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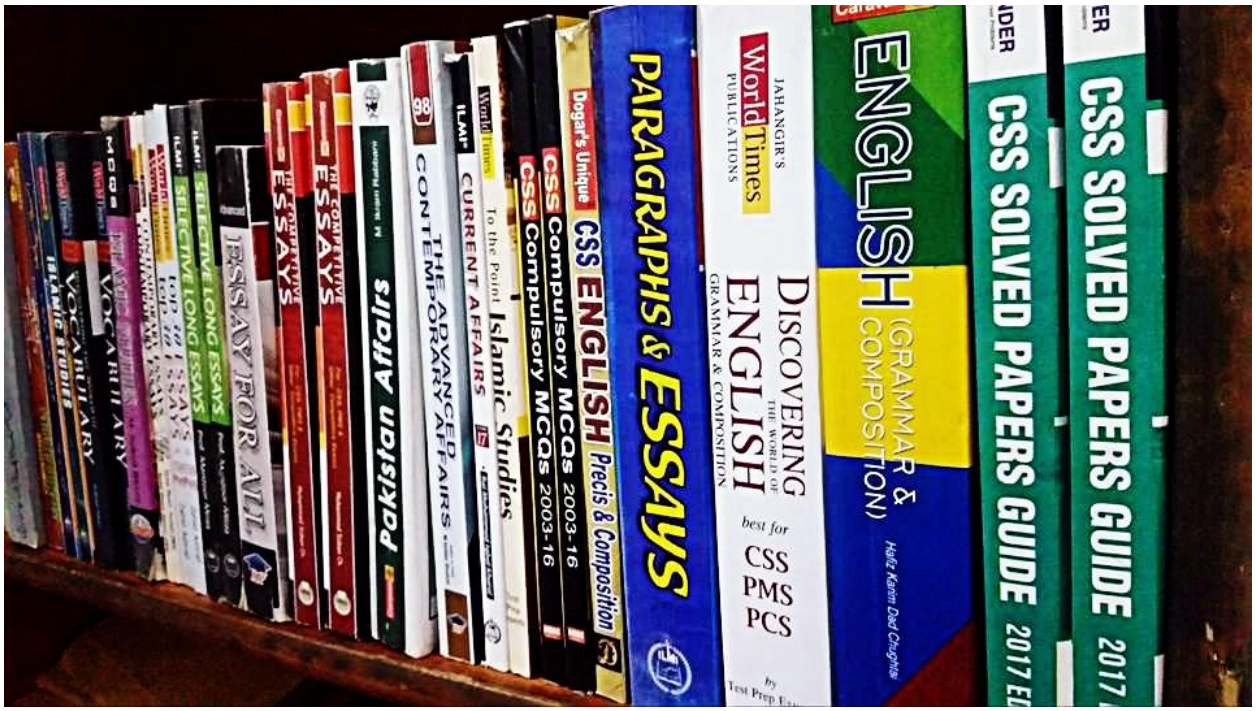

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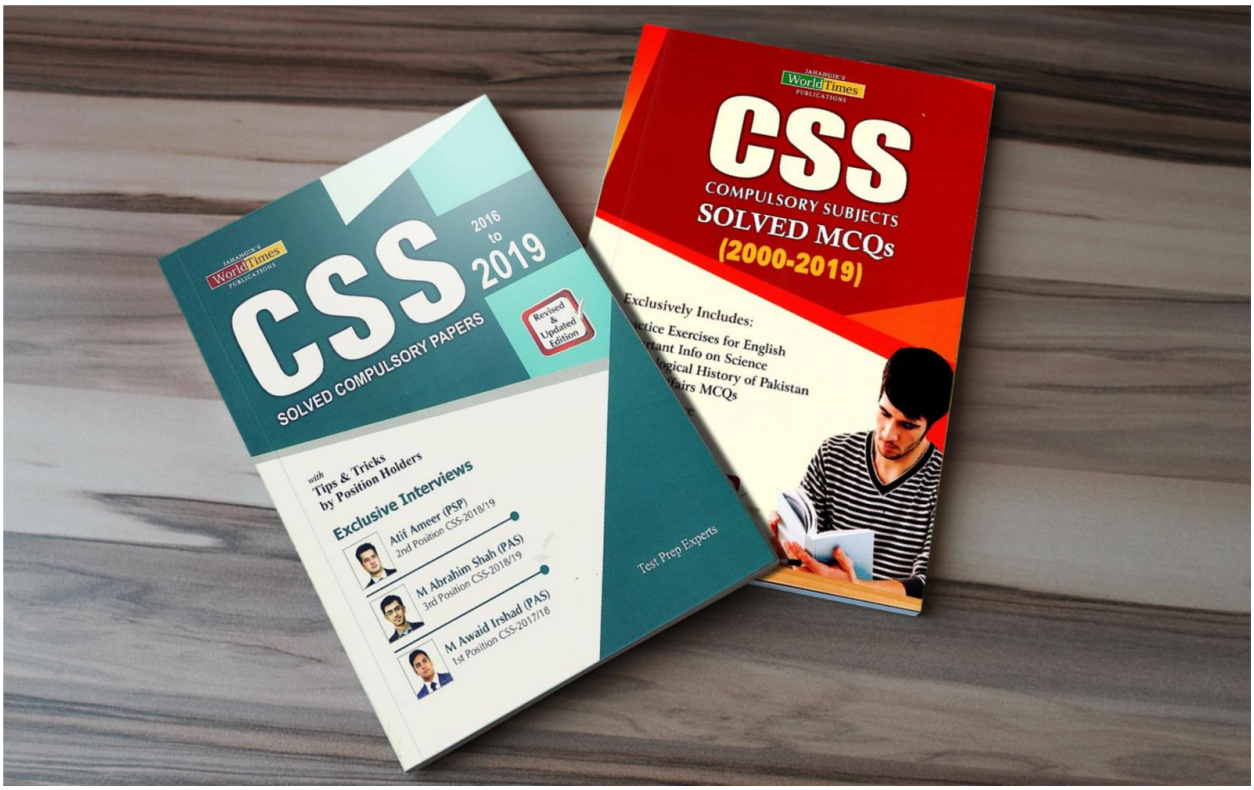

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How a World Order Ends By Richard Haass

A stable world order is a rare thing. When one does arise, it tends to come after a great convulsion that creates both the conditions and the desire for something new. It requires a stable distribution of power and broad acceptance of the rules that govern the conduct of international relations. It also needs skillful statecraft, since an order is made, not born. And no matter how ripe the starting conditions or strong the initial desire, maintaining it demands creative diplomacy, functioning institutions, and effective action to adjust it when circumstances change and buttress it when challenges come.

Eventually, inevitably, even the best-managed order comes to an end. The balance of power underpinning it becomes imbalanced. The institutions supporting it fail to adapt to new conditions. Some countries fall, and others rise, the result of changing capacities, faltering wills, and growing ambitions. Those responsible for upholding the order make mistakes both in what they choose to do and in what they choose not to do.

But if the end of every order is inevitable, the timing and the manner of its ending are not. Nor is what comes in its wake. Orders tend to expire in a prolonged deterioration rather than a sudden collapse. And just as maintaining the order depends on effective statecraft and effective action, good policy and proactive diplomacy can help determine how that deterioration unfolds and what it brings. Yet for that to happen, something else must come first: recognition that the old order is never coming back and that efforts to resurrect it will be in vain. As with any ending, acceptance must come before one can move on.

In the search for parallels to today's world, scholars and practitioners have looked as far afield as ancient Greece, where the rise of a new power resulted in war between Athens and Sparta, and the period after World War I, when an isolationist United States and much of Europe sat on their hands as Germany and Japan ignored agreements and invaded their neighbors. But the more illuminating parallel to the present is the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century, the most important and successful effort to build and sustain world order until our own time. From 1815 until the outbreak of World War I a century later, the order established at the Congress of Vienna defined many international

relationships and set (even if it often failed to enforce) basic rules for international conduct. It provides a model of how to collectively manage security in a multipolar world.

That order's demise and what followed offer instructive lessons for today—and an urgent warning. Just because an order is in irreversible decline does not mean that chaos or calamity is inevitable. But if the deterioration is managed poorly, catastrophe could well follow.

OUT OF THE ASHES

The global order of the second half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first grew out of the wreckage of two world wars. The nineteenth-century order followed an earlier international convulsion: the Napoleonic Wars, which, after the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, ravaged Europe for more than a decade. After defeating Napoleon and his armies, the victorious allies—Austria, Prussia, Russia, and the United Kingdom, the great powers of their day—came together in Vienna in 1814 and 1815. At the Congress of Vienna, they set out to ensure that France's military never again threatened their states and that revolutionary movements never again threatened their monarchies. The victorious powers also made the wise choice to integrate a defeated France, a course very different from the one taken with Germany following World War I and somewhat different from the one chosen with Russia in the wake of the Cold War.

The congress yielded a system known as the Concert of Europe. Although centered in Europe, it constituted the international order of its day given the dominant position of Europe and Europeans in the world. There was a set of shared understandings about relations between states, above all an agreement to rule out invasion of another country or involvement in the internal affairs of another without its permission. A rough military balance dissuaded any state tempted to overthrow the order from trying in the first place (and prevented any state that did try from succeeding). Foreign ministers met (at what came to be called "congresses") whenever a major issue arose. The concert was conservative in every sense of the word. The Treaty of Vienna had made numerous territorial adjustments and then locked Europe's borders into place, allowing changes only if all signatories agreed. It also did what it could to back

monarchies and encourage others to come to their aid (as France did in Spain in 1823) when they were threatened by popular revolt.

The concert worked not because there was complete agreement among the great powers on every point but because each state had its own reasons for supporting the overall system. Austria was most concerned with resisting the forces of liberalism, which threatened the ruling monarchy. The United Kingdom was focused on staving off a renewed challenge from France while also guarding against a potential threat from Russia (which meant not weakening France so much that it couldn't help offset the threat from Russia). But there was enough overlap in interests and consensus on first-order questions that the concert prevented war between the major powers of the day.

The concert technically lasted a century, until the eve of World War I. But it had ceased to play a meaningful role long before then. The revolutionary waves that swept Europe in 1830 and 1848 revealed the limits of what members would do to maintain the existing order within states in the face of public pressure. Then, more consequentially, came the Crimean War. Ostensibly fought over the fate of Christians living within the Ottoman Empire, in actuality it was much more about who would control territory as that empire decayed. The conflict pitted France, the United Kingdom, and the Ottoman Empire against Russia. It lasted two and a half years, from 1853 to 1856. It was a costly war that highlighted the limits of the concert's ability to prevent great-power war; the great-power comity that had made the concert possible no longer existed. Subsequent wars between Austria and Prussia and Prussia and France demonstrated that major-power conflict had returned to the heart of Europe after a long hiatus. Matters seemed to stabilize for a time after that, but this was an illusion. Beneath the surface, German power was rising and empires were rotting. The combination set the stage for World War I and the end of what had been the concert.

WHAT AILS THE ORDER?

What lessons can be drawn from this history? As much as anything else, the rise and fall of major powers determines the viability of the prevailing order, since changes in economic strength, political cohesion, and military power shape what states can and are willing to do beyond their borders. Over the second half of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth, a powerful, unified Germany and a modern Japan rose, the Ottoman Empire and tsarist Russia declined, and

France and the United Kingdom grew stronger but not strong enough. Those changes upended the balance of power that had been the concert's foundation; Germany, in particular, came to view the status quo as inconsistent with its interests.

Changes in the technological and political context also affected that underlying balance. Under the concert, popular demands for democratic participation and surges of nationalism threatened the status quo within countries, while new forms of transportation, communication, and armaments transformed politics, economics, and warfare. The conditions that helped give rise to the concert were gradually undone.

Because orders tend to end with a whimper rather than a bang, the process of deterioration is often not evident to decision-makers until it has advanced considerably.

Yet it would be overly deterministic to attribute history to underlying conditions alone. Statecraft still matters. That the concert came into existence and lasted as long as it did underscores that people make a difference. The diplomats who crafted it—Metternich of Austria, Talleyrand of France, Castlereagh of the United Kingdom—were exceptional. The fact that the concert preserved peace despite the gap between two relatively liberal countries, France and the United Kingdom, and their more conservative partners shows that countries with different political systems and preferences can work together to maintain international order. Little that turns out to be good or bad in history is inevitable. The Crimean War might well have been avoided if more capable and careful leaders had been on the scene. It is far from clear that Russian actions warranted a military response by France and the United Kingdom of the nature and on the scale that took place. That the countries did what they did also underscores the power and dangers of nationalism. World War I broke out in no small part because the successors to German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck were unable to discipline the power of the modern German state he did so much to bring about.

Two other lessons stand out. First, it is not just core issues that can cause an order to deteriorate. The concert's great-power comity ended not because of disagreements over the social and political order within Europe but because of competition on the periphery. And second, because orders tend to end with a

whimper rather than a bang, the process of deterioration is often not evident to decision-makers until it has advanced considerably. By the outbreak of World War I, when it became obvious that the Concert of Europe no longer held, it was far too late to save it—or even to manage its dissolution.

A TALE OF TWO ORDERS

The global order built in the aftermath of World War II consisted of two parallel orders for most of its history. One grew out of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. At its core was a rough balance of military strength in Europe and Asia, backed up by nuclear deterrence. The two sides showed a degree of restraint in their rivalry. “Rollback”—Cold War parlance for what today is called “regime change”—was rejected as both infeasible and reckless. Both sides followed informal rules of the road that included a healthy respect for each other’s backyards and allies. Ultimately, they reached an understanding over the political order within Europe, the principal arena of Cold War competition, and in 1975 codified that mutual understanding in the Helsinki Accords. Even in a divided world, the two power centers agreed on how the competition would be waged; theirs was an order based on means rather than ends. That there were only two power centers made reaching such an agreement easier.

The other post–World War II order was the liberal order that operated alongside the Cold War order. Democracies were the main participants in this effort, which used aid and trade to strengthen ties and fostered respect for the rule of law both within and between countries. The economic dimension of this order was designed to bring about a world (or, more accurately, the non-communist half of it) defined by trade, development, and well-functioning monetary operations. Free trade would be an engine of economic growth and bind countries together so that war would be deemed too costly to wage; the dollar was accepted as the de facto global currency.

The diplomatic dimension of the order gave prominence to the UN. The idea was that a standing global forum could prevent or resolve international disputes. The UN Security Council, with five great-power permanent members and additional seats for a rotating membership, would orchestrate international relations. Yet the order depended just as much on the willingness of the noncommunist world (and U.S. allies in particular) to accept American primacy. As it turns out, they were prepared to do this, as the United States was more often than not viewed

as a relatively benign hegemon, one admired as much for what it was at home as for what it did abroad.

Both of these orders served the interests of the United States. The core peace was maintained in both Europe and Asia at a price that a growing U.S. economy could easily afford. Increased international trade and opportunities for investment contributed to U.S. economic growth. Over time, more countries joined the ranks of the democracies. Neither order reflected a perfect consensus; rather, each offered enough agreement so that it was not directly challenged. Where U.S. foreign policy got into trouble—such as in Vietnam and Iraq—it was not because of alliance commitments or considerations of order but because of ill-advised decisions to prosecute costly wars of choice.

SIGNS OF DECAY

Today, both orders have deteriorated. Although the Cold War itself ended long ago, the order it created came apart in a more piecemeal fashion—in part because Western efforts to integrate Russia into the liberal world order achieved little. One sign of the Cold War order's deterioration was Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, something Moscow likely would have prevented in previous years on the grounds that it was too risky. Although nuclear deterrence still holds, some of the arms control agreements buttressing it have been broken, and others are fraying.

Although Russia has avoided any direct military challenge to NATO, it has nonetheless shown a growing willingness to disrupt the status quo: through its use of force in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine since 2014, its often indiscriminate military intervention in Syria, and its aggressive use of cyberwarfare to attempt to affect political outcomes in the United States and Europe. All of these represent a rejection of the principal constraints associated with the old order. From a Russian perspective, the same might be said of NATO enlargement, an initiative clearly at odds with Winston Churchill's dictum "In victory, magnanimity." Russia also judged the 2003 Iraq war and the 2011 NATO military intervention in Libya, which was undertaken in the name of humanitarianism but quickly evolved into regime change, as acts of bad faith and illegality inconsistent with notions of world order as it understood them.

The liberal order is exhibiting its own signs of deterioration. Authoritarianism is on the rise not just in the obvious places, such as China and Russia, but also in the Philippines, Turkey, and eastern Europe. Global trade has grown, but recent rounds of trade talks have ended without agreement, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) has proved unable to deal with today's most pressing challenges, including nontariff barriers and the theft of intellectual property. Resentment over the United States' exploitation of the dollar to impose sanctions is growing, as is concern over the country's accumulation of debt.

The UN Security Council is of little relevance to most of the world's conflicts, and international arrangements have failed more broadly to contend with the challenges associated with globalization. The composition of the Security Council bears less and less resemblance to the real distribution of power. The world has put itself on the record as against genocide and has asserted a right to intervene when governments fail to live up to the "responsibility to protect" their citizens, but the talk has not translated into action. The Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty allows only five states to have nuclear weapons, but there are now nine that do (and many others that could follow suit if they chose to). The EU, by far the most significant regional arrangement, is struggling with Brexit and disputes over migration and sovereignty. And around the world, countries are increasingly resisting U.S. primacy.

POWER SHIFTS

Why is all this happening? It is instructive to look back to the gradual demise of the Concert of Europe. Today's world order has struggled to cope with power shifts: China's rise, the appearance of several medium powers (Iran and North Korea, in particular) that reject important aspects of the order, and the emergence of nonstate actors (from drug cartels to terrorist networks) that can pose a serious threat to order within and between states.

The technological and political context has changed in important ways, too. Globalization has had destabilizing effects, ranging from climate change to the spread of technology into far more hands than ever before, including a range of groups and people intent on disrupting the order. Nationalism and populism have surged—the result of greater inequality within countries, the dislocation associated with the 2008 financial crisis, job losses caused by trade and

technology, increased flows of migrants and refugees, and the power of social media to spread hate.

Meanwhile, effective statecraft is conspicuously lacking. Institutions have failed to adapt. No one today would design a UN Security Council that looked like the current one; yet real reform is impossible, since those who would lose influence block any changes. Efforts to build effective frameworks to deal with the challenges of globalization, including climate change and cyberattacks, have come up short. Mistakes within the EU—namely, the decisions to establish a common currency without creating a common fiscal policy or a banking union and to permit nearly unlimited immigration to Germany—have created a powerful backlash against existing governments, open borders, and the EU itself.

The United States, for its part, has committed costly overreach in trying to remake Afghanistan, invading Iraq, and pursuing regime change in Libya. But it has also taken a step back from maintaining global order and in certain cases has been guilty of costly underreach. In most instances, U.S. reluctance to act has come not over core issues but over peripheral ones that leaders wrote off as not worth the costs involved, such as the strife in Syria, where the United States failed to respond meaningfully when Syria first used chemical weapons or to do more to help anti-regime groups. This reluctance has increased others' propensity to disregard U.S. concerns and act independently. The Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen is a case in point. Russian actions in Syria and Ukraine should also be seen in this light; it is interesting that Crimea marked the effective end of the Concert of Europe and signaled a dramatic setback in the current order. Doubts about U.S. reliability have multiplied under the Trump administration, thanks to its withdrawal from numerous international pacts and its conditional approach to once inviolable U.S. alliance commitments in Europe and Asia.

MANAGING THE DETERIORATION

Given these changes, resurrecting the old order will be impossible. It would also be insufficient, thanks to the emergence of new challenges. Once this is acknowledged, the long deterioration of the Concert of Europe should serve as a lesson and a warning.

For the United States to heed that warning would mean strengthening certain aspects of the old order and supplementing them with measures that account for changing power dynamics and new global problems. The United States would have to shore up arms control and nonproliferation agreements; strengthen its alliances in Europe and Asia; bolster weak states that cannot contend with terrorists, cartels, and gangs; and counter authoritarian powers' interference in the democratic process. Yet it should not give up trying to integrate China and Russia into regional and global aspects of the order. Such efforts will necessarily involve a mix of compromise, incentives, and pushback. The judgment that attempts to integrate China and Russia have mostly failed should not be grounds for rejecting future efforts, as the course of the twenty-first century will in no small part reflect how those efforts fare.

The United States also needs to reach out to others to address problems of globalization, especially climate change, trade, and cyber-operations. These will require not resurrecting the old order but building a new one. Efforts to limit, and adapt to, climate change need to be more ambitious. The WTO must be amended to address the sorts of issues raised by China's appropriation of technology, provision of subsidies to domestic firms, and use of nontariff barriers to trade. Rules of the road are needed to regulate cyberspace. Together, this is tantamount to a call for a modern-day concert. Such a call is ambitious but necessary.

The United States must show restraint and recapture a degree of respect in order to regain its reputation as a benign actor. This will require some sharp departures from the way U.S. foreign policy has been practiced in recent years: to start, no longer carelessly invading other countries and no longer weaponizing U.S. economic policy through the overuse of sanctions and tariffs. But more than anything else, the current reflexive opposition to multilateralism needs to be rethought. It is one thing for a world order to unravel slowly; it is quite another for the country that had a large hand in building it to take the lead in dismantling it.

All of this also requires that the United States get its own house in order—reducing government debt, rebuilding infrastructure, improving public education, investing more in the social safety net, adopting a smart immigration system that allows talented foreigners to come and stay, tackling political dysfunction by making it less difficult to vote, and undoing gerrymandering. The United States

cannot effectively promote order abroad if it is divided at home, distracted by domestic problems, and lacking in resources.

The major alternatives to a modernized world order supported by the United States appear unlikely, unappealing, or both. A Chinese-led order, for example, would be an illiberal one, characterized by authoritarian domestic political systems and statist economies that place a premium on maintaining domestic stability. There would be a return to spheres of influence, with China attempting to dominate its region, likely resulting in clashes with other regional powers, such as India, Japan, and Vietnam, which would probably build up their conventional or even nuclear forces.

A new democratic, rules-based order fashioned and led by medium powers in Europe and Asia, as well as Canada, however attractive a concept, would simply lack the military capacity and domestic political will to get very far. A more likely alternative is a world with little order—a world of deeper disarray. Protectionism, nationalism, and populism would gain, and democracy would lose. Conflict within and across borders would become more common, and rivalry between great powers would increase. Cooperation on global challenges would be all but precluded. If this picture sounds familiar, that is because it increasingly corresponds to the world of today.

The deterioration of a world order can set in motion trends that spell catastrophe. World War I broke out some 60 years after the Concert of Europe had for all intents and purposes broken down in Crimea. What we are seeing today resembles the mid-nineteenth century in important ways: the post–World War II, post–Cold War order cannot be restored, but the world is not yet on the edge of a systemic crisis. Now is the time to make sure one never materializes, be it from a breakdown in U.S.-Chinese relations, a clash with Russia, a conflagration in the Middle East, or the cumulative effects of climate change. The good news is that it is far from inevitable that the world will eventually arrive at a catastrophe; the bad news is that it is far from certain that it will not.

A New Americanism By Jill Lepore

Why a Nation Needs a National Story

In 1986, the Pulitzer Prize–winning, bowtie-wearing Stanford historian Carl Degler delivered something other than the usual pipe-smoking, scotch-on-the-rocks, after-dinner disquisition that had plagued the evening program of the annual meeting of the American Historical Association for nearly all of its centurylong history. Instead, Degler, a gentle and quietly heroic man, accused his colleagues of nothing short of dereliction of duty: appalled by nationalism, they had abandoned the study of the nation.

“We can write history that implicitly denies or ignores the nation-state, but it would be a history that flew in the face of what people who live in a nation-state require and demand,” Degler said that night in Chicago. He issued a warning: “If we historians fail to provide a nationally defined history, others less critical and less informed will take over the job for us.”

The nation-state was in decline, said the wise men of the time. The world had grown global. Why bother to study the nation? Nationalism, an infant in the nineteenth century, had become, in the first half of the twentieth, a monster. But in the second half, it was nearly dead—a stumbling, ghastly wraith, at least outside postcolonial states. And historians seemed to believe that if they stopped studying it, it would die sooner: starved, neglected, and abandoned.

Francis Fukuyama is a political scientist, not a historian. But his 1989 essay “The End of History?” illustrated Degler’s point. Fascism and communism were dead, Fukuyama announced at the end of the Cold War. Nationalism, the greatest remaining threat to liberalism, had been “defanged” in the West, and in other parts of the world where it was still kicking, well, that wasn’t quite nationalism. “The vast majority of the world’s nationalist movements do not have a political program beyond the negative desire of independence from some other group or people, and do not offer anything like a comprehensive agenda for socio-economic organization,” Fukuyama wrote. (Needless to say, he has since had to walk a lot of this back, writing in his most recent book about the “unexpected” populist nationalism of Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Poland’s Jaroslaw Kaczynski,

Hungary's Viktor Orban, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte, and the United States' Donald Trump.)

Fukuyama was hardly alone in pronouncing nationalism all but dead. A lot of other people had, too. That's what worried Degler.

Nation-states, when they form, imagine a past. That, at least in part, accounts for why modern historical writing arose with the nation-state. For more than a century, the nation-state was the central object of historical inquiry. From George Bancroft in the 1830s through, say, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., or Richard Hofstadter, studying American history meant studying the American nation. As the historian John Higham put it, "From the middle of the nineteenth century until the 1960s, the nation was the grand subject of American history." Over that same stretch of time, the United States experienced a civil war, emancipation, reconstruction, segregation, two world wars, and unprecedented immigration—making the task even more essential. "A history in common is fundamental to sustaining the affiliation that constitutes national subjects," the historian Thomas Bender once observed. "Nations are, among other things, a collective agreement, partly coerced, to affirm a common history as the basis for a shared future."

But in the 1970s, studying the nation fell out of favor in the American historical profession. Most historians started looking at either smaller or bigger things, investigating the experiences and cultures of social groups or taking the broad vantage promised by global history. This turn produced excellent scholarship. But meanwhile, who was doing the work of providing a legible past and a plausible future—a nation—to the people who lived in the United States? Charlatans, stooges, and tyrants. The endurance of nationalism proves that there's never any shortage of blackguards willing to prop up people's sense of themselves and their destiny with a tissue of myths and prophecies, prejudices and hatreds, or to empty out old rubbish bags full of festering resentments and calls to violence. When historians abandon the study of the nation, when scholars stop trying to write a common history for a people, nationalism doesn't die. Instead, it eats liberalism.

Maybe it's too late to restore a common history, too late for historians to make a difference. But is there any option other than to try to craft a new American history—one that could foster a new Americanism?

THE NATION AND THE STATE

The United States is different from other nations—every nation is different from every other—and its nationalism is different, too. To review: a nation is a people with common origins, and a state is a political community governed by laws. A nation-state is a political community governed by laws that unites a people with a supposedly common ancestry. When nation-states arose out of city-states and kingdoms and empires, they explained themselves by telling stories about their origins—stories meant to suggest that everyone in, say, "the French nation" had common ancestors, when they of course did not. As I wrote in my book These Truths, "Very often, histories of nation-states are little more than myths that hide the seams that stitch the nation to the state."

But in the American case, the origins of the nation can be found in those seams. When the United States declared its independence, in 1776, it became a state, but what made it a nation? The fiction that its people shared a common ancestry was absurd on its face; they came from all over, and, after having waged a war against Great Britain, just about the last thing they wanted to celebrate was their Britishness. Long after independence, most Americans saw the United States not as a nation but, true to the name, as a confederation of states. That's what made arguing for ratification of the Constitution an uphill battle; it's also why the Constitution's advocates called themselves "Federalists," when they were in fact nationalists, in the sense that they were proposing to replace a federal system, under the Articles of Confederation, with a national system. When John Jay insisted, in The Federalist Papers, no. 2, "that Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs," he was whistling in the dark.

One way to turn a state into a nation is to write its history.

It was the lack of these similarities that led Federalists such as Noah Webster to attempt to manufacture a national character by urging Americans to adopt distinctive spelling. "Language, as well as government should be national,"

Webster wrote in 1789. “America should have her own distinct from all the world.” That got the United States “favor” instead of “favour.” It did not, however, make the United States a nation. And by 1828, when Webster published his monumental American Dictionary of the English Language, he did not include the word “nationalism,” which had no meaning or currency in the United States in the 1820s. Not until the 1840s, when European nations were swept up in what has been called “the age of nationalities,” did Americans come to think of themselves as belonging to a nation, with a destiny.

This course of events is so unusual, in the matter of nation building, that the historian David Armitage has suggested that the United States is something other than a nation-state. “What we mean by nationalism is the desire of nations (however defined) to possess states to create the peculiar hybrid we call the nation-state,” Armitage writes, but “there’s also a beast we might call the state-nation, which arises when the state is formed before the development of any sense of national consciousness. The United States might be seen as a, perhaps the only, spectacular example of the latter”—not a nation-state but a state-nation.

One way to turn a state into a nation is to write its history. The first substantial history of the American nation, Bancroft’s ten-volume History of the United States, From the Discovery of the American Continent, was published between 1834 and 1874. Bancroft wasn’t only a historian; he was also a politician who served in the administrations of three U.S. presidents, including as secretary of war in the age of American continental expansion. An architect of manifest destiny, Bancroft wrote his history in an attempt to make the United States’ founding appear inevitable, its growth inexorable, and its history ancient. De-emphasizing its British inheritance, he celebrated the United States as a pluralistic and cosmopolitan nation, with ancestors all over the world:

The origin of the language we speak carries us to India; our religion is from Palestine; of the hymns sung in our churches, some were first heard in Italy, some in the deserts of Arabia, some on the banks of the Euphrates; our arts come from Greece; our jurisprudence from Rome.

Nineteenth-century nationalism was liberal, a product of the Enlightenment. It rested on an analogy between the individual and the collective. As the American theorist of nationalism Hans Kohn once wrote, “The concept of national self-

determination—transferring the ideal of liberty from the individual to the organic collectivity—was raised as the banner of liberalism."

Liberal nationalism, as an idea, is fundamentally historical. Nineteenth-century Americans understood the nation-state within the context of an emerging set of ideas about human rights: namely, that the power of the state guaranteed everyone eligible for citizenship the same set of irrevocable political rights. The future Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner offered this interpretation in 1849:

Here is the Great Charter of every human being drawing vital breath upon this soil, whatever may be his condition, and whoever may be his parents. He may be poor, weak, humble, or black,—he may be of Caucasian, Jewish, Indian, or Ethiopian race,—he may be of French, German, English, or Irish extraction; but before the Constitution of Massachusetts all these distinctions disappear. . . . He is a MAN, the equal of all his fellow-men. He is one of the children of the State, which, like an impartial parent, regards all of its offspring with an equal care.

Or as the Prussian-born American political philosopher Francis Lieber, a great influence on Sumner, wrote, "Without a national character, states cannot obtain that longevity and continuity of political society which is necessary for our progress." Lieber's most influential essay, "Nationalism: A Fragment of Political Science," appeared in 1860, on the very eve of the Civil War.

THE UNION AND THE CONFEDERACY

The American Civil War was a struggle over two competing ideas of the nation-state. This struggle has never ended; it has just moved around.

In the antebellum United States, Northerners, and especially northern abolitionists, drew a contrast between (northern) nationalism and (southern) sectionalism. "We must cultivate a national, instead of a sectional patriotism" urged one Michigan congressman in 1850. But Southerners were nationalists, too. It's just that their nationalism was what would now be termed "illiberal" or "ethnic," as opposed to the Northerners' liberal or civic nationalism. This distinction has been subjected to much criticism, on the grounds that it's nothing more than a way of calling one kind of nationalism good and another bad. But the nationalism of the North and that of the South were in fact different, and much of U.S. history has been a battle between them.

“Ours is the government of the white man,” the American statesman John C. Calhoun declared in 1848, arguing against admitting Mexicans as citizens of the United States. “This Government was made by our fathers on the white basis,” the American politician Stephen Douglas said in 1858. “It was made by white men for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever.”

Abraham Lincoln, building on arguments made by black abolitionists, exposed Douglas’ history as fiction. “I believe the entire records of the world, from the date of the Declaration of Independence up to within three years ago, may be searched in vain for one single affirmation, from one single man, that the negro was not included in the Declaration of Independence,” Lincoln said during a debate with Douglas in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1858. He continued:

I think I may defy Judge Douglas to show that he ever said so, that Washington ever said so, that any President ever said so, that any member of Congress ever said so, or that any living man upon the whole earth ever said so, until the necessities of the present policy of the Democratic party, in regard to slavery, had to invent that affirmation.

No matter, the founders of the Confederacy answered: we will craft a new constitution, based on white supremacy. In 1861, the Confederacy’s newly elected vice president, Alexander Stephens, delivered a speech in Savannah in which he explained that the ideas that lay behind the U.S. Constitution “rested upon the assumption of the equality of races”—here ceding Lincoln’s argument—but that “our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite ideas; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery is his natural and moral condition.”

The North won the war. But the battle between liberal and illiberal nationalism raged on, especially during the debates over the 14th and 15th Amendments, which marked a second founding of the United States on terms set by liberal ideas about the rights of citizens and the powers of nation-states—namely, birthright citizenship, equal rights, universal (male) suffrage, and legal protections for noncitizens. These Reconstruction-era amendments also led to debates over immigration, racial and gender equality, and the limits of citizenship. Under the terms of the 14th Amendment, children of Chinese immigrants born in the United

States would be U.S. citizens. Few major political figures talked about Chinese immigrants in favorable terms. Typical was the virulent prejudice expressed by William Higby, a one-time miner and Republican congressman from California. “The Chinese are nothing but a pagan race,” Higby said in 1866. “You cannot make good citizens of them.” And opponents of the 15th Amendment found both African American voting and Chinese citizenship scandalous. Fumed Garrett Davis, a Democratic senator from Kentucky: “I want no negro government; I want no Mongolian government; I want the government of the white man which our fathers incorporated.”

The most significant statement in this debate was made by a man born into slavery who had sought his own freedom and fought for decades for emancipation, citizenship, and equal rights. In 1869, in front of audiences across the country, Frederick Douglass delivered one of the most important and least read speeches in American political history, urging the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments in the spirit of establishing a “composite nation.” He spoke, he said, “to the question of whether we are the better or the worse for being composed of different races of men.” If nations, which are essential for progress, form from similarity, what of nations like the United States, which are formed out of difference, Native American, African, European, Asian, and every possible mixture, “the most conspicuous example of composite nationality in the world”?

To Republicans like Higby, who objected to Chinese immigration and to birthright citizenship, and to Democrats like Davis, who objected to citizenship and voting rights for anyone other than white men, Douglass offered an impassioned reply. As for the Chinese: “Do you ask, if I would favor such immigration? I answer, I would. Would you have them naturalized, and have them invested with all the rights of American citizenship? I would. Would you allow them to vote? I would.” As for future generations, and future immigrants to the United States, Douglass said, “I want a home here not only for the negro, the mulatto and the Latin races; but I want the Asiatic to find a home here in the United States, and feel at home here, both for his sake and for ours.” For Douglass, progress could only come in this new form of a nation, the composite nation. “We shall spread the network of our science and civilization over all who seek their shelter, whether from Asia, Africa, or the Isles of the sea,” he said, and “all shall here bow to the same law, speak the same language, support the same Government, enjoy the same

liberty, vibrate with the same national enthusiasm, and seek the same national ends." That was Douglass' new Americanism. It did not prevail.

Emancipation and Reconstruction, the historian and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois would write in 1935, was "the finest effort to achieve democracy . . . this world had ever seen." But that effort had been betrayed by white Northerners and white Southerners who patched the United States back together by inventing a myth that the war was not a fight over slavery at all but merely a struggle between the nation and the states. "We fell under the leadership of those who would compromise with truth in the past in order to make peace in the present," Du Bois wrote bitterly. Douglass' new Americanism was thus forgotten. So was Du Bois' reckoning with American history.

NATIONAL HISTORIES

The American Historical Association was founded in 1884—two years after the French philosopher Ernest Renan wrote his signal essay, "What Is a Nation?" Nationalism was taking a turn, away from liberalism and toward illiberalism, including in Germany, beginning with the "blood and iron" of Bismarck. A driver of this change was the emergence of mass politics, under whose terms nation-states "depended on the participation of the ordinary citizen to an extent not previously envisaged," as the historian Eric Hobsbawm once wrote. That "placed the question of the 'nation,' and the citizen's feelings towards whatever he regarded as his 'nation,' 'nationality' or other centre of loyalty, at the top of the political agenda."

This transformation began in the United States in the 1880s, with the rise of Jim Crow laws, and with a regime of immigration restriction, starting with the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first federal law restricting immigration, which was passed in 1882. Both betrayed the promises and constitutional guarantees made by the 14th and 15th Amendments. Fighting to realize that promise would be the work of standard-bearers who included Ida B. Wells, who led a campaign against lynching, and Wong Chin Foo, who founded the Chinese Equal Rights League in 1892, insisting, "We claim a common manhood with all other nationalities."

The uglier and more illiberal nationalism got, the more liberals became convinced of the impossibility of liberal nationalism.

But the white men who delivered speeches at the annual meetings of the American Historical Association during those years had little interest in discussing racial segregation, the disenfranchisement of black men, or immigration restriction. Frederick Jackson Turner drew historians' attention to the frontier. Others contemplated the challenges of populism and socialism. Progressive-era historians explained the American nation as a product of conflict "between democracy and privilege, the poor versus the rich, the farmers against the monopolists, the workers against the corporations, and, at times, the Free-Soilers against the slaveholders," as Degler observed. And a great many association presidents, notably Woodrow Wilson, mourned what had come to be called "the Lost Cause of the Confederacy." All offered national histories that left out the origins and endurance of racial inequality.

Meanwhile, nationalism changed, beginning in the 1910s and especially in the 1930s. And the uglier and more illiberal nationalism got, the more liberals became convinced of the impossibility of liberal nationalism. In the United States, nationalism largely took the form of economic protectionism and isolationism. In 1917, the publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, opposing U.S. involvement in World War I, began calling for "America first," and he took the same position in 1938, insisting that "Americans should maintain the traditional policy of our great and independent nation—great largely because it is independent."

In the years before the United States entered World War II, a fringe even supported Hitler; Charles Coughlin—a priest, near presidential candidate, and wildly popular broadcaster—took to the radio to preach anti-Semitism and admiration for Hitler and the Nazi Party and called on his audience to form a new political party, the Christian Front. In 1939, about 20,000 Americans, some dressed in Nazi uniforms, gathered in Madison Square Garden, decorated with swastikas and American flags, with posters declaring a "Mass Demonstration for True Americanism," where they denounced the New Deal as the "Jew Deal." Hitler, for his part, expressed admiration for the Confederacy and regret that "the beginnings of a great new social order based on the principle of slavery and inequality were destroyed by the war." As one arm of a campaign to widen divisions in the United States and weaken American resolve, Nazi propaganda distributed in the Jim Crow South called for the repeal of the 14th and 15th Amendments.

