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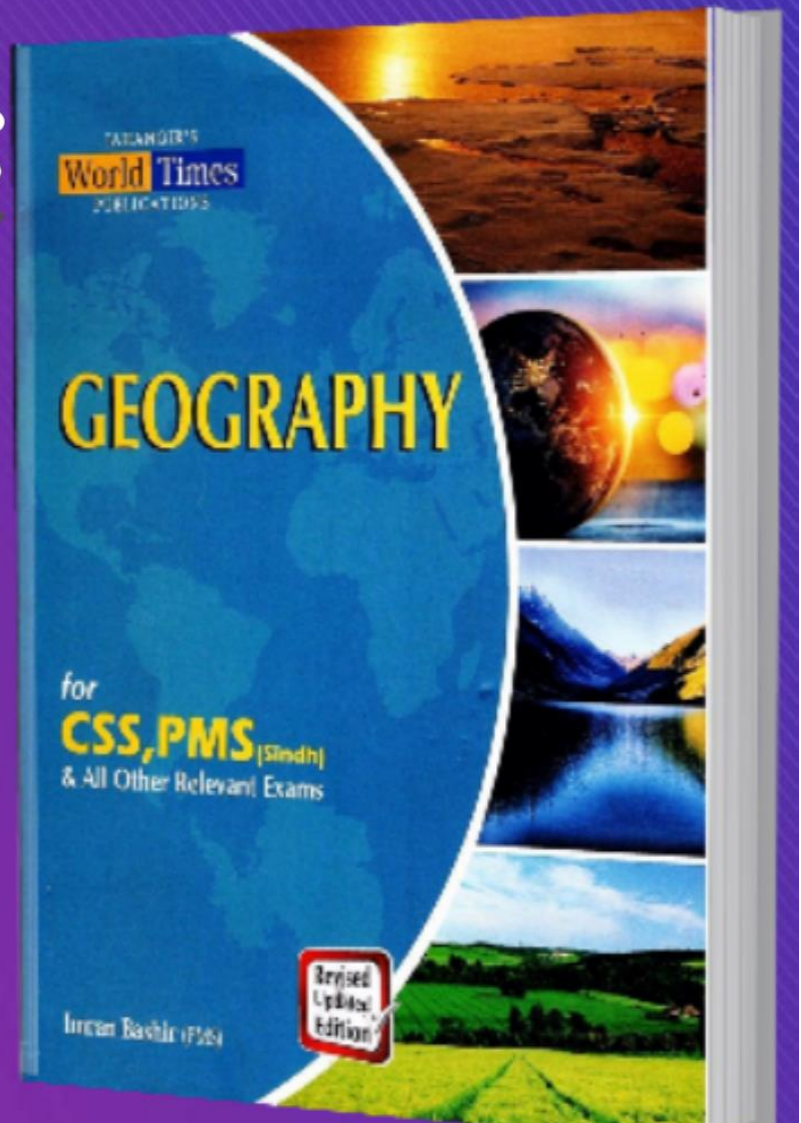
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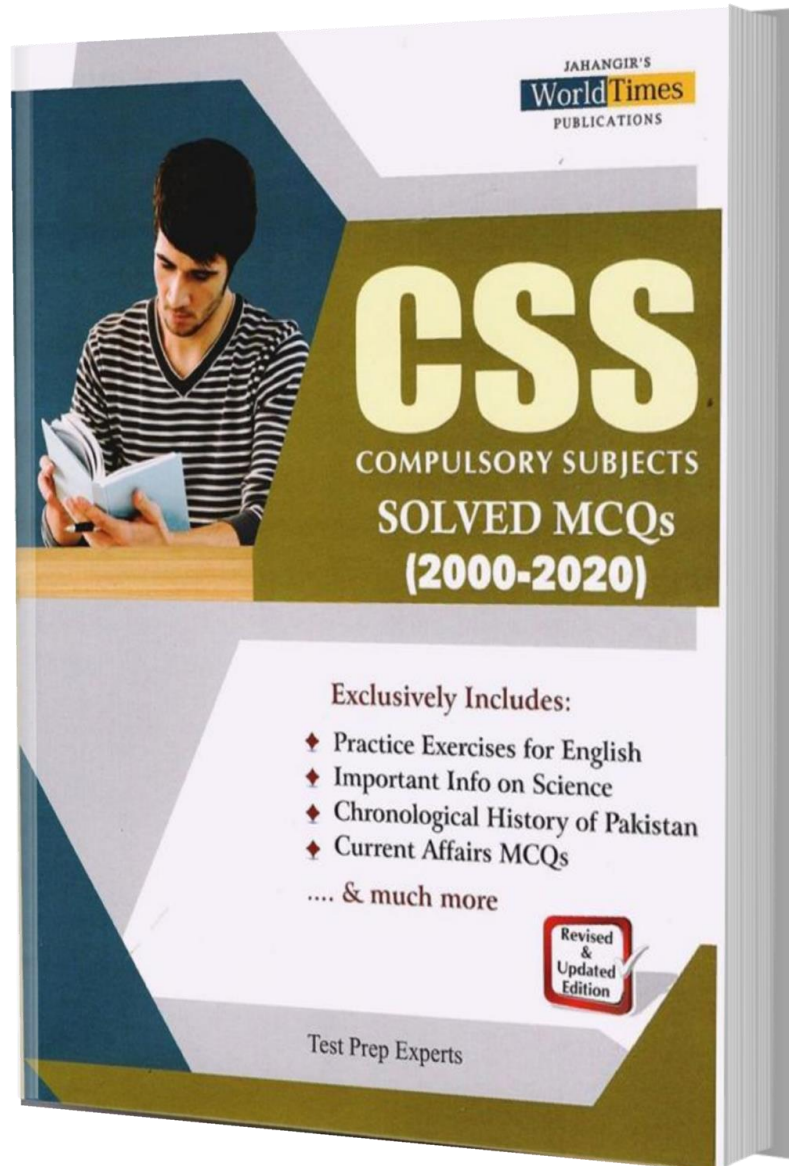
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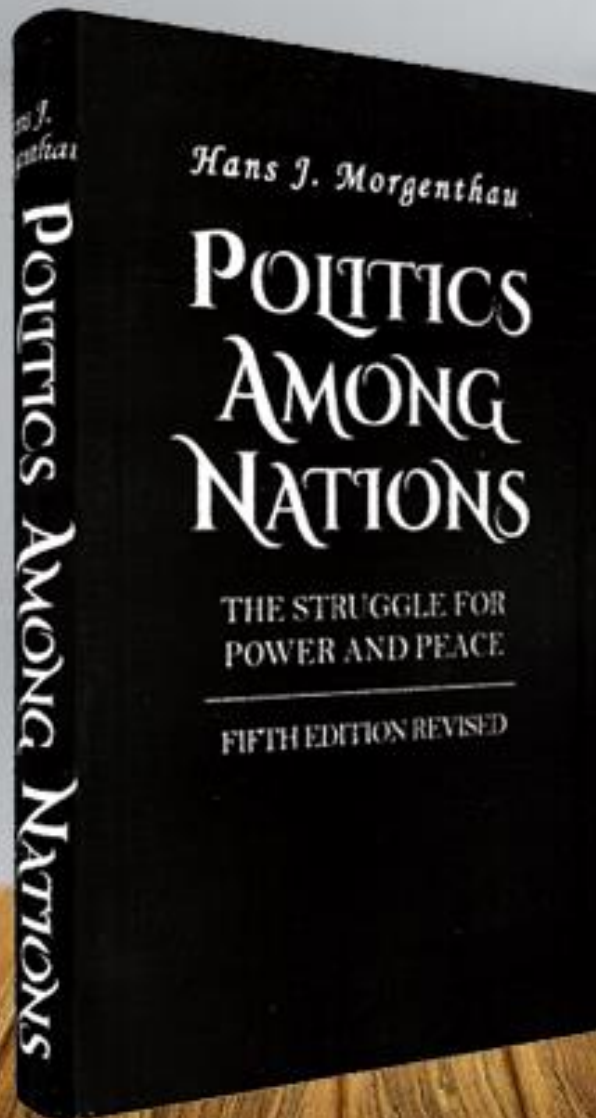
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How Poverty Ends

The Many Paths to Progress—and Why They Might Not Continue

Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020

For all the worries today about the explosion of inequality in rich countries, the last few decades have been remarkably good for the world's poor. Between 1980 and 2016, the average income of the bottom 50 percent of earners nearly doubled, as this group captured 12 percent of the growth in global GDP. The number of those living on less than \$1.90 a day—the World Bank's threshold for "extreme poverty"—has dropped by more than half since 1990, from nearly two billion to around 700 million. Never before in human history have so many people been lifted out of poverty so quickly.

There have also been massive improvements in quality of life, even for those who remain poor. Since 1990, the global maternal mortality rate has been cut in half. So has the infant mortality rate, saving the lives of more than 100 million children. Today, except in those places experiencing major social disruption, nearly all children, boys and girls

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They are the authors of *Good Economics for Hard Times* (PublicAffairs, 2019), from which portions of this essay are adapted, and winners of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics. Copyright © 2019 by Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo. Reprinted by permission of PublicAffairs.

alike, have access to primary education. Even deaths from HIV/AIDS, an epidemic that once seemed hopeless, peaked soon after the turn of the millennium and have been declining ever since.

A great deal of the credit for these gains can go to economic growth. In addition to increasing people's income, steadily expanding GDPs have allowed governments (and others) to spend more on schools, hospitals, medicines, and income transfers to the poor. Much of the decline in poverty happened in two large economies that have grown particularly fast, China and India. But now, as growth has begun to slow down in both countries, there are reasons to be anxious. Can China and India do anything to avoid stalling? And do these countries offer a sure recipe that other countries can imitate, so that they can lift millions of their people out of poverty?

Economists, ourselves included, have spent entire careers studying development and poverty, and the uncomfortable truth is that the field still doesn't have a good sense of why some economies expand and others don't. There is no clear formula for growth. If there is a common thread, it is that the fastest growth appears to come from reallocating poorly allocated resources—that is, putting capital and labor toward their most productive use. But eventually, the returns from that process diminish, at which point countries need to find a new strategy for combating poverty.

THE SEARCH FOR GROWTH

Although growth has been key to reducing poverty, “grow faster” or even “continue to grow fast” are more expressions of hope than actionable policy recommendations. During the 1980s and 1990s, economists spent a lot of time running cross-country growth regressions, a type of analysis aimed at predicting growth rates based on a number of variables. Researchers would plug in data—on education, investment, corruption, inequality, culture, distance to the sea, and so on—in an effort to discover which factors helped or hurt growth. The hope was to find a few levers that could be pulled to raise growth.

There were two problems with this search. First, as the economist William Easterly has shown, growth rates for the same country can change drastically from decade to decade without much apparent change in anything else. In the 1960s and 1970s, Brazil was a global front-runner in growth; starting around 1980, it essentially stopped growing for two decades (before growing again and then stopping again). In 1988, Robert Lucas, one of the founders of modern macro-

economics, published an article in which he wondered why India was such a laggard and wished it would become a fast grower, like Egypt or Indonesia. As fate would have it, India's economy was just beginning a 30-year period of fast growth, while Egypt's and Indonesia's were starting to fall behind. Bangladesh, widely derided as a basket case shortly after its founding in 1971, saw its economy grow at five percent or more for most years between 1990 and 2015, and in 2016, 2017, and 2018, Bangladesh's growth exceeded seven percent—making it among the 20 fastest-growing economies in the world. In all these cases, growth came or went without some obvious reason.

Second, at a more fundamental level, these efforts to discover what causes growth make little sense. Almost every variable for a given country is partly a product of something else. Take education, one factor positively correlated with growth. Education is partly a function of a government's effectiveness at running and funding schools. But a government that is good at doing that is probably good at other things, as well—say, building roads. If growth is higher in countries with better educational systems, should the schools that educate the workforce get credit, or the roads that make trade easier? Or is something else responsible? Further muddying the picture, it is likely that people feel more committed to educating their children when the economy is doing well—so perhaps growth causes education, and not just the other way around. Trying to tease out single factors that lead to growth is a fool's errand. So, by extension, is coming up with corresponding policy recommendations.

What, then, are policymakers left with? There are some things clearly worth avoiding: hyperinflation; extremely overvalued fixed exchange rates; communism in its Soviet, Maoist, or North Korean varieties; the kind of total government chokehold on private enterprise that India had in the 1970s, with state ownership of everything from shipyards to shoe factories. But this is not particularly helpful advice today, given that hardly anyone is reaching for such extreme options anymore.

What most developing countries want to know is not whether they should nationalize all private industry overnight but whether they should emulate China's economic model. Although China is very much a market economy, the country's approach to capitalism differs greatly from the classic Anglo-Saxon model, characterized by low taxes and few regulations, and even from its European variant, with a greater role for the state. In China, the state, at both the national and local levels, plays an outsize role in the allocation of land, capital, and even labor.

Other economies in East Asia have also deviated from the traditional capitalist model and experienced decades of high growth; consider Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, all places where the government initially pursued an active industrial policy.

All these economies achieved spectacular success after pursuing unconventional policies. The question is whether they did so because of their choices or in spite of them. Did East Asia just luck out, or is there a lesson to be learned from its success? The economies there were also devastated by World War II, so the fast growth might in part have been a function of mere recovery. Moreover, what elements of the Chinese experience are countries supposed to emulate? Should they start with Deng Xiaoping's China, a dirt-poor economy with comparatively excellent education and health care and a very flat income distribution? Or with the Cultural Revolution, an attempt to wipe out the advantages of the elites and place everyone on an even playing field? Or with the preceding 4,000 years of Chinese history? Those who herald the experience of the East Asian economies to prove the virtue of one approach or the other are dreaming: there is no way to prove any such thing.

There simply is no accepted recipe for how to make poor countries achieve permanently high growth. Even the experts seem to have accepted this. In 2006, the World Bank asked the economist Michael Spence to lead a commission on economic growth. In its final report, the group recognized that there are no general principles for growth and that no two instances of economic expansion are quite alike. Easterly described their efforts in less charitable terms: "After two years of work by the commission of 21 world leaders and experts, an 11-member working group, 300 academic experts, 12 workshops, 13 consultations, and a budget of \$4m, the experts' answer to the question of how to attain high growth was roughly: we do not know, but trust experts to figure it out."

THE LOW-HANGING FRUIT

Economists did learn something, however, from the back-and-forth about the sources of growth. In particular, they came to understand that transitions are an important yet underemphasized part of the growth story. One of the central tenets of traditional growth theory was that transitions were unimportant, because market forces ensured that resources were smoothly and speedily delivered to their most productive use. The most fertile plots of land should be farmed most intensively. The best workers should end up at the most profitable companies. Inves-

tors should entrust their capital to the most promising entrepreneurs.

But this assumption is often false. In a given economy, productive and nonproductive firms coexist, and resources do not always flow to their best use. This is particularly true in developing countries, where many markets, such as those for credit, land, or labor, function poorly. The problem is often not so much that talent, technology, and capital are not available but that the economy does not appear to put them to their best use. Some companies have more employees than they need, while others are unable to hire. Some firms use the latest technology, while others never do. Some entrepreneurs with great ideas may not be able to finance them, while others who are not particularly talented continue operating. This is what economists call “misallocation.”

Misallocation saps growth, which means that reallocation can improve it. In recent years, economists have tried to quantify just how much growth could come from moving resources to their best uses. Chang-Tai Hsieh and Peter Klenow, for example, found that merely reallocating factors within certain industries, while holding capital and labor constant, could increase productivity in China by 30–50 percent and in India by 40–60 percent. If reallocation took place across a broader swath of the economy, the payoff would be even larger.

In other words, it is possible to spur growth just by reallocating existing resources to more appropriate uses. If a country starts off with its resources very poorly used, as did China before Deng or India in its days of extreme dirigisme, then the first benefits of reform may come from simply harnessing so many poorly used resources. There are many ways to improve allocation, from the moves away from collectivized agriculture that China made under Deng to the efforts India made in the 1990s to speed the resolution of debt disputes and thus make credit markets more efficient.

But the flip side to this is that at a certain point, the gains start to diminish. Many developing economies are now reaching this point. They and the rest of the world will have to come to terms with an uncomfortable truth: the era of breathtaking growth is likely coming to an end.

Consider China’s trajectory. By now, the country has gotten rid of its most blatant forms of misallocation. Wisely, it plowed back the gains from the resulting growth in new investment, and as output grew, it sold that output abroad, benefiting from the world’s seemingly endless hunger for exports. But that strategy has largely run its course, too: now that China is the largest exporter in the world, it cannot possibly continue to

grow its exports much faster than the world economy is growing.

China might still eventually catch up with U.S. output in per capita terms, but its slowing growth means that it will take a long time. If Chinese growth falls to five percent per year, which is not implausible, and stays there, which is perhaps optimistic, and if U.S. growth continues to hover around 1.5 percent, then it will take at least 35 years for China to catch up with the United States in terms of per capita income. In the meantime, it makes sense for Chinese authorities to accept that fast growth is temporary, as they appear to be doing. In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke about adjusting to “the new normal” of slower growth. Many interpreted this to mean that although the days of double-digit annual growth were behind it, the Chinese economy would still expand at seven percent per year for the foreseeable future. But even that may be too optimistic. The International Monetary Fund projects that China’s growth will fall to 5.5 percent by 2024.

A similar story is playing out in India. Beginning around 2002, the country’s manufacturing sector saw sharp improvements in resource allocation. Plants swiftly upgraded their technology, and capital increasingly flowed to the best firms within each industry. Because the improvements appeared to be unrelated to any change in policy, some economists spoke of “India’s mysterious manufacturing miracle.” But it was no miracle—just a modest improvement from a dismal starting point. One can imagine various explanations for the upswing. Perhaps there was a generational shift, as control of companies passed from parents to their children, many of whom had been educated abroad and were often more ambitious and savvy about technology and world markets. Or perhaps it was the effect of the accumulation of modest profits, which eventually made it possible to pay for the shift to bigger and better plants. Regardless of the precise cause, India’s economic rise is best understood as the result of correcting misallocation: the type of growth that can come from picking low-hanging fruit.

That kind of growth cannot go on forever. As the economy sheds its worst plants and firms, the space for further improvement naturally shrinks. Today, India seems to be facing the prospect of a steep deceleration. The International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have all downgraded their growth estimates for India for 2019–20 to around six percent. Others have suggested that India’s economy may have already slowed: Arvind Subramanian, New Delhi’s chief economic

adviser from 2014 to 2018, has argued that official estimates have overstated the country's growth by as much as 2.5 percentage points in recent years. Growth in India could recover, but at some point, it will slow for good. Indeed, it is possible that India could get stuck in the dreaded "middle-income trap," whereby fast-growing economies start to stall. It would not be alone: according to the World Bank, of 101 middle-income economies in 1960, only 13 had become high income by 2008.

Unfortunately, just as economists don't know much about how to make growth happen, they know very little about why some countries, such as Mexico, get stuck in the middle-income trap and why some, such as South Korea, don't. One very real danger is that in trying to hold on to fast growth, countries facing sharply slowing growth will veer toward policies that hurt the poor now in the name of future growth. In a bid to preserve growth, many countries have interpreted the prescription to be business friendly as a license to enact all kinds of anti-poor, pro-rich policies, such as tax cuts for the rich and bailouts for corporations.

Such was the thinking in the United States under President Ronald Reagan and in the United Kingdom under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. If the experience of those two countries is any guide, however, asking the poor to tighten their belts in the hope that giveaways to the rich will eventually trickle down does nothing for growth and even less for the poor: in both, growth hardly picked up at all, but inequality skyrocketed. Globally, the one group that did even better than the poorest 50 percent between 1980 and 2016 was the top one percent—the rich in the already rich countries, plus an increasing number of superrich in the developing world—who captured an astounding 27 percent of total growth during that time. The 49 percent of people below them, which includes almost everybody in the United States and Europe, lost out, and their incomes stagnated throughout that period.

The explosion of inequality in economies that are no longer growing is bad news for future growth. The political backlash leads to the election of populist leaders touting miracle solutions that rarely work—and often lead to Venezuela-style disasters. In rich countries, the consequences are already visible, from the rising trade barriers in the United States to the mayhem of Brexit in the United Kingdom. Even the International Monetary Fund, once a bastion of growth-first orthodoxy, has come to recognize that sacrificing the poor to promote growth is bad policy. It now requires its country teams to take in-

equality into consideration when giving advice.

EYES ON THE PRIZE

Growth is likely to slow, at least in China and India, and there may be very little that anyone can do about it. It may well pick up in other countries, but no one can forecast where or why. The good news is that even in the absence of growth, there are ways to improve other indicators of progress. What policymakers need to remember is that GDP is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is a useful means, no doubt, especially when it creates jobs or raises wages or increases budgets so that the government can redistribute more. But the ultimate goal remains improving quality of life, especially for those who are the worst off.

Quality of life means more than just consumption. Although better lives are indeed partly about being able to consume more, most human beings, even the very poor, care about more than that. They want to feel worthy and respected, keep their parents healthy, educate their children, have their voices heard, and follow their dreams. A higher GDP may help the poor achieve many of those things, but it is only one way of doing so, and it is not always the best one. In fact, quality of life varies enormously between countries with similar income levels: for example, Sri Lanka has more or less the same GDP per capita as Guatemala but far lower maternal, infant, and child mortality rates.

Such disparities should not be so surprising. Looking back, it is clear that many of the important successes of the last few decades were the result not of economic growth but of a direct focus on improving particular outcomes, even in countries that were and have remained very poor. The under-five mortality rate, for example, has fallen drastically across the world, even in some very poor countries whose economies have not grown particularly fast. Credit goes mostly to policymakers' focus on newborn care, vaccination, and malaria prevention. The same approach can and should be applied to any of the other factors that improve quality of life, be it education, skills, entrepreneurship, or health. The focus should be identifying the key problems and figuring out how to solve them.

This is patient work: spending money by itself does not necessarily deliver real education or good health. But unlike with growth, experts actually know how to make progress. One big advantage of focusing on clearly defined interventions is that these policies have measurable objectives and therefore can be directly evaluated. Researchers can experi-

ment with them, abandon the ones that don't work, and improve the ones that do. This is what we have spent a good part of our careers doing and what hundreds of researchers and policymakers now routinely do with the help of such organizations as the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, or J-PAL (the network we started at MIT), and Innovations for Poverty Action, a group founded by the economist Dean Karlan.

So although no one knows how to transform Kenya into South Korea, thanks to the work of Jessica Cohen and Pascaline Dupas, we do know, for example, that the massive distribution of free insecticide-treated bed nets is the most effective way to fight malaria. In a series of randomized trials, these researchers found that charging people for bed nets, which was once thought to make the nets more likely to be used, in fact decreased their use—evidence that eventually convinced major development organizations to abandon fees. Between 2014 and 2016, a total of 582 million insecticide-treated mosquito nets were delivered globally. Of these, 75 percent were given out through mass distribution campaigns of free bed nets, saving tens of millions of lives.

BEYOND GROWTH

The bottom line is that the true ingredients of persistent economic growth remain mysterious. But there is much that can be done to get rid of the most egregious sources of waste in poor countries' economies and of suffering among their people. Children who die of preventable diseases, schools where teachers do not show up, court systems that take forever to adjudicate cases—all no doubt undercut productivity and make life miserable. Fixes to such problems may not propel countries to permanently faster growth, but they could dramatically improve the welfare of their citizens.

Moreover, although no one knows when the growth locomotive will start in a given country, if and when it does, the poor will be more likely to hop on the train if they are in decent health, can read and write, and can think beyond their immediate circumstances. It may not be an accident that many of the winners of globalization have been communist countries that invested heavily in the human capital of their populations for ideological reasons (such as China and Vietnam) or places that pursued similar policies because they were threatened by communism (such as South Korea and Taiwan).

The best bet, therefore, for a developing country such as India is to attempt to raise living standards with the resources it already has: in-

vesting in education and health care, improving the functioning of the courts and banks, and building better roads and more livable cities. The same logic holds for policymakers in rich countries, who should invest directly in raising living standards in poorer countries. In the absence of a magic potion for development, the best way to profoundly transform millions of lives is not to try in vain to boost growth. It is to focus squarely on the thing that growth is supposed to improve: the well-being of the poor. 🌍

The New China Scare

Why America Shouldn't Panic About Its Latest Challenger

Fareed Zakaria

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020

In February 1947, U.S. President Harry Truman huddled with his most senior foreign policy advisers, George Marshall and Dean Acheson, and a handful of congressional leaders. The topic was the administration's plan to aid the Greek government in its fight against a communist insurgency. Marshall and Acheson presented their case for the plan. Arthur Vandenberg, chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, listened closely and then offered his support with a caveat. "The only way you are going to get what you want," he reportedly told the president, "is to make a speech and scare the hell out of the country."

Over the next few months, Truman did just that. He turned the civil war in Greece into a test of the United States' ability to confront international communism. Reflecting on Truman's expansive rhetoric about aiding democracies anywhere, anytime, Acheson confessed in his memoirs that the administration had made an argument "clearer than truth."

Something similar is happening today in the American debate about China. A new consensus, encompassing both parties, the military establishment, and key elements of the media, holds that China is now a vital threat to the United States both economically and strategically, that U.S. policy toward China has failed, and that Washing-

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ton needs a new, much tougher strategy to contain it. This consensus has shifted the public's stance toward an almost instinctive hostility: according to polling, 60 percent of Americans now have an unfavorable view of the People's Republic, a record high since the Pew Research Center began asking the question in 2005. But Washington elites have made their case "clearer than truth." The nature of the challenge from China is different from and far more complex than what the new alarmism portrays. On the single most important foreign policy issue of the next several decades, the United States is setting itself up for an expensive failure.

Let's be clear: China is a repressive regime that engages in thoroughly illiberal policies, from banning free speech to interning religious minorities. Over the last five years, it has intensified its political control and economic statism at home. Abroad, it has become a competitor and in some places a rival of the United States. But the essential strategic question for Americans today is, Do these facts make China a vital threat, and to the extent that they do, how should that threat be addressed?

The consequences of exaggerating the Soviet threat were vast: gross domestic abuses during the McCarthy era; a dangerous nuclear arms race; a long, futile, and unsuccessful war in Vietnam; and countless other military interventions in various so-called Third World countries. The consequences of not getting the Chinese challenge right today will be vaster still. The United States risks squandering the hard-won gains from four decades of engagement with China, encouraging Beijing to adopt confrontational policies of its own, and leading the world's two largest economies into a treacherous conflict of unknown scale and scope that will inevitably cause decades of instability and insecurity. A cold war with China is likely to be much longer and more costly than the one with the Soviet Union, with an uncertain outcome.

BROKEN ENGAGEMENT

Henry Kissinger has noted that the United States has entered all its major military engagements since 1945—in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq—with great enthusiasm and bipartisan support. "And then, as the war developed," Kissinger said, "the domestic support for it began to come apart." Soon, everyone was searching for an exit strategy.

To avoid retreading that path, the United States should take the time to examine closely the assumptions behind the new China consensus. In broad terms, they are the following. First, engagement has

failed because it did not “transform China’s internal development and external behavior,” as the former U.S. officials Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner wrote in these pages in 2018. Second, Beijing’s foreign policy is currently the most significant threat to U.S. interests and, by extension, to the rules-based international order that the United States created after 1945. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has gone much further, saying in a 2019 speech at the Hudson Institute that “the Chinese Communist party is a Marxist-Leninist party focused on struggle and international domination.” And third, a policy of active confrontation with China will better counter the threat than a continuation of the previous approach.

This bipartisan consensus has formed in response to significant and in many ways worrying changes in China. Ever since President Xi Jinping became the country’s supreme ruler, China’s economic liberalization has slowed and its political reform—limited in any case—has been reversed. Beijing now combines political repression with nationalist propaganda that harks back to the Mao era. Abroad, China is more ambitious and assertive. These shifts are real and worrying. But how should they alter U.S. policy?

Formulating an effective response requires starting with a clear understanding of the United States’ China strategy up to this point. What the new consensus misses is that in the almost five decades since U.S. President Richard Nixon’s opening to Beijing, U.S. policy toward China has never been purely one of engagement; it has been a combination of engagement and deterrence. In the late 1970s, U.S. policymakers concluded that integrating China into the global economic and political system was better than having it sit outside it, resentful and disruptive. But Washington coupled that effort with consistent support for other Asian powers—including, of course, continued arms sales to Taiwan. That approach, sometimes described as a “hedging strategy,” ensured that as China rose, its power was checked and its neighbors felt secure.

In the 1990s, with no more Soviet foe to contain, the Pentagon slashed spending, closed bases, and reduced troop numbers around the world—except in Asia. The Pentagon’s 1995 Asia-Pacific strategy, known as the Nye Initiative, warned of China’s military buildup and foreign policy ambitions and announced that the United States would not reduce its military presence in the region. Instead, at least 100,000 American troops would remain in Asia for the foreseeable future. Arms sales to Taiwan would continue in the interest of peace in the Taiwan Strait—

that is, to deter Beijing from using force against the self-governing island, which the mainland government considers to be part of China.

This hedging approach was maintained by presidents of both parties. The George W. Bush administration overturned decades of bipartisan policy and embraced India as a nuclear power, in large part to add yet another check on China. Under President Barack Obama, the United States ramped up deterrence, expanding its footprint in Asia with new military agreements with Australia and Japan and nurturing a closer relationship with Vietnam. Such was also the purpose of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, designed to give Asian countries an economic platform that would enable them to resist dominance by the Chinese market. (The Trump administration pulled out of the agreement in early 2017.) Obama personally confronted Xi about Chinese cybertheft and placed tariffs on tire imports to retaliate against China's unfair trade policies.

To say that hedging failed reflects a lack of historical perspective. In the early 1970s, before Nixon's opening to China, Beijing was the world's greatest rogue regime. Mao Zedong was obsessed with the idea that he was at the helm of a revolutionary movement that would destroy the Western capitalist world. There was no measure too extreme for the cause—not even nuclear apocalypse. “If the worst came to the worst and half of mankind died,” Mao explained in a speech in Moscow in 1957, “the other half would remain while imperialism would be razed to the ground and the whole world would become socialist.” Mao's China funded and fomented anti-Western insurgencies, guerrilla movements, and ideological movements around the world, from Latin America to Southeast Asia. By one estimate, Beijing spent between \$170 million and \$220 million from 1964 to 1985 in Africa alone, training 20,000 fighters from at least 19 countries.

By comparison, today's China is a remarkably responsible nation on the geopolitical and military front. It has not gone to war since 1979. It has not used lethal military force abroad since 1988. Nor has it funded or supported proxies or armed insurgents anywhere in the world since the early 1980s. That record of nonintervention is unique among the world's great powers. All the other permanent members of the UN Security Council have used force many times in many places over the last few decades—a list led, of course, by the United States.

China has also gone from seeking to undermine the international system to spending large sums to bolster it. Beijing is now the second-

largest funder of the United Nations and the UN peacekeeping program. It has deployed 2,500 peacekeepers, more than all the other permanent members of the Security Council combined. Between 2000 and 2018, it supported 182 of 190 Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on nations deemed to have violated international rules or norms. Granted, the principles anchoring Beijing's foreign policy today—"respect for sovereignty," "territorial integrity," and "nonintervention"—are animated in large part by a desire to fend off Western interference. Yet they highlight a remarkable shift from a radical agenda of revolution to a conservative concern for stability. Had someone predicted in 1972 that China would become a guardian of the international status quo, few would have believed it possible.

TRADING PLACES

The new consensus on China's economic behavior holds that China has forced multinational companies to transfer their technology, has subsidized its "national champions," and has placed formal and informal barriers in the path of foreign firms seeking to enter its market. Beijing has, in short, used the open international economy to bolster its own statist and mercantilist system.

It is true that these unfair policies demand attention and action from the rest of the world. The Trump administration deserves some credit for tackling this problem—especially in light of Xi's embrace of statism after decades of liberalization. But how large and permanent is this reversal? How different are China's practices from those of other emerging market countries today? And again, what is the right American response?

Almost all economists agree that China owes much of its economic success to three fundamental factors: the switch from communist economics to a more market-based approach, a high savings rate that makes possible large capital investments, and rising productivity. Over the last three decades, the country has also opened itself up substantially to foreign investment—more so than many other large emerging markets—allowing capital to pour in. China is one of only two developing countries to have ranked in the top 25 markets for foreign direct investment since 1998. Of the BRICS group of large emerging markets (which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), China is consistently ranked as the most open and competitive economy. As for the effect of mercantilist Chinese policies on the U.S. economy,

former U.S. Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers has noted that “it cannot be argued seriously that unfair Chinese trade practices have affected U.S. growth by even 0.1 percent a year.”

It is worth noting that on the economic front, almost every charge leveled at China today—forced technology transfers, unfair trade practices, limited access for foreign firms, regulatory favoritism for locals—was leveled at Japan in the 1980s and 1990s. At the time, Clyde Prestowitz’s influential book *Trading Places: How America Is Surrendering Its Future to Japan and How to Win It Back* explained that the United States had never imagined dealing with a country in which “industry and trade [would be] organized as part of an effort to achieve specific national goals.” Another widely read book of the era was titled *The Coming War With Japan*. As Japanese growth tapered off, so did these exaggerated fears.

China today presents some new challenges, especially given Xi’s determination to have the state play a leading role in helping the country gain economic dominance in crucial sectors. But in the broad sweep of history, China’s greatest advantage in the global trading system has come not from its willingness to violate the rules but from its sheer size. Countries and companies want access to China and are willing to make concessions to get it. This hardly makes China unusual. Other countries with similar clout often get away with similar behavior or worse—none more so than the United States. A 2015 report by the financial services giant Credit Suisse provides a useful tally of nontariff barriers against foreign goods put in place by major countries between 1990 and 2013. With a total count of almost 450, the United States is in a league of its own. Next is India, then Russia. China comes in at number five, with one-third as many nontariff barriers imposed as the United States. The picture hasn’t changed much in the years since.

Most of the recent changes in Beijing’s economic policy have been negative, but even that is not the entire story. China is changing along several, sometimes contradictory lines. Even with the return to greater state control under Xi, a wild free market has flourished in vast spheres such as consumer goods and services. There has also been some real regulatory liberalization—even administrative and judicial reform, as the political scientist Yuen Yuen Ang has detailed. Government support for state-owned enterprises is greater than it was a few years ago, but Beijing has abandoned what was once a central part of its mercantilist strategy: using an undervalued currency to boost growth. The

economist Nicholas Lardy has calculated that the end of currency mercantilism accounts for “about half of China’s growth slowdown since the global financial crisis.”

Or consider what is, according to Peter Navarro, U.S. President Donald Trump’s top trade adviser, issue number one in the United States’ trade dispute with China: “the theft of our intellectual property.” That China engages in rampant theft of intellectual property is a widely accepted fact—except among U.S. companies doing business in China. In a recent survey of such companies conducted by the U.S.-China Business Council, intellectual property protection ranked sixth on a list of pressing concerns, down from number two in 2014. These companies worry more about state funding for rival companies and delayed approval of licenses for their products. Why this shift from 2014? That year, China created its first specialized courts to handle intellectual property cases. In 2015, foreign plaintiffs brought 63 cases in the Beijing Intellectual Property Court. The court ruled for the foreign firms in all 63.

Of course, reforms such as these are often undertaken only in the face of Western pressure and, even then, because they serve China’s own competitive interests—the largest filer of patents worldwide last year was the Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei. But it is also true that many Chinese economists and senior policymakers have argued that the country will modernize and grow its economy only if it pursues further reform. Failure to do so, they have warned, will get the country stuck in the “middle-income trap”—the common fate of countries that escape poverty but hit a wall at a GDP of around \$10,000 per capita, having failed to modernize their economic, regulatory, and legal systems any further.

As far as China’s political development is concerned, the verdict is unambiguous. China has not opened up its politics to the extent that many anticipated; it has in fact moved toward greater repression and control. Beijing’s gruesome treatment of the Uighurs in Xinjiang, a region in northwestern China, has created a human rights crisis. The state has also begun to use new technologies, such as facial recognition software and artificial intelligence, to create an Orwellian system of social control. These realities are a tragedy for the Chinese people and an obstacle to the country’s participation in global leadership. It would be an exaggeration, however, to adduce them as proof of the failure of U.S. policy. In truth, few U.S. officials ever argued that engagement would lead inexorably to liberal democracy in China. They hoped that

it would, even expected it, but their focus was always on moderating China's external behavior, which they achieved.

CROSSING THE LINE

Under Xi, China's foreign policy has become more ambitious and assertive, from its pursuit of leadership roles in UN agencies to the vast Belt and Road Initiative and the construction of islands in the South China Sea. These moves mark a break with the country's erstwhile passivity on the global stage, captured by the former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's adage "Hide your strength, bide your time." China's military buildup, in particular, has been of a size and designed in a manner that suggest that a long-term plan is being systematically executed. But what would an acceptable level of influence for China be, given its economic weight in the world? If Washington does not first ask this question, it cannot make serious claims about which uses of Chinese power cross the line.

China is, by some measures, already the world's largest economy. Within ten to 15 years, it will probably take this spot by all measures. Deng offered his advice to "bide your time" when the country's economy represented roughly one percent of global GDP. Today, it represents over 15 percent. China has indeed bided its time, and now, a much stronger China naturally seeks a larger regional and global role.

Consider the case of another country that was rising in strength, this one back in the nineteenth century, although not nearly on the scale of China today. The United States in 1823 was what would now be called a developing country—not even among the world's top five economies—and yet with the Monroe Doctrine, it declared the entire Western Hemisphere off-limits to the great powers of Europe. The American case is an imperfect analogy, but it serves as a reminder that as countries gain economic strength, they seek greater control and influence over their environment. If Washington defines every such effort by China as dangerous, it will be setting the United States up against the natural dynamics of international life and falling into what the scholar Graham Allison has called "the Thucydides trap"—the danger of a war between a rising power and an anxious hegemon.

