that serves as a gateway to the Internet. In a similar way, the Chinese Communist Party sees technology companies as a source of economic dynamism and soft power. And so it is increasing its political control over Chinese technology giants. As those companies come to supply more of the world's digital infrastructure, China's spy services will be tempted to collect data from them.

Chinese technology companies have several advantages: access to a lot of data with few restrictions on how they can use it, talented workers, and government support. But the country's legacy of central planning may lead companies to overinvest, build redundant operations, and stifle their employees' creativity. And Chinese technology firms have become the targets of political pressure in Australia, the United States, and Europe. The Australian government is considering banning Huawei from supplying equipment for Australia's fifth-generation mobile networks. Washington is working to limit Chinese investment in U.S. technology companies and has made it more difficult for Chinese telecommunications firms to do business in the United States: it has blocked China Mobile's application to provide telecommunications services in the United States, banned the sale of Huawei and ZTE smartphones on U.S. military bases, and sought to prohibit U.S. telecommunications companies

from spending critical infrastructure funds on equipment and services from China.

Yet none of these challenges is likely to deal a fatal blow to China's digital ambitions. The country is too large, too powerful, and too sophisticated. To prepare for greater Chinese control over the Internet, the United States should work with its allies and trading partners to pressure Beijing to open up the Chinese market to foreign companies, curb its preferential treatment of Chinese firms, and better protect foreign companies' intellectual property. U.S. policymakers should shift from simply defending the bottom-up, private-sector-led model of Internet governance to offering a positive vision that provides developing countries with realistic alternatives to working solely through the UN. Washington should talk to Beijing directly about norms of state behavior in cyberspace. The two countries should work together on setting global standards for government purchases of technology, determining how companies should secure their supply chains against cyberattacks, and planning government inspections of critical communications equipment. Yet these efforts will only shape trends, not reverse them. Whatever Washington does, the future of cyberspace will be much less American and much more Chinese.

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The New Arab Order

Power and Violence in Today's Middle East

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OMAR SANADIKI / REUTERS

The spoils of war: walking past damaged buildings in Damascus, Syria, May 2018

In 2011, millions of citizens across the Arab world took to the streets. Popular uprisings from Tunis to Cairo promised to topple autocracies and usher in democratic reforms. For a moment, it looked as if the old Middle Eastern order was coming to an end and a new and better one was taking its place. But things quickly fell apart. Some states collapsed under the pressure and devolved into civil war; others found ways to muddle through and regain control over their societies. Seven years later, those early hopes for a

fundamental, positive shift in Middle Eastern politics appear to have been profoundly misplaced.

But the upheaval did in fact create a new Arab order—just not the one most people expected. Although the Arab uprisings did not result in successful new democracies, they did reshape regional relations. The traditional great powers—Egypt, Iraq, and Syria—are now barely functional states. Wealthy and repressive Gulf countries—Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—are thriving. The proliferation of failed and weakened states has created new opportunities for competition and intervention, favoring new actors and new capabilities. Regional dynamics are no longer determined by formal alliances and conventional conflicts between major states. Instead, power operates through influence peddling and proxy warfare.

In almost every Arab state today, foreign policy is driven by a potent mixture of perceived threats and opportunities. Fears of resurgent domestic uprisings, Iranian power, and U.S. abandonment exist alongside aspirations to take advantage of weakened states and international disarray—a dynamic that draws regional powers into destructive proxy conflicts, which sow chaos throughout the region. Any vision of the region finding a workable balance of power is a mirage: the new order is fundamentally one of disorder.

The catalog of despair in the Middle East today is difficult to fathom. The Syrian civil war has become one of the greatest human catastrophes in history, killing at least half a million civilians and displacing more than ten million. Iraq has made remarkable progress in defeating the Islamic State, or ISIS, but that success has come at a great cost to those who live in the liberated areas. The civil war in Yemen has resulted in the largest outbreak of cholera in human history and left 8.4 million people on the brink of starvation. Libya remains a catastrophically failed state.

Even states that avoided collapse are struggling. Egypt is still suffering from the consequences of its 2013 military coup, as stifling repression prevents political progress, suppresses tourism, fuels insurgency, and drives popular discontent. Bahrain continues to simmer after 2011's bloody sectarian crackdown, with no solutions on offer beyond repression of the political opposition. Relatively successful states, such as Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, are grappling with massive economic problems, discontented youth, and unstable neighbors. In almost every country, the economic and political problems that drove the region toward popular uprising in 2011 are more intense today than they were seven years ago.

Meanwhile, there is no shortage of flash points in the region. The U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran has reopened the prospect of an American or Israeli military strike leading to war. The boycott of Qatar, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has divided the Gulf Cooperation Council, the most successful Arab international organization. In Syria, Israel's increasingly frequent air strikes, Turkey's cross-border operations, and Iran's entrenched presence are pushing the civil war in new directions even as the armed opposition to the Assad regime fades. The stalemated war in Yemen defies containment, with missiles launched by the Houthi rebels targeting Saudi Arabia, Saudi air strikes causing widespread civilian deaths, and the United Arab Emirates establishing naval bases across the Horn of Africa to help enforce the Saudi-led blockade and to protect its new presence in the country's south. Meanwhile, recurrent violence in Gaza and the death spiral of the two-state solution threaten to return the Palestinian territories to the center of international attention.

Amid all of this, the United States, under President Donald Trump, has enthusiastically aligned itself with an axis of like-minded states: Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. But this attempt to restore something that

resembles the pre-2011 order is far shakier than it appears. In the Middle East today, the proliferation of failed states, unresolved crises of governance, and crosscutting lines of competition undermine every exercise of power. When states attempt to assert control at home or influence abroad, they only exacerbate their own insecurity. The Trump administration's decision to double down on support for autocratic regimes while ignoring the profound structural changes that stand in the way of restoring the old order will neither produce stability nor advance U.S. interests.

The Changing Balance

There is nothing new about cross-border politics in the Middle East, but the structure and dynamics of the region today are quite different than they were in earlier periods. The 1950s and 1960s were defined by what the scholar Malcolm Kerr famously called "the Arab Cold War." Under President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt competed with Western-backed regimes and the conservative forces of Saudi Arabia in conflicts that ranged from direct military intervention in Yemen to proxy struggles over domestic politics in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Meanwhile, pan-Arabism—the belief in a shared Arab nation—established the terms for both cooperation and competition among the region's leaders on a platform of anticolonialism, Arab unity, and hostility toward Israel.

Conventional accounts of Middle Eastern history view the 1970s as the end of these cross-border ideological wars. With the death of Nasser and the sudden advent of massive oil wealth, states became more interested in regime survival than grand ideological causes. During this period, countries developed stronger national security apparatus, which blocked domestic uprisings. And as states became more internally secure, there were fewer opportunities for proxy interventions. (Lebanon, to its eternal misfortune, was the exception to this rule, and its civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990, became the primary arena for proxy

conflicts.) Even the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which introduced a new form of cross-border popular mobilization among Islamists, who were inspired by the successful overthrow of a U.S.-backed despot, failed to regenerate those same proxy-war dynamics. Instead, the Arab regimes united against a shared enemy and doubled down on their repression of Islamist challengers at home.

Contrary to the standard story, however, that era of hard states had been fading for some time before the 2011 eruption. In the 1990s, globalization began to introduce fundamental challenges to the traditional Middle Eastern order. New international economic orthodoxies pushed states to cut social welfare spending and public employment. The large Arab states saw poverty grow and their infrastructure decay. Even the wealthy oil states found themselves at the mercy of global economic forces, such as the 2008 financial crisis and fluctuations in oil prices. At the same time, satellite television, smartphones, social media, and other new technologies undermined regimes that had become dependent on controlling the flow of information and the expression of opinion. And after 2001, the global war on terrorism, the demons unleashed by the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process undermined the foundations of regional cooperation. By 2010, little justification remained for the Arab order beyond containing Iran and stifling democratic change.

> *The 2011 Arab uprisings did not come out of nowhere.*

The 2011 Arab uprisings did not come out of nowhere; they were the culmination of structural changes that had been developing for a long time. Popular frustration with countries' stagnant economies and lack of political freedoms had been mounting for at least a decade. The region's political space had become unified through satellite television, the Internet,

and other transnational networks, which allowed protests to spread rapidly from Tunisia to Egypt and then across the entire region. These simultaneous uprisings revealed a great deal about the internal strength of the Arab states: some easily adapted, others barely made it through, and the rest collapsed.

Although the impact of the uprisings on domestic politics was obvious, observers paid less attention to how the fallout fundamentally altered the regional balance of power. Traditional powers such as Egypt and Syria were consumed by domestic conflicts, which left them unable to project power abroad. The wealthy Gulf states, on the other hand, were almost ideally suited to the region's new structural realities. Money, media empires, and a central position in robust transnational networks such as the Muslim Brotherhood (Qatar) or international business (the United Arab Emirates) have allowed them to exercise soft power. Despite their small size, these countries have extremely well-equipped and well-trained militaries, supplemented by well-compensated mercenaries. This has enabled them to project far more hard power into arenas such as Libya and Yemen than the traditional Arab powers ever could. Most important, these regimes exercise near-total control over their populations, which means that they can dismiss external meddling in ways that larger, less wealthy, and less repressive states cannot. This is true even when they turn on one another. The year-long effort by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to destabilize Qatar by cutting off diplomatic relations, sowing misinformation, and instituting an economic and trade embargo has mostly failed because Qatar has the financial resources and the repressive capacity to quell potential domestic challenges.

Power to the Proxies

In this new regional order, power itself operates in a different way. The uprisings created new fears about regime survival,

even among the most successful players. At the same time, failed states and civil wars have presented countries with new opportunities to expand their influence. The unification of the Arab political space through the intense experience of the uprisings made states view every event in the region as both an index of power and a potential threat: no state could afford to opt out. Whether out of a desire to spread power or a defensive interest in preventing rivals from doing the same, almost every regime has found itself drawn into civil wars and other power games.

MOHAMED AL-SAYAGHI / REUTERS

A Houthi fighter secures a rally to denounce the Saudi-led coalition's offensive on the Red Coast areas, in Sanaa, Yemen, June 2018

If Tunisia and Egypt demonstrated the risks of popular uprisings to leaders who had grown too confident in their ability to prevent challenges to their rule, Libya offered the first template for taking advantage of these upheavals. When the Arab uprisings reached Libya, three Gulf states—Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—along with

Turkey, leaped at the opportunity to move against the despised Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi. The Gulf countries used their media empires to bring attention to Libya's atrocities (while ignoring simultaneous violence in Bahrain). And they passed an Arab League resolution to help push the United States and the United Nations into supporting a humanitarian intervention. They also funneled huge quantities of weapons and money to their preferred local militias fighting the regime.

These indirect interventions had long-lasting, negative effects. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates both supported the opposition to Qaddafi, but they backed different local proxies. After the regime fell, those forces retained both their weapons and their external patrons, thus impeding the consolidation of a functional Libyan state and enabling the country's subsequent descent into civil war. Even today, Egyptian and Emirati military support for the commander Khalifa Haftar's Operation Dignity, whose forces control much of eastern Libya, is accelerating and intensifying the fighting.

But the devastating fallout of external involvement was not immediately apparent. In the heady days of 2011, the Gulf states and Turkey (like the United States) viewed their intervention in Libya as a success story: they realized the benefits of supporting local proxies and learned that they could secure U.S., European, and UN support for interventions against their rivals. With their eyes opened to new possibilities, they saw the popular uprising against Syria's President Bashar al-Assad as an opportunity to pry Syria away from Iran and revise the regional balance of power decisively in their favor. When it became apparent in early 2012 that they could not replicate their success in Libya by gaining UN Security Council support for an intervention against Assad, the Gulf states and Turkey instead moved to arm the Syrian insurgency. Even if this failed to bring down Assad, they saw an opportunity to bloody an Iranian ally and

take the fight to the turf of a key rival.

This external support to the Syrian rebels produced catastrophic results, accelerating the violence without offering any plausible road to resolution. Although the Assad regime bears the most responsibility for the conflict's systematic atrocities and brutality, the external backers of the insurgency also helped intensify the war despite the obvious costs. The structure of the region's new politics dictated failure. Each time the rebels made inroads, competing external actors—Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia—intervened on the side of Assad. Each advance generated an inevitable countermove, which only escalated the level of human suffering. In one of the most decisive examples of this dynamic, in 2015, after radical externally backed insurgent groups gained ground in northern Syria, Russia brutally intervened in Aleppo.

The competing forces in Syria did not prove equally skilled at proxy warfare. The forces backing Assad focused like a laser on supporting the regime. The Iranians, in particular, have mastered the art of sponsoring local militias, often with the direct guidance and support of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, on the other hand, viewed one another as rivals as much as allies, and their competitive and uncoordinated efforts consistently backfired. (The United Arab Emirates took a back seat in Syria.)

Although the United States attempted to force cooperation among the Qatari-, Saudi-, and Turkish-backed factions, it failed to overcome the infighting among their sponsors or to impose a coherent strategy. These problems were magnified by the privatization of the flow of arms and money to insurgent groups in the decisive days of late 2012 and early 2013, as Salafi networks in the Gulf poured money into the insurgency. This generated even more tension and pulled

the insurgency's center of gravity toward the jihadist end of the spectrum. As the war ground on, the Gulf states and Turkey shifted their support to increasingly radical Islamist coalitions in the search for effective fighters. ISIS emerged from this environment, not as a proxy of any state but as an insurgent force that was well adapted to what Syria had become.

After years of attempting to simultaneously arm, restrain, and shape the opposition from a distance, the United States ultimately intervened in Syria to fight not Assad but ISIS. This intervention succeeded on its own terms, destroying ISIS as a state-like entity in both Iraq and Syria. At the same time, the campaign's limited scope and mandate prevented the United States from becoming entrapped in a wider conflict with Assad and Russia. But the complexities of managing even this limited intervention against ISIS proved daunting and generated unintended new commitments. The last several years have been characterized by U.S. and Russian efforts to manage their competition in Syria. Meanwhile, the Iranian- and Russian-backed regime has relentlessly recaptured territory from the steeply declining, externally backed insurgency.

But even the collapse of ISIS and the Assad regime's significant territorial gains have not brought the conflict closer to a conclusion. Syria's failed state continues to exercise a magnetic pull on other countries in the region. The campaign against ISIS, for example, ultimately led to greater Turkish involvement. In 2015, in desperate need of local proxies to fight ISIS, the United States settled on the Kurdish-dominated People's Protection Units, or ypg, which it armed, along with other militias, under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces, or sdf. The success of these forces triggered Turkish fears of Kurdish separatism, which in 2017 led Turkey to undertake its own escalating military interventions in several key areas in northern Syria. At the

same time, Israel began increasing its air strikes against Iranian and Hezbollah targets across Syria. Both the opposition to the regime and the campaign against ISIS now seem to be winding down, but the Syrian war is more internationalized than ever.

> *Every Arab regime today lives under the condition of profound perceived insecurity.*

Although Syria is the most cataclysmic case, the regional powers have created enormous human and political damage elsewhere, too, in their quest for influence and prestige. Their efforts have even destabilized countries that were not embroiled in civil war. The worst example of this is Egypt. In 2013, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates backed General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's military coup, which overthrew Mohamed Morsi, the democratically elected president who was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and supported by Qatar. But despite tens of billions of dollars in Gulf aid, Sisi's brutally repressive regime has failed to restore normalcy or stability in Egypt. Even in Tunisia, which has been relatively successful, competition between Qatar and the United Arab Emirates has driven instability. The large-scale injection of foreign cash and political support for local allies has polluted the country's nascent democratic politics.

Security Dilemmas Everywhere

These turbulent regional dynamics are the product of classic "security dilemmas": when states attempt to increase their own security, they trigger countermeasures that leave them even less secure than they were before. Every Arab regime today lives under the condition of profound perceived insecurity. For all their bravado, they are terrified of another outbreak of popular protests. And the rapid proliferation of protests in 2011 convinced states that an uprising anywhere in the region could ignite one at home. When economic

protests rocked Jordan this past May, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates immediately renewed economic assistance to Amman in order to stem the unrest.

But when states attempt to repress potential challengers by exerting greater control over their societies, they typically only make the situation worse. The harder they crack down, the more anger and resentment they generate and the more possibilities for democratic inclusion they foreclose. This dynamic can be seen most clearly in Egypt, where Sisi has expanded his anti-Islamist campaign to include secular activists, journalists, and academics. As a result, he has alienated increasingly large segments of the coalition that supported the coup.

These domestic security dilemmas explain otherwise inexplicable foreign policy decisions. Consider Saudi Arabia's new crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman. After quickly consolidating power, the crown prince, also known as MBS, made dramatic shifts in domestic policy. He introduced social reforms, such as allowing women to drive and opening movie theaters. At the same time, he cracked down on women's rights activists, arrested and intimidated a significant swath of the country's elites, and sidelined key parts of the religious establishment. But MBS' remarkably successful power consolidation at home should not be viewed in isolation from his disastrous and hyperaggressive interventions abroad. Even before his domestic power grab, he decided to intervene in Yemen's civil war, assuming that a quick victory there would mobilize support at home. Instead, Saudi forces became trapped in a devastating quagmire. Likewise, the 2017 blockade and boycott of Qatar was expected to both establish Saudi dominance of the Gulf Cooperation Council and undercut any domestic challenge from the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, it backfired: Qatar proved more resilient than most people expected. The blockade also undermined relations with Washington,

damaged attempts to contain Iran, and weakened the Gulf Cooperation Council, perhaps fatally. In both Yemen and Qatar, Saudi Arabia has found itself trapped, unable to escalate enough to win but also unable to back down for fear of the domestic political consequences.

MOHAMED AL-SAYAGHI / REUTERS

A man walks to a house that was damaged during an airstrike carried out by the Saudi-led coalition in Faj Attan village, Sanaa, Yemen, May 2015,

The competition between the Arab countries and Iran provides another example of the security dilemma at work. Although Arab fears of Iranian expansionism are grounded in reality, those anxieties have always been far out of proportion to actual Iranian power. Perversely, however, the more that Arab states do to confront Iran, the stronger it becomes. In Yemen, the Emirati and Saudi campaign has turned what was originally a minor Iranian foothold into a stronger strategic alliance with the Houthi rebels and led to greater penetration by Iranian-backed proxies. In Syria, the insurgency backed by the Gulf countries and Turkey has given

Iran a much more commanding role in the country. And in Lebanon, the bizarre spectacle of the Saudi government holding Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri hostage in Riyadh for several weeks triggered a domestic political crisis that ultimately weakened the pro-Saudi Sunni coalition in the Lebanese parliament.