The “America first” supporter Charles Lindbergh, who, not irrelevantly, had become famous by flying across the Atlantic alone, based his nationalism on geography. “One need only glance at a map to see where our true frontiers lie,” he said in 1939. “What more could we ask than the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Pacific on the west?” (This President Franklin Roosevelt answered in 1940, declaring the dream that the United States was “a lone island,” to be, in fact, a nightmare, “the nightmare of a people lodged in prison, handcuffed, hungry, and fed through the bars from day to day by the contemptuous, unpitying masters of other continents.”)

In the wake of World War II, American historians wrote the history of the United States as a story of consensus, an unvarying “liberal tradition in America,” according to the political scientist Louis Hartz, that appeared to stretch forward in time into an unvarying liberal future. Schlesinger, writing in 1949, argued that liberals occupied “the vital center” of American politics. These historians had plenty of blind spots—they were especially blind to the forces of conservatism and fundamentalism—but they nevertheless offered an expansive, liberal account of the history of the American nation and the American people.

The last, best single-volume popular history of the United States written in the twentieth century was Degler’s 1959 book, Out of Our Past: The Forces That Shaped Modern America: a stunning, sweeping account that, greatly influenced by Du Bois, placed race, slavery, segregation, and civil rights at the center of the story, alongside liberty, rights, revolution, freedom, and equality. Astonishingly, it was Degler’s first book. It was also the last of its kind.

THE DECLINE OF NATIONAL HISTORY

If love of the nation is what drove American historians to the study of the past in the nineteenth century, hatred for nationalism drove American historians away from it in the second half of the twentieth century.

It had long been clear that nationalism was a contrivance, an artifice, a fiction. After World War II, while U.S. President Harry Truman was helping establish what came to be called “the liberal international order,” internationalists began predicting the end of the nation-state, with the Harvard political scientist Rupert Emerson declaring that “the nation and the nation-state are anachronisms in the

atomic age." By the 1960s, nationalism looked rather worse than an anachronism. Meanwhile, with the coming of the Vietnam War, American historians stopped studying the nation-state in part out of a fear of complicity with atrocities of U.S. foreign policy and regimes of political oppression at home. "The professional practice of history writing and teaching flourished as the handmaiden of nation-making; the nation provided both support and an appreciative audience," Bender observed in Rethinking American History in a Global Age in 2002. "Only recently," he continued, "and because of the uncertain status of the nation-state has it been recognized that history as a professional discipline is part of its own substantive narrative and not at all sufficiently self-conscious about the implications of that circularity." Since then, historians have only become more self-conscious, to the point of paralysis. If nationalism was a pathology, the thinking went, the writing of national histories was one of its symptoms, just another form of mythmaking.

If love of the nation is what drove American historians to the study of the past in the nineteenth century, hatred for nationalism drove American historians away from it in the second half of the twentieth century.

Something else was going on, too. Beginning in the 1960s, women and people of color entered the historical profession and wrote new, rich, revolutionary histories, asking different questions and drawing different conclusions. Historical scholarship exploded, and got immeasurably richer and more sophisticated. In a there-goes-the-neighborhood moment, many older historians questioned the value of this scholarship. Degler did not; instead, he contributed to it. Most historians who wrote about race were not white and most historians who wrote about women were not men, but Degler, a white man, was one of two male co-founders of the National Organization for Women and won a Pulitzer in 1972 for a book called Neither Black nor White. Still, he shared the concern expressed by Higham that most new American historical scholarship was "not about the United States but merely in the United States."

By 1986, when Degler rose from his chair to deliver his address before the American Historical Association, a lot of historians in the United States had begun advocating a kind of historical cosmopolitanism, writing global rather than national history. Degler didn't have much patience for this. A few years later, after the onset of civil war in Bosnia, the political philosopher Michael Walzer grimly

announced that “the tribes have returned.” They had never left. They’d only become harder for historians to see, because they weren’t really looking anymore.

A NEW AMERICAN HISTORY

Writing national history creates plenty of problems. But not writing national history creates more problems, and these problems are worse.

What would a new Americanism and a new American history look like? They might look rather a lot like the composite nationalism imagined by Douglass and the clear-eyed histories written by Du Bois. They might take as their starting point the description of the American experiment and its challenges offered by Douglass in 1869:

A Government founded upon justice, and recognizing the equal rights of all men; claiming no higher authority for existence, or sanction for its laws, than nature, reason, and the regularly ascertained will of the people; steadily refusing to put its sword and purse in the service of any religious creed or family, is a standing offense to most of the Governments of the world, and to some narrow and bigoted people among ourselves.

At the close of the Cold War, some commentators concluded that the American experiment had ended in triumph, that the United States had become all the world. But the American experiment had not in fact ended. A nation founded on revolution and universal rights will forever struggle against chaos and the forces of particularism. A nation born in contradiction will forever fight over the meaning of its history. But that doesn’t mean history is meaningless, or that anyone can afford to sit out the fight.

“The history of the United States at the present time does not seek to answer any significant questions,” Degler told his audience some three decades ago. If American historians don’t start asking and answering those sorts of questions, other people will, he warned. They’ll echo Calhoun and Douglas and Father Coughlin. They’ll lament “American carnage.” They’ll call immigrants “animals” and other states “shithole countries.” They’ll adopt the slogan “America first.” They’ll say they can “make America great again.” They’ll call themselves

“nationalists.” Their history will be a fiction. They will say that they alone love this country. They will be wrong.

CORRECTION APPENDED (February 26, 2019)

An earlier version of this article misidentified the U.S. president who began building the liberal international order after World War II. It was Harry Truman, not Franklin Roosevelt.

Who's Afraid of Budget Deficits? By Jason Furman and Lawrence H. Summers

How Washington Should End Its Debt Obsession

The United States' annual budget deficit is set to reach nearly $1 trillion this year, more than four percent of GDP and up from $585 billion in 2016. As a result of the continuing shortfall, over the next decade, the national debt—the total amount owed by the U.S. government—is projected to balloon from its current level of 78 percent of GDP to 105 percent of GDP. Such huge amounts of debt are unprecedented for the United States during a time of economic prosperity.

Does it matter? To some economists and policymakers, the trend spells disaster, dragging down economic growth and potentially leading to a full-blown debt crisis before too long. These deficit fundamentalists see the failure of the Simpson-Bowles plan (a 2010 proposal to sharply cut deficits) as a major missed opportunity and argue that policymakers should make tackling the national debt a top priority. On the other side, deficit dismissers say the United States can ignore fiscal constraints entirely given low interest rates (which make borrowing cheap), the eagerness of investors in global capital markets to buy U.S. debt (which makes borrowing easy), and the absence of high inflation (which means the Federal Reserve can keep interest rates low).

The deficit dismissers have a point. Long-term structural declines in interest rates mean that policymakers should reconsider the traditional fiscal approach that has often wrong-headedly limited worthwhile investments in such areas as education, health care, and infrastructure. Yet many remain fixated on cutting spending, especially on entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicaid. That is a mistake. Politicians and policymakers should focus on urgent social problems, not deficits.

But they shouldn't ignore fiscal constraints entirely. The deficit fundamentalists are right that the debt cannot be allowed to grow forever. And the government cannot set budget policy without any limiting principles or guides as to what is and what is not possible or desirable.

There is another policy approach that neither prioritizes cutting deficits nor dismisses them. Unlike in the past, budgeters need not make reducing projected deficits a priority. But they should ensure that, except during downturns, when fiscal stimulus is required, new spending and tax cuts do not add to the debt. This middle course would tolerate large and growing deficits without making a major effort to reduce them—at least for the foreseeable future. But it would also stop the policy trend of the last two years, which will otherwise continue to pile up debt.

Policymakers must also recognize that maintaining existing public services, let alone meeting new needs, will, over time, require higher revenues. Today's large deficits derive more from falling revenues than rising entitlement spending. More spending is not, by itself, something to be afraid of. The United States needs to invest in solutions to its fundamental challenges: finding jobs for the millions of Americans who have given up hope of finding them, providing health insurance for the millions who still lack it, and extending opportunities to the children left behind by an inadequate educational system.

THE TRUTH ABOUT DEFICITS

Economic textbooks teach that government deficits raise interest rates, crowd out private investment, and leave everyone poorer. Cutting deficits, on the other hand, reduces interest rates, spurring productive investment. Those forces may have been important in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when long-term real interest rates (nominal interest rates minus the rate of inflation) averaged around four percent and stock market valuations were much lower than they are today. The deficit reduction efforts of Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton contributed to the investment-led boom in the 1990s.

Today, however, the situation is very different. Although government debt as a share of GDP has risen far higher, long-term real interest rates on government debt have fallen much lower. As shown in the table, in 2000, the Congressional Budget Office forecast that by 2010, the U.S. debt-to-GDP ratio would be six percent. The same ten-year forecast in 2018 put the figure for 2028 at 105 percent. Real interest rates on ten-year government bonds, meanwhile, fell from 4.3 percent in 2000 to an average of 0.8 percent last year. Those low rates haven't been manufactured by the Federal Reserve, nor are they just the result of the financial crisis. They preceded the crisis and appear to be rooted in a set

of deeper forces, including lower investment demand, higher savings rates, and widening inequality. Interest rates may well rise a bit over the next several years, but financial markets expect them to end up far below where they stood in the 1980s and 1990s. Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell has noted that the Fed's current 2.375 percent interest rate is close to the neutral rate, at which the economy grows at a sustainable pace, and financial markets expect that the federal funds rate will not rise any further.

Low interest rates mean that governments can sustain higher levels of debt, since their financing costs are lower. Although the national debt represents a far larger percentage of GDP than in recent decades, the U.S. government currently pays around the same proportion of GDP in interest on its debt, adjusted for inflation, as it has on average since World War II. The cost of deficits to the Treasury is the degree to which the rate of interest paid on the debt exceeds inflation. By this standard, the resources the United States needs to devote to interest payments are also around their historical average as a share of the economy. Although both real and nominal interest rates are set to rise in the coming decade, interest payments on the debt are projected to remain well below the share reached in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when deficit reduction topped the economic agenda.

Government deficits also seem to be hurting the economy less than they used to. Textbook economic theory holds that high levels of government debt make it more expensive for companies to borrow. But these days, interest rates are low, stock market prices are high relative to company earnings, and major companies hold large amounts of cash on their balance sheets. No one seriously argues that the cost of capital is holding back businesses from investing. Cutting the deficit, then, is unlikely to spur much private investment.

Moreover, the lower interest rates that would result from smaller deficits would not be an unambiguously good thing. Many economists and policymakers, including former Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and the economist Martin Feldstein, worry that interest rates are already too low. Cheap borrowing, they argue, with some merit, has led investors to put their money in unproductive ventures, created financial bubbles, and left central bankers with less leeway to cut rates in response to the next recession. If the United States cut its deficits by

three percent of GDP, enough to stabilize the national debt, interest rates would fall even further.

Some commentators worry that rising deficits don't just slowly eat away at economic growth, as the textbooks warn; they could lead to a fiscal crisis in which the United States loses access to credit markets, sparking an economic meltdown. There is precious little economic theory or historical evidence to justify this fear. Few, if any, fiscal crises have taken place in countries that borrow in their own currencies and print their own money. In Japan, for example, the national debt has exceeded 100 percent of GDP for almost two decades. But interest rates on long-term government debt remain near zero, and real interest rates are well below zero. Even in Italy, which does not borrow in its own currency or set its own monetary policy and, according to the markets, faces a substantial risk of defaulting, long-term real interest rates are less than two percent, despite high levels of debt and the government's plans for major new spending.

The eurozone debt crisis at the start of this decade is often held up as a cautionary tale about the perils of fiscal excess. But stagnant growth (made worse by government spending cuts in the face of a recession) was as much the cause of the eurozone's debt problems as profligate spending. And countries such as those in the eurozone, which borrow in currencies they do not control, face a far higher risk of debt crises than countries such as the United States, which have their own currencies. Countries with their own currencies can always have their central bank buy government debt or print money to repay it; countries without them can't.

Higher levels of debt do have downsides. They could make it harder for governments to summon the political will to stimulate the economy in a downturn. But saying that a country would be better off with lower debt is not the same as saying that it would be better off lowering its debt. The risks associated with high debt levels are small relative to the harm cutting deficits would do.

It's true that future generations will have to pay the interest on today's debt, but at current rates, even a 50-percentage-point increase in the U.S. debt-to-GDP ratio would raise real interest payments as a share of GDP by just 0.5

percentage points. That would bring those payments closer to the top of their historical range, but not into uncharted territory.

Deficits, then, should not cause policymakers much concern, at least for now. But some economists adopt an even more radical view. Advocates of what is known as modern monetary theory (MMT), such as Stephanie Kelton, an economist and former adviser to Senator Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign, have been widely interpreted as arguing that governments that borrow in their own currencies have no reason to concern themselves with budget constraints. Taxes should be set based not on spending levels but on macroeconomic conditions, and deficit financing has no effect on interest rates. Some politicians have invoked those positions to suggest that the government need not worry about debt at all. (Kelton and other MMT supporters claim that this is a misinterpretation of their theory, but it's not clear what their true arguments are, and most of the political supporters of MMT have used it as a justification for ignoring government debt entirely.)

This goes too far. When the economy is held back by lack of demand during a downturn, modern monetary theory gives similar answers to those provided by more mainstream Keynesian theory—that is, that more spending or lower taxes will have little effect on interest rates. But the modern monetarist approach is a poor guide to policy in normal economic times, when it would prescribe large tax hikes to control inflation—not exactly the policy its advocates highlight.

In truth, no one knows the benefits and costs of different debt levels—75 percent of GDP, 100 percent of GDP, or even 150 percent of GDP. According to the best projections, the United States is on course to exceed these figures over the next 30 years. Although the U.S. government will remain solvent for the foreseeable future, it would be imprudent to allow the debt-to-GDP ratio to rise forever in an uncertain world. Trying to make this situation sustainable without adjusting fiscal policy or raising interest rates, as recommended by some advocates of modern monetary theory, is a recipe for hyperinflation.

HOW WE GOT HERE

There is a widely held misconception that the deficit has risen primarily because government programs have grown more generous. Not so. Deficits have ballooned because a series of tax cuts have dramatically reduced government

revenue below past projections and historical levels. The tax cuts passed by Presidents George W. Bush and Donald Trump totaled three percent of GDP—much more than the projected increases in entitlement spending over the next 30 years. Those cuts meant that in 2018, the federal government took in revenue equivalent to just 16 percent of GDP, the lowest level in half a century, except for a few brief periods in the aftermath of recessions. Without the Bush and Trump tax cuts (and the interest payments on the debt that went with them), last year's federal budget would have come close to balancing. As things stand, however, the Congressional Budget Office projects that revenue over the next five years will continue to average less than 17 percent of GDP, a percentage point lower than under President Ronald Reagan.

Today's revenue levels are even lower relative to in the past than these share-of-GDP figures imply. If tax policy is left unchanged, government revenue should rise as a share of GDP. In part, this is because of what economists call "real bracket creep." Society has decided that it is fair to tax people making, say, $1 million at a higher rate than those making, say, $50,000. Over time, economic growth means more people earn higher incomes, adjusted for inflation, and so more people pay higher tax rates.

The United States has more of a revenue problem than an entitlement problem.
More serious than leading to inadequate revenue is the way that tax cuts in the last 25 years have misallocated resources. They have worsened income inequality and, at best, have done very little for economic growth. The most recent tax cut, in 2017, will cost $1.9 trillion over ten years, but it boosted growth only slightly, if at all, while shifting the distribution of income toward the wealthy and reducing the number of people with health insurance.

Look abroad, and it becomes obvious that the United States has more of a revenue problem than an entitlement problem. U.S. spending on social programs ranks among the lowest in 35 advanced economies, yet the country has the highest deficit relative to its GDP in the group. That is because the United States brings in the fifth-lowest total revenue as a share of GDP among those 35 countries.

The idea that higher spending, particularly on entitlements, is to blame for rising deficits stems from a combination of faulty numbers and faulty analysis. Total

U.S. government spending, excluding interest payments, amounts to 19 percent of GDP, up only slightly from its average of 18 percent between 1960 and 2000. Social Security and Medicare spending are set to rise by more than this over the coming decades, but that rise will be at least partially offset by other spending reductions and will do less to increase the deficit in terms of present value, which accounts for the current value of future spending and borrowing, than the tax cuts passed in the last two and a half decades.

What's more, looking at shares of GDP is a bad way to understand the underlying causes of deficits and how they might shrink. Entitlement costs have risen not because the programs have become more generous but largely because the population as a whole has aged, a fact that is mostly the result of falling birthrates. As retirees' share of the population grows, so does spending on Social Security and Medicare. That is not making government spending more generous to the elderly, and there is no reason why retirees should bear most of the burden of lower birthrates.

One might argue that the rise in entitlement spending caused by longer life spans represents an increase in the generosity of Social Security and Medicare, since people are collecting benefits for a longer period of time. But that is the wrong way to look at it. By 2025, the standard retirement age for Social Security will complete its rise from 65 to 67, reducing the time that most people will collect benefits. Many lower-income Americans, moreover, are dying younger than they used to. That disturbing trend means that poorer retirees are collecting less in Social Security payments than before.

There's another reason that shares of GDP make for a bad way to measure how much the government does: the things the government buys cost much more in relative terms than they used to. Over the last 30 years, the cost of both a day in a hospital and a year in college has risen by a factor of more than 200 relative to the price of a television set. It's also getting more expensive for the United States to maintain its global military advantage as potential adversaries, such as China, Iran, and Russia, boost their military spending.

At a more abstract level, rising inequality also pushes up the cost of achieving any given policy goal. Most people acknowledge that the government has some role to play in redistributing income, even though they disagree on how large that

role should be. For any given amount of redistribution, more inequality means more spending.

DO NO HARM

Although politicians shouldn't make the debt their top priority, they also shouldn't act as if it doesn't matter at all. Large mismatches between revenue and spending will have to be fixed at some point. All else being equal, it would be better to do so before the amounts involved get out of hand. And since economists aren't sure just how costly large deficits are, it would be prudent to keep government debt in check in case they turn out to be more harmful than expected.

Even setting aside these macroeconomic considerations, politicians should remember that running budget deficits does not replace the need to raise revenue or cut spending; it merely defers it. Sooner or later, government spending has to be paid for. It is hard to budget rationally and decide what expenditures and tax cuts are worthwhile when one obfuscates the ultimate cost of these policies. Policymakers won't be able to argue against a poorly designed but well-intentioned spending program or middle-class tax cut without any limiting principles for fiscal policy.

The right budget strategy must balance several competing considerations: it should get as close as possible to the most economically efficient policy while remaining understandable and politically sustainable. The optimal policy from an economic standpoint would be to gradually phase in spending cuts or tax increases at a rate that would prevent perpetual growth in the national debt as a share of the economy but would avoid doing serious harm to economic demand along the way. Such an approach, however, would be complicated and difficult to understand. Nuance doesn't sell.

A requirement that the federal government balance its budget or begin paying down the debt is easier to grasp but would impose far more deficit reduction than the economy needs or could bear. Such measures are also politically unsustainable. Even if policymakers passed such legislation tomorrow, they could not bind their successors to it. Clinton oversaw four balanced budgets and bequeathed a declining national debt to Bush, but a decade after Clinton left office, the debt was higher than when he arrived.

A simple approach to fiscal policy that would prove understandable, sustainable, and economically reasonable would be to focus on important investments but do no harm. In short, when you are in a hole, stop digging. That means that instead of passing unfunded legislation, Congress should pay for new measures with either spending cuts or extra revenues, except during recessions, when fiscal stimulus will be essential given the increased constraints on monetary policy now. This approach would provide a ready way to prioritize: if something is truly worth doing, it should be worth paying for. Such a course would also strike a reasonable balance between the harms of extra debt and the harms of deficit reduction. The deficit would continue climbing to unprecedented levels. But no longer would the United States be pursuing the reckless fiscal policies of the last two years, which, if continued, would add even more debt, even faster, while driving up inequality and failing to support growth.

A lot of details would need to be worked out. Analysts will have to decide whether to exclude from their deficit calculations certain kinds of spending—such as infrastructure spending—that represent investments rather than current consumption. One critical question is whether analysts will use dynamic scoring, an approach that accounts for how a new policy will affect the economy when calculating what it will cost. Advocates of dynamic scoring argue that it provides more accurate cost estimates, but critics point out that getting the numbers right is tricky, so it's easy to bake in overly optimistic assumptions and thus get almost any result you want. In truth, dynamic scoring is a useful tool, as long as it's done right.

Politicians should not let large deficits deter them from addressing the United States' fundamental challenges.

Dynamic scoring is usually limited to tax debates. That's a mistake, as nontax policies can also have significant budgetary effects. A wide range of experts believe that investments in tax enforcement pay off at a rate of $5 or more for every $1 spent. Although official scorekeepers gave only minimal credit to the cost-control measures in the Affordable Care Act, thanks in large part to those measures, cumulative Medicare and Medicaid spending in the decade after the ACA was passed is likely to end up coming in about $1 trillion below forecasts made at the time.

As policymakers set budgets in the coming years, a lot will depend on what interest rates do. Financial markets do not expect the increases in interest rates that budget forecasters have priced in. If the markets prove right, that will strengthen the case against deficit reduction. If, on the other hand, interest rates start to rise well above what even the budget forecasters expect, then, as in the early 1990s, more active efforts to cut the deficit could make sense.

Even if interest rates remain low, however, the do-no-harm approach won't be sustainable forever. How long the United States will be able maintain its growing national debt will depend on whether deficits come in above or below current projections. Even so, the national debt presents just one of many problems the United States faces—and not the most pressing.

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Much more pressing are the problems of languishing labor-force participation rates, slow economic growth, persistent poverty, a lack of access to health insurance, and global climate change. Politicians should not let large deficits deter them from addressing these fundamental challenges. A do-no-harm approach would allow large and growing deficits for a long time, but it would put some constraints on the most ambitious political agendas. Progressives have proposed Medicare for all, free college, a federal jobs guarantee, and a massive green infrastructure program. The merits of each of these proposals are up for debate. But each idea responds to a real need that will take resources to address. Some 29 million Americans still do not have health insurance. College is unaffordable for far too many. Millions of working-age Americans have given up even looking for work. Global warming cannot be ignored. Add in the widely shared desire for more investments in education and infrastructure and the likelihood that defense spending will keep rising, and the federal government will clearly have to spend a lot more.

Congress can fund some new programs by trimming lower-priority spending elsewhere. But this will be difficult. Take health care. There is substantial scope to slow the growth of both public and private health spending. But this will require addressing the health-care system as a whole, not just cutting payments or reforming public health programs. That's because public health-care spending

has shrunk relative to private spending in recent years as the government has found more effective ways to reduce payments and improve efficiency.

Beyond entitlements, everyone has a list of favorite examples of wasteful government spending: farm programs, corporate welfare, and so on. But the dirty secret is that these programs are mostly small, so making them more efficient would not save much money. Enacting serious cuts to spending is much more difficult than most people acknowledge.

One program the federal government should not cut is Social Security. The gap in life expectancy between the rich and the poor is growing, and reducing benefits to retirees could exacerbate that trend. Cutting Social Security would also weaken economic demand far more than cutting most other programs would, as its beneficiaries tend to spend the money rather than save it. If policymakers reform Social Security and Medicare, they should do so to make the programs more effective, not to reduce the debt.

The truth is the federal government needs to raise more revenue. Even if the United States made no new investments and cut Social Security benefits enough to eliminate half of the long-term gap between the program's revenues and its expenditures (an unwise policy), it would save only about one-third of what is needed to keep the debt from growing relative to the economy. That is why the Simpson-Bowles Commission also proposed raising revenue to 21 percent of GDP, a step that would require a $9 trillion tax increase over the next decade.

Congress can raise some extra revenue in ways many Americans would consider fair, such as by imposing higher taxes on the richest households. It should also raise revenue with another round of corporate tax reform. For example, it can make expensing permanent (expensing allows companies to immediately deduct the cost of new investments from their taxable income) while raising corporate tax rates or taxing firms for the carbon they emit. Economists regard such reforms as economically efficient because they make new investments cheaper while taxing windfall gains and past investments. But tapping the top few percent of households and raising corporate taxes won't be enough. Ultimately, all Americans will have to pay a little more to support the kind of society they say they want.

ENDING THE DEBT DELUSION

The economics of deficits have changed. A better appreciation of the sources and consequences of government debt, and of the options to address it, should lead policymakers away from many of the old deficit and entitlement-focused orthodoxies—but not to wholesale abandonment of fiscal constraints.

Deficit fundamentalists argue that they are championing a noble and underappreciated cause. In some ways, they are; deficit reduction is never a political winner. But if they turn out to be right, economists and policymakers will know soon enough. The financial markets give immediate feedback about the seriousness of the budget deficit. If the debt becomes a problem, interest rates will rise, putting financial and political pressure on policymakers to accomplish what fiscal fundamentalists have long wanted. But even if that happens, it is not likely to cost so much that it would be worth paying a definite cost today to prevent the small chance of a problem in the future.

Policymakers will always know when the market is worried about the deficit. But no alarm bells ring when the government fails to rebuild decaying infrastructure, properly fund preschools, or provide access to health care. The results of that kind of neglect show up only later— but the human cost is often far larger. It’s time for Washington to put away its debt obsession and focus on bigger things.

E Pluribus Unum? By Stacey Y. Abrams

The Fight Over Identity Politics

Recent political upheavals have reinvigorated a long-running debate about the role of identity in American politics—and especially American elections. Electoral politics have long been a lagging indicator of social change. For hundreds of years, the electorate was limited by laws that explicitly deprived women, African Americans, and other groups of the right to vote. (Efforts to deny voting rights and suppress voter turnout continue today, in less overt forms but with the same ill intent.) When marginalized groups finally gained access to the ballot, it took time for them to organize around opposition to the specific forms of discrimination and mistreatment that continued to plague them—and longer still for political parties and candidates to respond to such activism. In recent decades, however, rapid demographic and technological changes have accelerated this process, bolstering demands for inclusion and raising expectations in communities that had long been conditioned to accept a slow pace of change. In the past decade, the U.S. electorate has become younger and more ethnically diverse. Meanwhile, social media has changed the political landscape. Facebook captures examples of inequality and makes them available for endless replay. Twitter links the voiceless to newsmakers. Instagram immortalizes the faces and consequences of discrimination. Isolated cruelties are yoked into a powerful narrative of marginalization that spurs a common cause.

These changes have encouraged activists and political challengers to make demands with a high level of specificity—to take the identities that dominant groups have used to oppress them and convert them into tools of democratic justice. Critics of this phenomenon, including Francis Fukuyama (“Against Identity Politics,” September/October 2018), condemn it as the practice of “identity politics.” But Fukuyama’s criticism relies on a number of misjudgments. First, Fukuyama complains that “again and again, groups have come to believe that their identities—whether national, religious, ethnic, sexual, gender, or otherwise—are not receiving adequate recognition.” In the United States, marginalized groups have indeed come to believe this—because it is true. Fukuyama also warns that Americans are fragmenting “into segments based on ever-narrower identities, threatening the possibility of deliberation and collective

action by society as a whole." But what Fukuyama laments as "fracturing" is in reality the result of marginalized groups finally overcoming centuries-long efforts to erase them from the American polity—activism that will strengthen democratic rule, not threaten it.

THE CLASS TRAP

Fukuyama claims that the Democratic Party "has a major choice to make." The party, he writes, can continue "doubling down on the mobilization of the identity groups that today supply its most fervent activists: African Americans, Hispanics, professional women, the LGBT community, and so on." Or it can take Fukuyama's preferred tack, focusing more on economic issues in an attempt to "win back some of the white working-class voters . . . who have defected to the Republican Party in recent elections."

Fukuyama and other critics of identity politics contend that broad categories such as economic class contain multitudes and that all attention should focus on wide constructs rather than the substrates of inequality. But such arguments fail to acknowledge that some members of any particular economic class have advantages not enjoyed by others in their cohort. U.S. history abounds with examples of members of dominant groups abandoning class solidarity after concluding that opportunity is a zero-sum game. The oppressed have often aimed their impotent rage at those too low on the social scale to even attempt rebellion. This is particularly true in the catchall category known as "the working class." Conflict between black and white laborers stretches back to the earliest eras in U.S. history, which witnessed tensions between African slaves and European indentured servants. Racism and sexism have long tarnished the heroic story of the U.S. labor movement—defects that contributed to the rise of a segregated middle class and to persistent pay disparities between men and women, disparities exacerbated by racial differences. Indeed, the American working class has consistently relied on people of color and women to push for improved status for workers but has been slow to include them in the movement's victories.

The facile advice to focus solely on class ignores these complex links among American notions of race, gender, and economics. As Fukuyama himself notes, it has been difficult "to create broad coalitions to fight for redistribution," since

“members of the working class who also belong to higher-status identity groups (such as whites in the United States) tend to resist making common cause with those below them, and vice versa.” Fukuyama’s preferred strategy is also called into question by the success that the Democratic Party enjoyed in 2018 by engaging in what he derides as identity politics. Last year, I was the Democratic Party’s gubernatorial nominee in Georgia and became the first African American woman in U.S. history to be nominated for governor by a major political party. In my bid for office, I intentionally and vigorously highlighted communities of color and other marginalized groups, not to the exclusion of others but as a recognition of their specific policy needs. My campaign championed reforms to eliminate police shootings of African Americans, protect the LGBTQ community against ersatz religious freedom legislation, expand Medicaid to save rural hospitals, and reaffirm that undocumented immigrants deserve legal protections. I refused to accept the notion that the voters most affected by these policies would invariably support me simply because I was a member of a minority group. (The truth is that when people do not hear their causes authentically addressed by campaigns, they generally just don’t vote at all.) My campaign built an unprecedented coalition of people of color, rural whites, suburban dwellers, and young people in the Deep South by articulating an understanding of each group’s unique concerns instead of trying to create a false image of universality. As a result, in a midterm contest with a record-high turnout of nearly four million voters, I received more votes than any Democrat in Georgia’s history, falling a scant 54,000 votes shy of victory in a contest riddled with voting irregularities that benefited my opponent.

DIFFERENT STROKES

Beyond electoral politics, Fukuyama and others argue that by calling out ethnic, cultural, gender, or sexual differences, marginalized groups harm themselves and their causes. By enumerating and celebrating distinctions, the argument goes, they give their opponents reasons for further excluding them. But minorities and the marginalized have little choice but to fight against the particular methods of discrimination employed against them. The marginalized did not create identity politics: their identities have been forced on them by dominant groups, and politics is the most effective method of revolt.

The marginalized did not create identity politics: their identities have been forced on them by dominant groups, and politics is the most effective method of revolt. To seek redress and inclusion, the first step is to identify the barriers to entry: an array of laws and informal rules to proscribe, diminish, and isolate the marginalized. The specific methods by which the United States has excluded women, Native Americans, African Americans, immigrants, and the LGBTQ community from property ownership, educational achievement, and political enfranchisement have differed; so, too, have the most successful methods of fighting for inclusion—hence the need for a politics that respects and reflects the complicated nature of these identities and the ways in which they intersect. The basis for sustainable progress is legal protections grounded in an awareness of how identity has been used to deny opportunity. The LGBTQ community is not included in civil rights protections, which means members may lose their jobs or their right to housing or adoption. Antiabortion rules disproportionately harm women of color and low-income women of every ethnicity, affecting their economic capacity and threatening their very lives. Voter suppression, the most insidious tool to thwart the effectiveness of identity politics, demands the renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and massive reforms at the state and local levels.

When the groups most affected by these issues insist on acknowledgment of their intrinsic difference, it should not be viewed as divisive. Embracing the distinct histories and identities of groups in a democracy enhances the complexity and capacity of the whole. For example, by claiming the unique attributes of womanhood—and, for women of color, the experience of inhabiting the intersection of marginalized gender and race—feminists have demonstrated how those characteristics could be leveraged to enhance the whole. Take, for example, the Family and Medical Leave Act, which feminists originally pushed for in order to guarantee women's right to give birth and still keep their jobs, but which men have also come to rely on to take time off from work to care for children or aging parents.

The current demographic and social evolution toward diversity in the United States has played out alongside a trend toward greater economic and social inequality. These parallel but distinct developments are inextricably bound together. The entrance of the marginalized into the workplace, the commons, and the body politic—achieved through litigation and legislation—spawned

reactionary limits on their legal standing and restrictions meant to block their complaints and prevent remedies. The natural antidote to this condition is not a retrenchment to amorphous, universal descriptors devoid of context or nuance. Instead, Americans must thoughtfully pursue an expanded, identity-conscious politics. New, vibrant, noisy voices represent the strongest tool to manage the growing pains of multicultural coexistence. By embracing identity and its prickly, uncomfortable contours, Americans will become more likely to grow as one.

STACEY Y. ABRAMS served as Minority Leader of the Georgia House of Representatives from 2011 to 2017 and was the Democratic Party's nominee in Georgia's 2018 gubernatorial election.

IDENTITY POLITICS CAN LEAD TO PROGRESS

John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck

Francis Fukuyama argues that "identity politics has become a master concept that explains much of what is going on in global affairs." He attributes a variety of political developments in the United States and abroad—especially the emergence of populist nationalism—to identity politics. In Fukuyama's telling, the rise of identity politics constitutes a fall from grace. For him, most of "twentieth-century politics was defined by economic issues." But in the 1960s, he writes, the civil rights, feminist, and other social movements embraced identity politics. Later, he claims, forces on the political right followed suit, adopting "language and framing from the left." Fukuyama warns that if democratic societies continue "fracturing into segments based on ever-narrower identities," the result will be "state breakdown and, ultimately, failure."

Identity is indeed a "master concept" for understanding American politics. But identity politics has a much longer history than Fukuyama describes. And in the United States, identity politics hasn't led to the breakdown of democracy; rather, it has helped democracy thrive.

ORIGIN STORY

In Fukuyama's telling, identity politics first emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. In fact, Americans have been engaged in identity politics since the founding of the republic. If the fight for civil rights for African Americans was

fueled by identity politics, then so was the fight to establish and ensure white supremacy via slavery and Jim Crow. In other words, identity politics isn't behind only the efforts of marginalized groups to seek redress: it also drives the efforts of dominant groups to marginalize others.

Fukuyama believes identity politics went too far when groups such as African Americans began to "assert a separate identity" and "demand respect for [their members] as different from the mainstream society." Leaving aside whether that statement correctly characterizes the goal of such groups, it is important to acknowledge that identity politics also defined who was and who was not part of "mainstream society" in the first place.

If the fight for civil rights for African Americans was fueled by identity politics, then so was the fight to establish and ensure white supremacy via slavery and Jim Crow.

In Fukuyama's telling, U.S. politics were healthier when Americans—especially those on the left—organized around economic concerns that transcended ethnic categories. "In past eras," he writes, "progressives appealed to a shared experience of exploitation and resentment of rich capitalists." But there is no period in U.S. history when economics were so cleanly divorced from identity. For example, as the political scientist Ira Katznelson has documented, the key social welfare programs of the New Deal era were predicated on racial discrimination: U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt relied on the support of white segregationists, which he won by allowing southern states to prevent blacks from enjoying the New Deal's benefits. Identity, and especially racial and ethnic identity, has always been intrinsic to fights over economic opportunity and equality.

This is not to say that today's identity politics is the same as its historical forebears. What makes it different is how tightly Americans' views about racial, ethic, and religious identities are now bound up with another salient American identity: partisan affiliation. Well before 2016, Democratic and Republican voters had begun to diverge in their views of immigration and racial equality. Democrats became more supportive of immigration and more willing to attribute racial inequality to discrimination. Republicans became less supportive of immigration and more willing to attribute racial inequality to a lack of effort on the part of

African Americans. This divergence sharpened during Barack Obama's candidacy and presidency, as whites' racial attitudes became more closely tied to their partisan identities.

This trend might have accelerated even faster than it did had major political leaders tried to exploit it. But Obama actually talked about race less than other recent Democratic presidents and frequently used rhetoric that sought to unify Americans of different racial backgrounds. Meanwhile, Obama's Republican opponents in the presidential elections of 2008 and 2012, John McCain and Mitt Romney, chose not to stoke racialized fears of Obama.

Donald Trump was different. His provocative statements about race, immigration, and Islam helped define the 2016 election. Partly as a result, Americans' views on such issues became stronger predictors of how they voted. For example, compared with in earlier elections, it was easier to determine how people voted in 2016 based on whether they wanted a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants or believed that racial inequality was just a matter of minorities "not trying hard enough." Meanwhile, economic issues achieved more political potency when refracted through race. As far back as the 2016 Republican primary, whether voters supported Trump depended less on whether they were worried about losing their own jobs than it did on whether they were worried about whites losing jobs to ethnic minorities.

WHOSE CHOICE?

Since the election, this alignment of partisanship and attitudes about race and immigration has grown even stronger, and it has an important implication for Fukuyama's argument. Fukuyama's favored political agenda closely resembles that of Democratic voters and the Democratic Party. He supports remedies for police violence against minorities and the sexual harassment of women, endorses birthright citizenship, and wants an American identity based on ideals rather than on "blood and soil" nationalism.

The most forceful opposition to such ideas has come from the Trump administration and its Republican allies and supporters. Yet Fukuyama does not put the onus on Republicans to reject Trump. In his view, the "major choice" belongs to the Democratic Party, which must decide whether to double down on

"the mobilization of . . . identity groups" or "try to win back some of the white working-class voters . . . who have defected" to the GOP. But if Fukuyama wants federal action on his policy agenda in an era of divided government and narrow congressional majorities, the real onus is on Republicans to support his ideas. And if he wants an American identity based on shared values and open to all citizens—even those who hail from what Trump reportedly called "shithole countries"—then he will need at least some Republicans to stand up to Trump.

Fukuyama may be against identity politics, but identity politics is also critical to the success of the agenda that he supports. History has shown that progress toward equality doesn't come about because of happenstance, a sudden change of heart on Capitol Hill, or the magnanimity of dominant groups. Instead, progress comes when marginalized groups organize around their shared identities. Their fight is often unpopular. In one 1964 survey, conducted a few months after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, of those polled, 84 percent of southerners and 64 percent of Americans living outside the South said that civil rights leaders were pushing too fast. But pushing was their only recourse, and pushing helped change the country's laws and attitudes.