For the United States, dealing with such a competitor is a new and unique challenge. Since 1945, the major states rising to wealth and prominence have been Washington's closest allies, if not quasi protectorates: Germany, Japan, and South Korea. A normally disruptive feature of international life—rising new powers—has thus been extraordinarily

benign for the United States. China, however, is not only much larger than the rising powers that came before; it has also always been outside the United States' alliance structures and sphere of influence. As a result, it will inevitably seek a greater measure of independent influence. The challenge for the United States, and the West at large, will be to define a tolerable range for China's growing influence and accommodate it—so as to have credibility when Beijing's actions cross the line.

So far, the West's track record on adapting to China's rise has been poor. Both the United States and Europe have, for example, been reluctant to cede any ground to China in the core institutions of global economic governance, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which remain Euro-American clubs. For years, China sought a larger role in the Asian Development Bank, but the United States resisted. As a result, in 2015, Beijing created its own multilateral financial institution, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (which Washington opposed, fruitlessly).

Pompeo has asserted—in a patronizing statement that would surely infuriate any Chinese citizen—that the United States and its allies must keep China in “its proper place.” China's sin, according to Pompeo, is that it spends more on its military than it needs to for its own defense. But the same, of course, could be said of the United States—and of France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and most other large countries. In fact, a useful definition of a great power is one that is concerned about more than just its own security.

The old order—in which small European countries act as global heavyweights while behemoths such as China and India are excluded from the first ranks of global institutions—cannot be sustained. China will have to be given a place at the table and genuinely integrated into the structures of decision-making, or it will freelance and unilaterally create its own new structures and systems. China's ascension to global power is the most significant new factor in the international system in centuries. It must be recognized as such.

NEITHER LIBERAL NOR INTERNATIONAL NOR ORDERLY

To many, Beijing's rise has sounded the death knell of the liberal international order—the set of policies and institutions, forged largely by the United States after World War II, that compose a rules-based system in which interstate war has waned while free trade and human rights have flourished. China's domestic political character—a one-

party state that brooks no opposition or dissent—and some of its international actions make it an uneasy player in this system.

It is, however, worth remembering that the liberal international order was never as liberal, as international, or as orderly as it is now nostalgically described. From the very beginning, it faced vociferous opposition from the Soviet Union, followed by a series of breakdowns of cooperation among allies (over the Suez crisis in 1956, over Vietnam a decade later) and the partial defection of the United States under Nixon, who in 1971 ended Washington's practice of underwriting the international monetary order using U.S. gold reserves. A more realistic image is that of a nascent liberal international order, marred from the start by exceptions, discord, and fragility. The United States, for its part, often operated outside the rules of this order, making frequent military interventions with or without UN approval; in the years between 1947 and 1989, when the United States was supposedly building up the liberal international order, it attempted regime change around the world 72 times. It reserved the same right in the economic realm, engaging in protectionism even as it railed against more modest measures adopted by other countries.

The truth about the liberal international order, as with all such concepts, is that there never really was a golden age, but neither has the order decayed as much as people claim. The core attributes of this order—peace and stability—are still in place, with a marked decline in war and annexation since 1945. (Russia's behavior in Ukraine is an important exception.) In economic terms, it is a free-trade world. Average tariffs among industrialized countries are below three percent, down from 15 percent before the Kennedy Round of international trade talks, in the 1960s. The last decade has seen backsliding on some measures of globalization but from an extremely high baseline. Globalization since 1990 could be described as having moved three steps forward and only one step back.

China hardly qualifies as a mortal danger to this imperfect order. Compare its actions to those of Russia—a country that in many arenas simply acts as a spoiler, trying to disrupt the Western democratic world and its international objectives, often benefiting directly from instability because it raises oil prices (the Kremlin's largest source of wealth). China plays no such role. When it does bend the rules and, say, engages in cyberwarfare, it steals military and economic secrets rather than trying to delegitimize democratic elections in the United States

or Europe. Beijing fears dissent and opposition and is especially neulgalic on the issues of Hong Kong and Taiwan, using its economic clout to censor Western companies unless they toe the party line. But these are attempts to preserve what Beijing views as its sovereignty—nothing like Moscow’s systematic efforts to disrupt and delegitimize Western democracy in Canada, the United States, and Europe. In short, China has acted in ways that are interventionist, mercantilist, and unilateral—but often far less so than other great powers.

The rise of a one-party state that continues to reject core concepts of human rights presents a challenge. In certain areas, Beijing’s repressive policies do threaten elements of the liberal international order, such as its efforts to water down global human rights standards and its behavior in the South China Sea and other parts of its “near abroad.” Those cases need to be examined honestly. In the former, little can be said to mitigate the charge. China is keen on defining away its egregious human rights abuses, and that agenda should be exposed and resisted. (The Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from the UN Human Rights Council achieved the exact opposite by ceding the field to Beijing.)

But the liberal international order has been able to accommodate itself to a variety of regimes—from Nigeria to Saudi Arabia to Vietnam—and still provide a rules-based framework that encourages greater peace, stability, and civilized conduct among states. China’s size and policies present a new challenge to the expansion of human rights that has largely taken place since 1990. But that one area of potential regression should not be viewed as a mortal threat to the much larger project of a rules-based, open, free-trading international system.

CONTAINMENT AND ITS COSTS

The final assumption undergirding the new consensus is that some form of persistent confrontation with China will deter its adventurism abroad and set the stage for an internal transformation. Few embrace the Cold War term “containment,” but many adopt some version of its logic. The theory is that a hard line against China will force it to behave and even reform. Unspoken but clearly central to the hawks’ strategy is the notion that containing China will precipitate the collapse of its regime, just as happened with the Soviets.

But China is not the Soviet Union, an unnatural empire that was built on brutal expansion and military domination. In China, the United States would be confronting a civilization, and a nation, with

a strong sense of national unity and pride that has risen to take its place among the great powers of the world. China is becoming an economic peer, indeed a technology leader in some areas. Its population dwarfs that of the United States, and the world's largest market for almost every good is now in China. It houses some of the planet's fastest computers and holds the largest foreign exchange reserves on earth. Even if it experienced some kind of regime change, the broader features of its rise and strength would persist.

The Pentagon has embraced the notion of China as the United States' top "strategic competitor." From a bureaucratic point of view, this designation makes perfect sense. For the last 20 years, the U.S. military has fought against insurgencies and guerrillas in failed states, and it has time and again had to explain why its expensive machinery has failed against these underequipped, cash-strapped enemies. To make an enemy of China, by contrast, is to return to the halcyon days of the Cold War, when the Pentagon could raise large budgets by conjuring the specter of a war against a rich, sophisticated military with cutting-edge technology of its own. All the while, the logic of nuclear deterrence and the prudence of the great powers ensured that a full-scale war between the two sides would never take place. Yet whatever the advantages for Pentagon budgets, the costs of such a cold war with China would be immense, distorting the United States' economy and further inflating the military-industrial complex that U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower once warned against.

Add to this the large degree of interdependence between the United States and China. U.S. exports to China are up by 527 percent since 2001, and in 2018, China was the largest supplier of goods to the United States. There is also human interdependence—the hundreds of thousands of Chinese students who study in the United States, along with the almost five million U.S. citizens and residents of Chinese descent. The United States has benefited greatly from being the place where the brightest minds gather to do the most cutting-edge research and then apply it to commercial ends. If the United States barred its doors to such talent because it came with the wrong passport, it would quickly lose its privileged place in the world of technology and innovation.

The Trump administration's current approach to China runs along two distinct and contradictory tracks, at once eschewing interdependence and embracing it. On trade, Washington's aim is, broadly speaking, integrationist: to get China to buy more from the United States,

invest more in the United States, and allow Americans to sell and invest more in China. If successful, this effort would create more interdependence between the two countries. It is a laudable effort, although it bears pointing out that tariffs usually cost the party imposing the tax more than the recipient. By some estimates, the Obama administration's tire tariffs cost around \$1 million for every American job saved. The general approach, however, is wise, even if undertaken in pursuit of a narrow "America first" agenda, as interdependence gives the United States greater leverage over China.

In matters of technology, on the other hand, the Trump administration's approach is decidedly disintegrationist. The strategy here is to sever ties with China and force the rest of the world to do the same—creating a world split between two camps. The Trump administration's global campaign against Huawei has followed this logic; the meager results of that campaign indicate the logic's flaws. The rest of the world is not following the lead of the United States (which lacks an alternative technology to compete with Huawei's 5G offerings). The Trump administration has asked 61 countries to ban the company. So far, only three have acceded, all three of them close U.S. allies.

This dismal success rate is an early indicator of what a broader "decoupling" strategy would look like. China is the largest trading partner of many countries besides the United States, including key players in the Western Hemisphere, such as Brazil. When asked how they would respond to decoupling, senior leaders around the world almost all offer some version of the answer that one head of government gave me: "Please do not ask us to choose between the United States and China. You will not like the answer you get." This is not to say that they would necessarily side with China—but they might well prefer to stay nonaligned or play the two powers off against each other. What is more, an isolated China that built its own domestic supply chains and technology would be impervious to U.S. pressure.

Strangely absent from most discussions of U.S. policy toward China is the question of China's reaction. Beijing, too, has its hardliners, who have warned for years that the United States seeks to keep China down and that any sign of Chinese ambition would be met with a strategy of containment. More and more, the United States' posture toward China is allowing those voices to claim vindication, thereby giving them leverage to push exactly the kind of assertive and destabilizing behavior that U.S. policy aims to prevent.

The United States is in competition with China—that is a fact and will remain so for much of this century. The issue is whether the United States should compete within a stable international framework, continuing to try to integrate China rather than attempting to isolate it at all costs. A fractured, bifurcated international order, marked by government restrictions and taxes on trade, technology, and travel, would result in diminished prosperity, persistent instability, and the real prospect of military conflict for all involved.

The breakdown of globalization is, of course, the goal of many of the leading lights of the Trump administration. The president himself has decried “globalism” and considers free trade a way for other countries to loot American industry. He regards the United States’ alliances as obsolete and international institutions and norms as feckless constraints on national sovereignty. Right-wing populists have embraced these views for years. And many of them—especially in the United States—correctly understand that the easiest way to crack the entire liberal international edifice would be to trigger a cold war with China. More puzzling is that those who have spent decades building up that edifice are readily supporting an agenda that will surely destroy it.

AMERICA’S NOT-SO-SECRET STRATEGY

A wiser U.S. policy, geared toward turning China into a “responsible stakeholder,” is still achievable. Washington should encourage Beijing to exert greater influence in its region and beyond as long as it uses this clout to strengthen the international system. Chinese participation in efforts to tackle global warming, nuclear proliferation, money laundering, and terrorism should be encouraged—and appreciated. Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative could be a boon for the developing world if pursued in an open and transparent manner, even in cooperation with Western countries wherever possible. Beijing, for its part, would need to accept U.S. criticism about issues of human rights, freedom of speech, and liberty more generally.

The most dangerous flash points are likely to be Hong Kong and Taiwan, where the status quo is fragile and the balance of power favors Beijing. The Pentagon has reportedly enacted 18 war games against China over Taiwan, and China has prevailed in every one. Washington should make clear that any such victory would be Pyrrhic, resulting in economic collapse in Hong Kong or Taiwan, mass emigration from those islands, and international condemnation. If Beijing acts

precipitously in either Hong Kong or Taiwan, a U.S. policy of cooperation will become untenable for years.

The new consensus on China is rooted in the fear that the country might at some point take over the globe. But there is reason to have faith in American power and purpose. Neither the Soviet Union nor Japan managed to take over the world, despite similar fears about their rise. China is rising but faces a series of internal challenges, from demographic decline to mountains of debt. It has changed before and will be forced to change again if the combined forces of integration and deterrence continue to press on it. Beijing's elites know that their country has prospered in a stable, open world. They do not want to destroy that world. And despite a decade of political stagnation on the mainland, the connection between the rise of a middle class and demands for greater political openness is real, as is apparent in two Chinese societies watched closely by Beijing—Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Some American observers talk of China's long view, of its patient, secret plan to dominate the world, consistently executed since 1949, if not before. The scholar and former U.S. Defense Department official Michael Pillsbury has called it China's "hundred-year marathon," in a book often praised by the Trump administration. But a more accurate picture is that of a country that has lurched fitfully from a tight alliance with the Soviet Union to the Sino-Soviet split, from the Great Leap Forward to the Cultural Revolution to a capitalist success story, and from deep hostility toward the West to close ties with the United States and back to a flirtation with hostility. If this is a marathon, it has taken some strange twists and turns, many of which could have ended it altogether.

Meanwhile, since 1949, the United States has patiently put in place structures and policies to create a more stable, open, and integrated world; has helped countries enter that world; and has deterred those that sought to destroy it—all with astonishing success. Washington has been the opposite of vacillating or overly focused on the short term. In 2019, U.S. troops are still on the banks of the Rhine, they are still safeguarding Seoul, and they are still in Okinawa.

China presents a new and large challenge. But if Washington can keep its cool and patiently continue to pursue a policy of engagement plus deterrence, forcing China to adjust while itself adjusting to make space for it, some scholar decades from now might write about the United States' not-so-secret plan to expand the zone of peace, prosperity, openness, and decent governance across the globe—a marathon strategy that worked. 🌐

The Digital Dictators

How Technology Strengthens Autocracy

Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Erica Frantz, and Joseph Wright

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The Stasi, East Germany's state security service, may have been one of the most pervasive secret police agencies that ever existed. It was infamous for its capacity to monitor individuals and control information flows. By 1989, it had almost 100,000 regular employees and, according to some accounts, between 500,000 and two million informants in a country with a population of about 16 million. Its sheer manpower and resources allowed it to permeate society and keep tabs on virtually every aspect of the lives of East German citizens. Thousands of agents worked to tap telephones, infiltrate underground political movements, and report on personal and familial relationships. Officers were even positioned at post offices to open letters and packages entering from or heading to noncommunist countries. For decades, the Stasi was a model for how a highly capable authoritarian regime could use repression to maintain control.

In the wake of the apparent triumph of liberal democracy after the Cold War, police states of this kind no longer seemed viable. Global

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norms about what constituted a legitimate regime had shifted. At the turn of the millennium, new technologies, including the Internet and the cell phone, promised to empower citizens, allowing individuals greater access to information and the possibility to make new connections and build new communities.

But this wishful vision of a more democratic future proved naive. Instead, new technologies now afford rulers fresh methods for preserving power that in many ways rival, if not improve on, the Stasi's tactics. Surveillance powered by artificial intelligence (AI), for example, allows despots to automate the monitoring and tracking of their opposition in ways that are far less intrusive than traditional surveillance. Not only do these digital tools enable authoritarian regimes to cast a wider net than with human-dependent methods; they can do so using far fewer resources: no one has to pay a software program to monitor people's text messages, read their social media posts, or track their movements. And once citizens learn to assume that all those things are happening, they alter their behavior without the regime having to resort to physical repression.

This alarming picture stands in stark contrast to the optimism that originally accompanied the spread of the Internet, social media, and other new technologies that have emerged since 2000. Such hopefulness peaked in the early 2010s as social media facilitated the ouster of four of the world's longest-ruling dictators, in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen. In a world of unfettered access to information and of individuals empowered by technology, the argument went, autocrats would no longer be able to maintain the concentration of power that their systems depend on. It's now clear, however, that technology does not necessarily favor those seeking to make their voices heard or stand up to repressive regimes. Faced with growing pressure and mounting fear of their own people, authoritarian regimes are evolving. They are embracing technology to refashion authoritarianism for the modern age.

Led by China, today's digital autocracies are using technology—the Internet, social media, AI—to supercharge long-standing authoritarian survival tactics. They are harnessing a new arsenal of digital tools to counteract what has become the most significant threat to the typical authoritarian regime today: the physical, human force of mass antigovernment protests. As a result, digital autocracies have grown far more durable than their pre-tech predecessors and their less technologically savvy peers. In contrast to what technology optimists envisioned at the

dawn of the millennium, autocracies are benefiting from the Internet and other new technologies, not falling victim to them.

THE SPECTER OF PROTEST

The digital age changed the context in which authoritarian regimes operate. Such new technologies as the Internet and social media reduced barriers to coordination, making it easier for ordinary citizens to mobilize and challenge unresponsive and repressive governments. Data from the Mass Mobilization Project, compiled by the political scientists David Clark and Patrick Regan, and the Autocratic Regimes data set, which two of us (Erica Frantz and Joseph Wright) have helped build, reveal that between 2000 and 2017, 60 percent of all dictatorships faced at least one antigovernment protest of 50 participants or more. Although many of these demonstrations were small and posed little threat to the regime, their sheer frequency underscores the continuous unrest that many authoritarian governments face.

Many of these movements are succeeding in bringing about the downfall of authoritarian regimes. Between 2000 and 2017, protests unseated ten autocracies, or 23 percent of the 44 authoritarian regimes that fell during the period. Another 19 authoritarian regimes lost power via elections. And while there were nearly twice as many regimes ousted by elections as by protests, many of the elections had followed mass protest campaigns.

The rise in protests marks a significant change in authoritarian politics. Historically, coups by military elites and officers posed the greatest threat to dictatorships. Between 1946 and 2000, coups ousted roughly a third of the 198 authoritarian regimes that collapsed in that period. Protests, in contrast, unseated far fewer, accounting for about 16 percent of that total. Fast-forward to this century, and a different reality emerges: coups unseated around nine percent of the dictatorships that fell between 2001 and 2017, while mass movements led to the toppling of twice as many governments. In addition to toppling regimes in the Arab Spring, protests led to the ouster of dictatorships in Burkina Faso, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Protests have become the most significant challenge that twenty-first-century authoritarian regimes face.

The growing threat of protests has not been lost on today's autocrats. In the past, when they feared coups, most such leaders relied on "coup proofing" tactics, such as overpaying the security services to win their loyalty or rotating elites through positions of power so that no

one could develop an independent base of support. As protests have increased, however, authoritarian regimes have adapted their survival tactics to focus on mitigating the threat from mass mobilization. Data compiled by Freedom House reveal that since 2000, the number of restrictions on political and civil liberties globally has grown. A large share of this increase has occurred in authoritarian countries, where leaders impose restrictions on political and civil liberties to make it harder for citizens to organize and agitate against the state.

Beyond narrowing the space for civil society, authoritarian states are also learning to use digital tools to quell dissent. Although technology has helped facilitate protests, today's digitally savvy authoritarian regimes are using some of the same technological innovations to push back against dangerous popular mobilizations.

MEANS OF CONTROL

Our analysis using data from Varieties of Democracy's data set (which covers 202 countries) and the Mass Mobilization Project shows that autocracies that use digital repression face a lower risk of protests than do those autocratic regimes that do not employ these same tools. Digital repression not only decreases the likelihood that a protest will occur but also reduces the chances that a government will face large, sustained mobilization efforts, such as the "red shirt" protests in Thailand in 2010 or the anti-Mubarak and antimilitary protests in Egypt in 2011. The example of Cambodia illustrates how these dynamics can play out.

The government of Prime Minister Hun Sen, who has been in office since 1985, has adopted technological methods of control to help maintain its grip on power. Under Hun Sen's rule, traditional media have restricted their coverage of the Cambodian opposition. In the run-up to the July 2013 election, this led the opposition to rely heavily on digital tools to mobilize its supporters. The election was fraudulent, prompting thousands of citizens to take to the streets to demand a new vote. In addition to employing brute force to quell the protests, the government ratcheted up its use of digital repression. For instance, in August 2013, one Internet service provider temporarily blocked Facebook, and in December 2013, authorities in the province of Siem Reap closed down more than 40 Internet cafés. The following year, the government announced the creation of the Cyber War Team, tasked with monitoring the Internet to flag antigovernment activity online. A year later, the government passed a law giving it broad control over the tele-

communications industry and established an enforcement body that could suspend telecommunications firms' services and even fire their staff. Partly as a result of these steps, the protest movement in Cambodia fizzled out. According to the Mass Mobilization Project, there was only one antigovernment protest in the country in 2017, compared with 36 in 2014, when the opposition movement was at its peak.

Dictatorships harness technology not only to suppress protests but also to stiffen older methods of control. Our analysis drawing from Varieties of Democracy's data set suggests that dictatorships that increase their use of digital repression also tend to increase their use of violent forms of repression "in real life," particularly torture and the killing of opponents. This indicates that authoritarian leaders don't replace traditional repression with digital repression. Instead, by making it easier for authoritarian regimes to identify their opposition, digital repression allows them to more effectively determine who should get a knock on the door or be thrown in a cell. This closer targeting of opponents reduces the need to resort to indiscriminate repression, which can trigger a popular backlash and elite defections.

THE CHINA MODEL

The advancement of AI-powered surveillance is the most significant evolution in digital authoritarianism. High-resolution cameras, facial recognition, spying malware, automated text analysis, and big-data processing have opened up a wide range of new methods of citizen control. These technologies allow governments to monitor citizens and identify dissidents in a timely—and sometimes even preemptive—manner.

No regime has exploited the repressive potential of AI quite as thoroughly as the one in China. The Chinese Communist Party collects an incredible amount of data on individuals and businesses: tax returns, bank statements, purchasing histories, and criminal and medical records. The regime then uses AI to analyze this information and compile "social credit scores," which it seeks to use to set the parameters of acceptable behavior and improve citizen control. Individuals or companies deemed "untrustworthy" can find themselves excluded from state-sponsored benefits, such as deposit-free apartment rentals, or banned from air and rail travel. Although the CCP is still honing this system, advances in big-data analysis and decision-making technologies will only improve the regime's capacity for predictive control, what the government calls "social management."

China also demonstrates the way digital repression aids the physical variety—on a mass scale. In Xinjiang, the Chinese government has detained more than a million Uighurs in “reeducation” camps. Those not in camps are stuck in cities where neighborhoods are surrounded by gates equipped with facial recognition software. That software determines who may pass, who may not, and who will be detained on sight. China has collected a vast amount of data on its Uighur population, including cell phone information, genetic data, and information about religious practices, which it aggregates in an attempt to stave off actions deemed harmful to public order or national security.

New technologies also afford Chinese officials greater control over members of the government. Authoritarian regimes are always vulnerable to threats from within, including coups and high-level elite defections. With the new digital tools, leaders can keep tabs on government officials, gauging the extent to which they advance regime objectives and rooting out underperforming officials who over time can tarnish public perception of the regime. For example, research has shown that Beijing avoids censoring citizens’ posts about local corruption on Weibo (the Chinese equivalent of Twitter) because those posts give the regime a window into the performance of local officials.

In addition, the Chinese government deploys technology to perfect its systems of censorship. AI, for example, can sift through massive amounts of images and text, filtering and blocking content that is unfavorable to the regime. As a protest movement heated up in Hong Kong last summer, for example, the Chinese regime simply strengthened its “Great Firewall,” removing subversive content from the Internet in mainland China almost instantaneously. And even if censorship fails and dissent escalates, digital autocracies have an added line of defense: they can block all citizens’ access to the Internet (or large parts of it) to prevent members of the opposition from communicating, organizing, or broadcasting their messages. In Iran, for example, the government successfully shut down the Internet across the country amid widespread protests last November.

Although China is the leading player in digital repression, autocracies of all stripes are looking to follow suit. The Russian government, for example, is taking steps to rein in its citizens’ relative freedom online by incorporating elements of China’s Great Firewall, allowing the Kremlin to cut off the country’s Internet from the rest of the world. Likewise, Freedom House reported in 2018 that several countries were

seeking to emulate the Chinese model of extensive censorship and automated surveillance, and numerous officials from autocracies across Africa have gone to China to participate in “cyberspace management” training sessions, where they learn Chinese methods of control.

THE VELVET GLOVE

Today’s technologies not only make it easier for governments to repress critics; they also make it easy to co-opt them. Tech-powered integration between government agencies allows the Chinese regime to more precisely control access to government services, so that it can calibrate the distribution—or denial—of everything from bus passes and passports to jobs and access to education. The nascent social credit system in China has the effect of punishing individuals critical of the regime and rewarding loyalty. Citizens with good social credit scores benefit from a range of perks, including expedited overseas travel applications, discounted energy bills, and less frequent audits. In this way, new technologies help authoritarian regimes fine-tune their use of reward and refusal, blurring the line between co-option and coercive control.

Dictatorships can also use new technologies to shape public perception of the regime and its legitimacy. Automated accounts (or “bots”) on social media can amplify influence campaigns and produce a flurry of distracting or misleading posts that crowd out opponents’ messaging. This is an area in which Russia has played a leading role. The Kremlin floods the Internet with pro-regime stories, distracting online users from negative news, and creates confusion and uncertainty through the spread of alternative narratives.

Maturing technologies such as so-called microtargeting and deepfakes—digital forgeries impossible to distinguish from authentic audio, video, or images—are likely to further boost the capacity of authoritarian regimes to manipulate their citizens’ perceptions. Microtargeting will eventually allow autocracies to tailor content for specific individuals or segments of society, just as the commercial world uses demographic and behavioral characteristics to customize advertisements. AI-powered algorithms will allow autocracies to microtarget individuals with information that either reinforces their support for the regime or seeks to counteract specific sources of discontent. Likewise, the production of deepfakes will make it easier to discredit opposition leaders and will make it increasingly difficult for the public to know what is real, sowing doubt, confusion, and apathy.

Digital tools might even help regimes make themselves appear less repressive and more responsive to their citizens. In some cases, authoritarian regimes have deployed new technologies to mimic components of democracy, such as participation and deliberation. Some local Chinese officials, for example, are using the Internet and social media to allow citizens to voice their opinions in online polls or through other digitally based participatory channels. A 2014 study by the political scientist Rory Truex suggested that such online participation enhanced public perception of the CCP among less educated citizens. Consultative sites, such as the regime's "You Propose My Opinion" portal, make citizens feel that their voices matter without the regime having to actually pursue genuine reform. By emulating elements of democracy, dictatorships can improve their attractiveness to citizens and deflate the bottom-up pressure for change.

DURABLE DIGITAL AUTOCRACIES

As autocracies have learned to co-opt new technologies, they have become a more formidable threat to democracy. In particular, today's dictatorships have grown more durable. Between 1946 and 2000—the year digital tools began to proliferate—the typical dictatorship ruled for around ten years. Since 2000, this number has more than doubled, to nearly 25 years.

Not only has the rising tide of technology seemingly benefited all dictatorships, but our own empirical analysis shows that those authoritarian regimes that rely more heavily on digital repression are among the most durable. Between 2000 and 2017, 37 of the 91 dictatorships that had lasted more than a year collapsed; those regimes that avoided collapse had significantly higher levels of digital repression, on average, than those that fell. Rather than succumb to what appeared to be a devastating challenge to their power—the emergence and spread of new technologies—many dictatorships leverage those tools in ways that bolster their rule.

Although autocracies have long relied on various degrees of repression to support their objectives, the ease with which today's authoritarian regimes can acquire this repressive capacity marks a significant departure from the police states of the past. Building the effectiveness and pervasiveness of the East German Stasi, for example, was not something that could be achieved overnight. The regime had to cultivate the loyalty of thousands of cadres, training them and preparing them to engage in on-the-ground surveillance. Most dictatorships simply do not have the ability to create such a vast operation. There was,

according to some accounts, one East German spy for every 66 citizens. The proportion in most contemporary dictatorships (for which there are data) pales in comparison. It is true that in North Korea, which ranks as possibly the most intense police state in power today, the ratio of internal security personnel and informants to citizens is 1 to 40—but it was 1 to 5,090 in Iraq under Saddam Hussein and 1 to 10,000 in Chad under Hissène Habré. In the digital age, however, dictatorships don't need to summon immense manpower to effectively surveil and monitor their citizens.

Instead, aspiring dictatorships can purchase new technologies, train a small group of officials in how to use them—often with the support of external actors, such as China—and they are ready to go. For example, Huawei, a Chinese state-backed telecommunications firm, has deployed its digital surveillance technology in over a dozen authoritarian regimes. In 2019, reports surfaced that the Ugandan government was using it to hack the social media accounts and electronic communications of its political opponents. The vendors of such technologies don't always reside in authoritarian countries. Israeli and Italian firms have also sold digital surveillance software to the Ugandan regime. Israeli companies have sold espionage and intelligence-gathering software to a number of authoritarian regimes across the world, including Angola, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mozambique, and Nicaragua. And U.S. firms have exported facial recognition technology to governments in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

A SLIPPERY SLOPE

As autocracies last longer, the number of such regimes in place at any point in time is likely to increase, as some countries backslide on democratic rule. Although the number of autocracies globally has not risen substantially in recent years, and more people than ever before live in countries that hold free and fair elections, the tide may be turning. Data collected by Freedom House show, for example, that between 2013 and 2018, although there were three countries that transitioned from “partly free” to “free” status (the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, and Tunisia), there were seven that experienced the reverse, moving from a status of “free” to one of “partly free” (the Dominican Republic, Hungary, Indonesia, Lesotho, Montenegro, Serbia, and Sierra Leone).

The risk that technology will usher in a wave of authoritarianism is all the more concerning because our own empirical research has indi-

cated that beyond buttressing autocracies, digital tools are associated with an increased risk of democratic backsliding in fragile democracies. New technologies are particularly dangerous for weak democracies because many of these digital tools are dual use: technology can enhance government efficiency and provide the capacity to address challenges such as crime and terrorism, but no matter the intentions with which governments initially acquire such technology, they can also use these tools to muzzle and restrict the activities of their opponents.

Pushing back against the spread of digital authoritarianism will require addressing the detrimental effects of new technologies on governance in autocracies and democracies alike. As a first step, the United States should modernize and expand legislation to help ensure that U.S. entities are not enabling human rights abuses. A December 2019 report by the Center for a New American Security (where one of us is a senior fellow) highlights the need for Congress to restrict the export of hardware that incorporates AI-enabled biometric identification technologies, such as facial, voice, and gait recognition; impose further sanctions on businesses and entities that provide surveillance technology, training, or equipment to authoritarian regimes implicated in human rights abuses; and consider legislation to prevent U.S. entities from investing in companies that are building AI tools for repression, such as the Chinese AI company SenseTime.

The U.S. government should also use the Global Magnitsky Act, which allows the U.S. Treasury Department to sanction foreign individuals involved in human rights abuses, to punish foreigners who engage in or facilitate AI-powered human rights abuses. CCP officials responsible for atrocities in Xinjiang are clear candidates for such sanctions.

U.S. government agencies and civil society groups should also pursue actions to mitigate the potentially negative effects of the spread of surveillance technology, especially in fragile democracies. The focus of such engagement should be on strengthening the political and legal frameworks that govern how surveillance technologies are used and building the capacity of civil society and watchdog organizations to check government abuse.

What is perhaps most critical, the United States must make sure it leads in AI and helps shape global norms for its use in ways that are consistent with democratic values and respect for human rights. This means first and foremost that Americans must get this right at home, creating a model that people worldwide will want to emulate. The

United States should also work in conjunction with like-minded democracies to develop a standard for digital surveillance that strikes the right balance between security and respect for privacy and human rights. The United States will also need to work closely with like-minded allies and partners to set and enforce the rules of the road, including by restoring U.S. leadership in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations.

AI and other technological innovations hold great promise for improving everyday lives, but they have indisputably strengthened the grip of authoritarian regimes. The intensifying digital repression in countries such as China offers a bleak vision of ever-expanding state control and ever-shrinking individual liberty.

But that need not be the only vision. In the near term, rapid technological change will likely produce a cat-and-mouse dynamic as citizens and governments race to gain the upper hand. If history is any guide, the creativity and responsiveness of open societies will in the long term allow democracies to more effectively navigate this era of technological transformation. Just as today's autocracies have evolved to embrace new tools, so, too, must democracies develop new ideas, new approaches, and the leadership to ensure that the promise of technology in the twenty-first century doesn't become a curse. 🌐

Chronicle of a Pandemic Foretold

Learning From the COVID-19 Failure—
Before the Next Outbreak Arrives

Michael T. Osterholm and Mark Olshaker

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“**T**ime is running out to prepare for the next pandemic. We must act now with decisiveness and purpose. Someday, after the next pandemic has come and gone, a commission much like the 9/11 Commission will be charged with determining how well government, business, and public health leaders prepared the world for the catastrophe when they had clear warning. What will be the verdict?”

That is from the concluding paragraph of an essay entitled “Preparing for the Next Pandemic” that one of us, Michael Osterholm, published in these pages in 2005. The next pandemic has now come, and even though COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus that emerged in late 2019, is far from gone, it is not too soon to reach a verdict on the world’s collective preparation. That verdict is a damning one.

There are two levels of preparation, long range and short range, and government, business, and public health leaders largely failed on both. Failure on the first level is akin to having been warned by meteorologists that a Category 5 hurricane would one day make a direct hit on New Orleans and doing nothing to strengthen levies, construct water-

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diversion systems, or develop a comprehensive emergency plan. Failure on the second is akin to knowing that a massive low-pressure system is moving across the Atlantic toward the Gulf of Mexico and not promptly issuing evacuation orders or adequately stocking emergency shelters. When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans on August 29, 2005, preparation on both levels was inadequate, and the region suffered massive losses of life and property as a result. The analogous failure both over recent decades to prepare for an eventual pandemic and over recent months to prepare for the spread of this particular pandemic has had an even steeper toll, on a national and global scale.

The long-term failure by governments and institutions to prepare for an infectious disease outbreak cannot be blamed on a lack of warning or an absence of concrete policy options. Nor should resources have been the constraint. After all, in the past two decades, the United States alone has spent countless billions on homeland security and counterterrorism to defend against human enemies, losing sight of the demonstrably far greater threat posed by microbial enemies; terrorists don't have the capacity to bring Americans' way of life to a screeching halt, something COVID-19 accomplished handily in a matter of weeks. And then, in addition to the preparations that should have been started many years ago, there are the preparations that should have started several months ago, as soon as reports of an unknown communicable disease that could kill started coming out of China.

The public health community has for years known with certainty that another major pandemic was on the way, and then another one after that—not if but when. Mother Nature has always had the upper hand, and now she has at her disposal all the trappings of the modern world to extend her reach. The current crisis will eventually end, either when a vaccine is available or when enough of the global population has developed immunity (if lasting immunity is even possible), which would likely require some two-thirds of the total population to become infected. Neither of those ends will come quickly, and the human and economic costs in the meantime will be enormous.

Yet some future microbial outbreak will be bigger and deadlier still. In other words, this pandemic is probably not “the Big One,” the prospect of which haunts the nightmares of epidemiologists and public health officials everywhere. The next pandemic will most likely be a novel influenza virus with the same devastating impact as the pandemic of 1918, which circled the globe two and a half times over the

course of more than a year, in recurring waves, killing many more people than the brutal and bloody war that preceded it.

Examining why the United States and the world are in this current crisis is thus not simply a matter of accountability or assigning blame. Just as this pandemic was in many ways foretold, the next one will be, as well. If the world doesn't learn the right lessons from its failure to prepare and act on them with the speed, resources, and political and societal commitment they deserve, the toll next time could be considerably steeper. Terrible as it is, COVID-19 should serve as a warning of how much worse a pandemic could be—and spur the necessary action to contain an outbreak before it is again too late.

WAKE-UP CALL

For anyone who wasn't focused on the threat of an infectious disease pandemic before, the wake-up call should have come with the 2003 outbreak of SARS. A coronavirus—so named because, under an electron microscope, the proteins projecting out from the virion's surface resemble a corona, a halo-like astronomical phenomenon—jumped from palm civets and ferret badgers in the markets of Guangdong, China, made its way to Hong Kong, and then spread to countries around the world. By the time the outbreak was stopped, the animal sources eliminated from the markets, and infected people isolated, 8,098 cases had been reported and 774 people had died.

Nine years later, in 2012, another life-threatening coronavirus, MERS, spread across the Arabian Peninsula. In this instance, the virus originated in dromedaries, a type of camel. (Since camel owners in the Middle East understandably will not kill their valuable and culturally important animals, MERS remains a regional public health challenge.) Both coronaviruses were harbingers of things to come (as we wrote in our 2017 book, *Deadliest Enemy*), even if, unlike COVID-19, which can be transmitted by carriers not even aware they have it, SARS and MERS tend not to become highly infectious until the fifth or sixth day of symptomatic illness.

SARS, MERS, and a number of other recent outbreaks—the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic that started in Mexico, the 2014–16 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, the 2015–16 spread of the Zika flavivirus from the Pacific Islands to North and South America—have differed from one another in a number of ways, including their clinical presentation, their degree of severity, and their means of transmission. But all have had one notable thing in common: they all came as surprises, and they shouldn't have.

For years, epidemiologists and public health experts had been calling for the development of concrete plans for handling the first months and years of a pandemic. Such a “detailed operational blueprint,” as “Preparing for the Next Pandemic” put it in 2005, would have to involve everyone from private-sector food producers, medical suppliers, and health-care providers to public-sector health, law enforcement, and emergency-management officials. And it would have to anticipate “the pandemic-related collapse of worldwide trade . . . the first real test of the resiliency of the modern global delivery system.” Similar calls came from experts and officials around the world, and yet they largely went unheeded.

PREEXISTING CONDITIONS

If anything, despite such warnings, the state of preparedness has gotten worse rather than better in recent years—especially in the United States. The problem was not just deteriorating public health infrastructure but also changes in global trade and production.

During the 2003 SARS outbreak, few people worried about supply chains. Now, global supply chains are significantly complicating the U.S. response. The United States has become far more dependent on China and other nations for critical drugs and medical supplies. The Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota (where one of us, Osterholm, is the director) has identified 156 acute critical drugs frequently used in the United States—the drugs without which patients would die within hours. All these drugs are generic; most are now made overseas; and many of them, or their active pharmaceutical ingredients, are manufactured in China or India. A pandemic that idles Asian factories or shuts down shipping routes thus threatens the already strained supply of these drugs to Western hospitals, and it doesn’t matter how good a modern hospital is if the bottles and vials on the crash cart are empty. (And in a strategic showdown with its great-power rival, China might use its ability to withhold critical drugs to devastating effect.)