But these new dynamics are not merely the result of interstate competition; they are also the product of weak and fragile states, which generate their own security dilemmas by creating power vacuums. Even if a regional power does not immediately view a power vacuum as a good opportunity to expand its own influence, it fears that its rivals will. And once a state gets involved, it believes that reducing support for its local proxies will only strengthen the proxies of its regional rivals. That fear makes de-escalation intensely difficult in the civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Even if actors recognize that their interventions have failed, they are trapped by the competitive logic of the security dilemma—unable to win yet unable to leave.

The New Normal

In a region so saturated with security dilemmas, no amount of reassurance from the United States can ever be enough. The unprecedented volume of U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates over the last five years (which was approved by the Obama administration to garner support for the Iran nuclear deal) has not left either of those countries any more secure. Even as Washington has given up any talk of democratization or human rights compliance, autocracies have not had an easier time resolving their internal challenges. The U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal has only increased fears among the Arab Gulf states of an increasingly powerful Iran. Washington's one-sided support for Israel amid violence in Gaza has deepened that country's international isolation and hastened the likelihood of another conflict. And although the United States has brought

the Sunni Gulf states into increasingly open alignment with Israel, this effort has been undermined by the Emirati and Saudi clash with Qatar.

Even with a U.S. president who takes a hard line on Iran and seems to have no problem with autocratic rule, the Arab regimes no longer see the United States as a reliable guarantor of regime survival or their foreign policy interests. In this new environment, it makes sense for even close U.S. allies to build relationships with China, Russia, and the EU—as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and even Jordan are now doing. Such efforts are a rational hedge against the unpredictability of the United States, but they could easily escalate into something more through the same security-dilemma dynamics that have unsettled all other dimensions of regional politics.

The Trump administration has struggled to manage these new realities. Trump's sudden policy changes and the wildly incoherent messaging that is coming from different parts of the U.S. government are confusing allies and adversaries alike. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates may like Trump's harder line on Iran and his support for the war in Yemen, but other policies, such as Washington's pressure on them to end the blockade of Qatar, its demands for them to increase oil production, and the signals of its intention to pull out of Syria, have generated new frustrations.

Still, Trump's chaotic administration should not distract from the deeper structural realities, which would have presented a challenge to any U.S. president. The United States no longer has the power or the standing to impose a regional order on its own terms. In all likelihood, U.S. hegemony in the Middle East will never be restored because the region has fundamentally changed. Moving beyond the wars and political failures that followed the Arab uprisings will not be easy. The damage is too deep.

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Venezuela’s Suicide

Lessons From a Failed State

Moisés Naím and Francisco Toro

CARLOS GARCIA RAWLINS / REUTERS

A protester holds a burning flag at a rally against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela, June 2017

Consider two Latin American countries. The first is one of the region’s oldest and strongest democracies. It boasts a stronger social safety net than any of its neighbors and is making progress on its promise to deliver free health care and higher education to all its citizens. It is a model of social mobility and a magnet for immigrants from across Latin America and Europe. The press is free, and the political system is open; opposing parties compete fiercely in elections and regularly alternate power peacefully. It sidestepped the wave of military juntas that mired some Latin American countries in dictatorship. Thanks to a long political alliance and deep trade and investment ties with the United States, it

serves as the Latin American headquarters for a slew of multinational corporations. It has the best infrastructure in South America. It is still unmistakably a developing country, with its share of corruption, injustice, and dysfunction, but it is well ahead of other poor countries by almost any measure.

The second country is one of Latin America's most impoverished nations and its newest dictatorship. Its schools lie half deserted. The health system has been devastated by decades of underinvestment, corruption, and neglect; long-vanquished diseases, such as malaria and measles, have returned. Only a tiny elite can afford enough to eat. An epidemic of violence has made it one of the most murderous countries in the world. It is the source of Latin America's largest refugee migration in a generation, with millions of citizens fleeing in the last few years alone. Hardly anyone (aside from other autocratic governments) recognizes its sham elections, and the small portion of the media not under direct state control still follows the official line for fear of reprisals. By the end of 2018, its economy will have shrunk by about half in the last five years. It is a major cocaine-trafficking hub, and key power brokers in its political elite have been indicted in the United States on drug charges. Prices double every 25 days. The main airport is largely deserted, used by just a handful of holdout airlines bringing few passengers to and from the outside world.

These two countries are in fact the same country, Venezuela, at two different times: the early 1970s and today. The transformation Venezuela has undergone is so radical, so complete, and so total that it is hard to believe it took place without a war. What happened to Venezuela? How did things go so wrong?

The short answer is Chavismo. Under the leadership of Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, the country has experienced a toxic mix of wantonly destructive policy,

escalating authoritarianism, and kleptocracy, all under a level of Cuban influence that often resembles an occupation. Any one of these features would have created huge problems on its own. All of them together hatched a catastrophe. Today, Venezuela is a poor country and a failed and criminalized state run by an autocrat beholden to a foreign power. The remaining options for reversing this situation are slim; the risk now is that hopelessness will push Venezuelans to consider supporting dangerous measures, such as a U.S.-led military invasion, that could make a bad situation worse.

Chavismo Rising

To many observers, the explanation for Venezuela's predicament is simple: under Chávez, the country caught a strong case of socialism, and all its subsequent disasters stem from that original sin. But Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Uruguay have also elected socialist governments in the last 20 years. Although each has struggled politically and economically, none—aside from Nicaragua—has imploded. Instead, several have prospered.

If socialism cannot be blamed for Venezuela's demise, perhaps oil is the culprit. The most calamitous stage of Venezuela's crisis has coincided neatly with the sharp fall in international oil prices that started in 2014. But this explanation is also insufficient. Venezuela's decline began four decades ago, not four years ago. By 2003, Venezuela's GDP per worker had already declined by a disastrous 37 percent from its 1978 peak—precisely the decline that first propelled Chávez into office. Moreover, all of the world's petrostates suffered a serious income shock in 2014 as a result of plummeting oil prices. Only Venezuela could not withstand the pressure.

The drivers of Venezuela's failure run deeper. Decades of gradual economic decline opened the way for Chávez, a charismatic demagogue wedded to an outdated ideology, to

take power and establish a corrupt autocracy modeled on and beholden to Cuba's dictatorship. Although the crisis preceded Chávez's rise to power, his legacy and Cuba's influence must be at the center of any attempt to explain it.

Chávez was born in 1954 into a lower-middle-class family in a rural town. He became a career military officer on a baseball scholarship and was soon secretly recruited into a small leftist movement that spent over a decade plotting to overthrow the democratic regime. He exploded into Venezuela's national consciousness on February 4, 1992, when he led an unsuccessful coup attempt. This misadventure landed him in jail but turned him into an improbable folk hero who embodied growing frustration with a decade of economic stagnation. After receiving a pardon, he launched an outsider bid for the presidency in 1998 and won in a landslide, upending the two-party system that had anchored Venezuelan democracy for 40 years.

> *Chávez was brilliant at mining discontent.*

What drove the explosion of populist anger that brought Chávez to power? In a word, disappointment. The stellar economic performance Venezuela had experienced for five decades leading up to the 1970s had run out of steam, and the path to the middle class had begun to narrow. As the economists Ricardo Hausmann and Francisco Rodríguez noted, "By 1970 Venezuela had become the richest country in Latin America and one of the twenty richest countries in the world, with a per capita GDP higher than Spain, Greece, and Israel and only 13 percent lower than that of the United Kingdom." But by the early 1980s, a weakened oil market had brought the era of fast growth to an end. Lower oil revenue meant cuts in public spending, scaled-down social programs, currency devaluation, runaway inflation, a banking crisis, and mounting unemployment and hardship for the poor. Even so,

Venezuela’s head start was such that when Chávez was elected, it had a per capita income in the region that was second only to Argentina’s.

Another common explanation for Chávez’s rise holds that it was driven by voters’ reaction against economic inequality, which was driven in turn by pervasive corruption. But when Chávez came to power, income was more evenly distributed in Venezuela than in any neighboring country. If inequality determined electoral outcomes, then a Chávez-like candidate would have been more probable in Brazil, Chile, or Colombia, where the gap between the well-off and everyone else was larger.

Venezuela may not have been collapsing in 1998, but it had been stagnating and, in some respects, backsliding, as oil prices slumped to just $11 per barrel, leading to a new round of austerity. Chávez was brilliant at mining the resulting discontent. His eloquent denunciations of inequality, exclusion, poverty, corruption, and the entrenched political elite struck a chord with struggling voters, who felt nostalgic for an earlier, more prosperous period. The inept and complacent traditional political and business elite who opposed Chávez never came close to matching his popular touch.

MARCO BELLO / REUTERS

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro gestures next to Cuba's President Miguel Diaz-Canel during their meeting at the Miraflores Palace in Caracas, Venezuela, May 2018

Venezuelans gambled on Chávez. What they got was not just an outsider bent on upending the status quo but also a Latin American leftist icon who soon had followers all around the world. Chávez became both a spoiler and the star attraction at global summits, as well as a leader of the burgeoning global wave of anti-American sentiment sparked by U.S. President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq. At home, shaped by his career in the military, Chávez had a penchant for centralizing power and a profound intolerance of dissent. He set out to neuter not just opposition politicians but also political allies who dared question his policies. His collaborators quickly saw which way the wind was blowing: policy debates disappeared, and the government pursued a radical agenda with little forethought and no real scrutiny.

A 2001 presidential decree on land reform, which Chávez

handed down with no consultation or debate, was a taste of things to come. It broke up large commercial farms and turned them over to peasant cooperatives that lacked the technical know-how, management skills, or access to capital to produce at scale. Food production collapsed. And in sector after sector, the Chávez government enacted similarly self-defeating policies. It expropriated foreign-owned oil ventures without compensation and gave them to political appointees who lacked the technical expertise to run them. It nationalized utilities and the main telecommunications operator, leaving Venezuela with chronic water and electricity shortages and some of the slowest Internet connection speeds in the world. It seized steel companies, causing production to fall from 480,000 metric tons per month before nationalization, in 2008, to effectively nothing today. Similar results followed the seizure of aluminum companies, mining firms, hotels, and airlines.

> *The relationship between Cuba and Venezuela became more than an alliance.*

In one expropriated company after another, state administrators stripped assets and loaded payrolls with Chávez cronies. When they inevitably ran into financial problems, they appealed to the government, which was able to bail them out. By 2004, oil prices had spiked again, filling government coffers with petrodollars, which Chávez spent without constraints, controls, or accountability. On top of that were the easy loans from China, which was happy to extend credit to Venezuela in exchange for a guaranteed supply of crude oil. By importing whatever the hollowed-out Venezuelan economy failed to produce and borrowing to finance a consumption boom, Chávez was able to temporarily shield the public from the impact of his disastrous policies and to retain substantial popularity.

But not everyone was convinced. Oil industry workers were among the first to sound the alarm about Chávez's authoritarian tendencies. They went on strike in 2002 and 2003, demanding a new presidential election. In response to the protests, Chávez fired almost half of the work force in the state-run oil company and imposed an arcane currency-exchange-control regime. The system morphed into a cesspool of corruption, as regime cronies realized that arbitraging between the state-authorized exchange rate and the black market could yield fortunes overnight. This arbitrage racket created an extraordinarily wealthy elite of government-connected kleptocrats. As this budding kleptocracy perfected the art of siphoning off oil proceeds into its own pockets, Venezuelan store shelves grew bare.

It was all painfully predictable—and widely predicted. But the louder local and international experts sounded the alarm, the more the government clung to its agenda. To Chávez, dire warnings from technocrats were a sign that the revolution was on the right track.

PASSING THE TORCH

In 2011, Chávez was diagnosed with cancer. Top oncologists in Brazil and the United States offered to treat him. But he opted instead to search for a cure in Cuba, the country he trusted not only to treat him but also to be discreet about his condition. As his illness progressed, his dependence on Havana deepened, and the mystery about the real state of his health grew. On December 8, 2012, an ailing Chávez made one final television appearance to ask Venezuelans to make Maduro, then vice president, his successor. For the next three months, Venezuela was governed spectrally and by remote control: decrees emanated from Havana bearing Chávez's signature, but no one saw him, and speculation was rife that he had already died. When Chávez's death was finally announced, on March 5, 2013, the only thing that was clear amid the atmosphere of secrecy and concealment was that

Venezuela's next leader would carry on the tradition of Cuban influence.

Chávez had long looked to Cuba as a blueprint for revolution, and he turned to Cuban President Fidel Castro for advice at critical junctures. In return, Venezuela sent oil: energy aid to Cuba (in the form of 115,000 barrels a day sold at a deep discount) was worth nearly $1 billion a year to Havana. The relationship between Cuba and Venezuela became more than an alliance. It has been, as Chávez himself once put it, "a merger of two revolutions." (Unusually, the senior partner in the alliance is poorer and smaller than the junior partner—but so much more competent that it dominates the relationship.) Cuba is careful to keep its footprint light: it conducts most of its consultations in Havana rather than Caracas.

HANDOUT / REUTERS

Former Cuban leader Fidel Castro and former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez read a copy of the Cuban Communist Party newspaper "Granma", Havana, Cuba, June 2011

It did not escape anyone's attention that the leader Chávez annointed to succeed him had devoted his life to the cause of Cuban communism. As a teenager, Maduro joined a fringe pro-Cuban Marxist party in Caracas. In his 20s, instead of going to university, he sought training in Havana's school for international cadres to become a professional revolutionary. As Chávez's foreign minister from 2006 to 2013, he had seldom called attention to himself: only his unfailing loyalty to Chávez, and to Cuba, propelled his ascent to the top. Under his leadership, Cuba's influence in Venezuela has become pervasive. He has stacked key government posts with activists trained in Cuban organizations, and Cubans have come to occupy sensitive roles within the Venezuelan regime. The daily intelligence briefs Maduro consumes, for instance, are produced not by Venezuelans but by Cuban intelligence officers.

With Cuban guidance, Maduro has deeply curtailed economic freedoms and erased all remaining traces of liberalism from the country's politics and institutions. He has continued and expanded Chávez's practice of jailing, exiling, or banning from political life opposition leaders who became too popular or hard to co-opt. Julio Borges, a key opposition leader, fled into exile to avoid being jailed, and Leopoldo López, the opposition's most charismatic leader, has been moved back and forth between a military prison and house arrest. Over 100 political prisoners linger in jails, and reports of torture are common. Periodic elections have become farcical, and the government has stripped the opposition-controlled National Assembly of all powers. Maduro has deepened Venezuela's alliances with a number of anti-American and anti-Western regimes, turning to Russia for weapons, cybersecurity, and expertise in oil production; to China for financing and infrastructure; to Belarus for homebuilding; and to Iran for car production.

As Maduro broke the last remaining links in Venezuela's

traditional alliances with Washington and other Latin American democracies, he lost access to sound economic advice. He dismissed the consensus of economists from across the political spectrum: although they warned about inflation, Maduro chose to rely on the advice of Cuba and fringe Marxist policy advisers who assured him that there would be no consequences to making up budget shortfalls with freshly minted money. Inevitably, a devastating bout of hyperinflation ensued.

A toxic combination of Cuban influence, runaway corruption, the dismantling of democratic checks and balances, and sheer incompetence has kept Venezuela locked into catastrophic economic policies. As monthly inflation rates top three digits, the government improvises policy responses that are bound to make the situation even worse.

ANATOMY OF A COLLAPSE

Nearly all oil-producing liberal democracies, such as Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States, were democracies before they became oil producers. Autocracies that have found oil, such as Angola, Brunei, Iran, and Russia, have been unable to make the leap to liberal democracy. For four decades, Venezuela seemed to have miraculously beat these odds—it democratized and liberalized in 1958, decades after finding oil.

But the roots of Venezuelan liberal democracy turned out to be shallow. Two decades of bad economics decimated the popularity of the traditional political parties, and a charismatic demagogue, riding the wave of an oil boom, stepped into the breach. Under these unusual conditions, he was able to sweep away the whole structure of democratic checks and balances in just a few years.

When the decadelong oil price boom ended in 2014, Venezuela lost not just the oil revenue on which Chávez’s

popularity and international influence had depended but also access to foreign credit markets. This left the country with a massive debt overhang: the loans taken out during the oil boom still had to be serviced, although from a much-reduced income stream. Venezuela ended up with politics that are typical of autocracies that discover oil: a predatory, extractive oligarchy that ignores regular people as long they stay quiet and that violently suppresses them when they protest.

The resulting crisis is morphing into the worst humanitarian disaster in memory in the Western Hemisphere. Exact figures for Venezuela's GDP collapse are notoriously difficult to come by, but economists estimate that it is comparable to the 40 percent contraction of Syria's GDP since 2012, following the outbreak of its devastating civil war. Hyperinflation has reached one million percent per year, pushing 61 percent of Venezuelans to live in extreme poverty, with 89 percent of those surveyed saying they do not have the money to buy enough food for their families and 64 percent reporting they have lost an average of 11 kilograms (about 24 pounds) in body weight due to hunger. About ten percent of the population—2.6 million Venezuelans—have fled to neighboring countries.

The Venezuelan state has mostly given up on providing public services such as health care, education, and even policing; heavy-handed, repressive violence is the final thing left that Venezuelans can rely on the public sector to consistently deliver. In the face of mass protests in 2014 and 2017, the government responded with thousands of arrests, brutal beatings and torture, and the killing of over 130 protesters.

Meanwhile, criminal business is increasingly conducted not in defiance of the state, or even simply in cahoots with the state, but directly through it. Drug trafficking has emerged alongside oil production and currency arbitrage as a key source of profits to those close to the ruling elite, with high-

ranking officials and members of the president's family facing narcotics charges in the United States. A small connected elite has also stolen national assets to a unprecedented degree. In August, a series of regime-connected businessmen were indicted in U.S. federal courts for attempting to launder over $1.2 billion in illegally obtained funds—just one of a dizzying array of illegal scams that are part of the looting of Venezuela. The entire southeastern quadrant of the country has become an exploitative illegal mining camp, where desperate people displaced from cities by hunger try their luck in unsafe mines run by criminal gangs under military protection. All over the country, prison gangs, working in partnership with government security forces, run lucrative extortion rackets that make them the de facto civil -authority. The offices of the Treasury, the central bank, and the national oil company have become laboratories where complicated financial crimes are hatched. As Venezuela's economy has collapsed, the lines separating the state from criminal enterprises have all but disappeared.