Fukuyama wants a unifying American identity, what he calls a "creedal national identity." But the country is already fairly close to having one. According to the December 2016 Views of the Electorate Research, or VOTER, Survey, 93 percent of Americans think that respecting U.S. political institutions and laws is somewhat or very important to "being American." Far fewer believe that it's important to be born in the United States (55 percent) or to have European heritage (20 percent). Moreover, most Americans actually place identity politics at the center of the American creed: the vast majority (88 percent) think that accepting people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds is important to being American.

There is no necessary tension between identity politics and the American creed. The question is whether identity politics will help Americans live up to that creed. Historically, it has.

JOHN SIDES, MICHAEL TESLER, AND LYNN VAVRECK are political scientists and the authors of Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America.

A CREEDAL IDENTITY IS NOT ENOUGH

Jennifer A. Richeson

Francis Fukuyama argues that identity politics is eroding national unity in the United States and Europe, undermining the kind of civil discourse essential to the maintenance of liberal democracy. He also claims that “perhaps the worst thing about identity politics as currently practiced by the left is that it has stimulated the rise of identity politics on the right.” This is highly misleading. Identity politics was part of the American political discourse long before liberals and leftists began to practice it in the 1960s and 1970s. Think of the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s and the white-supremacist Ku Klux Klan during the first half of the twentieth century. What were such groups if not early practitioners of a brand of white identity politics?

But other parts of Fukuyama’s argument are more persuasive, and he is right to focus on the role that identity plays in the health of American democracy. Fukuyama makes one particularly useful point in the closing passages of his article:

People will never stop thinking about themselves and their societies in identity terms. But people’s identities are neither fixed nor necessarily given by birth. Identity can be used to divide, but it can also be used to unify. That, in the end, will be the remedy for the populist politics of the present.

Identity politics was part of the American political discourse long before liberals and leftists began to practice it in the 1960s and 1970s.

What Fukuyama gets right here is the fact that human beings have a fundamental need to belong—a need that their collective identities, be they racial, ethnic, religious, regional, or national, often satisfy. Such affiliations, which psychologists call “social identities,” serve multiple psychological functions. These include, for example, the need for a sense of safety, which social identities satisfy by reducing uncertainty and providing norms that help people navigate everyday life. Some social identities also offer rituals and customs to aid with loss, mourning, and other significant challenges that occur during the course of one’s life. At times, identities provide a sense of purpose and meaning and a basis for esteem and regard that is larger than people’s individual selves. As

Fukuyama suggests, identities efficiently satisfy the human need for respect and dignity.

What Fukuyama gets wrong, however, is the idea that a single unifying identity—a "creedal" American identity—could alone satisfy this suite of psychological needs and thereby allow citizens to abandon the smaller social identities that people invest in and clearly value. Broad identities such as the one Fukuyama promotes are useful and unifying at times, but they rarely meet the human need for individuation. That is why people look to narrower bases for identification. Moreover, broad social identities such as national affiliations—even when ostensibly based on principles that are hypothetically accessible to all—often rely on the terms and norms of the dominant majority and thus end up undermining the identity needs of minority groups.

Furthermore, people's existing social identities are important to them, and attempts to dissolve them would likely be met with severe resistance. The potential loss of a group's identity, real or imagined, is psychologically threatening. A powerful urge compels people to defend their groups at all costs in the face of such threats. As Fukuyama himself notes, a sense of loss due to the changing racial and ethnic composition of the United States is partly to blame for the rise of right-wing identity politics. Hence, it is important not only to cultivate a common American identity, as Fukuyama argues, but also to promote the idea of the United States as inclusive of multiple racial, ethnic, religious, and other types of identities. Indeed, Americans must create that society.

WHY DON'T WE HAVE BOTH?

Perhaps the main weakness of Fukuyama's argument is the implication that Americans face a binary choice when it comes to political identity: either they can embrace a broad creedal identity or they can cling to narrow identities based on race, ethnicity, gender, or ideology. There is no reason to think that is true. Political leaders can address the sense of psychological vulnerability triggered by shifting demographics and social change and also respect rightful claims for inclusion and fair treatment on the part of members of marginalized groups. Americans can acknowledge and, when appropriate, celebrate the particular identities, cultures, and histories of distinct social groups and also pursue a unifying national creed.

There is even some evidence to suggest that the more identities people maintain—and the more complex and overlapping those identities are—the less conflict they will have with people who maintain different sets of identities. Greater identity complexity may serve as a buffer against the feelings of humiliation and resentment that often fuel ethnonationalist movements.

Identifying as American does not require the relinquishing of other identities. In fact, it is possible to leverage those identities to cultivate and deepen one's Americanness. For instance, researchers have found that when people highlight their shared experiences, even when they belong to what appear to be opposing, if not adversarial, social groups, they experience an increase in empathy and harmony. Rather than dividing people, the act of reflecting on the marginalization of one's own social group—be it current or historical—can encourage societal cohesion.

Identifying as American does not require the relinquishing of other identities.
In the United States, an honest accounting and acknowledgment of what it has meant to be American could reveal Americans' shared vulnerability and their common capacity for wrongdoing, as well as their resilience in the face of mistreatment. This sentiment is echoed by the lawyer and civil rights activist Bryan Stevenson, who has argued for the need to engage honestly with the history of racial injustice in the United States. "We can create communities in this country where people are less burdened by our history of racial inequality," Stevenson told an interviewer last year. "The more we understand the depth of that suffering, the more we understand the power of people to cope and overcome and survive."

That sounds like a unifying national creed that would allow Americans to embrace their own identities, encourage them to respect the identities embraced by others, and affirm shared principles of equality and justice. Fukuyama appears to believe that this more complex form of national identification is not possible. I think it is. It may even be the only path toward a diverse nation that lives up to its democratic principles.

JENNIFER A. RICHESON is Philip R. Allen Professor of Psychology at Yale University.

FUKUYAMA REPLIES

I appreciate these thoughtful comments on my article. But all three responses, which contain a number of common themes, fundamentally miscast my thinking about identity politics. One reason for this might be that the article focuses more on the kind of identity politics characteristic of the contemporary progressive left, whereas the book from which the article was adapted, Identity, focuses more on my central concern: the recent rise of right-wing nationalist populism. This development threatens liberal democracy because populist leaders seek to use the legitimacy they gain from democratic elections to undermine liberal institutions such as courts, the media, and impartial bureauc-racies. This has been happening in Hungary, Poland, and, above all, the United States. Populists' distrust of "globalism" also leads them to weaken the international institutions necessary to manage the liberal world order.

I concur with the commonplace judgment that the rise of populism has been triggered by globalization and the consequent massive increase in inequality in many rich countries. But if the fundamental cause were merely economic, one would have expected to see left-wing populism everywhere; instead, since the 2008 financial crisis, parties on the left have been in decline, while the most energized new movements have been anti-immigrant groups, such as the far-right party Alternative for Germany and the populist coalition now governing Italy. In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, enough white working-class voters abandoned the Democratic Party to put Donald Trump over the top, capping a 40-year trend of shifting party loyalties. This means that there is something going on in the cultural realm that needs explaining, and that something is concern over identity.

BALANCING IDENTITY

The concept of "identity," as I use the term, builds on a universal aspect of the human psyche that Plato labeled thymos, the demand for respect for one's inner dignity. But there is a specifically modern expression of thymos that emerged after the Protestant Reformation and that values the inner self more highly than society's laws, norms, and customs and insists that society change its own norms to give recognition to that inner self. The first major expression of modern identity politics was nineteenth-century European nationalism, when cultural groups began to demand recognition in the form of statehood. I believe that

much of modern Islamism is similarly driven by identity confusion among Muslims in modernizing societies who feel neither Western nor traditional and see a particular form of politicized religion as a source of community and identity.

But it is not correct to say, as John Sides, Michael Tesler, Lynn Vavreck, and Jennifer Richeson do, that identity politics as I define it drove white-supremacist and anti-immigrant movements in the nineteenth-century United States. Racism and xenophobia have always existed. But a generation or two ago, white Americans did not typically think of themselves as a victimized minority mistreated by elites who were indifferent to their problems. Today, many do, because contemporary racists have borrowed their framing of identity from groups on the left, in ways that resonate with people who are not necessarily racist.

Another major misunderstanding of my argument has to do with my view of contemporary identity movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. Of course they are rooted in real social injustices such as police violence and sexual harassment; they legitimately call for concrete policy remedies and a broad shift in cultural norms. But people can walk and chew gum at the same time. Even as Americans seek to right injustices suffered by specific social groups, they need to balance their small-group identities with a more integrative identity needed to create a cohesive national democratic community. I am not arguing, contrary to Richeson, that this will be an adequate substitute for narrower identities; rather, it will be a complement to them.

Liberal democracy cannot exist without a national identity that defines what citizens hold in common with one another. Given the de facto multiculturalism of contemporary democracies, that identity needs to be civic or creedal. That is, it needs to be based on liberal political ideas that are accessible to people of different cultural backgrounds rather than on fixed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or religion. I thought that the United States had arrived at such a creedal identity in the wake of the civil rights movement, but that accomplishment is now being threatened by right-wing identitarians, led by Trump, who would like to drag Americans backward to identities based on ethnicity and religion.

WINNING VS. GOVERNING

Stacey Abrams criticizes my desire to return to class as the defining target of progressive politics, since class and race overlap strongly in the United States. But it is absurd to see white Americans as a uniformly privileged category, as she seems to do. A significant part of the white working class has followed the black working class into underclass status. Communities facing deindustrialization and job loss have experienced increases in crime, family breakdown, and drug use; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated that 72,000 Americans died in 2017 of drug overdoses related to the opioid epidemic. So although part of the populist vote both in the United States and in Europe is driven by racism and xenophobia, part of it is driven by legitimate complaints that elites—the mainstream political parties, the media, cultural institutions, and major corporations—have failed to recognize these voters' plight and have stood by as this decline has occurred.

Abrams knows much better than I do what is required to win an election in the contemporary United States, and I'm sorry that she did not succeed in her bid for governor of Georgia. But I'm not sure that a successful electoral strategy would necessarily translate into a sustainable governing strategy. The country's single greatest weakness today is the intense polarization that has infected its political system, a weakness that has been exploited by authoritarian rivals such as China and Russia. In practical terms, overcoming polarization means devising a posture that will win back at least part of the white working-class vote that has shifted from the left to the right. Peeling away populist voters not driven by simple racism means taking seriously some of their concerns over cultural change and national identity. I agree that the burden is on Republican politicians to stop defending Trump, but they will do so only when they realize that their own voters are turning against him.

The contemporary Middle East, like the Balkans before it, is an extreme example of out-of-control identity politics and what ultimately happens to countries that do not invest in integrative national identities. The United States is fortunately far from that point of state breakdown. But what is happening in the country is part of a larger global shift from a politics based on economic ideas to a politics based on identity. In the 2018 midterm elections, Trump was reportedly advised by Paul Ryan, the Republican Speaker of the House, to campaign on the 2017 tax cut and economic growth; Trump chose instead to go the identity route by railing

against migrant caravans and birthright citizenship. This is identity politics on steroids.

This shift, echoed in other countries, is not compatible with modern liberal democracy. The latter is rooted in the rights of individuals, and not the rights of groups or fixed communities. And unless the United States counters this trend domestically, it will continue to set a bad example for the rest of the world.

The Longest Wars By George Packer

Richard Holbrooke and the Decline of American Power

One of the most celebrated diplomats of his generation, Richard Holbrooke helped normalize U.S. relations with China; served as U.S. ambassador to a newly reunified Germany and then to the United Nations; and, most famously, negotiated the 1995 Dayton peace agreement that ended the war in Bosnia. But he began and ended his career struggling with how to resolve two American wars: first in Vietnam, then in Afghanistan.

Richard Holbrooke was six feet one but seemed bigger. He had long skinny limbs and a barrel chest and broad square shoulder bones, on top of which sat his strangely small head and, encased within it, the sleepless brain. His feet were so far from his trunk that, as his body wore down and the blood stopped circulating properly, they swelled up and became marbled red and white like steak. He had special shoes made and carried extra socks in his leather attaché case, sweating through half a dozen pairs a day, stripping them off on long flights and draping them over his seat pocket in first class, or else cramming used socks next to the classified documents in his briefcase. He wrote his book about ending the war in Bosnia—the place in history that he always craved, though it was never enough—with his feet planted in a Brookstone shiatsu foot massager. One morning he showed up late for a meeting in the secretary of state's suite at the Waldorf Astoria in his stocking feet, shirt untucked and fly half zipped, padding around the room and picking grapes off a fruit basket, while Madeleine Albright's furious stare tracked his every move. During a videoconference call from the U.S. mission to the United Nations, in New York, his feet were propped up on a chair, while down in the White House Situation Room their giant distortion completely filled the wall screen and so disrupted the meeting that President Bill Clinton's national security adviser finally ordered a military aide to turn off the video feed. Holbrooke put his feet up anywhere, in the White House, on other people's desks and coffee tables—for relief, and for advantage.

Near the end, it seemed as if all his troubles were collecting in his feet—atrial fibrillation, marital tension, thwarted ambition, conspiring colleagues, hundreds of

thousands of air miles, corrupt foreign leaders, a war that would not yield to the relentless force of his will.

But at the other extreme from his feet, the ice-blue eyes were on perpetual alert. Their light told you that his intelligence was always awake and working. They captured nearly everything and gave almost nothing away. Like one-way mirrors, they looked outward, not inward. No one was quicker to size up a room, an adversary, a newspaper article, a set of variables in a complex situation—even his own imminent death. The ceaseless appraising told of a manic spirit churning somewhere within the low voice and languid limbs. Once, in the 1980s, he was walking down Madison Avenue when an acquaintance passed him and called out, “Hi, Dick.” Holbrooke watched the man go by, then turned to his companion: “I wonder what he meant by that.” Yes, his curly hair never obeyed the comb, and his suit always looked rumpled, and he couldn’t stay off the phone or TV, and he kept losing things, and he ate as much food as fast as he could, once slicing open the tip of his nose on a clamshell and bleeding through a pair of cloth napkins—yes, he was in almost every way a disorderly presence. But his eyes never lost focus.

So much thought, so little inwardness. He could not be alone—he might have had to think about himself. Maybe that was something he couldn’t afford to do. Leslie Gelb, Holbrooke’s friend of 45 years and recipient of multiple daily phone calls, would butt into a monologue and ask, “What’s Obama like?” Holbrooke would give a brilliant analysis of the president. “How do you think you affect Obama?” Holbrooke had nothing to say. Where did it come from, that blind spot behind his eyes that masked his inner life? It was a great advantage over the rest of us, because the propulsion from idea to action was never broken by self-scrutiny. It was also a great vulnerability, and finally, it was fatal.

SOUTH VIETNAM, 1963

In 1963, Holbrooke was a 22-year-old U.S. Foreign Service officer on his first diplomatic posting, to South Vietnam. The State Department detailed Holbrooke to the U.S. Agency for International Development in Saigon and a small, unconventional entity called Rural Affairs. It was an odd place for a young diplomat to land—unheard of, really. Holbrooke and a colleague were going to be the first Foreign Service officers sent into the field as aid workers. The agency would put them out among peasants in Vietcong strongholds where the war was

being fought and have them hand out bulgur wheat, cement, fertilizer, and barbed wire. As bachelors, they were considered relatively expendable. It was an early experiment in counterinsurgency.

Within just a couple of months of arriving in Vietnam, Holbrooke had maneuvered his way into running the Rural Affairs operation in the province of Ba Xuyen, down in the Mekong Delta. Ba Xuyen was the end of the earth. It was almost all the way to Ca Mau, and Ca Mau was the terminal point of the Asian continent, "the southernmost province of North Vietnam," the New York Times correspondent David Halberstam once called it, because Ca Mau and the lower delta were the heartland of the Vietcong, the communist guerrillas who had been lurking for years among the hamlets and canals and rice paddies and mangrove forests. Ba Xuyen was a province of more than half a million, eight or nine hours' drive from Saigon down Route 4, across the interminable wet flatness of the delta, nothing but flooded paddy fields mile after mile all the way to the horizon—in mid-September, when Holbrooke arrived in the town of Soc Trang, the rice shoots were still golden, not yet the emerald green of the harvest—though more often he would fly, since there was a daily milk run on an Air America Caribou between Tan Son Nhut airport and airstrips around the delta, and driving was risky by day and out of the question after dark.

His room was on the second floor of a clay-colored colonial guesthouse, with a balcony overlooking the town square, across from the provincial headquarters and its tennis court. Next door to the guesthouse was a dance club called the Bungalow, except that the government of South Vietnam had banned dancing in order to protect the honor of Vietnamese women, so the Bungalow was now just a bar where local soldiers could go drink and pick up girls. Holbrooke's neighbors, also newly arrived, were a young Christian couple from Rhode Island, George and Renee McDowell. George was an aggie with International Voluntary Services—he was introducing local farmers to a strain of enormous watermelons from Georgia. Holbrooke made it known that he wasn't interested. He and McDowell once went to the Soc Trang airstrip to meet some officials visiting from Saigon, and Holbrooke introduced himself: "I'm Richard Holbrooke, the AID man here in Ba Xuyen." He gestured to McDowell, who was three years older. "This is George McDowell, the IVS boy."

Holbrooke's thing was strategic hamlets. There were 324 of them in Ba Xuyen—at least, that was what he arrived believing. When he asked to visit a few of the farther-flung hamlets he was told that it was too dangerous. He went anyway, in his white short-sleeve button-up shirt, with his sunglasses case clipped to the breast pocket, and found that the strategic hamlets consisted of punji sticks stuck in a moat and a barely armed local militia. The Vietcong were overrunning and destroying them at will. There were 3,000 hard-core cadres in the province, according to the intelligence reports. Saigon had permanently conceded half the provincial territory to the guerrillas, who had their own district chiefs, tax collectors, and schools. At night only the towns belonged to the government. Nonetheless, in Saigon and Washington there were 324 strategic hamlets in Ba Xuyen, putting 61 percent of the population under the government's theoretical control.

In Soc Trang the war was very close. The airstrip was often hit by mortar fire. Holbrooke lost 15 pounds in the heat. His room had no air conditioning or fan, no working toilet or shower, and he could never get away from the mosquitoes, so he spent a good deal of time at a compound a block toward the canal that was occupied by Americans from the Military Assistance Advisory Group. They were among the 15,000 U.S. troops supporting the South Vietnamese army, often in combat. The advisers had a small projector and showed movies such as Seven Brides for Seven Brothers and Satan Never Sleeps, for which Holbrooke had a bottomless appetite. On weekends he tried to get back to Saigon.

Holbrooke was a good writer, never better than in his youth. He wrote hundreds of letters. Let him tell it.

I wish I could tell it all to you—the poorly lit room and bar that I am now sitting in, where the MAAG men sit and wait their tours out; the playmates from Playboy on the walls here, somehow very much out of place; the stacks of old magazines and paperbacks, the other hints of home that the US Army flies into the Vietcong's homeland to make us feel a little less lost; the water everywhere, rising, raining, so that literally this province, even the ground around our building, is under water; the waiting; the ugliness, the cruelty, the tragedy. And in Saigon a regime so totally bankrupt and disgusting it is hard to describe.

There is something different about the Delta. Flying over it begins to give you some idea of the problems. It is completely flat, and ⅔ of it is under water right now. Yet it is the great VC [Vietcong] stronghold, which may be the last to fall. How is it possible? Where can they possibly be? Many are in the marshes and inaccessible swamps of the far south, but the fact is that for most, this day means being sheltered in someone's house and in one of the hamlets right below us.

My job as civilian advisor to the province chief and overseer of the aid program here puts me continually in the position of advocate of plans and projects which would seek to make a reality out of the clichés that everyone pays lip service to. I don't mind this (actually enjoy it) but it is sometimes tiring to try to get the Vietnamese to do something which is, after all, for their own good (or so we think . . .). On the other hand, when I step back just a little to look at everything, it seems to me that the Vietnamese have taken our overbearing presence rather well over the last few years. We arrive here with no knowledge of the country or of the situation and immediately start giving advice, some of which we can really turn almost into orders because of the materials and money and transportation that we fully control. I think that no American would stand for such a deep and continuing interference in our affairs, even if it appeared that survival was at stake. Yet the Vietnamese accept it, and with rather good grace.

At 0500 this morning the news came in that the VC had attacked and possibly overrun the furthest out outpost in the southeastern district of Ba Xuyen. It is a Cambodian post, located just three kilometers from a mangrove forest which forms the point where the lower branch of the Mekong meets the South China Sea. The mangrove forest is a VC haven, as almost all mangrove forests are. The post protects a huge and critical hamlet, also Cambodian, which was originally scheduled to be visited by [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara today before the schedule was cut. Anyway, by helicopter we flew out over the area for about an hour, circling at around 1500 feet, and from that height it could be clearly seen that the post had been destroyed. What the situation was on the ground could not yet be known—we did not go any lower, since we were getting shot at from time to time as we moved over the area. We refueled at Soc Trang, and joined an Eagle Flight moving out over the area now. An Eagle is a group of about 6 to 10 choppers, which fly very low over bad areas, hoping to draw fire, after which they pounce. We were above the main force choppers, which carry

Vietnamese army. Finally, after the infantry had reached the hamlet and post, we went in.

On the ground was one of the worst sights I ever hope to see. The VC had apparently dug in with recoilless 75mm fire only 50 yards away, and leveled the post before moving a man against it. (Such a weapon is definitely from China—they never were used here by either US, French or VN.) Unlike most posts which fall here, it was apparently not an inside job. This may in part be due to the fact that these were Cambodians, and they are the best fighters around.

The fort was a shambles, of the 31 men in it 10 were dead, as were 7 children and 4 women, who live with their men in these terrible traps. The bodies were being assembled as we came in, and the noise of the women wailing, plus the horrible air and stench that overlay everything, was . . . One sees pictures of people picking their way through the war-torn rubble of Europe and Japan, and we have seen this sort of thing often in the histories of our times, but going in on the ground like this is still something new. One doesn't know quite what his reactions will be. Mine were not as bad as I was afraid they might be; perhaps little by little I have been working up to this anyway. (There have been so many similar to this, and Vietnam is such a cruel country to begin with, but this was the worst I have yet been in immediately afterwards.)

But afterwards it has been harder to put away the pictures of Can Nganh post. In a way, so unreal, since the birds still flew around, and the children in the nearest houses, less than 50 yards away, played games and seemed normal. But there were the women crying over the torn bodies of their husbands, and legs sticking out here and there grotesquely.

I have my doubts, getting deeper and deeper, about our basic approach here. Recent discussions and hints I have got from various sources would indicate that out of the McNamara visits came added weight for the exponents of Victory through Air Power—the Air Force, and the armed helicopters. I feel that this is a terrible step, both morally and tactically. Of course, it would never do to actually attack policy on moral grounds in the American community here, which is a basically tough and getting tougher community ("War is hell," justifies any horror). However, the decision to fight the VC from the air can be quite easily attacked on the simple grounds of stupidity (or as Talleyrand once said, "Sir, it is worse than

a crime, it is a blunder"). The VC, I am convinced, often fire on our planes merely to draw artillery and air destruction down upon hamlets. This may sound amazing, but it is a generally accepted fact, and the reason for it that once we have committed such an act, the VC can make great propaganda hay out of it.

So, anyway, if by air power we mean to win this war, thousands of Vietnamese will die and the enemy will resist far longer; we will be making a grave mistake and I am not happy about it. Of course the irony of the whole thing is overwhelming, if one is ever stupid enough to stop and think about it. Today, in Vietnam, we are using by far worse weapons and worse—less humane—tactics than the enemy. I have no doubt at all that we kill more civilians than the VC, and with what might generally be admitted are less selective, less "right" tactics. I suppose that we are on the right side in the long run here. There is no doubt in my mind that if we lose here we will be fighting this war in other countries in Latin America and Asia within a few years. But right now, we are fighting wrong, and it hurts. In the short run terms, we really should be on the other side. Take away the ties to Hanoi and Peking and the VC are fighting for the things we should always be fighting for in the world. Instead we continue to defend a class of haves which has not yet shown its real ability to understand that the have-nots must be brought into the nation. Let that be shown, and perhaps there will be an improvement in the situation, not of our making, but to our benefit.

The whole damn thing makes me slightly ill. (Or is it my throat?) This is the most exciting assignment in the world, and I will always be grateful for having it. But I do not think I will be sorry to leave. One friend of mine just got his next assignment: Luxembourg. It seems almost a joke, but it is true. There are such places. I think I am beginning to see war, which goddamn it this really is, in the least glorified of lights. That is when the fight sometimes doesn't even seem worth it, so bloody is the cost. But there is no choice, really, is there?

Counterinsurgency isn't for everyone—it's a sophisticated taste. In Vietnam it attracted the idealists. This attraction wasn't what got Americans into the war. We fell into Vietnam and kept on sinking out of a mistaken belief that the policy of containment required us to stake our security and credibility on not losing another square mile of Asia to communism even though the enemy were nationalists. But counterinsurgency was part of the lure. It was what kept Holbrooke and Americans like him there.

We prefer our wars quick and decisive, concluding with a surrender ceremony, and we like firepower more than we want to admit, while counterinsurgency requires supreme restraint. Its apostles in Vietnam used to say, “The best weapon for killing is a knife. If you can’t use a knife, then a gun. The worst weapon is airpower.” Counterinsurgency is, according to the experts, 80 percent political. We spend our time on American charts and plans and tasks, as if the solution to another country’s internal conflict is to get our own bureaucracy right. And maybe we don’t take the politics of other people seriously. It comes down to the power of our belief in ourselves. If we are good—and are we not good?—then we won’t need to force other people to do what we want. They will know us by our deeds, and they will want for themselves what we want for them.

There was a Peanuts comic strip that circulated among Holbrooke and his friends in Vietnam. Charlie Brown’s baseball team has just gotten slaughtered, 184–0. “I don’t understand it,” Charlie Brown says. “How can we lose when we’re so sincere?!”

WASHINGTON, 1967

Years later, Holbrooke would describe an almost inevitable sequence of doubt and disillusionment that took place in the minds of certain Americans in Vietnam. First, they would begin to question official assessments of the war. Then, they would start to question U.S. tactics, and then, the strategy.

By 1967, Holbrooke had entered the fourth and final stage of doubt. He began to question the American commitment in Vietnam. He had returned home and taken a position as a senior aide to Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach. Nine thousand miles away from Vietnam, he could see that the true threat was on the home front, that the war was tearing his country apart. He was coming to the conclusion that the United States could never win, at least not on terms that Americans would accept. But for the few doves in government, that didn’t mean, “Let’s get the hell out of Vietnam.” It meant, “What the hell do we do now?” That was about as far as skepticism could take someone while he was still inside. The process of disenchantment was excruciatingly slow. Later on, people would backdate their moment of truth, their long-deferred encounter with the glaringly obvious. This was often inadvertent—they honestly couldn’t believe that they

were so wrong for so many years. And when they finally did begin to lose faith, they kept it to themselves and a few sympathetic friends.

Katzenbach, number two in the State Department, was having his own doubts. He began to meet with a dozen senior people from around the government every Thursday afternoon at five o'clock in his office on the seventh floor. For 90 minutes they would sit in a circle of chairs and have drinks and talk about Vietnam. Katzenbach called it "the Non-Group," because there was no agenda, no paper trail, and no one was allowed to quote anyone to outsiders. The Non-Group became a safe place to explore alternative policies—that was how deep the lying and fear ran throughout the Johnson administration. Secretary of State Dean Rusk knew but never attended so that he wouldn't be tainted by talk of peace. Holbrooke walked uninvited into Katzenbach's office and badgered him so many times that Katzenbach, who found Holbrooke's boyish enthusiasm refreshing, finally agreed to let him join the Non-Group. Holbrooke's neckties were too loud and his manner too flip for some of his colleagues, but he kept quiet unless one of his superiors asked him a question. Thus he was allowed priceless time with senior members of the foreign policy establishment, such as Averell Harriman, Walt Rostow, and McNamara's deputy, Cyrus Vance. Holbrooke was the only one of them with any experience in Vietnam.

On the evening of November 1, 11 elder statesmen of the Cold War assembled at the State Department for drinks, dinner, and a briefing on Vietnam. McNamara was there; he had just submitted a long memo to President Lyndon Johnson presenting a bleak view of the war, and he couldn't conceal his gloom. But Rusk remained a good soldier, and the briefing was upbeat—body counts and captured documents showed that the United States was winning. The next morning, the Wise Men filed into the Cabinet Room and, one by one, told Johnson what he wanted to hear—stay the course. The president was greatly reassured.

Katzenbach wasn't. He thought the briefing of the Wise Men had been misleading and their validation of Johnson all wrong. Holbrooke thought so, too, and he offered to write up a dissenting memo for his boss to give to the president. Government service tends to turn written prose to fog and mud because it's far better to say nothing intelligible than to make a mistake. Not in

the case of Holbrooke. In 17 pages, he laid out the strategic problem by turning to history:

Hanoi uses time the way the Russians used terrain before Napoleon's advance on Moscow, always retreating, losing every battle, but eventually creating conditions in which the enemy can no longer function. For Napoleon it was his long supply lines and the cold Russian winter; Hanoi hopes that for us it will be the mounting dissension, impatience, and frustration caused by a protracted war without fronts or other visible signs of success; a growing need to choose between guns and butter; and an increasing American repugnance at finding, for the first time, their own country cast as "the heavy" with massive fire power brought to bear against a "small Asian nation."

North Vietnam couldn't defeat half a million American troops, but it could drain the American public of the will to go on fighting. So Johnson had two choices. He could turn all of North and South Vietnam along with parts of Cambodia and Laos into a free-fire zone and try to knock out the enemy before dissent at home grew too strong. Or he could win back the center at home, and thus more time—not with patriotic slogans and false hopes, but by reducing the United States' commitment. The first option was unlikely to work, because Hanoi's will to fight was inexhaustible. The second option might work, but it would require several steps.

Johnson should change the United States' objective—from victory over communism to a South Vietnamese government that could survive and deal with an ongoing communist threat. The United States should demand more of the South Vietnamese, militarily and politically. It should look to its own moral values and stop using airpower and artillery that killed large numbers of civilians or turned them into refugees in order to eliminate a few Vietcong: "Too many people are appalled by the brutality of the war. They feel that to fight a war of insurgency with vastly superior fire power is immoral and counter-productive. . . . Some feeling (more abroad than in the United States) is based on a feeling that the United States is calloused where non-whites are concerned." And Johnson should announce a bombing halt over most of North Vietnam, which could lead to negotiations. "Time is the crucial element at this stage of our involvement in Viet-Nam," Holbrooke concluded. "If we can't speed up the tortoise of demonstrable

success in the field we must concentrate on slowing down the hare of dissent at home."

The memo didn't call for unilateral withdrawal, or even negotiated withdrawal. It made an argument for a way to buy more time. The war in Vietnam would go on. But on the spectrum of official opinion, the view was far dovish. In vivid and uncompromising language, the 26-year-old author said that the United States could not win the war. For this reason Katzenbach hesitated to put his name to the memo. But since he agreed with it and thought its analysis brilliant, he finally signed it on November 16. He didn't show the memo to Rusk until a copy had been sent to the White House. When Rusk read it, he told Katzenbach, "I always try to find out what the president thinks before I give my advice." No word came back from the White House. Johnson didn't want to hear it.

WASHINGTON, 2009

Right after taking office in 2009, President Barack Obama had to make a decision on the U.S. military's request to send 17,000 additional combat troops and 4,000 trainers to Afghanistan. According to the Pentagon, the increase was necessary to stave off growing chaos in the south and provide security for the Afghan election in August. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had appointed Holbrooke to a position created especially for him: special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. He would report through her to the president. Obama was already a historic figure, a democratic prince, the John F. Kennedy of a new generation. Holbrooke had worked for every Democratic president since Kennedy. He badly wanted to win the trust of this one.

He thought that the president should approve the troops, not just because of the eroding situation in Afghanistan but to make good on his campaign rhetoric about the need to win in Afghanistan. Holbrooke also thought that the military was trying to squeeze the new president with deceptive numbers and a rushed decision.

He kept thinking about 1965. That was the year when Johnson, after being elected, increased the number of troops in Vietnam from 23,000 to 184,000. The parallels with 2009 and Obama were uncanny.

On February 13, Holbrooke was in Kabul on his first trip to the region since his appointment. In the Situation Room, the president and his advisers were meeting to make a final decision on the troops. Clinton was giving a speech at the Asia Society and had asked Holbrooke to fill in for her. He sat in a darkened room in the U.S. embassy, connected by secure videoconference to the White House. It was past midnight in Kabul and Holbrooke was tired. When Obama called on him, he began to read from notes he'd written down in a lined copybook.

"Let me speak on Secretary Clinton's behalf, and at her direct instructions, in support of Option 2." This was the option to send 17,000 combat troops in one deployment rather than splitting them up into two tranches. "We do so with reluctance, and mindful of the difficulties entailed in any troop deployment. This is a difficult decision, especially at a time when Afghanistan faces a political and constitutional crisis over its own elections that further complicates your decision. As your first decision to send troops overseas and into combat—as opposed to Iraq—this decision lies at the savage intersection of policy, politics, and history."

"Who talks like this?" Obama murmured. He sounded genuinely puzzled. Everyone around the Situation Room table heard him, but Holbrooke, 7,000 miles away, didn't hear and kept going.

"It is in many ways strange to send more American troops into such a potentially chaotic political situation. If we send more troops, of course we deepen our commitment, with no guarantee of success. And the shadow of Vietnam hovers over us."

Obama interrupted him. "Richard, what are you doing? Are you reading something?"

Holbrooke, onscreen, explained that the secretary had wanted to be sure the president heard her views accurately. He continued, "But if we do not send more troops, the chances of both political chaos and Taliban success increase."

"Why are you reading?" Obama insisted.

Holbrooke stopped to explain again. He managed to get through the rest of his notes, which could have been summed up in a couple of lines. But he had lost

the president. He didn't understand what he'd done wrong, only that Obama sounded annoyed and ignored him for the rest of the meeting.

Holbrooke regretted reading his notes aloud. He'd done so in order not to ramble on, but it had sounded like a speech or a first draft of his memoirs. A few younger people seated back against the walls found it exciting to hear this old lion talk about savage intersections, but no one around the table wanted to be addressed like that, and when Obama expressed irritation they could only conclude that Holbrooke was already out of favor with the new president. Which meant that nobody had to worry about him. After the meeting, Obama told his national security adviser, James Jones, that he would tolerate Holbrooke in the Situation Room only if he kept his remarks short, and that he wanted to be in Holbrooke's presence as little as possible.

The heart of the matter was Vietnam. Holbrooke brought it up all the time. He couldn't resist. He passed around copies of a book he'd recently reviewed, Lessons in Disaster, about the fatally flawed decisions that led to escalation. He invoked the critical months of 1965 so portentously that Obama once asked him, "Is that the way people used to talk in the Johnson administration?" It wasn't just that Holbrooke was becoming a Vietnam bore, a sodden old vet staggering out of the triple-canopy jungle to grab strangers by the shirtfront and make them listen to his harrowing tale. Obama actually didn't want to hear about Vietnam. He told his young aides that it wasn't relevant, and they agreed: Vietnam was ancient history. Obama was three years old in July 1965.

And what was Obama supposed to do with the analogy? It didn't tell him how many more troops could make a difference in Helmand Province. It told him that his presidency might be destroyed by this war. It was the note of doom in the Situation Room. It turned Holbrooke into a lecturer, condescending to the less experienced man, and that was as intolerable to Obama as flattery. He liked young, smart, ultraloyal staffers. He didn't like big competitive personalities.

The divide between the two men began with temperament, widened with generation, and ended in outlook. Obama—half Kenyan, raised in Indonesia, Pakistani friends in college—saw himself as the first president who understood the United States from the outside in. He grasped the limits to American power and knew that not every problem had an American solution. The Bush

administration, and Clinton's before it, had fallen prey to the hubris of a lone superpower. Then came the Iraq war and the economic collapse of 2008, and a reckoning required the country to sober up.

Obama wouldn't say so, but his task was to manage American decline, which meant using power wisely. He embodied—his long slender fingers pressed skeptically against his cheek as he listened from the head of the table in the Situation Room—the very opposite of the baggy grandiosity that thought the United States could do anything and the craven fear of being called weak for not trying. Obama probably wasn't thinking of the Berlin airlift or the Dayton peace accords, which Holbrooke had negotiated and which had ended the Bosnian war; Obama was thinking of the impulses that had sunk the United States in Vietnam and Iraq. The president and his aides believed these were Holbrooke's impulses too, when in fact he was only saying, "Be careful. It could happen to you." Obama didn't want to hear it—couldn't hear it, because the speaker kept distracting him with theatrics and bombast worthy of Johnson himself. So Obama told Jones, and Jones told Clinton, and Clinton told Holbrooke: stop it with Vietnam.

"They don't think they have anything to learn from Vietnam," she said.

"They're going to make the same mistakes!" Holbrooke replied.

Holbrooke confessed to his friend Gelb that even Clinton wasn't interested.

He tried to stop, but it was impossible. How could he not be haunted? There was nothing new under the sun. Somehow, after a half-century excursion across the heights of American greatness, the country had returned to the exact same place. All the questions in Afghanistan had been the questions in Vietnam. Could the United States transform Afghan society? If not, could Americans still win the war? Did our very effort make it less likely? What leverage did we have? Should we get rid of the Afghan leader? Could we talk our way out?

"It is beyond ironic that 40+ years later we are back in Vietnam," Holbrooke wrote in his diary. "Of course, everything is different—and everything is the same. And somehow, I am back in the middle of it, the only senior official who really lived it. I had not thought much about it for years, now it comes back every day. Every program has its prior incarnation—mostly unsuccessful. . . . I think we must

recognize that military success is not possible, + we must seek a negotiation. But with who? The Taliban are not Hanoi, + their alliance with Al Qaeda is a deal-breaker."

Here was the paradox: he knew from Vietnam that what the United States was doing in Afghanistan wouldn't work—but he thought he could do it anyway. And there was something else. If he applied the real lesson of Vietnam—don't—he would be out of a job. And then who would he be?

Over time, he learned to save Vietnam for his staff. One day, as he sat through another White House meeting on Afghanistan, listening to another optimistic military briefing, a quote surfaced from the deep past, and he scribbled it down on a scrap of paper and took it back to the office to show his young aides, who of course had no idea where it came from: "How can we lose when we're so sincere?"