Financial pressure on hospitals and health systems has also left them less able to handle added stress. In any pandemic-level outbreak, a pernicious ripple effect disturbs the health-care equilibrium. The stepped-up need for ventilators and the tranquilizing and paralytic drugs that accompany their use produce a greater need for kidney dialysis and the therapeutic agents that requires, and so on down the line. Even speculation that the antimalarial hydroxy-

chloroquine might be useful in the treatment of COVID-19 caused a shortage of the drug for patients with rheumatoid arthritis and lupus, who depend on it for their daily well-being. It remains unclear what impact COVID-19 has had on the number of deaths due to other conditions, such as heart attacks. Even if it's mostly a matter of patients with severe or life-threatening chronic conditions avoiding care to minimize their risk of exposure to the virus, this could ultimately prove to be serious collateral damage of the pandemic.

In normal times, the United States' hospitals have little in the way of reserves and therefore little to no surge capacity for emergency situations: not enough beds, not enough emergency equipment such as mechanical ventilators, not enough N95 masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE). The result during a pandemic is the equivalent of sending soldiers into battle without enough helmets or rifles.

The National Pharmaceutical Stockpile was created during the Clinton administration and renamed the Strategic National Stockpile in 2003. It has never had sufficient reserves to meet the kind of crisis underway today, and it is fair to say that no administration has devoted the resources to make it fully functional in a large-scale emergency.

Even more of an impediment to a rapid and efficient pandemic response is underinvestment in vaccine research and development. In 2006, Congress established the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA). Its charge is to provide an integrated and systematic approach to the development and purchase of vaccines, drugs, and diagnostic tools that will become critical in public health emergencies. But it has been chronically underfunded, and the need to go to Congress and ask for new money every year has all but killed the possibility of major long-term projects.

Following the 2014–16 West African Ebola outbreak, there was a clear recognition of the inadequacy of international investment in new vaccines for regional epidemic diseases such as Ebola, Lassa fever, Nipah virus disease, and Zika, despite the efforts of BARDA and other international philanthropic government programs. To address this hole in preparedness, CEPI, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, a foundation that receives support from public, private, philanthropic, and civil society organizations, was conceived in 2015 and formally launched in 2017. Its purpose is to finance independent research projects to develop vaccines against emerging infectious diseases. It was initially supported with \$460 million from the Bill &

Melinda Gates Foundation, the Wellcome Trust, and a consortium of nations, including Germany, Japan, and Norway. Although CEPI has been a central player since early this year in developing a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, the absence of a prior major coronavirus vaccine initiative highlights the ongoing underinvestment in global infectious disease preparedness.

Had the requisite financial and pharmaceutical resources gone into developing a vaccine for SARS in 2003 or MERS in 2012, scientists already would have done the essential research on how to achieve coronavirus immunity, and there would likely be a vaccine platform on which to build (such a platform is a technology or modality that can be developed for a range of related diseases). Today, that would have saved many precious months or even years.

FIRST SYMPTOMS

By late 2019, the lack of long-range preparation had gone on for years, despite persistent warnings. Then, the short-range failure started. Early surveillance data suggested to epidemiologists that a microbial storm was brewing. But the action to prepare for that storm came far too slowly.

By the last week of December, reports of a new infectious disease in the Chinese city of Wuhan and surrounding Hubei Province were starting to make their way to the United States and around the world. There is no question that the Chinese government suppressed information during the first weeks of the outbreak, evident especially in the shameful attempt to silence the warnings of Li Wenliang, the 34-year-old ophthalmologist who tried to alert the public about the threat. Yet even with such dissembling and delay, the warning signs were clear enough by the start of this year. For example, the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy published its first description of the mystery disease on December 31 and publicly identified it as a novel coronavirus on January 8. And by January 11, China had published the complete genetic sequence for the virus, at which point the World Health Organization (WHO) immediately began developing a diagnostic test. By the second half of January, epidemiologists were warning of a potential pandemic (including one of us, Osterholm, on January 20). Yet the U.S. government at the time was still dismissing the prospect of a serious outbreak in the United States—despite valid suspicions that the Chinese government was suppressing information on the

Wuhan outbreak and underreporting case figures. It was the moment when preparation for a specific coming storm should have started in earnest and quickly shifted into high gear.

U.S. President Donald Trump would later proffer the twin assertions that he “felt it was a pandemic long before it was called a pandemic” and that “nobody knew there’d be a pandemic or an epidemic of this proportion.” But on January 29, Peter Navarro, Trump’s trade adviser, wrote a memo to the National Security Council warning that when the coronavirus in China reached U.S. soil, it could risk the health or lives of millions and cost the economy trillions of dollars. That same day, as reported by *The Wall Street Journal*, Alex Azar, the health and human services secretary, told the president that the potential epidemic was well under control. Navarro sent an even more urgent memo on February 23, according to *The New York Times*, pointing to an “increasing probability of a full-blown COVID-19 pandemic that could infect as many as 100 million Americans, with a loss of life of as many as 1–2 million souls.”

Washington’s lack of an adequate response to such warnings is by now a matter of public record. Viewing the initially low numbers of clinically recognized cases outside China, key U.S. officials were either unaware of or in denial about the risks of exponential viral spread. If an infectious disease spreads from person to person and each individual case causes two more, the total numbers will remain low for a while—and then take off. (It’s like the old demonstration: if you start out with a penny and double it every day, you’ll have just 64 cents after a week and \$81.92 after two weeks, and then more than \$5 million by the end of a month.) COVID-19 cases do not typically double overnight, but every five days is a pretty good benchmark, allowing for rapid growth even from just a few cases. Once the virus had spread outside East Asia, Iran and Italy were the first to experience this effect.

Even with the lack of long-range planning and investment, there was much that the U.S. government could and should have done by way of a short-range response. As soon as the novel and deadly coronavirus was identified, Washington could have conducted a quick but comprehensive review of national PPE requirements, which would have led to the immediate ramping up of production for N95 masks and protective gowns and gloves and plans to produce more mechanical ventilators. Relying on the experience of other countries, it should have put in place a comprehensive test-manufacturing capability and been ready to institute testing and contact tracing while the num-

ber of cases was still low, containing the virus as much as possible wherever it cropped up. It could have appointed a supply chain coordinator to work with governors, on a nonpartisan basis, to allocate and distribute resources. At the same time, Congress could have been drafting emergency-funding legislation for hospitals, to prepare them for both the onslaught of COVID-19 patients and the sharp drop in elective surgeries, routine hospitalizations, and visits by foreign visitors, essential sources of revenue for many institutions.

Instead, the administration resisted calls to advise people to stay at home and practice social distancing and was unable or unwilling to coordinate a government-wide effort among relevant agencies and departments. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initially shipped its own version of a test to state public health labs, only to find that it didn't work. This should have immediately triggered an elevation of the issue to a crisis-driven priority for both the CDC and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, including bringing the private clinical laboratory industry into the process to help manufacture test kits. Instead, the problem languished, and the FDA took until the end of February to approve any independent tests. At that point, the United States had 100 or so recognized cases of COVID-19. A little over a week later, the number would break 1,000, and after that, the president declared a national emergency.

In 1918, cities that reacted to the flu early, preventing public gatherings and advising citizens to stay home, suffered far fewer casualties overall. But for this approach to work, they had to have reliable information from central authorities in public health and government, which requires honesty, responsiveness, and credibility from the beginning. In the current crisis, the output from the White House was instead—and continues to be—a stream of self-congratulatory tweets, mixed messages, and contradictory daily briefings in which Trump simultaneously asserted far-reaching authority and control and denied responsibility for anything that went wrong or didn't get done. Everything was the governors' responsibility and fault—including not planning ahead, the very thing the administration refused to do. Two years earlier, it had even disbanded the pandemic-readiness arm of the National Security Council.

"You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time," U.S. Secretary of Defense Don-

ald Rumsfeld famously declared in 2004, addressing U.S. troops on the way to Iraq, where the military's vehicles lacked armor that could protect the service members inside from explosive devices. That grim message could apply to the pandemic response, too, with, for example, frontline health-care workers going to war against COVID-19 without PPE. But in many ways, the current situation is even worse. The United States and other countries went to war against a rapidly spreading infectious disease without a battle plan, sufficient personnel, adequate facilities or stocks of equipment and supplies, a reliable supply chain, centralized command, or a public educated about or prepared for the struggle ahead.

In the absence of strong and consistent federal leadership, state governors and many large-city mayors have taken the primary responsibility of pandemic response on themselves, as they had to, given that the White House had even advised them to find their own ventilators and testing supplies. (And health-care workers, forced into frontline treatment situations without adequate respiratory protection, are of course the hero-soldiers of this war.) But fighting the virus effectively demands that decision-makers start thinking strategically—to determine whether the actions being taken right now are effective and evidence-based—or else little will be accomplished despite the best of intentions. In this regard, it is not too late for the United States to take on its traditional leadership role and be an example in this fight, rather than lagging behind, as it has so far, places such as Germany, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea, and even, despite its initial missteps, China.

THE BIG ONE

Why did so many policymakers ignore the virus until it was too late to slow it down? It's not a failure of imagination that prevented them from understanding the dimensions and impact of a mass infectious disease outbreak. In the United States, numerous high-level simulated bioterror and pandemic tabletop exercises—from Dark Winter in 2001 through Clade X in 2018 and Event 201 in 2019—have demonstrated the confusion, poor decision-making, and lack of coordination of resources and messaging that can undermine a response in the absence of crisis contingency planning and preparation. The problem is mainly structural, one that behavioral economists call “hyperbolic discounting.” Because of hyperbolic discounting, explains Eric Dezen-

hall, a crisis manager and one-time Reagan White House staffer who has long studied the organizational reasons for action and inaction in government and business, leaders “do what is easy and pays immediate dividends rather than doing what is hard, where the dividends seem remote. . . . With something like a pandemic, which sounds like a phenomenon from another century, it seems too remote to plan for.”

The phenomenon is hardly new. Daniel Defoe relates in *A Journal of the Plague Year* that in 1665, municipal authorities in London first refused to accept that anything unusual was happening, then tried to keep information from the public, until the spike in deaths made it impossible to deny the much-feared bubonic plague. By that point, all they could do was lock victims and their families in their homes in a vain attempt to stop the spread.

Short of a global thermonuclear war and the long-term impact of climate change, an infectious disease pandemic has the greatest potential to devastate health and economic stability across the globe. All other types of disasters and calamities are limited in geography and duration—whether a hurricane, an earthquake, or a terrorist attack. A pandemic can occur everywhere at once and last for months or years.

Worldwide mortality estimates for the 1918 influenza pandemic range as high as 100 million—as a percentage of the global population, equivalent to more than 400 million people today—making it easily the worst natural disaster in modern times. So profound were the pandemic’s effects that average life expectancy in the United States immediately fell by more than ten years. Unlike a century ago, the world today has four times the population; more than a billion international border crossings each year; air travel that can connect almost any two points on the globe in a matter of hours; wide-scale human encroachment on forests and wildlife habitats; developing-world megacities in which impoverished people live in close confines with others and without adequate nutrition, sanitation, or medical care; industrial farming in which animals are kept packed together; a significant overuse of antibiotics in both human and animal populations; millions of people living cheek by jowl with domestic birds and livestock (creating what are essentially genetic reassortment laboratories); and a dependence on international just-in-time supply chains with much of the critical production concentrated in China.

The natural tendency might be to reassuringly assume that a century’s worth of medical progress will make up for such added vulner-

abilities. (The human influenza virus wasn't even discovered until 1933, when the virologists Wilson Smith, Christopher Andrewes, and Patrick Laidlaw, working at London's National Institute for Medical Research, first isolated the influenza A virus from the nasal secretions and throat washings of infected patients.) That would be a grave misconception. Even in a nonpandemic year, aggregated infectious diseases—including malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, seasonal influenza, and diarrheal and other vector-borne illnesses—represent one of the major causes of death worldwide and by far the leading cause of death in low-income countries, according to the WHO.

In fact, given those realities of modern life, a similarly virulent influenza pandemic would be exponentially more devastating than the one a century ago—as the current pandemic makes clear. In the absence of a reliable vaccine produced in sufficient quantities to immunize much of the planet, all the significant countermeasures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have been nonmedical: avoiding public gatherings, sheltering in place, social distancing, wearing masks of variable effectiveness, washing hands frequently. As of this writing, scientists and policymakers don't even have a good handle on how many of the RT-PCR tests that determine whether an individual has the virus and how many of the serology tests that detect antibodies and determine whether someone has already had it are even reliable. Meanwhile, international demand for reagents—the chemicals that make both kinds of tests work—and sampling swabs is already outstripping supply and production. It is hard to conclude that the world today is much better equipped to combat a massive pandemic than doctors, public health personnel, and policymakers were 100 years ago.

Some are calling the COVID-19 pandemic a once-in-100-year event, comparable to 100-year floods or earthquakes. But the fact that the world is enduring a pandemic right now is no more predictive of when the next one will occur than one roll of dice is of the result of the next roll. (Although the 1918 flu was the most devastating influenza pandemic in history, an 1830–32 outbreak was similarly severe, only in a world with around half of 1918's population.) The next roll, or the one after that, could really be “the Big One,” and it could make even the current pandemic seem minor by comparison.

When it comes, a novel influenza pandemic could truly bring the entire world to its knees—killing hundreds of millions or more, devastating commerce, destabilizing governments, skewing the course of

history for generations to come. Unlike COVID-19, which tends to most seriously affect older people and those with preexisting medical problems, the 1918 influenza took a particularly heavy toll on otherwise healthy men and women between the ages of 18 and 40 (thought to be a result of their more robust immune systems overreacting to the threat through a “cytokine storm”). There is no reason to think that the next big novel influenza pandemic couldn’t have similar results.

PLANS VS. PLANNING

Humans do not have the power to prevent all epidemics or pandemics. But with the sufficient will, resources, and commitment, we do have the power to mitigate their awesome potential for causing premature deaths and attendant misery.

To begin with, Americans must change how they think about the challenge. Although many people in the public health sphere don’t like associating themselves with the military—they heal rather than kill, the thinking goes—there is much that they can learn from military planning. The military focuses on flexibility, logistics, and maintaining readiness for any foreseeable situation. As U.S. General Dwight Eisenhower noted, “Peace-time plans are of no particular value, but peace-time planning is indispensable.”

The starting point should be to prioritize health threats in terms of their likelihood and potential consequences if unchecked. First on that list is a deadly virus that spreads by respiratory transmission (coughing, sneezing, even simple breathing). By far the most likely candidate would be another high-mortality influenza strain, like the 1918 one, although as revealed by SARS, MERS, Zika, and COVID-19, new and deadly noninfluenza microbes are emerging or mutating in unpredictable and dangerous ways.

Even before a specific threat has arisen, a broad group of actors should be brought together to develop a comprehensive strategy—with enough built-in flexibility that it can evolve as conditions demand—and then they should repeatedly review and rehearse it. That effort should involve everyone from high-level government and public health officials to emergency responders, law enforcement, medical experts and suppliers, food providers, manufacturers, and specialists in transportation and communications. (As emergency planners are fond of saying, you don’t want to be exchanging business cards at a disaster site.) The strategy should offer an operational blueprint for

how to get through the one or two years a pandemic would likely last; among the benefits of such a blueprint would be helping ensure that leaders are psychologically prepared for what they might face in a crisis, just as military training does for soldiers anticipating battlefield conditions. The Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense—jointly chaired by Tom Ridge, the first secretary of homeland security, under President George W. Bush, and a former Pennsylvania governor, and Joseph Lieberman, a former Democratic senator from Connecticut—has suggested that the operation could be located in the Office of the Vice President, with direct reporting to the president. Wherever it is based, it must be run by a smart and responsible coordinator, experienced in the mechanics of government and able to communicate effectively with all parties—as Ron Klain was as Ebola czar in the Obama administration.

In addition to the gaming out of various potential scenarios, adequate preparation must include a military-like model of procurement and production. The military doesn't wait until war is declared to start building aircraft carriers, fighter jets, or other weapons systems. It develops weapons over a period of years, with congressional funding projected over the entire development span. The same type of approach is needed to develop the weapons systems to fight potential pandemics. Relying solely on the market and the private sector to take care of this is a recipe for failure, because in many cases, there will be no viable customer other than the government to fund both the development and the manufacturing process.

That has proved particularly true when it comes to drug development, even when there is no pandemic. For many of the most critical drugs, a market-driven approach that relies on private pharmaceutical companies simply doesn't work. The problem is evident, for example, in the production of antibiotics. Because of the growing problem of antimicrobial resistance—which threatens to bring back a pre-antibiotic dark age, in which a cut or a scrape could kill and surgery was a risk-filled nightmare—it makes little sense for pharmaceutical companies to devote enormous human and financial resources to developing a powerful new antibiotic that might subsequently be restricted to use in only the most extreme cases. But in a flu pandemic, such highly effective antibiotics would be essential, since a primary cause of death in recent flu outbreaks has been secondary bacterial pneumonia infecting lungs weakened by the virus.

The same holds for developing vaccines or treatments for diseases such as Ebola. Such drugs have virtually no sales most of the time but are critical to averting an epidemic when an outbreak strikes. Governments must be willing to subsidize the research, development, clinical trials, and manufacturing capacity for such drugs the same way they subsidize the development and manufacture of fighter planes and tanks.

Preparation for pandemics and for the necessary surge of medical countermeasures will also require being more attentive to where drugs and medical supplies are produced. In times of pandemic, every nation will be competing for the same critical drugs and medical supplies at the same time, so it is entirely reasonable to expect that each will prioritize its own needs when distributing what it produces and controls. There is also the ongoing threat that a localized infectious hot spot will close down a manufacturing facility that produces critical drugs or medical supplies. Despite the higher costs that it would involve, it is absolutely essential that the United States lessen its dependence on China and India for its lifesaving drugs and develop additional manufacturing capacity in the United States itself and in reliably friendly Western nations.

The U.S. government must also get more strategic in overseeing the Strategic National Stockpile. Not only does it need to perform realistic evaluations of what should be on hand to meet surges in demand at any given time, in order to avoid repeating the current shame of not having enough PPE for health-care workers and first responders; supplies should also be rotated in and out on a regular basis, so that, for instance, the store doesn't end up including masks with degraded rubber bands or expired medications.

HOLISTIC TREATMENT

To make progress on either a specific vaccine or a vaccine platform for diseases of pandemic potential, governments have to play a central role. That includes funding basic research, development, and the Phase 3 clinical trials necessary for validation and licensing. (This phase is often referred to as “the valley of death,” because it is the point at which many drugs with early laboratory promise don't pan out in real-world applications.) It is also imperative that governments commit to purchasing these vaccines.

With its current concentration on the development of a vaccine for COVID-19 and other medical countermeasures, BARDA has had to put other projects on the back burner. For all the complaints about its

cumbersome contracting process and tight oversight controls (said by critics to stifle outside-the-box thinking and experimentation), BARDA is the closest thing the U.S. government has to a venture capital firm for epidemic response. COVID-19 should spur a commitment to upgrading it, and a panel of experts should undertake a review of BARDA's annual budget and scope to determine what the agency needs to meet and respond to future biomedical challenges.

Of all the vaccines that deserve priority, at the very top of the list should be a “universal” influenza vaccine, which would be game changing. Twice a year, once for the Northern Hemisphere and once for the Southern Hemisphere, through an observational and not very precise committee process, international public health officials try to guess which flu strains are likely to flare up the next fall, and then they rush a new vaccine based on these guesstimates into production and distribution. The problem is that influenza can mutate and reassort its genes with maddening ease as it passes from one living animal or human host to the next, so each year's seasonal flu vaccine is usually only partly effective—better than nothing, but not a precise and directly targeted bullet like the smallpox or the measles vaccine. The holy grail of influenza immunity would be to develop a vaccine that targets the conserved elements of the virus—that is, the parts that don't change from one flu strain to the next, no matter how many mutations or iterations the virus goes through.

A universal influenza vaccine would require a monumental scientific effort, on the scale of the billion-dollar annual investment that has gone into fighting HIV/AIDS. The price tag would be enormous, but since another population-devouring flu pandemic will surely visit itself on the globe at some point, the expense would be justified many times over. Such a vaccine would be the greatest public health triumph since the eradication of smallpox.

Of course, no single nation can fight a pandemic on its own. Microbes do not respect borders, and they manage to figure out workarounds to restrictions on international air travel. As the Nobel Prize-winning molecular biologist Joshua Lederberg warned, “The microbe that felled one child in a distant continent yesterday can reach yours today and seed a global pandemic tomorrow.” With that insight in mind, there should be a major, carefully coordinated disaster drill every year, similar to the military exercises the United States holds with its allies, but with a much broader range of partners. These should involve governments, public health and emergency-response institu-

tions, and the major medically related manufacturing industries of various nations that will need to work together quickly when worldwide disease surveillance—another vital component of pandemic preparedness—recognizes an outbreak.

The world was able to eradicate smallpox, one of the great scourges of history, because the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, both committed to doing so, following an appeal at the 1958 convening of the World Health Assembly, the decision-making body of the WHO. Today's tense geopolitics makes such a common commitment hard to achieve. But without it, there is little chance of adequate preparation for the next pandemic. The current global health architecture is far from sufficient. It has little hope of containing an even more threatening outbreak. Instead, something along the lines of NATO will be necessary—a public-health-oriented treaty organization with prepositioned supplies, a deployment blueprint, and an agreement among signatories that an epidemic outbreak in one country will be met with a coordinated and equally vigorous response by all. Such an organization could work in concert with the WHO and other existing institutions but act with greater speed, efficiency, and resources.

It is easy enough to dismiss warnings of another 1918-like pandemic: the next pandemic might not arise in our lifetimes, and by the time it does, science may have come up with robust medical countermeasures to contain it at lower human and economic cost. These are reasonable possibilities. But reasonable enough to collectively bet our lives on? History says otherwise. 🌐

The Endangered Asian Century

America, China, and the Perils of Confrontation

Lee Hsien Loong

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“In recent years, people have been saying that the next century will be the century of Asia and the Pacific, as if that were sure to be the case. I disagree with this view.” The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping made that argument to Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988. More than 30 years later, Deng has proved prescient. After decades of extraordinary economic success, Asia today is the world’s fastest-growing region. Within this decade, Asian economies will become larger than the rest of the world’s economies combined, something that has not been true since the nineteenth century. Yet even now, Deng’s warning holds: an Asian century is neither inevitable nor foreordained.

Asia has prospered because Pax Americana, which has held since the end of World War II, provided a favorable strategic context. But now, the troubled U.S.-Chinese relationship raises profound questions about Asia’s future and the shape of the emerging international order. Southeast Asian countries, including Singapore, are especially concerned, as they live at the intersection of the interests of various major powers and must avoid being caught in the middle or forced into invidious choices.

The status quo in Asia must change. But will the new configuration enable further success or bring dangerous instability? That depends

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on the choices that the United States and China make, separately and together. The two powers must work out a *modus vivendi* that will be competitive in some areas without allowing rivalry to poison cooperation in others.

Asian countries see the United States as a resident power that has vital interests in the region. At the same time, China is a reality on the doorstep. Asian countries do not want to be forced to choose between the two. And if either attempts to force such a choice—if Washington tries to contain China's rise or Beijing seeks to build an exclusive sphere of influence in Asia—they will begin a course of confrontation that will last decades and put the long-heralded Asian century in jeopardy.

THE TWO PHASES OF PAX AMERICANA

Pax Americana in Asia in the twentieth century had two distinct phases. The first was from 1945 to the 1970s, during the early decades of the Cold War, when the United States and its allies competed with the Soviet bloc for influence. Although China joined the Soviet Union to confront the United States during the wars in Korea and Vietnam, its economy remained inwardly focused and isolated, and it maintained few economic links with other Asian countries. Meanwhile, elsewhere in Asia, free-market economies were taking off. Japan's was the earliest to do so, followed by the newly industrializing economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan.

What made Asia's stability and prosperity possible was the United States. The United States championed an open, integrated, and rules-based global order and provided a security umbrella under which regional countries could cooperate and peacefully compete. American multinational corporations invested extensively in Asia, bringing with them capital, technology, and ideas. As Washington promoted free trade and opened U.S. markets to the world, Asian trade with the United States grew.

Two pivotal events in the 1970s shifted Pax Americana in Asia into a new phase: the secret visit to China in 1971 by Henry Kissinger, then the U.S. national security adviser, which laid the basis for U.S.-Chinese rapprochement after decades of hostility, and the launch, in 1978, of Deng's program of "reform and opening up," which allowed China's economy to take off. By the end of the decade, economic barriers were coming down, and international trade was growing rapidly. After the Vietnam War and the war in Cambodia ended, Vietnam and the other countries of Indo-

china were able to focus their energies and resources on economic development, and they started catching up with the rest of Asia.

Many Asian countries had long viewed the United States and other developed countries as their main economic partners. But they now increasingly seized the opportunities created by China's rapid development. Trade and tourism with China grew, and supply chains became tightly integrated. Within a few decades, China went from being economically inconsequential for the rest of Asia to being the region's biggest economy and major economic partner. China's influence in regional affairs grew correspondingly.

Still, Pax Americana held, and these radical changes in China's role took place within its framework. China was not in a position to challenge U.S. preeminence and did not attempt to do so. Indeed, it adopted as its guiding philosophy Deng's dictum "Hide your strength, bide your time" and prioritized the modernization of its agricultural, industrial, and science and technology sectors over building military strength.

Southeast Asian countries thus enjoyed the best of both worlds, building economic relationships with China while maintaining strong ties with the United States and other developed countries. They also deepened ties with one another and worked together to create an open architecture for regional cooperation rooted in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. ASEAN played a central role in forming the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 1989, establishing the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994, and convening the annual East Asia Summit since 2005.

China participates fully in these processes. Every year, the Chinese premier travels to an ASEAN member state to meet the ASEAN countries' leaders, well prepared to explain how China sees the region and armed with proposals to enhance Chinese cooperation with the grouping's members. As China's stake in the region has grown, it has launched its own initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. These have helped deepen China's engagement with its neighbors and, of course, increased its influence.

But because the regional architecture is open, China's influence is not exclusive. The United States remains an important participant, underpinning regional security and stability and enhancing its economic engagement through initiatives such as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act and the BUILD Act. ASEAN also has formal dialogue mechanisms with the European Union, as well as with India and many other countries. ASEAN believes that such a network of connections

creates a more robust framework for cooperation and more space to advance its members' collective interests internationally.

So far, this formula has worked well. But the strategic basis of Pax Americana has shifted fundamentally. In the four decades since it began to reform and open up, China has been transformed. As its economy, technological capabilities, and political influence have grown exponentially, its outlook on the world has changed, as well. Chinese leaders today no longer cite Deng's maxim about hiding one's strength and biding one's time. China sees itself as a continental power and aspires to become a maritime power, too; it has been modernizing its army and navy and aims to turn its military into a world-class fighting force. Increasingly, and quite understandably, China wants to protect and advance its interests abroad and secure what it sees as its rightful place in international affairs.

At the same time, the United States, which is still the preeminent power in many dimensions, is reassessing its grand strategy. As its share of global GDP diminishes, it is unclear whether the United States will continue to shoulder the burden of maintaining international peace and stability, or whether it might instead pursue a narrower, "America first" approach to protecting its interests. As Washington asks fundamental questions about its responsibilities in the global system, its relationship with Beijing has come under increased scrutiny.

THE FUNDAMENTAL CHOICES OF THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

The United States and China each face fundamental choices. The United States must decide whether to view China's rise as an existential threat and try to hold China back through all available means or to accept China as a major power in its own right. If it chooses the latter path, the United States must craft an approach to China that will foster cooperation and healthy competition wherever possible and not allow rivalry to poison the entire relationship. Ideally, this competition will take place within an agreed multilateral framework of rules and norms of the kind that govern the United Nations and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The United States is likely to find this a painful adjustment, especially with the growing consensus in Washington that engaging Beijing has failed and that a tougher approach is necessary to preserve U.S. interests. But however difficult the task will be for the United States, it is well worth making a serious effort to accommodate China's aspira-

tions within the current system of international rules and norms. This system imposes responsibilities and restraints on all countries, strengthens trust, helps manage conflicts, and creates a safer and stabler environment for both cooperation and competition.

If the United States chooses instead to try to contain China's rise, it will risk provoking a reaction that could set the two countries on a path to decades of confrontation. The United States is not a declining power. It has great resilience and strengths, one of which is its ability to attract talent from around the world; of the nine people of Chinese ethnicity who have been awarded Nobel Prizes in the sciences, eight were U.S. citizens or subsequently became U.S. citizens. On the other side, the Chinese economy possesses tremendous dynamism and increasingly advanced technology; it is far from being a Potemkin village or the tottering command economy that defined the Soviet Union in its final years. Any confrontation between these two great powers is unlikely to end as the Cold War did, in one country's peaceful collapse.

For its part, China must decide whether to try to get its way as an unencumbered major power, prevailing by dint of its sheer weight and economic strength—but at the risk of strong pushback, not just from the United States but from other countries, too. This approach is likely to increase tensions and resentment, which would affect China's standing and influence in the longer term. This is a real danger: a recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that people in Canada, the United States, and other Asian and western European countries have increasingly unfavorable views of China. Despite China's recent efforts to build soft power abroad—through its network of Confucius Institutes, for example, and through Chinese-owned international newspapers and television outlets—the trend is negative.

Alternatively, China could acknowledge that it is no longer poor and weak and accept that the world now has higher expectations of it. It is no longer politically justifiable for China to enjoy the concessions and privileges it won when it was smaller and less developed, such as the generous terms under which it joined the WTO in 2001. A larger and more powerful China should not only respect global rules and norms but also take on greater responsibility for upholding and updating the international order under which it has prospered so spectacularly. Where the existing rules and norms are no longer fit for purpose, China should collaborate with the United States and other countries to work out revised arrangements that all can live with.

The path to creating a new order is not straightforward. Powerful domestic pressures impel and constrain both countries' foreign policy choices. Foreign policy has featured little in the current U.S. presidential campaign, and when it has, the prevailing focus has been variants of the theme of "America first." In China, the leadership's overriding priority is to maintain internal political stability and, after enduring nearly two centuries of weakness and humiliation, to manifest the confidence of an ancient civilization on the rise again. So it cannot be taken for granted that the United States and China will manage their bilateral relations based on rational calculations of their national interests or even share a desire for win-win outcomes. The countries are not necessarily set on a course of confrontation, but confrontation cannot be ruled out.

DYNAMICS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

These dynamics will play out all over the world, but one crucial arena will be the Asia-Pacific. The United States has always had vital national interests in this region. It expended blood and treasure fighting the Pacific War to defeat Japan, a war in which the United States nearly lost three future presidents. It fought two costly wars in Korea and Vietnam, which bought precious time for noncommunist countries in Asia to consolidate their societies and economies and win the battle of hearts and minds against communism.

The United States' generous, open policies that have so greatly benefited the Asia-Pacific derived from deep-rooted political ideals and its self-image as "a city upon a hill" and "a light unto the nations," but they also reflected its enlightened self-interest. A stable and prospering Asia-Pacific was first a bulwark against the communist countries in the Cold War and then an important region of the world comprising many stable and prosperous countries well disposed toward the United States. To U.S. businesses, the Asia-Pacific offered sizable markets and important production bases. Unsurprisingly, several of the United States' staunchest allies are in Asia, such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea, and so are some of its long-standing partners, such as Singapore.

China has vital interests in the region, too. In Northeast Asia, the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Korean War still cast long shadows. In Southeast Asia, China sees a source of energy and raw materials, economic partners, and important sea lines of communication. It also sees chokepoints in the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea that must be kept open to protect China's energy security. But

one critical difference with the United States is that China sees the Asia-Pacific as its “near abroad,” to borrow a Russian expression, and thus as essential to its own security.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has said that the Pacific Ocean is big enough to accommodate both the United States and China. But he has also said that Asian security should be left to Asians. A natural question arises: Does Xi think that the Pacific Ocean is big enough for the United States and China to coexist peacefully, with overlapping circles of friends and partners, or that it is big enough to be divided down the middle between the two powers, into rival spheres of influence? Singapore and other Asia-Pacific countries have no doubt which interpretation they prefer. Although they may not have much influence over how things will turn out, they fervently hope not to be forced to choose between the United States and China.

The U.S. security presence remains vital to the Asia-Pacific region. Without it, Japan and South Korea would be compelled to contemplate developing nuclear weapons; both are nuclear threshold states, and the subject already regularly surfaces in their public discourse, especially given North Korea’s growing nuclear weapons capabilities. Such developments are fortunately still hypothetical, but their prospect is conducive neither to stability in Northeast Asia nor to nonproliferation efforts globally.

In Southeast Asia, the U.S. Seventh Fleet has contributed to regional security since World War II, ensuring that sea lines of communication remain safe and open, which has enabled trade and stimulated economic growth. Despite its increasing military strength, China would be unable to take over the United States’ security role. Unlike the United States, China has competing maritime and territorial claims in the South China Sea with several countries in the region, which will always see China’s naval presence as an attempt to advance those claims.

Another obstacle that would prevent China from taking over the security role currently played by the United States stems from the fact that many Southeast Asian countries have significant ethnic Chinese minorities, whose relations with the non-Chinese majority are often delicate. These countries are extremely sensitive about any perception that China has an inordinate influence on their ethnic Chinese populations—especially recalling the history of China’s support for communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia until the early 1980s. Those sensitivities will constrain China’s role in Southeast Asian affairs for the foreseeable future.

Singapore is the only Southeast Asian country whose multiracial population is majority ethnic Chinese. In fact, it is the only sovereign state in the world with such demographics other than China itself. But Singapore has made enormous efforts to build a multiracial national identity and not a Chinese one. And it has also been extremely careful to avoid doing anything that could be misperceived as allowing itself to be used as a cat's-paw by China. For this reason, Singapore did not establish diplomatic relations with China until 1990, making it the final Southeast Asian country, except for Brunei, to do so.

Of course, Singapore and all other Asian countries want to cultivate good relations with China. They hope to enjoy the goodwill and support of such a major power and to participate in its growth. Global supply chains—whether for aircraft, cellular phones, or surgical masks—link China and other Asian countries closely together. China's sheer size has made it the largest trading partner of most other Asian countries, including every treaty ally of the United States in the region, as well as Singapore and nearly every other ASEAN country.

It would be very difficult, bordering on impossible, for the United States to replace China as the world's chief supplier, just as it would be unthinkable for the United States itself to do without the Chinese market, which is the third-largest importer of U.S. goods, after Canada and Mexico. But neither can China displace the United States' economic role in Asia. The global financial system relies heavily on U.S. financial institutions, and the renminbi will not replace the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency anytime soon. Although the other Asian countries export more to China than to the United States, U.S. multinational corporations still form the largest source of foreign investments in many Asia-Pacific countries, including Singapore. China's major companies are starting to invest abroad, but it will be many years before China has multinational corporations of the same scale and sophistication as those based in the United States, which tie global production chains together, link Asia with the global economy, and create millions of jobs.

For these reasons, Asia-Pacific countries do not wish to be forced to choose between the United States and China. They want to cultivate good relations with both. They cannot afford to alienate China, and other Asian countries will try their best not to let any single dispute dominate their overall relationships with Beijing. At the same time, those Asian countries regard the United States as a resident power with vital interests in the region. They were supportive—some more overtly

than others—when U.S. President Barack Obama declared that the United States intended to “rebalance” American foreign policy toward Asia. They take comfort that although the Trump administration has raised issues of cost and burden sharing with its friends and allies, it has also put forward a strategy for the Indo-Pacific region and announced its intention to build up the U.S. military’s Indo-Pacific Command.

But those Asian countries also recognize that the United States is a global hyperpower, with far-flung preoccupations and urgent priorities all over the world. They are realistic that should tensions grow—or, even worse, should conflict occur—they cannot automatically take U.S. support for granted. They expect to do their part to defend their countries and interests. They also hope that the United States understands that if other Asian countries promote ties with China, that does not necessarily mean that they are working against the United States. (And of course, these Asian countries hope for the same understanding from China, too, if they strengthen their ties with the United States.)

AN INCLUSIVE REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The United States and China are not the only major countries with a great deal of influence in the region; other players also have significant roles. Japan, in particular, has much to contribute to the region, given the size and sophistication of its economy. Under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, it has contributed more actively than before. For example, after the United States withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in 2017, Japan stepped up. It galvanized the remaining 11 members to complete the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which brings together developed and developing countries on both sides of the Pacific Ocean and is a step toward free trade in the Asia-Pacific region.

India also enjoys a great deal of potential influence. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has declared a strategic shift through its Act East Policy, and other countries look forward to seeing this policy put into action. The East Asia Summit includes India as a member because other members hoped that as India’s economy grew, it would see more value in regional cooperation. India was also one of the original countries negotiating to form the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a proposed free-trade agreement that aims to integrate all the major economies in the Asia-Pacific, similar to the way that the North American Free Trade Agreement (now the U.S.-

Mexico-Canada Agreement) linked together countries in North America. After extensive negotiations, India decided last year not to join the RCEP; the remaining 15 participating countries are moving forward, although without India, something significant has been lost.

As most Asian countries recognize, the value of such agreements goes beyond the economic gains they generate. They are platforms that enable Asia-Pacific countries to cooperate with one another, develop stakes in one another's success, and together mold the regional architecture and the rules that govern it. Such regional arrangements must be open and inclusive. They should not, whether by design or result, keep any party out, undermine existing cooperation arrangements, create rival blocs, or force countries to take sides. This is why CPTPP members have left the door open for the United States to sign on once again, and why the countries that are working to form the RCEP still hope that India will join one day.

This is also the basis on which Asia-Pacific countries support regional cooperation initiatives such as the various Indo-Pacific concepts proposed by Japan, the United States, and other countries, as well as China's Belt and Road Initiative. Many other Asian countries view supporting the Belt and Road Initiative as a constructive way to accommodate China's growing influence in the region. If implemented well and with financial discipline, the initiative's projects can strengthen regional and multilateral cooperation and address the pressing need for better infrastructure and connectivity in many developing countries. Some such projects have been criticized for lacking transparency or viability, but there is no reason to believe that all of the initiative's projects, by definition, will impose unsustainable financial burdens on countries or prevent them from growing their links with other major economies. Such consequences would not serve China's interests, either, since they would undermine its international standing and influence.