THE VENEZUELAN DILEMMA

Whenever U.S. President Donald Trump meets with a Latin American leader, he insists that the region do something about the Venezuelan crisis. Trump has prodded his own national security team for "strong" alternatives, at one point stating that there are "many options" for Venezuela and that he is "not going to rule out the military option." Republican Senator Marco Rubio of Florida has similarly flirted with a military response. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, however, has echoed a common sentiment of the U.S. security apparatus by publicly stating, "The Venezuelan crisis is not a military matter." All of Venezuela's neighboring countries have also voiced their opposition to an armed attack on Venezuela.

And rightly so. Trump's fantasies of military invasion are deeply misguided and extremely dangerous. Although a U.S.-

led military assault would likely have no problem overthrowing Maduro in short order, what comes next could be far worse, as the Iraqis and the Libyans know only too well: when outside powers overthrow autocrats sitting atop failing states, open-ended chaos is much more likely to follow than stability—let alone democracy.

Nonetheless, the United States will continue to face pressure to find some way of arresting Venezuela's collapse. Each initiative undertaken so far has served only to highlight that there is, in reality, little the United States can do. During the Obama administration, U.S. diplomats attempted to engage the regime directly. But negotiations proved futile. Maduro used internationally mediated talks to neutralize massive street protests: protest leaders would call off demonstrations during the talks, but Chavista negotiators would only stonewall, parceling out minor concessions designed to divide their opponents while they themselves prepared for the next wave of repression. The United States and Venezuela's neighbors seem to have finally grasped that, as things stand, negotiations only play into Maduro's hands.

> *The other Latin American countries are finally grasping that Venezuela's instability will inevitably spill across their borders.*

Some have suggested using harsh economic sanctions to pressure Maduro to step down. The United States has tried this. It passed several rounds of sanctions, under both the Obama and Trump administrations, to prevent the regime from issuing new debt and to hamper the financial operation of the state-owned oil company. Together with Canada and the EU, Washington has also put in place sanctions against specific regime officials, freezing their assets abroad and imposing travel restrictions. But such measures are redundant: if the task is to destroy the Venezuelan economy,

no set of sanctions will be as effective as the regime itself. The same is true for an oil blockade: oil production is already in a free fall.

Washington can sharpen its policy on the margins. For one thing, it needs to put more emphasis on a Cuban track: little can be achieved without Havana's help, meaning that Venezuela needs to be front and center in every contact Washington and its allies have with Havana. The United States can cast a wider net in countering corruption, preventing not just crooked officials but also their frontmen and families from enjoying the fruits of corruption, drug trafficking, and embezzlement. It could also work to turn the existing U.S. arms embargo into a global one. The Maduro regime must be constrained in its authoritarian intent with policies that communicate clearly to its cronies that continuing to aid the regime will leave them isolated in Venezuela and that turning on the regime is, therefore, the only way out. Yet the prospects of such a strategy succeeding are dim.

After a long period of dithering, the other Latin American countries are finally grasping that Venezuela's instability will inevitably spill across their borders. As the center-left "pink wave" of the early years of this century recedes, a new cohort of more conservative leaders in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Peru has tipped the regional balance against Venezuela's dictatorship, but the lack of actionable options bedevils them, as well. Traditional diplomacy hasn't worked and has even backfired. But so has pressure. For example, in 2017, Latin American countries threatened to suspend Venezuela's membership in the Organization of American States. The regime responded by withdrawing from the organization unilaterally, displaying just how little it cares about traditional diplomatic pressure.

Venezuela's exasperated neighbors are increasingly seeing

the crisis through the prism of the refugee problem it has created; they are anxious to stem the flow of malnourished people fleeing Venezuela and placing new strains on their social programs. As a populist backlash builds against the influx of Venezuelan refugees, some Latin American countries appear tempted to slam the door shut—a temptation they must resist, as it would be a historic mistake that would only worsen the crisis. The reality is that Latin American countries have no idea what to do about Venezuela. There may be nothing they can do, save accepting refugees, which will at least help alleviate the suffering of the Venezuelan people.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Today, the regime is so solidly entrenched that a change of faces is much more likely than a change of system. Perhaps Maduro will be pushed out by a slightly less incompetent leader who is able to render Cuban hegemony in Venezuela more sustainable. Such an outcome would merely mean a more stable foreign-dominated petro-kleptocracy, not a return to democracy. And even if opposition forces—or a U.S.-led armed attack—somehow managed to replace Maduro with an entirely new government, the agenda would be daunting. A successor regime would need to reduce the enormous role the military plays in all areas of the public sector. It would have to start from scratch in restoring basic services in health care, education, and law enforcement. It would have to rebuild the oil industry and stimulate growth in other economic sectors. It would need to get rid of the drug dealers, prison racketeers, predatory miners, wealthy criminal financiers, and extortionists who have latched on to every part of the state. And it would have to make all these changes in the context of a toxic, anarchic political environment and a grave economic crisis.

Given the scale of these obstacles, Venezuela is likely to remain unstable for a long time to come. The immediate challenge for its citizens and their leaders, as well as for the

international community, is to contain the impact of the nation's decline. For all the misery they have experienced, the Venezuelan people have never stopped struggling against misrule. As of this summer, Venezuelans were still staging hundreds of protests each month. Most of them are local, grass-roots affairs with little political leadership, but they show a people with the will to fight for themselves.

Is that enough to nudge the country away from its current, grim path? Probably not. Hopelessness is driving more and more Venezuelans to fantasize about a Trump-led military intervention, which would offer a fervently desired deus ex machina for a long-suffering people. But this amounts to an ill-advised revenge fantasy, not a serious strategy.

Rather than a military invasion, Venezuelans' best hope is to ensure that the flickering embers of protest and social dissent are not extinguished and that resistance to dictatorship is sustained. Desperate though the prospect may seem, this tradition of protest could one day lay the foundations for the recovery of civic institutions and democratic practices. It won't be simple, and it won't be quick. Bringing a state back from the brink of failure never is.

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January 18, 2018

Is Trump a Normal Foreign-Policy President?

What We Know After One Year

Elizabeth N. Saunders

JOSHUA ROBERTS / REUTERS

President Trump on Capitol HIll, January 2018.

For scholars studying the effects of presidential leadership on U.S. foreign policy, Donald Trump's surprise victory in 2016 has offered quite the test. What does it mean for the United States to elect a leader with no experience in government, little knowledge of foreign policy, and an explicit disdain for expertise?

After a year in office, Trump has confirmed a lot of what we

knew about how leaders matter: he has held firm to the few beliefs he brought with him to office, demonstrated the importance of substantive knowledge (or lack thereof) for decision-making, and shown why advisers cannot substitute for experienced leadership. In other ways, he has proven a surprise, principally by failing to appoint people who could help him get what he wants. And as the world faces at least another three years of Trump, there are few reasons to think his behavior will change in the future.

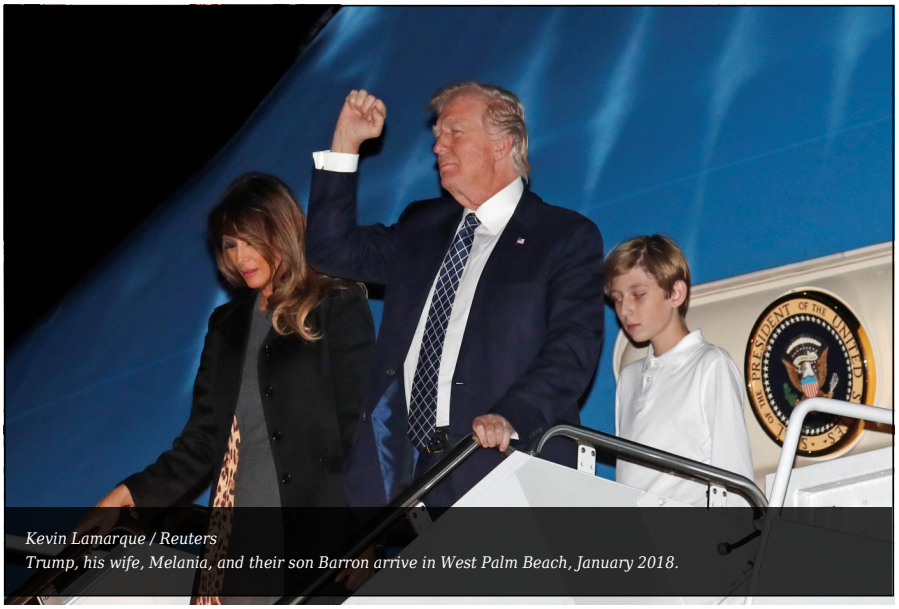
GREAT MAN THEORY

International relations scholars long believed that leaders do not matter much—states will act how they act, regardless of who is at the helm. The political scientist Kenneth Waltz, for instance, has argued that the constraints of the international system, not individuals or domestic politics, determine the actions of states.

More recently, however, that view has begun to change. Long before Trump's election, scholars had assembled a wealth of new evidence about how individual leaders influence their countries' behavior. One major finding is that leaders' background experiences and beliefs—formed long before they arrive in office—shape how they make decisions, from taking in and processing information to deliberating with advisers and, ultimately, deciding on a course of action. What we see when leaders enter office is essentially what we'll get, at least for the first few years.

Three insights from this body of scholarship stand out in particular. First, leaders' beliefs are "sticky," meaning that they are formed before leaders enter office and tend not to change much over time. As former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in his memoirs, "The convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue

in office." Although such stickiness is sometimes seen as a defect, fixed beliefs are, as the political scientist Robert Jervis has argued, necessary guides that help decision-makers grapple with a complex world. We should not want our leaders' beliefs to change too rapidly—sticky beliefs are a feature, not a bug.



Kevin Lamarque / Reuters
Trump, his wife, Melania, and their son Barron arrive in West Palm Beach, January 2018.

The second insight is that substantive knowledge matters—it is important for leaders to be informed about the world—and there are no shortcuts for acquiring that knowledge on the job. Research on expertise shows that it is "domain-specific," meaning that it does not translate from one topic or issue area to another; even chess masters are humbled by the random placement of pieces on a board. Little wonder, then, that business experience does not translate into foreign policy acumen.

Third, although advisers and bureaucratic appointments are crucial, they are no substitute for a leader with direct foreign policy expertise. Inexperienced presidents often make the case that advisers can fill the gaps in their own knowledge or

tutor them on the job. During the 2000 presidential campaign, for example, George W. Bush emphasized that he would be "surrounded by good, strong, capable, smart people."

But as my own recent work has shown, it matters a great deal whether a president has as much knowledge of foreign policy as his advisers. Experienced leaders provide better oversight of foreign policy decision-making because they are more likely to ask hard questions, spot poor planning, or recognize unrealistic proposals. Their reputation for expertise can enhance oversight indirectly, since subordinates know that their boss will check their work. Experienced presidents are also better able to draw on diverse sources of advice.

In Bush's case, his inexperience empowered advisers such as Vice President Dick Cheney to act without oversight, leading to poor planning for the Iraq war and its aftermath. By contrast, Bush's father, former President George H. W. Bush, relied on many of the same advisers, including Cheney (who was then secretary of defense), to plan the successful Gulf War in 1991. An important difference was that the older Bush, a former vice president, UN ambassador, and director of the CIA, had deep foreign policy experience that prompted his team to question and revise war plans before they even made it to the Oval Office.

A NORMAL PRESIDENT?

Despite the near-continuous drama of the last 12 months, Trump's first year in office has confirmed much of what we know about how leaders affect foreign policy. That does not mean that Trump has played by the old rules—he has not. But he is essentially the president hired on November 8, 2016: a man with a few fixed beliefs and little substantive knowledge. And his actions as president have tended to confirm the three insights noted above.

Despite the near-continuous drama of the last 12 months,

> *Trump's first year in office has confirmed much of what we know about how leaders affect foreign policy.*

First, although Trump is often accused of lacking any fixed beliefs, he has several sticky views that were visible before the election. Exactly one year before Trump's inauguration, the journalist Thomas Wright argued in Politico that the then candidate had three clear beliefs: he was against trade, against alliances, and in favor of strongmen abroad.

Trump has stayed true to those beliefs during his first year in the White House. Soon after entering office, he withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and he has made clear his disdain for trade pacts such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. After railing against NATO on the campaign trail, Trump raised doubts about the United States' commitment to Article 5—which provides for collective defense—when he declined to endorse it in a speech in Brussels (he finally reaffirmed the Article 5 commitment when back in Washington). And his admiration for authoritarian leaders has been evident, reflected in his public praise for the leaders of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. These beliefs have proven quite sticky indeed.

Second, Trump has been hurt by his inexperience and lack of knowledge. His actions, including accidentally disclosing classified information to the Russian ambassador and trumpeting largely symbolic business deals with an increasingly assertive China—even as the other TPP countries try to move on with a multilateral deal without the United States—reveal a careless man with a naive belief in bilateral deals, not a master negotiator.

Third, Trump's team has not been able to substitute for his lack of knowledge, even where it is experienced. Although Secretary of Defense James Mattis is running the Pentagon effectively, as a group, Trump's advisers are neither

constraining him nor channeling his preferences into coherent policies. For instance, as Susan Glasser reported for Politico, during his trip to Europe this summer, Trump removed a reference in his speech to NATO's Article 5 at the last minute, blindsiding his team. The president's constant Twitter threats against North Korea likewise undermine the notion of a coherent administration policy.

Reuters
Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Tokyo, November 2017.

TRUMP'S SURPRISES

Where Trump has really surprised is in the area of personnel. In one sense, his rejection of expertise should be expected, given the populist tenor of his campaign. But when one looks more broadly at the history of U.S. foreign policy, the sharp break between Trump and the Republican foreign policy and national security community is remarkable. This community was central to the "Never Trump" movement during the campaign, as symbolized by a March 2016 open letter opposing Trump that was signed by 122 Republican national security professionals. In return, Trump has refused to appoint these professionals to positions within his

administration.

Instead, with a few notable exceptions, Trump has staffed his administration with remarkably inexperienced people. Most presidencies struggle to find their footing, and especially when their party has been out of power for a long time, new presidents often face the challenge of having knowledgeable appointees with little direct experience or years spent outside of government. But an inexperienced president deliberately choosing inexperienced advisers was, until Trump, essentially unthinkable.

The Trump administration has declined or failed to make appointments to an unprecedented degree, even leaving what most observers consider crucial foreign policy posts, such as ambassadorships in Europe and the Middle East, unfilled. Trump himself has left little doubt that this shortage, as well as the shrinking of the State Department, is deliberate, declaring in response to a question about State Department job vacancies that “I’m the only one that matters.”

Part of what makes Trump’s behavior in this area surprising is that although his rejection of expertise clearly has some political appeal, it also makes it harder for him to get the policies he wants. Even a president who wants to do less in the world still has priorities. Career officials can fill in on a temporary basis, but it takes confirmed political appointees to try to translate the president’s words into action.

The first year is typically when presidents make what I have called “policy investments,” which include staffing decisions, budgets, strategies and institutional creation and change. Presidents have varied in their skill at making these investments. But most, until Trump, have at least tried.

WHAT'S NEXT?

What should we expect for the remainder of Trump’s term?

Not much learning, for one thing. Learning, when it takes place at all, is often slow. For instance, George W. Bush's foreign policy evolved in his second term as he confronted the difficult realities of Iraq. But Bush read books and consulted with outside experts. Such learning requires openness to new ideas and new people, both qualities that Trump sorely lacks.

There are also likely long-term effects that we have not yet begun to appreciate. As Jim Goldgeier and I wrote in this magazine shortly after the inauguration, a lot of good foreign policy is invisible. Diplomacy, trade, and alliances—all things Trump disdains—have benefits that can be hard to see until they're gone. But like an insurance policy, they are missed only when they are needed. Trump's weakening of these foreign policy tools leaves the United States ill prepared for the crises that inevitably challenge presidents.

Trump's leadership has confirmed a lot of what we know about how presidents shape foreign policy—but that is scary, given what we know about Trump. In the debate over whether Trump's first year has been better or worse than expected, the real fear is that the worst is yet to come

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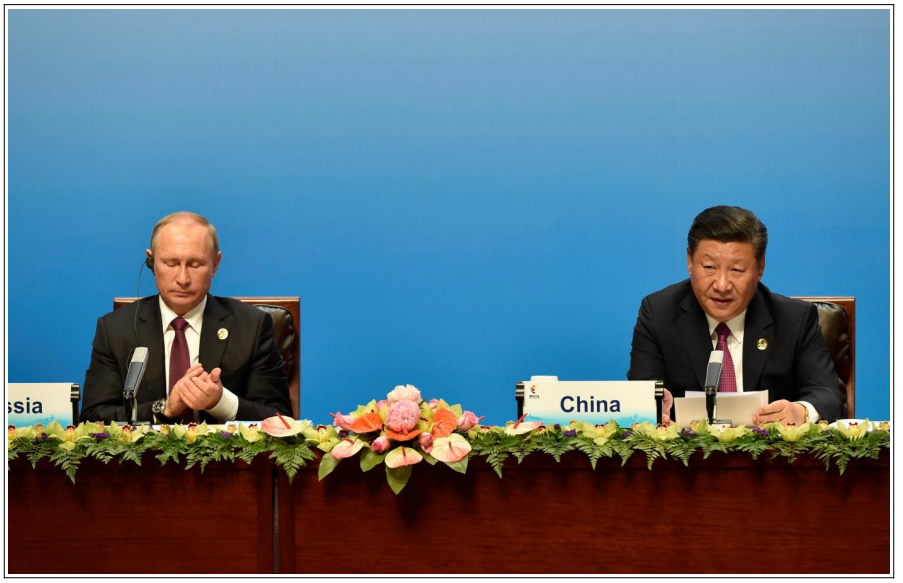
How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power

The Right and Wrong Ways to Respond to Authoritarian Influence

Joseph S. Nye Jr.



KENZABURO FUKUHARA / REUTERS

Russian President Vladimir Putin applauds Chinese President Xi Jinping, who delivers a speech at the BRICS Business Council and Signing ceremony at 2017 BRICS Summit in Xiamen, China September 2017.