In the fall of 2009, Obama faced another decision on troops. His new commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, was asking for 40,000 troops in addition to the earlier 21,000. The latest increase would put the total number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan at more than 100,000. McChrystal had been in Afghanistan since June, traveling around the country, learning the state of the war, and he had come to a conclusion: without a surge, Afghanistan would go into what he called "a death spiral." McChrystal's troop request had leaked, and Obama and his advisers felt boxed in again by the military.

Over ten weeks in the fall of 2009, Obama presided at no fewer than nine sessions of his National Security Council, two or three hours at a time. In his diary, Holbrooke once called the Situation Room "a room that, to me, symbolizes the problem; a windowless below-ground room in which the distance from real knowledge to people is at its very greatest—very high-ranking people who know very little make grand (or not so grand) decisions, or maybe (as in the Clinton years so often) no decisions at all." There had been an Afghanistan strategy review in the last months of the Bush administration, and there had been another in Obama's first weeks in office, and here they were again, this time a marathon review: a sure sign of a troubled war, like the many fact-finding missions Kennedy had sent to South Vietnam.

The discussion ran up against the fundamental contradictions of the war. Obama knew them as well as anyone. Around and around they went in the Situation Room as the weeks dragged on and Obama, crisp and lawyerly, listened and asked hard questions.

Let's get started.

Why are we in Afghanistan?

Because al Qaeda attacked us from Afghanistan. Our objective is to prevent another attack, and ultimately to destroy al Qaeda.

If the Taliban take power again in Afghanistan, al Qaeda could regain its safe haven there.

not to mention in Somalia and Yemen and the African Sahel. Why do we need 100,000 troops and a counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan to go after 100 al Qaeda members in the tribal areas of Pakistan?

Pakistan, our supposed ally, is actually supporting our enemies. The Pakistanis won't stand for American troops on their soil. All we can do is covert ops, intelligence collection, drone strikes in the tribal areas against militants, some of whom are attacking Pakistani targets—even that is very unpopular.

What do we really know about the Taliban? Are we sure they will allow al Qaeda back into Afghanistan?

No, but they refuse to renounce al Qaeda.

Why not do a counterterrorism campaign: drones and a few thousand Special Forces and spies going after the hard-core bad guys?

That's what we've been trying since 2001, and it hasn't worked. Only counterinsurgency will give the Afghan government the breathing space to win the support of the people and gain strength until it can defend itself.

But classic counterinsurgency requires hundreds of thousands of troops.

So we'll limit ourselves to protecting population centers and key lines of communication until the Afghan army gets bigger and better.

What if the enemy keeps getting bigger and better?

We might need to send more troops in a year or two.

What if our presence makes it bigger and better?

We'll begin to transfer responsibility to the Afghan government in two to three years.

What if the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, wants us to stick around for the fat contracts and the combat brigades while his government continues to prey on the people? Counterinsurgency can only succeed with a reliable partner, and the election did Karzai's legitimacy great harm. What if the Afghan government lacks the ability or will to win the support of the people?

There's no good answer.

And what if the Pakistani military will never change its strategy?

There's no good answer.

Holbrooke sat at the far end of the table, next to General David Petraeus with his four stars, and took notes. Among his notes were private interjections. When McChrystal showed a slide that changed his definition of the American goal from "defeat the Taliban" to "the Taliban-led insurgency no longer poses an existential threat to the government of Afghanistan," without changing the number of troops, Holbrooke wrote: "Wow! Words can be used to mean whatever we want them to mean." Susan Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, proposed joint U.S.-Chinese aid programs in Pakistan: "NONSENSE." Robert Gates, the secretary of defense, argued that civilian aid to Pakistan might cause a backlash against the United States: "THIS IS NONSENSE!" Vice President Joe Biden said that every one of Pakistan's interests was also America's interest: "HUH?"

Holbrooke kept the caustic skepticism to himself. He no longer gave speeches or read from notes. He complimented the president less often. He spoke very little, and when he did, it was on subjects that were part of his job but peripheral to the main discussion—agriculture and police corruption. He advocated a "civilian surge"—the State Department's plan to recruit more than a thousand American experts and deploy them to Afghanistan's cities and districts. The civilian surge gave Holbrooke a place at the table and credibility with the generals, who were always complaining that the civilian effort lagged behind. So at the White House he was careful not to say what he really thought—but back at the office, when his adviser on aid, Sepideh Keyvanshad, who did not believe that more was better in Afghanistan, asked him, "Why are we sending all these people? It won't make any difference," Holbrooke shot back, "You don't think I know that?"

In the 1990s, during meetings on the war in Bosnia, Holbrooke had said whatever he believed—hadn't hesitated to contradict his boss, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, or even President Clinton, when he thought they were wrong. Now, in the 47th year of his career, he grew careful. He felt that he didn't have the standing with Obama to go up against the military, least of all the famous general sitting just to his left. He had no supporters in the room except Hillary Clinton, and because he was wounded, and his need for her was existential, he couldn't allow a glimmer of light or a breath of air between them. And she was with the generals. As a result, almost no one knew what Holbrooke thought of the surge. He kept it from his colleagues and his staff.

On Columbus Day weekend, he stayed up one night till four in the morning drafting a nine-page memo for Clinton. He rewrote it several times in the following days, still not satisfied. It goes straight back to the memo he wrote for Johnson in the fall of 1967, the one about Napoleon's Russia campaign. It has the same clarity, the same ice-blue gaze at a difficult reality.

Like you, I believe in the possibilities of American leadership, and I am not a pessimist by nature. I hope my judgments are wrong. In 1965, over the course of a week, Lyndon Johnson had the same kind of discussions we are having now, but came up with the wrong answers. In 2002–3 George W. Bush never even really consulted his own Secretary of State before committing himself to the Iraq war. Now it is our turn, and Barack Obama deserves credit for having lengthy discussions and listening to everyone before making his decisions. But the

parameters of the debate have been defined almost entirely by the military, and I do not believe the full political, regional, and global implications of McChrystal's requests have been adequately discussed.

Holbrooke believed that counterinsurgency would never succeed in Afghanistan. Historically it had worked in colonial wars, where it required a lot of coercion, and in wars where the enemy had no cross-border sanctuary. In Iraq, Petraeus' counterinsurgency strategy had depended on specific political developments in the Shiite and Sunni communities. The analogy for Afghanistan was none of these. It was Vietnam, the war that had been barred from discussion.

Rather than securing the Afghan population, 100,000 U.S. troops would only confirm the Taliban narrative of an infidel army of occupation supporting a puppet government. Everyone said that this was a political war, but Holbrooke pointed out that the review had ignored politics—the election disaster, the cancer of corruption, Karzai's illegitimacy. The discussions had focused almost entirely on troop numbers—but what kind of government would tens of thousands of new troops be sent to support? "The current government does not have sufficient legitimacy and appeal to motivate hundreds of thousands of Afghans to die for it," he wrote. "While a substantial portion of the Afghan population is strongly motivated to fight the Taliban, their principal motivation is usually ethnic and tribal, not any commitment to the values supposedly represented by the government in Kabul."

He wasn't arguing against sending more troops—not in a memo to Clinton, anyway. (He told Gelb privately that if it were up to him, they'd send just 4,500 advisers, but he couldn't tell Clinton that, not even discreetly.) A U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan would "set off a cycle of uncontrollable events that could seriously damage our most vital interests," he wrote. It was a kind of soft domino theory—not that neighboring governments would topple one after another, but the whole region stretching from the Middle East to India, with nuclear weapons and numerous insurgencies and jihadist groups, would be destabilized. Instead of a way out, Holbrooke was seeking a policy that allowed the United States to stay.

The country didn't want to hear this, and neither did Obama, but Americans needed to be long-distance runners in Afghanistan. That was why Holbrooke

kept saying it would be the longest American war. A big surge promised too much, to both Americans and Afghans, and would soon play out in predictable ways, with calls for yet more troops or a rapid departure. A more modest number—Holbrooke settled on 20,000 to 25,000, just one combat brigade and the rest trainers and advisers to the Afghan army—would hold off the Taliban and the American public while giving a new political strategy time to work. “And time, the commodity we need most to succeed, is in the shortest supply.” More time—that had been the theme of his Napoleon-in-Russia memo, too.

What would a political strategy look like? That part wasn’t clear—solutions for Afghanistan were never as persuasive as critiques. Holbrooke included a brief, vague paragraph on “reintegration and reconciliation”—“the biggest missing piece of our policy.” Reintegration meant bringing in low-level Taliban defectors. Reconciliation meant talking to the Taliban leadership. But Clinton didn’t want to hear of peace talks, and neither did the military, and neither did the White House. Talking to the enemy—the only way to end the war—was never part of the strategy review.

NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON, 2010

Yesterday I went to the final performance of the revival of South Pacific at Lincoln Center. A fantastic production, which I found immensely moving. Men were crying, myself included. I tried to understand why that show had such an enormous emotional impact on us. For me it was the combination of the beauty of the show and its music, and the capturing in that show of so many moments in American history, the show itself opening in New York at the height of New York’s greatness, 1949, the theme—Americans at war in a distant land or islands in the South Pacific—the sense of loss of American optimism and our feeling that we could do anything. The contrast with today—it was very powerful, and I kept thinking of where we were today, our nation, our lack of confidence in our own ability to lead compared to where we were in 1949 when it came out, evoking an era only five years or seven years earlier, when we had gone to the most distant corners of the globe and saved civilization.

Even though the chances of success in any kind of dialogue with the Taliban are very small—I put it at 10 to 20 percent—it would be irresponsible of us not to try given the fact that there’s no military solution to the war and given the fact that

we are in a harsh spiral right now, a declining relationship with Karzai and at home. The bottom is falling out of this policy as we speak, and everybody knows it. The only way to deal with it, in my view, is to seek a political solution.

Petraeus, on the other hand, believes deeply that classic counterinsurgency is the answer. By classic counterinsurgency he means what he wrote about in his doctrine. I don't believe it will work here any more than it did in other places. They can talk about the Algerian or Moroccan or Malaysian or Philippine models all they want, but it won't work here because of the sanctuary that is Pakistan, and because of the incompetence of the government, because we don't have enough resources and we don't have enough time, and because the president is going to start drawing down troops next year. Petraeus is gambling that his brilliance—and he's undeniably brilliant—will trigger an outcome which will decimate the enemy, and then they will in effect fade away. Highly unlikely.

When I went up to see [Obama's senior adviser David] Axelrod, I said as I was leaving, "David, I know you don't want to hear this again from me, but the president is the only person in the Administration at a high level who I haven't ever given my views to directly and candidly, and I hope we can correct that." He just nodded. This has been my greatest frustration, though I do not believe that if I saw him I would actually make a difference. At least, however, I would have fulfilled my obligation to him.

The question constantly arises—I ask it of myself, friends ask me—how long do you want to do this? My answer is simple: as long as I can make a difference. We're now embarked on the most difficult period in terms of formulation of policy. Since last year, we're shaping the policy, as I wrote Hillary in my memo last week, in ways that will determine the rest of the course of the war. It's the president's last chance to turn away from the problems that are faced. We are going to try to get them to make one effort at what we call reconciliation. That's really a euphemism for seeing if there's the basis for a political settlement with the odious Taliban. But since a military victory is impossible, we have to make that search.

On December 10, 2010, during a meeting in Clinton's office, Holbrooke suffered a torn aorta. He died three days later, at the age of 69. Negotiations between the United States and the Taliban began the following year, but the war in Afghanistan continues to this day.

The Self-Destruction of American Power By Fareed Zakaria

Sometime in the last two years, American hegemony died. The age of U.S. dominance was a brief, heady era, about three decades marked by two moments, each a breakdown of sorts. It was born amid the collapse of the Berlin Wall, in 1989. The end, or really the beginning of the end, was another collapse, that of Iraq in 2003, and the slow unraveling since. But was the death of the United States' extraordinary status a result of external causes, or did Washington accelerate its own demise through bad habits and bad behavior? That is a question that will be debated by historians for years to come. But at this point, we have enough time and perspective to make some preliminary observations.

As with most deaths, many factors contributed to this one. There were deep structural forces in the international system that inexorably worked against any one nation that accumulated so much power. In the American case, however, one is struck by the ways in which Washington—from an unprecedented position—mishandled its hegemony and abused its power, losing allies and emboldening enemies. And now, under the Trump administration, the United States seems to have lost interest, indeed lost faith, in the ideas and purpose that animated its international presence for three-quarters of a century.

A STAR IS BORN

U.S. hegemony in the post–Cold War era was like nothing the world had seen since the Roman Empire. Writers are fond of dating the dawn of "the American century" to 1945, not long after the publisher Henry Luce coined the term. But the post–World War II era was quite different from the post-1989 one. Even after 1945, in large stretches of the globe, France and the United Kingdom still had formal empires and thus deep influence. Soon, the Soviet Union presented itself as a superpower rival, contesting Washington's influence in every corner of the planet. Remember that the phrase "Third World" derived from the tripartite division of the globe, the First World being the United States and Western Europe, and the Second World, the communist countries. The Third World was everywhere else, where each country was choosing between U.S. and Soviet influence. For much of the world's population, from Poland to China, the century hardly looked American.

The United States' post–Cold War supremacy was initially hard to detect. As I pointed out in The New Yorker in 2002, most participants missed it. In 1990, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher argued that the world was dividing into three political spheres, dominated by the dollar, the yen, and the deutsche mark. Henry Kissinger's 1994 book, Diplomacy, predicted the dawn of a new multipolar age. Certainly in the United States, there was little triumphalism. The 1992 presidential campaign was marked by a sense of weakness and weariness. "The Cold War is over; Japan and Germany won," the Democratic hopeful Paul Tsongas said again and again. Asia hands had already begun to speak of "the Pacific century."

U.S. hegemony in the post–Cold War era was like nothing the world had seen since the Roman Empire.

There was one exception to this analysis, a prescient essay in the pages of this magazine by the conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer: "The Unipolar Moment," which was published in 1990. But even this triumphalist take was limited in its expansiveness, as its title suggests. "The unipolar moment will be brief," Krauthammer admitted, predicting in a Washington Post column that within a very short time, Germany and Japan, the two emerging "regional superpowers," would be pursuing foreign policies independent of the United States.

Policymakers welcomed the waning of unipolarity, which they assumed was imminent. In 1991, as the Balkan wars began, Jacques Poos, the president of the Council of the European Union, declared, "This is the hour of Europe." He explained: "If one problem can be solved by Europeans, it is the Yugoslav problem. This is a European country, and it is not up to the Americans." But it turned out that only the United States had the combined power and influence to intervene effectively and tackle the crisis.

Similarly, toward the end of the 1990s, when a series of economic panics sent East Asian economies into tailspins, only the United States could stabilize the global financial system. It organized a $120 billion international bailout for the worst-hit countries, resolving the crisis. Time magazine put three Americans, Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan, and

Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers, on its cover with the headline "The Committee to Save the World."

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Just as American hegemony grew in the early 1990s while no one was noticing, so in the late 1990s did the forces that would undermine it, even as people had begun to speak of the United States as "the indispensable nation" and "the world's sole superpower." First and foremost, there was the rise of China. It is easy to see in retrospect that Beijing would become the only serious rival to Washington, but it was not as apparent a quarter century ago. Although China had grown speedily since the 1980s, it had done so from a very low base. Few countries had been able to continue that process for more than a couple of decades. China's strange mixture of capitalism and Leninism seemed fragile, as the Tiananmen Square uprising had revealed.

But China's rise persisted, and the country became the new great power on the block, one with the might and the ambition to match the United States. Russia, for its part, went from being both weak and quiescent in the early 1990s to being a revanchist power, a spoiler with enough capability and cunning to be disruptive. With two major global players outside the U.S.-constructed international system, the world had entered a post-American phase. Today, the United States is still the most powerful country on the planet, but it exists in a world of global and regional powers that can—and frequently do—push back.

The 9/11 attacks and the rise of Islamic terrorism played a dual role in the decline of U.S. hegemony. At first, the attacks seemed to galvanize Washington and mobilize its power. In 2001, the United States, still larger economically than the next five countries put together, chose to ramp up its annual defense spending by an amount—almost $50 billion—that was larger than the United Kingdom's entire yearly defense budget. When Washington intervened in Afghanistan, it was able to get overwhelming support for the campaign, including from Russia. Two years later, despite many objections, it was still able to put together a large international coalition for an invasion of Iraq. The early years of this century marked the high point of the American imperium, as Washington tried to remake wholly alien nations—Afghanistan and Iraq—thousands of miles away, despite the rest of the world's reluctant acquiescence or active opposition.

Iraq in particular marked a turning point. The United States embarked on a war of choice despite misgivings expressed in the rest of world. It tried to get the UN to rubber-stamp its mission, and when that proved arduous, it dispensed with the organization altogether. It ignored the Powell Doctrine—the idea, promulgated by General Colin Powell while he was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War, that a war was worth entering only if vital national interests were at stake and overwhelming victory assured. The Bush administration insisted that the vast challenge of occupying Iraq could be undertaken with a small number of troops and a light touch. Iraq, it was said, would pay for itself. And once in Baghdad, Washington decided to destroy the Iraqi state, disbanding the army and purging the bureaucracy, which produced chaos and helped fuel an insurgency. Any one of these mistakes might have been overcome. But together they ensured that Iraq became a costly fiasco.

After 9/11, Washington made major, consequential decisions that continue to haunt it, but it made all of them hastily and in fear. It saw itself as in mortal danger, needing to do whatever it took to defend itself—from invading Iraq to spending untold sums on homeland security to employing torture. The rest of the world saw a country that was experiencing a kind of terrorism that many had lived with for years and yet was thrashing around like a wounded lion, tearing down international alliances and norms. In its first two years, the George W. Bush administration walked away from more international agreements than any previous administration had. (Undoubtedly, that record has now been surpassed under President Donald Trump.) American behavior abroad during the Bush administration shattered the moral and political authority of the United States, as long-standing allies such as Canada and France found themselves at odds with it on the substance, morality, and style of its foreign policy.

OWN GOAL

So which was it that eroded American hegemony—the rise of new challengers or imperial overreach? As with any large and complex historical phenomenon, it was probably all of the above. China’s rise was one of those tectonic shifts in international life that would have eroded any hegemon’s unrivaled power, no matter how skillful its diplomacy. The return of Russia, however, was a more complex affair. It’s easy to forget now, but in the early 1990s, leaders in Moscow were determined to turn their country into a liberal democracy, a European nation, and an ally of sorts of the West. Eduard Shevardnadze, who was foreign

minister during the final years of the Soviet Union, supported the United States' 1990–91 war against Iraq. And after the Soviet Union's collapse, Russia's first foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, was an even more ardent liberal, an internationalist, and a vigorous supporter of human rights.

The greatest error the United States committed during its unipolar moment was to simply stop paying attention.

Who lost Russia is a question for another article. But it is worth noting that although Washington gave Moscow some status and respect—expanding the G-7 into the G-8, for example—it never truly took Russia's security concerns seriously. It enlarged NATO fast and furiously, a process that might have been necessary for countries such as Poland, historically insecure and threatened by Russia, but one that has continued on unthinkingly, with little concern for Russian sensitivities, and now even extends to Macedonia. Today, Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggressive behavior makes every action taken against his country seem justified, but it's worth asking, What forces produced the rise of Putin and his foreign policy in the first place? Undoubtedly, they were mostly internal to Russia, but to the extent that U.S. actions had an effect, they appear to have been damaging, helping stoke the forces of revenge and revanchism in Russia.

The greatest error the United States committed during its unipolar moment, with Russia and more generally, was to simply stop paying attention. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Americans wanted to go home, and they did. During the Cold War, the United States had stayed deeply interested in events in Central America, Southeast Asia, the Taiwan Strait, and even Angola and Namibia. By the mid-1990s, it had lost all interest in the world. Foreign-bureau broadcasts by NBC fell from 1,013 minutes in 1988 to 327 minutes in 1996. (Today, the three main networks combined devote roughly the same amount of time to foreign-bureau stories as each individual network did in 1988.) Both the White House and Congress during the George H. W. Bush administration had no appetite for an ambitious effort to transform Russia, no interest in rolling out a new version of the Marshall Plan or becoming deeply engaged in the country. Even amid the foreign economic crises that hit during the Clinton administration, U.S. policymakers had to scramble and improvise, knowing that Congress would appropriate no funds to rescue Mexico or Thailand or Indonesia. They offered

advice, most of it designed to require little assistance from Washington, but their attitude was one of a distant well-wisher, not an engaged superpower.

Ever since the end of World War I, the United States has wanted to transform the world. In the 1990s, that seemed more possible than ever before. Countries across the planet were moving toward the American way. The Gulf War seemed to mark a new milestone for world order, in that it was prosecuted to uphold a norm, limited in its scope, endorsed by major powers and legitimized by international law. But right at the time of all these positive developments, the United States lost interest. U.S. policymakers still wanted to transform the world in the 1990s, but on the cheap. They did not have the political capital or resources to throw themselves into the effort. That was one reason Washington's advice to foreign countries was always the same: economic shock therapy and instant democracy. Anything slower or more complex—anything, in other words, that resembled the manner in which the West itself had liberalized its economy and democratized its politics—was unacceptable. Before 9/11, when confronting challenges, the American tactic was mostly to attack from afar, hence the twin approaches of economic sanctions and precision air strikes. Both of these, as the political scientist Eliot Cohen wrote of airpower, had the characteristics of modern courtship: "gratification without commitment."

Of course, these limits on the United States' willingness to pay prices and bear burdens never changed its rhetoric, which is why, in an essay for The New York Times Magazine in 1998, I pointed out that U.S. foreign policy was defined by "the rhetoric of transformation but the reality of accommodation." The result, I said, was "a hollow hegemony." That hollowness has persisted ever since.

THE FINAL BLOW

The Trump administration has hollowed out U.S. foreign policy even further. Trump's instincts are Jacksonian, in that he is largely uninterested in the world except insofar as he believes that most countries are screwing the United States. He is a nationalist, a protectionist, and a populist, determined to put "America first." But truthfully, more than anything else, he has abandoned the field. Under Trump, the United States has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and from engaging with Asia more generally. It is uncoupling itself from its 70-year partnership with Europe. It has dealt with Latin America through the prism of either keeping immigrants out or winning votes in Florida. It has even managed

to alienate Canadians (no mean feat). And it has subcontracted Middle East policy to Israel and Saudi Arabia. With a few impulsive exceptions—such as the narcissistic desire to win a Nobel Prize by trying to make peace with North Korea—what is most notable about Trump's foreign policy is its absence.

When the United Kingdom was the superpower of its day, its hegemony eroded because of many large structural forces—the rise of Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union. But it also lost control of its empire through overreach and hubris. In 1900, with a quarter of the world's population under British rule, most of the United Kingdom's major colonies were asking only for limited autonomy—"dominion status" or "home rule," in the terms of the day. Had the country quickly granted that to all its colonies, who knows whether it would have been able to extend its imperial life for decades? But it didn't, insisting on its narrow, selfish interests rather than accommodating itself to the interests of the broader empire.

There is an analogy here with the United States. Had the country acted more consistently in the pursuit of broader interests and ideas, it could have continued its influence for decades (albeit in a different form). The rule for extending liberal hegemony seems simple: be more liberal and less hegemonic. But too often and too obviously, Washington pursued its narrow self-interests, alienating its allies and emboldening its foes. Unlike the United Kingdom at the end of its reign, the United States is not bankrupt or imperially overextended. It remains the single most powerful country on the planet. It will continue to wield immense influence, more than any other nation. But it will no longer define and dominate the international system the way it did for almost three decades.

What remains, then, are American ideas. The United States has been a unique hegemon in that it expanded its influence to establish a new world order, one dreamed of by President Woodrow Wilson and most fully conceived of by President Franklin Roosevelt. It is the world that was half-created after 1945, sometimes called "the liberal international order," from which the Soviet Union soon defected to build its own sphere. But the free world persisted through the Cold War, and after 1991, it expanded to encompass much of the globe. The ideas behind it have produced stability and prosperity over the last three-quarters of a century. The question now is whether, as American power wanes, the international system it sponsored—the rules, norms, and values—will survive. Or will America also watch the decline of its empire of ideas?

Putin the Great By Susan B. Glasser

Russia's Imperial Impostor

In January 27, 2018, Vladimir Putin became the longest-serving leader of Russia since Joseph Stalin. There were no parades or fireworks, no embarrassingly gilded statues unveiled or unseemly displays of nuclear missiles in Red Square. After all, Putin did not want to be compared with Leonid Brezhnev, the bushy-browed septuagenarian whose record in power he had just surpassed. Brezhnev, who ruled the Soviet Union from 1964 to 1982, was the leader of Putin's gritty youth, of the long stagnation that preceded the empire's collapse. By the end, he was the butt of a million jokes, the doddering grandfather of a doddering state, the conductor of a Russian train to nowhere. "Stalin proved that just one person could manage the country," went one of those many jokes. "Brezhnev proved that a country doesn't need to be managed at all."

Putin, a ruler at a time when management, or at least the appearance thereof, is required, prefers other models. The one he has liked the longest is, immodestly, Peter the Great. In the obscurity and criminality of post-Soviet St. Petersburg in the 1990s, when Putin was deputy mayor, he chose to hang on his office wall a portrait of the modernizing tsar who built that city on the bones of a thousand serfs to be his country's "window to the West." By that point in his career, Putin was no Romanov, only an unknown former lieutenant colonel in the KGB who had masqueraded as a translator, a diplomat, and a university administrator, before ending up as the unlikely right-hand man of St. Petersburg's first-ever democratically elected mayor. Putin had grown up so poor in the city's mean postwar courtyards that his autobiography speaks of fighting off "hordes of rats" in the hallway of the communal apartment where he and his parents lived in a single room with no hot water or stove.

Peter the Great had no business being his model, but there he was, and there he has remained. Earlier this summer, in a long and boastful interview with the Financial Times in which he celebrated the decline of Western-style liberalism and the West's "no longer tenable" embrace of multiculturalism, Putin answered unhesitatingly when asked which world leader he admired most. "Peter the

Great," he replied. "But he is dead," the Financial Times' editor, Lionel Barber, said. "He will live as long as his cause is alive," Putin responded.

No matter how contrived his admiration for Peter the Great, Putin has in fact styled himself a tsar as much as a Soviet general secretary over the course of his two decades in public life. The religion he grew up worshiping was not the Marxist-Leninist ideology he was force-fed in school but the heroic displays of superpower might he saw on television and the imperial grandeur of his faded but still ambitious hometown, Peter's town. Strength was and is his dogma, whether for countries or men, and the Russian emperors' motto "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" is a closer philosophical fit with today's Putinism than the Soviet paeans to international workers' solidarity and the heroism of the laborer that Putin had to memorize as a child. Brezhnev was not the model for Putin but the cautionary tale, and if that was true when Putin was a young KGB operative in the days of détente and decline in the 1970s and early 1980s, it is even more the case now, when Putin faces the paradox of his own extended rule, defined by great length but also by perpetual insecurity.

SURVIVOR: RUSSIA

Insecurity might seem the wrong word for it: Putin is well into his 20th year as Russia's leader and in some ways appears to be at his most powerful, the global template for a new era of modern authoritarians. In the early years of this century, when the post-Soviet wave of democratization still seemed inexorable, Putin reversed Russia's course, restoring centralized authority in the Kremlin and reviving the country's standing in the world. Today, in Washington and certain capitals of Europe, he is an all-purpose villain, sanctioned and castigated for having invaded two neighbors—Georgia and Ukraine—and for having provoked Western countries, including by interfering in the 2016 U.S. presidential election in favor of Donald Trump and using deadly nerve agents to poison targets on British soil. His military intervention in Syria's civil war helped save the regime of Bashar al-Assad, making Putin the most significant Russian player in the Middle East since Brezhnev. His increasingly close alliance with China has helped usher in a new era of great-power competition with the United States. Finally, it appears, Putin has brought about the multipolar world that he has dreamed of since he took office determined to revisit the Americans' Cold War victory. All that, and he is only 66 years old, seemingly vigorous and healthy and capable of

governing for many more years to come. His state is no Brezhnevian gerontocracy, at least not yet.

An enormous struggle for post-Putin Russia has already begun.

But if Putin has aspired to be a ruthless modern tsar, he is not the all-seeing, all-powerful one he is often portrayed to be. He is an elected leader, even if those elections are shams, and his latest term in office will run out in 2024, when he is constitutionally required to step aside, unless he has the constitution changed again to extend his tenure (a possibility the Kremlin has already raised). Putin has struggled at home far more than his swaggering on the world stage suggests. He controls the broadcast media, the parliament, the courts, and the security services, the last of which have seen their influence metastasize to practically Soviet-era levels under his rule. Yet since winning his latest fake election, in 2018, with 77 percent of the vote, his approval ratings have declined precipitously. In a poll this past spring, just 32 percent of Russians surveyed said they trusted him, according to the state pollster, the lowest level of his long tenure, until the Kremlin demanded a methodological change, and his approval rating now stands in the mid-60s, off from a high of close to 90 percent after his 2014 annexation of Crimea. The subsequent war he unleashed through proxies in eastern Ukraine has stalemated. Protests are a regular feature of Russian cities today—a decision to raise the retirement age last year was particularly unpopular—and a genuine opposition still exists, led by such figures as the anticorruption activist Alexei Navalny, despite years of state efforts to shut it down. Putin has no obvious successor, and today's Kremlinologists report an increase in infighting among the security services and the business class, suggesting that an enormous struggle for post-Putin Russia has already begun.

At every stage of Putin's long, eventful, and unlikely rule, there have been similar moments of uncertainty, and often there has been an enormous gap between the analysis of those in distant capitals, who tend to see Putin as a classic dictator, and those at home, who look at the president and his government as a far more slapdash affair, where incompetence as well as luck, inertia as well as tyranny, has played a role. "Stagnation," in fact, is no longer an automatic reference to Brezhnev in Russia anymore; increasingly, it is an epithet used to attack Putin and the state of the nation, beset as it is by corruption, sanctions, economic backwardness, and an indeterminate program for doing anything about it all. At the end of 2018, Putin's former finance minister, Alexei Kudrin, said that Russia's

economy was mired in a “serious stagnation pit.” As the economist Anders Aslund concludes in his new book, Russia’s Crony Capitalism, the country has devolved into “an extreme form of plutocracy that requires authoritarianism to persist,” with Putin joining in the looting to become a billionaire many times over himself, even as his country has grown more isolated because of his aggressive foreign policy.

Sheer survival—of his regime and of himself—is often the aim that best explains many of Putin’s political decisions, at home and abroad. In 2012, when Putin returned to the presidency after a hiatus as prime minister so as to observe constitutional niceties, he was greeted with massive demonstrations. These shook Putin to the core, and his belief that street protests can all too easily turn into regime-threatening revolutions is the key to understanding his present and future behavior. On the international stage, no cause has animated Putin more than the prospect of another country’s leader being forced from office, no matter how evil the leader or how deserved the toppling. Early on in his presidency, he opposed the “color revolutions” sweeping some post-Soviet states: the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. He condemned the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya. He went to war after his ally Viktor Yanukovych, the president of Ukraine, fled the country amid a peaceful street uprising. He is an antirevolutionary through and through, which makes sense when you remember how it all began.

FROM DRESDEN TO THE KREMLIN

The first revolution Putin experienced was a trauma that he has never forgotten, the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall and the resulting collapse of the communist regime in East Germany. It happened when he was a 36-year-old undercover KGB operative stationed in Dresden, and Putin and his men were left on their own to figure out what to do as angry East Germans threatened to storm their offices, burning papers “night and day,” as he would later recall, while they waited for help. Putin had already become disillusioned by the huge disparity between the higher standard of living in East Germany and the poverty he was used to back home. Now, he saw his country’s leadership, weak and uncertain, abandon him, too. “We cannot do anything without orders from Moscow,” he was told. “And Moscow is silent.”

This is perhaps the most memorable passage from Putin's 2000 as-told-to memoir, First Person, which remains both the key source for understanding the Russian president's history and a prescient document in which he laid out much of the political program he would soon start implementing. The revolution in East Germany, as scarring as it was for Putin, turned out to be only the prelude to what he considered and still considers the greater catastrophe, the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union itself, in 1991. This was the signal moment of Putin's adult life, the tragedy whose consequences he is determined to undo.

Putin was a KGB man in full, an authoritarian modernizer, a believer in order and stability.

Putin would go from his KGB posting in the backwater of Dresden to president of Russia in less than a decade, ascending to the Kremlin on New Year's Eve in 1999 as Boris Yeltsin's handpicked successor. Yeltsin, aging and alcoholic, had brought democracy to Russia after the Soviet collapse but had soured his country on the word itself, which had come to be associated with economic crisis, gangster rampages, and the crooked giveaway of state assets to communist insiders turned capitalists. By the end of his two terms in office, Yeltsin was barely able to speak in public and was surrounded by a corrupt "Family" of relatives and associates who feared they would face prosecution once they lost the protection of his high office.

Putin had arrived in Moscow at an opportune moment, rising in just a few years from an obscure job in Yeltsin's presidential administration to head of the post-Soviet successor to the KGB, known as the Federal Security Service, or FSB. From there, he was appointed prime minister, one in a series of what had been up until then replaceable young Yeltsin acolytes. Putin, however, was different, launching a brutal war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya in response to a series of domestic terrorist attacks whose murky origins continue to inspire conspiracy theories about the FSB's possible role. His displays of macho activism transformed Russian politics, and Yeltsin's advisers decided that this KGB veteran—still only in his 40s—would be just the sort of loyalist who could protect them. In March 2000, Putin won the first of what would be four presidential elections. As in those that followed, there was no serious competition, and Putin never felt compelled to offer an electoral program or a policy platform.

But his agenda from the start was both clear and acted on with breathtaking speed. In just over a year, Putin not only continued to wage the war in Chechnya with unforgiving force but also reinstated the Soviet national anthem, ordered the government takeover of the only independent television network in Russia's history, passed a new flat tax on income and required Russians to actually pay it, and exiled powerful oligarchs—including Boris Berezovsky, who had helped him come to power and would later suspiciously turn up dead in his British home. Over the next few years, Putin would further consolidate his authority, canceling elections for regional governors, eliminating political competition in the State Duma, and surrounding himself with loyal advisers from the security services and St. Petersburg. He also, in 2004, arrested Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia's richest man, and seized his oil company in a politically charged prosecution that had the intended effect of scaring Russia's wealthy robber barons into subservience.

These actions, even at the time, were not difficult to read. Putin was a KGB man in full, an authoritarian modernizer, a believer in order and stability. And yet he was called a mystery, a cipher, an ideological blank slate—"Mr. Nobody," the Kremlinologist Lilia Shevtsova dubbed him. Perhaps only U.S. President George W. Bush found Putin to be "very straightforward and trustworthy" after getting "a sense of his soul," as he announced after their initial 2001 summit meeting in Slovenia, but Bush was not alone in considering Putin a Western-oriented reformer who, although certainly no democrat, might prove to be a reliable partner after Yeltsin's embarrassing stumbles. At the World Economic Forum in Davos a year earlier, an American journalist had asked the new Russian president point-blank, "Who is Mr. Putin?" But of course, it was the wrong question. Everyone already knew, or should have.

Outsiders have always judged Russia on their own terms.
In many ways, Putin has been strikingly consistent. The president who made headlines in 2004 by calling the breakup of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century" is the same president of today, the one who told the Financial Times earlier this year that "as for the tragedy related to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that is something obvious." For Putin, the goal of the state remains what it was when he came to office two decades ago. It is not a policy program, not democracy or anything approaching it, but the absence of something—namely, the upheaval that preceded him.

“Ultimately,” he said in the same interview, “the well-being of the people depends, possibly primarily, on stability.” It might as well have been his slogan for the last 20 years. Where once there was chaos and collapse, he claims to offer Russia confidence, self-sufficiency, and a “stable, normal, safe and predictable life.” Not a good life, or even a better one, not world domination or anything too grand, but a Russia that is reliable, stolid, intact. This may or may not continue to resonate with Russians as the collapse of the Soviet Union recedes further and further from living memory. It is the promise of a Brezhnev, or at least his modern heir.

MISUNDERESTIMATING PUTIN

Today, Putin is no more a man of mystery than he was when he took power two decades ago. What’s most remarkable, knowing what we know now, is that so many thought he was.

There are many reasons for the mistake. Outsiders have always judged Russia on their own terms, and Americans are particularly myopic when it comes to understanding other countries. Putin’s rise from nowhere received more attention than where he intended to take the country. Many failed to take Putin either seriously or literally until it was too late, or decided that what he was doing did not matter all that much in a country that U.S. President Barack Obama characterized as a “regional power.” Often, Western policymakers simply believed his lies. I will never forget one encounter with a senior Bush administration official in the months just before Putin decided to stay in power past his constitutionally limited two terms and engineered his temporary shift to the Russian premiership. That would not happen, I was told. Why? Because Putin had looked the official in the eye and said he wouldn’t do it.

In general, U.S. interpretations of Putin’s Russia have been determined far more by the politics of Washington than by what has actually been happening in Moscow. Cold Warriors have looked backward and seen the Soviet Union 2.0. Others, including Bush and Obama at the outset of their presidencies and now Trump, have dreamed of a Russia that could be a pragmatic partner for the West, persisting in this despite the rapidly accumulating evidence of Putin’s aggressively revisionist, inevitably zero-sum vision of a world in which Russia’s national revival will succeed only at the expense of other states.

There are many reasons why the West misunderestimated Putin, as Bush might have put it, but one stands out with the clarity of hindsight: Westerners simply had no framework for a world in which autocracy, not democracy, would be on the rise, for a post–Cold War geopolitics in which revisionist powers such as Russia and China would compete on more equal terms again with the United States. After the Soviet collapse, the United States had gotten used to the idea of itself as the world's sole superpower, and a virtuous one at that. Understanding Putin and what he represents seems a lot easier today than it did then, now that the number of democracies in the world, by Freedom House's count, has fallen each year for the past 13 years.

When Putin came to power, it seemed as though the world was going in the opposite direction. Putin had to be an outlier. Russia was a declining power, "Upper Volta with nukes," as critics used to call the Soviet Union. Putin's project of restoring order was necessary, and at least not a significant threat. How could it be otherwise? On September 9, 2001, I and a few dozen other Moscow-based correspondents traveled to neighboring Belarus to observe the rigged elections in which Alexander Lukashenko was ensuring his continuation as president. We treated the story as a Cold War relic; Lukashenko was "the last dictator in Europe," as the headlines called him, a living Soviet anachronism. It was simply inconceivable to us that two decades later, both Lukashenko and Putin would still be ruling, and we would be wondering how many more dictators in Europe might join their club.