Developing new regional arrangements does not mean abandoning or sidelining existing multilateral institutions. These hard-won multilateral arrangements and institutions continue to give all countries, especially smaller ones, a framework for working together and advancing their collective interests. But many existing multilateral institutions are in urgent need of reform: they are no longer effective, given current economic and strategic realities. For instance, since the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations in 1994, the WTO has found it increasingly difficult to reach meaningful trade agreements,

because any deal requires consensus from its 164 members, which have hugely divergent interests and economic philosophies. And since last year, the WTO's Appellate Body has been paralyzed by the lack of a quorum. This is a loss for all countries, which should work constructively toward reforming such organizations rather than diminishing their effectiveness or bypassing them altogether.

A FERVENT HOPE

The strategic choices that the United States and China make will shape the contours of the emerging global order. It is natural for big powers to compete. But it is their capacity for cooperation that is the true test of statecraft, and it will determine whether humanity makes progress on global problems such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, and the spread of infectious diseases.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of how vital it is for countries to work together. Diseases do not respect national borders, and international cooperation is desperately needed to bring the pandemic under control and reduce damage to the global economy. Even with the best relations between the United States and China, mounting a collective response to COVID-19 would be hugely challenging. Unfortunately, the pandemic is exacerbating the U.S.-Chinese rivalry, increasing mistrust, one-upmanship, and mutual blame. This will surely worsen if, as now seems inevitable, the pandemic becomes a major issue in the U.S. presidential election. One can only hope that the gravity of the situation will concentrate minds and allow wiser counsel to prevail.

In the meantime, Asian countries have their hands full, coping with the pandemic and the many other obstacles to improving the lives of their citizens and creating a more secure and prosperous region. Their success—and the prospect of an Asian century—will depend greatly on whether the United States and China can overcome their differences, build mutual trust, and work constructively to uphold a stable and peaceful international order. This is a fundamental issue of our time. 🌐

The Rise of Strategic Corruption

How States Weaponize Graft

Philip Zelikow, Eric Edelman, Kristofer Harrison, and Celeste Ward Gventer

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Graft is nothing new; it may be the second-oldest profession. Powerful people and those with access to them have always used kickbacks, pay-to-play schemes, and other corrupt practices to feather their nests and gain unfair advantages. And such corruption has always posed a threat to the rule of law and stood in the way of protecting basic civil and economic rights.

What is new, however, is the transformation of corruption into an instrument of national strategy. In recent years, a number of countries—China and Russia, in particular—have found ways to take the kind of corruption that was previously a mere feature of their own political

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systems and transform it into a weapon on the global stage. Countries have done this before, but never on the scale seen today.

The result has been a subtle but significant shift in international politics. Rivalries between states have generally been fought over ideologies, spheres of influence, and national interests; side payments of one kind or another were just one tactic among many. Those side payments, however, have become core instruments of national strategy, leveraged to gain specific policy outcomes and to condition the wider political environment in targeted countries. This weaponized corruption relies on a specific form of asymmetry. Although any government can hire covert agents or bribe officials elsewhere, the relative openness and freedom of democratic countries make them particularly vulnerable to this kind of malign influence—and their nondemocratic enemies have figured out how to exploit that weakness.

The fight against corruption has generally been marginalized in public and academic discussions of foreign policy. The problem is usually treated as a law enforcement challenge or a good-government issue—something that holds back political or economic development but that does not rise to the level of national strategy. Today, however, weaponized corruption has become an important form of political warfare. Defenses against it must move into the mainstream of international policy work in every vulnerable government, including in the United States.

CORRUPTION ERUPTION

Strategic corruption differs in important ways from the more traditional forms that scholars call “bureaucratic corruption” and “grand corruption.” Bureaucratic corruption is the pervasive conversion of ordinary public service into a “bid for service”: for example, in many countries, simple steps such as getting a driver’s license or passing a building inspection require paying a bribe. This is the sort of graft that hobbles economic development by allowing well-connected insiders to profit from investment at the expense of genuine growth.

Grand corruption occurs when business leaders or major criminals (or oligarchs, who are a combination of the two) directly pay off top government officials in exchange for favors, such as a preferential position or control of a key economic sector that presents opportunities for high-margin plunder—often banking, telecommunications, or natural resources such as oil and gas. Both forms of traditional corruption erode weak states, leading to breakdown and civil conflict—a

process playing out right now in countries such as Algeria, Bolivia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Venezuela.

In bureaucratic and grand corruption, the payer and the payee are mainly just trying to get rich. In strategic corruption, by contrast, the greed is still there, for at least some of the players, but the corrupt inducements are wielded against a target country by foreigners as a part of their own country's national strategy. Sometimes, but not always, these schemes entail violations of the law, including by citizens of the target country. In other cases, the conduct may be technically legal but still involves "the perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties," as the venerable *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of "corruption" puts it. For that reason, some corrupt acts are punishable by law; other kinds must be left to the judgment of citizens, if they are brought to light.

The first great effort to counter strategic corruption in the United States sought to do just that. The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), signed into law in 1938, arose from congressional investigations into communist and Nazi propaganda in the United States. The law required representatives of foreign sponsors to register, allowing what the legislation's authors called "the spotlight of pitiless publicity" to do its work.

In the 1960s, more congressional investigations led to a set of major amendments to FARA, which focused the legislation more on foreign sponsorship of political lobbying rather than propaganda. For the next few decades, foreign influence peddling remained a relatively marginal phenomenon, characterized by the efforts of a handful of dictators and their cronies to buy influence in Washington and other Western capitals.

Things began to change in the 1990s. Suddenly, there were many more buyers. The collapse of communism put more than 20 new governments into the marketplace. All of them, and many more, were eager to make friends and influence people in Washington, the capital of the world's sole remaining superpower. There, they found many consultants and lawyers ready to offer high-priced advice. A particularly lucrative new line of business was helping funnel U.S. or global investment to countries newly opened to business. And as the United States and others leaned more on economic sanctions as a policy tool, foreigners needed more and more help navigating the regulatory machinery.

Meanwhile, because of the deregulation of the global financial system during the 1970s and 1980s, it was much easier to move and invest money in all directions and be able to get it back out again. Open and

prosperous countries such as Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States were becoming the preferred shelters for the billions of dollars that every year are laundered through anonymized companies, real estate investments, and other schemes. As early as 2001, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development identified anonymized companies as a primary means for hiding illicit transactions around the world. The United States, lacking national legislation that requires transparency about the “ultimate beneficial owner” of corporate entities, gradually became a financial haven for money launderers, terrorist financiers, kleptocrats, and smugglers. For that reason, the striking growth of transnational criminal networks during the post–Cold War era has aided not just traditional corruption but also the strategic kind; after all, as the journalist Oliver Bullough memorably put it, “the evil money always mixes with the naughty money.”

The cumulative result of all these shifts has been an exponential increase in the scale of U.S. commerce involving foreign interest groups. Americans with connections (real or merely claimed) to decision-makers now enjoy opportunities that can lead to all sorts of corrupt behavior. Political consultants and former U.S. officials who spend time in the large, lucrative, and lightly regulated marketplace of influence peddling face frequent tests of their ethics, integrity, and patriotism. Some handle these challenges with care and dutiful propriety. Others do not.

RUDY AND DMYTRO'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURE

Perhaps the most prominent case of strategic corruption in recent years is the Ukraine imbroglio that led to the impeachment of U.S. President Donald Trump in 2019. Many Americans may think of this as primarily a domestic political scandal. But it is crucial to understand its foreign roots.

Trump was impeached because over the summer of 2019, he sought to condition his and his administration's future relations with Ukraine on Kyiv's willingness to help him dig up dirt on his political opponent Joe Biden, blame former Ukrainian government officials (and not the Kremlin) for hacking the Democratic National Committee during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, and cast doubt on evidence that U.S. prosecutors had used to put one of Trump's 2016 campaign managers, Paul Manafort, in prison. But the story actually started long before Trump did any of those things, and its primary authors were not Americans.

Beginning in 2018, a group of plotters launched a concerted effort to smear the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch, and push

for her removal from office. The group included two naturalized American citizens with ties to Ukraine, Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman; their American lawyer and partner Rudy Giuliani (who also works as a personal lawyer to Trump); and two former Ukrainian law enforcement officials, Yuriy Lutsenko and Viktor Shokin. Parnas, Lutsenko, and Shokin passed on derogatory information about Yovanovitch and Biden—including allegations later proved to be false—to Giuliani and Pete Sessions, then a Republican congressman from Texas. Giuliani encouraged media coverage of the claims, which were then amplified by Trump and his son Donald Trump, Jr.

But behind this group were bigger players with deeper pockets, and it was their agenda that was driving the campaign. According to federal prosecutors in New York who indicted Parnas and Fruman last fall on charges of conspiracy to violate campaign finance laws, the pair, who had little money of their own, had been donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to U.S. political action committees through a shell company backed by foreign funds. They had other plans, as well. The Associated Press reported that in March 2019, Parnas and Fruman proposed a deal to Andrew Favorov, an executive at the state-owned Ukrainian gas company Naftogaz, in which the company would import U.S. liquefied natural gas. As part of the deal, Favorov would replace the company's widely admired chief executive, Andriy Kobolyev. Parnas and Fruman told Favorov that the U.S. ambassador, Yovanovitch, would likely oppose the deal—but they assured him that she would soon be removed from office.

The men, it seems, were hardly freelancing. As the journalist Catherine Belton writes in her recent book, *Putin's People*, Parnas and Fruman were working for Dmytro Firtash, a Ukrainian tycoon “who'd taken over the Turkmenistan-Ukraine-Russia gas trade with the backing of the Kremlin.” (The federal prosecutors in New York revealed that Firtash has provided at least \$1 million to Parnas.) According to *The Washington Post*, under Parnas and Fruman's proposal, Naftogaz would agree to write off hundreds of millions of dollars in debt that Firtash owed the company.

The plot's political objectives and Firtash's apparent involvement elevates this sordid tale from the level of ordinary sleaze to that of strategic corruption. Firtash is a well-known figure in Ukraine. For many years, he managed trade with Ukraine for Gazprom, the state-controlled Russian gas company that is, in the words of the economist and Russia expert Anders Aslund, “probably Russia's foremost geopo-

litical tool in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.” For Russia, effective control of the gas trade in and through Ukraine is a national objective of paramount importance. And Firtash was Gazprom’s man in Kyiv; indeed, according to Aslund, “Firtash appears to have been a Kremlin influence agent rather than a businessman.”

Firtash was arrested in Vienna in 2014 after federal prosecutors in the United States charged him with attempting to bribe officials in India. A Russian businessman close to Russian President Vladimir Putin loaned Firtash 125 million euros to cover his bail. Firtash has since fought his extradition from Austria with the help of many American lawyers, including former officials from both political parties. Among them are Joseph diGenova and Victoria Toensing, two attorneys with close ties to Giuliani; Firtash has said that he has paid the pair more than \$1 million to represent him. DiGenova and Toensing have denied that Firtash was involved in Parnas and Fruman’s dealings, and according to *The Washington Post*, the lawyers were able to arrange an unusual meeting with the U.S. attorney general, William Barr, to plead Firtash’s extradition case. (Meanwhile, money may not be the only thing of value that Firtash’s American associates have gotten out of the relationship: according to *The New York Times*, Firtash’s legal team in Austria has supplied Giuliani with documents that he claims show wrongdoing by Biden.)

DiGenova and Toensing have also appeared on Fox News, not to explain Firtash’s side of the story but to warn millions of American viewers that a supposedly wicked banker, George Soros, was trying to take over U.S. foreign policy in Ukraine. Soros, they claimed, was manipulating American diplomats there. Firtash’s lawyers were referring to the work of the foundations that Soros has funded to pursue his vision of an “open society.” Whatever one thinks of Soros’s preferences in U.S. politics, his foundations have done enormous good in supporting transparency and law enforcement initiatives in eastern Europe. The Kremlin and its friends have prioritized undoing that progress and so have targeted Soros with vicious and often anti-Semitic propaganda.

The Ukraine scandal, Belton writes, “exposed both the fragility of the American political system and how it had been corroded from within. ‘It looks like the whole of U.S. politics is for sale,’ said a former senior Russian banker with ties to the security services. . . . ‘It turned out everything depended on money, and all these [Western] values were pure hypocrisy.’”

The upshot is that by spending millions of dollars and dangling bait about information to help Trump, Firtash and his associates are appar-

ently trying to keep him from being extradited, put control of Ukraine's energy sector in more pliable hands, get rid of the American officials who stand in the way, and propagate conspiracy theories that have long been a staple of Russian propaganda. It is no coincidence that these aims almost completely match the Kremlin's. It's quite an agenda—and little of it originated in the United States.

CORRUPTION WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

Putin's regime is hardly the only one that has weaponized corruption to advance its national interests; Beijing has gotten in the game, as well. Consider the case of a once high-flying Chinese energy conglomerate, CEFC China Energy. The actual character of the company's operations and its chief executive, Ye Jianming, remains mysterious. Ye had invested and arranged official connections around the world, including in the Czech Republic. In 2018, an expert in Prague who was tracking Ye's efforts told *The New York Times* that "it's been clear for some time that this is not just a Chinese commercial company, that they had some intelligence ties." As a CNN report put it, "at its height, [the company] aligned itself so closely with the Chinese government that it was often hard to distinguish between the two."

The mystery deepened in November 2017, when U.S. authorities arrested a CEFC executive named Patrick Ho on charges of bribery and money laundering. A former Hong Kong government minister, Ho was well known for speeches extolling China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massively ambitious infrastructure plan intended to link China to Africa and Europe through road, rail, and maritime networks that China believes will stimulate trade and economic development.

Ho was not just relying on his oratorical gifts. In 2014, he offered President Idriss Déby of Chad \$2 million, hidden in gift boxes. Two years later, he arranged for a bribe of \$500,000 for the president of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni. The bribes were meant to open the oil and gas markets in those countries to Chinese business. And the BRI wasn't the only thing Ho was promoting: U.S. federal prosecutors also alleged that he had arranged for illicit arms sales to Libya and Qatar and had offered to help Iran move sanctioned money out of China.

A few months after Ho's arrest, the chief executive of CEFC China Energy, Ye, disappeared. He is believed to be detained in China, and the company has been formally taken over by a Chinese state enterprise.

Owing to China's history of conflict with the British Empire, China's leaders are familiar with the way the British operated in the nineteenth century, and they seem to appreciate how the empire's power did not rely solely on soldiers or warships; it came, rather, from the empire's control of ports, canals, railroads, mines, shipping routes, telegraph cables, commercial standards, and financial exchanges. Students of British imperial history could only shake their heads with recognition last year when they heard Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, the foreign minister of strategically located Djibouti, tell *The Washington Post*, "Yes, our debt to China is 71 percent of our GDP, but we needed that infrastructure." China now fosters land and sea connectivity in a global system built to Chinese norms and standards of cooperation, financed by a network of Chinese-funded banks, and enabled by Chinese graft and bribery on an epic scale.

Experts disagree about whether, on balance, the BRI poses a threat to U.S. interests. Regardless of one's judgment on that question, however, it's essential to see that corruption is central to the BRI, which involves little transparency and lots of money and which puts officials all over the world in hock to the Chinese Communist Party. It also connects infrastructure on three continents to an authoritarian government in Beijing known for collecting personal information and suppressing dissent. Not all local officials take the same insouciant view as the foreign minister of Djibouti; some may need to be influenced in other ways.

That may be why China has taken a more systematic approach to strategic corruption in Australia. During the last few years, revelations of Chinese efforts to reshape Australia's political environment have dominated headlines in the country. Wealthy donors with ties to Chinese authorities have funded Australian political organizations and election campaigns, organized efforts to influence public opinion, and contributed to politicians who have praised China. In 2018, after media accounts revealed one such donor's under-the-table contributions to an Australian senator—who then provided countersurveillance advice to the Chinese donor—the senator was forced to resign his seat.

In 2005, a Chinese diplomat named Chen Yonglin defected to Australia and later wrote that "the Communist Party of China had begun a structured effort to infiltrate Australia in a systematic way." The Australian authorities agree. After retiring last year as director general of Australia's main intelligence agency, Duncan Lewis went public with a warning about China's "insidious" agenda. "Not only in politics but

also in the community or in business, [such foreign interference] takes over, basically, pulling the strings from offshore,” Lewis said. What Australia is experiencing is a version of the strategic corruption that alarmed Americans in the 1930s and led to the passage of FARA. In 2018, Australia enacted the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act, which is based on FARA but improves on it.

“A LITTLE CONFLICT OF INTEREST”

U.S. adversaries are not the only ones that have weaponized corruption. Turkey is just one example of a nominal ally that has also tried its hand at the technique. Last year, U.S. federal prosecutors charged the second-largest state-owned bank in Turkey, Halkbank, with organizing a massive scheme to evade international sanctions on Iran by shipping gold to the Islamic Republic in exchange for oil and gas. After initially protesting that U.S. courts had no jurisdiction, Halkbank pleaded not guilty, and the case is awaiting trial in New York. But Turkey wasn’t just trying to undermine the effort to isolate and weaken the Iranian regime, which is one of Washington’s most important foreign policy goals; it was also attempting to produce a specific policy outcome.

In 2016, an Iranian Turkish businessman involved in the conspiracy, Reza Zarrab, was arrested in the United States. There was a significant chance that he might plead guilty and talk, perhaps about the involvement of senior Turkish officials in his scheme. Before Zarrab entered his plea, however, Giuliani and his longtime friend Michael Mukasey, who served as attorney general in the George W. Bush administration, agreed to represent Zarrab and worked hard to free him.

Before allowing the two lawyers to represent Zarrab, the judge in the case held a number of hearings to explore their potential conflicts of interest. Giuliani’s law firm was a registered agent for Turkey, and the judge noted that Giuliani might be barred from reaching a resolution to the case “that would be contrary to Turkey’s interests.” In February 2017, Giuliani and Mukasey traveled to Turkey to discuss Zarrab’s case with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Then, according to *The Washington Post*, in the fall of that year, the two lawyers secured a meeting with Trump in which they lobbied the president to release Zarrab; the bait was the idea of swapping him for Andrew Brunson, an American pastor whom the Turks had arrested on pretextual charges.

According to the *Post*, Trump was tempted, and then Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was called over to the Oval Office. He was surprised

to find Giuliani and Mukasey there and refused to go along with the deal. Nor would the Justice Department. The White House chief of staff at the time, John Kelly, was also reportedly quite concerned about the Giuliani-Mukasey-Trump effort to interfere in a criminal investigation. The swap never occurred (Brunson was released anyway in 2018), and Zarrab eventually pleaded guilty and spilled vital evidence that led to the indictment of Halkbank.

Ever since, Halkbank and Turkish officials have worked on Trump, trying to protect the bank from having to pay the kind of huge, multi-billion-dollar fines levied in a similar case against the French firm BNP Paribas. Their task has been made easier by the fact that Tillerson, Kelly, and many other potential objectors are now gone and that there seems to be no shortage of willing interlocutors in addition to Giuliani. Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, has become a key go-between for relatives of Turkish leaders—including one of Erdogan's sons-in-law. Last year, Lindsey Graham, a Republican U.S. senator from South Carolina, was fooled by a prank caller posing as the defense minister of Turkey, who recorded Graham's assurances that Trump was "very sensitive" to Turkey's concerns about the Halkbank case and that Trump wanted "to be helpful."

It's impossible to say for certain what Turkey has offered through its informal channels to Trump. But in November 2019, Trump's former national security adviser John Bolton delivered an off-the-record speech to a private group in which he reportedly expressed his belief that "there is a personal or business relationship dictating Trump's position on Turkey." Other evidence suggests this may be true: Trump has been remarkably deferential to Erdogan and has treated the Turkish president with a leniency that stands in stark contrast to the manner in which Trump has dealt with the leaders of close U.S. allies, such as former British Prime Minister Theresa May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In 2012, when Trump Towers Istanbul opened, Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump tweeted her thanks to Erdogan for attending the opening ceremony. And according to the *Washington Examiner*, Trump himself once remarked in regard to Turkey, "I have a little conflict of interest, because I have a major, major building in Istanbul."

It is surprising that a state-owned bank of a nominal U.S. ally defied Washington by helping Iran thwart sanctions. But what is far more dismaying is that when this activity came to light, those involved looked

for and found American proxies who could plead their case to prevent the U.S. government from punishing their behavior. That goes well beyond pay-to-play. It is pay-for-policy; it is strategic corruption. And so far, it has succeeded. Halkbank has not paid significant fines for its massive violations of the sanctions against Iran.

LONDON'S CAUTIONARY TALE

For the United States and its partners, strategic corruption poses three dangers. First, there is the direct and obvious threat of bad policy outcomes. Then, there is the more general risk that stems from rivals adopting corruption as a technique for global influence building, as the Chinese have done in developing the BRI. Such efforts amount to a steady reversal of the post-Cold War effort led by the United States and its allies to promote prosperity in developing countries through transparency, political reforms, and economic liberalization. In the past, by following such advice, countries could enhance their status in Western institutions and join the community of nations. In contrast, the new Beijing-centered system has built a global network of oligarchs who owe their positions and livelihoods to their Chinese patrons. As the Chinese system grows in influence and expands its geographic reach, it corrodes not only the development prospects of the affected countries but also their participation in open trade relationships and their security cooperation with others.

The third and final danger comes from countries such as China and Russia leveraging state-directed enterprises and illicit money flows to directly penetrate Western governments and institutions. Canadian banks, British real estate companies, and American lobbying and public relations firms, among others, now serve the interests of authoritarian states—wittingly or otherwise. In the United States, a steady drip of revelations about this foreign influence has fed citizens' tendency to view their political system as corrupt and to conclude that U.S. policy is for sale to the highest bidders—even overseas rivals.

This is, of course, by design. As a 2016 study published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies put it, "Russian influence centers on weakening the internal cohesion of societies and strengthening the perception of the dysfunction of the Western democratic and economic system. . . . This is achieved by influencing and eroding democratic governance from within its own institutions." That is why, as the scholar Larry Diamond recently warned, "large-scale endemic

corruption poses the single most urgent internal threat to democracy—and renders it all the more vulnerable to external subversion.”

For a cautionary tale about what happens when strategic corruption goes unchecked, Americans need look no further than the United Kingdom. Putin believes that he has so neutered Washington’s closest strategic partner that he feels secure deploying exotic clandestine weapons there to conduct political assassinations. To amass this staggering degree of freedom to maneuver, Putin and his cronies exploited a number of weaknesses in the British system. The United Kingdom’s anonymous property registry allowed Russian oligarchs to swamp London and its financial sector, where they stashed dirty money. British libel law favors plaintiffs far more than the equivalent U.S. statutes and doctrines do, and Russian oligarchs have ruthlessly exploited that advantage with the goal of censoring speech that exposes their schemes. In 2014, for example, Cambridge University Press backed away from plans to publish the American political scientist Karen Dawisha’s book *Putin’s Kleptocracy* out of fear that Russians named in the book would unleash an avalanche of frivolous libel lawsuits—with the help of high-powered British lawyers, of course.

HOW TO CLEAN HOUSE

The growing threat from strategic corruption has gone largely unnoticed or underappreciated in the Pentagon and the State Department. It is not enough to subcontract the problem out to federal prosecutors and hope for the best; the response needs to move to the center of foreign and national security policy. That will require public and private campaigns to monitor corruption, efforts by lawmakers to eliminate vulnerabilities in the U.S. legal and political systems, and an end to Washington’s overreliance on economic sanctions, which will become less and less effective if U.S. rivals can offer alternative means of support.

The policy moves that Washington needs to take to avoid London’s fate are not glamorous; they will rarely involve precision munitions or SEAL teams. But they are nevertheless vital. For starters, the traditional agenda of promoting transparency needs to be updated and reinforced. A first step would be for the federal government and state capitals to tighten their regulation of limited liability companies, the anonymous nature of which allows them to hide funds of questionable origin and the ownership of luxury properties. Last year, the House of Representatives passed the Corporate Transparency Act, which would, among

other things, require disclosure of the beneficial owners of registered firms or corporations. This is a step in the right direction. Congress should also conduct fresh hearings on the scope and enforcement of FARA, which needs another round of amendments.

The United States also needs legislation to make it harder to pursue baseless libel claims designed to harass and censor critics. Twenty-nine states have already passed such laws, but that is not enough. Federal legislation may be a better route.

The fight against strategic corruption sometimes blurs the traditional lines between counterintelligence, law enforcement, and diplomacy. That can pose problems even when the federal government is in the hands of a normal presidential administration and is functioning well. Corruption investigations can overreach; they can become politicized. But U.S. intelligence and foreign policy agencies must be alert to the danger posed by strategic corruption. The defense against this threat cannot simply be left to a U.S. attorney's office or to the Treasury Department.

A normal U.S. presidential administration would have already opened a national security investigation into the campaign against Yovanovitch, taking a hard look at Firtash and his associates and using resources that extend beyond those available to the FBI. But even without any inside knowledge of the Trump White House, it is not difficult to imagine the difficulties such an investigation would currently pose for career officials. The Halkbank case presents some analogous problems. And there may be similar situations that are not yet publicly known.

But the means to fight strategic corruption exist, and a future administration might decide to use them in an honest manner. A conscientious executive branch could take advantage of tools such as the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, which was established in 2004 to help check the dangers of overzealous or politicized investigations. And of course, there are older methods for cleaning house, such as agency inspector generals (now being targeted by the current president) and congressional oversight (if Congress ever manages to earn back the public's trust, which has almost entirely eroded in recent decades).

The danger of strategic corruption does not have to be a partisan issue. An anticorruption agenda could unite those on the left and the right who favor economic transparency—which protects consumers, investors, and citizens alike—and who want to stamp out crony capitalism. Those shared values explain why anticorruption is an animating

issue for civil society groups across the political spectrum, from Transparency International to the Hudson Institute's Kleptocracy Initiative.

Although Trump's impeachment has receded into the rearview mirror, the Ukraine debacle that precipitated it still presents an opportunity. Instead of merely contributing to the polarization and dysfunction that plagues Washington, that scandal and others can help reset the agenda for policy action. The Ukraine scandal is not just an alarm about the current U.S. president. It is a warning that drives home how vulnerable governments have become to a new form of political warfare, a strategy that takes advantage of freedoms in order to discredit them. 🌐

Giving Up on God

The Global Decline of Religion

Ronald F. Inglehart

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In the early years of the twenty-first century, religion seemed to be on the rise. The collapse of both communism and the Soviet Union had left an ideological vacuum that was being filled by Orthodox Christianity in Russia and other post-Soviet states. The election in the United States of President George W. Bush, an evangelical Christian who made no secret of his piety, suggested that evangelical Christianity was rising as a political force in the country. And the 9/11 attacks directed international attention to the power of political Islam in the Muslim world.

A dozen years ago, my colleague Pippa Norris and I analyzed data on religious trends in 49 countries, including a few subnational territories such as Northern Ireland, from which survey evidence was available from 1981 to 2007 (these countries contained 60 percent of the world's population). We did not find a universal resurgence of religion, despite claims to that effect—most high-income countries became less religious—but we did find that in 33 of the 49 countries we studied, people became more religious during those years. This was true in most former communist countries, in most developing countries, and even in a

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number of high-income countries. Our findings made it clear that industrialization and the spread of scientific knowledge were not causing religion to disappear, as some scholars had once assumed.

But since 2007, things have changed with surprising speed. From about 2007 to 2019, the overwhelming majority of the countries we studied—43 out of 49—became less religious. The decline in belief was not confined to high-income countries and appeared across most of the world.

Growing numbers of people no longer find religion a necessary source of support and meaning in their lives. Even the United States—long cited as proof that an economically advanced society can be strongly religious—has now joined other wealthy countries in moving away from religion. Several forces are driving this trend, but the most powerful one is the waning hold of a set of beliefs closely linked to the imperative of maintaining high birthrates. Modern societies have become less religious in part because they no longer need to uphold the kinds of gender and sexual norms that the major world religions have instilled for centuries.

Although some religious conservatives warn that the retreat from faith will lead to a collapse of social cohesion and public morality, the evidence doesn't support this claim. As unexpected as it may seem, countries that are less religious actually tend to be less corrupt and have lower murder rates than more religious ones. Needless to say, religion itself doesn't encourage corruption and crime. This phenomenon reflects the fact that as societies develop, survival becomes more secure: starvation, once pervasive, becomes uncommon; life expectancy increases; murder and other forms of violence diminish. And as this level of security rises, people tend to become less religious.

THE RISE AND FALL OF FAITH

Our earlier study, published in 2011, compared levels of religious belief measured as early as 1981 with findings from the latest surveys then available, from around 2007, bridging a period of roughly a quarter century. In each survey, respondents were asked to indicate how important God was in their lives by choosing a value on a scale ranging from one—"Not at all important"—to ten—"Very important."

Examining how a country's level of religiosity changed over time led to some striking findings. A majority of the countries surveyed showed upticks in a belief in the importance of God. The largest increases were in former communist countries. For example, from 1981 to 2007, the mean score of the Bulgarian public rose from 3.6 to 5.7. In Russia, it

rose from 4.0 to 6.0. In part, this growth in religiosity was a response to the severe decline of economic, physical, and psychological security experienced after the Soviet Union disintegrated; religion was filling the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of communism. Religious beliefs also increased in many developing countries outside the former Soviet Union, including Brazil, China, Mexico, and South Africa. On the other hand, religion declined in most high-income countries.

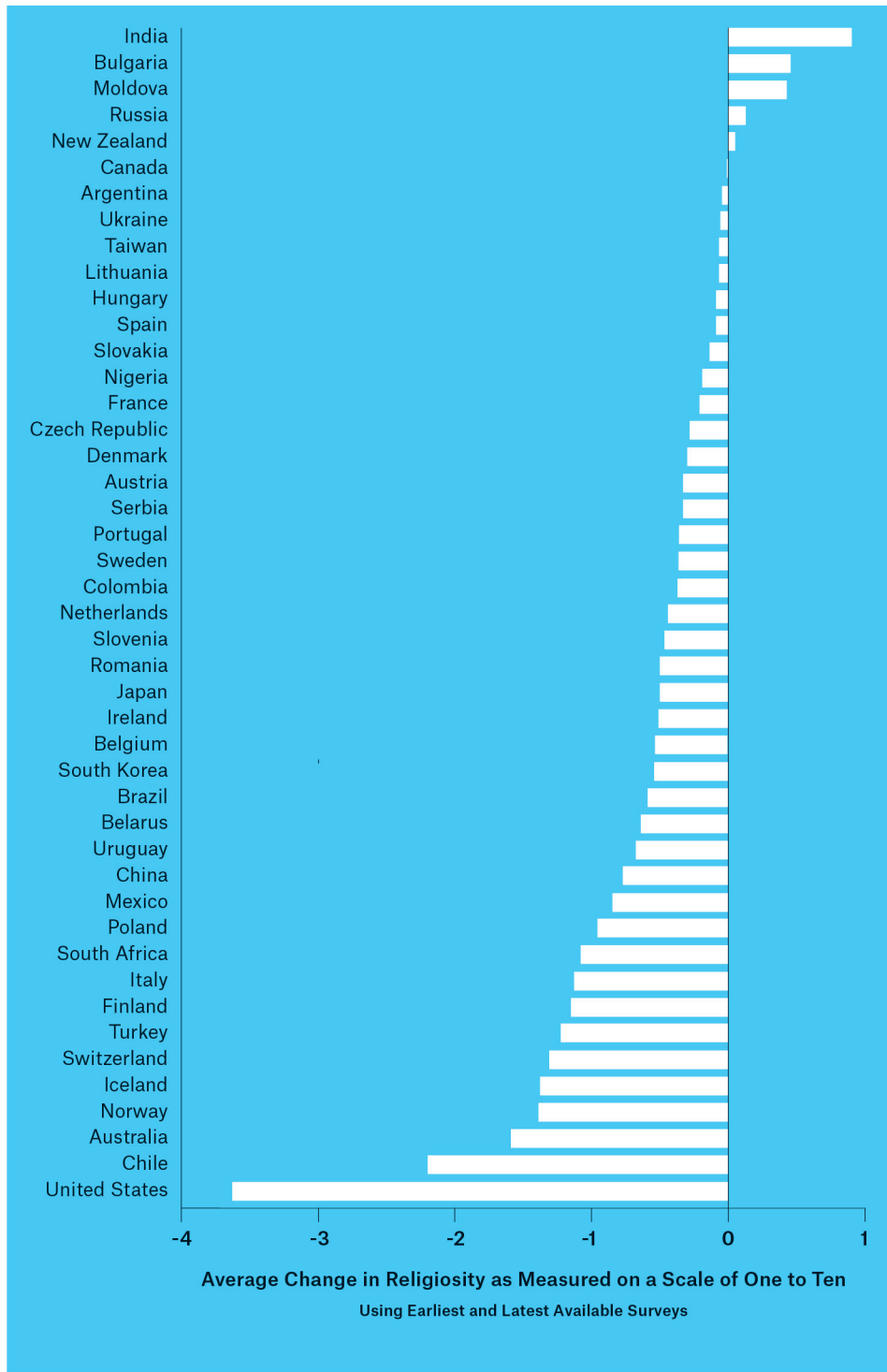
Since 2007, there has been a remarkably sharp trend away from religion. In virtually every high-income country, religion has continued to decline. At the same time, many poor countries, together with most of the former communist states, have also become less religious. From 2007 to 2019, only five countries became more religious, whereas the vast majority of the countries studied moved in the opposite direction.

India is the most important exception to the general pattern of declining religiosity. The period of the study coincides roughly with the return to power of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, whose brand of politics seeks to conflate national identity with religious identity. The BJP government has advocated policies that discriminate against the followers of other religions, particularly India's large Muslim minority, polarizing communities and whipping up religious sentiments.

The most dramatic shift away from religion has taken place among the American public. From 1981 to 2007, the United States ranked as one of the world's more religious countries, with religiosity levels changing very little. Since then, the United States has shown the largest move away from religion of any country for which we have data. Near the end of the initial period studied, Americans' mean rating of the importance of God in their lives was 8.2 on a ten-point scale. In the most recent U.S. survey, from 2017, the figure had dropped to 4.6, an astonishingly sharp decline. For years, the United States had been the key case demonstrating that economic modernization need not produce secularization. By this measure, the United States now ranks as the 11th least religious country for which we have data.

Influential thinkers from Karl Marx to Max Weber to Émile Durkheim predicted that the spread of scientific knowledge would dispel religion throughout the world, but that did not happen. For most people, religious faith was more emotional than cognitive. And for most of human history, sheer survival was uncertain. Religion provided assurance that the world was in the hands of an infallible higher power (or powers) who promised that, if one followed the rules, things would

The Decline of Religion, 2007-2019



ultimately work out for the best. In a world where people often lived near starvation, religion helped them cope with severe uncertainty and stress. But as economic and technological development took place, people became increasingly able to escape starvation, cope with disease, and suppress violence. They become less dependent on religion—and less willing to accept its constraints, including keeping women in the kitchen and gay people in the closet—as existential insecurity diminished and life expectancy rose.

Secularization doesn't happen everywhere at once; it occurs when countries have attained high levels of existential security, and even then it usually moves at a glacial pace, as one generation replaces another. It can even reverse itself, with societies becoming more religious if they experience prolonged periods of diminished security. Secularization has been gradually taking place since the nineteenth century, starting with the societies of western Europe and North America that were most secure economically and physically and then spreading to more and more parts of the world.

Although secularization normally occurs at the pace of intergenerational population replacement, it can reach a tipping point when the dominant opinion shifts and, swayed by the forces of conformism and social desirability, people start to favor the outlook they once opposed—producing exceptionally rapid cultural change. Younger and better-educated groups in high-income countries have recently reached this threshold.

LOSING THEIR RELIGION

Several other factors beyond rising levels of economic and technological development help explain the waning of religion. In the United States, politics accounts for some of the decline. Since the 1990s, the Republican Party has sought to win support by adopting conservative Christian positions on same-sex marriage, abortion, and other cultural issues. But this political appeal to religious voters has had the corollary effect of pushing other voters, especially those who are young and culturally liberal, away from religion. It once was generally assumed that religious beliefs shaped political views, not the other way around. But recent evidence indicates that the causality can run the other way: panel studies have found that many people change their political views first and then become less religious.

The uncritical embrace of President Donald Trump—a leader who cannot be described as a paragon of Christian virtue—by many promi-

ment evangelicals has led other evangelicals to fear that young people will desert their churches in droves, accelerating an ongoing trend. The Roman Catholic Church, for its part, has lost adherents because of its own crises. Earlier this year, the Pew Research Center found that fully 92 percent of U.S. adults were aware of recent reports of sexual abuse by Catholic priests, and about 80 percent of those surveyed said they believed that the abuses were “ongoing problems that are still happening.” Accordingly, 27 percent of U.S. Catholics polled said that they had scaled back their attendance at Mass in response to these reports.

But perhaps the most important force behind secularization is a transformation concerning the norms governing human fertility. For many centuries, most societies assigned to women the role of producing as many children as possible and discouraged divorce, abortion, homosexuality, contraception, and any sexual behavior not linked to reproduction. The sacred writings of the world’s major religions vary greatly, but as Norris and I have demonstrated, virtually all world religions instilled these pro-fertility norms in their adherents. Religions emphasized the importance of fertility because it was necessary. In the world of high infant mortality and low life expectancy that prevailed until recently, the average woman had to produce five to eight children in order to simply replace the population.

During the twentieth century, a growing number of countries attained drastically reduced infant mortality rates and higher life expectancies, making these traditional cultural norms no longer necessary. This process didn’t happen overnight. The major world religions had presented pro-fertility norms as absolute moral rules and stoutly resisted change. People only slowly gave up the familiar beliefs and societal roles they had known since childhood concerning gender and sexual behavior. But when a society reached a sufficiently high level of economic and physical security, younger generations grew up taking that security for granted, and the norms around fertility receded. Ideas, practices, and laws concerning gender equality, divorce, abortion, and homosexuality are now changing rapidly.