Washington has been wrestling with a new term that describes an old threat. "Sharp power," as coined by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig of the National Endowment for Democracy (writing for ForeignAffairs.com and in a longer report), refers to the information warfare being waged by today's authoritarian powers, particularly

China and Russia. Over the past decade, Beijing and Moscow have spent tens of billions of dollars to shape public perceptions and behavior around the world—using tools new and old that exploit the asymmetry of openness between their own restrictive systems and democratic societies. The effects are global, but in the United States, concern has focused on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and on Chinese efforts to control discussion of sensitive topics in American publications, movies, and classrooms.

In their National Endowment for Democracy report, Walker and Ludwig argue that the expansion and refinement of Chinese and Russian sharp power should prompt policymakers in the United States and other democracies to rethink the tools they use to respond. They contrast sharp power, which "pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries," with "soft power," which harnesses the allure of culture and values to enhance a country's strength. And democracies, they argue, must not just "inoculate themselves against malign authoritarian influence" but also "take a far more assertive posture on behalf of their own principles."

Today, the challenge posed by Chinese and Russian information warfare is real. Yet in the face of that challenge, democratic governments and societies should avoid any temptation to imitate the methods of their adversaries. That means taking care not to overreact to sharp power in ways that undercut their true advantage. Even today, that advantage comes from soft power.

THE STAYING POWER OF SOFT POWER

In international politics, soft power (a term I first used in a 1990 book) is the ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion rather than through the hard power of coercion and payment. Soft power is rarely sufficient on its own. But

when coupled with hard power, it is a force multiplier. That combination, though hardly new (the Roman Empire rested on both the strength of Rome's legions and the attractions of Rome's civilization), has been particularly central to U.S. leadership. Power depends on whose army wins, but it also depends on whose story wins. A strong narrative is a source of power.

Soft power is not good or bad in itself. It is not necessarily better to twist minds than to twist arms. Osama bin Laden neither threatened nor paid the men who flew aircraft into the World Trade Center—he had attracted them with his ideas. But although soft power can be used to evil ends, its means depend on voluntarism, which is preferable from the point of view of human autonomy.

Hard power, by contrast, rests on inducements by payment or coercion by threat. If someone puts a gun to your head and demands your wallet, it does not matter what you want or think. That is hard power. If that person is trying to persuade you to freely give up your wallet, everything depends on what you want or think. That is soft power.

Sharp power, the deceptive use of information for hostile purposes, is a type of hard power. The manipulation of ideas, political perceptions, and electoral processes has a long history. Both the United States and the Soviet Union resorted to such methods during the Cold War. Authoritarian governments have long tried to use fake news and social disruption to reduce the attractiveness of democracy. In the 1980s, the KGB seeded the rumor that AIDS was the product of U.S. government experiments with biological weapons; the rumor started with an anonymous letter to a small New Delhi newspaper and then was propagated globally by widespread reproduction and constant repetition. In 2016, an updated version of the same technique was used to create "Pizzagate," the false rumor that Hillary Clinton's campaign manager had

abused children in a Washington restaurant.

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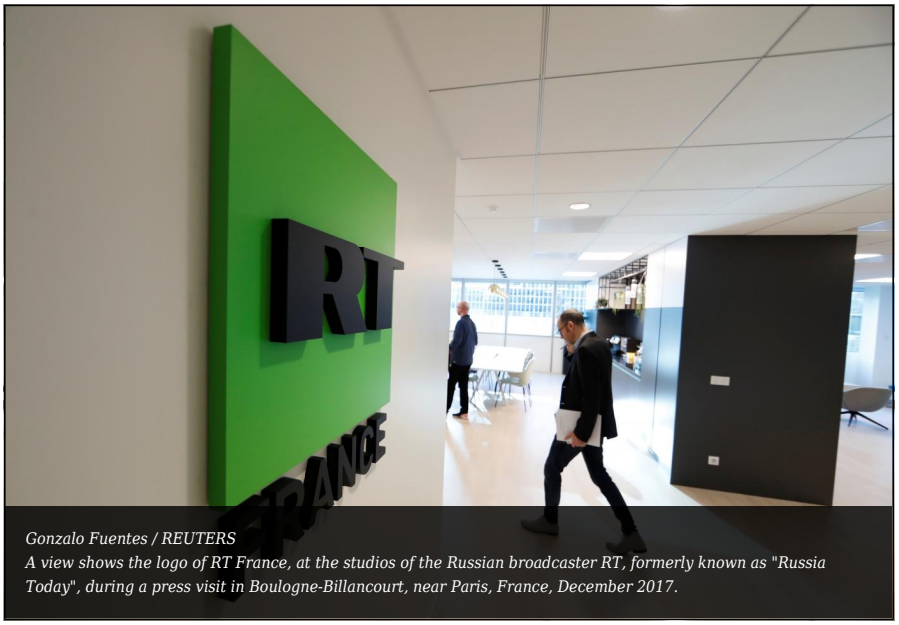
What's new is not the basic model; it's the speed with which such disinformation can spread and the low cost of spreading it. Electrons are cheaper, faster, safer, and more deniable than spies. With its armies of paid trolls and botnets, along with outlets such as Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik, Russian intelligence, after hacking into the e-mails of the Democratic National Committee and senior Clinton campaign officials, could distract and disrupt news cycles week after week.



Gonzalo Fuentes / REUTERS
A view shows the logo of RT France, at the studios of the Russian broadcaster RT, formerly known as "Russia Today", during a press visit in Boulogne-Billancourt, near Paris, France, December 2017.

But if sharp power has disrupted Western democratic processes and tarnished the brand of democratic countries, it has done little to enhance the soft power of its perpetrators—and in some cases it has done the opposite. For Russia, which is focused on playing a spoiler role in international politics, that could be an acceptable cost. China,

however, has other aims that require the soft power of attraction as well as the coercive sharp power of disruption and censorship. These two goals are hard to combine. In Australia, for example, public approval of China was growing, until increasingly alarming accounts of its use of sharp power tools, including meddling in Australian politics, set it back considerably. Overall, China spends $10 billion a year on its soft power instruments, according to George Washington University's David Shambaugh, but it has gotten minimal return on its investment. The "Soft Power 30" index ranks China 25th (and Russia 26th) out of 30 countries assessed.

THE DEMOCRAT'S DILEMMA

Although sharp power and soft power work in very different ways, the distinction between them can be hard to discern—and that's part of what makes responding to sharp power difficult. All persuasion involves choices about how to frame information. Only when that framing shades into deception, which limits the subject's voluntary choices, does it cross the line into coercion. It is this quality—openness and limits on deliberate deception—that distinguishes soft from sharp power. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to see.

In public diplomacy, when Moscow's RT or Beijing's Xinhua broadcasts openly in other countries, it is employing soft power, which should be accepted even if the message is unwelcome. When China Radio International covertly backs radio stations in other countries, that crosses the line into sharp power, which should be exposed. Without proper disclosure, the principle of voluntarism has been breached. (The distinction applies to U.S. diplomacy as well: during the Cold War, secret funding for anticommunist parties in the 1948 Italian election and the CIA's covert support to the Congress for Cultural Freedom were examples of sharp power, not soft power.)

Today’s information environment introduces additional complications. In the 1960s, the broadcaster Edward R. Murrow noted that the most important part of international communications was not the ten thousand miles of electronics, but the final three feet of personal contact. But what does that mean in a world of social media? “Friends” are a click away, and fake friends are easy to fabricate; they can propagate fake news generated by paid trolls and mechanical bots. Discerning the dividing line between soft and sharp power online has become a task not only for governments and the press but also for the private sector.

As democracies respond to sharp power, they have to be careful not to overreact, so as not to undercut their own soft power by following the advice of those who advocate competing with sharp power on the authoritarian model. Much of this soft power comes from civil societies—in the case of Washington, Hollywood, universities, and foundations more than official public diplomacy efforts—and closing down access or ending openness would waste this crucial asset. Authoritarian countries such as China and Russia have trouble generating their own soft power precisely because of their unwillingness to free the vast talents of their civil societies.

Moreover, shutting down legitimate Chinese and Russian soft power tools can be counterproductive. Like any form of power, soft power is often used for competitive zero-sum purposes, but it can also have positive-sum effects. For example, if China and the United States wish to avoid conflict, exchange programs that increase American attraction to China, and vice versa, can be good for both countries. And on transnational challenges such as climate change, soft power can help build the trust and networks that make cooperation possible. Yet as much as it would be a mistake to prohibit Chinese soft power efforts simply because they sometimes shade into sharp power, it is important to monitor the

dividing line carefully. Take the 500 Confucius Institutes and 1,000 Confucius classrooms that China supports in universities and schools around the world to teach Chinese language and culture. Government backing does not mean they are necessarily a sharp power threat. The BBC also gets government backing but is independent enough to remain a credible soft power instrument. Only when a Confucius Institute crosses the line and tries to infringe on academic freedom (as has occurred in some instances) should it be treated as sharp power.

To respond to the threat, democracies should be careful about offensive actions. Information warfare can play a useful tactical role on the battlefield, as in the war against the Islamic State (or ISIS). But it would be a mistake for them to imitate the authoritarians and launch major programs of covert information warfare. Such actions would not stay covert for long and when revealed would undercut soft power.

In the realm of defensive measures, meanwhile, there are some steps that democratic governments can take to counter the authoritarians' aggressive information warfare techniques, including cyberattacks on political processes and elections. Democracies have not yet developed adequate strategies for deterrence and resilience. They will also have to be more attentive to making sure that Russian and Chinese soft power programs, such as Confucius Institutes, do not slip into "sharp" power. But openness remains the best defense: faced with this challenge, the press, academics, civic organizations, government, and the private sector should focus on exposing information warfare techniques, inoculating the public by exposure.

Fortunately, that is another edge that democracies have over dictatorships. It is true that the openness of democratic societies provides opportunities for authoritarian governments to employ age-old techniques of information

warfare. But openness is also a key source of democracies' ability to attract and persuade. Even with the mounting use of sharp power, they have little to fear in open competition with autocracies for soft power. By reducing themselves to the level of their adversaries, democracies would squander their key advantage.

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The Remarkable Scale of Turkey's "Global Purge"

How It Became a Threat to the Rule of Law Everywhere

Nate Schenkkan

AMMAR AWAD / REUTERS

Taksim square in Istanbul, Turkey, July 17, 2016.

In October of last year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke at a gathering of his Justice and Development Party (AKP) about the steps that have been taken so far to eliminate the Islamic movement of the exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen whom he blames for organizing the July 15, 2016, coup attempt. After describing some of the domestic measures that

he has pursued to stamp out the group, known officially as the Fethullahist Terror Organization (FETO), Erdogan noted his desire to also take down its networks abroad.

“Neither in the East nor in the West is a single member of this organization comfortable as before, nor will they be,” he said. “If not today, then tomorrow, one day every member of the FETO traitors’ front will pay for his treason against the country and the nation.”

These were not idle words. Since before the coup attempt, but with frantic intensity since then, the Turkish state has been hunting its opponents abroad, especially those who belong to the Gulen movement. In at least 46 countries across four continents, Turkey has pursued an aggressive policy to silence its perceived enemies and has allegedly used Interpol as a political tool to target its opponents. Ankara has revoked thousands of passports, and achieved the arrest, deportation, or rendition of hundreds of Turkish citizens from at least 16 countries, including many who were under UN protection as asylum seekers. It has successfully pressured at least 20 countries to close or transfer to new owners dozens, perhaps hundreds, of Gulen movement schools.

Turkey is not unique in pursuing its opponents abroad, nor is it the first time it has done so. But this “global purge,” which mirrors the effort after the coup attempt to rid Turkey’s domestic institutions of anyone associated with Gulen, is remarkable in its speed, scale, and aggression. It demonstrates how normal what the political scientist Dana M. Moss calls “transnational repression” has become, and how its widespread application has demolished the hope that the globalization of a liberal order would result in democratic consolidation.

THE BACKBONE OF TURKEY’S SOFT POWER

Turkey's global purge cannot be understood without examining the Gulen movement, which is a part of Turkey's diaspora and, until recently, a part of the state's soft power. The movement grew in Turkey around its charismatic leader, Fetullah Gulen, during the 1970s, and survived the military coup of 1980 by aligning itself with successive juntas and secular governments. Its domestic promotion of a modernizing, nationalist Islam fit well within the doctrine of "Turkish-Islamic synthesis," which flourished after the 1980 coup. It was used by the junta and successive Turkish governments to promote the idea of Islamic identity as a key plank of Turkish nationalism and to beat back the perceived threat of a leftist revolution.

The Gulen movement was thus aligned with the state at the end of the Cold War and during Turkey's period of economic liberalization, both of which gave the country a new opportunity to project soft power abroad. First in the Balkans and in Central Asia, which were regions newly opened to outside influence and where Turkey held historical advantages, the state pursued and facilitated development and investment while also building cultural and educational ties as a means to extend Turkish influence and access new consumer markets. But Turkey lacked the financial and human resources to pursue a truly global foreign policy, and so the Gulen schools served as a beachhead.

The movement's schools abroad also became the backbone of its international network. Focusing on the cultivation of elites to form a "golden generation," the schools adapted themselves to local circumstances as needed, providing high-quality education in math and science and in local or international languages, with only a smattering of relatively anodyne Turkish nationalism, and with little or no religious overlay. For the Turkish state, the benefits were clear. Gulen schools portrayed Turkey as a mystical but adaptable and open-minded country, and became a place for building

intimate connections with elites and their children in dozens of countries.

Starting in the early 2000s, the role of these schools expanded dramatically under successive AKP governments. In 1999, Gulen himself fled Turkey for the United States, fearing he would be caught in the military's crackdown on those associated with the previous government led by the Islamist Welfare Party. He remained exiled even after the AKP won a majority in the 2002 parliamentary elections, and even as the alliance between the movement and the ruling party grew closer. The AKP was in that phase a big tent party, capturing various strands of Islamism and conservative businessmen, as well as liberals and minorities sick of nationalistic military interventions. The movement comprised only a small portion of the party's base, but it played key roles in supplying well-educated cadres for the civil service and military and in promoting the government both domestically and abroad through its media and civil society arms.

The alliance did produce a "golden generation" for Turkey's international profile, at least. With the movement as its proxy, the AKP embraced a soft power vision for Turkey that cast the country as modern, capitalist, and Islamic—a "model" for the Middle East at a time when the United States and Western Europe were desperately looking for good news from the region. It expanded its diplomatic efforts with new initiatives in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. The movement's media, especially the flagship English-language daily Today's Zaman, were a major part of Turkey's image overhaul in this period. And wherever the Turkish state went, Gulen schools were erected.

A VIOLENT SPLIT

In late 2013, however, the movement and the AKP had a falling-out over increasingly divergent positions on the

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Israel, and government corruption. The tensions peaked between December 17 and December 25, 2013, when police arrested 52 people, including the sons of three cabinet ministers, the head of the state-owned HalkBank, and the gold trader Reza Zarrab, on accusations of engaging in grand corruption. The government denounced the arrests, claiming they were an attempt to illegally usurp power, and squelched the scandal over the next several months through a series of purges of the police and judiciary. In the Turkish government's official narrative, the December 17–25 arrests were part of a string of "soft" efforts to overthrow the government engineered by its enemies, which culminated in the hard coup attempt of July 15, 2016.

Since the failed coup attempt, Turkey has exerted diplomatic pressure on various governments to arrest or deport hundreds of individuals from around the world. By my count, 15 countries have arrested or deported various representatives of the movement, ranging from supposed financiers to schoolteachers. Those countries include Angola, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Georgia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Morocco, Myanmar, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Turkmenistan. Their diversity gives a sense of how dispersed the Gulen movement is and how aggressively the Turkish government has behaved. In at least three cases—Kazakhstan, Myanmar, and Sudan—individuals appear to have been turned over to Turkey without judicial proceedings, perhaps through the operation of a special National Intelligence Organization unit that Turkey's state news agency says was established to track down "high-value" Gulenists.

There have also been multiple cases in which those deported were apparently seeking asylum and thus had protected status at the time they were sent to Turkey: news reports say this was the case in Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bulgaria, Malaysia,

and Pakistan. Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov admitted that the August 2016 deportation of a software engineer who had applied for asylum before the coup attempt was "on the edge of the law." In other cases, like in Angola, Pakistan, and Qatar, there were mass deportations following the closure of Gulen schools.

The global purge has also touched Interpol. In December, the AP reported that Interpol representatives were examining up to 40,000 extradition requests, some perhaps from Turkey, for possible political abuse. The report came after a number of high-profile cases involving Turks abroad, including Dogan Akhanli, a left-wing writer with dual German and Turkish citizenship who was arrested and forced to remain in Spain for two months while Spanish authorities assessed Turkey's extradition request.

The movement's schools are under extreme pressure in the global purge. Since its falling-out with the Gulenist movement in 2013, the government has been pressing other countries to shutter the schools. The Gambia closed its Gulen schools in April 2014. Turkey's close ally Azerbaijan followed soon thereafter and Tajikistan shut down its Gulen schools in 2015. But elsewhere in the world, these schools largely remained open until the coup attempt of July 2016, after which Turkey increased the pressure. The results were quick. Schools were almost immediately closed in Jordan, Libya, and Somalia. Angola, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Morocco, and Tanzania followed suit in early 2017. Before the year was out, Afghanistan, Chad, Georgia, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sudan, and Tunisia had all closed or transferred schools. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said in October 2017 that the government had forced the closure of schools in 15 countries, but news reports indicate that he is understating the results.

A "TRAITORS' FRONT"

The arrests and deportations have spread fear throughout Turkey's diaspora, which understands what Ankara's intelligence service is capable of once a group is marked as the enemy. In the most dramatic example prior to the coup attempt, the assassination of three PKK–connected activists in 2013 in Paris was widely attributed to the National Intelligence Organization (MIT). (The intelligence agency denied responsibility.) German officials have discussed the issue of the MIT threatening the Turkish diaspora in their country and Dutch officials have raised concerns about Turkey's religious affairs body, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, monitoring Turks abroad. Pro-government commentators, such as Cem Kucuk, have talked casually about how MIT should kill members of the Gulen movement abroad.