History has shown that just because something is inconceivable does not mean it won't happen. But that is an important reason we got Putin wrong, and why, all too often, we still do. Putin is only nine years away from hitting Stalin's modern record for Kremlin longevity, which appears to be more than achievable. But the West's long history of misreading Russia suggests that this outcome is no more preordained than Putin's improbable path to the Russian presidency was in the first place. We may have misunderestimated him before, but that doesn't mean we might not misoverestimate him now. The warning signs are all there: the shrinking economy, the shrill nationalism as a distraction from internal decay, an inward-looking elite feuding over the division of spoils while taking its monopoly on power for granted. Will this be Putin's undoing? Who knows? But the ghost of Brezhnev is alive and well in Putin's Kremlin.

Trump's Assault on the Global Trading System By Chad P. Bown And Douglas A. Irwin

Donald Trump has been true to his word. After excoriating free trade while campaigning for the U.S. presidency, he has made economic nationalism a centerpiece of his agenda in office. His administration has pulled out of some trade deals, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and renegotiated others, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. Many of Trump's actions, such as the tariffs he has imposed on steel and aluminum, amount to overt protectionism and have hurt the U.S. economy. Others have had less obvious, but no less damaging, effects. By flouting international trade rules, the administration has diminished the country's standing in the world and led other governments to consider using the same tools to limit trade arbitrarily. It has taken deliberate steps to weaken the World Trade Organization (WTO)—some of which will permanently damage the multilateral trading system. And in its boldest move, it is trying to use trade policy to decouple the U.S. and Chinese economies.

A future U.S. administration that wants to chart a more traditional course on trade will be able to undo some of the damage and start repairing the United States' tattered reputation as a reliable trading partner. In some respects, however, there will be no going back. The Trump administration's attacks on the WTO and the expansive legal rationalizations it has given for many of its protectionist actions threaten to pull apart the unified global trading system. And on China, it has become clear that the administration is bent on severing, not fixing, the relationship. The separation of the world's two largest economies would trigger a global realignment. Other countries would be forced to choose between rival trade blocs. Even if Trump loses reelection in 2020, global trade will never be the same.

The first two years of the Trump administration featured pitched battles between the so-called globalists (represented by Gary Cohn, then the director of the National Economic Council) and the nationalists (represented by the Trump advisers Steve Bannon and Peter Navarro). The president was instinctively a

nationalist, but the globalists hoped to contain his impulses and encourage his attention-seeking need to strike flashy deals. They managed to slow the rollout of some new tariffs and prevent Trump from precipitously withdrawing from trade agreements.

But by mid-2018, the leading globalists had left the administration, and the nationalists—the president among them—were in command. Trump has a highly distorted view of international trade and international negotiations. Viewing trade as a zero-sum, win-lose game, he stresses one-time deals over ongoing relationships, enjoys the leverage created by tariffs, and relies on brinkmanship, escalation, and public threats over diplomacy. The president has made clear that he likes tariffs (“trade wars are good, and easy to win”) and that he wants more of them (“I am a Tariff Man”).

Even if Trump loses reelection in 2020, global trade will never be the same. Although the thrust of U.S. policy over the past 70 years has been to pursue agreements to open up trade and reduce barriers, every president has for political purposes used protectionist measures to help certain industries. President Ronald Reagan, for example, capped imports to protect the automotive and steel industries during what was then the worst U.S. recession since the Great Depression. Trump, however, has enjoyed a period of strong economic growth, low unemployment, and a virtual absence of protectionist pressure from industry or labor. And yet his administration has imposed more tariffs than most of its predecessors.

Take steel. Although there is nothing unusual about steel (along with aluminum) receiving government protection—the industry maintains a permanent presence in Washington and has been an on-again, off-again beneficiary of trade restrictions since the Johnson administration—the scope of the protection provided and the manner in which the Trump administration gave it last year were unusual. In order to avoid administrative review by independent agencies such as the nonpartisan, quasi-judicial U.S. International Trade Commission, the White House dusted off Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962. This Cold War statute gives the president the authority to impose restrictions on imports if the Commerce Department finds that they threaten to harm a domestic industry the government deems vital to national security.

The Trump administration's national security case was weak. More than 70 percent of the steel consumed in the United States was produced domestically, the imported share was stable, and there was no threat of a surge. Most imports came from Canada, Germany, Japan, Mexico, and other allies, with only a small fraction coming from China and Russia, thanks to antidumping duties already in place on those countries. The number of jobs in the U.S. steel industry had been shrinking, but this was due more to advances in technology than falling production or imports. In the 1980s, for example, it took ten man-hours to produce a ton of steel; today, it takes just over one man-hour. Even the Defense Department was skeptical about the national security motivation.

Prior administrations refrained from invoking the national security rationale for fear that it could become an unchecked protectionist loophole and that other countries would abuse it. In a sign that those fears may come true, the Trump administration recently stood alongside Russia to argue that merely invoking national security is enough to defeat any WTO challenge to a trade barrier. This runs counter to 75 years of practice, as well as to what U.S. negotiators argued when they created the global trading system in the 1940s.

The Trump administration dismissed all those concerns. The president and leading officials desperately wanted to help the steel and aluminum industries. (It did not hurt that Wilbur Ross, the commerce secretary, and Robert Lighthizer, the U.S. trade representative, both used to work for the steel industry.) The administration also believed that its willingness to impose economic self-harm in the form of higher steel and aluminum prices for domestic manufacturers would send a strong signal to other countries about its commitment to economic nationalism.

Trump also went so far as to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Canada, something that even the domestic industry and labor unions opposed. Over the last 30 years, the U.S. steel and aluminum industries had transformed to become North American industries, with raw steel and aluminum flowing freely back and forth between Canadian and U.S. plants. The same union represents workers on both sides of the border. In addition to lacking an economic ration-ale, targeting Canada alienated a key ally and seemed to make no political sense, either.

The administration also miscalculated the foreign blowback against the tariffs. “I don’t believe there’s any country in the world that will retaliate for the simple reason that we are the biggest and most lucrative market in the world,” Navarro, the president’s hawkish trade adviser, told Fox News in 2018, apparently unaware that other countries have trade hawks, too. Canada, China, Mexico, the European Union, and others all hit back hard, largely by slapping tariffs on U.S. agricultural exports. In effect, the administration jeopardized the welfare of 3.2 million American farmers to help 140,000 U.S. steelworkers, a remarkable move given Trump’s electoral reliance on Midwestern farm states.

Foreign governments fear that the United States is willing to abandon established trade norms.

If the aim was to fire a shot across the bow of U.S. trading partners, the tariffs worked. Foreign governments were suddenly on alert that the United States was willing to abandon the established norms of trade policy. The White House has insisted that “economic security is national security.” Yet defining security so broadly opens the door to unrestricted protectionism. And so when, in mid-2018, the Trump administration made yet another national security case for tariffs, this time on automobiles—imports of which dwarf those of steel and aluminum combined by a factor of seven—the fear abroad reached a new level. Although the administration recently announced that it was delaying any new auto tariffs, the threat remains. The consequences of imposing such a large tax on a major household item, in the sure knowledge that there would be swift and heavy foreign retaliation, may be staying the administration’s hand.

The president’s enthusiasm for tariff threats has even spilled over to issues beyond trade. In May, Trump suddenly demanded that Mexico stop the flow of immigrants into the United States or risk facing new, across-the-board tariffs of 25 percent. As long as Trump is in office, no country—even one that has just negotiated a trade agreement with the United States—can be confident that it won’t be a target.

POINTLESS RENEGOTIATIONS

On the 2016 campaign trail, Trump complained that NAFTA was “the worst trade deal ever,” a theme he has continued in office. His advisers talked him out of simply withdrawing from the agreement, but Trump insisted on renegotiating it

and proceeded to make the renegotiation process needlessly contentious. The administration made odd demands of Canada and Mexico, including that the deal should result in balanced trade and include a sunset clause that could terminate the agreement after five years, thus eliminating the benefits of reduced uncertainty.

The three countries finally reached a new agreement last September. Unimaginatively called the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), it is hardly a major rewrite of NAFTA. It preserves NAFTA's requirement of duty-free access, would slightly open up Canadian dairy markets to U.S. farmers, and incorporates a host of new provisions from the TPP.

The renegotiation was in some ways an unnecessary exercise. NAFTA was a sound agreement—no one in the administration could identify what made it such a terrible deal—and many of its shortcomings had been fixed in the TPP, from which Trump withdrew the United States in 2017. But the contrast between the hostile rhetoric Trump heaped on NAFTA and the soft reality of the USMCA illuminates the president's approach to trade. Trump just doesn't like certain outcomes, including trade deficits and the loss of certain industries. But instead of addressing their underlying causes, which have little to do with specific trade agreements, he opts for managed trade, substituting government intervention for market forces, or new rules—a requirement that a greater proportion of a vehicle be made in the United States for it to enter Mexico duty free, for example—that try to force his preferred outcome. The goal is not to free up trade further but to constrain trade according to Trump's whims.

The USMCA is currently stalled in Congress, partly because the administration did not cultivate congressional support for the renegotiation in the first place. But if the USMCA ultimately dies, neither Canada nor Mexico will miss it. Both felt the need to sign the deal simply to get past the uncertainty created by Trump's threats to withdraw from NAFTA, as well as to forestall the chance that he would impose auto tariffs.

Both Japan and the EU also begrudgingly signed up for trade talks with the administration, in large part to delay Trump's auto tariffs for as long as possible. Of the two, Japan is more likely to agree to a deal—after all, it negotiated a trade agreement with the Obama administration as part of the TPP. The Europeans

are less likely to do so, not only due to conflicts over agriculture but also because of Trump's unpopularity across Europe. But the Europeans hope that by agreeing to talk, they can put off Trump's auto tariffs and perhaps run out the clock on the administration.

YOU'RE GONNA MISS ME WHEN I'M GONE

Acts of protectionism are acts of self-harm. But the Trump administration is also doing broader, and more permanent damage to the rules-based trading system. That system emerged from the ashes of the trade wars of the 1930s, when protectionism and economic depression fueled the rise of fascism and foreign governments made deals that cut U.S. commercial interests out of the world's leading markets. In 1947, the United States responded by leading the negotiations to create the WTO's predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which limited arbitrary government interference in trade and provided rules to manage trade conflicts. Under this system, trade barriers have gradually fallen, and growing trade has contributed to global economic prosperity.

The United States once led by example. No longer. Trump has threatened to leave the WTO, something his previous actions suggest is more than idle talk. He says the agreement is rigged against the United States. The administration denounces the WTO when the organization finds U.S. practices in violation of trade rules but largely ignores the equally many cases that it wins. Although the WTO's dispute-settlement system needs reform, it has worked well to defuse trade conflict since it was established over two decades ago.

Trump's attacks on the WTO go beyond rhetoric. The administration has blocked appointments to the WTO's Appellate Body, which issues judgments on trade disputes; by December, if nothing changes, there will be too few judges to adjudicate any new cases. When that happens, a dispute-settlement system that countries big and small, rich and poor have relied on to prevent trade skirmishes from turning into trade wars will disappear. This is more than a withdrawal of U.S. leadership. It is the destruction of a system that has worked to keep the trade peace.

That is particularly unwelcome because so much of global trade has nothing to do with the United States. The system resolves conflicts between Colombia and Panama, Taiwan and Indonesia, Australia and the EU. Most disputes are settled

without retaliation or escalation. The WTO has created a body of law that ensures more predictability in international commerce. The system it manages works to the benefit of the United States while freeing the country from having to police global commerce single-handedly.

The dispute-settlement system is not perfect. But rather than make constructive proposals for how to improve it, something Canada and others are now doing, the United States has disengaged. The Trump administration may end up destroying the old system without having drafted a blueprint for its successor.

Trump's goal is nothing less than a complete transformation of the Chinese economy.

What will come next? In the worst-case scenario, the new world trading system will be dominated by discriminatory trade blocs that raise the costs of commerce, make trade negotiations harder, and encourage retaliation. Size and economic power, not principles or rules, will determine the outcome of trade disputes. Such a system will hurt smaller, weaker countries and could push them to align with more powerful ones for self-preservation. It was precisely that trend in the 1930s that forced the United States to create the postwar trading system. And the lack of adherence to trade rules beginning in the 1970s made the United States press for the creation of a stronger, more effective dispute-settlement system in the 1990s, resulting in the WTO. For Washington to tear down the trading system it created would be a tragedy.

CONSCIOUS DECOUPLING

Nowhere has the Trump administration left a greater mark on U.S. trade policy than with China. In early 2018, it released a lengthy report documenting a litany of concerns with Chinese trade practices. China had been forcing U.S. companies to form joint ventures with local firms to access its 1.4 billion consumers. These arranged marriages then allowed China to acquire U.S. technology. Sometimes companies would hand it over to grease the palms of regulators, sometimes they would license it at below commercially viable rates, and sometimes Chinese firms or spies would steal it.

Combined with some of the economic concerns underlying the U.S. steel and aluminum tariffs—China's industrial subsidies, state-owned enterprises, overcapacity, and failure to more fully transform into a market economy—the list

of U.S. grievances created a recipe for confrontation. The result was tariffs, and countertariffs, on $360 billion worth of trade between the two countries, an unprecedented figure.

Many observers assumed that the Trump administration simply wanted to get a better deal from China. But what constituted a better deal was always vague. If the primary concern was the bilateral trade deficit, China could be pressured to go on a massive spending spree, buying up U.S. soybeans and energy products. If it was intellectual property theft, China might be persuaded to change a few laws and commit to international norms.

It has become clear, however, that the administration does not want a permanent deal, or at least any deal with an explicit path forward that the Chinese government might accept. Even if Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping come to some superficial agreement, it is unlikely to be more than a temporary truce in what is now a permanent trade war. The administration's goal seems to be nothing less than the immediate and complete transformation of the Chinese economy or bust—with bust the most likely outcome. To satisfy the United States, China would have to end forced technology transfers, stop stealing intellectual property, curtail subsidies to state-owned enterprises, abandon industrial policies designed to gain technological dominance, stop harassing foreign firms operating in China, and begin to open markets that the government deliberately closed to give control to domestic firms. In other words, the United States wants China to turn its state-dominated economic system into a market-based one overnight.

Such a change would perhaps be in China's best interest, but economic regime change is quite an ask for one country to make of another. The Communist Party leadership keeps its lock on power by maintaining control over all facets of the Chinese economy. Losing that control would jeopardize its grip on political power. No one seriously expects China's leaders to cede control of the economy simply because of U.S. threats.

The Trump administration may not even expect them to; it may have been asking all along for something that it knew China could not deliver. If so, the objective was never a comprehensive deal; it was the tariffs themselves. For one thing, if the administration had been serious about getting a deal from China, it would

have maximized its leverage by bringing along Japan and the EU, both of which have similar economic concerns. Indeed, Japan and the EU have made considerable efforts to work with the administration when it comes to China. They have mostly been rebuffed.

There were hints from the beginning that the administration was never searching for a deal that would truly end the trade war. In 2017, Navarro outlined the administration's view that trade with China threatened U.S. national security. He also let slip that he wanted to rip up the supply chains that bound the United States and China together. At the time, some dismissed him as a rogue eccentric. Now, the United States is on the cusp of slapping tariffs on all imports from China—the first step toward Navarro's goal. Geopolitics has trumped economics.

This is not protectionism in the sense of trying to help a domestic industry in its struggle against imports. The goal is much broader and more significant: the economic decoupling of the United States and China. That would mark a historic fragmentation of the world economy. It would represent, in the words of former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, the falling of an "economic iron curtain" between the world's two largest economies. Such a separation would have foreign policy and national security implications well beyond the economic consequences.

In some respects, the rupture is already happening. Students and scientists from China are no longer as welcome in the United States as they once were. China's already meager investments in the U.S. economy are now under heightened scrutiny from national security agencies. The administration is tightening up export controls, curtailing how and with whom Americans can share their inventions, especially in cutting-edge areas such as artificial intelligence, advanced computing, and additive manufacturing. That will not stop China from gaining better technology, however; German, Japanese, and South Korean firms will simply fill the void. Going it alone will put the U.S. economy at even more of a disadvantage.

Most traditional supporters of free trade are not so naive as to believe that the United States should tolerate China's bad behavior as long as cheap goods continue to flow into the United States. China, they agree, breaks the rules. But

the Trump administration's clumsy unilateral approach is not the right answer. A better response would be to identify specific instances in which China has violated international agreements and then join with trading partners and allies to file cases with the WTO. (This is not as hopeless a tactic as it might sound: China has complied with findings from the WTO surprisingly often.) Where China has not explicitly violated agreements, Washington could still sanction unfair practices, preferably together with other countries so as to exert the maximum pressure possible, but unilaterally if that is the only feasible option.

The final plank of a sensible trade policy would be to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, the revised trade deal struck by the remaining members of the TPP after the U.S. withdrawal. Joining the CPTPP would establish a large zone of trade rules favorable to the United States and unfavorable to China. That would help push China to resume its progress toward economic reform. Historians will look back on Trump's precipitous decision to quit the TPP as a major blunder.

If the Trump administration really does want to separate the U.S. and Chinese economies, the United States will have to pay an economic price. Trump denies that his strategy has costs. China, he says, is paying the tariffs. "I am very happy with over $100 Billion a year in Tariffs filling U.S. coffers," he tweeted in May. This is nonsense: research shows that firms pass on the cost of the tariffs to American consumers. And U.S. exporters—mainly farmers facing the loss of markets due to China's retaliation—are paying the price, as well. So, too, are American taxpayers, now on the hook for tens of billions of dollars needed to bail out the reeling agricultural sector.

Whether Trump appreciates these costs isn't clear, but it's evident that economic considerations aren't driving policy. The president's willingness to look past stock market slumps and continue to push China shows that he is willing to pay an economic price—whatever he says in public. For someone whose reelection depends on maintaining a strong economy, that is a bold gamble.

THE DAMAGE DONE

If Trump becomes a one-term president, the next administration will have an opportunity to reverse many of its predecessor's trade policies—eliminating the steel and aluminum tariffs, repairing relationships with the United States' NAFTA

partners, joining the CPTPP, and improving the WTO. That would not only help restore U.S. credibility on the world stage but also enable other countries to lift their retaliatory duties on U.S. exports, helping suffering farmers. If Trump wins reelection and continues down the path of economic nationalism, however, the prospect of continued, and perhaps intensified, trade conflict is likely to destroy the world trading system. That would do incalculable damage to the world economy.

Although many of Trump's policies can be reversed, the tariffs on China are a game changer. Any future administration would have a difficult time removing them without sizable concessions from the Chinese leadership and some way of alleviating the heightened national security fears that now dominate the bilateral relationship. A future Democratic administration may be even more disinclined to change course. Many Democrats opposed the TPP and broadly support the president's anti-China stance. In May, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, Democrat of New York, tweeted his support for Trump on China, urging him to "Hang tough" and not to cave in to a bad deal. More than a decade ago, Schumer and his Senate colleagues supported slapping even higher tariffs on Chinese goods than the ones Trump has imposed, on the grounds that China was keeping its currency artificially low to boost exports. Concerns over human rights will also push Democrats to confront China. Although China's herding of over a million Muslim Uighurs in western China into concentration camps did not factor into the Trump administration's trade negotiations, it could loom large in those of a future administration.

The system of world trade that the United States helped establish after World W ar II is often described as multilateral. But it was not a global system; it originally consisted of a small number of Western, market-oriented economies and Japan and excluded the Soviet Union, its eastern European satellites, and other communist countries. That division was about more than politics. Market and nonmarket economies are in many ways incompatible. In a market economy, a firm losing money has to adjust or go bankrupt. Under state capitalism, state-owned firms get subsidies to maintain production and save jobs, forcing non-state-owned firms—at home or abroad—to make the painful adjustment instead. The Trump administration, together with China, as it retreats from pro-market reforms, may be moving the world back to the historic norm of political and economic blocs.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism opened up eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to global markets. The reforms of Deng Xiaoping did the same for China. But only in the unipolar moment, which began in 2001, when China joined the WTO, were open markets truly global. Now, the period of global capitalism may be coming to an end. What many thought was the new normal may turn out o have been a brief aberration.

The Sources of Chinese Conduct By Odd Arne Westad

Are Washington and Beijing Fighting a New Cold War?

In February 1946, as the Cold War was coming into being, George Kennan, the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, sent the State Department a 5,000-word cable in which he tried to explain Soviet behavior and outline a response to it. A year later, the text of his famous "Long Telegram" was expanded into a Foreign Affairs article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." Writing under the byline "X," Kennan argued that the Soviets' Marxist-Leninist ideology was for real and that this worldview, plus a deep sense of insecurity, was what drove Soviet expansionism. But this didn't mean that outright confrontation was inevitable, he pointed out, since "the Kremlin has no compunction about retreating in the face of superior force." What the United States had to do to ensure its own long-term security, then, was contain the Soviet threat. If it did, then Soviet power would ultimately crumble. Containment, in other words, was both necessary and sufficient.

Kennan's message became the canonical text for those who tried to understand the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Always controversial and often revised (not least by the author himself), the containment strategy that Kennan laid out would define U.S. policy until the end of the Cold War. And as Kennan predicted, when the end did come, it came not just because of the strength and steadfastness of the United States and its allies but even more because of weaknesses and contradictions in the Soviet system itself.

Now, more than 70 years later, the United States and its allies again face a communist rival that views the United States as an adversary and is seeking regional dominance and global influence. For many, including in Washington and Beijing, the analogy has become irresistible: there is a U.S.-Chinese cold war, and American policymakers need an updated version of Kennan's containment. This past April, Kiron Skinner, the director of policy planning at the State Department (the job Kennan held when "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" was published), explicitly called for a new "X" article, this time for China.

But if such an inquiry starts where Kennan's did—with an attempt to understand the other side's basic drivers—the differences become as pronounced as the parallels. It is these differences, the contrast between the sources of Soviet conduct then and the sources of Chinese conduct now, that stand to save the world from another Cold War.

FROM WEALTH TO POWER

There are two central facts about China today. The first is that the country has just experienced a period of economic growth the likes of which the world had never before seen. The second is that it is ruled, increasingly dictatorially, by an unelected communist party that puts people in prison for their convictions and limits all forms of free expression and association. Under Xi Jinping, there are abundant signs that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wants to roll back even the limited freedoms that people took for themselves during the reform era of Deng Xiaoping. There are also indications that the party wants to bring private enterprise to heel, by intervening more directly in how businesses are run.

Behind these policies lies a growing insistence that China's model of development is superior to the West's. In a 2017 speech, Xi claimed that Beijing is "blazing a new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization" and "offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence." According to the CCP, Western talk about democracy is simply a pretext for robbing poorer countries of their sovereignty and economic potential. Just as China has needed dictatorship to achieve extreme economic growth, the thinking goes, other countries may need it, too. Although such convictions have been slow to find acolytes abroad, many Chinese have bought into the party's version of truth, believing with Xi that thanks to the party's leadership, "the Chinese nation, with an entirely new posture, now stands tall and firm in the East."

China's extreme centralization of power could have extreme consequences.

Such views are the product of both the unprecedented improvement in living standards in China and an increase in Chinese nationalism. The CCP issues relentless propaganda about the greatness and righteousness of China, and the Chinese people, understandably proud of what they have achieved, embrace it enthusiastically. The party also claims that the outside world, especially the

United States, is out to undo China's progress, or at least prevent its further rise—just as Soviet propaganda used to do.

Making this nationalism even more sinister is the particular view of history endorsed by the Chinese leadership, which sees the history of China from the mid-nineteenth century to the Communists' coming to power in 1949 as an endless series of humiliations at the hands of foreign powers. While there is some truth to this version of events, the CCP also makes the frightening claim that the party itself is the only thing standing between the Chinese and further exploitation. Since it would be untenable for the party to argue that the country needs dictatorship because the Chinese are singularly unsuited to governing themselves, it must claim that the centralization of power in the party's hands is necessary for protecting against abuse by foreigners. But such extreme centralization of power could have extreme consequences. As Kennan correctly observed about the Soviet Union, "if . . . anything were ever to occur to disrupt the unity and efficacy of the Party as a political instrument, Soviet Russia might be changed overnight from one of the strongest to one of the weakest and most pitiable of national societies."

Another troubling aspect of nationalism in China today is that the country is a de facto empire that tries to behave as if it were a nation-state. More than 40 percent of China's territory—Inner Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang—was originally populated by people who do not see themselves as Chinese. Although the Chinese government grants special rights to these "minority nationalities," their homelands have been subsumed into a new concept of a Chinese nation and have gradually been taken over by the 98 percent of the population who are ethnically Chinese (or Han, as the government prefers to call them). Those who resist end up in prison camps, just as did those who argued for real self-government within the Soviet empire.

Externally, the Chinese government sustains the world's worst dystopia, next door in North Korea, and routinely menaces its neighbors, including the democratic government in Taiwan, which Beijing views as a breakaway province. Much of this is not to China's advantage politically or diplomatically. Its militarization of faraway islets in the South China Sea, its contest with Japan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and its attempts at punishing South Korea over the acquisition of advanced missile defenses from the United States have all

backfired: East Asia is much warier of Chinese aims today than it was a decade ago. (The percentage of South Koreans, for example, who viewed China's rise favorably fell from 66 percent in 2002 to 34 percent in 2017, according to the Pew Research Center.) Despite this dip in China's popularity, people across the region overwhelmingly believe that China will be the predominant regional power in the future and that they had better get ready.

China is a de facto empire that tries to behave as if it were a nation-state.
This assumption is based primarily on China's spectacular economic growth. Today, China's economic power relative to the United States' exceeds what the Soviet Union's relative power was by a factor of two or three. Although that growth has now slowed, those who believe that China will soon go the way of Japan and fall into economic stagnation are almost certainly wrong. Even if foreign tariffs on Chinese goods stayed high, China has enough of an untapped domestic market to fuel the country's economic rise for years to come. And the rest of Asia, which is a much larger and more economically dynamic region than Western Europe was at the beginning of the Cold War, fears China enough to refrain from walling it off with tariffs.

It is in military and strategic terms that the competition between the United States and China is hardest to gauge. The United States today has tremendous military advantages over China: more than 20 times as many nuclear warheads, a far superior air force, and defense budgets that run at least three times as high as China's. It also has allies (Japan and South Korea) and prospective allies (India and Vietnam) in China's neighborhood that boast substantial military capabilities of their own. China has no equivalent in the Western Hemisphere.

And yet within the last decade, the balance of power in East Asia has shifted perceptibly in China's favor. Today, the country has enough ground-based ballistic missiles, aircraft, and ships to plausibly contend that it has achieved military superiority in its immediate backyard. The Chinese missile force presents such a challenge to U.S. air bases and aircraft carriers in the Pacific that Washington can no longer claim supremacy in the region. The problem will only get worse, as China's naval capabilities are set to grow massively within the next few years, and its military technologies—especially its lasers, drones, cyber-operations, and capabilities in outer space—are fast catching up to those of the United States. Even though the United States currently enjoys far greater military

superiority over China than it did over the Soviet Union, Beijing has the potential to catch up much more quickly and comprehensively than Moscow ever could. Overall, China is more of a match for the United States than the Soviet Union was when Kennan wrote down his thoughts.

PLUS ÇA CHANGE

The similarities between China today and the Soviet Union of old may seem striking—starting, of course, with communist rule. For almost 40 years, blinded by China's market-led economic progress, the West had gotten used to downplaying the fact that the country was run by a communist dictatorship. In spite of occasional reminders of Chinese leaders' ruthlessness, such as the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the Western consensus held that China was liberalizing and becoming more pluralistic. Today, such predictions look foolish: the CCP is strengthening its rule and intends to remain in power forever. "The great new project of Party building . . . is just getting into full swing," Xi announced in 2017. He added, "We must work harder to uphold the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the Central Committee. . . . The Party remains always the backbone of the nation."

Another similarity is that just as the Soviet Union sought predominance in Europe, China is seeking it in East Asia, a region that is as important to the United States today as Europe was at the beginning of the Cold War. The methods China is using are similar—political and military extortion, divide-and-rule tactics—and its capabilities are in fact greater. Unless the United States acts to countervail it, China is likely to become the undisputed master of East Asia, from Japan to Indonesia, by the late 2020s.

Like Soviet leaders, Chinese ones view the United States as the enemy. They are careful and courteous in public, and often declare their adherence to international norms, but in the party's internal communications, the line is always that the United States is planning to undermine China's rise through external aggression and internal subversion. "So long as we persist in CCP leadership and socialism with Chinese characteristics," went one 2013 communiqué, "the position of Western anti-China forces to pressure for urgent reform won't change, and they'll continue to point the spearhead of Westernizing, splitting, and 'Color Revolutions' at China." Such anti-Americanism bears a striking resemblance to the type Stalin promoted in the late 1940s, including open appeals to nationalism.

In 1949, the Soviet-led Cominform proclaimed that the West had “as its main aim the forcible establishment of Anglo-American world domination, the enslavement of foreign countries and peoples, the destruction of democracy and the unleashing of a new war.” The Americans, the CCP leadership tells its followers, hate us because we are Chinese. They are out to rule the world, and only the Communist Party stands in their way.

NOW AND THEN

But China is not the Soviet Union. For one thing, Soviet ideology was inherently opposed to any long-term coexistence with the United States. From Lenin onward, Soviet leaders saw the world in zero-sum terms: bourgeois democracy and capitalism had to lose for communism to win. There could be alliances of convenience and even periods of détente, but in the end, their form of communism would have to be victorious everywhere for the Soviet Union to be safe. The CCP does not share such beliefs. It is nationalist rather than internationalist in outlook. The party sees Washington as an obstacle to its goals of preserving its own rule and gaining regional dominance, but it does not believe that the United States or its system of government has to be defeated in order to achieve these aims.

Moreover, Chinese society is more similar to American society than Soviet society ever was. In the Soviet Union, citizens generally accepted and conformed to socialist economic policies. Chinese, by contrast, appear to be interested above all in getting ahead in their competitive, market-oriented society. For the vast majority of them, communism is simply a name for the ruling party rather than an ideal to seek. True, some sympathize with Xi’s efforts to centralize power, believing that China needs strong leadership after the individualism of the 1990s and early years of this century went too far. But nobody, including Xi himself, wants to bring back the bad old days before the reform and opening began. For all his Maoist rhetoric, Xi, both in thought and practice, is much further removed from Mao Zedong than even the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev was from Lenin.

What’s more, the Chinese have enjoyed a remarkably peaceful few decades. In 1947, the Russians had just emerged from 30-plus years of continuous war and revolution. In Kennan’s words, they were “physically and spiritually tired.” The Chinese have had the opposite experience: some two-thirds of the population

have known nothing but peace and progress. The country's last foreign military intervention, in Vietnam, ended 30 years ago, and its last major conflict, the Korean War, ended almost 70 years ago. On the one hand, the past few decades of success have demonstrated the value of peace, making people wary of risking it all in war. On the other hand, the lack of near-term memories of war has led to a lot of loose talk about war among people who have never experienced it. These days, it is increasingly common to hear Chinese, especially the young, espousing the idea that their country may have to fight a war in order to avoid getting hemmed in by the United States. Xi and his group are not natural risk-takers. But in a crisis, the Chinese are more likely to resemble the Germans in 1914 than the Russians after World War II—excitable, rather than exhausted.

Chinese society is more similar to American society than Soviet society ever was.

The global balance of power has also changed since Kennan's time. Today, the world is becoming not more bipolar but more multipolar. This process is gradual, but there is little doubt that the trend is real. Unlike in the Cold War, greater conflict between the two biggest powers today will not lead to bipolarity; rather, it will make it easier for others to catch up, since there are no ideological compulsions, and economic advantage counts for so much more. The more the United States and China beat each other up, the more room for maneuver other powers will have. The result may be a world of regional hegemons, and sooner rather than later.

The U.S. domestic situation also looks very different from the way it did at the beginning of the Cold War. There were divisions among voters and conflicts between parts of the government back then, but there was nothing compared to the polarization and gridlock that characterize American politics today. Now, the United States seems to have lost its way at home and abroad. Under the Trump administration, the country's overall standing in the world has never been lower, and even close allies no longer view Washington as a reliable partner. Since well before the presidency of Donald Trump, U.S. foreign policy elites have been lamenting the decline of any consensus on foreign affairs, but they have proved incapable of restoring it. Now, the rest of the world questions the United States' potential for leadership on issues great and small, issues on which American guidance would have been considered indispensable in the past.

The U.S. economy is also intertwined with the Chinese economy in ways that would have been unimaginable with the Soviet economy. As Kennan knew well, economically speaking, the Soviets did not need to be contained; they contained themselves by refusing to join the world economy. China is very different, since about one-third of its GDP growth can be traced to exports, and the United States is its largest trading partner. Attempting to disentangle the United States' economy from China's through political means, such as travel restrictions, technology bans, and trade barriers, will not work, unless a de facto state of war makes economic interaction impossible. In the short run, tariffs could create a more level playing field, but in the long run, they may end up advantaging China by making it more self-reliant, to say nothing of the damage they would inflict on American prestige. And so the rivalry with China will have to be managed within the context of continued economic interdependence.

Finally, China's leaders have some international cards to play that the Soviets never held. Compared with the class-based politics Moscow was peddling during the Cold War, China's appeals for global unity on such issues as climate change, trade, and inequality could find far greater traction abroad. That would be ironic, given China's pollution, protectionism, and economic disparities. But because the United States has failed to take the lead on any of these issues, China's communist government may be able to convince foreigners that authoritarian governments handle such problems better than democracies do.

FOCUSING THE AMERICAN MIND

The sources of Chinese conduct, along with the current global role of the United States, point to a rivalry of a different kind than the one Kennan saw coming in 1946 and 1947. The risk of immediate war is lower, and the odds of limited cooperation are higher. But the danger that nationalism will fuel ever-widening circles of conflict is probably greater, and China's determination to hack away at the United States' position in Asia is more tenacious than anything Stalin ever attempted in Europe. If the United States wants to compete, it must prepare for a long campaign for influence that will test its own ability for strategic prioritizing and long-term planning. That is especially true given that fast-moving economic and technological changes will make a traditional containment policy impossible—information travels so much more easily than before, especially to a country like China, which does not intend to cut itself off from the world.

The risk of immediate war is lower, and the odds of limited cooperation are higher.

Even though the pattern of conflict between the United States and China will look very different from the Cold War, that doesn't mean that Kennan's advice is irrelevant. For one thing, just as he envisioned continued U.S. involvement in Europe, the United States today needs to preserve and build deep relationships with Asian countries that are fearful of China's rising aggression. To counter the Soviet threat, Washington rolled out the Marshall Plan (which was partly Kennan's brainchild) in 1948 and created NATO (of which Kennan was at least partly skeptical) the following year. Today, likewise, U.S. alliances in Asia must have not only a security dimension but also an economic dimension. Indeed, the economic aspects are probably even more important today than they were 70 years ago, given that China is primarily an economic power. The removal of U.S. support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership was therefore much as if the Americans, having just invented NATO, suddenly decided to withdraw from it. The Trump administration's decision may have made domestic political sense, but in terms of foreign policy, it was a disaster, since it allowed China to claim that the United States was an unreliable partner in Asia.

Kennan also recognized that the United States would be competing with the Soviet Union for decades to come, and so U.S. statecraft would have to rely on negotiations and compromises as much as on military preparedness and intelligence operations. Kennan's fellow policymakers learned this lesson only gradually, but there is little doubt that the process of developing a mutual understanding contributed to the peaceful end of the Cold War. U.S. and Soviet officials had enough contact to make the best of a bad situation and stave off war long enough for the Soviets to change their approach to the United States and to international affairs in general.

China is even more likely to change its attitude than the Soviet Union was. The current struggle is not a clash of civilizations—or, even worse, of races, as Skinner suggested in April, when she pointed out that China is a "competitor that is not Caucasian." Rather, it is a political conflict between great powers. A substantial minority of Chinese resent their current leaders' power play. They want a freer and more equitable China, at peace with its neighbors and with the United States. The more isolated China becomes, the less of a voice such

people will have, as their views drown in an ocean of nationalist fury. As Kennan stressed in the Soviet case, “demands on Russian policy should be put forward in such a manner as to leave the way open for a compliance not too detrimental to Russian prestige.”

The United States also needs to help create a more benign environment beyond Asia. At a time when China is continuing its rise, it makes no sense to leave Russia as a dissatisfied scavenger on the periphery of the international system. Washington should try to bring Moscow into a more cooperative relationship with the West by opening up more opportunities for partnership and helping settle the conflict in eastern Ukraine. If Washington refuses to do that, then the strategic nightmare that haunted U.S. officials during the Cold War yet never fully materialized may actually come true: a real Sino-Russian alliance. Today, the combination of Russia’s resources and China’s population could power a far greater challenge to the West than what was attempted 70 years ago. As Kennan noted in 1954, the only real danger to Americans would come through “the association of the dominant portion of the physical resources of Europe and Asia with a political power hostile to [the United States].”

One of Kennan’s greatest insights, however, had nothing to do with foreign affairs; it had to do with American politics. He warned in his “X” article that “exhibitions of indecision, disunity and internal disintegration” within the United States were the biggest danger the country faced. Kennan also warned against complacency about funding for common purposes. Like 70 years ago, to compete today, the United States needs to spend more money, which necessarily means higher contributions from wealthy Americans and corporations, in order to provide top-quality skills training, world-class infrastructure, and cutting-edge research and development. Competing with China cannot be done on the cheap. Ultimately, Kennan argued, American power depended on the United States’ ability to “create among the peoples of the world generally the impression of a country which knows what it wants, which is coping successfully with the problems of its internal life and with the responsibilities of a world power, and which has a spiritual vitality capable of holding its own among the major ideological currents of the time.”

Although one might phrase it differently, the challenge is exactly the same today. Will the competition with China focus, to use one of Kennan’s favored phrases,

“the American mind” to the point that the United States abandons domestic discord in favor of consensus? If some unifying factor does not intervene, the decline in the United States’ ability to act purposefully will, sooner than most people imagine, mean not just a multipolar world but an unruly world—one in which fear, hatred, and ambition hold everyone hostage to the basest instincts of the human imagination.

War Is Not Over By Tanisha M. Fazal and Paul Poast

What the Optimists Get Wrong About Conflict

The political turmoil of recent years has largely disabused us of the notion that the world has reached some sort of utopian “end of history.” And yet it can still seem that ours is an unprecedented era of peace and progress. On the whole, humans today are living safer and more prosperous lives than their ancestors did. They suffer less cruelty and arbitrary violence. Above all, they seem far less likely to go to war. The incidence of war has been decreasing steadily, a growing consensus holds, with war between great powers becoming all but unthinkable and all types of war becoming more and more rare.