This shift is quantifiable. Data collected in the World Values Survey over the years offer a glimpse of a deep transformation. The survey uses a ten-point scale based on each country’s acceptance of divorce, abortion, and homosexuality. The tipping point is around the middle of the scale, at 5.50: lower scores indicate that a majority of the country’s people harbor more conservative views, and higher scores indicate that

a majority have more liberal views centered on individual choice. Around 1981, majorities in every country for which we have data supported pro-fertility norms. Even in high-income countries, the mean scores ranged from as low as 3.44 (Spain), 3.49 (the United States), 3.50 (Japan), 4.14 (the United Kingdom), and 4.63 (Finland) to as high as 5.35 for Sweden—then the most liberal country but with a score still slightly below the scale’s tipping point. But a profound change was underway. By 2019, Spain’s mean score had risen to 6.74, the United States’ to 5.86, Japan’s to 6.17, the United Kingdom’s to 6.90, Finland’s to 7.35, and Sweden’s to 8.49. All these countries were below the 5.50 tipping point when first surveyed, and all of them were above it by 2019. These numbers offer a simplified picture of a complex reality, but they convey the scale of the recent acceleration of secularization.

This trend has been spreading to the rest of the world, with one major exception. The populations of the 18 Muslim-majority countries for which data are available in the World Values Survey have stayed far below the tipping point, remaining strongly religious and committed to preserving traditional norms concerning gender and fertility. Even controlling for economic development, Muslim-majority countries tend to be somewhat more religious and culturally conservative than average.

THINGS WON’T FALL APART

For centuries, religion has served as a force for social cohesion, reducing crime and encouraging compliance with the law. Every major religion inculcates some version of the biblical commandments “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not kill.” So it is understandable that religious conservatives fear that the retreat of religion will lead to social disarray, with rising corruption and crime. But to a surprising extent, that concern is not supported by the evidence.

Since 1993, Transparency International has monitored the relative corruption and honesty of government officials and business people around the world. Each year, this watchdog group publishes the Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks public-sector corruption in 180 countries and territories. These data make it possible to test the actual relationship between religiosity and corruption: Is corruption less widespread in religious countries than in less religious ones? The answer is an unequivocal no—in fact, religious countries actually tend to be more corrupt than secular ones. The highly secular Nordic states have some of the world’s lowest levels of corruption, and highly reli-

gious countries, such as Bangladesh, Guatemala, Iraq, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, have some of the highest.

Clearly, religiosity does not cause corruption. Countries with low levels of economic and physical security tend to have high levels of religiosity and also high levels of corruption. Although religion may once have played a crucial role in supporting public morality, that role shrinks as societies develop economically. The people of religious countries are slightly more likely to condemn corruption than the people of less religious countries, but the impact of religion on behavior ends there. Religion may make people more punitive, but it does not make them less corrupt.

This pattern also applies to other crimes, such as murder. As surprising as it may seem, the murder rate is more than ten times as high in the most religious countries as it is in the least religious countries. Some relatively poor countries have low murder rates, but overall, prosperous countries that provide their residents with material and legal security are much safer than poor countries. It is not that religiosity causes murders, of course, but that both crime and religiosity tend to be high in societies with low levels of existential security.

The evidence suggests that modern societies will not descend into nihilistic chaos without religious faith to bind them, but that may not always have been the case. In early agrarian societies, when most people lived just above the survival level, religion may have been the most effective way to maintain order and cohesion. But modernization has changed the equation. As traditional religiosity declines, an equally strong set of moral norms seems to be emerging to fill the void. Evidence from the World Values Survey indicates that in highly secure and secular countries, people are giving increasingly high priority to self-expression and free choice, with a growing emphasis on human rights, tolerance of outsiders, environmental protection, gender equality, and freedom of speech.

Traditional religions can be dangerously divisive in contemporary global society. Religions inherently tend to present their norms as absolute values, despite the fact that they actually reflect their societies' histories and socioeconomic characteristics. The rigidity of any absolute belief system can give rise to fanatical intolerance, as the historical conflicts between Catholics and Protestants and Christians and Muslims have demonstrated.

As societies develop from agrarian to industrial to knowledge-based, growing existential security tends to reduce the importance of religion

in people's lives, and people become less obedient to traditional religious leaders and institutions. That trend seems likely to continue, but the future is always uncertain. Pandemics such as the COVID-19 one reduce people's sense of existential security. If the pandemic lasts for many years or leads to a new Great Depression, the cultural changes of recent decades might begin to reverse.

But that shift remains unlikely, because it would run counter to the powerful, long-term, technology-driven trend of growing prosperity and increased life expectancy that is helping push people away from religion. If that trend continues, the influence that traditional religious authorities wield over public morality will keep shrinking as a culture of growing tolerance becomes ever stronger. 🌐

Capitalism After the Pandemic

Getting the Recovery Right

Mariana Mazzucato

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

Now, as countries are reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, they must avoid making the same mistake. In the months after the virus first surfaced, governments stepped in to address the concomitant economic and health crises, rolling out stimulus packages to protect jobs, issuing rules to slow the spread of the disease, and investing in the research and development of treatments and vaccines. These rescue efforts are necessary. But it is not enough for gov-

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ernments to simply intervene as the spender of last resort when markets fail or crises occur. They should actively shape markets so that they deliver the kind of long-term outcomes that benefit everyone.

The world missed the opportunity to do that back in 2008, but fate has handed it another chance. As countries climb out of the current crisis, they can do more than spur economic growth; they can steer the direction of that growth to build a better economy. Instead of handing out no-strings-attached assistance to corporations, they can condition their bailouts on policies that protect the public interest and tackle societal problems. They can require COVID-19 vaccines receiving public support to be made universally accessible. They can refuse to bail out companies that won't curb their carbon emissions or won't stop hiding their profits in tax havens.

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

THE ROT IN THE SYSTEM

Advanced economies had been suffering from major structural flaws well before COVID-19 hit. For one thing, finance is financing itself, thus eroding the foundation of long-term growth. Most of the financial sector's profits are reinvested back into finance—banks, insurance companies, and real estate—rather than put toward productive uses such as infrastructure or innovation. Only ten percent of all British bank lending, for example, supports nonfinancial firms, with the rest going to real estate and financial assets. In advanced economies, real estate lending constituted about 35 percent of all bank lending in 1970; by

2007, it had risen to about 60 percent. The current structure of finance thus fuels a debt-driven system and speculative bubbles, which, when they burst, bring banks and others begging for government bailouts.

Another problem is that many large businesses neglect long-term investments in favor of short-term gains. Obsessed with quarterly returns and stock prices, CEOs and corporate boards have rewarded shareholders by buying back stocks, increasing the value of the remaining shares and hence of the stock options that form part of most executive pay packages. In the last decade, Fortune 500 companies have repurchased more than \$3 trillion worth of their own shares. These buybacks come at the expense of investment in wages, worker training, and research and development.

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

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

The COVID-19 crisis has only worsened all these problems. For the moment, the world's attention is focused on surviving the immediate health crisis, not on preventing the coming climate crisis or the next financial crisis. The lockdowns have devastated people who work in the perilous gig economy. Many of them lack both the savings and the employer benefits—namely, health care and sick leave—needed to ride out the storm. Corporate debt, a key cause of the previous financial

crisis, is only climbing higher as companies take on hefty new loans to weather the collapse in demand. And many companies' obsession with pleasing the short-term interests of their shareholders has left them with no long-term strategy to see them through the crisis.

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

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

Equally bad deals have been made with Big Tech. In many ways, Silicon Valley is a product of the U.S. government's investments in the development of high-risk technologies. The National Science Foundation funded the research behind the search algorithm that made Google famous. The U.S. Navy did the same for the GPS technology that Uber depends on. And the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, part of the Pentagon, backed the development of the Internet, touch-screen technology, Siri, and every other key component in the iPhone. Taxpayers took risks when they invested in these technologies, yet most of the technology companies that have benefited fail to pay their fair share of taxes. Then they have the audacity to fight against regulations that would protect the privacy rights of the public. And although many have pointed to the power of artificial intelligence and other technologies being developed in Silicon Valley, a closer look shows that in these cases, too, it was high-risk public investments that laid the

foundations. Without government action, the gains from those investments could once again flow largely to private hands. Publicly funded technology needs to be better governed by the state—and in some cases owned by the state—in order to ensure that the public benefits from its own investments. As the mass closure of schools during the pandemic has made clear, only some students have access to the technology needed for at-home schooling, a disparity that only furthers inequality. Access to the Internet should be a right, not a privilege.

RETHINKING VALUE

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

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

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

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

BAD BAILOUTS

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

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

The United States’ main response to COVID-19—the CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act, passed by Congress in March—illustrates these points in reverse. Rather than put in place effective payroll supports, as most other advanced countries did, the United States offered enhanced temporary unemployment benefits. This choice led to over 30 million workers being laid off, causing the United States to have one of the highest rates of pandemic-related

unemployment in the developed world. Because the government offered trillions of dollars in both direct and indirect support to large corporations without meaningful conditions, many companies were free to take actions that could spread the virus, such as denying paid sick days to their employees and operating unsafe workplaces.

The CARES Act also established the Paycheck Protection Program, under which businesses received loans that would be forgiven if employees were kept on the payroll. But the PPP ended up serving more as a massive cash grant to corporate treasuries than as an effective method of saving jobs. Any small business, not just those in need, could receive a loan, and Congress quickly loosened the rules regarding how much a firm needed to spend on payroll to have the loan forgiven. As a result, the program put a pitifully small dent in unemployment. An MIT team concluded that the PPP handed out \$500 billion in loans yet saved only 2.3 million jobs over roughly six months. Assuming that most of the loans are ultimately forgiven, the annualized cost of the program comes out to roughly \$500,000 per job. Over the summer, both the PPP and the expanded unemployment benefits ran out, and the U.S. unemployment rate still exceeded ten percent.

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

The point of the government's intervention was to prevent the collapse of the labor market and to maintain firms as productive organizations—essentially, to act as a catastrophic risk insurer. But this approach cannot be allowed to impoverish government, nor should the funds be permitted to bankroll destructive business strategies. In the case of insolvencies, the government might consider demanding equity positions in the companies it is rescuing, as happened in 2008 when the U.S. Treasury took ownership stakes in General Motors and other troubled firms. And when rescuing businesses, the government should impose conditions that prohibit all sorts of bad behavior: handing out untimely

CEO bonuses, issuing excessive dividends, conducting share buybacks, taking on unnecessary debt, diverting profits to tax havens, engaging in problematic political lobbying. They should also stop firms from price gouging, especially in the case of COVID-19 treatments and vaccines.

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

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

THE VENTURE CAPITALIST MENTALITY

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

Consider the solar company Solyndra, which received a \$535 million guaranteed loan from the U.S. Department of Energy before going bust in 2011 and becoming a conservative byword for the government's inability to pick winners. Around the same time, the Department of Energy gave a \$465 million guaranteed loan to Tesla, which went on to

experience explosive growth. Taxpayers paid for the failure of Solyndra, but they were never rewarded for the success of Tesla. No self-respecting venture capitalist would structure investments like that. Worse, the Department of Energy structured Tesla's loan so that it would get three million shares in the company if Tesla was unable to repay the loan, an arrangement designed to not leave taxpayers empty-handed. But why would the government want a stake in a failing company? A smarter strategy would have been to do the opposite and ask Tesla to pay three million shares if it was able to repay the loan. Had the government done that, it would have earned tens of billions of dollars as Tesla's share price grew over the course of the loan—money that could have covered the cost of the Solyndra failure with plenty left over for the next round of investments.

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

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

A better alternative is a citizen's dividend. Under this policy, the government takes a percentage of the wealth created with government investments, puts that money in a fund, and then shares the proceeds with the people. The idea is to directly reward citizens with a share of the wealth they have created. Alaska, for example, has distributed oil revenues to residents through an annual dividend from its Permanent Fund since 1982. Norway does something similar with its Government Pension Fund. California, which hosts some of the richest companies in the

world, might consider doing something similar. When Apple, headquartered in Cupertino, California, set up a subsidiary in Reno, Nevada, to take advantage of that state's zero percent corporate tax rate, California lost an enormous amount of tax revenue. Not only should such tax gimmicks be blocked, but California should also fight back by creating a state wealth fund, which would offer a way besides taxation to directly capture a share of the value created by the technology and companies it fostered.

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

THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN ECONOMY

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

More than 50 years later, in the midst of a global pandemic, the world has a chance to attempt an even more ambitious moonshot: the creation of a better economy. This economy would be more inclusive and sustainable. It would emit less carbon, generate less inequality, build modern public transport, provide digital access for all, and offer universal health care. More immediately, it would make a COVID-19 vaccine available to everyone. Creating this type of economy will require a type of public-private collaboration that hasn't been seen in decades.

Some who talk about recovering from the pandemic cite an appealing goal: a return to normalcy. But that is the wrong target; normal is

broken. Rather, the goal should be, as many have put it, to “build back better.” Twelve years ago, the financial crisis offered a rare opportunity to change capitalism, but it was squandered. Now, another crisis has presented another chance for renewal. This time, the world cannot afford to let it go to waste. 🌍

Rogue Superpower

Why This Could Be an Illiberal American Century

Michael Beckley

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

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

Trump’s approach already appeals to many Americans today. That appeal will grow even stronger in the years ahead as two global trends—rapid population aging and the rise of automation—accelerate, remaking international power dynamics in ways that favor the United States. By 2040, the United States will be the only country with a large, growing

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market and the fiscal capacity to sustain a global military presence. Meanwhile, new technologies will reduce U.S. dependence on foreign labor and resources and will equip the U.S. military with new tools to contain the territorial expansion of the country's great-power rivals. As long as the United States does not squander those advantages, it will remain the world's dominant economic and military power.

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

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

AMERICA THE ALOOF

Trump's "America first" approach to foreign policy has deep roots in U.S. history. Before 1945, the United States defined its interests narrowly, mostly in terms of money and physical security, and pursued them aggressively, with little regard for the effects on the rest of the world. It espoused liberal values such as freedom and liberty but applied them selectively, both at home and abroad. It formed no alliances besides the

one it signed with France during the Revolutionary War. Its tariffs ranked among the highest in the world. It shunned international institutions. The United States was not isolationist; in fact, its rampant territorial expansion inspired the envy of Adolf Hitler. But it was often aloof.

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

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

But when the Cold War ended, Americans increasingly did not see the point of U.S. global leadership and became ever more wary of overseas entanglements. In the decades that followed, U.S. presidents often took office having pledged to do less abroad and more at home. Despite such promises, the post-Cold War era saw Washington launch numerous military interventions (in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya) and witnessed the further expansion of the U.S.-led liberal order, as China joined the World Trade Organization, the European Union solidified, NATO expanded, and the global economy relied ever more on U.S. institutions.

That trend is one reason why many American elites, who mostly welcomed the spread of U.S. liberal hegemony, were shocked by Trump's election on an "America first" platform. It would be comforting to blame the country's current nationalist posture on Trump alone, but Americans' support for the postwar liberal order has been shaky for decades. Surveys now show that more than 60 percent of Americans want the United States simply to look after itself. When pollsters ask Americans what ought to be the priorities of U.S. foreign policy, few cite promoting democracy, trade, and human rights—the core activities of liberal international leadership. Instead, they point to preventing terrorist attacks, protecting U.S. jobs, and reducing illegal immigration. Roughly half of those surveyed say they oppose sending U.S. troops to defend

allies under attack, and nearly 80 percent favor the use of tariffs to prevent job losses from trade. Trump's approach is no aberration; it taps into a current that has always run through American political culture.

AN AGING WORLD

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

The United States will soon be the only country with a large, growing market. Among the world's 20 largest economies, only Australia, Canada, and the United States will have growing populations of adults aged 20 to 49 throughout the next 50 years. The other large economies will suffer, on average, a 16 percent decline in that critical age group, with most of the demographic decline concentrated among the world's most powerful economic players. China, for example, will lose 225 million young workers and consumers aged 20 to 49, a whopping 36 percent of its current total. Japan's population of 20- to 49-year-olds will shrink by 42 percent, Russia's by 23 percent, and Germany's by 17 percent. India's will grow until 2040 and then decline rapidly. Meanwhile, the United States' will expand by ten percent. The American market is already as large as that of the next five countries combined, and the United States depends less on foreign trade and investment than almost any other country. As other major economies shrivel, the United States will become even more central to global growth and even less reliant on international commerce.

The United States will also have less need for staunch allies, because rapid aging will hobble the military expansion of its great-power adversaries. By 2050, Russia's spending on pensions and medical care for the elderly will increase by nearly 50 percent as a share of its GDP, and China's will nearly triple, whereas in the United States, such spending will increase by only 35 percent. Russia and China will soon face severe choices between buying guns for their militaries and buying canes

for their ballooning elderly populations, and history suggests they will prioritize the latter to prevent domestic unrest. Even if Russia and China do not cut their military spending, they will struggle to modernize their militaries because of the rapid aging of their troops. Personnel costs already consume 46 percent of Russia's military budget (compared with 25 percent of the U.S. military budget) and likely will exceed 50 percent this decade as a wave of older troops retire and draw pensions. China's personnel costs are officially listed at 31 percent of its military budget, but independent estimates suggest they consume nearly half of China's defense spending and will rise in the years ahead.

AUTOMATION ADVANTAGE

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

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

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

THE SAGGING LIBERAL ORDER

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

The outlook is more dire than many people realize. Over the next 30 years, the working-age populations of the United States' democratic allies will shrink by 12 percent, on average, making sustained economic growth almost impossible. Meanwhile, the senior populations of these countries will expand by 57 percent, on average, and their average spending on pensions and health care will double as a share of GDP. These countries will not be able to borrow their way out of the resulting fiscal mess, because they already carried debts equal to 270 percent of GDP, on average, before the COVID-19 pandemic plunged their balance sheets further into the red. Instead, they will have to cut entitlements for the elderly, slash social spending for the young, raise taxes, or increase immigration—all of which would likely produce political backlashes.

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

Sluggish growth, enormous debts, stagnant wages, chronic unemployment, and extreme inequality are bound to breed nationalism and extremism. In the 1930s, economic frustrations caused many people to reject democracy and international cooperation and to embrace fascism or communism. Today, ultranationalists are ascendant across the democratic world—and not just in fledgling democracies in eastern Europe. In Germany, for example, a right-wing nationalist party, Alternative for Germany, now holds the third-largest number of seats in the parliament, and cases of neo-Nazi infiltration in the military and the police have multiplied alarmingly. The United States' task of leading the liberal world order will grow harder as nationalists gain power and raise tariffs, close borders, and abandon international institutions.

A ROGUE SUPERPOWER

Faced with flailing allies and a divided and apathetic public, the United States might start acting less like the head of a grand coalition and more like a rogue superpower—an economic and military colossus lacking moral commitments, neither isolationist nor internationalist, but aggressive, heavily armed, and entirely out for itself. In fact, under Trump, it already seems to be headed in that direction. During Trump's time in office, some U.S. security guarantees have started to look like protection rackets, with the president musing that allies should pay the costs of hosting U.S. troops plus a 50 percent premium. The Trump administration has taken to enforcing trade deals

with unilateral tariffs rather than working through the World Trade Organization. Trump has largely abandoned the goal of democracy promotion and has downgraded diplomacy, gutting the State Department and handing ever more responsibility to the Pentagon. The U.S. military is changing, too. Increasingly, it is a force geared for punishment rather than protection. The Trump administration has downsized permanent U.S. deployments on allied territory, replacing them with roving expeditionary units that can steam overseas, smash targets, and then slink back over the horizon.

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

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

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

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

Outside of those partnerships, all of Washington's alliances and relationships—including NATO and its connections with longtime allies such as South Korea—would be negotiable. The United States would no longer woo countries to participate in multilateral alliances. Instead, other countries would have to bargain on a bilateral basis for U.S. protection and market access. Countries with little to offer would have to find new partners or fend for themselves.

What would happen to the world if the United States fully embraced this kind of "America first" vision? Some analysts paint catastrophic pictures. Robert Kagan foresees a return to the despotism, protectionism, and strife of the 1930s, with China and Russia reprising the roles of imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. Peter Zeihan predicts a violent scramble for security and resources, in which Russia invades its neighbors and East Asia descends into naval warfare. These forecasts may be extreme, but they reflect an essential truth: the post-war order, although flawed and incomplete in many ways, has fostered the most peaceful and prosperous period in human history, and its absence would make the world a more dangerous place.

Thanks to the U.S.-led order, for decades, most countries have not had to fight for market access, guard their supply chains, or even seriously defend their borders. The U.S. Navy has kept international waterways open, the U.S. market has provided reliable consumer demand and capital for dozens of countries, and U.S. security guarantees have covered nearly 70 nations. Such assurances have benefited everyone: not just Washington's allies and partners but also its adversaries. U.S. secu-

rity guarantees had the effect of neutering Germany and Japan, the main regional rivals of Russia and China, respectively. In turn, Moscow and Beijing could focus on forging ties with the rest of the world rather than fighting their historical enemies. Without U.S. patronage and protection, countries would have to get back in the business of securing themselves and their economic lifelines.

Such a world would see the return of great-power mercantilism and new forms of imperialism. Powerful countries would once again try to reduce their economic insecurity by establishing exclusive economic zones, where their firms could enjoy cheap and secure access to raw materials and large captive consumer markets. Today, China is already starting to do this with its Belt and Road Initiative, a network of infrastructure projects around the world; its “Made in China 2025” policy, to stimulate domestic production and consumption; and its attempts to create a closed-off, parallel Internet. If the United States follows suit, other countries will have to attach themselves to an American or a Chinese bloc—or forge blocs of their own. France might seek to restore its grip on its former African colonies. Russia might accelerate its efforts to corral former Soviet states into a regional trade union. Germany increasingly would have to look beyond Europe’s shrinking populations to find buyers for its exports—and it would have to develop the military capacity to secure those new far-flung markets and supply lines, too.

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

The resulting disorder would jeopardize the very survival of some states. Since 1945, the number of countries in the world has tripled, from 46 to nearly 200. Most of these new states, however, are weak and lack energy, resources, food, domestic markets, advanced technology, military power, or defensible borders. According to research by the

political scientist Arjun Chowdhury, two-thirds of all countries today cannot provide basic services to their people without international help. In short, most countries depend critically on the postwar order, which has offered historically unprecedented access to international aid, markets, shipping, and protection. Without such support, some countries would collapse or be conquered. Fragile, aid-dependent states such as Afghanistan, Haiti, and Liberia are only some of the most obvious high-risk cases. Less obvious ones are capable but trade-dependent countries such as Saudi Arabia, Singapore, and South Korea, whose economic systems would struggle to function in a world of closed markets and militarized sea-lanes.

A PATH FORWARD

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

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

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

The best hope for the liberal world order is that future U.S. administrations find ways to channel growing nationalist impulses in internationalist directions. The United States has occasionally undertaken liberal campaigns for selfish reasons. It opposed European colonialism in part to open markets for U.S. goods, for example, and it nur-

tured and protected a community of capitalist democracies to crush Soviet communism and establish its global dominance. These campaigns garnered public support because they linked liberal ideals to vital U.S. interests. A similar approach could work today.

Americans may not want to fight and die to defend their country's far-flung allies, but they do want to prevent authoritarian powers, such as China and Russia, from becoming regional hegemons. The United States could therefore replace some of its most vulnerable bases on allied territories with diffuse networks of missile launchers and drones, thereby containing Chinese and Russian expansion while reducing the number of American lives on the line. Americans would also stand for protecting U.S. workers and businesses. Although the American public opposes trade deals that spur outsourcing, strong support exists for deals that create a level playing field for U.S. businesses. The United States could therefore use its enormous economic clout to compel trading partners to adopt American standards on labor, the environment, and intellectual property protection. Americans are unenthusiastic about promoting democracy overseas but willing to partner with allies to defend U.S. institutions from foreign meddling. Thus, the United States could forge a coalition of democracies to coordinate collective sanctions against foreign powers that interfere in democratic elections. Eventually, the coalition could become a liberal bloc that excludes countries that do not respect open commerce and freedom of expression and navigation.

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

The Transformation of Diplomacy

How to Save the State Department

*William J. Burns and Linda Thomas-
Greenfield*

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

There were 32 of us in the Foreign Service's class of January 1982. It was an eclectic group that included former Peace Corps volunteers, military veterans, a failed rock musician, and an ex-Catholic priest. None of us retained much from the procession of enervating speakers describing their particular islands in the great archipelago of U.S. foreign policy. What we did learn early on, and what stayed true throughout our careers, is that smart and sustained investment in people is the

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key to good diplomacy. Well-intentioned reform efforts over the years were crippled by faddishness, budgetary pressures, the overmilitarization of foreign policy, the State Department's lumbering bureaucracy, a fixation on structure, and—most of all—inattention to people.

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

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

In Washington, career public servants who worked on controversial issues during the Obama administration, such as the Iran nuclear negotiations, have been smeared and attacked, their careers derailed. Colleagues who upheld their constitutional oaths during the Ukraine impeachment saga were maligned and abandoned by their own leadership. In May, the State Department's independent inspector general, Steve Linick, was fired after doing what his job required him to do: opening an investigation into Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's alleged personal use of government resources. Battered and belittled, too many career officials have been tempted to go along to get along.

That undercuts not only morale but also a policy process that depends on apolitical experts airing contrary views, however inconvenient they may be to the politically appointed leadership.

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

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

REFORM AND RENEWAL

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

Although the transformation of the State Department into a more expeditionary and agile institution was healthy in many respects, it was

also distorting. It was tethered to a fundamentally flawed strategy—one that was too narrowly focused on terrorism and too wrapped up in magical thinking about the United States' supposed power to transform regions and societies. It paid too little attention to a rapidly changing international landscape in which geopolitical competition with a rising China and a resurgent Russia was accelerating and mammoth global challenges, such as climate change, were looming. It also neglected what was happening at home—the powerful storms of globalization that had left many communities and parts of the economy underwater and would soon overwhelm the United States' political levees.

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

Instead, U.S. diplomacy has to accept the country's diminished, but still pivotal, role in global affairs. It has to apply greater restraint and discipline; it must develop a greater awareness of the United States' position and more humility about the wilting power of the American example. It has to reflect the overriding priority of accelerating domestic renewal and strengthening the American middle class, at a time of heightened focus on racial injustice and economic inequality. And it has to take aim at other crucial priorities. One is to mobilize coalitions to deal with transnational challenges and ensure greater resilience in American society to the inevitable shocks of climate change, cyberthreats, and pandemics. Another is to organize wisely for geopolitical competition with China.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

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

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

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

All these ideas would have landed in the “too hard” pile when we were serving. But the reality today is that the State Department simply cannot afford to continue its bad habits of offering inflexible career tracks, imposing self-defeating hiring constraints, and encouraging tribal inbreeding among its cloistered ranks.

Another major priority is the need to treat the lack of diversity in the diplomatic corps as a national security crisis. It not only undermines the power of the United States' example; it also suffocates the potential of the country's diplomacy. Study after study has shown that more diverse organizations are more effective and innovative organizations. At the very moment when American diplomacy could benefit most from

fresh perspectives and a closer connection to the American people, the diplomatic corps is becoming increasingly homogeneous and detached, undercutting the promotion of American interests and values.

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

The State Department should make an unambiguous commitment that by 2030, America’s diplomats will, at long last, resemble the country they represent. Achieving this goal will require making diversity a key feature of the diplomatic surge at every point along the career pipeline. It will demand an unshakable commitment to diverse candidates and gender parity in senior appointments. And it will require the State Department’s leadership to hold itself accountable by not only getting departmental data in order and making the information accessible to the public but acting on it, as well, with clear annual benchmarks for progress. Lower promotion rates for racial and ethnic minorities and the precipitous drop-off in the number of women and minorities in the senior ranks are flashing red warning lights of structural discrimination.

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

To succeed in both a serious diplomatic surge and a historic new campaign for diversity and inclusion, the department must commit to

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

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

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

To unlock its potential, the State Department must increase its staffing pipelines to deepen its officers' command of core diplomatic

skills and fluency in areas of growing importance, such as climate change, technology, public health, and humanitarian diplomacy. In the traditional area of economics, the State Department must strengthen its capabilities significantly—working closely with the Commerce and Treasury Departments—and promote the interests of American workers with the same zeal with which it has promoted the interests of corporate America.

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

A NEW CULTURE

Part of investing in people means investing in the technology that allows them to realize their full potential. A more digital, agile, collaborative, and data-centric diplomatic corps depends on more robust and secure communications tools. Today, too many diplomats lack access to classified systems and technology, especially on the road. That leaves them more vulnerable to foreign intelligence and unable to keep up with other U.S. national security agencies. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the need to reimagine how to conduct diplomacy remotely or virtually.

Technology can no longer be seen as a luxury good for diplomacy. The last big technological push at the State Department came during Colin Powell’s tenure as secretary of state, nearly two decades ago, when the department began to set aside its mini-fridge-sized desktop computers and move cautiously into the modern age. It is long past time for another major effort. To enhance the department’s technological platforms, the State Department should appoint a chief technology officer reporting directly to the secretary of state. That official should work with the U.S. Digital Service—an information technol-

ogy consulting group within the executive branch that was created in 2014—to make internal systems, foreign aid, and public diplomacy more effective. Just as the department’s chief economist helps diplomats understand the impact of global economic trends on U.S. interests, the chief technology officer should help diplomats grapple with disruptive technologies and leverage private-sector talent.

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

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

A seismic cultural shift is needed to create a more upstanding, courageous, and agile institution, with greater tolerance for risk and a simplified, decentralized decision-making process. The State Department must get out of its own way—delegating responsibility downward in Washington and outward to qualified chiefs of mission overseas and reducing the number of undersecretaries and top-level staff members to avoid duplicative authority and inefficiencies. Initiative should be prized, and the passive-aggressive habit of waiting for guidance from above should be discouraged.

The department ought to discard the current cumbersome process for clearing papers and policy recommendations and start from scratch. A new, more flexible framework would allow expertise in Washington and in the field to be quickly distilled into cogent policy proposals and would grant embassies in the field more autonomy to implement the resulting decisions. The State Department’s leaders must also offer political top cover for constructive dissent, supplanting the corrosive “keep your head down” culture with an “I have your back” mentality—

in other words, the exact opposite of how the State Department treated its diplomats during the 2019 impeachment hearings.

CHANGE THAT LASTS

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

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

With a sturdy foundation of reforms laid, the next step would be to codify them in the first major congressional legislation on U.S. diplomacy in 40 years. The last Foreign Service Act, passed in 1980, modernized the mission and structure of the State Department, building on acts from 1924 and 1946. A new act would be crucial to making reforms durable. It would also help shape a style of diplomacy that is fit for an increasingly competitive international landscape and better equipped to serve the priority of domestic renewal. Serious, lasting transformation of U.S. diplomacy will be very hard. But it matters enormously to the future of American democracy in an unforgiving world.

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

talks with adversaries, mobilizing other countries to ease the plight of refugees, or promoting American jobs and economic opportunities.

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

WEB

THE WOUNDED PRESIDENCY

THE CORONAVIRUS COULD RESHAPE GLOBAL ORDER

THE PANDEMIC WILL ACCELERATE HISTORY

RATHER THAN RESHAPE IT

PUBLIC HEALTH CALLS FOR SOLIDARITY, NOT WARFARE

THE COMING POST-COVID ANARCHY

CIVIL RIGHTS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

HOW A GREAT POWER FALLS APART

THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS ARE POISED TO TAKE OVER IRAN

THE WORLD IS BECOMING MORE EQUAL

FIGHTING A PANDEMIC REQUIRES TRUST

The Wounded Presidency

How Impeachment Has Shaped U.S. Foreign Policy

Timothy Naftali

EDITORS' NOTE

Historians who study impeachment tend to treat it as a domestic political affair: the bloody combat of partisan politics taken to its extreme, threatening the very survival of a presidency. But when the commander in chief must fight for his political life, the repercussions inevitably ripple around the world. In theory at least, foreign policy and domestic politics are supposed to occupy separate domains. In practice, presidents face tremendous pressure to use foreign policy to bolster their domestic political fortunes—never more so than when they face the threat of impeachment. U.S. adversaries can likewise be tempted to exploit a weakened American president to advance their regional ambitions or to subvert the international system. Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton both faced challenges from U.S. adversaries when their presidencies were on the line, and both sought flashy foreign policy achievements that would distract from their political woes.

In this exhaustive three-part series, CNN presidential historian Timothy Naftali plumbs the Nixon and Clinton impeachment sagas for insight into the global dimensions of President Donald Trump's current crisis. Naftali, who is an associate clinical professor of public service at New York University, draws on reams of recently declassified documents as well as memoirs, oral histories, and other archival materials to weave together the previously untold story of U.S. for-

TIMOTHY NAFTALI is Associate Clinical Professor of Public Service at New York University and a CNN Presidential Historian. He is a co-author of *Impeachment: An American History*.

eign policy during the last two impeachment crises. Part One examines the Watergate scandal, during which Nixon's controversial policy of détente with the Soviet Union lay on the line. An addled president nonetheless delegated his foreign policy to an enormously empowered secretary of state, Henry Kissinger. Part Two delves into the 1998 impeachment, during which Clinton did the opposite, keeping a tight leash on his national security aides as they sought to broker an attention-grabbing peace deal in the Middle East. The lessons from these two historical episodes are manifold, and they help to explain how the world has reacted to Trump's impeachment drama, which is explored in Part Three.

— The editors of *Foreign Affairs*

The Wounded Presidency, Part One

The Untold Story of U.S. Foreign Policy
During the Nixon Impeachment Crisis

JANUARY 28, 2020

“If the Democrats and the U.S. public do not stop laying siege to their government, sooner or later someone will take a run at us,” Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said to a small group of national security principals assembled in the White House Situation Room. It was nearing midnight on October 24, 1973, and Kissinger believed that the Soviets were about to exploit the wounded presidency of Richard Nixon to challenge the United States in the Middle East. The secretary of state had received an ominous phone call at 9:35 that evening from the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, who delivered an urgent message from Leonid Brezhnev: the

Soviet leader sought a joint U.S.-Soviet intervention in Egypt, but absent U.S. cooperation the Soviets were prepared to go it alone.

It had been a little more than two weeks since Egypt and Syria began a coordinated offensive against Israel, blowing past the cease-fire lines established after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and capturing much of the Sinai Peninsula and some of the Golan Heights. But the Israelis had recovered from the initial shock of the Yom Kippur attack, and with the help of a significant U.S. resupply effort, pushed the invading armies back. The Soviets had undertaken a resupply effort of their own to aid the Egyptians, but now the Israelis had crossed the Suez Canal, encircled Egypt's Third Army, and violated a superpower-brokered cease-fire by moving into the city of Suez. So worried was Brezhnev about the fate of his Egyptian ally that Kissinger believed the Soviets were contemplating a military intervention.

"I will say it straight," Dobrynin said, quoting from Brezhnev's message, "that if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessary urgency to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally. We cannot allow arbitrariness on the part of Israel."

Fifteen minutes after he got off the phone with the Soviet ambassador, Kissinger called White House Chief of Staff Alexander M. Haig, Jr. "I think we have to go to the mat on this one," Kissinger said. "Should I wake up the president?" The perceived threat from Moscow necessitated the question, but developments closer to home likely determined the answer. Nixon was then in the first days of a crisis that would eventually end his presidency. Four days earlier, in what would become known as the Saturday Night Massacre, he had ordered the firing of Archibald Cox, the Watergate special prosecutor, and the closure of the independent inquiry into the June 1972 burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters and the ensuing White House cover-up. The country had erupted in bipartisan outrage, spurring Democrats and Republicans alike to endorse the first impeachment inquiry since 1868.

The turn of events in the Watergate scandal had thrown Nixon into a funk. Stress often destabilized the president, causing him to test his famously low tolerance for alcohol and bringing to the fore the darker elements of his nature. With his presidency suddenly in peril, his aides feared he was too unstable to respond to the emerging crisis in the Middle East. To Kissinger's question about waking the president, Haig answered with a single word: "No."

POLITICS AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Although Americans tend to view impeachment as a domestic affair, efforts to remove a sitting president inevitably reverberate beyond U.S. borders. When the leader of a superpower is hobbled, the world reacts. And each U.S. president to face impeachment has dealt with that reaction differently: Nixon delegated responsibility for foreign policy during Watergate, whereas Bill Clinton continued to immerse himself in foreign-policy making throughout his own impeachment scandal. But in every impeachment battle, including the current one, the commander in chief's fight for political survival has shaped the conduct of U.S. foreign policy as well as its reception around the world.

For as long as the United States has been a superpower, its foreign policy establishment has embraced the idea of a wall between foreign policy and domestic politics. This consensus flows from a shared belief in the existence of national interests, which though not necessarily fixed, transcend individual presidencies. Of course, the wall represents an ideal. Domestic political pressures intrude on foreign-policy making in every presidency, and there are policy areas where the two are inextricably linked—trade policy, for example. Even before he was elected, Nixon showed that he was not above subverting U.S. foreign policy to advance his political aims: in 1968, he interfered with peace talks with North Vietnam lest they benefit his opponent. But his impeachment crisis, and Clinton's after it, put additional pressure on the wall between domestic politics and foreign policy, as both presidents reached for accomplishments overseas that would make them seem indispensable at home. Moments of presidential overreach during both the Nixon and Clinton impeachment crises had similar causes, but slightly different effects. More significant were the differences in how foreign powers reacted—differences that help to explain the world's response to the current U.S. impeachment crisis.

A wounded American presidency might seem like an opportunity for U.S. adversaries, and one can instantly grasp why Kissinger feared a challenge from Moscow while Nixon's position was weakening. But the story of what might be called the Kissinger Regency, when the secretary of state exercised broad control over U.S. foreign policy, shows why his fears about Moscow were misplaced—and why the biggest threat to U.S. global leadership in times of domestic crisis comes not necessarily from great-power rivals, which have a stake in upholding the status quo, but from revisionist powers bent on upending the

international system. Turkey, Greece, and possibly North Vietnam sought to capitalize on Nixon's impeachment, whereas the Soviet Union and China actually came to the president's aid. A quarter of a century on, the Clinton impeachment saga invited similar revisionist provocations, but more of them this time, from Iraq, Serbia, and a nonstate actor, Osama bin Laden.