The fear extends beyond the Gulen movement. Erdogan's reference to a "traitors' front" in his October speech to the AKP is not just rhetoric. In the Turkish government's official version of events, the Gulen movement entered into an alliance with the PKK, which Ankara considers a terrorist group, and its Syrian affiliate the PYD. Together with other leftist groups, this alliance supposedly engineered a series of coup attempts against the state that started with the Gezi Park protests in mid-2013. The latter was led by Turkish liberals, and thus, Turkey's purge has also targeted leftist and pro-Kurdish voices. In fact, 31 percent of all those arrested in government operations under the state of emergency, which has been in place since October 2016, were associated with Kurdish or leftist groups, according to official figures compiled by iHop, a Turkish human rights monitoring group. Nearly 400 academics who signed a petition before the coup attempt calling for peace between the state and the PKK in January 2016 have also been fired, and some have left Turkey or remained abroad. Others who have been convicted or charged while outside the country now fear traveling because

of the threat of detention due to Interpol notices.

A GLOBAL THREAT

What is so concerning about Turkey's global purge is that transnational repression is increasingly woven into the fabric of the international order. Civil-society movements and non-state actors weren't the only ones who gained from the globalization of finance, travel, and instantaneous communications. Nation-states did, too. Our globalized era affords nation-states new and cheaper opportunities to pursue exiles, dissidents, and regular citizens wherever they may be, through monitoring and surveillance, international law enforcement mechanisms such as Interpol, and collaboration between security services. Turkey's abilities in this department may not match those of China, Russia, or the United States, but as the global purge shows, they can get results when applied bluntly.

The global purge matters for understanding where Turkey is headed in foreign policy and in its internal trajectory. Turkey's much-vaunted soft power in the 2002–2013 period depended to a large degree on having the Gulen movement serve as a government proxy in the educational, media, and cultural spheres. There are some similarities between the more state-directed approach post-coup attempt and what the scholars Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig have described as "sharp power." But achieving real "sharp power"—and not simply repression—will require a more sophisticated and less inward-looking frame than what Turkey currently uses.

In terms of Turkey's domestic politics, the impact of the global purge on Turkish exile communities' political organizing may determine the stability of the personalized authoritarian system Erdogan is creating in what he and the AKP call the "new Turkey." Given the size of the country's

diaspora and the battered condition of democratic institutions at home, the capacity of Turkey to limit its population's exercise of speech and associational rights outside its borders could determine whether viable democratic alternatives to authoritarian rule emerge.

Finally, the global purge further erodes hopes that the end of the Cold War and expansion of the liberal order would result in democratic consolidation. Rather than hemming authoritarian states in with a network of obligations and commitments that would eventually "socialize" them to rules-based democracy, authoritarian states are using the international system to accomplish a socialization of their own, turning the international order into a system of nation-states mutually committed to policing each others' populations abroad while imposing domestic constraints on rights and liberties beyond their borders. The global purge is a threat not just to the Turkish diaspora but to the rule of law everywhere.

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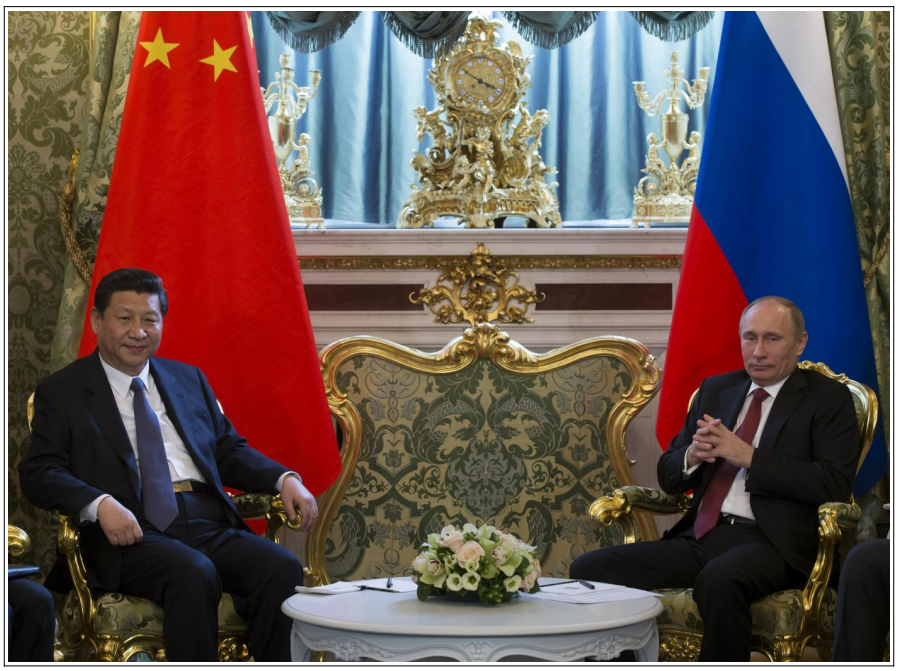
Has a New Cold War Really Begun?

Why the Term Shouldn't Apply to Today's Great-Power Tensions

Odd Arne Westad



ALEXANDER ZEMLIANICHENKO / REUTERS

Russian President Vladimir Putin meets with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping at the Kremlin in Moscow, March 2013.

For about four years now, since Russia's occupation of Crimea and China's launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, there has been much speculation about whether another Cold War between East and West is coming. In the last month

alone, headlines have proclaimed that "The New Cold War Is Here," heralded "Putin's New Cold War," and warned that "Trump Is Preparing for a New Cold War." But are we really returning to the past? Contemporary politics is full of false analogies, and the return of the Cold War seems to be one of them.

At its peak, the Cold War was a global system of countries centered on the United States and the Soviet Union. It did not determine everything that was going on in the world of international affairs, but it influenced most things. At its core was an ideological contest between capitalism and socialism that had been going on throughout the twentieth century, with each side fervently dedicated to its system of economics and governance. It was a bipolar system of total victory or total defeat, in which neither of the main protagonists could envisage a lasting compromise with the other. The Cold War was intense, categorical, and highly dangerous: strategic nuclear weapons systems were intended to destroy the superpower opponent, even at a cost of devastating half the world.

Today's international affairs are in large part murky and challenging, but they are a far cry from Cold War absolutes. Calling twenty-first-century great-power tensions a new Cold War therefore obscures more than it reveals. It is a kind of terminological laziness that equates the conflicts of yesteryear, which most analysts happen to know well, with what takes place today. Although many echoes and remnants of the Cold War are still with us, the determinants and conduct of international affairs have changed.

Although many echoes and remnants of the Cold War are still with us, the determinants and conduct of international affairs have changed.

Russia’s truculent and obstructionist foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin comes from a sense of having lost the Cold War in the 1980s and having suffered the consequences of the defeat in the 1990s. Many Russians hold the West responsible for the chaos and decay that befell their country under Boris Yeltsin’s presidency. They miss the respect that the Soviet Union got as the other superpower (even though few miss the dreariness of the Soviet state itself). They cherish a strong president who, they believe, has given Russia its self-respect back by sticking it to the West as often as possible, just as they welcome the inner stability that they believe Putin has given Russia.

China, on the other hand, believes that its unprecedented economic growth has given it the status of a predominant power in the region—it is no longer a pawn for others as it was during the Cold War. If the Cold War was holding China back, then the post–Cold War era has set China free to act on its own behalf, as many Chinese believe. Meanwhile, Communist Party leaders are obsessively studying how the Soviet Union collapsed, in order to avoid a similar fate for their country. China (and everyone else) has inherited the North Korea imbroglio from the Cold War, as well as a deep resentment of what most Chinese see as U.S. global hegemony.

On the U.S. side, the main echo of the Cold War is a sense—very prominent among President Donald Trump’s voters, but also apparent elsewhere—that Washington has been taken advantage of by others. As the argument goes, throughout the Cold War, the United States delivered security on the cheap for the rest of the capitalist world while American allies helped themselves to U.S. money and jobs, giving little in return. Many U.S. voters feel that their country, having won the Cold War, gained next to nothing as a result. The current administration is thus shedding systemic responsibilities in favor of much narrower U.S. interests.

These are aspects of how the Cold War created the world we live in now. But today's international affairs have moved beyond the Cold War.

Bipolarity is gone. If there is any direction in international politics today, it is toward multipolarity. The United States is getting less powerful in international affairs. China is getting more powerful. Europe is stagnant. Russia is a dissatisfied scavenger on the fringes of the current order. But other big countries such as India and Brazil are growing increasingly influential within their regions.

Ideology is no longer the main determinant. China, Europe, India, Russia, and the United States disagree on many things, but not on the value of capitalism and markets. China and Russia are both authoritarian states that pretend to have representative governments. But neither is out to peddle their system to faraway places, as they did during the Cold War. Even the United States, the master promoter of political values, seems less likely to do so under Trump's "America first" agenda.

Nationalism is also on the rise. Having had a hard time reasserting itself after the ravages of two nationalist-fueled world wars and a Cold War that emphasized non-national ideologies, all great powers are now stressing identity and national interest as main features of international affairs. Cold War internationalists claimed that the national category would matter less and less. The post–Cold War era has proven them wrong. Nationalists have thrived on the wreckage of ideology-infused grand schemes for the betterment of humankind.

Whatever international system is being created at the moment, it is not a Cold War. It may turn out to be conflict-ridden and confrontational, but using "Cold War" as common denominator for everything we don't like makes no sense.

Instead, we should try to understand how perceived lessons from the past influences thinking about the present. If we want to apply history to policymaking, we must learn to be as alert to differences as we are to analogies.

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May 2, 2018

The Pentagon's Transparency Problem

Why Accurate Troop Levels Are So Hard to Find

Loren DeJonge Schulman and Alice Friend

YURI GRIPAS / REUTERS

U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis in Arlington, Virginia, April 2018.

With the war in Afghanistan now in its 17th year, the U.S. military is engaged in the longest stretch of armed conflict in its history. And yet its leaders are keeping the American public in the dark about its operations around the world, while seeking to obscure what little information is available.

Secrecy surrounding the U.S. military isn't new: under President Barack Obama, the Department of Defense (DOD) used creative accounting strategies, such as excluding temporary deployments from official tallies, to keep reported troop levels beneath caps set by the White House. And no president has been capable of publicly confirming the total number and cost of military personnel, civilians, and contractors necessary to support U.S. operations overseas. Still, recent administrations have understood that the public relies on troop levels as an imperfect marker of American strategy, commitment, and even success, and have shared force management levels as planning tools and contributions to public dialogue.

But President Donald Trump has stepped back from this precedent, making evasiveness a focal point of his administration's security strategy. "We no longer tell our enemies our plans," the president bragged during his January State of the Union, recalling his campaign promise to keep his strategy to defeat the Islamic State (ISIS) a secret so that no enemies could benefit from it.

Trump's commitment to secrecy, once a punchline among policy elites, has been widely embraced throughout the national security establishment. The secrets, moreover, are kept not only from Washington's enemies but also from the American public. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, for instance, has carefully curtailed his public communication (partly to avoid contradicting his boss) and has held very few on-camera press conferences. Both Mattis and former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson made a point to reduce the number of journalists accompanying them on trips abroad. And the DOD has issued severe warnings to its staff about dealing with the press—in the most recent case, the Air Force ordered officials to freeze their engagement with the media until they had completed new operational security training, a justification that many analysts questioned.

But perhaps the most consequential change has been an unstated decision to offer significantly less information to the American people on where, and for what purpose, U.S. troops are in combat overseas. With Trump's encouragement, the Pentagon has transitioned from its Obama-era policy of applying public caps on deployed forces, set by the White House, to quietly controlling its own force management levels. The DOD has welcomed this newfound autonomy, using it to ramp up operations without requesting permission from the White House. And in the absence of any public fanfare surrounding its moves, it has generally kept information on troop movements close to the vest. As a result, official U.S. troop levels are no longer a poor but still useful proxy for Washington's strategy and commitment—and no alternative has yet filled in the void.

Baz Ratner / Reuters
U.S. Army soldiers fire artillery in Afghanistan's Kandahar province, June 2011.

FOG OF WAR

Troop levels in operational theaters are complex. Simple tallies of U.S. personnel in a wartime theater have never been immediately accessible, an astonishing gap to anyone who's

never worked with the Pentagon. Nevertheless, Americans have usually been able to gain an understanding of U.S. military commitments through force management levels set by the executive branch. These levels are set for a number of reasons: to accord with host nation agreements for how many U.S. troops may operate in a country; to incentivize or govern multilateral commitments (as when U.S. troops were limited to 15 percent of the overall NATO force in Kosovo); to indicate priorities (as in the Iraq and Afghanistan surges); to serve as a ceiling on U.S. commitment; or to serve as a set of milestones for withdrawal.

The Obama administration's first major national security debates were over Afghanistan, where force management levels became a strategic shorthand. Particularly after the beginning of the surge in 2009, force management levels were used to shape the drawdown of U.S. forces, first in Iraq and later in Afghanistan, setting public guideposts and making real Obama's promise that the "tide of war is receding." Nearly all were accompanied by a coordinated series of speeches, talking points, or fact sheets to affirm the president's intentions and to establish a target for his critics.

But any defense nerd will tell you that such troop caps are made to be manipulated. The military despises the use of personnel limits to constrain security objectives, and force planners have become quite artful at working around these caps. Short-term deployments such as those frequently done by special forces were not counted under the Obama administration's caps, nor was the use of contractors. Consequently, when Mattis came into office in early 2017, he inherited a system that did not track the actual level of U.S. forces in operational theaters abroad. This, combined with the new freedom from White House force management levels and presidentially encouraged secrecy, meant that for much of 2017 the Pentagon did not and, by its own accounting, could not give thorough assessments of its force levels in

Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria.

Mattis, confronted regularly by the press about the DOD's lack of transparency and inconsistent reporting, claimed that he had set out to change this, for his own purposes and for public consumption. In December 2017, the Pentagon did eventually announce that the United States had 2,000 troops in Syria. This followed months, however, in which it claimed that only 500 U.S. troops were in the country, even as the DOD's own bureaucratic data source, the Defense Manpower Data Center (which publicly reports on all kinds of personnel data), had long indicated a far higher number.

The disconnect was baffling. And the absence of a public reckoning about the United States' commitments in Syria was not merely a data problem. U.S. forces lacked guidance on their mission as ISIS neared defeat and geopolitical dynamics in the country became more complex; in one remarkable hour this spring, President Trump announced a likely withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria just as his senior commander for the region suggested a long-term American commitment to the mission.

> *Senior defense officials may enjoy their newfound autonomy, but they are exercising it at the cost of openness with the American people.*

Afghanistan has a similar story. After months of rumors, last fall the public belatedly learned that official troop levels in the country had increased from around 8,500 to over 15,000, following Trump's vague strategy announcement in August promising a stronger U.S. military presence in the country. This data, too, was part of a Pentagon attempt at more accurate accounting. Yet neither the Pentagon nor the White House has since formally explained what this new strategy would mean in terms of additional American blood and treasure, nor what Washington's objectives are. General

Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has referred to the administration's Afghanistan mission as "a fundamentally different approach" from anything previous, but no official has taken the podium to lay out precisely what those differences are. And the White House seems fine with that.

Other theaters have also seen troop buildups without much strategic fanfare. In Somalia, the number of U.S. troops grew from 50 to around 500 in 2017. Indeed, estimates of U.S. deployments across Africa have also recently crept upward. In October 2017, Dunford stated that approximately 6,000 U.S. personnel were deployed to the continent. But in March, Thomas Waldhauser, the commander of U.S. Africa Command, put the number at 7,200. These increases were generally not publicly announced, bypassing any dialogue about adjustments in strategy, focus, or risk.

BACKSLIDING ON TRANSPARENCY

These are just a few examples. But they suggest a larger pattern: after years of purported micromanagement by the Obama White House, the DOD is now taking full advantage of its freedom to manage deployments as it sees fit without drawing attention to the process. In this, the Pentagon is supported by Trump, who has said "I defer to my generals" on more than one occasion and has been happy to delegate decisions and responsibility to top military officials.

But the president is not the only one to whom the Pentagon is accountable. Senior defense officials may enjoy their newfound autonomy, but they are exercising it at the cost of openness with the American people.

What, where, and how the U.S. military is operating overseas does tend to come out, if grudgingly. But despite Mattis himself pledging better access and to fix continued

discrepancies of force levels that began in the Obama administration, such reforms have been slow, and they have been delinked from the strategic choices that such levels imperfectly represent. Under Trump, the Pentagon has at best belatedly or reactively come forward with some approximation of troop levels and mission changes in relevant theaters. And the Pentagon's stubborn refusal to confirm regularly leaked troop increases lends an air of absurdity to the institution while diminishing the credibility of the men and women tasked with speaking for the military. Even workarounds are limited: after years of being able to generally rely on the Defense Manpower Data Center to offer a glimpse into deployment statistics when Pentagon spokespeople were tight-lipped, last month DOD stripped out Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria numbers from its quarterly reports.

Trump has also walked back transparency measures introduced under his predecessor. Data on air strikes and civilian casualties, which the Obama administration took slow and painful steps to publicize, have become harder to find for a number of theaters, despite the fact that, as former Obama administration counterterrorism officials Luke Hartig and Joshua Geltzer argue, such transparency "went a long way toward meaningfully building at least some trust with the local population and a modicum of tolerance for the operations." Hartig and Geltzer further reveal that the Trump administration is now only releasing aggregate data on air strikes in Yemen, which have substantially increased in frequency, and has offered no public justification as to why the tempo of operations is ramping up. Similarly, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism has shown that strikes in Afghanistan, once a model for operational transparency, also receive less acknowledgement and detail.

JONATHAN ERNST / REUTERS

Trump (L) and Mattis in Norfolk, Virginia, July 2017.

In another break from its predecessors, in 2016 the Obama White House released a report on the legal and policy frameworks guiding U.S. military operations—a practice that is now required by the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. Yet Trump's first transparency report, although unclassified, was not released to the public, which learned about it only after a leaked version was reported in The New York Times.

Over a year of administration reticence to discuss its military operations overseas has sent a message to defense officials to deprioritize transparency and the dialogue that typically accompanies it. The DOD's actions have, as a result, fallen short of the engagement necessary to inform public debate. In general, Trump administration military operations are not the subject of signature and commitment-laden national security speeches or announcements of changes in strategy as usually seen in prior administrations; rather, they trickle out after the

fact via responses to query, occasional public reports, or, at worst, leaks.