This optimistic narrative has influential backers in academia and politics. At the start of this decade, the Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker devoted a voluminous book, The Better Angels of Our Nature, to the decrease of war and violence in modern times. Statistic after statistic pointed to the same conclusion: looked at from a high enough vantage point, violence is in decline after centuries of carnage, reshaping every aspect of our lives “from the waging of wars to the spanking of children.”

Pinker is not alone. “Our international order,” U.S. President Barack Obama told the United Nations in 2016, “has been so successful that we take it as a given that great powers no longer fight world wars, that the end of the Cold War lifted the shadow of nuclear Armageddon, that the battlefields of Europe have been replaced by peaceful union.” At the time of this writing, even the Syrian civil war is winding down. There have been talks to end the nearly two decades of war in Afghanistan. A landmark prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine has revived hopes of a peace agreement between the two. The better angels of our nature seem to be winning.

If this sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Such optimism is built on shaky foundations. The idea that humanity is past the era of war is based on flawed measures of war and peace; if anything, the right indicators point to the worrying

opposite conclusion. And the anarchic nature of international politics means that the possibility of another major conflagration is ever present.

BODY COUNTS

The notion that war is in terminal decline is based, at its core, on two insights. First, far fewer people die in battle nowadays than in the past, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the world population. Experts at the Peace Research Institute Oslo pointed this out in 2005, but it was Pinker who introduced the point to a wider audience in his 2011 book. Reviewing centuries of statistics on war fatalities, he argued that not only is war between states on the decline; so are civil wars, genocides, and terrorism. He attributes this fall to the rise of democracy, trade, and a general belief that war has become illegitimate.

Then there is the fact that there has not been a world war since 1945. “The world is now in the endgame of a five-century-long trajectory toward permanent peace and prosperity,” the political scientist Michael Mousseau wrote in an article in International Security earlier this year. The political scientist Joshua Goldstein and the legal scholars Oona Hathaway and Scott Shapiro have also argued as much, tying the decline of interstate war and conquest to the expansion of market economies, the advent of peacekeeping, and international agreements outlawing wars of aggression.

Taken together, these two points—fewer and fewer battle deaths and no more continent-spanning wars—form a picture of a world increasingly at peace. Unfortunately, both rest on faulty statistics and distort our understanding of what counts as war.

War has not become any less prevalent; it has only become less lethal.

To begin with, relying on body counts to determine if armed conflict is decreasing is highly problematic. Dramatic improvements in military medicine have lowered the risk of dying in battle by leaps and bounds, even in high-intensity fighting. For centuries, the ratio of those wounded to those killed in battle held steady at three to one; the wounded-to-killed ratio for the U.S. military today is closer to ten to one. Many other militaries have seen similar increases, meaning that today’s soldiers are far more likely to wind up injured than dead. That historical trend undermines the validity of most existing counts of war and, by extension, belies the argument that war has become a rare occurrence. Although reliable statistics

on the war wounded for all countries at war are hard to come by, our best projections cut by half the decline in war casualties that Pinker has posited. What's more, to focus only on the dead means ignoring war's massive costs both for the wounded themselves and for the societies that have to care for them.

Consider one of the most widely used databases of armed conflict: that of the Correlates of War project. Since its founding in the 1960s, COW has required that to be considered a war, a conflict must generate a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities among all the organized armed actors involved. Over the two centuries of war that COW covers, however, medical advances have drastically changed who lives and who dies in battle. Paintings of wounded military personnel being carried away on stretchers have given way to photographs of medevac helicopters that can transfer the wounded to a medical facility in under one hour—the "golden hour," when the chances of survival are the highest. Once the wounded are on the operating table, antibiotics, antiseptics, blood typing, and the ability to transfuse patients all make surgeries far more likely to be successful today. Personal protective equipment has evolved, too. In the early nineteenth century, soldiers wore dress uniforms that were often cumbersome without affording any protection against gunshots or artillery. World War I saw the first proper helmets; flak jackets became common in the Vietnam War. Today, soldiers wear helmets that act as shields and radio sets in one. Over the course of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq alone, medical improvements have decreased the number of deaths from improvised explosive devices and small-arms fire. As a result of these changes, many contemporary wars listed in COW's database appear less intense. Some might not make it past COW's fatality threshold and would therefore be excluded.

Better sanitation has left its mark, too, especially improvements in cleanliness, food distribution, and water purification. During the American Civil War, physicians often failed to wash their hands and instruments between patients. Today's doctors know about germs and proper hygiene. A six-week campaign during the Spanish-American War of 1898 led to just 293 casualties, fatal and nonfatal, from fighting but a staggering 3,681 from various illnesses. This was no outlier. In the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, nearly 80 percent of the deaths were caused by disease. Because counting and categorizing casualties in a war is notoriously difficult, these statistics should be taken with a grain of salt, but they illustrate a broader point: as sanitation has improved, so has the survivability

of war. The health of soldiers also skews battle deaths, since ill soldiers are more likely to die in battle than healthier soldiers. And military units fighting at their full complement will have higher survival rates than those decimated by disease.

Moreover, some of the advances that have made modern war less deadly, although no less violent, are more reversible than they seem. Many depend on the ability to quickly fly the wounded to a hospital. For the U.S. military, doing so was possible in the asymmetric conflicts against insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the United States had almost total control of the skies. In a great-power war, however, airpower would be distributed much more equally, limiting both sides' ability to evacuate their wounded via air. Even a conflict between the United States and North Korea would severely test U.S. medevac capabilities, shifting more casualties from the "nonfatal" to the "fatal" column. And a great-power war could involve chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons, which have been used so rarely that there are no good medical models for treating their victims.

Skeptics may point out that most wars since World War II have been civil wars, whose parties might not actually have had access to sophisticated medical facilities and procedures—meaning that the decline in casualties is more real than artifice. Although this is true for many rebel groups, civil wars also typically involve state militaries, which do invest in modern military medicine. And the proliferation of aid and development organizations since 1945 has made many of these advances available, at least to some extent, to civilian populations and insurgents. A foundational principle of humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross is impartiality, meaning that they do not discriminate between civilians and combatants in giving aid. In addition, rebel groups often have external supporters who provide them with casualty-reducing equipment. (The United Kingdom, for example, shipped body armor to the insurgent Free Syrian Army at the start of the Syrian civil war.) As a result, even databases that include civil wars and use a much lower fatality threshold than COW, such as the widely referenced database of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, may end up giving the erroneous impression that civil wars have become less prevalent when in fact they have become less lethal.

Collecting exact data on the injured in civil wars is admittedly difficult. As a recent report by the nongovernmental organization Action on Armed Violence argues,

fewer resources for journalists and increased attacks on aid workers mean that those most likely to report on the wounded are less able to do so today than in the past, leading to a likely undercounting. Dubious statistics thus come out of conflicts such as the Syrian civil war, with media reports suggesting a wounded-to-killed ratio of nearly one to one since 2011. But common sense suggests that the real number of injuries is far higher.

If one ignores these trends and takes the existing databases at face value, the picture is still far from rosy. The tracker managed by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program shows that even according to existing databases that may undercount conflict, the number of active armed conflicts has been ticking up in recent years, and in 2016, it reached its highest point since the end of World War II. And many of today's conflicts are lasting longer than past conflicts did. Recent spikes of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mexico, and Yemen show few signs of abating.

To be sure, the decline of battle deaths, when considered on its own, is a major victory for human welfare. But that achievement is reversible. As the political scientist Bear Braumoeller pointed out in his book Only the Dead, the wars of recent decades may have remained relatively small in size, but there is little reason to expect that trend to continue indefinitely. One need only recall that in the years preceding World War I, Europe was presumed to be in a "long peace." Neither brief flashes of hostility between European powers, such as the standoff between French and German forces in Morocco in 1911, nor the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 could dispel this notion. Yet these small conflicts turned out to be harbingers of a much more devastating conflagration.

Today, the long shadow of nuclear weapons ostensibly keeps that scenario from repeating. Humanity has stockpiles of nuclear warheads that could wipe out billions of lives, and that terrifying fact, many argue, has kept great-power clashes from boiling over into all-out wars. But the idea that military technology has so altered the dynamics of conflict as to make war inconceivable is not new. In the 1899 book Is War Now Impossible?, the Polish financier and military theorist Jan Gotlib Bloch posited that "the improved deadliness of weapons" meant that "before long you will see they will never fight at all." And in 1938—just a year before Hitler invaded Poland, and several years before nuclear technology was considered feasible—the American peace advocate Lola Maverick Lloyd

warned that “the new miracles of science and technology enable us at last to bring our world some measure of unity; if our generation does not use them for construction, they will be misused to destroy it and all its slowly-won civilization of the past in a new and terrible warfare.”

It may be that nuclear weapons truly have more deterrent potential than past military innovations—and yet these weapons have introduced new ways that states could stumble into a cataclysmic conflict. The United States, for example, keeps its missiles on a “launch on warning” status, meaning that it would launch its missiles on receiving word that an enemy nuclear attack was in progress. That approach is certainly safer than a policy of preemption (whereby the mere belief that an adversary’s strike was imminent would be enough to trigger a U.S. strike). But by keeping nuclear weapons ready to use at a moment’s notice, the current policy still creates the possibility of an accidental launch, perhaps driven by human error or a technical malfunction.

SMALL GREAT WARS

All in all, recent history does not point to a decline of war at large. But what about war between great powers? The historian John Lewis Gaddis famously referred to the post-1945 era as “the long peace.” Deterred by nuclear weapons and locked into a global network of international institutions, great powers have avoided a repeat of the carnage of the two world wars. When the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012, it was in part for this remarkable achievement.

We tend to view World Wars I and II as emblematic of war. They are not.

There has, indeed, not been a World War III. But that does not necessarily mean the age of great-power peace is here. In truth, the last century’s world wars are a poor yardstick, as they bore little resemblance to most of the great-power wars that preceded them. The 1859 Franco-Austrian War lasted less than three months; the 1866 Austro-Prussian War was a little over one month long. Each produced fewer than 50,000 battle deaths. Even the 1870–71 Franco-Prussian War, which paved the way for a unified German empire, lasted just six months and resulted in about 200,000 battle deaths. The world wars were orders of magnitude different from those conflicts. World War I was over four years long and produced some nine million battle deaths. World War II lasted six years and led to over 16 million battle deaths.

In other words, World Wars I and II have severely skewed our sense of what war is. Scholars and policymakers tend to view these conflicts as emblematic of war. They are not. Most wars are relatively short, lasting less than six months. They tend to result in 50 or fewer battle deaths per day—a number that pales in comparison to the figures produced during World War I (over 5,000 dead per day) and World War II (over 7,000 per day). In fact, if one excludes these two outliers, the rates of battle deaths from the mid-nineteenth century until 1914 are consistent with those in the decades since 1945.

There have, in fact, been a number of great-power wars since 1945. But they are rarely recognized as such because they did not look like the two world wars. They include the Korean War, in which the United States faced off against forces from China and the Soviet Union, and the Vietnam War, which also pitted the United States against Chinese forces. In both cases, major powers fought each other directly.

The list of recent great-power conflicts grows much longer if one includes instances of proxy warfare. From U.S. support for the mujahideen fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan during the Cold War to the foreign rivalries playing out in Syria and Ukraine, major powers regularly fight one another using the military labor of others. Outsourcing manpower like this is no recent invention and is in fact a relatively normal feature of great-power war. Consider Napoleon's march to Russia in 1812. The invasion is famous for the attrition suffered by the Grande Armée as it pushed east. Far less known is that despite its immense size of over 400,000 men, the force was largely not French. Foreign fighters, be they mercenaries or recruits from conquered territories, made up the overall majority of the troops that set off to invade Russia. (Many of them soon tired of marching in the summer heat and abandoned the coalition, shrinking Napoleon's forces by more than half before he was yet one-quarter of the way through the campaign.) Still, his reliance on foreign troops allowed Napoleon to place the burden of the fighting on non-French, and he reportedly told the Austrian statesman Klemens von Metternich that "the French cannot complain of me; to spare them, I have sacrificed the Germans and the Poles."

Put simply, most violent conflicts, even among great powers, do not look like World War I or II. This is not at all to diminish the importance of those two wars.

Understanding how they happened can help avoid future wars or at least limit their scale. But to determine if great-power war is in decline requires a clear conceptual understanding of what such a war is: one that recognizes that World War I and II were unparalleled in scale and scope but not the last instances of great-power conflict—far from it. The behavior of states has not necessarily improved. In truth, the apparent decline in the deadliness of war masks a great deal of belligerent behavior.

DON'T CELEBRATE TOO EARLY

The idea that war is increasingly a thing of the past is not just mistaken; it also enables a harmful brand of triumphalism. War's ostensible decline does not mean that peace is breaking out. Certainly, the citizens of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Venezuela would object to the notion that their countries are peaceful, even though none is technically at war. As the sociologist Johan Galtung has argued, true peace, or "positive peace," must also contain elements of active engagement and cooperation, and although globalization since the end of the Cold War has linked disparate communities together, there have also been setbacks. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there were fewer than ten border walls in the world. Today, there are over 70, from the fortified U.S.-Mexican border to the fences separating Hungary and Serbia and those between Botswana and Zimbabwe.

It strains credulity that the better angels of our nature are winning when humanity is armed to the teeth.

Even when ongoing wars do come to an end, caution is warranted. Consider civil wars, many of which now end in peace treaties. Some, such as the 2016 Colombian peace deal, are elaborate and ambitious documents that run over 300 pages long and go far beyond standard disarmament processes to address land reform, drug policy, and women's rights. And yet civil wars that end with peace agreements tend to sink back into armed conflict sooner than those that end without them. Often, what looks to the international community as an orderly end to a conflict is just a means for the warring parties to retrench and regroup before fighting breaks out anew.

Likewise, it strains credulity that the better angels of our nature are winning when humanity is armed to the teeth. Global military expenditures are higher today than during the late Cold War era, even when adjusted for inflation. Given that

countries haven't laid down their arms, it may well be that today's states are neither more civilized nor inherently peaceful but simply exercising effective deterrence. That raises the same specter as the existence of nuclear weapons: deterrence may hold, but there is a real possibility that it will fail.

FEAR IS GOOD

The greatest danger, however, lies not in a misplaced sense of progress but in complacency—what U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in a different context, called "throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet." At a time of U.S.-Russian proxy wars in Syria and Ukraine, rising tensions between the United States and Iran, and an increasingly assertive China, underestimating the risk of future war could lead to fatal mistakes. New technologies, such as unmanned drones and cyberweapons, heighten this danger, as there is no consensus around how states should respond to their use.

Above all, overconfidence about the decline of war may lead states to underestimate how dangerously and quickly any clashes can escalate, with potentially disastrous consequences. It would not be the first time: the European powers that started World War I all set out to wage limited preventive wars, only to be locked into a regional conflagration. In fact, as the historian A. J. P. Taylor observed, "every war between Great Powers . . . started as a preventive war, not a war of conquest."

A false sense of security could lead today's leaders to repeat those mistakes. That danger is all the more present in an era of populist leaders who disregard expert advice from diplomats, intelligence communities, and scholars in favor of sound bites. The gutting of the U.S. State Department under President Donald Trump and Trump's dismissive attitude toward the U.S. intelligence community are but two examples of a larger global trend. The long-term consequences of such behavior are likely to be profound. Repeated enough, the claim that war is in decline could become a self-defeating prophecy, as political leaders engage in bombastic rhetoric, military spectacles, and counterproductive wall building in ways that increase the risk of war.

Warnings From Versailles By Margaret MacMillan

The Lessons of 1919, a Hundred Years On

We often recall World War I and the two decades that followed as a grim chapter of history, the prelude to an even costlier and more destructive war from 1939 to 1945. We remember terrible losses—the nine million or more dead in battle, the civilians who died of preventable disease or starvation, the ghastly influenza epidemic that, in the dying days of the war and the shaky first moments of peace, may have carried off as many as 50 million around the world. We think of a Europe that once led the world in wealth, innovation, and political power, only to emerge from the war diminished, its Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires in tatters, Bolshevism and ethnic nationalism threatening more upheaval and misery.

The calamity of the 1930s was not foreordained at Versailles.
Yet when the Allies gathered at the Paris Peace Conference in Versailles 100 years ago, from January to June 1919, the time was also one of hope. The Allied leaders promised their own peoples a better world in recompense for all they had suffered, and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson made of those promises a crusade for humankind: a War to End All Wars, a World Safe for Democracy. Wilson's League of Nations was meant to create an international community of democratic nations. By providing collective security for one another, they would not only end aggression but build a fairer and more prosperous world. These ideas drew support around the globe—from Europe, where Wilson was greeted as a savior, to the West's colonies, and even in struggling nations such as China.

But the world was to discover that making peace endure was a matter not just of hopes and ideas but of will, determination, and persistence. Leaders need to negotiate as well as to inspire; to be capable of seeing past short-term political gains; and to balance the interests of their nations against those of the international community. For want of such leadership, among other things, the promise of 1918 soon turned into the disillusionment, division, and aggression of the 1930s.

This outcome was not foreordained at Versailles. Although some of the decisions made upon ending the war in 1919 certainly fueled populist demagoguery and inspired dreams of revenge, the calamity of World War II owed as much to the failure of the democracies' leaders in the interwar decades to deal with rule-breaking dictators such as Mussolini, Hitler, and the Japanese militarists. A century later, similar forces—ethnic nationalism, eroding international norms and cooperation, and vindictive chauvinism—and authoritarian leaders willing to use them are again appearing. The past is an imperfect teacher, its messages often obscure or ambiguous, but it offers both guidance and warning.

THE PRICE OF PEACE

"Making peace is harder than waging war," French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau reflected in 1919 as the victorious powers drew up peace terms, finalized the shape of the new League of Nations, and tried to rebuild Europe and the global order.

For Clemenceau and his colleagues, among them Wilson and David Lloyd George, the British prime minister, the prospect was particularly daunting. Unlike in 1815, when negotiators met in Vienna to wind up the Napoleonic Wars, in 1919 Europe was not tired of war and revolution. Nor had aggressor nations been utterly defeated and occupied, as they would be in 1945. Rather, leaders in 1919 confronted a world in turmoil. Fighting continued throughout much of eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Russia's Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 had apparently set off a series of unstoppable revolutionary waves that threatened to overwhelm even the victors' societies.

The war had damaged or destroyed old political and social structures, particularly in Central Europe, leaving formerly stable and prosperous peoples adrift, desperate for someone or something to restore their status and a form of order. Ethnic nationalists seized the opportunity to build new countries, but these states were often hostile to one another and oppressive to their own minorities. Inevitably, too, old and new rivalries came to the surface as leaders in Paris maneuvered to promote the interests of their nations.

Wilson and company also had to deal with a phenomenon that their forerunners at the Congress of Vienna had never had to consider: public opinion. The publics in Allied countries took an intense interest in what was happening in Paris, but

what they wanted was contradictory: a better world of the Wilsonian vision, on the one hand, and retribution on the other.

Many Europeans felt that someone must be made to pay for the war. In France and Belgium, which Germany had invaded on the flimsiest of pretexts, the countryside lay in ruins, with towns, mines, railways, and factories destroyed. Across the border, Germany was unscathed, because little of the war had been fought there. The British had lent vast sums to their allies (their Russian debts were beyond hope of recovery), had borrowed heavily from the Americans, and wanted recompense.

John Maynard Keynes, not yet the world-renowned economist he was to become, suggested that the Americans write off the money the British owed them so as to reduce the need to extract reparations from the defeated and then concentrate on getting Europe's economy going again. The Americans, Wilson included, rejected the proposal with self-righteous horror. And so the Allied statesmen drew up a reparations bill that they knew was more than the defeated could ever pay. Austria and Hungary were impoverished remnants of a once vast Habsburg empire, Bulgaria was broke, and the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of disintegrating. That left only Germany capable of meeting the reparations bill.

A RUDE AWAKENING

The circumstances of Germany's defeat had left its citizens in no mood to pay. That feeling would grow stronger over the decade to follow. And its outcome contains a warning for our era: the feelings and expectations of both the winners and the losers, however unrealistic, matter and require careful management.

Toward the end of the war, the German High Command under Generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg had effectively established a military dictatorship that kept all news from the front under wraps. The civilian government in Berlin knew as little as the public about the string of defeats the country's military suffered in the late spring and summer of 1918. When the High Command suddenly demanded that the government immediately sue for an armistice, the announcement came like a thunderbolt.

The German chancellor appealed to Wilson in a series of open letters, and the U.S. president, somewhat to the annoyance of the European Allies, took on the role of arbiter between the warring sides. In doing so, Wilson made two mistakes. First, he negotiated with Germany's civilian government rather than the High Command, allowing the generals to avoid responsibility for the war and its outcome. As time went by, the High Command and its right-wing supporters put out the false story that Germany had never lost on the battlefield: the German military could have fought on, perhaps even to victory, if the cowardly civilians had not let it down. Out of this grew the poisonous myth that Germany had been stabbed in the back by an assortment of traitors, including liberals, socialists, and Jews.

Second, Wilson's public statements that he would not support punitive indemnities or a peace of vengeance reinforced German hopes that the United States would ensure that Germany was treated lightly. The U.S. president's support for the revolution that overthrew Germany's old monarchy and paved the way for the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic compounded this misplaced optimism. Weimar, its supporters argued, represented a new and better Germany that should not pay for the sins of the old.

Many Europeans felt that someone must be made to pay for the war, but the circumstances of Germany's defeat had left its citizens in no mood to pay.
The French and other Allies, however, were less concerned with Germany's domestic politics than with its ability to resume fighting. The armistice signed in the famous railway carriage at Compiègne on November 11, 1918, reads like a surrender, not a cessation of hostilities. Germany would have to evacuate all occupied territory and hand over its heavy armaments, as well as the entirety of its navy.

Even so, the extent of the military defeat was not immediately clear to the German public. Troops returning from the front marched into Berlin in December 1918, and the new socialist chancellor hailed them with the words "No enemy has overcome you." Apart from those living in the Rhineland on the western edge of the country, Germans did not experience firsthand the shame of military occupation. As a result, many Germans, living in what Max Weber called the dreamland of the winter of 1918–19, expected the Allies' peace terms to be mild—milder, certainly, than those Germany had imposed on revolutionary

Russia with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. The country might even expand if Austria, newly formed out of the German-speaking territories of the vanished Austro-Hungarian Empire, decided to join its fate to Germany's.

The actual Treaty of Versailles, published in the spring of 1919, came as a shock.Public opinion from right to left was dismayed to learn that Germany would have to disarm, lose territory, and pay reparations for war damage. Resentment focused in particular on Article 231 of the treaty, in which Germany accepted responsibility for starting the war and which a young American lawyer, John Foster Dulles, had written to provide a legal basis for claiming reparations. Germans loathed the "war guilt" clause, as it came to be known, and there was little will to pay reparations.

Weimar Germany—much like Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union—nursed a powerful and lasting sense of national humiliation. For many years, the German Foreign Office and its right-wing supporters did their best to further undermine the legitimacy of the Treaty of Versailles. With the help of selectively released documents, they argued that Germany and its allies were innocent of starting the war. Instead, Europe had somehow stumbled into disaster, so that either everyone or no one was responsible. The Allies could have done more to challenge German views about the origins of the war and the unfairness of the treaty. Instead, at least in the case of the English-speaking peoples, they eventually came rather to agree with the German narrative, and this fed into the appeasement policies of the 1930s.

Peace would take a very different form in 1945. With memories of the previous two decades fresh in their minds, the Allies forced the Axis powers into unconditional surrender. Germany and Japan were to be utterly defeated and occupied. Selected leaders would be tried for war crimes and their societies reshaped into liberal democracies. Invasive and coercive though it was, the post–World War II peace generated far less resentment about unfair treatment than did the arrangements that ended World War I.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

The terms of Versailles were not the only obstacle to a lasting resolution of European conflicts in 1919. London and Washington also undermined the

chances for peace by quickly turning their backs on Germany and the rest of the continent.

Although it was never as isolationist as some have claimed, the United States turned inward soon after the Paris Peace Conference. Congress rejected the Treaty of Versailles and, by extension, the League of Nations. It also failed to ratify the guarantee given to France that the United Kingdom and the United States would come to its defense if Germany attacked. Americans became all the more insular as the calamitous Great Depression hit and their attention focused on their domestic troubles.

The United States' withdrawal encouraged the British—already distracted by troubles brewing in the empire—to renege on their commitment to the guarantee. France, left to itself, attempted to form the new and quarreling states in Central Europe into an anti-German alliance, but its attempts turned out to be as ill-fated as the Maginot Line in the west. One wonders how history might have unfolded if London and Washington, instead of turning away, had built a transatlantic alliance with a strong security commitment to France and pushed back against Adolf Hitler's first aggressive moves while there was still time to stop him.

London and Washington undermined the chances for peace by quickly turning their backs on the continent.

Again, the post-1945 world was different from the one that emerged in 1919. The United States, now the world's leading power, joined the United Nations and the economic institutions set up at Bretton Woods. It also committed itself to the security and reconstruction of western Europe and Japan. Congress approved these initiatives in part because President Franklin Delano Roosevelt made building the postwar order a bipartisan enterprise—unlike Wilson, who doomed the League of Nations by alienating the Republicans. Wilson's failure had encouraged the isolationist strain in U.S. foreign policy; Roosevelt, followed by Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, countered and contained that impulse. The specter of communism also did its part by alarming even the isolationists. The establishment of the Soviet empire in eastern Europe, and Soviet rhetoric about the coming struggle against capitalism, persuaded many Americans that they faced a pressing danger that required continued engagement with allies in Europe and Asia.

Today's world is not wholly comparable to the worlds that emerged from the rubble of the two world wars. Yet as the United States once again turns inward and tends only to its immediate interests, it risks ignoring or underestimating the rise of populist dictators and aggressive powers until the hour is dangerously late. President Vladimir Putin of Russia has already violated international rules and norms, most notably in Crimea, and others—such as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey or Chinese President Xi Jinping—seem willing to do the same. And as Washington and other democratic powers abdicate their responsibility for the world, smaller powers may abandon their hopes for a peaceful international order and instead submit to the bullies in their neighborhoods. A hundred years on, 1919 and the years that followed still stand as a somber warning.

Trump's Foreign Policy Is No Longer Unpredictable By Thomas Wright

It has become a commonplace to describe the foreign policy of U.S. President Donald Trump as unpredictable. But doing so mischaracterizes the man and the policy. In fact, although Trump's actions may often be shocking, they are rarely surprising. His most controversial positions—questioning NATO, seeking to pull out of Syria, starting trade wars—are all consistent with the worldview he has publicly espoused since the 1980s.

The unpredictability of this administration originated not in Trump's views but in the struggle between the president and his political advisers on the one hand and the national security establishment on the other. Until recently, these two camps vied for supremacy, and it was difficult to know which would win on any given issue.

At the two-year mark, it is now clear that the president is dominating this struggle, even if he has not yet won outright. For the first time, it is possible to identify a singular Trump administration foreign policy, as the president's team coalesces around his ideas. This policy consists of a narrow, transactional relationship with other nations, a preference for authoritarian governments over other democracies, a mercantilist approach to international economic policy, a general disregard for human rights and the rule of law, and the promotion of nationalism and unilateralism at the expense of multilateralism.

WHAT SET TRUMP APART

Many U.S. presidents have been elected with no real foreign policy experience. Some had ideas that contradicted a core tenet of U.S. foreign policy—for example, Jimmy Carter's position in favor of pulling troops out of Korea. Trump, however, is different. He is the only president ever elected on a platform that explicitly rejected all of the pillars of U.S. grand strategy.

Although Trump has changed his mind on many issues, he has clear, consistent, visceral foreign policy instincts that date back three decades. He has long rejected the United States' security alliances as unfair to the taxpayer and accused allies of conning Washington into defending them for free. He has long

seen trade deficits as a threat to U.S. interests and has rejected virtually all trade deals that the United States has negotiated since World War II. And he has a history of expressing admiration for strongmen around the world: in 1990, for example, he lamented in an interview that Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had not cracked down on demonstrators as Beijing had in Tiananmen Square one year before.

During his presidential campaign, Trump not only refused to disavow these instincts but doubled down on them. He drew a moral equivalence between the Kremlin under Russian President Vladimir Putin and the U.S. government; criticized NATO; praised Saddam Hussein's toughness on terrorists and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's ascent to power; and opposed free trade. His position on foreign policy had an immediate and enduring effect: it prompted dozens of Republican foreign policy experts to condemn him publicly.

Bereft of establishment advisers, Trump managed to sign up a handful of unknowns and a couple of former officials—for example, Michael Flynn and Walid Phares—but this was largely for show. Throughout his campaign, Trump relied on his own instincts and added a few new issues, particularly strong opposition to illegal immigration and criticism of trade with China.

After he won, Trump had a problem. He was completely unprepared to govern and had hardly anyone on his team who was qualified to hold high office in matters of national security. This dearth, coupled with his continuing grudge against the establishment experts who opposed him during the campaign, led him to turn to retired generals and captains of industry, including James Mattis as secretary of defense, Rex Tillerson as secretary of state, Gary Cohn as director of the National Economic Council, and, after a few weeks in office, H. R. McMaster as national security adviser.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S TWO PHASES

The first phase of Trump's term in office—that of constraint—lasted from his inauguration until August 2017. During these seven months, Trump said and did many controversial things. He refused to endorse NATO's Article 5 while giving a speech at NATO headquarters in Brussels, and he announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris agreement on climate change. But for the most part, the administration followed an interagency process (whereby decisions were

made through a formal consultation process with the relevant departments and agencies, culminating in meetings of the national security team in the Situation Room) and Trump grudgingly accepted the advice of his cabinet. He did not pull out of the North American Free Trade Agreement. He reversed himself on NATO. He reached out to Asian allies. And he remained in the Iran nuclear deal.

Soon, however, the president began to push back against his advisers. In mid-July 2017, he complained bitterly about having to renew the waivers as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and blamed his advisers for not giving him an option to withdraw. A few weeks later, at a Camp David meeting to decide on Afghanistan policy, he grew frustrated at McMaster's assertiveness in arguing to keep U.S. troops in place. Trump grudgingly conceded but let his displeasure be known.

By the fall of 2017, the second phase of the Trump administration's foreign policy—that of unilateral action—had begun. In this period, which continues to the present day, Trump has tried to bypass the formal deliberative interagency process in his decision-making and has made his preferences clear. In December 2017, over the objections of his team, he announced he was moving the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. In May of last year, he withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal. He imposed tariffs on friends and rivals alike. He renewed his criticism of NATO at the 2018 Brussels summit and pushed hard to pull U.S. troops out of Syria. Perhaps most famously, he decided to meet with Kim in Singapore without consulting his national security cabinet and also made the unilateral decision to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki and proceeded to defy his advisers by embracing the Russian leader at the summit's press conference.

To facilitate this shift, Trump needed a new team that would empower him, not stand in his way. This was the story of 2018. It began with the removal of Tillerson, McMaster, and Cohn in a three-week period in March and April. Their respective replacements—Mike Pompeo, John Bolton, and Larry Kudlow—all had one thing in common: personal loyalty to Trump. The trend continued with UN Ambassador Nikki Haley's departure and concluded with Mattis' resignation on December 21 following Trump's announcement of a U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria.

Trump now has a team that seeks not to minimize the impact of his decisions but to maximize it.

The appointment of Bolton was particularly crucial to Trump's foreign policy autonomy. As long as a member of the national security establishment held the position of national security adviser, Trump was deprived of the agenda-setting power that controlling the interagency process entails. Bolton gave him this power. There were bumps along the way, of course. Bolton reportedly had to promise Trump that he would not drag him into a new war, and several weeks into Bolton's tenure, Trump blamed him for trying to sabotage U.S. outreach to Kim. In general, however, Trump now has a team that seeks not to minimize the impact of his decisions but to maximize it.

There have been some positive developments during this phase of Trump's foreign policy. In December 2017 and January 2018, for example, the administration put forth a National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy that shifted focus from terrorism to great-power competition, a development that many foreign policy experts in Washington welcomed. The strategies recognized the challenge that Russia and China posed to the U.S.-led international order and affirmed the importance of alliances. The president, however, seems uninterested in the change of emphasis, having spoken about it only once. In his remarks introducing the National Security Strategy, Trump uttered a single sentence about rival powers—immediately followed by a plea for the importance of cooperation with Russia.

A UNIFIED FOREIGN POLICY

The struggle between the president and his team defined his first two years. Although there is still a substantive gap between them, there is now considerable alignment as well. For the first time, observers can identify a unified, if still incomplete, Trump foreign policy in which the administration accommodates the president's impulses and seeks to act on them.

This unified foreign policy is one in which the Trump administration has no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. It takes a transactional approach with all nations, places little value in historical ties, and seeks immediate benefits ranging from trade and procurement to diplomatic support. As it happens, authoritarian governments are more inclined to offer such swift concessions to

the United States, with the result that the Trump administration finds it easier to deal with them than with democratic allies. Consider the contrast between Saudi Arabia and Japan. Saudi Arabia was able to reduce the price of oil to appease the president after the president sided with it following the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi. By contrast, Japan lost out despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's early efforts to flatter the president—Trump's embrace of Kim has unnerved Japanese officials, and he continues to threaten to impose tariffs on Japanese cars.

The Trump administration is now united in its willingness to use tariffs, including against allies and partners, to advance its economic agenda. There may still be some differences over other tactics, but the larger debate on international economic strategy, which raged in 2017, is over. The administration regularly seeks to use U.S. leverage to gain an economic advantage over other countries. Consider, for example, how Trump's team entertained Poland's bid to pay for a U.S. military base in its country and how the administration has pressured the United Kingdom to pursue a hard Brexit so that the United States could pocket concessions in talks on a bilateral U.S.-British free trade agreement.

The administration has embraced nationalism and disdained multilateralism as part of its overarching philosophical framework—something evident in speeches by Trump, Bolton, and Pompeo. The administration also has little regard for democracy and human rights, except in the cases of Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela. This worldview is manifest in Washington's opposition to the European Union, support for authoritarian leaders who defy international norms, and withdrawal from international organizations and treaties. At the same time, the administration's thinking remains ad hoc and unsophisticated—the administration is leaning heavily on Germany to cancel the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, but according to the doctrine the German government should just follow its own interests.

Trump's approach to Europe varies by region. The administration is engaging unconditionally with central and eastern Europe, where it provides political support to Hungarian autocrat Viktor Orban and is working on increasing liquefied natural gas exports to counter Russian influence. By contrast, its agenda with western Europe has been much more hostile and seems to consist only of points of disagreement, including opposition to the Nord Stream 2

pipeline, free trade with Europe, and defense spending on NATO, as well as its disagreements with the European Union over Iran.

In East Asia, Trump's policy has two main components—China and North Korea. On the former, Trump's desire to win the trade war with Beijing has led him to support the broader efforts to balance China that some of his advisers have championed, which include countering Chinese political influence and reorienting the U.S. military to compete with China. But this support could be tested as Chinese President Xi Jinping's rhetoric on Taiwan heats up, and particularly if the trade war is resolved—would Trump stand up to China over Taiwan if he felt he was championing a trade deal that offered the United States significant concessions? The administration's North Korea policy, meanwhile, consists of an informal bargain whereby the United States allows for a thawing of relations so long as Kim agrees not to test missiles or nuclear weapons, even if this brings no meaningful progress on denuclearization. Some administration officials, particularly Bolton, have reservations about this strategy of accommodation, but they defer to the president.

Differences remain between the president and his team. The most striking example is in U.S. Middle East policy. Trump and his advisers agree on taking a hard line against Iran. But the president is deeply reluctant to commit U.S. resources to rolling back Iranian influence in Syria and would like to see a retrenchment from the region. In his view, U.S. efforts should be confined to supporting allies in taking any actions they deem fit to counter Iran (such as Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen), imposing sanctions, and pulling out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. This is the one issue where the president's current team has made statements that appear to contradict him. For instance, on a trip to the Middle East, Bolton said that U.S. troops would not leave Syria until the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) was fully defeated and the Kurds were protected. On the whole, however, Trump's foreign policy is more unified than ever before.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Paradoxically, the advent of a more unified and predictable U.S. foreign policy is likely to weaken American influence and destabilize the international order. A deeply divided Trump administration was the best case for those who believe in the United States' postwar strategy, defined by strong alliances, an open global

economy, and broad support for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Because Trump was never going to change his worldview, his administration has had to be marked by either division or agreement on his terms. We now have the latter. Thus begins phase three—the impact of a unified Trump administration on the world.

Iran's Other Generation Gap, 40 Years On

By Narges Bajoghli

Among the Revolutionary Faithful, the Young Seek Confrontation While Their Elders Embrace Change

It was late in the afternoon on a cold winter day. Light snow had covered Tehran the night before, and I was spending the day in the production office of a small film unit of the Basij paramilitary militia. I was researching cultural producers in the Islamic Republic's military and paramilitary organizations, and the young men who worked in this film unit had agreed to talk to me on the condition of anonymity.

Ali, a 20-year-old Basij film editor, came into the office where I sat with his colleague Mustafa, 24. Ali was working on a sequence for state television about U.S. media and its opposition to the Islamic Republic. Carrying his laptop, he excitedly showed us his latest find, a segment on CNN prior to the signing of the Iran deal about why the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Basij are so powerful in Iran. The segment depicted Iran's armed forces as a homogenous crowd of bearded men with stern faces, dressed in fatigues or black button-down shirts, listening to the supreme leader. Mustafa and Ali watched the report with wide smiles. Ali turned to me once it ended and said: "It's funny to me how Westerners depict us. They make it seem as if the leader [Ali Khamenei] says something and we just fall in line." He laughed. "Does anything in Iran work so smoothly? They should come and see how messy everything is here. What makes them think that amid everything barely functioning—from our economy, to our traffic, to our work culture—the Basij are so well organized?"

Across town the following week, I observed a production meeting with a group of IRGC leaders in charge of media. All the men in the room were in their early 50s. Fervent revolutionaries in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, today they wanted to modify the system by easing social and cultural restrictions and opening the political system to greater competition, but they disagreed with one another about what those changes would look like. They agreed, however, that they needed to cultivate a broader audience for their media and that young Basijis, such as Ali and Mustafa, should not make ideological films that appealed

only to small audiences. The young Basijis “are our real problem,” Alireza, a lieutenant in the Revolutionary Guard, lamented. “They’re so black and white in their outlook, and they drive a bigger wedge between us and the people.”

“Their arrogance is poison for us,” Javad, a captain in the guard, added. Referring to the eight-year war with Iraq that consumed the first postrevolutionary decade, he said, “They wouldn’t last a day in the trenches of the war.”