What had changed in the intervening years was the end of the Cold War and the rise—in number and relative strength—of powers seeking to revise borders and other aspects of the international system. Today, power is even more diffuse on the global stage, and potential challengers to the international system and to U.S. national interests are more numerous. Following the pattern of the Clinton impeachment drama, Iran and North Korea have already tested President Donald Trump in his moment of greatest political vulnerability, and it seems likely that China pressed its advantage in its recent trade deal with the United States, the details of which have been kept secret.

Trump, for his part, has eagerly sought foreign policy wins during his impeachment crisis just as Nixon and Clinton did before him, except that his administration never accepted the principle of a wall between foreign policy and domestic politics in the first place. (Evidence that Trump bent U.S. policy toward Ukraine to serve his own private interests, after all, forms the basis of his current impeachment trial.) Instead of resisting the temptation to play politics with the national interest, Trump has collapsed foreign policy and domestic politics into a single, self-serving enterprise. As a result, the perversion of U.S. foreign policy that many feared during the last two impeachment crises has been the norm throughout this presidency.

THE KISSINGER REGENCY

During the Nixon impeachment, Kissinger assumed an extraordinary degree of responsibility for U.S. foreign policy, especially where his and Nixon's shared vision aligned with that of the rest of the president's national security team. Increasingly distracted by the fight to save his presidency, Nixon entrusted day-to-day management of foreign affairs almost entirely to his secretary of state. Still, like the two presidents who would face impeachment inquiries after him, he made periodic forays into foreign policy where it suited his domestic political needs.

During Nixon's first term, from January 1969 to January 1973, U.S. foreign policy was the product of a fraught but productive partnership

between the president and his then national security adviser. Nixon set the general course and Kissinger devised the tactics to execute it. A diplomatic opening to China, for instance, was the president's idea. But Kissinger forged the secret contacts that made Nixon's historic 1972 visit possible. The administration's handling of the Vietnam War also reflected this partnership, although it couldn't be shielded from other domestic influences, such as Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Congress, and the American public.

But Kissinger began to accrue greater control over foreign affairs even before the start of the impeachment crisis. According to Kissinger, Nixon started losing his capacity to focus on foreign policy in the spring of 1973, when the Watergate investigations led to the resignation of his top domestic adviser, John Ehrlichman, and his iron-fisted chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman. The first area the president relinquished was arms control policy toward the Soviets. "[I]n the wake of the resignations of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, he explicitly told me (on May 1) to follow my own judgment in choosing among options," Kissinger recalled in his memoirs. From that point on, Nixon's attention span for foreign policy got weaker and weaker. "He would sign memoranda or accept my recommendations almost absentmindedly now, without any of the intensive underlining and marginal comments that in the first term had indicated he had read my papers with care," Kissinger recalled. "Increasingly, he went through the motions of governing."

In September 1973, Nixon formalized Kissinger's unprecedented role in U.S. foreign policy by appointing him secretary of state in addition to national security adviser. In one fell swoop, Kissinger became the master of the nation's traditional centers of foreign-policy making and implementation—the cockpit for the powerful "Nixoniger" secret diplomacy. Kissinger's mantra throughout this period was, "Our job is to demonstrate that the foreign policy of the United States continues forcefully, competently," even during a domestic political crisis. And because the president shared this goal, U.S. foreign policy largely carried on as before under the secretary of state's leadership. Kissinger would not have attained this level of power if not for Watergate and the all-consuming crisis that it created for his boss. "One of the more cruel torments of Nixon's Watergate purgatory," Kissinger noted a decade later, "was my emergence as the preeminent figure in foreign policy."

But the specter of impeachment threatened Nixon's authority, and Kissinger's by extension. To retain mastery of the situation, the secre-

tary of state needed to maintain the impression, at home and abroad, that the president remained committed to a worldwide “structure of peace,” or *détente*, as Nixon’s signature policy of easing tensions between the superpowers was known. The president’s 1972 visits to Beijing and Moscow had ended a 22-year U.S. effort to isolate the People’s Republic of China, and led to the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as other confidence-building measures. A peace accord with Hanoi in January 1973 had also taken Vietnam, the most destabilizing Cold War regional conflict, largely off the table. But the United States hadn’t given up on its South Vietnamese ally, and it sought to expand its new relationship with China and move toward a second nuclear arms control agreement with Russia. In other words, *détente* was still a work in progress, and Kissinger’s authority over foreign policy depended on its advancement.

“NO FUNCTIONAL PRESIDENT, IN THEIR EYES”

The fate of *détente* seemed to hang in the balance on the night of October 24, 1973, when Kissinger assembled the crisis subset of the National Security Council 30 minutes after getting off the phone with the president’s chief of staff. In addition to Haig, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Thomas Moorer, and CIA director William Colby all gathered in the Situation Room while the president slept. Both Kissinger and Haig believed that the Soviets were prepared to sacrifice *détente*, because, as Kissinger put it, “We have no functional president, in their eyes.” The other men present didn’t disagree. As Schlesinger later recalled, “[W]e were concerned, because of the domestic situation, that the publicity and the uproar associated with the Saturday Night Massacre and then the calls for Nixon’s impeachment might persuade the Russians that we were incapable of reacting to what we regarded as Brezhnev’s threat.”

There were other reasons for Nixon’s national security team to worry. Recently declassified documents reveal that a Soviet ship that the CIA thought might be carrying nuclear weapons was approaching Egypt that night, and that the Soviets had abruptly shut down their airlift operation to resupply the Egyptian army, potentially freeing up those planes to carry troops. By midnight, the principals had decided to institute a DEFCON III alert, the highest U.S. strategic alert status since the Cuban missile crisis, and to move two aircraft carriers closer to the western part of the Soviet Union. “I think it was Henry’s [Kis-

singer] idea,” Schlesinger later recalled. “[R]aising the DEFCON level of the forces was our way of conveying the message, ‘We are quite capable of reacting; don’t you dare do anything.’”

Nixon was never in the room for what was ultimately a five-hour meeting. Schlesinger later recalled Haig going back and forth between the Situation Room and the White House residence, saying, “‘The president has agreed to this’ or ‘The president has not agreed to this.’” Regardless of what, if anything, Nixon agreed to that night, Kissinger and his team didn’t think a presidential decision was required. Brent Scowcroft, who was then Kissinger’s deputy on the National Security Council, later described the alert as an “administrative” decision.

The Soviets picked up the alert early on October 25, but their response wasn’t what Kissinger and the other principals expected. Soviet documents and memoirs that became available after the end of the Cold War suggest that Moscow wasn’t scheming to veer off the path of détente after all. Rather, Brezhnev and some others in the Soviet Politburo really were panicked about the survival of the Egyptian regime. Brezhnev, who had dictated his letter to Nixon from his hunting lodge, rushed back to Moscow for meetings in the Kremlin after the U.S. alert was detected. If the Soviets had intended to intervene militarily in Egypt, Brezhnev would likely have been with the Politburo on October 24. Moreover, the Soviets didn’t respond to the U.S. alert with one of their own but, rather, took steps to reassure the embattled U.S. president.

What Soviet leaders seemed to have gleaned from Watergate was that as Nixon grew weaker, forces inside the United States that opposed détente grew stronger. “The threat of ‘impeachment’ has now become more realistic for Nixon than it was a few months ago,” Yuri Andropov, then the head of the KGB, wrote to Brezhnev on October 29. “One cannot rule out that in this situation the Jewish lobby in the Congress is seriously limiting Nixon’s actions and his desire to implement the agreement” for a cease-fire in the Middle East.

Although Moscow’s intelligence analysis was hobbled by anti-Semitism and knee-jerk conspiracy thinking, the Soviets had good reason to think that détente faced serious domestic challenges. Since the fall of 1972, Senator Henry Jackson, a Democrat from Washington, had sought to link further U.S.-Soviet economic relations, a key element of détente supported by both the Kremlin and the White House, to the easing of restrictions on Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1973, Kissinger had helped the Soviets

craft a formal statement to Congress aimed at bypassing Jackson's efforts and enabling the Soviet Union to gain most-favored nation trade status. The attempt had failed, but as a result Moscow knew where the Nixon White House stood on the issue.

On November 10, in the immediate aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, Brezhnev sent a private note to Nixon wishing him "energy and success in overcoming all sorts of complexities, the causes of which are not so easy to understand at a distance... [O]ur determination to proceed further along the path of decisive improvement in the Soviet-American relations has not diminished as a result of the events in the Middle East." Nixon, who was touched by the message from Moscow, invited Ambassador Dobrynin to meet with him privately. And in mid-December 1973, he assured the Soviets through Dobrynin that he was still dedicated to *détente*. Then, as if to confirm the KGB's analysis of the situation, the president made a point of blaming Israel and the American Jewish community for opposing any improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations.

A MIDDLE EAST DÉTENTE

There were other countries that favored *détente* as well, especially in the Middle East, where the extension of Nixon's "structure of peace" had the potential to ease regional tensions. Arab countries hoped a more engaged U.S. administration would help them gain concessions from Israel, while Israel hoped the United States would make a stronger commitment to peace on Israel's borders, and weaken Soviet influence in the region. If the wounding of Nixon's presidency had any effect in the region, it was to make Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat eager to pressure his fellow Arab leaders, most notably Hafez al-Assad of Syria, to take advantage of U.S. mediation with Israel before Nixon, and presumably Kissinger, were swept from the scene. Sadat became Kissinger's essential partner in exploiting the effects of the Yom Kippur War, which Sadat had started, to de-escalate the Arab-Israeli and inter-Arab conflict.

With the president's general approval, Kissinger undertook the most strenuous negotiations by any American secretary of state up to that point, logging days away from Washington, D.C., first to secure agreements to separate the Israeli and Arab armies on both the Egyptian and Syrian fronts and then in pursuit of a framework for negotiations—indirect at this point—between Cairo, Damascus, and Israel. As Harold Saunders, a key staffer on Middle East policy, later recalled, Kissinger's

“shuttle diplomacy” largely proceeded outside of the shadow of the impeachment drama. “[S]trangely I don’t think we could have achieved more than we did... [Watergate] didn’t have that much effect.”

Initially, Nixon left Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy alone for the most part. On the Middle East issue, as with other issues where the Pentagon and the State Department were aligned, the Kissinger Regency was relatively uncontroversial. Kissinger’s results were also impressive. In January 1974, with the United States acting as intermediary and prod, Israel and Egypt reached a disengagement agreement. So impressed were the Saudis by Kissinger’s efforts that they made clear to the United States that if a similar achievement could be achieved between Syria and Israel, OPEC would lift the oil embargo it had imposed on countries seen as supportive of Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The United States agreed, but made clear that the embargo had to be lifted first, and not held hostage to talks in Damascus. In March 1974, the Saudis lifted the embargo and Kissinger soon began what would be 26 meetings with Assad over 35 days.

But as the impeachment crisis deepened, the president made clear that there were limits to how much credit he was willing to let Kissinger take for foreign policy successes. When Nixon sensed his presidency was in mortal danger in the spring of 1974, after he released edited transcripts of his secret Oval Office recordings under subpoena from the House Judiciary Committee, he tried to reassert superficial command over Kissinger’s Middle East diplomacy. He had no substantive suggestions to make; Kissinger’s diplomacy was going very well. But Nixon felt that he desperately needed some good public relations, and began to view the emerging Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement as necessary for his political survival. As a result, he began to pressure Kissinger to broker an agreement as quickly as possible.

On May 9, the same day that House Minority Leader John Rhodes, a Republican from Arizona, suggested that Nixon should consider resigning, Kissinger sent a note to his deputy, Scowcroft, to reassure Haig that Nixon would get public credit for the emerging deal with Syria. “Please tell Haig that I will use every available opportunity to mention the President’s role in the current negotiations,” Kissinger wrote, presumably in response to a message from the president’s chief of staff. “I will continue to stress the importance of his involvement in our overall effort to seek a lasting peace,” he added. But the White House wanted more than that. The president felt he needed a splashy

trip to distract from his troubles at home, and to underscore that just as only Nixon could go to China, only Nixon could go to Damascus.

But there was a sticking point. A grand Middle East trip for Nixon in May or June 1974 would depend on Israel and Syria reaching an agreement, something that was proving much more difficult than the Israel-Egypt deal. After Syria's initial gains in the first days of the Yom Kippur War, the Israelis had pushed the Syrians back into their own interior, past the borders of the Golan Heights, which Israel had occupied since June 1967. Not only did Syria want Israel to withdraw from the territory it had taken in this war, but Syria wanted Israel to relinquish some of what it had taken in 1967, including Quneitra, a town of 20,000 people in the Golan Heights. Israel, however, showed no interest in handing over occupied territory. As Prime Minister Golda Meir explained to Kissinger, "the Syrians had no right to gain territory after losing a war." Under U.S. pressure, Israel did offer to withdraw from Quneitra as long as it could keep troops on the western edge of the town, but Assad regarded this compromise as unacceptable.

When Kissinger reported to Nixon on May 14 that an agreement between Israel and Syria seemed out of reach in the short term because Israel refused to make any more compromises around Quneitra, Nixon blew up. The president's support for Israel had always been cold and strategic. An anti-Semite who doubted the enormity of the Holocaust, Nixon was now convinced that Israeli obstinacy threatened his political future. In the middle of the night on May 15, as Kissinger later recalled, the president "phoned Scowcroft twice to order him to cut off all aid to Israel unless it changed its position by the next morning." Nixon was insistent, but he didn't tell Scowcroft what exactly he wanted Israel's new position on Quneitra to be.

As Nixon fumed about the lack of progress toward a deal, the situation in the region took a dramatic turn for the worse. Early in the morning of May 15, a group of terrorists from the Syrian-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine killed five people and took four teachers and about 90 children hostage in a school in the northern Israeli town of Ma'alot. In the midst of this new crisis, Kissinger was very concerned about the possible effect of the president's ultimatum. "With respect to your recent message on cutting off Israel's aid," he wrote to Nixon from Jerusalem, "I must tell you as strongly as I can that such a course would be disastrous in terms of the immediate negotiation, the long-term evolution and the U.S. position in the Middle East."

Yet somehow Kissinger managed to simultaneously calm the irrational U.S. president and coax additional concessions from the Israelis. Despite the Churchillian sweep of his three-volume memoirs, Kissinger's account of how he ultimately persuaded Israel to pull far enough back from Quneitra to satisfy the Syrians seems oddly incomplete, and State Department historians compiling the Foreign Relations of the United States volume for those negotiations could find no official record of the secretary of state's meeting with Israel's negotiating team or his private meetings with Meir and the Israeli ambassador to the United States on May 15.

Perhaps Kissinger, who knew for whom he was working, warned Meir that his anti-Semitic boss was losing it. The Israelis' finely honed political antennae in Washington, D.C., had certainly picked up Nixon's distress. It is also possible that Meir, who had already decided to step down and was affected by the horrific events in Ma'alot, didn't need much of a push to make another concession for peace at the end of her long political career. Subsequent events suggest that an implicit deal may have been part of the equation as well: at the bitter end of Nixon's presidency in August, the Israelis would deliver a major request for weapons. Kissinger may have signaled in mid-May that in return for help with Syria, the United States would look more favorably on additional military support. In any case, Israel did Nixon a favor and agreed to a compromise on Quneitra drafted by Kissinger. And, even more surprising, Syria agreed to it as well on May 18, with only a slight modification related to the placement of Israeli arms. One cannot be certain of the reason for Syria's agreement, but it seems likely that Assad recognized that the Americans had got him a win and that further intransigence might cause him to lose the peace.

A few days later, a much calmer President Nixon sent Kissinger a private message: "I believe we should follow up this development with a trip to the Middle East at the earliest possible time. We will thereby be able to seal in concrete those new relationships which are essential if we are to be successful in building a permanent structure of peace in the area."

Two weeks after Israel and Syria formalized their agreement on May 31, Nixon took his victory lap in the Middle East, becoming the first sitting U.S. president to visit Israel and Syria, and only the second to visit Egypt. Sadat arranged a remarkable visit for Nixon, with millions cheering him in Cairo and Egypt's state-controlled press extolling his "peace visit." Nixon tested his stamina on the trip and arguably risked

his life. On his way to the Middle East, his doctor urged him to stay off his feet as much as possible. His left leg was enlarged with phlebitis, and although “the greatest danger had already passed,” according to Nixon’s memoirs, the condition was known to cause fatal blood clots. Despite the doctor’s warning, Nixon stood for hours next to Sadat, first in a motorcade through Cairo and then on an open train car to the port city of Alexandria, holding on with his right hand while waving with his left.

THE REAL ENEMIES OF DÉTENTE

The Kissinger Regency was not as successful in areas, at home or abroad, where the policy of détente was not as broadly supported. Curiously, the most robust challenge to Nixon’s “structure of peace” didn’t come from a communist power. Soviet leaders resisted the idea that the scandal could bring down the U.S. president, and Brezhnev himself didn’t want to see Nixon go. Similarly, the Chinese did nothing to complicate Nixon’s personal political fight. A month after Nixon left office, Richard Solomon, a senior staffer on the National Security Council, observed that the Chinese “have shown a remarkable degree of loyalty and personal warmth to Mr. Nixon.”

Rather, as the Soviets had surmised, the real pressure on détente came from inside the United States. The collapse of Nixon’s presidency accelerated centrifugal forces in the Republican Party, where détente had already caused a rift. It also emboldened hawkish Democrats and the Pentagon to seek a tougher approach to arms control.

The signal achievement of Nixon’s détente policy had been the conclusion of the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, known as SALT I, in 1972. The purpose of the treaty was to avoid an expensive and dangerous arms race by freezing in place a status quo acceptable to both sides. But by 1974, advances in technology had reduced the effectiveness of key SALT I restrictions. The Nixon administration was pursuing a second round of talks that it hoped would yield a new treaty—SALT II. But it also had a new defense secretary, Schlesinger, who had not been in the cabinet during the earlier SALT negotiations and was skeptical of both détente and Nixon’s judgment in the throes of an impeachment crisis.

In June 1974, facing the prospect of a Nixon-Brezhnev arms control summit in Crimea, Schlesinger and other skeptics of détente in the administration took steps to prevent Nixon and Kissinger from rushing into a bad SALT II agreement. On June 4, Schlesinger wrote to Jackson, the nation’s most prominent critic of détente, implying that

he preferred the senator's approach to arms control over that of the administration. At an NSC meeting two weeks later, Schlesinger recommended, and Moorer endorsed, a negotiating position on arms limitation that Nixon knew the Soviets would reject out of hand. "The NSC meeting was a real shocker," Nixon dictated to his diary, "insofar as the Chiefs, and particularly of Schlesinger, was concerned."

Schlesinger's skepticism about Nixon's judgment on arms control was even shared by some on Kissinger's staff, including Scowcroft. At the summit in the Crimea, "Nixon and Brezhnev went off by themselves to negotiate, and I think Nixon was hoping for an arms control agreement, a follow-on agreement in principle that would have given him a psychological boost with the American people and maybe prevent something happening," Scowcroft later recalled. At another point during the summit, perhaps out of desperation to push Brezhnev to accept new limits on strategic missiles, Nixon scared Kissinger by appearing to accept Brezhnev's suggestion of a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union designed to counter China. Kissinger later revoked this acceptance and Nixon would deny ever giving it.

The June summit did produce a limited underground nuclear test ban and a new limitation on anti-ballistic missile systems. But by that point, no foreign policy achievement, however dramatic, could have changed the conversation in Washington as Nixon's presidency careened toward collapse. On July 24, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled that the president would have to turn over the secret tapes that the Watergate special prosecutor had requested for the criminal trials of the president's top lieutenants. One of those tapes, Nixon knew, would reveal his participation in a criminal conspiracy to cover up the Watergate burglary.

DANGEROUS BUSINESS

With the Nixon presidency in its death throes, Kissinger still worried about the Soviets making trouble. But the only countries that actually attempted to exploit the widening power vacuum in Washington during this period were small ones. In mid-July, Greece had overthrown the government of Cyprus, prompting Turkey to invade the Mediterranean island. Nixon was in San Clemente at the time, and he didn't want to return to Washington, where the House Judiciary Committee was about to debate articles of impeachment. "I can do whatever I could in Washington here," he told Kissinger. Once again, Kissinger was expected to manage all aspects of the crisis, although

Nixon did reassure his secretary of state that if “the Greeks did go to war, then I would come back to Washington.”

Nixon and Kissinger had previously discussed what to do if Greece retaliated by attacking Turkey in Thrace. Despite the weakened state of Nixon’s presidency, the Department of Defense and the CIA suggested covert action to overthrow the Greek regime. But Kissinger objected: “I don’t like overthrowing governments. I’m not sure the Greek government will last out the week, anyway,” he said at a crisis meeting of the NSC. When the CIA suggested working with the former king instead, Kissinger replied, “That’s dangerous business in the middle of a war. I’ll talk to the President about it.” The Greek government ultimately fell without any U.S. intervention, and the Turks awaited Nixon’s own fall to resume their military operations in Cyprus.

The Pentagon worried that North Vietnam, too, might be preparing to take advantage of the collapse of the Nixon presidency. In early August, the intelligence community detected chatter that seemed to suggest that three divisions of the North Vietnamese army had gone on alert. It also picked up tactical communications from a reserve division outside Hanoi. On August 6, “A local force unit in Quang Nam Province was instructed to prepare for a ‘general offensive,’” intelligence officials reported to the White House. The intelligence officials didn’t expect an offensive against South Vietnam that day, but they believed that “serious communist attacks may be imminent.”

The previous day, August 5, the transcript of the tape revealing Nixon’s involvement early in the Watergate cover-up had been released to the public, and even Republicans were describing it as a “smoking gun.” With Washington expecting Nixon’s resignation at any moment, Schlesinger didn’t call the president about worrying chatter in Vietnam. Instead, he called Kissinger on August 7. “Anything we can do?” Kissinger asked in response to the secretary of defense. There were no troop options, but Schlesinger suggested moving some aircraft carriers closer to Vietnam. He also suggested telling the Soviets and the Chinese what the United States had detected. Kissinger agreed: “I think that’s an excellent idea,” he told Schlesinger. In the twilight of Nixon’s presidency, Kissinger’s agreement was all that the secretary of defense needed to act.

Later that same day, at 5:58 PM, the president’s chief of staff called Kissinger. “Henry, could you get to the Oval Office in five or six minutes?” Haig asked. Kissinger wasn’t surprised. The day before, his

confidante and former White House aide Rita Hauser had made clear to him that the “smoking gun” transcript effectively meant that Nixon had “pleaded guilty.” Now a Republican delegation from Congress had told the president that impeachment and removal were inevitable, and Kissinger was the first member of the cabinet whom Nixon informed of his intention to announce his resignation the next day.

In the end, with the exceptions of Greece, Turkey, and possibly North Vietnam, the world watched the collapse of the Nixon presidency largely with sadness and surprise, but not with a sense of opportunity. Egypt, Syria, the Soviet Union, and China had, if anything, been helpful to the wounded president, and Israel had actually done him a favor. The peculiarities of Nixon’s partnership with Kissinger, shaped before the impeachment crisis, allowed the foreign policy system to function with a dysfunctional president. Something very different would play out in the nation’s second impeachment crisis as a superpower.

The Wounded Presidency, Part Two

The Untold Story of U.S. Foreign Policy During the Clinton Impeachment Crisis

JANUARY 29, 2020

Just after 10:30 AM on August 7, 1998, two truck bombs exploded within minutes of each other outside the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, killing 224 people—12 of them Americans—and wounding more than 5,000 others. In the days that followed, the FBI and the CIA briefed U.S. President Bill Clinton on those they believed were responsible. “This one is a slam dunk, Mr. President,” said the CIA’s basketball-loving director, George Tenet. “There is no doubt that

this was an al Qaeda operation.”

The CIA had been tracking Osama bin Laden, the fanatical son of a Saudi construction magnate, since 1996. His global organization, al Qaeda, was not yet synonymous with mass carnage, but the CIA knew that it was plotting operations against U.S. interests around the world. Now, the CIA director didn't just have proof that bin Laden was behind the East African embassy bombings—he had intelligence that would allow the president to target the terrorist mastermind. Bin Laden planned to attend a meeting near the southern Afghan town of Khost on August 20, the agency had learned. Soon after the meeting with Tenet, Clinton told his national security adviser, Samuel Berger, to begin preparations for a military strike.

But as Berger and other aides drew up a target list for the planned attack, a very different kind of intelligence altered Clinton's presidency forever. On August 16, the president learned that semen found on the dress of former White House intern Monica Lewinsky contained DNA that matched his own. For the last seven months, Clinton had denied an affair with Lewinsky, including in a sworn deposition related to a separate sexual harassment suit brought by former Arkansas state employee Paula Jones. But he had agreed to appear voluntarily before the grand jury of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, and the date for his testimony had been set for August 17. Now, with the evidence from the dress, the president would have to admit what modern science could prove.

The implications of the scandal enveloping the White House weren't lost on Clinton's national security team as it assembled a plan to assassinate bin Laden by cruise missile. Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, both staffers on the National Security Council, recalled Secretary of Defense William Cohen saying to members of the NSC in the Situation Room that the president would face criticism for “trying to change the subject.” After the Pentagon shared the final plan for the strike with Clinton, another aide cautioned the president about the political optics of military action. “If I have to take more criticism for this, I will,” Clinton replied.

And take criticism he did. On August 17, Clinton appeared before the grand jury and then went on national television to admit an inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky. Three days later, U.S. warships fired dozens of Tomahawk missiles at al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and at a suspected chemical weapons factory in Sudan. Bin Laden escaped unharmed, and the Sudanese factory turned out to make

pharmaceuticals. But even before the error in Sudan was confirmed, some lawmakers reacted to the missile strikes with incredulity. Although Republican leaders supported the president's decision, the grumbling on Capitol Hill was so widespread that members of the president's own party felt the need to respond. "I know some are suggesting this was a decision made for other reasons, because of the Monica Lewinsky investigation," Senator Christopher J. Dodd, of Connecticut, said. "To those people I have one thing to say: Either put up or shut up."

But the narrative didn't go away. At a Pentagon press briefing on August 20, a journalist even asked Secretary of Defense William Cohen if he had seen the Hollywood movie *Wag the Dog*, in which the U.S. president stages a fake war in Albania in the midst of a sex scandal. Although wholly unsubstantiated, the *Wag the Dog* parallel caught on in popular culture—and it hit a nerve with the president. And as the scandal devolved into the second impeachment crisis of the superpower era, Clinton constantly worried about being perceived as blurring the lines between domestic politics and foreign policy. The pressures of impeachment would continually test that sacred barrier and occasionally breach it—just as they had in the Nixon era.

NEW WORLD, NEW THREATS

Clinton handled impeachment in a fundamentally different way than Nixon did a quarter century earlier, but his vulnerability invited similar challenges from revisionist powers bent on disrupting the international system. Unlike Nixon, who delegated day-to-day responsibility for foreign policy to Henry Kissinger, Clinton remained the most important decision-maker throughout his impeachment saga. A decade younger than Nixon was during Watergate, Clinton was also not as psychologically traumatized by his personal political crisis. His resilience enabled him to devote more energy and focus to foreign policy. Even so, during a meeting in the Middle East in December 1998, when the House's impeachment hearings were at their height, aides watched the president scrawl on a notepad, "focus on your job, focus on your job, focus on your job." Clinton seems to have followed his own advice for the most part, and he never shifted overall supervision of foreign affairs to his lieutenants.

Clinton also faced a very different international system than Nixon did. The end of the Cold War had weakened the ability of the superpowers—never great to begin with—to temper or blunt regional power plays.

At the same time, it unleashed new and deadly transnational ambitions among non-state actors that seemed more characteristic of the Middle Ages than of the modern era. Compared to Nixon and Kissinger, Clinton and his national security staff faced a more formidable cast of villains eager to exploit the administration's domestic difficulties. As Clinton confided in his closest ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, a few days before the bin Laden strike, "We're going to increasingly have to deal with terrorists with no ties to any nation-state . . . [I]n the case of a lot of Middle East and African countries, we could be dealing with these people, like in those old James Bond movies with SPECTRE and Dr. No. We're going to have a twenty-first-century version of those."

The nature of such adversaries made the late 1990s a very different testing ground for a weakened U.S. presidency than the early 1970s. Clinton faced multiple foes with less to gain from shoring up the international system than from disrupting it. Among these, in addition to bin Laden, were Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, both of whom sensed opportunity in the wounded American presidency. Each sought to defy the United States in a moment of domestic political confusion, often adjusting the boldness of their provocations to match their perceptions of Clinton's weakness.

TROUBLE IN KOSOVO

Trouble came first from Milosevic, less than a month after early rumors of Clinton's affair with Lewinsky appeared on the Drudge Report in January 1998. The Serbian leader, then the self-styled president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, had begun flooding troops into the rebellious province of Kosovo. Milosevic feared that the province's Albanian majority would follow the lead of the Croats, Slovenes, and Bosnians in seeking independence from the rump Yugoslav state, and so he prepared to crush any such aspirations.

The United States had played a leading role in forcing Serbia to accept the loss of most of Bosnia in 1995. As a result, Milosevic saw any weakening of the American presidency as helpful in holding on to the territories that remained under his control. In July, Milosevic's forces began "busting" Kosovar towns, driving out Albanian-speaking civilians with the stated goal of rooting out members of the separatist Kosovo Liberation Army. The Pentagon worried that full-scale ethnic cleansing was not far behind, and so it submitted plans for an air campaign to NATO, which had already undertaken an unsuccessful flyover

exercise in order to deter the Serbian leader.

While the situation in Kosovo deteriorated, so did the U.S. president's domestic political position. On September 9, Starr issued his salacious report to Congress, recommending articles of impeachment against Clinton for lying under oath and then seeking to cover up his affair with Lewinsky. Almost immediately, the Republican majority in the House began preparing for an impeachment inquiry, which the House Judiciary Committee formally commenced on October 5.

By October 2, Clinton had decided to prepare Congress and the public for airstrikes against Milosevic. But the president didn't want or expect that the United States would ultimately have to use force. Clinton sent his chief Balkans negotiator, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, to Belgrade to broker a diplomatic settlement with Milosevic. On October 12, Holbrooke struck what he thought was a deal to get the Serbian leader to withdraw his forces from Kosovo. But the White House and the U.S. team at NATO couldn't be sure the agreement would hold, so preparations for an airstrike continued. The North Atlantic Council, NATO's political arm, approved an air campaign that would begin as early as October 16, and NATO began assembling strike aircraft in Italy to put Milosevic on notice. Clinton continued to believe that even though his presidency was under strain in Washington, the threat of force was credible and would be enough to convince the Serbian leader to back down. "I'm convinced we can avoid military action, if it [military action] is always hanging there," he told Blair on October 14.

The president was right about the Serbian dictator, at least for the time being. The next day, October 15, Milosevic caved, pledging to withdraw the forces he had deployed to Kosovo over the last seven months. General Wesley Clark, the NATO military commander, met with Milosevic that day to nail down the details of the withdrawal, and NATO agreed to put a ten-day hold on the planned airstrikes to ensure Milosevic's compliance. For the moment, Clinton's high-stakes brinkmanship appeared to have paid off. His impeachment troubles, moreover, didn't seem to have diminished his ability to cow a dictator like Milosevic into submission.

TROUBLE IN BAGHDAD

But the embattled U.S. president didn't have to face down just one revisionist autocrat that October. And while one can debate the extent to which domestic U.S. politics shaped Milosevic's choice of tactics in Kosovo, there can be little doubt that Iraqi dictator Saddam

Hussein sought to take advantage of the impeachment scandal to escape a UN containment regime imposed on him by Clinton's predecessor, President George H. W. Bush.

At the end of the Gulf War in 1991, the UN Security Council had passed Resolution 687, which required Iraq to identify and destroy all of its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers. Although Iraq had formally accepted the resolution in April 1991, seven years later the United States believed that Saddam was cheating. "I've reached the conclusion after eliminating all possible alternatives that Saddam still has the makings of a chemical and biological program he doesn't want to give up," Clinton had told Blair back in February. As he had been with Milosevic, Clinton was prepared to threaten force, but bombing was not his preferred means of dealing with the dictator. In the same conversation with Blair, he had revealed that he had sent a signal to Saddam through King Hassan of Morocco: "I told him to go to Saddam, call him, and tell him that I have no interest in killing him or hunting him down. I'm not fooling with him. I just don't want his chemical and biological program going forward."

In the summer of 1998, the U.S. president's deteriorating political fortunes seem to have emboldened the Iraqi dictator. On August 5, Saddam expelled UN inspectors sent to catalogue Iraq's compliance with the WMD portion of Resolution 687. Clinton sought to pressure Saddam through additional UN sanctions, but, unlike Milosevic, the Iraqi dictator dug in. On October 31, Iraq announced that it was ending all cooperation with the UN inspection regime, known as UNSCOM. Unless the UN lifted sanctions and purged certain UNSCOM officials that the Iraqis didn't like, weapons inspectors wouldn't be allowed back into the country.

Clinton seemed to grasp that the Iraqi leader was testing him. On November 3, the day of the midterm elections in the United States, he called Blair again. "We have to take decisive action this time to respond to Saddam's challenge," he said. "It is clear to me that Saddam really wants to force the [Security] Council to lift sanctions without giving up his weapons of mass destruction and missile program."

Later that day, the U.S. president received an unexpected boost as a result of the midterms, one that would cause the threat of impeachment to temporarily recede and likely strengthened his hand with Saddam. Historically, second-term presidents have seen their parties lose seats in their sixth year in office. But in the 1998 midterms, the Democrats, not the Republicans, gained seats (five in total), signaling

that impeachment was a political loser. Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich, who had made impeachment the rallying cry of the mid-term campaign, was forced to resign his speakership on November 7, pending the selection of his replacement.

Clinton and his aides assumed that the Republican drive for impeachment would end as a result, but they pressed ahead with their preparations to strike Saddam's military headquarters as well as his suspected WMD depots. On November 11, Clinton told his friend and historian Taylor Branch, with whom he was taping a presidential diary, that he assumed the impeachment crisis had subsided. He also told his diarist that he had approved "orders to dispatch more bombers and reposition ships" for the planned operation in Iraq. He hoped Saddam would get the message and back down as Milosevic had done. If the Iraqi leader didn't, Clinton was confident he would get support from Republicans as well as Democrats to go through with the strikes.

Clinton's signaling worked once again, and on November 14, the Iraqis sent two letters to the UN, the second less equivocal than the first, promising to allow UNSCOM back in. Berger rejected the first as "Swiss cheese," or full of holes, and because there was a great deal of uncertainty about whether the second was acceptable, the military preparations continued.

The next day, with U.S. and British bombers in the air, Clinton finally decided to place a hold on the strikes. He did so over the objections of Secretary of State Madeline Albright, Secretary of Defense Cohen, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Hugh Shelton, all of whom thought that Saddam couldn't be trusted to keep his word. But the president felt that he couldn't launch a strike that would inevitably kill Iraqis if Saddam had formally backed down. In calling off the attack, Clinton made it clear that this was Saddam's last chance: if he interfered with UNSCOM's disarmament mission again, the United States would respond with military force.

THE PRIZE OF MIDEAST PEACE

Clinton's successful brinkmanship with Saddam and Milosevic in the fall of 1998 came at a moment when his presidency was imperiled, although not yet in mortal danger. But neither threat of force was a *Wag the Dog* story. Had the embattled president wanted to distract the public from his personal foibles, he would have actually struck these deserving targets. Instead, he got them to back down without resorting to violence.

But not all areas of U.S. foreign policy remained insulated from

domestic political pressures in the early days of Clinton's impeachment crisis. Like Nixon before him, Clinton energetically sought a major foreign policy achievement to prove his indispensability. And also like Nixon, he sought that achievement in the Middle East. But Clinton's chief Middle East negotiator, Ambassador Dennis Ross, found steering a peace process in the middle of an impeachment crisis much harder than Kissinger did.

"I could hardly insulate my efforts from the drama being played out in Washington," recalled Ross, who served as a Middle East negotiator for both George H. W. Bush and Clinton. "President Clinton's ability to survive in office was in doubt, with ill effect for the peace process." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular was skeptical that the president could remain in office. Yasir Arafat, leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), had his own concerns, but he accepted Ross's optimistic prognosis that the president would fend off this constitutional challenge.

Nonetheless, Clinton set his sights on the ultimate prize of Middle East peace. Back in 1994, the Gaza-Jericho Agreement between Israel and the PLO had started a five-year clock to complete a final agreement on Palestinian statehood and Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A year later, an interim agreement laid out some guideposts for redrawing the map in the areas Israel had occupied since 1967, transforming these areas into three zones of varying Israeli and Palestinian control. But the final map and the timetable for Israeli withdrawal remained unresolved in the fall of 1998. With less than a year remaining before the end of the five-year period, after which the PLO threatened to declare independence, there was already pressure on the parties to reach an agreement. Clinton's impending impeachment added a touch of political desperation to the mix.

During his famous "shuttle diplomacy" in 1974, Kissinger had effectively held three posts: chief Middle East negotiator, secretary of state, and national security adviser. Twenty years later, three people held those positions—and impeachment tested the triad. In early September, Clinton ratcheted up the pressure on Berger and Albright, who, in turn, pressured Ross to wrap up the agreement between Netanyahu and Arafat.

Clinton pushed his Middle East team even harder after Starr's damaging report was released to the public on September 11 and the gears of impeachment began to turn in Congress. Ross later recalled that he

was being pressed “under the pressure of the Starr Report . . . to show that the President was doing his job, was not distracted, and was visibly dealing with highly sensitive, serious issues.” Ross added: “I would say that’s the one time—and I would also say that’s a unique circumstance where he literally thinks that his Presidency may be at stake and the only way to save his Presidency is to show that he’s being Presidential. I mean, it didn’t have to be this issue, it could have been something else, but this was the one that was there and it was probably most prominent and could capture attention.”