PEOPLE POWER

Votel, Mattis, and other defense officials seem to believe that their secrecy is justified. Mattis has suggested that operational security limits his ability to publicize troop buildups and missions, saying that he would avoid doing so “if it involves telling the enemy something that will help them.”

There is a reasonable argument to be made that this lack of transparency increases military effectiveness. The less adversaries know about the U.S. force structure in a given theater, the less they can threaten U.S. troops. Moreover, public discussions of troop numbers can be misconstrued as caps, which can in turn be interpreted as a limited U.S. commitment. For the United States’ enemies in Afghanistan and the Middle East, it is not hard to test Washington’s will to fight: one need merely tune in to public discussions about the American people’s tolerance for boots on the ground. Military commanders and civilian defense leaders alike tend to believe that when it comes to details about deployments, less is more.

The problem with this approach, however, is that it assumes that domestic support for U.S. military engagements can be sustained in an information vacuum. It draws on a reservoir of public faith in the military while also limiting the public’s ability to make an informed decision. This is a losing gamble, as it will eventually wear away the public’s sense of investment in either the nation’s wars or its military, decoupling the use of force from domestic politics.

Separating government action from public preferences in this way is undemocratic. Military operations should serve domestic politics, not vice versa. Worse, in a news market saturated with excellent reporting on the one hand and

inaccurate, misleading, or partisan news stories on the other, there is no such thing as a true information vacuum. If the military is not open about what it is doing, other parties will fill the void. And some of those parties will be the very adversaries U.S. secrecy is meant to undermine.

From a policy perspective, moreover, force levels are a lousy way to conduct a conversation that should be about strategy. Neither troop numbers nor missions explain much of anything. But they do start a conversation. And from the perspective of domestic politics, troop levels are indeed a litmus test for the scope and scale of the American public's commitment to a particular conflict, and one of civilians' best windows into the operations of their country's military. Transparency can create some operational vulnerability. But it can also communicate what political scientists call a credible commitment—doing something less advantageous to oneself to indicate seriousness about an agreement or strategy. The political scientist Kenneth Schultz has shown that when a democracy goes through public discussions about the use of force and rallies behind a military action, it communicates its commitment especially clearly.

Whatever the Pentagon's intent, by all appearances the United States now has a DOD that is reluctant to explain coherently, and to audiences that matter, where it is deploying U.S. troops overseas, what they are doing there, why they are doing it, and what the legal basis for their actions is. From the Pentagon's perspective, there is little reason to change—as long as it meets its mandated reporting requirements, faces no legal challenges to its interpretation of the 2001 Authorization of the Use of Military Force, and continues to receive its operational budgets, nothing stands in its way. And with a president willing to constantly defer to his generals, nothing is likely to.

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June 20, 2018

Reeducation Returns to China

Will the Repression in Xinjiang Influence Beijing's Social Credit System?

Adrian Zenz

THOMAS PETER / REUTERS

A police patrol walk in front of the Id Kah Mosque in the old city of Kashgar, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China, March 2017.

In recent months, troubling details have emerged about a sprawling network of secretive political reeducation camps in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang. Both official and leaked evidence indicates that up to one million Muslims, chiefly from the Uighur minority, have been interned without

legal proceedings. Ex-internees describe vast facilities that can hold nearly 6,000 persons and are heavily secured with barbed wire, surveillance systems, and armed police. Government tenders confirm these reports and provide detailed insights into the sizes and features of reeducation facilities throughout the region. Those interned are subject to intense indoctrination procedures that force them to proclaim "faith" in the Chinese Communist Party while denigrating large parts of their own religion and culture.

When asked by the international media, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that it "had not heard" of this situation. Clearly, Beijing has ample reason to avoid the topic. The fact that a core region of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative is littered with internment camps is not a pretty picture to convey to the global community. After all, the last memorable time that one million or more members of a particular ethnicity or religion were interned in barbed-wire-clad compounds was under Nazi Germany—even though the intention in Xinjiang is political indoctrination rather than extermination. China also just abolished its nationwide reeducation through labor system in 2013, a system instituted under Mao Zedong to reform "opponents of socialism." Both the leadership and the population felt that sending people into such camps without legal proceedings, merely at the whims of local police authorities, was no longer appropriate in a modern society governed by the rule of law. The fact that Xinjiang's current reeducation network might outstrip the size of the entire former national system is decidedly disconcerting.

The roots of China's denial of the unfolding human rights disaster in Xinjiang might be deeper still. The reeducation campaign has been a profound shock even to seasoned observers of Beijing's policies in its restive western regions. From a broader perspective, however, it merely represents the logical culmination of Beijing's wider strategy to reassert

control over the spiritual-moral realm of society. The regime's willingness to subject an entire ethnic group to inhumane indoctrination procedures simply reflects a consistent application of communist praxis to a people who stubbornly insist on maintaining their own ethnoreligious identity. But reeducation is not a specialized tool reserved for assimilating restive minorities. Any citizen is liable to some form of reeducation if he or she fails to align with a prescribed set of values and behaviors. In the nation in general, different reeducation practices could potentially be administered in tandem with the upcoming national social credit system, because the latter is ideally suited to evaluate and enforce state-sanctioned definitions of morality.

THE FAILURE OF MARXIST MATERIALISM?

After the Cultural Revolution, China's leadership realized that the improvement of basic material conditions was an urgent priority. The resulting "reform and opening up" under Deng Xiaoping placed the nation on a path of unprecedented economic growth. Deng's successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, realized the need for a more equal distribution of the resulting economic windfall, especially in the less developed western minority regions. Following the basic Marxist tenet that material progress and societal modernization will rid the nation of the superstitious hold of religion, both continued to emphasize economic development as China's key strategy for pacifying and integrating restive ethnic groups such as Tibetans and Uighurs.

More than anything else, the 2008 Lhasa uprising and the 2009 Urumqi riots demonstrated to Beijing that economic growth and the trappings of modernity had not won the hearts of Tibetans and Uighurs. In both cases, religion played an important role in the reassertion of ethnic identity. Tibetans continue to revere the Dalai Lama, whose so-called clique was quickly identified by the state as the presumed

external agent behind the 2008 uprising. Tibetan Buddhist monasteries had become important loci of ethnic meaning and pride for the Tibetan population and had played an important role in the revival of the Tibetan language, and monks were repeatedly involved in protests and self-immolations. The authorities identified Islam as a primary culprit for violent resistance among the Uighurs and are quick to identify Uighur Islamic State (ISIS) fighters abroad as a major threat to national security. Western Xinjiang experts have pointed out that by blaming violent resistance even on non-extremist expressions of religion and increasingly suppressing any religious practice whatsoever, Beijing turned the Islamic extremist threat into a self-fulfilling prophecy by pushing the Uighurs into organized forms of militant resistance.

Meanwhile, religious ideology had also made strong inroads among the Han majority. Today's China is home to millions of Catholics and Protestants, along with large numbers of adherents of traditional Chinese religions such as Chinese Buddhism or Taoism. According to estimates from the Pew Research Center, China may be home to up to 100 million Christians as of 2018, more than the estimated 90 million Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members. (Many Party members themselves secretly adhere to a religion.) Equally troubling was the fact that even in regions with strong economic growth, distinct religious as well as ethnic identities have been flourishing rather than weakening. My own fieldwork among Tibetans in the wake of the Lhasa uprising showed that in the face of ethnic conflict, quite a few of the more Sinicized Tibetan students (in terms of language and cultural habits) became acutely concerned about the survival of their ethnic group's distinctiveness.

By the time that Hu handed the baton to his successor, Xi, in 2012, it had become increasingly evident that the classic Marxist-materialist strategy of replacing the "crutch" of religion through improved material conditions and

enlightened scientific reasoning was failing. Globally, predictions that religious faiths would naturally decline in tandem with modernization have proved illusory. In this context, it is only logical that Xi has accelerated the regime shift from a materialist to a spiritual and ideological focus, or in Marxist terms, from base to superstructure. The Chinese regime has always maintained an uneasy relationship with religion. But how could it come to a point where even largely secular Christmas parties or the mere possession of a government-approved Koran translation or Muslim prayer mat have become practices deemed subversive to the state?

MEASURING CITIZENS' TRUSTWORTHINESS

Historically, authoritarian regimes have tended to fear their own populations. In China, state trust and distrust of individuals and populations is apparently measured along two axes. Firstly, in ethnocultural terms, it is measured by distance from the core of Han culture, language, and ethnicity. This means that minorities with strongly distinct linguistic and other traits are inherently suspect, explaining for example the obsession of Xinjiang's reeducation camps with forcing even elderly Uighurs to memorize Chinese characters. In network studies it has been shown that homophily, the love of sameness, is an important predictor of trust. Secondly, the state measures the trustworthiness of its citizens by their alignment with "core socialist values." This set of 12 values, first presented at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, has become the new standard for measuring positive behavior and moral character, a standard in direct competition with religion. Notably, the first individual value of this set is patriotism. These values, some of which are similar to Confucian visions of social harmony under autocratic yet benevolent leadership, are now taught to children starting from kindergarten.

The combination of these two scales results in a unique blend

of what one might call socialism with Han-centric characteristics. Minorities such as Uighurs are especially affected since they are not only culturally and linguistically distinct but also hold on to a comprehensive religious worldview. The link between Islamic extremism and violent resistance fuels this perception. In Xinjiang, an official government document portrayed reeducation as “free medical treatment” from an intoxicating addiction. A Han Chinese official bluntly compared it to spraying weed killer on a field.

THOMAS PETER / REUTERS

A police officer talks to men in a street in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China, March 2017.

But the state’s morality project also targets the Han who are religious or otherwise affected by so-called foreign cultural and ideological influences. In southeastern Jiangxi Province, party members told residents they were “melting the hard ice in the hearts of religious believers” and “helping turn them into believers in the party.” Even Taoism, an indigenous Chinese religion, is now required to "Sinicize" by discarding

its “superstitious” elements, while being permitted to retain beliefs compatible with “core socialist values” such as not believing in an afterlife. In their battle for the minds of the next generation, Chinese authorities have been rapidly increasing restrictions on religious practice in relations to minors, banning religious teaching activities for children such as Christian Sunday schools or Muslim school holiday scripture classes. In Xinjiang, worshippers now have to scan their ID when entering a Christian church, and an alarm will ring if the person in question works for the government or a public institution. Entrances to mosques feature facial recognition cameras and those attending must register with the police.

Deng’s policy of economic growth through opening up represented a strongly incentives-based approach. Those who aligned with Han Chinese cultural norms and who did not overstep certain boundaries set by the state could often reap the resulting material benefits. Xi’s China continues to offer material rewards for cultural integration but has also massively ramped up the coercive side, increasing the consequences of ideological misalignment in the context of vastly increased surveillance capabilities.

AN APARTHEID-LIKE SYSTEM

As Chinese society and its social management by the state is becoming increasingly complex, the government plans to introduce a nationwide social credit system by 2020. But unlike Western credit scoring systems, China’s upcoming social credit system is much more comprehensive in nature, not restricted to the economic realm but also designed to measure a person’s moral character. Not only can Beijing use this new system to gradually force out the competition in the form of other religions and effectively impose its own version of morality but Chinese citizens could additionally receive negative credit for practicing unapproved expression of

religiosity.

Here, it is possible to see how Xinjiang's reeducation drive could end up influencing the nation's future social credit system: those who end up falling below a certain score could be required to undergo reeducation treatments to greater or lesser degrees. As in Xinjiang, reeducation could take place along a continuum, ranging from daytime courses in moderately secured facilities versus longer internments in more secured compounds and under tougher, military-drill-style conditions.

> *The social credit system could promote a more subtle form of preemptive obedience by providing continual incentives to align one's behavior with the standards of an all-seeing state.*

In Han-majority regions, where the former reeducation through labor system was abolished, a new array of barbed-wire-clad reeducation camps might spark substantial resistance. But aided by high-tech surveillance, new forms of reeducation could be much sleeker and more sophisticated than their crude predecessor. The social credit system could promote a more subtle form of preemptive obedience by providing continual incentives to align one's behavior with the standards of an all-seeing state. In an era of high-capacity smart computing, the benefits of compliance and the costs of noncompliance are effortlessly and seamlessly scalable. Moreover, since social distrust and financial fraud are very real issues in Chinese society, a mechanism such as social credit is more acceptable than in the West. Its algorithmic nature lends it an air of objectivity and fairness in a society where predictability, reliability, and equal treatment before the law are often in short supply.

Ultimately, this could result in a nationwide apartheid-like system. In Xinjiang, Uighurs are already subject to much

greater scrutiny and restrictions. The future national social credit scheme could follow existing pilots in creating green or fast lanes for those with high social credit scores, be it for security checks or bureaucratic procedures, while those with low scores are set to face more complex and time-consuming checks or are outright banned from certain privileges.

Both reeducation and social credit represent metrics-based approaches to social control. In one sense, what is happening in Xinjiang today is the logical result of the state's reassertion of control over the moral-spiritual sphere. In another sense, what is happening in Xinjiang is likely foreshadowing the future of societal freedoms throughout the nation. Akin to visions of the Confucian superior man or the New Socialist Man, the current regime takes recourse to Mao's thought reform methods in order to mold a subservient and "civilized" citizenry—in time for China to become a "great modern socialist country" by 2050.

WILL IT WORK?

If successful, the proposed social credit system and its interplay with existing ideological control mechanisms could play a key role in enshrining the party's grip on power. But will this really turn people away from the opium of the masses toward the liberation promised by state ideology? Historically, religions have flourished most in times of intense persecution. Christianity thrived in the underground catacombs of the Roman Empire when Emperor Nero had its adherents torn apart by wild beasts. The Cultural Revolution created a seedbed for many traditional Chinese and other faiths to spring up after the oppressions ended. After four decades of communist indoctrination in one of the world's most sophisticated police states, thousands of East Germans flocked across the opened borders to experience the feeling of being able to freely speak their minds.

Today, there is little indication that Xinjiang's archipelago of reeducation camps is turning Uighurs into well-integrated, grateful, and patriotic citizens. Rather, several ex-internees have literally risked everything in order to tell the story of their horrors to the world. Conversely, Uighurs who "successfully" completed their reeducation term are by no means subsequently treated as more trustworthy citizens. Importantly, even the most refined social credit system cannot replace the social trust that comes from a fundamental faith in another person. Not only is this kind of trust difficult to conjure through coercion; it seems to wither wherever human freedom is in short supply.

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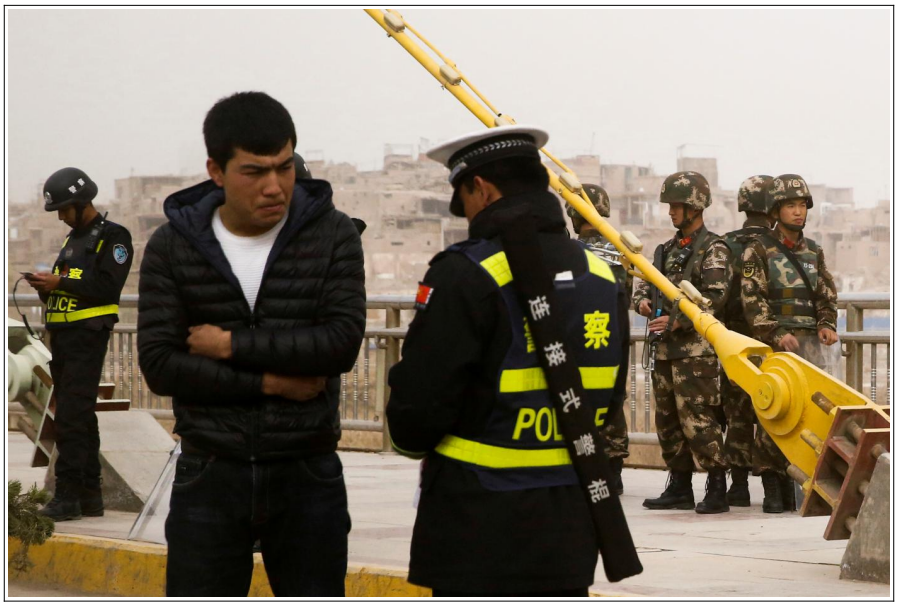
How Artificial Intelligence Will Reshape the Global Order

The Coming Competition Between Digital Authoritarianism and Liberal Democracy

Nicholas Wright



THOMAS PETER / REUTERS

A police officer checks the identity card of a man as security forces keep watch in a street in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China, March 2017.

The debate over the effects of artificial intelligence has been dominated by two themes. One is the fear of a singularity, an event in which an AI exceeds human intelligence and escapes

human control, with possibly disastrous consequences. The other is the worry that a new industrial revolution will allow machines to disrupt and replace humans in every—or almost every—area of society, from transport to the military to healthcare.

There is also a third way in which AI promises to reshape the world. By allowing governments to monitor, understand, and control their citizens far more closely than ever before, AI will offer authoritarian countries a plausible alternative to liberal democracy, the first since the end of the Cold War. That will spark renewed international competition between social systems.

For decades, most political theorists have believed that liberal democracy offers the only path to sustained economic success. Either governments could repress their people and remain poor or liberate them and reap the economic benefits. Some repressive countries managed to grow their economies for a time, but in the long run authoritarianism always meant stagnation. AI promises to upend that dichotomy. It offers a plausible way for big, economically advanced countries to make their citizens rich while maintaining control over them.

Some countries are already moving in this direction. China has begun to construct a digital authoritarian state by using surveillance and machine learning tools to control restive populations, and by creating what it calls a “social credit system.” Several like-minded countries have begun to buy or emulate Chinese systems. Just as competition between liberal democratic, fascist, and communist social systems defined much of the twentieth century, so the struggle between liberal democracy and digital authoritarianism is set to define the twenty-first.

DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM

New technologies will enable high levels of social control at a

reasonable cost. Governments will be able selectively censor topics and behaviors to allow information for economically productive activities to flow freely, while curbing political discussions that might damage the regime. China's so-called Great Firewall provides an early demonstration of this kind of selective censorship.

As well as retroactively censoring speech, AI and big data will allow predictive control of potential dissenters. This will resemble Amazon or Google's consumer targeting but will be much more effective, as authoritarian governments will be able to draw on data in ways that are not allowed in liberal democracies. Amazon and Google have access only to data from some accounts and devices; an AI designed for social control will draw data from the multiplicity of devices someone interacts with during their daily life. And even more important, authoritarian regimes will have no compunction about combining such data with information from tax returns, medical records, criminal records, sexual-health clinics, bank statements, genetic screenings, physical information (such as location, biometrics, and CCTV monitoring using facial recognition software), and information gleaned from family and friends. AI is as good as the data it has access to. Unfortunately, the quantity and quality of data available to governments on every citizen will prove excellent for training AI systems.