A VIEW FROM INSIDE

In the more than ten years I spent researching among the media producers in the Islamic Republic’s Revolutionary Guard, Basij, and Ansar-e Hezbollah, I found a world in which men tied to the country’s armed forces held heated debates about the future of the Islamic Republic and fought with one another over resources. The institutions I studied were far from monolithic, nor were they purely ideological in their outlook. The concerns of the men who helped create the Islamic Republic’s vast media output were not confined to religion and Islamic politics. Rather, they tended to focus on class, generational differences, and social mobility. My findings led me to question not only the existing depictions of these men but more generally the predominant frame of analysis when it comes to understanding the Islamic Republic.

Since 1979, when revolution swept through a country that just one year earlier U.S. President Jimmy Carter had toasted as an “island of stability,” American policymakers have scrambled to understand an upheaval that not only blindsided them but expressed a deeply felt anti-imperialism, as Iranians demanded independence from Washington. U.S. news media described Iranian society as “possessed by madness” and Iranians as blinded by religious fervor and seeking martyrdom at all costs. Such explanations may have answered an immediate need to understand on simple terms—and to undermine—the revolutionary government and the aging ayatollah at its helm. But those who have viewed Iran’s politics over these last 40 years exclusively through the lens of Islam have overlooked important social dynamics that undergird the regime.

What happens if we reframe our analysis of Iranian politics from the vantage point of those who work inside the Islamic Republic in support of the goals of the 1979 revolution? If scholarly and policy analysis thus far has failed to understand the Islamic Republic in all of its complexity, what can be gained from an

approach that insists on exploring the positions and worldviews of its supporters, on their own terms? Such questions led me to try to understand how the Islamic Republic attempts to keep its revolution “alive” and how it communicates a vision for the future of the Islamic Republic. What I came to see was that contestation in the Islamic Republic is not just between the regime and the people, or the old generation and a protesting young generation. Rather, the regime itself is conflicted over its very nature and what its future should look like.

GENERATIONAL CHANGE WITHIN THE BASIJ

One afternoon in central Tehran, I left a tense meeting between young Basiji film students and Reza, a leading regime filmmaker and captain in the Revolutionary Guard. During the meeting, he had told the nearly two dozen students in attendance that regime media needed to work toward projecting a more inclusive vision of the Islamic Republic—one that could reach portions of the population that have become disillusioned. Reza referred to the events of 2009, which witnessed the largest protests against the Iranian government since the 1979 revolution. In what came to be called the Green Movement, a cross section of mainly urban women and young people protested perceived voter fraud, eventually producing a crisis of legitimacy for the political elite. In order to reach the part of the population that had protested or sympathized with the protests, Reza suggested creating media that would emphasize narratives of nationalism and unity, while allowing religion to fade into the background. The leader of the students stood up, his finger pointed angrily at Reza, and proclaimed, “Your generation may be tired of confrontation, but not ours!”

When we left, Reza turned to me and said, “These young Basijis don’t realize that distancing ourselves from the general public is what got us in this mess we now face. We need to reach out to the other side that is protesting us, not alienate them, as these kids want. You know what these kids’ problem is? They don’t know what it was like to be marginalized in society. They don’t remember, because they were born after the revolution. All they’ve ever known is a system in which our side has been in power.”

The leaders of the Islamic Republic’s armed forces have more, even, at stake today than the defense of a political system. These men and their families did not command respect in Iranian society before 1979. The monarchy of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi formally marginalized religious families, and the Iranian intellectual

elite of the day looked down on them as well. The creation of the Islamic Republic gave pious Iranians of Reza's class and generation a sense of purpose and a place in society. I often heard them wonder aloud anxiously: If circumstances in the country changed, would they be driven to the periphery again?

Reza continued, "The younger Basijis don't know that if we don't take care of this revolution, we'll be relegated back to the margins. They don't know how quickly things can change."

Many men of Reza's generation see the younger Basijis as opportunistic and soft because they have not passed through the harrowing experience of war. Regime paramilitary organizations such as the Basij were the main recruitment arm through which the revolutionary state sent soldiers to the front in the 1980s. After 1988, when the war with Iraq ended, Iran's political elite were left to figure out what to do with these organizations. The supreme leader's office eventually deployed them to confront Western "soft war" tactics and to police anti-regime activists. Because it is tailored to these purposes, and frames the general population as a potential threat and target of policing, the ideological training the younger Basij receive today is one the older generation of the Revolutionary Guard disagrees with. "The only similarity between the Basij of today and the Basij of the war is that we share the same organizational name. Those in the Basij today are horrible," Mehdi, a war veteran and filmmaker, said to me.

"It's so painful for me that people think of the Basij in negative terms now," he continued. "We were created for a different purpose at the beginning of the revolution. We went to defend the country against the invading Iraqi military, not to get better jobs or get into university, like the Basij of today. Or to beat our own people, for God's sake! Today these kids are opportunistic."

Although Reza and his colleagues had all eagerly joined the Basij in the first years after the revolution, not a single guardsman I met over a ten-year period would allow his children to become active Basijis. "There's no reason for them to be involved. And the atmosphere is not one I want my kids to be in," one of them told me. Instead, they send their children abroad to Europe. Allowing their children to be a part of the Basij would be a step down the social ladder they have already scaled.

Younger Basijis such as Ali and Mustafa, however, feel that the revolution has gone astray because the older generation lost touch with its values. Like many of their colleagues, Ali and Mustafa hail from pious working- and lower-middle-class families that migrated to Tehran from smaller provincial towns. When, as a teenager, Mustafa wanted to pursue filmmaking, the Basij in his high school provided the resources and social network his family could not. Once he graduated from film school, Mustafa easily found a job at a production house that made documentaries for state television, allowing him to be a full-time filmmaker and provide for his new wife. The revolution had offered Mustafa and Ali a social mobility to which they saw the corruption of the older generation of revolutionaries as a threat.

“They’re the ones who are soft, not us,” Ali told me. “We appreciate their sacrifices during the war, but they’ve become corrupted by money and obsessed with making themselves like the secular elite.”

CONTESTED FUTURE

Again and again, my conversations with members of the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij turned back to issues of corruption, social and cultural class, and generational differences. Often my interlocutors turned their ire on one another more than on those who were not supporters of the regime. Their vast and nuanced disagreements revealed a complicated political reality that could not be contained in the familiar binaries, such as reformist vs. hard-line or anti-regime vs. pro-regime.

As the Islamic Republic enters its fifth decade, keeping the revolution “alive” will depend on the ability of its image-makers not only to appeal to a younger population that wants change but also to build consensus among members of the younger generation within the regime’s own ranks. The task before the Islamic Republic is to win over a broad cross section of its citizens while simultaneously defining what shape its revolutionary project, and its state apparatus, will take over the long term. How best to achieve this goal, without losing the Islamic Republic’s founding vision altogether, defines Iran’s conundrum and its field of possibility.

The Problem With Xi's China Model By Elizabeth C. Economy

Why Its Successes Are Becoming Liabilities

As China's National People's Congress and its advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, gather this March in Beijing for their annual two-week sessions to discuss the country's challenges and path forward, President Xi Jinping may well be tempted to take a victory lap. Within his first five years in office, he has pioneered his own style of Chinese politics, at last upending the model Deng Xiaoping established 30 years ago. As I wrote in Foreign Affairs last year ("China's New Revolution," May/June 2018), Xi has moved away from Deng's consensus-based decision-making and consolidated institutional power in his own hands. He has driven the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) more deeply into Chinese political, social, and economic life, while constraining the influence of foreign ideas and economic competition. And he has abandoned Deng's low-profile foreign policy in favor of one that is ambitious and expansive.

And yet the mood in Beijing is far from victorious. As Xi begins his second five-year term as CCP general secretary and (soon) president, there are signs that the new model's very successes are becoming liabilities. Too much party control is contributing to a stagnant economy and societal discontent, while too much ambition has cooled the initial ardor with which many in the international community greeted Xi's vision of a new global order "with Chinese characteristics."

Xi has given few signals publicly that anything has gone awry: the first speeches of his second term even suggest that he is doubling down on his current approach. Doing so will only exacerbate the challenges that are emerging. But fortunately, because most of the country's current problems are of Xi's own making, he still has both the time and the power to correct his course.

HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

Xi's accomplishments to date are undeniable. His efforts to consolidate institutional power paid off in March 2018, when he successfully maneuvered to

eliminate the two-term limit on the presidency, ensuring that he could continue to hold three of the country's most powerful positions—CCP general secretary, chairman of the Central Military Commission, and president—through at least 2027, if not beyond. His anticorruption campaign also continued to gain steam: in 2018, 621,000 officials were punished, a marked increase over the 527,000 detained in 2017. And dozens of universities have raced to establish new institutes and departments devoted to the study of Xi Jinping thought, a 14-point manifesto that includes the inviolability of CCP leadership, the rule of law, enhanced national security, and socialism with Chinese characteristics, among other broad commitments.

Under Xi's leadership, the party now has eyes everywhere—literally. As many as 200 million surveillance cameras have already been installed in an effort to reduce crime and control social unrest. The surveillance technology will also play an essential role in the 2020 national rollout of the country's social credit system, which will evaluate people's political and economic trustworthiness and reward and punish them accordingly. The CCP has now established party committees within nearly 70 percent of all private enterprises and joint ventures, in order to ensure that the businesses advance the interests of the state. Beijing has also succeeded in constraining outside influences: thanks to a law passed two years ago, for example, the number of foreign nongovernmental organizations operating in China has fallen from more than 7,000 to just over 400. And "Made in China 2025"—China's plan to protect its domestic firms from foreign competition in ten areas of critical cutting-edge technology—is well under way. The Sichuan provincial government, for example, has stipulated that for 15 types of medical devices, hospitals will be reimbursed only for procedures that use Chinese-manufactured devices.

Xi's efforts to establish greater control at home have been matched by equally dramatic moves to assert control over areas China considers its sovereign territory. Xi has militarized seven artificial features in the South China Sea, and in January 2019, a Chinese naval official suggested that China might "further fortify" the islets if it feels threatened. As Beijing negotiates a South China Sea code of conduct with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, it seeks to exclude non-ASEAN or Chinese multinationals from oil exploration and to bar foreign powers from conducting military drills, unless agreed to by all signatories. Meanwhile, Xi has increased the mainland's political and economic control over

Hong Kong, banning a pro-independence political party, calling on the Hong Kong media to resist pressure from “external forces” to criticize or challenge Beijing, and constructing a rail terminal on Hong Kong territory, which includes a customs check by China for travel to the mainland. Xi has also adopted a range of coercive economic and political policies toward Taiwan, including reducing the number of mainland tourists to the island, successfully persuading multinationals not to recognize Taiwan as a separate entity, and convincing five countries to switch their diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the mainland, to try to advance his sovereignty claims. The Belt and Road Initiative—Xi’s grand-scale connectivity plan—now extends beyond Asia, Europe, and Africa to include Latin America. A little more than a year ago, the People’s Liberation Army set up a logistics base in Djibouti, and in private conversations, Chinese military officials acknowledge that scores more could follow.

Even as China expands its hard infrastructure—ports, railroads, highways, and pipelines—it has become an increasingly essential player in the technology sphere. Brands such as Alibaba, Lenovo, and Huawei have gone global, and more are on the horizon. A book by the Chinese tech guru Kai-Fu Lee proclaims that China will inevitably dominate in artificial intelligence—unsurprisingly, the book has become an international bestseller. Although Lee’s prediction may yet fall short, China is laying the foundation for AI leadership: two-thirds of the world’s investment in AI is in China, and China already boasts a commanding presence in areas such as drone and facial recognition technologies.

All these successes have made China attractive to smaller countries not only as an economic partner but as an ideological standard-bearer. Xi has admonished that the so-called China model offers countries disenchanted with Western-style market democracy a different path to development. In countries such as Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda, the message resonates, and officials are learning from their Chinese counterparts how to control the media and constrain political dissent.

WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT PROBLEMS

For all its successes so far, however, the Xi model, fully realized, may simply be too much of a good thing. Too much party control—perhaps too consolidated into Xi’s hands—has contributed to economic stagnation. The constant stream of often competing directives from Beijing has produced paralysis at the local level.

In August 2018, China's Finance Ministry reinforced an earlier directive calling on local governments to issue more bonds to support infrastructure projects to help boost the slowing economy; many local governments had been resisting the government's call because the projects have low returns. That same month, however, Beijing announced that officials who failed to implement Beijing's policies could lose their jobs or be expelled from the party.

Xi's predilection for state control in the economy has also starved the more efficient private sector of capital. His desire for enhanced party control within firms led one state-owned enterprise head to quit; he commented privately that the party committees wanted to make decisions but wouldn't take responsibility when they failed. Evidence of economic distress abounds. The government is deleting statistics from the public record, a sure sign that things are not moving in the right direction. One economist has suggested that growth in 2018 fell to 1.67 percent, and the Shanghai stock market turned in the worst performance of any stock market in the world. Birthrates, which correlate closely with economic growth and optimism, fell to their lowest rate since 1961. Beijing has pulled back on its air pollution reduction targets—after some noteworthy initial success—out of concern that pollution control measures might further slow the economy.

The economic downturn has also stoked social discontent. Multiprovince strikes have galvanized crane operators as well as workers in food delivery and van delivery. A nationwide trucker strike erupted in the summer of 2018, as the online platform Manbang established a competitive bidding system that exerted downward pressure on haulage fees, highlighting the potentially disruptive effect of the gig economy on the Chinese work force. Most troubling to Xi, however, was likely the news that university Marxist groups were converging on Shenzhen's Jasic Technology plant to stand beside workers and retired party cadres in support of efforts to organize independent labor unions. The protest was quickly shut down, but the moral legitimacy of its demands remains to be addressed. At the same time, broad social movements that cross age, gender, and class, such as those advocating women's and LGBTQ rights, have arisen alongside the traditional protests around the environment, wages, and pensions.

Xi's consolidation of power has not only cost China's economy but raised suspicions around its enterprises abroad. The deepening penetration of the party into Chinese business has caused all Chinese companies to be viewed as

extended arms of the CCP. Foreign firms and governments no longer have confidence that a Chinese company—private or not—can resist a CCP directive. Because of this assessment, they are cautious about drawing technology made by the Chinese national champion Huawei into their critical infrastructure.

Even the Belt and Road project risks bending under the weight of its ambitions. Some countries, including Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sierra Leone, among others, have reconsidered the deals they've made with China as their debts have mounted and/or environmental, labor, and governance concerns go unaddressed. Some experts within China now question the wisdom of the country's foreign investments as many of the large state-owned enterprises driving the Belt and Road projects dramatically increase their debt-to-asset ratios—well beyond those incurred by other countries' firms.

Amid all this turmoil, Xi's efforts to project Chinese soft power have fallen flat. Beijing's draconian treatment of its Uighur Muslim population in Xinjiang and its abduction of foreign citizens in China, such as the Swedish citizen Gui Minhai or the Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, undermine its efforts to shape a positive narrative of international engagement and leadership. In addition, Beijing's mobilization of its overseas students globally for political and economic purposes, such as informing on other students who do not follow the Communist Party line, has led to a backlash in a number of countries. Moreover, Xi's regulations have created a difficult operating environment for foreign nongovernmental organizations and businesses, the two constituencies most supportive of deeper engagement with China.

THE TRUMP FACTOR

The Trump administration's reaction to Xi has only made things worse for Beijing. Most obviously, the U.S. government's enforcement of tariffs on $250 billion in Chinese exports to the United States has weakened Chinese consumer confidence and caused some multinational corporations to shift or consider shifting manufacturing out of China to other countries. More profoundly, however, the administration and Congress have adopted a more bare-knuckled approach to Chinese global assertiveness. The White House has enhanced relations with Taiwan, increased the number of freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, constrained Chinese investment in areas of core U.S. technology, elevated international attention to Chinese human rights practices, and begun to

compete directly with the Belt and Road Initiative through infrastructure investments in partnership with other countries, such as Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, as well as through the establishment of a new development finance institution, the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation.

The United States is not alone in resisting Xi's charms. In the spring 2018 Pew Research Center polls, a 25-country median of 63 percent said they preferred a world in which the United States was the leading power, while 19 percent favored China (although Donald Trump himself fared poorly in the polls in comparison with Xi Jinping). Market democracies collectively have adopted a number of measures similar to those of the United States, and despite Trump's questioning of the importance of partners and allies, his team has proved remarkably adept at coordinating approaches to many of these countries. Even in China, some intellectuals and entrepreneurs quietly state to visiting foreigners that the Trump administration provides an important bulwark against the worst excesses of the current Chinese model.

XI 2.0 For Xi to tackle the rapidly mounting problems his political model has created, he will need to undertake a significant course correction and modify many of his first-term initiatives. On the economic front, his priorities should include structural economic reform that gives preference to the private sector over state-owned enterprises and provides a level playing field for multinationals that want to do business with China. He should also take a revised approach to the Belt and Road Initiative that adopts international standards around governance—including transparency, risk management, and environmental and labor practices. Politically, China's image and soft power would be greatly enhanced by a reduction in the government's use of Chinese citizens abroad as tools of its political and economic objectives, a step back from its coercive policies toward Hong Kong and Taiwan, and a sharp reduction in its repressive policies toward its own citizens in Xinjiang and Tibet.

In his description of leadership, Xi is fond of using the analogy of a relay race: a baton is passed from one runner to the next, and each runner builds upon what has come before while delivering his own contribution. With the baton in Xi's hand, the Chinese government has expanded its reach and influence at home and abroad. Yet the negative consequences of Xi's approach—local government paralysis, a declining birthrate, and international opposition, among others—have begun to hold China back from the finish line. Xi needs to course correct—or perhaps pass the baton to the next runner.

What a Military Intervention in Venezuela Would Look Like By Frank O. Mora

Getting in Would Be the Easy Part

The United States has a clear objective in Venezuela: regime change and the restoration of democracy and the rule of law. Yet sanctions, international diplomatic isolation, and internal pressure have failed to deliver a breakthrough. Minds are turning to military intervention. U.S. President Donald Trump has said that “all options are on the table.” What if he means it?

There are two plausible ways the United States might use force in Venezuela: a precision bombing campaign and a full-scale invasion. Either course would have to be followed by efforts to stabilize the country and establish a civilian government. That could take years, given the country's size and military strength. Venezuela has a population of 33 million spread across a territory twice the size of Iraq. Its military is 160,000 strong and paramilitaries, colectivos (armed leftist groups that support Maduro), and criminal gangs collectively have more than 100,000 members. Even if a military intervention began well, U.S. forces would likely find themselves bogged down in the messy work of keeping the peace and rebuilding institutions for years to come.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

For precision strikes to work, they would need to destroy the Maduro regime’s military, security, and economic infrastructure. The aim would be to eliminate the regime’s ability to repress the Venezuelan people and to convince the military to abandon the government.

Precision strikes are often portrayed as a quick, cheap, safe, and effective alternative to a broader military intervention. But two U.S. precision strike operations—in Libya, in 2011, and in Yugoslavia, in 1999—underscore their unpredictable nature and their limited ability to shape political outcomes. In Libya, where the strikes lasted for seven months, the intervention achieved its narrow objective—the collapse of Muammar al-Qaddafi’s regime—but left the country in chaos. The three-month bombing campaign in Yugoslavia was more successful: it degraded the Yugoslav military’s ability to repress the population and helped

lead to the establishment of a UN-monitored political framework, although that was a more limited goal than regime change.

A precision military intervention in Venezuela would require operations in the air, at sea, and in cyberspace. The U.S. Navy would need to station an aircraft carrier off the coast of Venezuela to enforce a no-fly zone and hit military targets and crucial infrastructure. The navy would also need to deploy a group of battleships and, perhaps, submarines that could launch a steady stream of Tomahawk missiles at military targets, such as air bases, air defense facilities, and communications and command and control centers. The United States would need to deploy other assets, too, such as attack tactical aircraft (which have greater precision) and drones, deployed either from an aircraft carrier or from a partner nation, to help destroy infrastructure. Finally, U.S. forces would likely use cyberweapons to manipulate, degrade, and destroy Venezuela's defenses.

The United States would almost certainly get sucked in to a long, difficult campaign to stabilize Venezuela after the initial fighting was over.

In the best-case scenario, the Venezuelan military would defect at the sight of the first Tomahawk missile, deciding to support a new government to avoid escalation. The Venezuelan military, however, may not have the professional wherewithal, after decades of degradation by the Chavista regime, to maintain order as an interim government assumed power by disarming rogue groups that would continue to support Maduro.

In the worst-case scenario, a precision strike operation would last for months, killing possibly thousands of civilians, destroying much of what remains of Venezuela's economy, and wiping out the state security forces. The result would be anarchy. Militias and other armed criminal groups would roam the streets of major cities unchecked, wreaking havoc. More than eight million Venezuelans would likely flee. The chaos would likely lead the United States to send in ground troops in order either to finally dislodge the regime and its security forces or to provide security once the dictatorship had collapsed.

Such a scenario is not improbable. Indeed, the most likely outcome of a campaign of air strikes is that the Venezuelan armed forces would disintegrate.

The United States, perhaps with international partners, would then have no option but to send troops to neutralize Venezuela's irregular armed groups and restore order while a new government and security apparatus established themselves. How long such a peacekeeping occupation would last is hard to say, but the difficulty of the project and the complexity of the country's geography suggest that troops would stay in Venezuela for a lot longer than the few months for which they might initially be sent. The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, for example, lasted 13 years in a much smaller country.

GROUND INVASION

Rather than launching precision strikes and getting sucked into a ground war later, the United States might choose to go all-in from the beginning. That would mean a major intervention, including both air strikes and the deployment of at least 150,000 ground troops to secure or destroy airfields, ports, oil fields, power stations, command and control centers, communications infrastructure, and other important government facilities, including the president's residence, Miraflores Palace. The invading army would face 160,000 regular Venezuelan troops and more than 100,000 paramilitaries.

The most recent large-scale U.S.-led military interventions, in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003, both required U.S. troops to remain after the initial invasion for nearly 20 years. By 2017, the two interventions had involved more than two million U.S. military personnel and cost more than $1.8 trillion. More than 7,000 U.S. service members have died in Afghanistan and Iraq. The costs of an intervention in Venezuela, which is free of the kind of sectarian divides that plague Afghanistan and Iraq, would likely not come near those numbers, but they would likely be significant.

The last Latin American country the United States invaded was Panama, in 1989. More than 27,000 U.S. military personnel and more than 300 aircraft quickly overwhelmed a Panamanian Defense Force of less than 20,000. Although the invasion lasted only about 42 days, U.S. military operations in Panama continued for another four and a half years. An invasion of Venezuela would take far more troops and last far longer.

In the best-case scenario, the Venezuelan military would fold quickly and Maduro and his inner circle would flee without a fight. The colectivos, civilian militias, and

other paramilitaries would stay out of the way. Cuban and Russian security forces would abandon their posts, and the Venezuelan people would welcome the foreign forces with open arms. After the collapse of the regime, the United States would withdraw most of its troops, except a limited number who would stay to support the Venezuelan security forces working to restore order.

Yet things would likely not go so easily. In the worst-case outcome, U.S. forces would quickly defeat the Venezuelan military but then find themselves bogged down in guerrilla warfare with former members of the Venezuelan military, paramilitary groups, Colombian insurgents, colectivos, and some members of the civilian militia—all of them aided by Cuba and Russia. Under those conditions, the U.S. military would have to stay in Venezuela for years until a new government was able to maintain order.

The most likely scenario lies somewhere between the two extremes. After a U.S. invasion, the Venezuelan military would likely surrender quickly, the regime would collapse, and most Cuban and Russian personnel would withdraw. But the U.S. presence would push military defectors, paramilitary groups, and militias into hiding. The United States would have to lead the rebuilding of Venezuela's security forces and keep troops in the country for years.

There's no such thing as risk-free military action. But in this case, the social, economic, and security costs of intervening far outweigh the benefits. Whether the United States launched limited air strikes or a full ground invasion, it would almost certainly get sucked in to a long, difficult campaign to stabilize Venezuela after the initial fighting was over. Such an engagement would cost American lives and money and hurt the United States' standing in Latin America. An extended occupation would reignite anti-Americanism in the region, particularly if U.S. soldiers committed real or perceived abuses, and it would damage U.S. relations with countries outside the region, too. Finally, a war-weary American public is unlikely to stand for yet another extended military campaign.

The Global Language of Hatred Is French By Marc Weitzmann

And Anti-Semites and Islamophobes Both Speak It

Since the terror attack that killed 49 Muslims and wounded dozens at Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15, French authorities have been investigating what connections, if any, the killer, Brenton Tarrant, may have had in France.

We know that Tarrant visited the country during the presidential campaign of 2017, witnessing the defeat of what he called “the nationalist camp” (that is, Marine Le Pen). Tarrant traveled to several countries at the time, including Israel, but France impressed him the most—so much so that he made his final decision to “do something” to stop the Muslim invasion of the West on his way back from France. France is where he claims to have had the revelation that the West was “invaded” by the “nonwhites,” a problem to which French politicians offered only a “farce” in guise of a solution. In language disturbingly close to that emerging from the anti-Semitic corners of the “yellow vest” movement in recent months, Tarrant also meditates on French President Emmanuel Macron, whom he sees as “a globalist, capitalist, egalitarian, an ex-investment banker was [sic] no national beliefs other than the pursuit of profit.”

Unlike their Muslim counterparts, who tend to rely on anonymous texts that submerge their subjectivity, Western terrorists are graphomaniacs. The American Unabomber of the 1990s; the Norwegian Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people on the island of Utoya in 2011; the U.S. misogynist Elliot Rodger, who killed six and injured 14 in Isla Vista, California, in 2014; and now Tarrant, who quotes Breivik: All seem eager to justify bloodshed through highly individualistic, verbose jeremiads that sometimes sound like a mockery of the intellectual posturings the French are so known for. (Robert Bowers, the author of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue massacre, appears to be an exception, but only because he spent the months preceding the attack expounding his hate on a daily basis on social media.) These “manifestoes” offer a glimpse into the killers’ views of the world.

Unlike their Muslim counterparts, Western terrorists are graphomaniacs.
In Tarrant's case, the references to France and French culture literally saturate his 74 pages, starting with the title: "The Great Replacement"—a formula popularized in far-right circles worldwide by the French essayist Renaud Camus, who holds that a "Muslim invasion" threatens white Europeans with a new genocide. In July 2017, for instance, the alt-right Canadian figure Lauren Southern posted on YouTube a video titled "The Great Replacement" that received more than 250,000 views that year. An anonymous website called great-replacement.com, which quotes Camus in an epigraph, claims that mass immigration of non-European people poses a demographic threat and that "European races are facing the possibility of extinction in a relatively near future." Tarrant's manifesto echoes this language almost word for word.

Even Tarrant's mention of the British fascist Oswald Mosley as the sole political figure worthy of his respect sounds like a French reference by proxy: Mosley moved to Paris in the 1950s, after his British Union of Fascists had gone to ashes along with Adolf Hitler. Later, after a brief, unsuccessful attempt to return to British politics, Mosley retired to the City of Light to write his memoirs and to die.

During his years in the French capital, Mosley developed a postfascist movement called Europe a Nation that worked hand in hand with two groups ingrained in France: Jeune Europe, led by the former Nazi Jean-François Thiriart, from Francophone Belgium, and the European Social Movement, cofounded by René Binet, a French Trotskyite militant who turned Nazi in 1940 and enlisted in the Charlemagne Division of the Waffen-SS. Several former members of his SS contingent joined the National Front when Jean-Marie Le Pen created it in the early 1970s. It was Binet, not Camus, who first came up with "the great replacement" formula in the early 1960s.

In other words, that catch phrase finds us right at the heart of the French far-right, postfascist tradition. What to make of this genealogy of hate, and why is it important to understand it?

French activists, perhaps sensing rightly that there is something specific afoot in France, tend to conclude that the country has always been inherently racist. In The Washington Post a few days after the Christchurch massacre, for instance,

the essayist Rokhaya Diallo claimed that France has been Islamophobic for years, and now “French islamophobia goes global.” But what did Mosley, Thiriart, and Binet mean, exactly, when they invented “the great replacement” formula at the dawn of the Cold War? Were they really seeking above all to promote Islamophobia—or is such a conclusion convincing only to those unfamiliar with the history of French political violence? The question is not purely rhetorical, nor is it a matter of historical detail.

On the evening of March 17, two days after the Christchurch killings, two New York University student activists—Leen Dweik, a Muslim Palestinian, and Rose Asaf, an American Jew—attended a vigil for the victims at a New York City Islamic center. Chelsea Clinton was present, and the two students verbally assailed her for complicity, so they claimed, in the Christchurch massacre. As absurd as the attack on the former first daughter may seem, there was a logic behind it: that of fighting Islamophobia. A few days earlier, Clinton had tweeted her support “as an American” for a statement criticizing Ilhan Omar’s remarks on the Jewish lobby in the United States. For the two students, that tweet and the expression “as an American” could be read only as a racist, Islamophobic targeting of Omar, and since Chelsea Clinton was therefore Islamophobic, and all Islamophobes are one, she shared responsibility for the bloodbath in New Zealand.

The Christchurch killing is “a massacre stoked by people like you and the words that you have put out into the world, and I want you to . . . feel that,” Dweik harangues Clinton, who, pregnant and understandably frozen with terror, tries to apologize on the video the two students posted on social media that same evening. The video instantly went viral, to the pleasure of the two students, who rejoiced the next day on BuzzFeed: more than 10,000 shares, they let us know, while the bodies of the victims of the Christchurch killings were still warm.

More than just a symptom of the narcissism of righteous anger in the digital age, this incident shows what happens when a superficial analysis is taken to its logical conclusion. If the heart of the matter, the seed of the crime, is indeed Islamophobia, and only that, then everyone tainted with such sin has blood on their hands. Steve Bannon, Chelsea Clinton, and Brenton Tarrant are one and the same—while Robert Bowers, the Tree of Life killer, simply disappears from the murderous equation.

It is to avoid such simplistic thinking, and obtain a more complete view of the landscape of violence, that we need to better understand the French source of a poison that is indeed threatening to go global. So what did Mosley, Thiriart, and Binet have in mind with their “great replacement,” and what in their thinking has influenced killers today?

The midcentury postfascists started from the premise that Europe had been occupied since 1945 by two competing imperial forces: the capitalist United States, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union on the other. Both were forms of the one true enemy: cosmopolitanism, engineered and controlled by an international Jewry looking for revenge. Yes, Jews could be both communists and capitalists: such ubiquity was in itself the sign of the Jews’ nefarious power. But if communists were plotting to import internationalism through social change, capitalism was bringing cosmopolitanism through the melting pot, technology, and modernity. In order to save what they saw as the “true” white, Western tradition and culture once defended by the Nazis, European nationalists everywhere had to regroup and unite against all this. Such a union of nationalists, paradoxically enough, knew no borders.

But this presentation sounds more coherent than it actually was. In fact, antimodernism and hostility to immigration were less an ideology than a mindset, a disparate collection of reactionary ideas embodied by different movements—Mosley’s Europe a Nation, Thiriart’s Jeune Europe, Binet’s European Social Movement, and a few others—and translated into very paradoxical actions, to say the least. Mosley and Thiriart, for instance, both fiercely defended the remnants of the French and British empires, including French Algeria and apartheid South Africa. Yet as soon as the former colonies acquired their independence, Thiriart changed his mind, and by the mid-1960s, his neofascist party, Jeune Europe, was siding with the new nationalisms of the Third World. Hence in 1967, the first Western terrorist to fall, weapon in hand, in the Middle East was Roger Coudroy, a Jeune Europe militant from France. He died training in a Palestinian camp. By the same token, Jeune Europe’s anti-Americanism led its members to support the Black Panther movement in the United States.

The year after Coudroy’s death, in 1968, far-right activists created the Research and Study Group for European Civilization, known by the French acronym

GRECE. Under the tutelage of its leading thinker, the aristocrat Alain de Benoist, GRECE would later be relabeled “the New Right” and extend its influence over people as different as Russian President Vladimir Putin’s chamber philosopher Aleksandr Dugin, the mad theoretician of “Eurasianism,” and figures of the U.S. alt-right such as John Morgan, editor for the white nationalist publication Counter-Currents, and Richard Spencer, the man who gave President Donald Trump a Nazi salute in Washington.

Benoist pushed to the logical extreme the foggy set of paradoxical ideas Mosley and Thiriart first set forth. He gave those ideas a new shape. What he did, essentially, was to replace “nationalism” with “identity.” Under his influence, the far right began to support politically correct notions such as “diversity” or “ethnopluralism,” and it is with him that things become tricky and that the border between far left and far right begins to blur.

Read, for instance, this excerpt from Benoist’s “Manifesto for a European Renaissance”: “The true wealth of the world is first and foremost the diversity of its culture and peoples. The West’s conversion to universalism has been the main cause of its subsequent attempt to convert the rest of the world: in the past, to its religion (the Crusades); yesterday, to its political principles (colonialism); and today, to its economic and social model (development) or its moral principles (human rights). . . . The Westernisation of the planet has represented an imperialist movement fed by the desire to erase all otherness.”

By the time Benoist wrote this in 1999, the Cold War had been over for ten years and the United States could be seen as the last Western empire: the ultimate hyperpower, fatherland of world citizens, source of a process of globalization through technology and international banking that would subject the rest of the planet to an American way of life. Now that even communism was dead, what force could resist this?

References to France and French culture literally saturate the 74 pages of Tarrant's manifesto.
To Benoist, that force is called Islam. Benoist supports the Islamic Republic of Iran and more broadly, since the mid-1980s, “the awakening of political Islam,” in which he sees “not a threat but a hope”: a sign that “popular collective identities” are starting to rebel “against the dominant systems.” In 1989, he took Ayatollah

Ruhollah Khomeini's side against Salman Rushdie, even suggesting that the publication of The Satanic Verses was an American manipulation intended to tarnish Iran's public image. Although he is opposed to immigration, Benoist is to this day a defender of the veil. Do these sound like Islamophobic positions?

In fact, what is most striking about the extract above is how similar it sounds to Islamist propaganda. Consider the attack against the Crusades, against colonialism, or against "universal values" such as human rights. All of these are regular targets of Islamists. Or consider the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front, which starting in 1990 waged a civil war that would claim some 200,000 lives, based on a similar worldview. The Algerian Islamists fought, so they claimed, to defend "the true Algerians" and "the true Muslims" against "the democracy of homosexuals championed by the West, which brought us only Communism and capitalism that corrupt the soul of man where Islam frees it."

The so-called democracy of homosexuals is a reference to the notion that globalization's most dire effect is to undermine virility and the patriarchal order. In France, far-right polemicists such as Éric Zemmour have written whole books to protest against "the feminization of society." The same Zemmour, an editorialist of the right-wing daily Le Figaro, has publicly claimed his "admiration" for the killers of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, the Kouachi brothers, for doing "things that we [Westerners] are not able to do any longer." He was joined in his praise by the far-left novelist Virginie Despentes, who three weeks after the killings said in an interview that she "loved" the killers for their clumsiness.

Interviewing himself in his manifesto, Tarrant writes: "Do you personally hate Muslims? A Muslim man or woman living in their homeland? No. A Muslim man or woman choosing to invade our lands, live on our soils and replace our people? Yes, I don't like them." He adds, significantly: "the only Muslims I really hate is the convert, those from our own people that turn their backs on, turn their backs on their cultures and became blood traitors to their own race. These I hate." Incidentally, he expresses the same view about Jews, whom he sees as fit to live only in "their country of origin"—namely, Israel. For him, Jews had no purpose and no place in the diaspora.

The same goes for Renaud Camus. In the spring of 2000, Camus, at that time praised by the left as an heir to Roland Barthes, published a book titled La

Campagne de France in which he complained that the main voices of "the French experience as it was lived for some fifteen centuries" are "representatives of the Jewish race," which was to say, people who "do not participate directly in that experience" and therefore "express that culture and that civilization in a foreign way." The sentence implied that writers such as Marcel Proust, for instance, were "exterior" to French culture.

The book was widely reviewed and this passage systematically bypassed. I wrote a piece quoting these lines in the magazine I worked for at the time, Les Inrockuptibles, and this set off a three-month-long intellectual psychodrama for which only the French have patience. Only after 9/11 did Camus modify his views, in effect exchanging his anti-Semitism for an obsession with Muslims while publicly turning into an ardent Zionist.

Does this mean that anti-Muslim feelings are absent in France or unknown in far-right circles? No, of course not. There are famous sentences written by Charles de Gaulle asserting that Muslims, "with their turbans and djellabas," can't be French: "Do you believe that the French nation can absorb ten million Muslims who tomorrow will be twenty million and the day after forty? . . . My village would no longer be called Colombey-les-Deux-Églises [Colombey of Two Churches], but Colombey-les-Deux-Mosquées [Colombey of Two Mosques]." Interestingly enough, de Gaulle wrote this during the Algerian war, contemplating the prospect, for him unreal, that after the independence Muslims would migrate to France en masse. To add a cruel twist, the Muslims he refers to here are "the Harkis," which is to say, the Muslims who fought with the French, against the Algerian freedom fighters; and the question de Gaulle sought to answer was whether, when the French retired, these Harkis should be left behind to be slaughtered or taken to France. As it happened, most were abandoned to their fate, and the ones brought to France were treated like slaves.

But what matters most in de Gaulle's view here is that he considers the question of Islam in the context of a possible migration, not as a religious question per se. In fact, in the decades following the Algerian war, during the 1960s and 1970s, when the migrants did come and the bitterness toward Algerians was at its worst and racism a daily reality in France, nobody spoke of "the Muslims"— except, perhaps, some of the repatriated French settlers, whose vision remained colored by imperial nostalgia. But for most of the French, the target of hatred was "the

Arabs"—or, if one really wanted to be insulting, "les crouilles." But as for "the Muslims," they did not exist. That changed only in the early 1980s, with the rise of political Islam in Iran and above all in Algeria. Suspicion of Islam deepened when Algerian Islamists came to France in 1990.

The core issue is not Islamophobia but plastic identities, migrations, and changes.

The extreme right was always divided on the subject of Islam. In retrospect, Benoist's writings look like the far right's most powerful attempt to solve the contradiction at a time, in the 1990s, when it had reached its peak. Throughout this period and beyond it, the main danger in the view of the identitarians, as they are known in France, was what Benoist called "the ideology of the sameness": U.S.-led globalization, to which political Islam looked like a form of resistance. But which was more to be feared—globalization or a Muslim invasion of Europe and, therefore, of the West?

After 9/11, while the far right in France began to benefit as much from the anguish the attack brought on as from the rampant French anti-Americanism it awoke, and Jean-Marie Le Pen came in second in the first round of the 2002 presidential election, this dilemma became unsustainable.