When Ross reported back that Arafat and Netanyahu were still far from a deal, Clinton apparently pounded the table, demanding that Albright and Berger get the results that he needed. Clinton wanted Arafat and the Israeli prime minister to come to the United States to conclude an agreement so he could have a very public diplomatic victory. For Nixon, the standard had been a repeat of his China trip. For Clinton, the standard was President Jimmy Carter’s historic 1978 Camp David accords, a peace deal between Egypt and Israel that enabled Israel’s withdrawal from the Sinai.

But Ross wasn’t Kissinger. He didn’t have the chits to play, and neither Albright nor Berger controlled a foreign policy regency. All U.S. foreign policy power flowed directly from Clinton, and his stature overseas had diminished as a result of the scandal. Ross didn’t sugarcoat the situation for his bosses: “The President doesn’t have the authority or clout with them [Arafat and Netanyahu] that he had previously—and they won’t make concessions just because he needs them to do a deal.”

Another problem was the president’s schedule, since the president wanted to be personally involved in closing the agreement. Clinton’s approval rating remained high throughout the fall, despite the revelations of his affair and the opening of an impeachment inquiry. As a result, Democratic congressional candidates were eager for him to stump for them in their districts, a task the president viewed as a welcome distraction. Unlike Nixon, Clinton loved campaigning. But the midterms placed an artificial deadline on the Middle East negotiations, since Clinton political team hoped he would be available by October 24 or so for the last week of the campaign.

That deadline—and the U.S. president’s need for a win—gave Netanyahu an edge. The Israeli leader agreed to come to the Wye Plantation in Maryland on October 15 for negotiations with Arafat, but he wasn’t prepared to make additional concessions. Although the peace

process was very popular with most Israelis, it was not popular with the base of supporters that propped up his fragile Likud government. As a result, for Netanyahu the advantage lay in appearing to be for peace without really doing anything to achieve it.

In the end, Netanyahu offered Clinton a quid pro quo. U.S. negotiators thought they were on the verge of brokering an agreement between Netanyahu and Arafat, but at the last minute, the Israeli prime minister insisted that he could not give his final assent without a side agreement with Clinton: the United States would have to pledge to release Jonathan Pollard, a U.S. citizen who had been convicted of spying for Israel. In his memoirs, Clinton admitted that he told Netanyahu that he was “inclined” to release Pollard if that was what it would take for Netanyahu to accept the deal with Arafat.

Clinton floated this idea on his own, and when he told his negotiating team that he had done so, many members objected. Albright thought that Netanyahu was engaging in blackmail. Tenet, whose CIA was essential for brokering the complex security arrangements that would be needed to govern the future West Bank, threatened to resign on the spot if the Pollard deal happened. The U.S. intelligence community had experienced Pollard’s espionage as not just a personal betrayal but as a betrayal of Israel’s special intelligence relationship with the United States. With hours left before the Clinton administration’s self-imposed deadline of October 23, the Israelis leaked that the deal wasn’t happening because Clinton had reneged on his promise to Netanyahu.

Neither Clinton nor Netanyahu could afford to let the negotiations fail. Both leaders needed a win for their own domestic reasons. So instead of giving ground to one another, they decided to take something away from Arafat. The agreement on the table had promised to release from Israeli jails some 750 Palestinians, some of whom had injured or killed people. Now Clinton secretly promised Netanyahu that Israel could release more common criminals and fewer people whom Arafat viewed as political prisoners. Clinton vaguely revealed to his team that he had agreed to let Netanyahu alter the “mix” of prisoners to be released, so that they could get Arafat’s reluctant approval. But the U.S. president withheld the key detail that he had assured Netanyahu that he could refuse to release anyone with “blood on their hands.”

On October 23, Arafat and Netanyahu joined Clinton in Washington, D.C., for the signing of the Wye River memorandum. The agree-

ment was to give the Palestinian Authority control over 40 percent of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a major improvement over the 27 percent agreed on in 1995. For their part, the Israelis were to receive security guarantees, monitored by the United States, from the Palestine Liberation Army, the military wing of the PLO. The Clinton-Netanyahu understanding on Palestinian prisoners, once it became known, angered the Palestinians, but it didn't scuttle the deal—or the diplomatic win that it conferred on Clinton.

DESERT FOX

The president's domestic political problems didn't disappear with the midterms. Even without Speaker Gingrich, the Republicans continued to pursue impeachment, to Clinton's surprise. On December 11, the House Judiciary Committee sent three articles of impeachment to the House floor. The next day the Committee added a fourth, setting the stage for a debate and then a vote by the entire House. For the first time since October, Clinton's presidency seemed in jeopardy, and once again, U.S. adversaries took note.

In early December, Saddam resumed his obstruction of UNSCOM's inspection efforts and refused its representatives entry to an installation controlled by the ruling Baath Party. The move was a violation of Clinton's November ultimatum and of the Iraqi leader's commitment to the United Nations. On December 11, the same day that the Judiciary Committee sent its articles of impeachment to the floor, Clinton called Blair and told him that there would have to be a military response. Operation Desert Fox began five days later and included 650 bomber or missile sorties by U.S. and British air forces. It lasted four days and targeted Iraqi command and control sites as well as installations associated with WMD delivery systems. In addition, the Clinton administration changed its official Iraqi policy from "containment" to "containment plus" and made "regime change" its explicit goal.

Predictably, the operation reignited earlier partisan claims that the president was trying to distract the American public from his domestic political woes. Clinton had called off the planned attack against Baghdad in November, when the threat of impeachment was dissipating. In doing so, he had disappointed many on his national security team. Now, the president was forging ahead with the strikes at a time when the country was once again riveted by the impeachment drama. As a result, he was again vulnerable to charges, however unfair, of

creating a *Wag the Dog* diversion.

But it was the Pentagon, not the president, that recommended the airstrikes and their timing. “I would never have been a party to anything—neither Cohen nor I—that was not based on sound military logic and something that needed to be done militarily,” Shelton, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, later recalled. “The timing of that particular one had been made by Cohen and me, primarily based on my recommendation because of the light conditions, the attack conditions, the weather conditions that were forecast, and Ramadan that fell in that particular area.”

HOLD YOUR FIRE

On December 19, 1998, the House approved two of the four articles of impeachment, necessitating the first Senate trial of a president since 1868. (Nixon resigned before the House approved any articles of impeachment.) Under the U.S. constitution, the bar is very high to remove a president, requiring the vote of two-thirds of the senators. But the Senate had a Republican majority, and despite Clinton’s enduring public support, even some senators from his own party wanted to find a way to punish him for his dishonesty and his Oval Office indiscretions.

The trial, which started on January 7, 1999, coincided with yet another sensitive military decision involving an opportunistic U.S. adversary. Ever since the failed attempt to kill bin Laden in August 1998, Clinton’s national security team had remained on the lookout for another opportunity to permanently disrupt al Qaeda’s leadership. Following the U.S. and British air campaign in Iraq, the terrorist mastermind had issued a threat that prompted the United States to close 38 embassies and three consulates in Africa for two full days. Not long after, Clinton’s national security team received intelligence that put bin Laden back in their sights. The opportunity to get him, it turned out, came just when Clinton’s impeachment crisis reached a crescendo.

Back in mid-December, U.S. intelligence officials had received information that the terrorist leader was spending a lot of time in Kandahar. At the beginning of February, the intelligence became more precise: bin Laden was at or near a desert hunting camp called Sheik Ali, and, according to later revelations in the 9/11 Commission Report, CIA informants believed he would be there until midmorning on February 11. On or about February 8, the White House ordered the

Pentagon to begin preparing for another missile strike.

The timing could not have been worse for Clinton. February 8 was the day that the House impeachment managers, arguing for prosecution, and the president's lawyers made their closing arguments in his Senate trial. The window of opportunity for the bin Laden strike—between then and February 11—coincided with the closed-door deliberations of the senators who would be deciding whether to convict or acquit Clinton.

Some in the administration counseled against carrying out the strike. Prominent figures from the United Arab Emirates were also known to be at the Sheik Ali camp. Clinton worried about what would happen if the Emiratis were killed and bin Laden survived or turned out not to have been there. But the tide in the administration seemed to be turning toward taking that risk—as well as the risk of an impeachment-related political uproar. Later, the 9/11 Commission found reason to believe that House Speaker Dennis Hastert, who had replaced Gingrich in January, was notified of an impending attack. The U.S. military was ready to strike on the morning of February 11.

But the attack didn't happen, and there is reason to believe that the Senate trial influenced Clinton's decision to hold back. Top officials in his administration have sought to dispel that notion. "Before a decision could be made as to whether to launch a strike," Tenet later wrote, "we got word [bin Laden] had moved on." But that information came on February 12, a day after the U.S. military was ready to strike. And although no NSC staffers—in discussions with the 9/11 Commission—blamed the Senate trial for the president's decision, they were divided over whether the intelligence had been good enough to run the risk of killing the Emiratis. In his memoirs, Tenet noted that he "never saw any evidence that Clinton's personal problems distracted him from focusing on his official duties." Nevertheless, he allowed that "[p]erhaps they circumscribed the range of actions he could take." On February 12, the day that the military stood down the planned strike in Afghanistan, the Senate acquitted Clinton on both of the impeachment counts.

A HOBBSIAN WORLD

Compared to Nixon's impeachment crisis in 1973–74, Clinton's impeachment crisis coincided with a more turbulent period in U.S. foreign relations. Nixon and Kissinger's unusual relationship, and the

unusual respect it was accorded overseas, explains part of the difference, but there is a more important reason that Clinton faced so many tests in his moment of greatest vulnerability. Fewer powers had an interest in propping up a weakened chief executive in 1998–99 than in 1973–74, and more had an interest in challenging him when he seemed vulnerable. While the United States was indisputably the world's sole superpower during Clinton's presidency, its relative power was beginning to ebb. More important, a greater number of countries and dangerous nonstate actors were eager to reshape the global system that had emerged after the Cold War.

What was true at the end of the 1990s is even truer today. In 2016, Americans elected a leader who rejected the very notion of an international system that relies on the United States to maintain equipoise. U.S. President Donald Trump understands international affairs through threats and counterthreats, bluffs, and exploitation, and these are the means by which he expects other countries to behave. The success of Trump's approach depends on the illusion of U.S. invincibility, and by extension his own. A weakening of his authority, in this more Hobbesian world, will invite ever greater challenges to U.S. interests.

Historians have much to learn about the tit for tat between Iran and the United States in the final months of 2019, but, at the very least, Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani and the Iranian leadership underestimated what Trump would do if tested during his impeachment crisis. There can be no doubt, however, that another U.S. adversary, North Korea's Kim Jong Un, has taken advantage of the current impeachment crisis to resume his nuclear program. On December 31, 2019, Kim announced a "new path," promising more nuclear tests and a backing away from diplomatic efforts to denuclearize. In January, reports emerged of preparations for more missile tests.

Moreover, the Trumpian worldview ensures that American foreign relations will be distorted to serve the end of personal political survival. The Nixon and Clinton cases show that while those presidents occasionally breached the barrier between domestic politics and foreign policy, they knew that they shouldn't. Trump has no such compunction, as the very basis for the impeachment trial makes clear. The use of executive action to distract, which Nixon and Clinton were at least wary of when it came to foreign affairs, was a beloved tool of this president before impeachment was even on the horizon. Having sold himself as a dealmaker, moreover, Trump is even more likely than his predeces-

sors to want to produce agreements with foreign states. The details of the recently signed U.S.-Chinese trade deal have yet to be made public. But it is unlikely this time that Beijing acted as it did in 1973–74, helping a wounded president maintain a stable international system. Rather, like Netanyahu in 1998, it likely exploited the U.S. president's need for a deal that he can hold up as a win. Even after being impeached for subordinating the national interest to his own, Trump appears to see foreign policy only as a means to personal ends. "Get over it," as his acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney advises us all.

Trump Hijacked U.S. Foreign Policy During His Impeachment

Private Political Interests Became the
Nation's in a Moment of Crisis

MARCH 13, 2020

At 9:00 PM on September 24, 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron waited on a secure line to speak with U.S. President Donald Trump. Macron was in New York for the annual meeting of the UN General Assembly. But he wasn't calling about UN business that night. In the previous 48 hours, he had met three times with the U.S. president and twice with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. His aim: to broker the first direct and official contact between leaders of the two adversaries since 1978. Now he was about to leave for Paris, and he had bad news for Trump. The Iranian leader had gotten cold feet at the last minute. According to French sources, Trump

thanked Macron for his effort and encouraged him to keep trying.

At the time of Macron's call with Trump, a political tornado had already begun to swirl around a different Trump call to a different world leader. Earlier that day, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from California, had announced the start of an official impeachment inquiry, the fourth in U.S. history and the third since 1973. Leaks about the existence of a whistleblower complaint from within the intelligence community had prompted Trump to admit, implicitly, that he had raised unsubstantiated corruption allegations against former Vice President Joe Biden in a call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The whistleblower complaint was not yet public, but Trump's partial acknowledgement of rumors that he had sought dirt on the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination for president jolted the cumbersome machinery of impeachment into motion once again.

Macron no doubt knew that Trump was in political trouble. And his gesture in trying to open a line of communication to Rouhani was not purely or even primarily an altruistic one. The Europeans had watched helplessly in 2018 as the Trump administration junked the meticulously negotiated 2015 U.S.-European nuclear deal with Iran in favor of a "maximum pressure" campaign of economic sanctions. European companies, including France's Total and Airbus, had rushed to do business with Iranian firms after the 2015 deal, which lifted many international sanctions. Now those French investments were at risk.

Iran had also begun harassing ships in the Persian Gulf and incrementally violating the terms of the now defunct nuclear accord—taking calculated steps toward developing a nuclear weapon. In August, Macron had tried to get Trump and the Iranians talking again at the G-7 summit in Biarritz, France. But the effort had failed, and on September 14, Iranian drones struck state-owned oil production facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia. With tensions between the United States and Iran at risk of boiling over into open hostilities, the French leader had plenty of reasons to hope for a diplomatic breakthrough.

Trump had his own reasons for seeking a historic meeting with Rouhani. On the morning of September 24, the day of his call with Macron, Trump tweeted, "I am currently at the United Nations representing our Country, but have authorized the release tomorrow of the complete, fully declassified and unredacted transcript of my phone conversation with President Zelensky of Ukraine." Perhaps Trump thought that a pathbreaking conversation with Rouhani would over-

shadow that earlier call with Zelensky. But the hoped-for meeting with Iran's leader never materialized. Nor did the unredacted transcript. Instead, the Trump administration released an edited and incomplete record of the call. Even that was incriminating: it revealed that the president had asked as a "favor" for an investigation of two bogus conspiracy theories, the first about Ukrainian involvement in the 2016 hacking of the Democratic National Committee and the second about Biden's supposed interference in Ukraine's criminal justice system on behalf of his son, who served on the board of a Ukrainian energy company from 2014 to 2019. Instead of alleviating suspicions, the record of the call only added to the momentum behind the Democrats' impeachment investigation.

AN IMPEACHMENT FIRST

During the United States' two previous impeachment crises of the superpower era—President Richard Nixon's in 1973–74 and President Bill Clinton's in 1998–99—one could have reasonably asked whether the domestic constitutional challenge to the president would affect U.S. foreign relations. In 2019, that question was moot, because for the first time in U.S. history, impeachment proceedings arose out of the president's conduct of foreign affairs. Trump's efforts to pressure Ukraine to investigate his political rival—as well as his administration's efforts to manage the resulting impeachment investigation by misrepresenting Trump's actions with regard to Ukraine—shattered the traditional wall between domestic politics and foreign policy.

Both Nixon and Clinton tested and occasionally breached that wall, looking abroad for foreign policy achievements when their presidencies came under threat at home. But Trump never acknowledged the existence of the wall in the first place. Faced with the prospect of impeachment, he made dramatic adjustments to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and struck an unfavorable trade deal with China—all to boost his flagging domestic popularity.

Trump's impeachment crisis was also the first to seriously damage the foreign policy apparatus of the United States. During Nixon's impeachment saga, his foreign policy team, led by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, filled a vacuum created by a near-paralyzed president. In the Clinton era, the national security team did the opposite, following the energetic leadership of a president who largely stayed the course on foreign policy. But during the Trump impeachment cri-

sis, the president went to war, privately and publicly, with the national security establishment—a reaction, no doubt, to the fact that the whistleblower was probably a national security professional, as were many of those who complied with House subpoenas to testify against Trump. And with their indifference to the rot exposed by the Ukraine scandal, the leaders of Trump’s foreign policy team—the largely invisible National Security Adviser Robert C. O’Brien and the energetically partisan Secretary of State Mike Pompeo—revealed their contempt for the very notion of traditional U.S. diplomatic principles.

The president’s defense did even greater damage to the United States’ ability to project “soft power” around the globe. Trump and his official defenders—elected members of Congress and his lawyers—argued that there was essentially nothing wrong with a president using foreign policy to advance his personal political agenda. The world’s dictatorships might be cynically receptive to such an admission. But an American president who is for sale is not one whom democratic U.S. allies will look to for global leadership. To those in the U.S. administration who stood up for old-fashioned ideals such as the national interest, Trump reacted with a scorched-earth campaign of derisive and threatening tweets, dampening morale across the national security and intelligence bureaucracy and denting his credibility abroad.

BAD ACTORS

Trump’s initial reaction to the threat of impeachment was to attempt to reduce the possibility of foreign trouble. Not only did he hope for a breakthrough meeting with Rouhani but he sought further disengagement from the entire Middle East, a region from which as a presidential candidate he had promised to withdraw U.S. troops. On October 6, two weeks after the House began its investigation of his July 25 phone call with Zelensky, Trump shocked the world by agreeing to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s suggestion that the U.S. military withdraw from the Turkish-Syrian border region in order to make way for a Turkish invasion.

The deal with Turkey sparked immediate opposition not just from Democrats on Capitol Hill and national security professionals but from members of Trump’s own party and the U.S. military: Washington was effectively abandoning its Kurdish partners, who had played a central role in the coalition that former President Barack Obama had set up to counter the Islamic State, known as ISIS. The sharply negative reaction

probably wasn't the one Trump had expected, and he quickly moved to try to contain the political fallout. After Turkey launched airstrikes on Kurdish positions on October 9, Trump sent Erdogan a letter pleading with him not to go ahead with the planned invasion. "Let's work out a good deal! . . . I have worked hard to solve some of your problems," Trump wrote to his Turkish counterpart. No U.S. president facing impeachment had ever made his domestic vulnerability as apparent to a foreign strongman. Not surprisingly, the Turkish army moved into Syria anyway, much as Turkey had taken advantage of Nixon's wounded American presidency in 1974 to invade Cyprus.

The U.S. position in the Levant was collapsing, U.S. allies were being slaughtered in northern Syria—and lawmakers whom Trump would need to defend him in an eventual impeachment trial let their rising displeasure be known. In a reluctant effort to appease them, Trump imposed sanctions on Turkey on October 14. He then sent Vice President Mike Pence to the region to negotiate a cease-fire. After the Turks agreed to a five-day pause in fighting, which ended without a resumption of hostilities, Trump announced on October 23 that he was lifting of the sanctions. Yet the bipartisan criticism continued, in part because the Turks still held the territory formerly occupied by the United States' Kurdish partners. Four days later, on October 27, the president seemed to catch a lucky break: U.S. special operations forces killed Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS, in a raid in northern Syria.

What little information about the operation has been made public doesn't indicate the role, if any, U.S.-Turkish tensions played in the timing. But in announcing Baghdadi's death, Trump thanked Turkey and Russia (in addition to Iraq and the Syrian Kurds) for their assistance with the mission. At the very least, the timing of the raid was convenient. Basking in the glow of that success, Trump welcomed Erdogan to the Oval Office on October 29. Even Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Republican from Kentucky, who would prove key to the president's eventual acquittal in the Senate, found the symbolism of the Turkish visit hard to take. "I share my colleagues' uneasiness at seeing President Erdogan honored at the White House," he said in a statement.

Turkey wasn't the only country to try to exploit Trump's weakened political position. On December 18, the House approved two articles of impeachment against the U.S. president. Less than two weeks later, Iranian-backed militants in Iraq launched rockets at a military base in northern Iraq, wounding several U.S. and Iraqi soldiers and killing an

American contractor. Tehran likely thought Trump was distracted with impeachment and wouldn't retaliate. But Trump wasted no time in responding: two days later, the United States launched airstrikes at installations associated with Iran or its proxies in Iraq and Syria. Like Clinton's airstrikes against Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein in 1998, these strikes were clear responses to actions by an adversary that crossed a well-understood line. They did not seem to be acts of political diversion.

But what happened next in the cold war between Tehran and Washington is more difficult to explain without taking domestic political considerations into account. On December 31, Iraqi supporters of Iran breached an outer gate of the American embassy in Baghdad, setting a reception area on fire. Even in the calmest of political moments, such an action would have touched a historical nerve. But in the midst of an impeachment saga, the echoes of Tehran in 1979 and Benghazi in 2012 were even more resonant. Trump couldn't afford to let the volatile situation in Baghdad to become his Benghazi.

Tehran must have known that the U.S. president would strike back, but the response he chose—reportedly at the urging of Pompeo—was tougher and more reckless than anything either of Trump's immediate predecessors would have considered, suggesting a desire to replicate the political bounce he had gotten from killing Baghdadi in October. On January 3, 2020, the United States killed Major General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, in a drone strike in Baghdad. The CIA reportedly advised Trump that the Iranian response would be restrained (Trump's main concern was that Americans might die in any revenge attack by Iran). Although the Trump administration initially explained the attack as a response to an "imminent threat," it became clear that this rationale was offered as a hedge in case the first publicly acknowledged assassination of a foreign military leader by the United States in peacetime sparked a war.

When Iran predictably responded with retaliatory rocket attacks against Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops on January 8, it also became clear that the assassination of Soleimani hadn't been part of any larger strategy of deterrence or regime change. "All is well! . . . So far, so good . . .," the president tweeted after initial public reports suggested there were no U.S. casualties. Apparently in the president's mind, only a U.S. death would have necessitated a U.S. military response, which Trump clearly didn't want—even if standing down meant al-

lowing Iran to continue its march toward a nuclear bomb. More than 100 soldiers were hospitalized with head injuries, but the White House made no mention of this fact. (The public learned of the casualties only because the Defense Department issued periodic statements about the injuries that were picked up by veterans' groups, members of Congress, and the media.) The message to Iran was clear: Trump didn't want war in the Middle East. He wanted a show of force to boost his standing in the midst of a domestic political crisis.

BAD DEAL

As Trump's Senate trial loomed in January 2020, the U.S. president showcased an international trade agreement that he hoped would also burnish his image. Back in October, when the House was just beginning its impeachment inquiry, Trump announced that the United States and China had agreed to a general framework for a "Phase One" deal, a cease-fire in the trade war that was to lead to negotiations for a more comprehensive agreement "in the near future." As part of that framework, Trump pledged to delay implementing new tariffs he had threatened to impose in October. Underlying Trump's approach to these negotiations was a simple-minded mercantilism that Beijing would have recognized—Jean-Baptiste Colbert lite. Indeed, the Chinese leadership is equally mercantilist; both equate state power and influence with the accumulation of export surpluses. When Trump first began his trade war in 2018, the Chinese had responded by working to undermine him politically—designing tariffs that went after Trump-friendly U.S. soybean farmers and ethanol producers in Iowa and Nebraska. A similar option was available to Beijing in 2019, when Trump was arguably even weaker politically.

But instead the Chinese decided to help an American president in a moment of need. In 1974, Mao Zedong's dictatorship sought to maintain its relationship with the Nixon-Kissinger team, which had supplied it with access to U.S. technology, intelligence, and security capabilities it could use to counter the Soviet Union. And so Mao's regime supported Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East and did nothing to complicate the wounded Nixon's 1974 *détente* summit with the Soviets. Likewise, in 2019 and 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping saw long-term benefit in throwing Trump a short-term bone. Prior to Trump's impeachment crisis, the Chinese hadn't thought they could bring the trade war to an end without undergoing

domestic legislative and regulatory reform. Such reform, which would be painful for an autocrat who sought more rather than less control over China's domestic economy, was baked into an agreement under review by both countries until Beijing backed out of negotiations suddenly in June. But as the impeachment inquiry deepened, China likely saw another way out of the costly trade war: an economic concession that Trump could claim as a victory.

As part of the Phase One deal signed on January 15, the week before Trump's impeachment trial got underway in the Senate, the Chinese promised to purchase \$200 billion worth of U.S. imports over the next two years—and that \$76 billion of those purchases would take place during the presidential election year of 2020. The United States and China have kept secret which U.S. companies will benefit, but Trump made clear at the signing ceremony that U.S. negotiators will funnel the Chinese money to states that are necessary for the president's reelection bid.

"Joni Ernst," Trump called out from his presidential rostrum, referring to the Republican senator from Iowa. "You got ethanol, so you can't be complaining, right? . . . [Senator] Deb Fischer—same boat, right, Deb? You want that ethanol for Nebraska." Fischer, like Ernst, was about to become a juror in Trump's trial.

LASTING DAMAGE

The Trump impeachment crisis—and, in particular, the defense of the president by his allies in Congress—destroyed any remaining pretense that the United States currently operates on the basis of recognizable national interests. Alan Dershowitz, one of Trump's attorneys, argued in the Senate trial that "even if the president, any president, were to demand a quid pro quo as a condition to sending aid to a foreign country, obviously a highly disputed matter in this case, that would not by itself constitute an abuse of power." Dershowitz then added, "Quid pro quo alone is not a basis for abuse of power, it's part of the way foreign policy has been operated by presidents since the beginning of time." For any normal presidency, these two statements would seem banal. But made in defense of a scheme to extort an investigation of one of the president's rivals from an important U.S. ally, they implied an unprecedented—and undemocratic—foreign policy doctrine that confused the personal needs of the leader with the interests of the state.

In seeking to justify the president's half-baked and self-centered

policies as a matter of time-honored prerogative, Trump's allies showed indifference to any enduring principles of U.S. national security that might transcend presidencies. And their defense enabled an even more Trumpian foreign policy during the impeachment crisis. In an attempt to bolster his popularity, the president accelerated his "America first" agenda, which in practice was a "Trump first" agenda. The United States effectively withdrew from the Middle East, signaling a lack of interest in stabilizing Syria or Iraq. And when Tehran tested Trump in this moment of weakness, he reacted appropriately at first, only to recklessly escalate with a high-profile assassination, the predictable fallout from which he was evidently unprepared to answer. Finally, Trump accepted an election-year bribe from China in lieu of real structural changes to the U.S.-Chinese trading relationship.

Almost three years into his presidency, Trump had already squandered most of his international credibility. The impeachment crisis destroyed what little was left. Under increased political pressure at home, Trump—the self-styled master of the deal—proved even easier for foreign leaders to manipulate than he had been before. Ultimately, the Republican majority in the Senate acquitted Trump at great cost to U.S. foreign policy and to the constitutional balance of power. Of the three impeachment crises of the superpower era, Trump's was the most damaging to the United States, its alliances, and what is left of the liberal world order. 🌐

The Coronavirus Could Reshape Global Order

China Is Maneuvering for International Leadership as the United States Falters

Kurt M. Campbell and Rush Doshi

MARCH 18, 2020

With hundreds of millions of people now isolating themselves around the world, the novel coronavirus pandemic has become a truly global event. And while its geopolitical implications should be considered secondary to matters of health and safety, those implications may, in the long term, prove just as consequential—especially when it comes to the United States’ global position. Global orders have a tendency to change gradually at first and then all at once. In 1956, a botched intervention in the Suez laid bare the decay in British power and marked the end of the United Kingdom’s reign as a global power. Today, U.S. policymakers should recognize that if the United States does not rise to meet the moment, the coronavirus pandemic could mark another “Suez moment.”

It is now clear to all but the most blinkered partisans that Washington has botched its initial response. Missteps by key institutions, from the White House and the Department of Homeland Security to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have undermined confidence in the capacity and competence of U.S. governance. Public

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statements by President Donald Trump, whether Oval Office addresses or early-morning tweets, have largely served to sow confusion and spread uncertainty. Both public and private sectors have proved ill-prepared to produce and distribute the tools necessary for testing and response. And internationally, the pandemic has amplified Trump's instincts to go it alone and exposed just how unprepared Washington is to lead a global response.

The status of the United States as a global leader over the past seven decades has been built not just on wealth and power but also, and just as important, on the legitimacy that flows from the United States' domestic governance, provision of global public goods, and ability and willingness to muster and coordinate a global response to crises. The coronavirus pandemic is testing all three elements of U.S. leadership. So far, Washington is failing the test.

As Washington falters, Beijing is moving quickly and adeptly to take advantage of the opening created by U.S. mistakes, filling the vacuum to position itself as the global leader in pandemic response. It is working to tout its own system, provide material assistance to other countries, and even organize other governments. The sheer chutzpah of China's move is hard to overstate. After all, it was Beijing's own missteps—especially its efforts at first to cover up the severity and spread of the outbreak—that helped create the very crisis now afflicting much of the world. Yet Beijing understands that if it is seen as leading, and Washington is seen as unable or unwilling to do so, this perception could fundamentally alter the United States' position in global politics and the contest for leadership in the twenty-first century.

MISTAKES WERE MADE

In the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, which causes the disease now referred to as COVID-19, the missteps of Chinese leaders cast a pall on their country's global standing. The virus was first detected in November 2019 in the city of Wuhan, but officials didn't disclose it for months and even punished the doctors who first reported it, squandering precious time and delaying by at least five weeks measures that would educate the public, halt travel, and enable widespread testing. Even as the full scale of the crisis emerged, Beijing tightly controlled information, shunned assistance from the CDC, limited World Health Organization travel to Wuhan, likely undercounted infections and deaths, and repeatedly altered the

criteria for registering new COVID-19 cases—perhaps in a deliberate effort to manipulate the official number of cases.

As the crisis worsened through January and February, some observers speculated that the coronavirus might even undermine the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. It was called China's "Chernobyl"; Dr. Li Wenliang—the young whistleblower silenced by the government who later succumbed to complications from the COVID-19—was likened to the Tiananmen Square "tank man."

Yet by early March, China was claiming victory. Mass quarantines, a halt to travel, and a complete shutdown of most daily life nationwide were credited with having stemmed the tide; official statistics, such as they are, reported that daily new cases had fallen into the single digits in mid-March from the hundreds in early February. In a surprise to most observers, Chinese leader Xi Jinping—who had been uncharacteristically quiet in the first weeks—began to put himself squarely at the center of the response. This month, he personally visited Wuhan.

Even though life in China has yet to return to normal (and despite continuing questions over the accuracy of China's statistics), Beijing is working to turn these early signs of success into a larger narrative to broadcast to the rest of the world—one that makes China the essential player in a coming global recovery while airbrushing away its earlier mismanagement of the crisis.

A critical part of this narrative is Beijing's supposed success in battling the virus. A steady stream of propaganda articles, tweets, and public messaging, in a wide variety of languages, touts China's achievements and highlights the effectiveness of its model of domestic governance. "China's signature strength, efficiency and speed in this fight has been widely acclaimed," declared Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian. China, he added, set "a new standard for the global efforts against the epidemic." Central authorities have instituted tight informational control and discipline at state organs to snuff out contradictory narratives.

These messages are helped by the implicit contrast with efforts to battle the virus in the West, particularly in the United States—Washington's failure to produce adequate numbers of testing kits, which means the United States has tested relatively few people per capita, or the Trump administration's ongoing disassembly of the U.S. government's pandemic-response infrastructure. Beijing has seized the narrative opportunity provided by American disarray, its state media and diplomats regularly reminding a global audience of the superiority of

Chinese efforts and criticizing the “irresponsibility and incompetence” of the “so-called political elite in Washington,” as the state-run Xinhua news agency put it in an editorial.

Chinese officials and state media have even insisted that the coronavirus did not in fact emerge from China—despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary—in order to reduce China’s blame for the global pandemic. This effort has elements of a full-blown Russian-style disinformation campaign, with China’s Foreign Ministry spokesman and over a dozen diplomats sharing poorly sourced articles accusing the U.S. military of spreading the coronavirus in Wuhan. These actions, combined with China’s unprecedented mass expulsion of journalists from three leading American papers, damage China’s pretensions to leadership.

CHINA MAKES, THE WORLD TAKES

Xi understands that providing global goods can burnish a rising power’s leadership credentials. He has spent the last several years pushing China’s foreign policy apparatus to think harder about leading reforms to “global governance,” and the coronavirus offers an opportunity to put that theory into action. Consider China’s increasingly well-publicized displays of material assistance—including masks, respirators, ventilators, and medicine. At the outset of the crisis, China purchased and produced (and received as aid) vast quantities of these goods. Now it is in a position to hand them out to others.

When no European state answered Italy’s urgent appeal for medical equipment and protective gear, China publicly committed to sending 1,000 ventilators, two million masks, 100,000 respirators, 20,000 protective suits, and 50,000 test kits. China has also dispatched medical teams and 250,000 masks to Iran and sent supplies to Serbia, whose president dismissed European solidarity as “a fairy tale” and proclaimed that “the only country that can help us is China.” Alibaba co-founder Jack Ma has promised to send large quantities of testing kits and masks to the United States, as well as 20,000 test kits and 100,000 masks to each of Africa’s 54 countries.

Beijing’s edge in material assistance is enhanced by the simple fact that much of what the world depends on to fight the coronavirus is made in China. It was already the major producer of surgical masks; now, through wartime-like industrial mobilization, it has boosted production of masks more than tenfold, giving it the capacity to provide them to the world. China also produces roughly half of the N95 respi-

rators critical for protecting health workers (it has forced foreign factories in China to make them and then sell them directly to the government), giving it another foreign policy tool in the form of medical equipment. Meanwhile, antibiotics are critical for addressing emerging secondary infections from COVID-19, and China produces the vast majority of active pharmaceutical ingredients necessary to make them.

The United States, by contrast, lacks the supply and capacity to meet many of its own demands, let alone to provide aid in crisis zones elsewhere. The picture is grim. The U.S. Strategic National Stockpile, the nation's reserve of critical medical supplies, is believed to have only one percent of the masks and respirators and perhaps ten percent of the ventilators needed to deal with the pandemic. The rest will have to be made up with imports from China or rapidly increased domestic manufacturing. Similarly, China's share of the U.S. antibiotics market is more than 95 percent, and most of the ingredients cannot be manufactured domestically. Although Washington offered assistance to China and others at the outset of the crisis, it is less able to do so now, as its own needs grow; Beijing, in contrast, is offering aid precisely when the global need is greatest.

Crisis response, however, is not only about material goods. During the 2014–15 Ebola crisis, the United States assembled and led a coalition of dozens of countries to counter the spread of the disease. The Trump administration has so far shunned a similar leadership effort to respond to the coronavirus. Even coordination with allies has been lacking. Washington appears, for example, not to have given its European allies any prior notice before instituting a ban on travel from Europe.

China, by contrast, has undertaken a robust diplomatic campaign to convene dozens of countries and hundreds of officials, generally by videoconference, to share information about the pandemic and lessons from China's own experience battling the disease. Like much of China's diplomacy, these convening efforts are largely conducted at the regional level or through regional bodies. They include calls with central and eastern European states through the "17 + 1" mechanism, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's secretariat, with ten Pacific Island states, and with other groupings across Africa, Europe, and Asia. And China is working hard to publicize such initiatives. Virtually every story on the front page of its foreign-facing propaganda organs advertises China's efforts to help different countries with goods and information while underscoring the superiority of Beijing's approach.

HOW TO LEAD

China's chief asset in its pursuit of global leadership—in the face of the coronavirus and more broadly—is the perceived inadequacy and inward focus of U.S. policy. The ultimate success of China's pursuit, therefore, will depend as much on what happens in Washington as on what happens in Beijing. In the current crisis, Washington can still turn the tide if it proves capable of doing what is expected of a leader: managing the problem at home, supplying global public goods, and coordinating a global response.

The first of those tasks—stopping the spread of the disease and protecting vulnerable populations in the United States—is most urgent and largely a question of domestic governance rather than geopolitics. But how Washington goes about it will have geopolitical implications, and not just insofar as it does or does not reestablish confidence in the U.S. response. For example, if the federal government immediately supports and subsidizes expansion of domestic production of masks, respirators, and ventilators—a response befitting the wartime urgency of this pandemic—it would both save American lives and help others around the world by reducing the scarcity of global supplies.

While the United States isn't currently able to meet the urgent material demands of the pandemic, its continuing global edge in the life sciences and biotechnology can be instrumental in finding a real solution to the crisis: a vaccine. The U.S. government can help by providing incentives to U.S. labs and companies to undertake a medical “Manhattan Project” to devise, rapidly test in clinical trials, and mass-produce a vaccine. Because these efforts are costly and require dauntingly high upfront investments, generous government financing and bonuses for successful vaccine production could make a difference. And it is worth noting that despite Washington's mismanagement, state and local governments, nonprofit and religious organizations, universities, and companies are not waiting for the federal government to get its act together before taking action. U.S.-funded companies and researchers are already making progress toward a vaccine—though even in the best-case scenario, it will be some time before one is ready for widespread use.

Yet even as it focuses on efforts at home, Washington cannot simply ignore the need for a coordinated global response. Only strong leadership can solve global coordination problems related to travel restrictions, information sharing, and the flow of critical goods. The

United States has successfully provided such leadership for decades, and it must do so again.

That leadership will also require effectively cooperating with China, rather than getting consumed by a war of narratives about who responded better. Little is gained by repeatedly emphasizing the origins of the coronavirus—which are already widely known despite China’s propaganda—or engaging in petty tit-for-tat rhetorical exchanges with Beijing. As Chinese officials accuse the U.S. military of spreading the virus and lambaste U.S. efforts, Washington should respond when necessary but generally resist the temptation to put China at the center of its coronavirus messaging. Most countries coping with the challenge would rather see a public message that stresses the seriousness of a shared global challenge and possible paths forward (including successful examples of coronavirus response in democratic societies such as Taiwan and South Korea). And there is much Washington and Beijing could do together for the world’s benefit: coordinating vaccine research and clinical trials as well as fiscal stimulus; sharing information; cooperating on industrial mobilization (on machines for producing critical respirator components or ventilator parts, for instance); and offering joint assistance to others.