Even the mere existence of this kind of predictive control will help authoritarians. Self-censorship was perhaps the East German Stasi's most important disciplinary mechanism. AI will make the tactic dramatically more effective. People will know that the omnipresent monitoring of their physical and digital activities will be used to predict undesired behavior, even actions they are merely contemplating. From a technical perspective, such predictions are no different from using AI health-care systems to predict diseases in seemingly healthy people before their symptoms show.

In order to prevent the system from making negative predictions, many people will begin to mimic the behaviors of a “responsible” member of society. These may be as subtle as how long one’s eyes look at different elements on a phone screen. This will improve social control not only by forcing people to act in certain ways, but also by changing the way they think. A central finding in the cognitive science of influence is that making people perform behaviors can change their attitudes and lead to self-reinforcing habits. Making people expound a position makes them more likely to support it, a technique used by the Chinese on U.S. prisoners of war during the Korean War. Salespeople know that getting a potential customer to perform small behaviors can change attitudes to later, bigger requests. More than 60 years of laboratory and fieldwork have shown humans’ remarkable capacity to rationalize their behaviors.

As well as more effective control, AI also promises better central economic planning. As Jack Ma, the founder of the Chinese tech titan Alibaba, argues, with enough information, central authorities can direct the economy by planning and predicting market forces. Rather than slow, inflexible, one-size-fits-all plans, AI promises rapid and detailed responses to customers’ needs.

There’s no guarantee that this kind of digital authoritarianism will work in the long run, but it may not need to, as long as it is a plausible model for which some countries can aim. That will be enough to spark a new ideological competition. If governments start to see digital authoritarianism as a viable alternative to liberal democracy, they will feel no pressure to liberalize. Even if the model fails in the end, attempts to implement it could last for a long time. Communist and fascist models collapsed only after thorough attempts to implement them failed in the real world.

CREATING AND EXPORTING AN ALL-SEEING STATE

No matter how useful a system of social control might prove to a regime, building one would not be easy. Big IT projects are notoriously hard to pull off. They require high levels of coordination, generous funding, and plenty of expertise. For a sense of whether such a system is feasible, it's worth looking to China, the most important non-Western country that might build one.

China has proved that it can deliver huge, society-spanning IT projects, such as the Great Firewall. It also has the funding to build major new systems. Last year, the country's internal security budget was at least $196 billion, a 12 percent increase from 2016. Much of the jump was probably driven by the need for new big data platforms. China also has expertise in AI. Chinese companies are global leaders in AI research and Chinese software engineers often beat their American counterparts in international competitions. Finally, technologies, such as smartphones, that are already widespread can form the backbone of a personal monitoring system. Smartphone ownership rates in China are nearing those in the West and in some areas, such as mobile payments, China is the world leader.

China is already building the core components of a digital authoritarian system. The Great Firewall is sophisticated and well established, and it has tightened over the past year. Freedom House, a think tank, rates China the world's worst abuser of Internet freedom. China is implementing extensive surveillance in the physical world, as well. In 2014, it announced a social credit scheme, which will compute an integrated grade that reflects the quality of every citizen's conduct, as understood by the government. The development of China's surveillance state has gone furthest in Xinjiang Province, where it is being used to monitor and control the Muslim Uighur population. Those whom the system deems unsafe are shut out of everyday life; many are even sent to reeducation centers. If Beijing wants, it could roll out the

system nationwide.

To be sure, ability is not the same as intention. But China seems to be moving toward authoritarianism and away from any suggestion of liberalization. The government clearly believes that AI and big data will do much to enable this new direction. China's 2017 AI Development Plan describes how the ability to predict and "grasp group cognition" means "AI brings new opportunities for social construction."

Digital authoritarianism is not confined to China. Beijing is exporting its model.The Great Firewall approach to the Internet has spread to Thailand and Vietnam. According to news reports, Chinese experts have provided support for government censors in Sri Lanka and supplied surveillance or censorship equipment to Ethiopia, Iran, Russia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Earlier this year, the Chinese AI firm Yitu sold "wearable cameras with artificial intelligence-powered facial-recognition technology" to Malaysian law enforcement.

More broadly, China and Russia have pushed back against the U.S. conception of a free, borderless, and global Internet. China uses its diplomatic and market power to influence global technical standards and normalize the idea that domestic governments should control the Internet in ways that sharply limit individual freedom. After reportedly heated competition for influence over a new forum that will set international standards for AI, the United States secured the secretariat, which helps guide the group's decisions, while Beijing hosted its first meeting, this April, and Wael Diab, a senior director at Huawei, secured the chairmanship of the committee. To the governments that employ them, these measures may seem defensive—necessary to ensure domestic control—but other governments may perceive them as tantamount to attacks on their way of life.

THE DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE

The rise of an authoritarian technological model of governance could, perhaps counterintuitively, rejuvenate liberal democracies.How liberal democracies respond to AI's challenges and opportunities depends partly on how they deal with them internally and partly on how they deal with the authoritarian alternative externally. In both cases, grounds exist for guarded optimism.

Internally, although established democracies will need to make concerted efforts to manage the rise of new technologies, the challenges aren't obviously greater than those democracies have overcome before. One big reason for optimism is path dependence. Countries with strong traditions of individual liberty will likely go in one direction with new technology; those without them will likely go another. Strong forces within U.S. society have long pushed back against domestic government mass surveillance programs, albeit with variable success. In the early years of this century, for example, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency began to construct "Total Information Awareness" domestic surveillance systems to bring together medical, financial, physical and other data. Opposition from media and civil liberties groups led Congress to defund the program, although it left some workarounds hidden from the public at the time. Most citizens in liberal democracies acknowledge the need for espionage abroad and domestic counterterrorism surveillance, but powerful checks and balances constrain the state's security apparatus. Those checks and balances are under attack today and need fortification, but this will be more a repeat of past efforts than a fundamentally new challenge.

In the West, governments are not the only ones to pose a threat to individual freedoms. Oligopolistic technology companies are concentrating power by gobbling up competitors and lobbying governments to enact favorable

regulations. Yet societies have overcome this challenge before, after past technological revolutions. Think of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt's trust-busting, AT&T's breakup in the 1980s, and the limits that regulators put on Microsoft during the Internet's rise in the 1990s.

Digital giants are also hurting media diversity and support for public interest content as well as creating a Wild West in political advertising. But previously radical new technologies, such as radio and television, posed similar problems and societies rose to the challenge. In the end, regulation will likely catch up with the new definitions of "media" and "publisher" created by the Internet. Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg resisted labeling political advertising in the same way as is required on television, until political pressure forced his hand last year.

Liberal democracies are unlikely to be won over to digital authoritarianism. Recent polling suggests that a declining proportion in Western societies view democracy as "essential," but this is a long way from a genuine weakening of Western democracy.

The external challenge of a new authoritarian competitor may perhaps strengthen liberal democracies. The human tendency to frame competition in us versus them terms may lead Western countries to define their attitudes to censorship and surveillance at least partly in opposition to the new competition. Most people find the nitty-gritty of data policy boring and pay little attention to the risks of surveillance. But when these issues underpin a dystopian regime in the real world they will prove neither boring nor abstract. Governments and technology firms in liberal democracies will have to explain how they are different.

LESSONS FOR THE WEST

The West can do very little to change the trajectory of a

country as capable and confident as China. Digital authoritarian states will likely be around for a while. To compete with them, liberal democracies will need clear strategies. First, governments and societies should rigorously limit domestic surveillance and manipulation. Technology giants should be broken up and regulated. Governments need to ensure a diverse, healthy media environment, for instance by ensuring that overmighty gatekeepers such as Facebook do not reduce media plurality; funding public service broadcasting; and updating the regulations covering political advertising to fit the online world. They should enact laws preventing technology firms from exploiting other sources of personal data, such as medical records, on their customers and should radically curtail data collection from across the multiplicity of platforms with which people come into contact. Even governments should be banned from using such data except in a few circumstances, such as counterterrorism operations.

Second, Western countries should work to influence how states that are neither solidly democratic nor solidly authoritarian implement AI and big data systems. They should provide aid to develop states' physical and regulatory infrastructure and use the access provided by that aid to prevent governments from using joined-up data. They should promote international norms that respect individual privacy as well as state sovereignty. And they should demarcate the use of AI and metadata for legitimate national security purposes from its use in suppressing human rights.

Finally, Western countries must prepare to push back against the digital authoritarian heartland. Vast AI systems will prove vulnerable to disruption, although as regimes come to rely ever more on them for security, governments will have to take care that tit-for-tat cycles of retribution don't spiral out of control. Systems that selectively censor communications will enable economic creativity but will also inevitably reveal the

outside world. Winning the contest with digital authoritarian governments will not be impossible—as long as liberal democracies can summon the necessary political will to join the struggle.

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The United States' Perpetual War in Afghanistan

Why Long Wars No Longer Generate a Backlash at Home

Tanisha M. Fazal and Sarah Kreps

FINBARR O'REILLY/REUTERS

Graffiti left behind by Taliban fighters remains in a U.S. Marine Corps in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province, November 2010

In October, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan will turn 17. The human and material costs of what has become the United States' longest-ever war are colossal. More than 2,000 U.S.

military personnel have been killed and over 20,000 have been injured. The UN estimates that nearly 20,000 Afghan civilians have been killed and another 50,000 injured since 2009 alone. The United States has spent some $877 billion on the war. The Trump administration's recent initiative to seek direct peace talks with the Taliban—a first since the start of the war in 2001—highlights that Washington is actively looking for new ways to wind down its involvement in the conflict. But why has the U.S. intervention lasted so long in the first place?

Part of the answer is that Afghanistan's toxic mix of "state collapse, civil conflict, ethnic disintegration and multisided intervention has locked it in a self-perpetuating cycle that may be simply beyond outside resolution," as Max Fisher and Amanda Taub summarized in a New York Times post. But their diagnosis does not speak to a critical dimension of the conflict: namely, how the relative indifference of the U.S. public has allowed the war to drag on.

In theory, leaders in a democracy have incentives to heed public preferences or risk being voted out of office, which means that public opposition to a war makes its continuation untenable. Yet when it comes to Afghanistan, the U.S. public has favored the status quo at best and expressed deep ambivalence at worst. In polls taken a year ago, only 23 percent of Americans believed the United States was winning the war in Afghanistan, and a plurality (37 percent) supported a troop drawdown. At the same time, however, 44 percent wanted to either keep troop levels about the same or increase them, while 19 percent did not have an opinion. Another poll showed that 71 percent of respondents agreed that "full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan would leave a vacuum that would allow terrorist groups like ISIS to expand." Americans are not necessarily enthusiastic about sending more troops to Afghanistan, but they certainly are not clamoring for withdrawal.

Contrast this with the vocal opposition to the Vietnam War. What began as a small antiwar movement in 1964–65 scaled up as the war escalated in 1966, giving rise to massive protests in 1967: 100,000 people marching in Washington, D.C., and half a million protesting in New York City. Passions in the antiwar movement reflected opposition in the public as a whole. Most Americans knew little about the war until the Johnson administration ramped up troop levels, but as it became clear that the war would be long and protracted, elite disaffection increased. And public opinion, dragged down by the unpopularity of the draft, began "a path of slow and steady decline" from which it would never recover. When citizens were asked in 1965 whether sending troops was a mistake, only 24 percent agreed. Three years on, 46 percent said yes. By 1970, the proportion rose to 57 percent, and it remained at around 60 percent until the end of the war.

LONG BUT PAINLESS

That public disaffection at home hastened the end of the Vietnam War is now widely acknowledged. By contrast, the American public has so far failed to turn up the heat on leaders to end the war in Afghanistan—even though few think that the country is winning. Protests against the war have been few and far between.

Popular anger is absent because the public is no longer directly affected by the war legally, personally, or financially. For one, today's wars are less noticeable because they are increasingly unofficial. As the laws of war have proliferated, putting ever more constraints on what states at war can and cannot do, governments have looked for ways to sidestep this legal regime. At times, this simply means not signing international agreements: U.S. presidents of both parties have been unwilling to push for ratification of the Rome Statute, the treaty that founded the International Criminal Court, lest U.S. military personnel abroad be prosecuted unjustly. More often, however, states avoid stepping over any

bright lines that put them unequivocally in the legal domain of war. As a result, the United States has gradually moved away from the legal formalities that had defined war for centuries. It has not issued a formal declaration of war since World War II. Congress did not invoke its power to declare war under Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution to send troops to Afghanistan. Instead, it passed the sweeping Authorization for Use of Military Force, which has limped along since 2001 despite a constant barrage of bipartisan criticism. Likewise, the United States has not signed any formal peace agreements since the 1973 Paris Peace Accords—a trend that bodes ill for negotiations with the Taliban. Because such treaties have become less frequent, citizens no longer expect a formal end to war. Today's informal wars are more easily normalized and even obscured from public view, removing some of the pressure to conclude them at all.

Second, most U.S. citizens no longer bear the physical costs of war personally. The end of conscription and the creation of an all-volunteer military in the 1970s have led to an opt-in system and a growing gap between most citizens and the military. In 1980, 18 percent of the population were veterans. By 2016, that number was down to 7 percent, which means that the average person today is far less likely to have experienced war. And the fact that not even one in 200 U.S. citizens serves in the military today means that few people directly know someone on active duty. Today's public is more insulated from the human costs of war than previous generations.

Third, the nature of those physical costs has changed. Nonfatal casualties have almost always outnumbered fatal casualties in war, but this gap is increasingly stark for the United States today. For every U.S. soldier who died during World War II, four others were wounded. This wounded-to-killed ratio mostly held steady through Korea and Vietnam. In

Afghanistan, however, it has more than doubled, and there are now ten wounded soldiers for every fatality. That media and polling organizations tend to focus on fatalities rather than the injured obscures this particular cost of war.

> *Today's public is more insulated from the human costs of war than previous generations.*

Finally, war no longer has the direct financial impact on U.S. citizens that it once did. Up until the Vietnam War, the United States levied war taxes. As a result, the public was patently aware of the costs of the war, and when citizens felt that a military campaign was no longer worth the costs they personally had to bear, they pressured leaders to bring it to a close. Tax hikes in 1968 to fund the fight in Vietnam were not the only reason millions took to the streets, but they were clearly a contributing factor. Based on official estimates, the war in Afghanistan had cost $714 billion by 2017 and continues to cost about $45 billion per year. But taxpayers wouldn't know it, since these costs are just added to the national debt. Because the war is but one source among many to blame for the growing mountain of U.S. debt, its financial impact is easily overlooked.

All of these changes—legal, civil-military, and financial—are unlikely to reverse themselves anytime soon, which means that the way Americans feel the effect of conflict is unlikely to change either. But without being confronted with the grim realities of war, the public is unlikely to exercise the levers of accountability that it did in the past by voicing opposition and pressuring leaders to bring a close to the war. And without pressure from below, Congress is unlikely to act. War without end will be not the exception but the rule.

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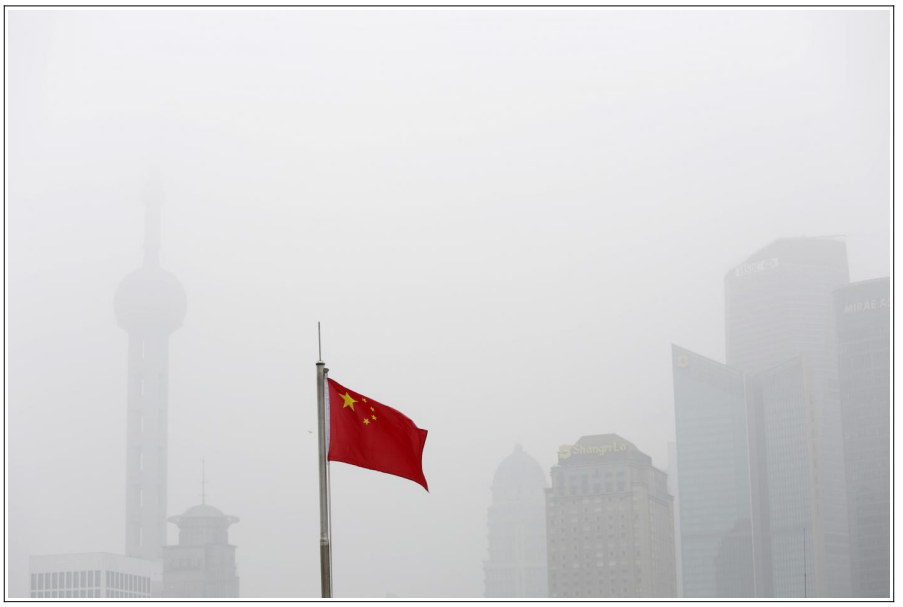
Stop Obsessing About China

Why Beijing Will Not Imperil U.S. Hegemony

Michael Beckley



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A Chinese flag in Shanghai's financial district, December 2015.

The United States is a deeply polarized nation, yet one view increasingly spans the partisan divide: the country is at imminent risk of being overtaken by China. Unless Washington does much more to counter the rise of its biggest rival, many argue, it may soon lose its status as the world's leading power. According to this emerging consensus, decades of U.S. investment and diplomatic concessions have

helped create a geopolitical monster. China now boasts the world's largest economy and military, and it is using its growing might to set its own rules in East Asia, hollow out the U.S. economy, and undermine democracy around the globe. In response, many Democrats and Republicans agree, the United States must ramp up its military presence in Asia, slap tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars of Chinese goods, and challenge China's influence worldwide.

But this emerging consensus is wrong and the policy response misguided. China is not about to overtake the United States economically or militarily—quite to the contrary. By the most important measures of national wealth and power, China is struggling to keep up and will probably fall further behind in the coming decades. The United States is and will remain the world's sole superpower for the foreseeable future, provided that it avoids overextending itself abroad or underinvesting at home.