So, yes, Tarrant and Camus are racist. But it's a racism that David Duke and Louis Farrakhan could both agree on: it is called identity politics or separatism, and you find it in Islamist countries as well. The core issue is not Islamophobia but plastic identities, migrations, and changes.

The source of that separatism can be traced to still more French authors, including some praised, incidentally, by President Trump's former strategist Steve Bannon: one is the novelist Jean Raspail, whose terrible sci-fi book, The Camp of the Saints, written in the 1970s, anticipates Tarrant's killings (the book recounts the exploits of a group of white French resisters who take up arms against the migrants and the "hippies" who support them); the other, and much more influential, is the intensely anti-Semitic journalist Charles Maurras.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Maurras was probably the first European thinker to mix high-culture critiques of modernity and the Enlightenment with the low, nationalist, popular anger at international finance and capitalism, then

personified by Jewish bankers. Maurras was behind the cardinal notion that the real fight was not between the rich and the poor, or the bourgeois and the workers, but between "the real country"—the "real people"—and "the legal country," by which he meant the country where a person's identity, nationality, and rights are defined by law rather than by tradition. In other words, the legal country is the country of the cosmopolitan, fake elites, born out of the Enlightenment and determined to cheat the people and to "replace" them.

Interestingly enough, in November 2018, Renaud Camus published a book written in English whose title, You Will Not Replace Us!, was the slogan of the Charlottesville white supremacists during their march the year before. The "you" in that sentence were the Jews, said to secretly control world migration in order to ruin the West.

France is a much more dangerous country than the usual clichés about flânerie, galanterie, and the love of books and good food lead one to imagine. Or should we say that France's tradition of political violence and populist fury is, as it were, the other side of the country's legendary easy life? In the middle of the nineteenth century, the poet Charles Baudelaire invented both la flânerie and The Flowers of Evil. At the beginning of the twentieth century, while the belle époque was in full swing, prominent writers such as Maurice Barrès and Joris-Karl Huysmans regularly spoke of their "disgust for everything." During the same period, Theodor Herzl, the future founder of political Zionism, then a simple correspondent for the Austrian press in Paris, wrote Arthur Schnitzler that the atmosphere in the City of Light was such that he thought it best to flee the place before being killed "as a financier, as a bourgeois or as a Jew." With the exception of Arthur Rimbaud, the history of modernity in France has largely been written by people who intensely disliked or hated modernity—people who, from Honoré de Balzac to Baudelaire and Louis-Ferdinand Céline, also happened to be the country's best minds.

After the fall of Vichy in 1944 and throughout much of the Cold War period, Gaullist and socialist narratives shaped France's political identity, and the antimodernist tradition sank underground, into the writings of Binet, Benoit, and others. It began to revive in the 1990s—a time during which, coincidentally, antimodern political Islam also spread rapidly, both in Arab countries formerly

under Soviet influence and in areas geographically close to France, such as Algeria.

Today, with the French antimodernist tradition exporting itself across the West—and a populist Islamist ideology also widely diffused—it is of the most vital importance, if we want to fight it, to understand what is really at play in this vicious dynamic of hate.

What a War With Iran Would Look Like By Ilan Goldenberg

Neither Side Wants a Fight, but That Doesn't Eliminate the Danger

Tensions between Iran and the United States are at their highest point in years. The 2015 Iran nuclear agreement is teetering. The Trump administration is using sanctions to strangle the Iranian economy and in May deployed an aircraft carrier, a missile defense battery, and four bombers to the Middle East. Washington has evacuated nonessential personnel from its embassy in Baghdad, citing intelligence suggesting that Iran is increasingly willing to hit U.S. targets through its military proxies abroad.

The United States also stated that Iran almost certainly perpetrated the recent damage to oil tankers flagged by Saudi Arabia, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and claimed that Iran had temporarily loaded missiles onto small boats in the Persian Gulf. In early May, U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton publicly threatened a response to any Iranian attacks, "whether by proxy, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards [sic] Corps or regular Iranian forces."

The good news is that the situation is not as bad as it appears. None of the players—with the possible exception of Bolton—seem to really want a war. Iran's military strategy is to keep tensions at a low boil and avoid a direct confrontation with the United States. Washington struck a tough public posture with its recent troop deployment, but the move was neither consequential nor terribly unusual. If the United States were truly preparing for a war, the flow of military assets into the region would be much more dramatic.

The bad news is that a war could still happen. Even if neither side wants to fight, miscalculation, missed signals, and the logic of escalation could conspire to turn even a minor clash into a regional conflagration—with devastating effects for Iran, the United States, and the Middle East.

A conflict would most likely start with a small, deniable attack by Iran on a U.S.-related target. Iran's leaders, in this scenario, decide that it is time to stand up to U.S. President Donald Trump. Shiite militias in Iraq with ties to Iran hit a U.S.

military convoy in Iraq, killing a number of soldiers, or Iranian operatives attack another oil tanker in the Persian Gulf, this time causing an oil spill. Tehran knows from past experience that such attacks do not result in direct retaliation from Washington, provided they are somewhat deniable. Iranian proxies in Iraq, for example, killed roughly 600 American soldiers from 2003 to 2011, with few consequences for Iran.

But this time is different. Following the Iranian attack, the Trump administration decides to strike at several military sites in Iran, just as it hit Syrian targets in 2017 and 2018 after the regime of President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons. Using air and naval assets already stationed in the Middle East, the United States strikes an Iranian port or hits a training camp for Iraqi Shiite fighters in Iran. Through public and private channels, the U.S. government communicates that it conducted a one-time strike to "reestablish deterrence" and that if Iran backs off, it will face no further consequences. Ideally, the Iranian leadership pulls back, and things end there.

But what if Iran does not respond the way Assad did? After all, Assad was fighting for his very survival in a years-long civil war and knew better than to pull the United States any further into that fight. Iran's leader has many more options than the beleaguered Syrian president did. The Islamic Republic can use proxy forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen to attack the United States and its partners. It has an arsenal of ballistic missiles that can target U.S. bases in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Its mines and land-based antiship missiles can wreak havoc in the Strait of Hormuz and drive up global oil prices. Iran has the capacity to shut down a significant portion of Saudi oil production with aggressive sabotage or cyberattacks, and with its paramilitary unit known as the Quds Force, Iran can attack U.S. targets around the globe.

Between the United States and Iran there is a distinct potential for misunderstanding, not least when both actors are making decisions under time pressure, on the basis of uncertain information, and in a climate of deep mutual distrust. Iran may mistake a one-off strike by the United States as the beginning of a significant military campaign that requires an immediate and harsh response. The danger that the United States will send confusing signals to the Iranians is especially high given Trump's tendency to go off on Twitter and the fact that his national security adviser has articulated a more hawkish agenda than his own.

The two sides will also face an intense security dilemma, with each side's defensive measures appearing aggressive to the other side. Suppose that during the crisis the United States decides to send aircraft carriers, battleships, bombers, and fighters to the region to defend itself and its allies. Iran's military leaders might infer that Washington is gearing up for a bigger attack. Similarly, imagine that Iran decides to protect its missiles and mines from a preemptive U.S. strike by moving them out of storage and dispersing them. The United States might interpret such defensive measures as preparation for a dramatic escalation—and respond by carrying out the very preemptive strike that Iran sought to avoid.

In one scenario, all these escalatory pressures set off a larger conflict. The United States sinks several Iranian ships and attacks a port and military training facilities. Iran drops mines and attacks U.S. ships in the Persian Gulf. Iranian proxies kill dozens of U.S. troops, aid workers, and diplomats in the region, and Iranian missiles strike U.S. bases in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, causing limited damage. At every turn, Iran tries to save face by showing resolve but stopping short of all-out war; Washington, intent on "reestablishing deterrence," retaliates a little more aggressively each time. Before long, the two have tumbled into full-scale hostilities.

Even if neither side wants to fight, miscalculation, missed signals, and the logic of escalation could conspire to turn even a minor clash into a regional conflagration. At this point, the United States faces a choice: continue the tit-for-tat escalation or overwhelm the enemy and destroy as much of its military capabilities as possible, as the United States did during Operation Desert Storm against Iraq in 1991. The Pentagon recommends "going big" so as not to leave U.S. forces vulnerable to further Iranian attacks. Bolton and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo support the plan. Trump agrees, seeing a large-scale assault as the only way to prevent humiliation.

The United States sends some 120,000 troops to its bases in the Middle East, a figure approaching the 150,000 to 180,000 troops deployed to Iraq at any given point from 2003 to 2008. American aircraft attack conventional Iranian targets and much of Iran's nuclear infrastructure in Natanz, Fordow, Arak, and Esfahan. For now, the military does not start a ground invasion or seek to topple the

regime in Tehran, but ground forces are sent to the region, ready to invade if necessary.

Iran's military is soon overwhelmed, but not before mounting a powerful, all-out counterattack. It steps up mining and swarming small-boat attacks on U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf. Missile attacks, cyberattacks, and other acts of sabotage against Gulf oil facilities send global oil prices skyrocketing for weeks or months, perhaps to $150 or more per barrel. Iran launches as many missiles as it can at U.S. military bases. Many of the missiles miss, but some do not. Iran's proxies target U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, and Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen increase their rocket attacks against Saudi Arabia. Iran may even attempt terrorist attacks on U.S. embassies or military facilities around the globe—but will likely fail, as such attacks are difficult to execute successfully.

Israel might get drawn into the conflict through clashes with Hezbollah, the Shiite militant group and political party in Lebanon. Iran has tremendous influence over Hezbollah and could potentially push the group to attack Israel using its arsenal of 130,000 rockets in an attempt to raise the costs of the conflict for the United States and one of its closest allies. Such an attack will likely overwhelm Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system, leaving the Israelis with no choice but to invade Hezbollah's strongholds in southern Lebanon and possibly southern Syria. What began as a U.S.-Iranian skirmish now engulfs the entire region, imposing not only devastating losses on Iran's leadership and people but serious costs in blood and treasure for the United States, Israel, Lebanon, the Gulf states, and other regional players.

The United States may stumble into the kind of regime change operation it carried out in Iraq and Libya—but this time on a much larger scale.
Even once major military operations cease, the conflict will not be over. Iranian proxies are hard to eradicate through conventional battlefield tactics and will target U.S. forces and partners in the Middle East for years to come. U.S. air strikes would set back the Iranian nuclear program anywhere from 18 months to three years. But air strikes cannot destroy scientific know-how, and the conflict may push Iran to take the program further underground and build an actual nuclear weapon—a goal it has refrained from achieving thus far.

Moreover, even if the United States goes into the conflict hoping only to weaken Iran militarily, it will soon face calls at home and from Jerusalem, Riyadh, and Abu Dhabi to overthrow the Islamic Republic. As a result, the United States may stumble into the kind of regime change operation it carried out in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011—but this time on a much larger scale. Iran today has a population of 80 million, more than three times that of Iraq at the beginning of the Iraq war. The country's topography is much more challenging than Iraq's. The cost of an invasion would over time reach into the trillions of dollars. And consider for a moment the destabilizing effects of a refugee crisis stemming from a country with a population the size of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria combined.

The United States might instead try to engineer the collapse of the Islamic Republic without invading, as it tried in Iraq in the 1990s. But unlike many Middle Eastern countries that have grown unstable in recent years, Iran is not an artificial creation of European colonialism but a millennia-old civilization whose nationalism runs deep. Iranians are not likely to respond to a major war with the United States by blaming their own leadership and trying to overthrow it. Even if they did, the most likely result would be a transition from clerical rule to a military dictatorship headed by the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. In the worst case, internal collapse would lead to civil war, just as it has with several of Iran's neighbors, potentially creating terrorist safe havens and enormous refugee flows.

Even short of such worst-case scenarios, any war with Iran would tie down the United States in yet another Middle Eastern conflict for years to come. The war and its aftermath would likely cost hundreds of billions of dollars and hobble not just Trump but future U.S. presidents. Such a commitment would mean the end of the United States' purported shift to great-power competition with Russia and China.

Most likely, all parties understand these dangers—not least the Iranian government, for which a war with the United States would be particularly catastrophic. And for this reason, both sides will continue to try to avoid an all-out war. But sometimes even wars that nobody wants still happen. The Trump administration and the Islamic Republic should tread much more carefully, lest they send their countries down a dangerous and costly spiral that will quickly spin out of control.

The End of Asylum By Nanjala Nyabola

A small tent city is taking shape in Tapachula, on the Mexican-Guatemalan border, and its inhabitants are living proof of the systematic erosion of one of the foundational principles of the post–World War II international order. The residents are primarily refugees and migrants from African countries who fled political persecution, social upheaval, and economic uncertainty, taking one of the longest and most perilous migration routes in the world in the hope of reaching the United States.

Until recently, most would have been granted a 21-day grace period to either normalize their residency status in Mexico or continue on to the U.S. border. But since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in May that the administration of President Donald Trump can deny asylum to anyone who has crossed a third country en route to the U.S. border, Mexico has started denying Africans free passage through its territory. And so the migrants arriving in Tapachula have nowhere to go. They are trapped between hard-line U.S. asylum policies, Mexico's acquiescence to those policies, and a growing global backlash against anyone seeking asylum.

The United States is far from the only country to slam its gates on those fleeing crumbling social, political, and economic systems. Around the world, rich and poor countries alike are pulling up their drawbridges, slashing the number of refugees they are willing to accept, and denying asylum to those who might have been admitted in the past. Europe, for instance, sank to a new nadir in the summer of 2019 by criminalizing rescue in the Mediterranean, allowing preventable deaths at sea, and forcibly returning vulnerable people to torture and indefinite detention in Libya.

In Africa, Asia, and South America, the mood is much the same. Kenya is building a wall along its border with Somalia and sending thousands of Somali refugees back into a war zone. Bangladesh plans to repatriate thousands of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar with the help of the UN Refugee Agency, despite the fact that other UN agencies warn that returnees still face the threat of genocide. And across South America and the Caribbean, Venezuelans fleeing their country's economic collapse have been met with sudden policy changes

designed to make them ineligible for asylum, while Australia's extraterritorial detention system, based on the Pacific island of Nauru, remains a symbol of the violent lengths to which that country is willing to go to prevent people from seeking safety within its borders.

Demand for asylum has never been higher, with more than 25.9 million people around the world having fled their countries as a result of war and instability. Yet the list of countries willing to take them in is shrinking by the day, and the international system that created and is bound to protect the right to asylum is increasingly complicit in its demise. If there were a theme song to 2019, it would be a dirge for the end of asylum.

ROOTS OF AN INVIOLABLE RIGHT

Derived from the ancient Greek asulos, which roughly translates to "inviolable," the word "asylum" first entered the English lexicon in the late Middle Ages, when it was understood to mean "an inviolable shelter or protection from pursuit or arrest." By definition, an asylum seeker was a person who sought a form of protection that could never be violated, broken, or infringed upon. Throughout history, various nations have recognized or aspired to some version of the right to asylum—from the ancient Greek and Hebrew civilizations to medieval England and the French First Republic.

In Europe, the history of asylum was closely intertwined with that of religious discrimination and strife. When the Catholic monarchs of Spain ordered the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Jews in 1492, for example, many sought refuge in Turkey, Italy, and North Africa. In fact, many of the atrocities of World War II were the culmination of violent and discriminatory practices that had caused episodic displacement for centuries. One major distinction of the Nazi period, however, was that targeted groups, including Jews, Roma, Sinti, and homosexuals, saw their avenues of escape gradually closed off. No country was willing to take them in.

In 1938, representatives of 32 countries met in Évian, France, to try to agree on a coordinated response to the refugee crisis in Europe. While all recognized the gravity of the situation, most steadfastly refused to accept more refugees. Thus, in 1939, a ship carrying more than 900 Jews fleeing Nazi persecution was turned

away by Cuba, the United States, and finally Canada, before it returned to Europe, where the Nazis eventually executed 254 of the passengers.

An inviolable right to asylum was seen as necessary to end Europe's endless cycle of war and displacement.

This shameful history explains the centrality of the principle of asylum to the post–World War II international order. Its inviolability was seen as necessary to end Europe's endless cycle of war and displacement. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, declared that "everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees codified this protection for anyone persecuted on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. However, the convention stopped short of requiring countries to grant qualifying individuals asylum, saying only that they should do so.

As a result, asylum became an ad hoc and often political affair. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union almost always granted asylum to political dissidents from the other side, while extending permissive immigration policies toward countries in their spheres of influence. In much of the rest of the world, asylum was handled on a situational basis—again, often to serve explicitly political ends. For example, people fleeing apartheid in Zimbabwe and South Africa routinely received protection, legal status, and travel documents from other African countries looking to contribute to the broader antiapartheid struggle. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela describes his journey through 13 African countries in 1967, using travel documents granted by Tanzania and Ethiopia.

After the end of the Cold War, world powers had less interest and fewer opportunities to instrumentalize asylum, and refugee protection became more formalized as a legal and bureaucratic practice. At the same time, however, civil conflicts in places such as Somalia, Angola, and the former Yugoslavia produced extended turmoil and millions of refugees. As pressure mounted on receiving countries, many decided that these refugees did not meet the rigid bureaucratic requirements of the 1951 refugee convention: fear of general violence or instability did not fit neatly into any of the five narrow categories of persecution outlined in the UN convention. When millions needed asylum the most, countries

defined the right as narrowly as they could so as to shoulder the least-possible burden.

THE AGE OF ENCAMPMENT

Thus began the age of encampment. Around the world, countries receiving large numbers of refugees began to force the displaced into camps. Usually, the host governments granted these new arrivals prima facie refugee status, because they had fled their home countries en masse, but rarely did they go through the process of adjudicating individual asylum claims. As a result, these people were often treated as second-class refugees, unable to access the same rights and freedoms as refugees granted asylum through an individual determination process or resettled to a third country such as the United States or Canada. Many were denied freedom of movement, barred from receiving international travel documents, and given limited access to education and health care outside the camp.

The scale of displacement after the end of the Cold War quickly overwhelmed major host countries such as Kenya and Pakistan, as well as the UN system that kept the camps running. People with prima facie recognition but not full refugee status remained in limbo for decades. Some countries tightened the bureaucratic standards for full status even further, and many applications stalled indefinitely. Even then, the host countries insisted that the camps be treated as temporary, a designation that made the denial of full refugee status more politically palatable.

That most of the countries hosting large numbers of asylum seekers were poor countries, while rich countries led the way in eroding the right to asylum, was no accident.

The alarming rise in encampment—and the realization that the camps were anything but temporary—should have catalyzed a review of the 1951 convention with the aim of closing the gap between refugees with full status and those who remained in camps. Instead, the international community responded with a measure of delusion, refusing to recognize that the camps were slowly becoming permanent open-air prisons. To agree on a new convention at a time when more and more countries wanted less and less asylum would no doubt have been difficult. Already, the guiding philosophy in many countries had shifted from default inclusion to default exclusion. But failure to end the two-tiered system, in

which some refugees enjoy the full protections of the 1951 refugee convention and some remain at the mercy of host governments—perpetual asylum seekers—set the stage for the current crisis.

That most of the countries hosting large numbers of asylum seekers were poor countries, while rich countries led the way in eroding the right to asylum, was no accident. UN agencies, whose budgets were mainly funded by rich countries, were complicit in maintaining this status quo. Some asylum seekers were eventually resettled from the camps to third countries, mainly in the developed world, but only a tiny fraction of those in need of asylum. And so the camps became permanent cities. Today, there are millions of people around the world who have never known life outside of a refugee camp. The Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya, for example, was until recently the largest refugee camp in the world, with a population of more than 500,000. But Dadaab doesn't exist on official maps of Kenya, even though at its peak it would have been the country's third-largest city. Its residents enjoy none of the rights of Kenyan citizenship.

HOW ASYLUM ENDS

Today, the status of asylum as an international legal principle is more tenuous than ever. The age of encampment has led to an intensifying global retrenchment, as the poor countries bearing the brunt of the burden are now reluctant to accept more asylum seekers. Some, with the cooperation of the United Nations, are actively returning refugees to conflict zones, in clear breach of the 1951 convention.

At the same time, crises not contemplated at the time of the 1951 convention expose the regime's inadequacy. Large-scale commercial logging has displaced whole indigenous communities from the rainforests of Brazil and Indonesia. Rising sea levels threaten island nations and coastal cities whose residents could soon be uprooted. And higher global temperatures will eventually make parts of the world uninhabitable while fueling extreme weather events such as Hurricane Dorian, which leveled much of the Bahamas earlier this year. Yet there is no internationally recognized definition of a climate refugee, no doubt because many countries are slow to recognize the threat.

In an ideal world, now would be the time to review and update the 1951 refugee convention. That was the original goal of many who pushed for the Global

Compact on Refugees, a new international framework for addressing the refugee crisis, which the UN General Assembly passed last year. But the nonbinding compact fell far short of expectations, failing to sufficiently shift the responsibility for hosting refugees from poor to rich countries and doing nothing to defend or expand the right to asylum. Along with Prime Minister Viktor Orban's Hungary, the United States nonetheless voted against the Global Compact on Refugees, limited and toothless though it was.

Both of the ideas embedded in the historical definition of asylum—inviolability and protection—are under attack as never before. Last month, the incoming head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, changed the title of her migration commissioner to "vice president for protecting our European way of life," seemingly endorsing the idea that migration is a threat to Europe. There was a moment of social media outrage, but the discourse around refugees in Europe remains unchanged. Few political leaders anywhere in the world are willing to defend the inviolability of the right to asylum. And this is how asylum will end—in a low boil of ambivalence that will eventually consume this foundational principle of the liberal order.

The Demolition of U.S. Diplomacy By William J. Burns

Not Since Joe McCarthy Has the State Department Suffered Such a Devastating Blow

In my three and a half decades as a U.S. Foreign Service officer, proudly serving five presidents and ten secretaries of state from both parties, I've never seen an attack on diplomacy as damaging, to both the State Department as an institution and our international influence, as the one now underway.

The contemptible mistreatment of Marie Yovanovitch—the ambassador to Ukraine who was dismissed for getting in the way of the president's scheme to solicit foreign interference in U.S. elections—is just the latest example of President Donald Trump's dangerous brand of diplomatic malpractice. His is a diplomacy of narcissism, bent on advancing private interests at the expense of our national interests.

Ambassador Yovanovitch is not the first professional diplomat to find herself in political crosshairs in the history of the State Department. Trump is not the first demagogue to bully career personnel. And Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is not the first secretary of state derelict in his duty. But the damage from this assault—coming from within the executive branch itself, after nearly three years of unceasing diplomatic self-sabotage, and at a particularly fragile geopolitical moment—will likely prove to be even more severe to both diplomatic tradecraft and U.S. foreign policy.

THE NEW MCCARTHYISM

Almost 70 years ago, in the early years of the Cold War, Senator Joseph McCarthy conducted a savage campaign against "disloyalty" in the State Department. Partisan investigators, untethered to evidence or ethics, forced out 81 department employees in the first half of the 1950s. Among them was John Paton Davies, Jr., an accomplished China hand. His sin was to foresee the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War. Davies was subjected to nine security and loyalty investigations, none of which substantiated the paranoid

accusation that he was a communist sympathizer. Nevertheless, in a moment of profound political cowardice, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles fired him.

Purging Davies and his colleagues was not only wrong but also foolish. The loss of such expertise blinded American diplomacy on China for a generation and had a chilling effect on the department and its morale. One of the United States' most distinguished diplomats, George Kennan, was also pushed out of the Foreign Service during this era. He tried to defend Davies, who had served with him in Moscow and on the Policy Planning Staff, to little avail. Years later, Kennan wrote in his memoirs that McCarthy's onslaught and the department's failure to defend its employees was the most "sobering and disillusioning" episode of his long career.

That Senator McCarthy's chief counsel, Roy Cohn, was also Donald Trump's lawyer and mentor is one of history's sad ironies. Trump's scorched-earth tactics, casual relationship with truth, and contempt for career public service bear more than a passing resemblance to the playbook that Cohn wrote for McCarthy. And when Trump cried out for a "new Roy Cohn" to replace the late original, it was hardly a surprise that former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani appeared—or that he dove into the muck of the Ukraine scandal and agitated for the removal of a career ambassador whose integrity and expertise proved to be an obstruction.

One might imagine that the State Department's leadership would stand up to the president and for its personnel—so many of whom are doing hard jobs in hard places around the world. If only that were the case.

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Instead, today's leaders have shown no more spine than Dulles did. Secretary Pompeo apparently worked around the embassy in Kiev to advance the president's private agenda, allowed specious opposition research about Yovanovitch to circulate around the department, and sat on his hands as Trump slandered Yovanovitch on the infamous call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and warned ominously that "she's going to go through some things." The ghost of Roy Cohn was smiling somewhere.

Even before the Ukraine mess, the Trump administration had been waging a war on diplomacy for nearly three years. The White House regularly pushes historic cuts to diplomacy and development spending, which is already 19 times smaller than the defense budget. Career diplomats are sidelined, with only one of 28 assistant secretary-rank positions filled by a Foreign Service officer, and more ambassadorships going to political appointees in this administration than in any in recent history. One-fifth of ambassadorships remain unfilled, including critical posts.

Not coincidentally, applications to join the Foreign Service have declined precipitously, with fewer people taking the entrance exam in 2019 than in more than two decades. The pace of resignations by career professionals is depressing, the pernicious practice of retaliation against individual officers just because they worked on controversial issues in the last administration is damning, and the silence from the department's leadership is deafening.

AGAINST THE AMERICAN INTEREST

Last spring, I wrote an essay in Foreign Affairs called "The Lost Art of American Diplomacy." It was meant less as an elegy than as a reminder of diplomacy's significance. I'm feeling much more elegiac today.

To clean up the institutional wreckage in the State Department will take many years. The damage to our influence and reputation may prove to be even longer lasting—and harder to repair.

The practical consequences are not hard to discern. If a U.S. ambassador doesn't speak for the president, and the embassy is seen as an enemy of the White House, why would the local government take seriously its diplomatic messages? Why use official channels, rather than speak directly to the president's personal lawyer and his grifting confidants? If the key to unlocking aid is stroking the president's vanity, why undertake the hard work of economic or political reform, with all the risks that entails?

For dictators, Trump is the gift that keeps on giving, a non-stop advertisement for Western self-dealing.

The president's actions distort diplomatic practice and decapitate the American interest. Because of them, a new Ukrainian administration is all the more exposed to corruption and democratic backsliding, and all the more vulnerable to Russian manipulation and aggression. Russian President Vladimir Putin, professionally trained to manufacture compromising material on all sorts of opponents, couldn't have produced a more disruptive document than the summary of the Trump-Zelensky call last July, which has sowed political dysfunction in both Washington and Kiev.

By using his public office for personal gain, Trump has affirmed Putin's long-held conviction—shared by autocrats the world over—that Americans are just as venal and self-absorbed as they are, just more hypocritical about it. For dictators, Trump is the gift that keeps on giving, a non-stop advertisement for Western self-dealing. So much for enlightened self-interest. So much for the power of our example. So much for our credibility.

We are digging a deep hole for ourselves in a world that is changing fast, filled with players who won't wait for us to stop digging and a landscape that is quickly hardening against U.S. interests. Our allies are confused. Our adversaries are quick to take advantage. The institutions and coalitions we shaped over decades are wobbling. The confidence of the American people in the power and purpose of disciplined American leadership is evaporating.

THE URGENCY OF RENEWAL

The Trump administration's dereliction of duty takes place at a time when the United States will need to rely on diplomacy more, not less, to advance its interests and values in an ever more competitive world.

I closed my essay six months ago on a reasonably optimistic note. I acknowledged that a long, tough journey lay ahead—that American diplomacy would take a lot longer to fix than it has taken to break. But I also emphasized the opportunity before us, which the malpractice of the Trump administration has thrown into sharp relief. The journey toward renewal will be even more arduous now, and even more urgent.

Joseph Welch, the legendary attorney in the Army-McCarthy hearings, burst the balloon of McCarthyism in 1954 when he posed his unforgettable question:

“Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you left no sense of decency?”

The question was rhetorical then, just as it is today for the McCarthy imitators in and around the Trump administration. Their sense of decency is well hidden, their venality and vindictiveness on full display.

But the decency that burns brightly, and that gives me some lingering faith even in these dark times for American diplomacy, is that which career officers like Yovanovitch have displayed. Their honor and commitment characterize professional diplomacy and public service at their best. So long as those qualities remain intact, however much they are battered in the age of Trump, there is still hope for diplomacy’s renewal.

The United States Should Fear a Faltering China By Michael Beckley

The defining geopolitical story of our time is the slow death of U.S. hegemony in favor of a rising China. Harbingers of Beijing's ascent are everywhere. China's overseas investments span the globe. The Chinese navy patrols major sea lanes, while the country colonizes the South China Sea in slow motion. And the government cracks down on dissent at home while administering a hefty dose of nationalist propaganda.

Beijing's newfound assertiveness looks at first glance like the mark of growing power and ambition. But in fact it is nothing of the sort. China's actions reflect profound unease among the country's leaders, as they contend with their country's first sustained economic slowdown in a generation and can discern no end in sight. China's economic conditions have steadily worsened since the 2008 financial crisis. The country's growth rate has fallen by half and is likely to plunge further in the years ahead, as debt, foreign protectionism, resource depletion, and rapid aging take their toll.

China's economic woes will make it a less competitive rival in the long term but a greater threat to the United States today. When rising powers have suffered such slowdowns in the past, they became more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. China seems to be headed down just such a path.

RED FLAGS

In March 2007, at the height of a years-long economic boom, then Premier Wen Jiabao gave an uncharacteristically gloomy press conference. China's growth model, Wen warned, had become "unsteady, unbalanced, uncoordinated, and unsustainable." The warning was prescient: in the years since, China's official gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate has dropped from 15 percent to six percent—the slowest rate in 30 years. The country's economy is now experiencing its longest deceleration of the post-Mao era.

A growth rate of six percent could still be considered spectacular. By way of contrast, consider that the U.S. economy has been stuck at a rate of around two percent. But many economists believe that China's true rate is roughly half the

official figure. Moreover, GDP growth does not necessarily translate into greater wealth. If a country spends billions of dollars on infrastructure projects, its GDP will rise. But if those projects consist of bridges to nowhere, the country's stock of wealth will remain unchanged or even decline. To accumulate wealth, a country needs to increase its productivity—a measure that has actually dropped in China over the last decade. Practically all of China's GDP growth has resulted from the government's pumping capital into the economy. Subtract government stimulus spending, some economists argue, and China's economy may not be growing at all.

Subtract stimulus spending and China's economy may not be growing at all.
The signs of unproductive growth are easy to spot. China has built more than 50 ghost cities—sprawling metropolises of empty offices, apartments, malls, and airports. Nationwide, more than 20 percent of homes are vacant. Excess capacity in major industries tops 30 percent: factories sit idle and goods rot in warehouses. Total losses from all this waste are difficult to calculate, but China's government estimates that it blew at least $6 trillion on "ineffective investment" between 2009 and 2014 alone. China's debt has quadrupled in absolute size over the last ten years and currently exceeds 300 percent of its GDP. No major country has ever racked up so much debt so fast in peacetime.

Worse still, assets that once propelled China's economic ascent are fast turning into liabilities. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the country enjoyed expanding access to foreign markets and technology. China was nearly self-sufficient in food, water, and energy resources, and it had the greatest demographic dividend in history, with eight working-age adults for every citizen aged 65 or older. Now China is losing access to foreign markets and technology. Water has become scarce, and the country is importing more food and energy than any other nation, having decimated its own natural endowments. Thanks to the one-child policy, China is about to experience the worst aging crisis in history, because it will lose 200 million workers and young consumers and gain 300 million seniors in the course of three decades. Any country that has accumulated debt, lost productivity, or aged at anything close to China's current clip has lost at least one decade to near-zero economic growth. How will China handle the coming slump?

WE'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE

When fast-growing great powers run out of economic steam, they typically do not mellow out. Rather, they become prickly and aggressive. Rapid growth has fueled their ambitions, raised their citizens' expectations, and unnerved their rivals. Suddenly, stagnation dashes those ambitions and expectations and gives enemies a chance to pounce. Fearful of unrest, leaders crack down on domestic dissent. They search feverishly for ways to restore steady growth and keep internal opposition and foreign predation at bay. Expansion presents one such opportunity—a chance to seek new sources of wealth, rally the nation around the ruling regime, and ward off rival powers.

The historical precedents are plentiful. Over the past 150 years, nearly a dozen great powers experienced rapid economic growth followed by long slowdowns. None accepted the new normal quietly. U.S. growth plummeted in the late nineteenth century, and Washington reacted by violently suppressing labor strikes at home while pumping investment and exports into Latin America and East Asia, annexing territory there and building a gigantic navy to protect its far-flung assets. Russia, too, had a late-nineteenth-century slowdown. The tsar responded by consolidating his authority, building the Trans-Siberian Railway, and occupying parts of Korea and Manchuria. Japan and Germany suffered economic crises during the interwar years: both countries turned to authoritarianism and went on rampages to seize resources and smash foreign rivals. France had a postwar boom that fizzled in the 1970s: the French government then tried to reconstitute its economic sphere of influence in Africa, deploying 14,000 troops in its former colonies and embarking on a dozen military interventions there over the next two decades. As recently as 2009, world oil prices collapsed, which led a stagnating Russia to pressure its neighbors to join a regional trade bloc. A few years later, that campaign of coercion spurred Ukraine's Maidan revolution and Russia's annexation of Crimea.

When fast-growing great powers run out of economic steam, they become prickly and aggressive.

The question, then, is not whether a struggling rising power will expand abroad but what form that expansion will take. The answer depends in part on the structure of the global economy. How open are foreign markets? How safe are international trade routes? If circumstances allow it, a slowing great power might be able to rejuvenate its economy through peaceful trade and investment, as

Japan tried to do after its postwar economic miracle came to an end in the 1970s. If that path is closed, however, then the country in question may have to push its way into foreign markets or secure critical resources by force—as Japan did in the 1930s. The global economy is more open today than in previous eras, but a global rise in protectionism and the trade war with the United States increasingly threaten China's access to foreign markets and resources. China's leaders fear, with good reason, that the era of hyperglobalization that enabled their country's rise is over.

The structure of a country's home economy will further shape its response to a slowdown. The Chinese government owns many of the country's major firms, and those firms substantially influence the state. For this reason, the government will go to great lengths to shield companies from foreign competition and help them conquer overseas markets when profits dry up at home. A state-led economy like China's is unlikely to liberalize during a slowdown. Doing so would require eliminating subsidies and protections for state-favored firms, reforms that risk instigating a surge in bankruptcies, unemployment, and popular resentment. Liberalization also could disrupt the crony capitalist networks that the regime depends on for survival. Instead, regimes like China's usually resort to mercantilist expansion, using money and muscle to carve out exclusive economic zones abroad and divert popular anger toward foreign enemies. The most aggressive expanders of all tend to be authoritarian capitalist states, of which China is clearly a prime example.

TROUBLE AHEAD

China's recent behavior is a textbook response to economic insecurity. Back in the 1990s and the early years of this century, when the country's economy was booming, China loosened political controls and announced to the world its "peaceful rise," to be pursued through economic integration and friendly diplomatic relations. Compare the situation today: labor protests are on the rise, elites have been moving their money and children out of the country en masse, and the government has outlawed the reporting of negative economic news. President Xi Jinping has given multiple internal speeches warning party members of the potential for a Soviet-style collapse. The government has doubled internal security spending over the past decade, creating the most advanced propaganda, censorship, and surveillance systems in history. It has detained one million Uighurs in internment camps and concentrated power in the hands of a

dictator for life. State propaganda blames setbacks, such as the 2015 stock market collapse and the 2019 Hong Kong protests, on Western meddling. These are not the actions of a confident superpower.

China has projected its power abroad throughout this turbulent period—tripling foreign direct investment and quintupling overseas lending in an ambitious attempt to secure markets and resources for Chinese firms. Beijing also has gone out militarily, launching more warships over the past decade than the whole British navy holds and flooded major sea lanes in Asia with hundreds of government vessels and aircraft. It has built military outposts across the South China Sea and frequently resorts to sanctions, ship-ramming, and aerial intercepts in territorial disputes with its neighbors.

If China's growth slows further in the coming years, as is likely, the Chinese government will probably double down on the repression and aggression of the past decade. When the country's leaders cannot rely on rapid growth to bolster their domestic legitimacy and international clout, they will be all the more eager to squelch dissent, burnish their nationalist credentials, and boost the economy by any means necessary. Moreover, powerful interest groups—most notably, state-owned enterprises and the military and security services—have developed a vested interest in maintaining China's current strategy, which funnels money into their coffers. As a result, the government would struggle to extricate itself from foreign entanglements even if it wanted to.

WASHINGTON'S BALANCING ACT

The danger to the United States and its allies is clear. Rampant espionage, protectionism, a splintered Internet, naval clashes in the East and South China Seas, and a war over Taiwan are only the more obvious risks that a desperate and flailing China will pose. U.S. statecraft will need to contain these risks without causing China to lash out in the process. To that end, Washington will have to deter Chinese aggression, assuage China's insecurities, and insulate the United States from blowback should deterrence and reassurance fail. The inherent tension among these objectives will make the task a very difficult one.

Chinese power will gradually mellow. Now, however, is a moment of maximum danger.

Some initiatives could help strike the proper balance. Instead of deterring Chinese expansionism by sailing provocative but vulnerable naval armadas past China's coastline, for instance, Washington could deploy mobile antiship and surface-to-air missile launchers on allied shores. If the United States joined the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership—and invited China to join, too—Beijing would have the motive and means to reduce its trade-distorting practices without fighting a 1930s-style trade war. China might spurn the offer, but then the treaty would at least strengthen the commitment of its signatories to the free flow of goods, money, and data. In so doing, it would limit the spread of China's mercantilist and digital authoritarian policies. The United States could supplement this stance by investing more in scientific research and investigations into specific Chinese companies and investors, so that it can maintain technological superiority without banning Chinese investment and immigration into the United States. These moves would not eliminate the root causes of U.S.-Chinese rivalry, but they would protect U.S. interests while avoiding a slide into a cold or hot war.

Perhaps in a few decades, Chinese power will gradually mellow. Now, however, is a moment of maximum danger, because China is too weak to feel secure or satisfied with its place in the world order but strong enough to destroy it. As China's economic miracle comes to an end, and Xi's much-touted Chinese Dream slips away, the United States must contain China's outbursts with a careful blend of deterrence, reassurance, and damage limitation. Compared to gearing up for a whole-of-society throwdown against a rising superpower, this mission may seem uninspiring. But it would be smarter—and ultimately more effective.