The greatest risk for U.S. strategy, accordingly, lies not in doing too little but in overreacting to fears of Chinese ascent and American decline. Instead of hyping China's rise and gearing up for a new Cold War, Washington should take more modest steps to reinforce the existing balance of power in East Asia and reinvigorate the U.S. economy. To keep the peace, U.S. leaders should seek to engage rather than alienate Beijing, safe in the knowledge that long-term geopolitical trends will favor the United States.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

The main piece of evidence typically cited for China's supposedly inexorable rise is its large gross domestic product (GDP), along with various other statistics that are essentially sub-components of GDP, including industrial and manufacturing output; trade and financial flows; and spending on military, research and development (R&D), and infrastructure. These gross indicators, however, are terrible

measures of a country's power. As I show in a new book, they fail to track the rise and fall of great powers over the past 200 years and perform little better than a coin toss at predicting the winners and losers of international disputes and wars.

In fact, by these very measures, China was at the top once before: in the nineteenth century, China had the world's largest economy and the largest military. It also ran a trade surplus with other great powers. Yet many Chinese citizens today think of this era as a "century of humiliation" during which their country lost huge chunks of territory and most of its sovereign rights to smaller rivals, most notably the United Kingdom and Japan. Similarly, nineteenth-century Russia had Europe's largest GDP and military, but it suffered a series of crushing defeats by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany that culminated in the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917. In the last century, the Soviet Union outpaced the United States by most measures of gross resources, including industrial output, military and R&D spending, and the number of troops, nuclear weapons, scientists, and engineers. It still lost the Cold War.

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These and hundreds of other cases illustrate a simple but crucial point: gross indicators such as GDP and military spending exaggerate the power of populous countries, because they count the benefits of having a large workforce and a big military but not the costs of having many people to feed, police, protect, and serve.

A big population is obviously an important asset. Luxembourg, for example, will never be a major power, because its economy is a blip in world markets and its military is smaller than Cleveland's police department. But a big

population is no guarantee of great power, because people both produce and consume resources. One billion peasants will produce immense output, but they also will consume most of that output on the spot, leaving few resources left over for power projection abroad.

To become a superpower, by contrast, a country needs to amass a large stock of economic and military resources. To do this, in turn, it must be big and efficient at the same time—not one or the other. It must not only mobilize vast inputs but also extract as much as possible from these inputs. In short, a nation's power stems not from its gross resources but from its net resources—the resources left over after subtracting the costs of making them.

MIGHT MAKES RIGHT, BUT WHAT MAKES MIGHT?

The list of these costs is long. For starters, there are production costs, which include the raw materials consumed to generate wealth and military capabilities, as well as any negative byproducts of that process (think pollution). Then, add welfare costs—the expenses a nation pays to keep its people from dying in the streets, including spending on food, health care, education, and social security. Finally, there's the price of security: the government has to police and protect its citizens from enemies foreign and domestic. Needless to say, these costs add up. In fact, they usually consume most of a nation's resources.

To get an accurate sense of a country's overall power, then, analysts need to account for these costs. In recent years, the World Bank and the United Nations have taken up this task and published rough estimates of countries' net stocks of resources. Their analyses focus on three areas: produced capital (man-made items such as machines, buildings, fighter aircraft, and software), human capital (the population's education, skills, and working life span), and natural capital (water, energy resources, and arable land). In addition, the

investment bank Credit Suisse has published data on countries' net stocks of privately held wealth. Although these three databases use different data and methods, they largely paint the same picture: the United States' net stocks of resources are several times the size of China's, and its lead is growing each year, possibly by trillions of dollars.

It gets even more astonishing. These numbers are conservative estimates, because they rely on Chinese government statistics, which exaggerate China's output by as much as 30 percent and ignore numerous costs that erode its wealth and military capabilities. Chinese businesses, for instance, use roughly two times more capital and five times more labor than U.S. companies to generate the same level of output. More than one-third of China's industrial capacity is wasted. More than half of its R&D spending is stolen. Nearly two-thirds of its infrastructure projects cost more to build than they will ever generate in economic returns. China also spends hundreds of billions of dollars more than the United States every year to feed, police, and provide social services to its population.

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These same inefficiencies and barriers drag down China's military might. On average, Chinese weapons systems are roughly half as capable as those of the United States in terms of range, firepower, and accuracy. Chinese troops, pilots, and sailors lack combat experience and receive less than half the training of their American counterparts. Moreover, border defense and internal security consume at least 35 percent of China's military budget and bog down half of its active-duty force, whereas the U.S. military enjoys a secure home base and can focus almost entirely on power projection abroad.

The U.S. military, of course, disperses its assets around the world, whereas China's are concentrated in East Asia, making it a formidable regional power. But the United States' military presence in many far-flung corners of the globe is a matter of policy preference rather than necessity, meaning that Washington can quickly redeploy forces from one area to another without seriously jeopardizing its security. China, by contrast, has to keep most of its military on guard at home. For one, it suffers much higher levels of domestic unrest than the United States. It also shares sea or land borders with 19 countries, five of which have fought wars against China within the last century and ten of which still claim parts of Chinese territory as their own. Crucially, many of these countries have developed advanced air, naval, and missile capabilities that could prevent China from establishing sea or air control in most of the East China and South China Seas.

In sum, the United States maintains a huge economic and military lead over China. To catch up, China will need to grow its power resources faster. This, however, is a long shot, not only given its massive debts, dwindling resources, and rampant corruption but also because of its eroding work force. By some estimates, China will lose a quarter of its working-age population—more than 200 million workers—over the next 30 years, while the number of Chinese aged 65 years or older will more than triple. As a result, China's ratio of workers to retirees, which today stands at seven to one, will shrink to two to one. In the same period, the U.S. work force is expected to grow by 30 percent and the American worker-to-retiree ratio will remain around three to one.

THE PRICE OF FEAR

On top of being wrong, the conventional wisdom that China is a juggernaut set to overtake the United States as the world's dominant power has dangerous policy implications. It creates the impression that the United States and China are locked in

Thucydides' Trap, in which a rising power challenges the ruling hegemon, and the two slide into a major war. This misguided notion, widespread in both countries, is already driving a spiral of hostility. Emboldened by the global hype about its rise, China has embarked on the greatest territorial expansion of any nation since World War II, staking claim to roughly 80 percent of the East China and South China Seas and pouring resources into its military. The United States has responded by labeling China a rival, imposing steep tariffson Chinese goods, gutting the State Department to free up funds for the military, inserting U.S. forces into East Asian territorial disputes, and making plans to hit China early and hard in the event of war.

Slowing this spiral requires both sides to take a clear-eyed look at the real balance of power. China must recognize that its economy and military are not strong enough to support grand ambitions for territorial conquest and regional hegemony. Its best option, therefore, is to become a responsible stakeholder in the existing international order. The United States, on the other hand, must recognize that China is nowhere close to achieving regional hegemony, let alone to challenging U.S. global primacy. The most sensible path, therefore, is to maintain deep economic, diplomatic, and cultural ties with China while taking sensible steps to keep it in check.

Instead of spending trillions of dollars building a 355-ship navy, for example, the United States should strengthen existing power relationships in East Asia by helping China's neighbors develop defensive military capabilities and deploying U.S. antiship and surface-to-air missile launchers on allied shores along the East and South China Seas. Instead of rushing into a 1930s-style tariff war, the United States should punish Chinese trade violations and espionage through a reformed WTO, regional free trade pacts, and targeted export controls and investment

restrictions. Rather than reflexively opposing China's international initiatives, as the United States did with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Washington should join and shape them from within, as China did with the World Bank. Instead of combatting Chinese sharp power by imitating Beijing and shutting down media, cultural exchanges, and private organizations, the United States should use its free press and open civil society as soft power tools to expose and discredit Chinese meddling. Instead of countering China's Belt and Road Initiative by spending billions of dollars on dubious infrastructure abroad, Washington would do better to spend those funds on infrastructure, scientific research, and job training at home.

The main threat to U.S. primacy is not China's rise but geopolitical hyperventilating that emboldens Beijing while encouraging reckless U.S. foreign adventures and domestic underinvestment. The United States' longstanding policy of engagement may not have democratized China, but it has preserved U.S. primacy and made the world a more peaceful place. To let exaggerated fears undermine this achievement is a tragic misstep that will ultimately leave the United States less secure, powerful, and prosperous.

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Is Going It Alone the Best Way Forward for Europe?

Why Strategic Autonomy Should Be the Continent's Goal

Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polyakova

HANNIBAL HANSCHKE / REUTERS

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron attend a press conference after their meeting at the German government guesthouse Meseberg Palace in Meseberg, Germany, June 2018.

Since the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, Europeans have struggled to come to terms with his confrontational style and policies. From Trump's tariffs to his withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris agreement to calling the EU a "foe," no U.S. president since

World War II has appeared so distant, even hostile, to European interests. Early on, many European leaders attempted to cultivate a good relationship with Trump, hoping that a personal connection could help calm the increasingly turbulent waters of the transatlantic alliance. Some, such as French President Emmanuel Macron and EU President Jean-Claude Juncker, succeeded, while others, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Theresa May, fared less well.

In recent months, however, the tone coming from European capitals has changed. In August, in a rather undiplomatic op-ed, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas expressed doubts that his country could just "sit this presidency out" and called for "a sovereign, strong Europe" in response to Trump's hostility. Macron echoed this sentiment in his annual speech to ambassadors: "I do not honestly think today that China or the United States thinks Europe is a power with strategic autonomy comparable to their own. I do not believe it." Invoking former U.S. President Andrew Jackson's foreign-policy legacy, Macron warned his diplomatic corps not to see Trump as a fluke and to think through Europe's own strategic priorities as the United States becomes increasingly untethered from its allies across the pond. Europeans are right to eschew nostalgia when it comes to the transatlantic relationship: it took a figure as direct and undiplomatic as Trump to wake Europeans up to this new normal. Devising European strategic autonomy is now the new name of the game, but what does it actually mean for a European continent long used to following the United States' lead?

U.S. UNTETHERING IS A LONG-TERM TREND

The United States' pivot away from Europe did not start with Trump. The end of the Cold War made Europe less central to U.S. national security interests, as shown by the 75 percent decrease in U.S. troop presence in Europe since then.

The ongoing tensions in transatlantic relations are first and foremost about a power imbalance. Americans are frustrated at Europe's lack of defense investments and do not see the continent as a reliable ally; Europeans resent American unilateralism and disregard for their policy concerns. This isn't new. With the Soviet Union's collapse, the United States became the sole superpower and was no longer hindered by concerns of provoking its old enemy. It was also increasingly willing to take unilateral actions, which Europeans were expected to accept. Under President Bill Clinton, the United States led the NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia, ignoring Russian President Boris Yeltsin's objections. U.S. President George W. Bush ignored European protests when he chose not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Although France (alongside Germany) led the opposition to the Iraq war at the UN Security Council, even threatening to use its veto, Washington moved forward. And the centerpiece of U.S. President Barack Obama's foreign policy in his first term was a strategic pivot to Asia, which inevitably meant a move away from Europe as the core of U.S. economic and strategic interests.

Reaffirming his view of imbalance in the U.S.-European relationship, Obama, frustrated with France and the United Kingdom's absence from the post-conflict political reconstruction of Libya, famously called Europeans "free riders" in his outgoing interview with The Atlantic. Robert Gates, his first defense secretary, held the same view. As he put it, there will be "dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress, and in the American body politic writ large, to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources ... to be serious and capable partners in their own defense."

Trump's "America first" foreign policy is following this pattern of U.S. untethering from Europe. Through policies such as the successful use of extraterritorial sanctions to

force European businesses into submission when it comes to Iran and Russia, Trump reveals Europe's weaknesses, and, to be blunt, its hypocrisies. And, on a critical international crisis such as Syria, which has far more direct consequences for European security than that of the United States, Europeans have mostly responded by pleading for the United States to get involved.

Trump's foreign policy vis-à-vis Europe is thus the continuation of a trend, which began when the Cold War ended, just without the diplomatic niceties.

WHAT STRATEGIC AUTONOMY LOOKS LIKE

The European model of foreign policy is rooted in the ideal of multilateralism and peaceful cooperation, embodied in the EU's aspiration of an "ever closer union." Despite setbacks, the European project, which brought 70 years of unprecedented peace to a war-torn continent, has been a success. But it would not have been possible without the U.S. military umbrella and NATO, which, among other things, allowed Europeans to invest in their economies rather than in their militaries. This underlying dependency on U.S. power enabled Europe to become what it is today—an economically robust and politically integrated continent—but it has also left Europeans unprepared for a world of great power competition.

As Europeans begin to ponder the reality of strategic autonomy, they should heed the advice of Macron and Maas—there is no going back to the comforts of dependency after Trump. Strategic autonomy means, first and foremost, a vision for Europe as an actor on the world stage capable of defending itself at home and pursuing its objectives abroad. Although the current imbalances in U.S. and European security and defense spending make such a Europe difficult to imagine, it should nonetheless be the guiding principle for long-term European stability.

In the short term, strategic autonomy means urgently shoring up European military capacities and capabilities. The NATO commitment to spend two percent of GDP on defense should be the minimum benchmark. A broader rethinking of European capabilities, capacities, and readiness is already taking place with the framework of the EU-launched Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which will better pool resources for acquisition and R&D, the creation of the European Defense Fund, and Macron's proposed European Intervention Initiative, which aims to create a common European strategic culture through joint planning and exchange of troops. These initiatives go in the right direction and will compensate for Europe's shortcomings today, but it will hardly suffice if the United States decides to stand by during a major security crisis on the European periphery: the priority should be to increase Europe-wide spending on defense and capacity building, regardless of the form it takes. These efforts would and should complement NATO. Europeans should also be more engaged in addressing conflicts on their periphery by matching U.S. military support for Ukraine to deter Russia and intervening in Syria with or without the United States.

Strategic autonomy should, however, not solely be based on defense and security. As the United States' expansive use of extraterritorial sanctions has shown, Europeans are vulnerable to U.S. weaponization of its economic power. Inevitably, the economic imbalance will mean a reckoning by EU leaders with the role of the euro in the global economy. Taken as a whole, the EU is one of the world's largest economies, accounting for 22 percent of world GDP. Yet the euro represents a much smaller share of global currency reserves and international trade than the dollar, a sign that investors still don't trust the long-term future of the eurozone after years of crises and ad hoc responses to address the zone's shortcomings. Germany, as the economic powerhouse

of the eurozone, should work together with France and the European Commission to take concrete steps to ensure the sustainability and competitiveness of the monetary zone.

Such a broad effort on economic and defense strategy will likely span generations. And it will mean overcoming the divisions between Europe's integrationists and nationalists. But what the European project sorely needs today is a vision for its future, which is no longer as clear cut as an "ever closer union." Strategic autonomy could be the vision that rallies both integrationists such as Macron and more conservative figures such as Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz without giving in to the illiberalism of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban. If the integrationists can make the case that the EU can shield its citizens against an unstable geopolitical environment through investments in security, border control, and effective trade policies, it will undermine the agenda of illiberal forces.

HOW WASHINGTON BENEFITS

U.S. leaders should not be wary of Europe going it alone. A more autonomous Europe will cause some headaches for future U.S. policymakers, but European strategic autonomy will benefit Washington as well. First, politically: the lopsided defense relationship has fueled resentment among U.S. policymakers and voters who wonder why rich European countries have to rely on the United States to fight wars closer to European shores than American ones. More important, as the United States shifts resources toward competition with Russia and China, a more autonomous Europe could contribute to global security and economic balancing, from the fight against terrorism to containing the rise of China.

Chinese foreign direct investment in Europe is nine times larger than in the United States. Some European capitals are concerned that Chinese investments, especially in central and

eastern Europe and along the Mediterranean, give China too much political influence. Greece, for example, where China has invested heavily in ports, recently blocked an EU statement on China's human rights abuses at the United Nations.

Europe should work with the United States to balance against China by curbing Chinese attempts to leverage economic investments into political influence in Europe. The European Commission already has a set of tools and regulations—including requiring that mergers and acquisitions of a certain size and nature be subject to commission approval—that it uses to ensure transparency and competition in the energy sector to curb Russian influence. It could use the same toolkit to curb Chinese influence. Some countries, such as France and Germany, have started to take such steps, while the EU commission under Juncker has adopted a foreign investment screening procedure to ensure investments don't threaten strategic infrastructure, technology, or media independence. Europe should also aggressively pursue Chinese trade violations and theft of intellectual property, and phase out Chinese products used in defense and security operations.

> *A Europe whole, free, and at peace means a Europe able to fend for itself on the world stage.*

U.S. policymakers, meanwhile, should help steer Europe in the right direction to ensure that Europeans remain part of the U.S. global agenda. The tumultuous relationship that three U.S. presidents—John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon—had with French President Charles de Gaulle could serve as inspiration. The leader of the French Resistance in World War II was a complicated ally. He withdrew from NATO's military command in 1966, prompting the organization's headquarters to move from Paris to the

suburbs of Brussels, and openly criticized U.S. Vietnam policy. Yet de Gaulle never wavered in his support for Washington during the Cuban missile crisis, famously claiming he didn't need to see the evidence of Soviet missiles that the U.S. ambassador was offering. France's acquisition of the nuclear deterrent, first tested in 1960, which initially troubled U.S. policymakers who feared it would mark the decoupling the Alliance, was eventually seen as an addition to the continent's deterrence. De Gaulle's autonomous foreign policy, such as his recognition of the People's Republic of China in 1966, opened the door to future U.S. initiatives. As a former French foreign minister put it: France was, to the United States, a "friend, an ally, but not aligned."

There is no alternative to an autonomous Europe. A Europe whole, free, and at peace means a Europe able to fend for itself on the world stage. A weaker and divided Europe will not weather the coming storm of geopolitical competition if it is too reliant on a United States preoccupied elsewhere and less engaged with European concerns. Greater European autonomy will inevitably transform the transatlantic alliance. There will, no doubt, be differences and disagreements, but it is a small price to pay for ensuring European presence on the world stage and Western balancing against China.

To prevent a perverse version of European autonomy in which Europe pivots toward Russia with the false hope of replacing the U.S. security umbrella, Washington will have to support and encourage European autonomy in the right direction. After all, European strategic autonomy is not about building a counterweight to U.S. military power. It's about Europe investing in its own security and the security of the transatlantic alliance. And Europe will have to overcome its internal divisions while managing the political challenges of growing populism and working with the United States to counter common threats—no easy task, to be sure. Despite differences, leaders on both sides should be confident. In the

face of a rising China, resurgent Russia and increasing security threats, there is much more binding the liberal democracies of the United States and Europe than dividing them.

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