Ultimately, the coronavirus might even serve as a wake-up call, spurring progress on other global challenges requiring U.S.-Chinese cooperation, such as climate change. Such a step should not be seen—and would not be seen by the rest of the world—as a concession to Chinese power. Rather, it would go some way toward restoring faith in the future of U.S. leadership. In the current crisis, as in geopolitics today more generally, the United States can do well by doing good. 🌐

The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It

Not Every Crisis Is a Turning Point

Richard Haass

APRIL 7, 2020

We are going through what by every measure is a great crisis, so it is natural to assume that it will prove to be a turning point in modern history. In the months since the appearance of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, analysts have differed over the type of world the pandemic will leave in its wake. But most argue that the world we are entering will be fundamentally different from what existed before. Some predict the pandemic will bring about a new world order led by China; others believe it will trigger the demise of China's leadership. Some say it will end globalization; others hope it will usher in a new age of global cooperation. And still others project that it will supercharge nationalism, undermine free trade, and lead to regime change in various countries—or all of the above.

But the world following the pandemic is unlikely to be radically different from the one that preceded it. COVID-19 will not so much change the basic direction of world history as accelerate it. The pandemic and the response to it have revealed and reinforced the fundamental characteristics of geopolitics today. As a result, this crisis promises to be less of a turning point than a way station along the road that the world has been traveling for the past few decades.

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It is too soon to predict when the crisis itself will end. Whether in six, 12, or 18 months, the timing will depend on the degree to which people follow social-distancing guidelines and recommended hygiene; the availability of quick, accurate, and affordable testing, antiviral drugs, and a vaccine; and the extent of economic relief provided to individuals and businesses.

Yet the world that will emerge from the crisis will be recognizable. Waning American leadership, faltering global cooperation, great-power discord: all of these characterized the international environment before the appearance of COVID-19, and the pandemic has brought them into sharper-than-ever relief. They are likely to be even more prominent features of the world that follows.

POST-AMERICAN WORLD

One characteristic of the current crisis has been a marked lack of U.S. leadership. The United States has not rallied the world in a collective effort to confront either the virus or its economic effects. Nor has the United States rallied the world to follow its lead in addressing the problem at home. Other countries are looking after themselves as best they can or turning to those past the peak of infection, such as China, for assistance.

But if the world that follows this crisis will be one in which the United States dominates less and less—it is almost impossible to imagine anyone today writing about a “unipolar moment”—this trend is hardly new. It has been apparent for at least a decade.

To some degree, this is a result of what Fareed Zakaria described as “the rise of the rest” (and of China in particular), which brought a decline in the United States’ relative advantage even though its absolute economic and military strength continued to grow. But even more than that, it is a result of faltering American will rather than declining American capacity. President Barack Obama oversaw a pullback from Afghanistan and the Middle East. President Donald Trump has employed mostly economic power to confront foes. But he has essentially ended the U.S. presence in Syria, and seeks to do the same in Afghanistan, and, perhaps more significant, has shown little interest either in alliances or in maintaining the United States’ traditional leading role in addressing major transnational issues.

The prospect of this change was a big part of the appeal of Trump’s “America first” message, which promised that the United States would be stronger and more prosperous if it did less abroad and focused its

energies on domestic issues. Implicit in this view was the assumption that much of what the United States did in the world was wasteful, unnecessary, and unconnected to domestic well-being. For many Americans, the pandemic will likely reinforce this view despite the fact that it should instead highlight how domestic well-being is affected by the rest of the world; the United States, they will say, will have to focus on righting itself and devote resources to needs at home rather than abroad, to butter rather than guns. That is a false choice, as the country needs and can afford both, but it is likely to be argued all the same.

Just as consequential as U.S. policy choices is the power of America's example. Long before COVID-19 ravaged the earth, there had already been a precipitous decline in the appeal of the American model. Thanks to persistent political gridlock, gun violence, the mismanagement that led to the 2008 global financial crisis, the opioid epidemic, and more, what America represented grew increasingly unattractive to many. The federal government's slow, incoherent, and all too often ineffective response to the pandemic will reinforce the already widespread view that the United States has lost its way.

ANARCHICAL SOCIETY

A pandemic that begins in one country and spreads with great velocity around the world is the definition of a global challenge. It is also further evidence that globalization is a reality, not a choice. The pandemic has ravaged open and closed countries, rich and poor, East and West. What is missing is any sign of a meaningful global response. (Newton's law—that for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction—has apparently been suspended.) The near irrelevance of the World Health Organization, which should be central to meeting the threat at hand, speaks volumes to the poor state of global governance.

But while the pandemic has made this reality especially obvious, the underlying trends long preceded it: the emergence of global challenges that no country, no matter how powerful, can successfully contend with on its own—and the failure of global organizations to keep up with these challenges. Indeed, the gap between global problems and the capacity to meet them goes a long way toward explaining the scale of the pandemic. The sad but inescapable truth is that although the phrase “international community” is used as if it already existed, it is mostly aspirational, applying to few aspects of geopolitics today. This will not change anytime soon.

The principal responses to the pandemic have been national or even subnational, not international. And once the crisis passes, the emphasis will shift to national recovery. In this context, it is hard to see much enthusiasm for, say, tackling climate change, particularly if it remains viewed—incorrectly—as a distant problem that can be shelved in favor of addressing more immediate ones.

One reason for this pessimism is that cooperation between the world's two most powerful countries is necessary to tackle most global challenges, yet U.S.-Chinese relations have been deteriorating for years. The pandemic is exacerbating friction between the two countries. In Washington, many hold the Chinese government responsible, thanks to its weeks of cover-up and inaction, including failing to promptly lock down Wuhan, the city where the outbreak started, and allowing thousands of infected people to leave and spread the virus farther. China's attempt now to portray itself as offering a successful model for coping with the pandemic and to use this moment as an opportunity to expand its influence around the world will only add to American hostility. Meanwhile, nothing about the current crisis will change China's view that the U.S. presence in Asia is a historical anomaly or reduce its resentment of U.S. policy on a range of issues, including trade, human rights, and Taiwan.

The idea of “decoupling” the two economies had gained considerable traction before the pandemic, driven by fears in the United States that it was becoming too dependent on a potential adversary for many essential goods and overly susceptible to Chinese espionage and intellectual property theft. The impetus to decouple will grow as a result of the pandemic, and only in part because of concerns about China. There will be renewed focus on the potential for interruption of supply chains along with a desire to stimulate domestic manufacturing. Global trade will partly recover, but more of it will be managed by governments rather than markets.

The resistance across much of the developed world to accepting large numbers of immigrants and refugees, a trend that had been visible for at least the past half decade, will also be intensified by the pandemic. This will be in part out of concern over the risk of importing infectious disease, in part because high unemployment will make societies wary of accepting outsiders. This opposition will grow even as the number of displaced persons and refugees—already at historic levels—will continue to increase significantly as economies can no longer support their populations.

The result will be both widespread human suffering and greater burdens on states that can ill afford them. State weakness has been a significant global problem for decades, but the economic toll of the pandemic will create even more weak or failing states. This will almost certainly be exacerbated by a mounting debt problem: public and private debt in much of the world was already at unprecedented levels, and the need for government spending to cover health-care costs and support the unemployed will cause debt to skyrocket. The developing world in particular will face enormous requirements it cannot meet, and it remains to be seen whether developed countries will be willing to provide help given demands at home. There is a real potential for aftershocks—in India, in Brazil and Mexico, and throughout Africa—that could interfere with global recovery.

The spread of COVID-19 to and through Europe has also highlighted the loss of momentum of the European project. Countries have mostly responded individually to the pandemic and its economic effects. But the process of European integration had run out of steam long before this crisis—as Brexit demonstrated especially clearly. The principal question in the post-pandemic world is how much the pendulum will continue to swing from Brussels to national capitals, as countries question whether control over their own borders could have slowed the virus's spread.

The pandemic is likely to reinforce the democratic recession that has been evident for the past 15 years. There will be calls for a larger government role in society, be it to constrain movement of populations or provide economic help. Civil liberties will be treated by many as a casualty of war, a luxury that cannot be afforded in a crisis. Meanwhile, threats posed by illiberal countries such as Russia, North Korea, and Iran will still exist once the pandemic does not; indeed, they may well have increased while attention was trained elsewhere.

A WORLD IN EVEN GREATER DISARRAY

More than three years ago, I published a book titled *A World in Disarray*. It described a global landscape of increased great-power rivalry, nuclear proliferation, weak states, surging refugee flows, and growing nationalism, along with a reduced U.S. role in the world. What will change as a result of the pandemic is not the fact of disarray but the extent.

Ideally, the crisis would bring renewed commitment to building a more robust international order, much as the cataclysm of World War

II led to arrangements that promoted peace, prosperity, and democracy for nearly three-quarters of a century. Such an order would include greater cooperation to monitor outbreaks of infectious diseases and deal with their consequences, as well as greater willingness to address climate change, set rules for cyberspace, assist forced migrants, and tackle proliferation and terrorism.

But there is little reason to believe the past will repeat itself after this latest global calamity. The world today is simply not conducive to being shaped. Power is distributed in more hands, both state and nonstate, than ever before. Consensus is mostly absent. New technologies and challenges have outpaced the collective ability to contend with them. No single country enjoys the standing the United States did in 1945.

What is more, this United States is not currently disposed to take on a leading international role, the result of fatigue brought on by two long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and rising needs at home. Even if a foreign policy “traditionalist” such as former Vice President Joseph Biden wins the November presidential election, resistance from Congress and the public will prevent the full-scale return of an expansive U.S. role in the world. And no other country, not China or anyone else, has both the desire and the ability to fill the void the United States has created.

After World War II, the need to meet the looming communist threat galvanized the American public to support their country in assuming a leading role around the world. Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson famously said that the government had to make arguments “clearer than truth” to get the American people and Congress to buy into the effort to contain the Soviet Union. Some analysts suggest that invoking the threat of China could similarly galvanize public support today, but a foreign policy based on opposing China is hardly suited to addressing the global challenges that shape today’s world. Meanwhile, appealing to the American people to put tackling those global problems at the heart of U.S. foreign policy will continue to be a tough sell. Accordingly, the more relevant precedent to consider may be not the period following World War II but the period following World War I—an era of declining American involvement and mounting international upheaval. The rest, as they say, is history. 🌐

Public Health Calls for Solidarity, Not Warfare

Policing Is the Wrong Tactic for a Disease That Preys on Inequality

Natalia Linos and Mary T. Bassett

APRIL 30, 2020

Politicians all over the world have embraced war metaphors to describe the global pandemic. COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, is the enemy. In the United States, President Donald Trump has called himself a “wartime president,” and in New York, the current epicenter of the pandemic, Governor Andrew Cuomo has referred to health-care workers as “troops,” even though many frontline health workers object to the characterization. With deaths growing at an exponential rate, and millions having lost jobs and livelihoods, the metaphor may seem to fit: disease, like war, calls for sacrifice and battle.

Language has consequences, however, and war is a loaded term. Metaphors of war prove useful to authoritarian regimes that clamp down on dissent and exploit public fear to consolidate power. They also support the use of police and military forces to impose quarantines, curfews, and other public health measures. Most governments have mobilized such forces, and many have concluded that a punitive approach—using arrests, fines, and intimidation—is necessary to protect public health. But is it?

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Physical-distancing measures—such as staying home, wearing masks, washing hands, and closing non-essential businesses—are necessary, but their enforcement can be humane, may allow for exceptions, and should not unnecessarily involve armed personnel. After all, the war with COVID-19 is likely to be protracted. Researchers have warned that social distancing measures such as stay-at-home orders may be necessary—intermittently, one hopes—well into 2022. And these orders are not easy for everyone to obey. Some people don't have homes. For others, home is not a safe place, and for many, staying home is an unaffordable luxury.

Saving lives during this pandemic will require a different approach from simply “policing bad behavior.” Individual failures are not driving high rates of infection—rather, the infection reveals structural failures in the manner in which societies are organized. Those whose employment is precarious and who cannot afford to stay home—because they lack paid sick leave or because they have been designated “essential workers” but nonetheless lack protective equipment—struggle to protect themselves and their families. Those in congregate settings, such as nursing homes, prisons, and homeless shelters, depend on others to reduce their risk of infection.

UNEQUAL TOLL

The data in the United States, although incomplete, tell a clear story. Death and illness are concentrated among people of color and in neighborhoods where a large majority are poor. African Americans account for 13 percent of the country's population but fully 30 percent of confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Hispanics and Latinos account for 18 percent of the population and 24 percent of confirmed cases.

The United States is not alone in recording such health inequities. In the United Kingdom, only 14 percent of the population identifies as black, Asian, or minority ethnic, but so far this population accounts for more than a third of the country's cases of COVID-19. Even in Sweden, with its egalitarian reputation, poor neighborhoods where the vast majority of residents are immigrants have the highest rates of infection and death.

The militarization of the COVID-19 response is particularly troubling in light of these disparities—and in light of the experience many communities of color and immigrants have had of excessive surveillance and violence at the hands of police. In a recent letter to U.S.

Attorney General William Barr and FBI Director Christopher Wray, Democratic lawmakers called on police departments to build trust with communities of color and undergo anti-bias training, especially as people are being told to wear masks in public. They warn: “If communities of color—especially African American communities—feel at risk of disproportionate or selective enforcement, they may avoid seeking help or adopting precautionary measures recommended by the CDC. This, in turn, could have dire public health consequences.”

Anecdotal evidence suggests that disproportionate and selective enforcement is already a problem in the United States. Some reports suggest that police use excessive force to enforce social-distancing measures and that they disproportionately single out people of color. A video has circulated of black men followed by police and then expelled from a Walmart outside St. Louis for wearing masks. Another shows police dragging a black man off a bus in Philadelphia for failing to wear a mask. Such reports may or may not be representative of enforcement practices, but they are widely circulated because they reflect a tragic reality: compared with white Americans, black Americans die at the hands of police, and people of color are stopped, arrested, and incarcerated, at much higher rates.

Because law enforcement is so differentially received among Americans, its use as a tool of public health could have the unintended consequence of undermining health policy and provoking noncompliance. Police violence has been shown to increase legal cynicism, or the public belief that the system is incompetent, unresponsive, and illegitimate. In a Pew Research Center poll just this month, U.S. citizens ranked ten government agencies for favorability. The CDC emerged almost at the top, second only to the U.S. Postal Service. The Department of Justice and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency ranked at the very bottom, although Republicans were more favorable toward them than Democrats. Public trust in the federal government has dropped to almost historic lows, most dramatically among black Americans, only nine percent of whom reported in 2019 that they trusted the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” or “most of the time.” Such attitudes can have serious public health implications. Research from the Ebola epidemic in Liberia showed that those who distrusted government took fewer precautions against the disease and were less compliant with government-mandated social-distancing policies.

A CIVILIAN SOLUTION

On April 23, the United Nations issued a report underlining the importance of respecting human rights in the global struggle against the novel coronavirus. Citing widespread recent incidents of discrimination and excessive use of force, the report warned that emergency measures, especially if applied with a heavy hand or disproportionately, could undermine the entire pandemic response.

So what is the alternative to the armed enforcement of public health measures? A civilian, unarmed response. Imagine that police are not patrolling streets to fine or arrest those breaking curfew or to pull people without masks from public buses—but that a civilian public health workforce instead distributes masks, food, and other essentials, while monitoring compliance with quarantine orders. The police would step in only under extraordinary circumstances.

The idea is hardly novel. Community health workers have functioned successfully all over the world for decades. In the United States, there is a new call for such a public health workforce.

According to Tom Frieden, the former director of the CDC, countries will need to follow certain steps if they are to “box the virus in” and reopen their economies without putting lives at risk: test widely, isolate safely, contact and find everyone exposed, and quarantine comfortably. A significant expansion in the public health workforce will be needed to support these actions. Massachusetts has already begun training and deploying hundreds of contact tracers, following a program the state devised in partnership with Partners in Health, a health nonprofit with long global experience working with community health workers.

If the United States is to design a civilian health workforce, it must do so with the aim of not only containing COVID-19 but also addressing the inequality the disease has so starkly exposed, with its divergent toll in death and suffering. The new workforce should help millions in hard-hit communities to sign up for government benefits, from unemployment to supplemental nutritional assistance. Health workers should be representative of the communities they serve, and their governments should pay them well and provide them with adequate personal protective equipment.

As the United States moves slowly toward reopening its economy, it should enforce public health measures with unarmed personnel. New York City did exactly that in response to Ebola in 2014, Legionnaires’ disease in 2015, and measles in 2018. Behind this less militarized re-

sponse will perhaps be political talk not of war and conflict but of postwar reconstruction and social solidarity, in which the government's response creates economic opportunities—while the public demands a radical overhaul of the health-care, social security, and employment systems that have proven so disastrous for so many. 🌐

The Coming Post-COVID Anarchy

The Pandemic Bodes Ill for Both American and Chinese Power—and for the Global Order

Kevin Rudd

MAY 6, 2020

In January and February of this year, there was audible popping of champagne corks in certain quarters of the U.S. foreign policy establishment. What some observers had long seen as this era's giant geopolitical bubble had finally begun to deflate. China's Communist Party leadership, the thinking went, was at last coming apart, a result of its obsession with official secrecy, its initial missteps in responding to the novel coronavirus outbreak, and the unfolding economic carnage across the country.

Then, as China began to recover and the virus migrated to the West in March and April, irrational jubilation turned to irrational despair. The commentariat greeted with outrage any possibility that the pandemic might in fact help China emerge triumphant in the ongoing geopolitical contest with the United States. This concern was a product of China's seemingly cunning remolding of the narrative on the origins of the virus, the brutal efficiency of the Chinese authoritarian model in containing it, and Beijing's global COVID-aid campaign. China's own nationalist commentariat happily piled on,

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delighting in the United States' distress and noting the supposed contrast between Chinese largesse and American indifference: the "people's war" against COVID-19 had been won, and the virtues of China's political model had been vindicated.

Yet despite the best efforts of ideological warriors in Beijing and Washington, the uncomfortable truth is that China and the United States are both likely to emerge from this crisis significantly diminished. Neither a new Pax Sinica nor a renewed Pax Americana will rise from the ruins. Rather, both powers will be weakened, at home and abroad. And the result will be a continued slow but steady drift toward international anarchy across everything from international security to trade to pandemic management. With nobody directing traffic, various forms of rampant nationalism are taking the place of order and cooperation. The chaotic nature of national and global responses to the pandemic thus stands as a warning of what could come on an even broader scale.

OF POWER AND PERCEPTION

As with other historical inflection points, three factors will shape the future of the global order: changes in the relative military and economic strength of the great powers, how those changes are perceived around the world, and what strategies the great powers deploy. Based on all three factors, China and the United States have reason to worry about their global influence in the post-pandemic world.

Contrary to the common trope, China's national power has taken a hit from this crisis on multiple levels. The outbreak has opened up significant political dissension within the Chinese Communist Party, even prompting thinly veiled criticism of President Xi Jinping's highly centralized leadership style. This has been reflected in a number of semiofficial commentaries that have mysteriously found their way into the public domain during April. Xi's draconian lockdown of half the country for months to suppress the virus has been widely hailed, but he has not emerged unscathed. Internal debate rages on the precise number of the dead and the infected, on the risks of second-wave effects as the country slowly reopens, and on the future direction of economic and foreign policy.

The economic damage has been massive. Despite China's published return-to-work rates, no amount of domestic stimulus in the second half of 2020 will make up for the loss in economic activity in the first and second quarters. Drastic economic retrenchment among China's

principal trading partners will further impede economic recovery plans, given that pre-crisis, the traded sector of the economy represented 38 percent of GDP. Overall, 2020 growth is likely to be around zero—the worst performance since the Cultural Revolution five decades ago. China's debt-to-GDP ratio already stands at around 310 percent, acting as a drag on other Chinese spending priorities, including education, technology, defense, and foreign aid. And all of this comes on the eve of the party's centenary celebrations in 2021, by which point the leadership had committed to double China's GDP over a decade. The pandemic now makes that impossible.

As for the United States' power, the Trump administration's chaotic management has left an indelible impression around the world of a country incapable of handling its own crises, let alone anybody else's. More important, the United States seems set to emerge from this period as a more divided polity rather than a more united one, as would normally be the case following a national crisis of this magnitude; this continued fracturing of the American political establishment adds a further constraint on U.S. global leadership.

Meanwhile, conservative estimates see the U.S. economy shrinking by between six and 14 percent in 2020, the largest single contraction since the demobilization at the end of World War II. Washington's fiscal interventions meant to arrest the slide already amount to ten percent of GDP, pushing the United States' ratio of public debt to GDP toward 100 percent—near the wartime record of 106 percent. The U.S. dollar's global reserve currency status enables the government to continue selling U.S. treasuries to fund the deficit. Nonetheless, large-scale debt sooner or later will constrain post-recovery spending, including on the military. And there's also risk that the current economic crisis will metastasize into a broader financial crisis, although the Federal Reserve, other G-20 central banks, and the International Monetary Fund have so far managed to mitigate that risk.

Chinese leaders have a simple Leninist view of the United States' power. It rests on two fundamentals: the U.S. military and the U.S. dollar (including the depth and liquidity of the U.S. financial markets that underpin it). Everything else is detail.

All states are mindful of what Leninists call "objective power" and the willingness of the great powers to deploy it. But the perception of power is equally important. China is now working overtime to repair the enormous damage to its global standing that resulted from the geo-

graphical origin of the virus and Beijing's failure to contain the epidemic in the critical early months. Whatever China's new generation of "wolf-warrior" diplomats may report back to Beijing, the reality is that China's standing has taken a huge hit (the irony is that these wolf-warriors are adding to this damage, not ameliorating it). Anti-Chinese reaction over the spread of the virus, often racially charged, has been seen in countries as disparate as India, Indonesia, and Iran. Chinese soft power runs the risk of being shredded.

For different reasons, the United States does not come out of the crisis much better. The world has watched in horror as an American president acts not as the leader of the free world but as a quack apothecary recommending unproven "treatments." It has seen what "America first" means in practice: don't look to the United States for help in a genuine global crisis, because it can't even look after itself. Once there was the United States of the Berlin airlift. Now there is the image of the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* crippled by the virus, reports of the administration trying to take exclusive control of a vaccine being developed in Germany, and federal intervention to stop the commercial sale of personal protective equipment to Canada. The world has been turned on its head.

AFTER ENGAGEMENT

The crisis also appears to have shredded much of what was left of the U.S.-Chinese relationship. In Washington, any return to a pre-2017 world of "strategic engagement" with Beijing is no longer politically tenable. A second Trump term will mean greater decoupling and possibly attempted containment, driven by Trump's base and widespread national anger over the origins of the virus, although this strategy will be rendered incoherent at times by the president's personal interventions. In a Biden administration, strategic competition (and decoupling in some areas) will continue, likely to be executed on a more systematic basis and leaving some scope for cooperation in defined areas, such as climate, pandemics, and global financial stability. On balance, Beijing would prefer Trump's reelection over the alternative, because it sees value in his tendency to fracture traditional alliances, to withdraw from multilateral leadership, and episodically to derail the United States' China strategy. Either way, the U.S. relationship with Beijing will become more confrontational.

In Beijing, China's response to the United States' ever-hardening posture is now under intense review. This process began in 2018, dur-

ing the first full year of the U.S.-Chinese trade war. It has now been intensified, because of the pandemic and its international consequences. The review is part of a broader internal debate in Beijing about whether China's national strategy, at this stage of its economic and military development, has in recent years become insufficiently reformist at home and excessively assertive abroad.

Prior to Xi, the strategy was to wait until the correlation of economic and military forces shifted in China's favor before seeking any major adjustments to the regional and international order—including on Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the U.S. presence in Asia. Under Xi, Beijing has become significantly more assertive, taking calculated—and so far successful—risks to bring about changes on the ground, as demonstrated by island reclamation in the South China Sea and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The United States' reaction to this approach has been deemed to be manageable, but that calculation could change in a post-trade war, post-pandemic world. Xi could seek to ameliorate tensions with the United States until the pandemic is lost to political memory; or facing internal challenges, he could take a more nationalist approach abroad. Both of these tendencies will likely appear in Chinese policy behavior until China's internal policy review process concludes, which may not happen until shortly before the 20th Communist Party Congress in 2022. But if Xi's style thus far is any indication, he is likely to double down in the face of any internal dissent.

That would mean hardening China's posture toward the United States, including on issues such as Taiwan, the single most destabilizing element in the U.S.-Chinese relationship. Beijing is likely to sharpen its strategy of shrinking Taiwan's international space, even as U.S. efforts to secure Taiwan's readmission to the World Health Organization intensify. Given that this comes on the heels of other recent U.S. efforts to upgrade official-level engagement between Washington and Taipei, the understandings of the "one China policy" that underpinned the normalization of U.S.-Chinese relations in 1979 could begin to unravel. If these understandings collapse, the prospect of some form of military confrontation over Taiwan, even as the inadvertent result of failed crisis management, suddenly moves from abstraction to reality.

A NEW COLD WAR?

Prior to the current crisis, the postwar liberal international order was already beginning to fragment. The United States' military and eco-

conomic power, the geopolitical fulcrum on which the order rested, was being challenged by China, first regionally and more recently, globally. The Trump administration was adding to the order's problems by weakening the U.S. alliance structure (which in conventional strategic logic would have been central to maintaining a balance of power against Beijing) and systematically delegitimizing multilateral institutions (effectively creating a political and diplomatic vacuum for China to fill). The result has been an increasingly dysfunctional and chaotic world.

The current crisis is likely to reinforce such trends. Strategic rivalry will now define the entire spectrum of the U.S.-Chinese relationship—military, economic, financial, technological, ideological—and increasingly shape Beijing's and Washington's relationships with third countries. Until the current crisis, the notion that the world had entered a new Cold War, or Cold War 2.0, seemed premature at best; the two countries' financial systems were so intertwined that true decoupling was unlikely, and there seemed to be little prospect of geopolitical or ideological proxy wars in third countries, a defining feature of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry.

But the new threats that both sides are making as COVID-related tensions grow could change all that. A decision in Washington to end U.S. pension-fund investments in China, restrict future Chinese holdings of U.S. Treasury bonds, or start a new currency war (exacerbated by the recent launch of China's new digital currency) would quickly remove the financial glue that has held the two economies together; a decision in Beijing to increasingly militarize the BRI would raise the risk of proxy wars. Moreover, as U.S.-Chinese confrontation grows, the multilateral system and the norms and institutions underpinning it are beginning to falter. Many institutions are themselves becoming arenas for rivalry. And with a damaged United States and a damaged China, there is no "system manager," to borrow Joseph Nye's phrase, to keep the international system in functioning order. It may not yet be Cold War 2.0, but it is starting to look like Cold War 1.5.

There are better alternatives to this scenario. They depend, however, on significant political and policy change in Washington; a reformist and internationalist readjustment in Beijing; the development of a new architecture of détente between the United States and China (drawing on the U.S.-Soviet experience), which places clear parameters around competition in order to avoid military disaster; and efforts by other countries to pool political and financial resources to preserve the essential multilateral institutions of the current system as a form of

institutional triage until there is a return to geopolitical stability. History is not predetermined. But none of this will come about unless political leaders in multiple capitals decide to change course. With the wrong decisions, the 2020s will look like a mindless rerun of the 1930s; the right decisions, however, could pull us back from the abyss. 🌐

Civil Rights Has Always Been a Global Movement

How Allies Abroad Help the Fight Against Racism at Home

Brenda Gayle Plummer

JUNE 19, 2020

A global audience witnessed the lynching of George Floyd, on May 25, at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. Floyd's agonizing death by suffocation, his pleas for help, and his final words, "I can't breathe"—recorded in a cell phone video and promptly shared on Facebook by a quick-witted young bystander—have been viewed billions of times and have unleashed a shock wave of outrage and revulsion that continues to reverberate around the world.

Murders of black people in the United States by law enforcement officers are not uncommon, and thanks to near-universal access to video-enabled smartphones and social media, they are increasingly well documented. In recent years, videos recording these killings and other forms of police violence against African Americans have emerged with horrifying regularity; their release and the outpouring of fury, grief, and calls for change that they inspire have become a macabre national ritual. Global condemnation of racist violence by U.S. law enforcement is not new, either. But the extraordinary scale and reach of the reaction to Floyd's death—which has ignited weeks of mass pro-

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tests in at least 60 countries and prompted the UN human rights chief to convene a special session this week focused on systemic racism in the United States—represents an order-of-magnitude shift.

In seeking to explain why the killing of Floyd has galvanized the world in this manner, many analysts point to COVID-19's disproportionate impact on minority communities. To be sure, the pandemic's shocking toll on black lives and livelihoods—and the speed with which long-standing inequalities such as police brutality, voter suppression, and a discriminatory criminal justice system were laid bare and thrust into the spotlight—were contributing factors. But this analysis omits nearly two centuries of African American outreach and activism overseas. Although the long history of African American engagement on the international stage is often absent from conventional narratives about U.S. foreign policy, it has shaped contemporary global understandings of race in profound ways and has complicated—when it has not outright undermined—official U.S. government messaging about American values.

SEEKING ALLIES OVERSEAS

African American international activism began in the early nineteenth century, when black people who escaped the cruelties of slavery sought support from abolitionists overseas. In the mid-1840s, Frederick Douglass toured the United Kingdom for 19 months, forging relationships with English and Irish leaders who opposed human bondage in the United States and raising funds that would later help him launch an influential abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*.

In the decades after the Civil War, when newly emancipated people faced economic deprivation and political terrorism, African American leaders again sought allies abroad. In the United Kingdom, pioneering black journalist Ida B. Wells found a receptive audience for her 1890s-era campaign against the omnipresent threat of lynching. British support for African Americans was especially helpful, Wells wrote, because white Americans viewed the United Kingdom as morally and culturally superior; American journalists and religious leaders had largely ignored lynching, but British criticism would be impossible for them to ignore. The British activists Wells mobilized helped generate the campaign's early momentum—and embarrassed American leaders by demanding that they publicly denounce mob violence.

As the European empires consolidated in the early twentieth century, African Americans joined their African and Caribbean counter-

parts at a series of Pan-African Congresses with the goal of reforming colonial institutions that were founded on racial domination and developing strategies to resist antiblack racism. Although these efforts suffered a blow in 1919, when U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and other Western leaders rejected Japan's proposal to insert a racial equality clause in the League of Nations charter, the struggle against racism was coming into sharper focus as a broad-based, global movement.

The United Nations formed at last in 1945, and the U.S. government gave the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Council of Negro Women ceremonial roles as observers at the founding conference, in the hope of encouraging domestic support for the new institution. Washington was displeased, however, when, in 1947, the NAACP submitted a 96-page petition to the UN Commission on Human Rights, asking it to investigate human rights violations against African Americans in the United States. Edited by W. E. B. Du Bois and titled "An Appeal to the World," the document began with a pointed denunciation of American hypocrisy. "A nation which boldly declared 'that all men are created equal,' proceeded to build its economy on chattel slavery," Du Bois wrote. India and the Soviet Union displayed interest in the petition, and more insightful U.S. officials realized that critics and enemies could make political capital of a race problem that could no longer be sequestered.

A GLOBAL MOVEMENT WITH DEEP ROOTS

During the early Cold War period, in the decade and a half following the NAACP's landmark 1947 appeal to global public opinion, numerous governments and international institutions expressed their strong disapproval of institutional racism in the United States and their deep concern about the antiblack violence that accompanied early integration efforts. Global criticism of institutional racism against African Americans subsided after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. American officials of the Cold War era reviewed common talking points on race with concerned foreign interlocutors—that racism was rapidly being eradicated from American life, that it persisted mostly in regional backwaters, and that it was in fact on the brink of disappearing. U.S. officials continue to repeat these platitudes, despite the fact that racism has never gone away. And whether the United States would have pursued racial justice without the threat of humiliation

on the international stage and the pressure exerted by powerful global rivals remains an open question.

Global reactions to the Floyd murder were not simply responses to a single event. The world already knew about antiblack racism in the United States. Voter suppression, disproportionately affecting people of color, has no parallel in other democracies. The particulars of Floyd's murder, taking place against the backdrop of the pandemic, may well have been the dam-break moment for the global protest movement. But they are only part of the story. International solidarity with the African American civil rights struggle comes not from some kind of projection or spontaneous sentiment; it was seeded by centuries of black activism abroad and foreign concern about human rights violations in the United States.

The status of African Americans cannot be unlinked from the United States' standing in the world. And unfortunately, Du Bois's 1947 warning that a "great nation, which today ought to be in the forefront of the march toward peace and democracy, finds itself continuously making common cause with race hate," remains just as fresh and urgent today.

The international response to Floyd's murder has been informed by a deep understanding of and concern about the conditions endured by black people living in the United States—information that African American intellectuals have been disseminating overseas for generations. If, as millions of protesters worldwide now so fervently hope, intensifying pressure from the international community in the wake of Floyd's death helps to prompt a new reckoning with racism in the United States and a commitment to lasting change, the efforts of these activists may finally begin to get the recognition they deserve. 🌍

How a Great Power Falls Apart

Decline Is Invisible From the Inside

Charles King

JUNE 30, 2020

On November 11, 1980, a car filled with writers was making its way along a rain-slick highway to a conference in Madrid. The subject of the meeting was the human rights movement in the Soviet Union, and in the vehicle were some of the movement's long-suffering activists: Vladimir Borisov and Viktor Fainberg, both of whom had endured horrific abuse in a Leningrad psychiatric hospital; the Tatar artist Gyuzel Makudinova, who had spent years in internal exile in Siberia; and her husband, the writer Andrei Amalrik, who had escaped to Western Europe after periods of arrest, re-arrest, and confinement.

Amalrik was at the wheel. Around 40 miles from the Spanish capital, the car swerved out of its lane and collided with an oncoming truck. Everyone survived except Amalrik, his throat pierced by a piece of metal, probably from the steering column. At the time of his death at the age of 42, Amalrik was certainly not the best-known Soviet dissident. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn had published *The Gulag Archipelago*, won the Nobel Prize in Literature, and immigrated to the United States. Andrei Sakharov had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which he was forced to accept in absentia because the Soviet govern-

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ment denied him an exit visa. But in the pantheon of the investigated, the imprisoned, and the exiled, Amalrik occupied a special place.

Starting in the mid-1960s, a series of high-profile prosecutions of writers, historians, and other intellectuals under Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev had galvanized the country's dissidents. To many observers in the West, this nascent democratic movement seemed to offer a path toward de-escalating the Cold War. In the summer of 1968, just weeks before Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, *The New York Times* set aside three pages for an essay by Sakharov on "progress, peaceful coexistence, and intellectual freedom." In the era of nuclear weapons, Sakharov said, the West and the Soviet Union had no choice but to cooperate to ensure the survival of humankind. The two systems were already witnessing a "convergence," as he put it. They would have to learn to live together, leveling out national distinctions and taking steps toward planetwide governance.

To all of this, Amalrik showed up with a bucket of cold water. In the fall of 1970, he managed to smuggle his own short manuscript out of the Soviet Union. It soon appeared in the London-based journal *Survey*. Global capitalism and Soviet-style communism were not converging, Amalrik argued, but were in fact growing further apart. Even the communist world itself was in danger of splitting up. The Soviet Union and China were increasingly mistrustful of each other and seemed on a clear course toward a cataclysmic war. (A year earlier, in 1969, the two countries had skirmished along their common border, with significant casualties.) But the real problem with Sakharov, Amalrik wrote, was that he failed to recognize that the Soviet state and the Soviet system—both the country and communism as a political and economic order—were headed for self-destruction. To make his point, he titled his essay "Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?"

The piece was a persecuted dissenter's struggle to diagnose early Brezhnev-era malaise, but Amalrik ended up identifying a more general political syndrome: the process through which a great power succumbs to self-delusion. By the 1960s, the Soviet government had hammered into existence a country that citizens under Lenin or Stalin would have thought impossible. Consumer goods, single-family apartments, a space program, international sports heroes, a globe-spanning airline—the successes of Soviet society were on full display. Yet more than any other thinker at the time, Amalrik grasped the fact that countries decay only in retrospect. Powerful states, as well as their inhabit-

ants, tend to be congenital conservatives when it comes to their own futures. The “comfort cult,” as he called it—the tendency in seemingly stable societies to believe “that ‘Reason will prevail’ and that ‘Everything will be all right’”—is seductive. As a result, when a terminal crisis comes, it is likely to be unexpected, confusing, and catastrophic, with the causes so seemingly trivial, the consequences so easily repairable if political leaders would only do the right thing, that no one can quite believe it has come to this.

Amalrik also provided a kind of blueprint for analytic alienation. It is actually possible, he suggested, to think your way through the end of days. The method is to practice living with the most unlikely outcome you can fathom and then to work backward, systematically and carefully, from the what-if to the here’s-why. The point isn’t to pick one’s evidence to fit a particular conclusion. It is rather to jolt oneself out of the assumption of linear change—to consider, for a moment, how some future historian might recast implausible concerns as inevitable ones.

Viewed from 2020, exactly 50 years since it was published, Amalrik’s work has an eerie timeliness. He was concerned with how a great power handles multiple internal crises—the faltering of the institutions of domestic order, the craftiness of unmoored and venal politicians, the first tremors of systemic illegitimacy. He wanted to understand the dark logic of social dissolution and how discrete political choices sum up to apocalyptic outcomes. His prophecy was time delimited, ending in 1984, but it isn’t hard to hear its ghostly echo today. To know how great powers end, one could do worse than study the last one that actually did.

A COUNTRY ON THE PRECIPICE

Amalrik began his essay by setting out some of his qualifications for the task. As a history student, he had researched Kievan Rus, the medieval principality that gave rise to modern-day Russia and Ukraine, and suffered for some of his findings. He had been expelled from Moscow State University for suggesting that it was Norse traders and colonizers, not Slavs, who were the real founders of Russian statehood—a claim now widely accepted by historians but that at the time ran counter to official Soviet history writing. As an intellectual and friend of writers and journalists, he had been closely associated with the democratic movement in the Soviet Union and knew its major players. For people in the West, he said, he was what a talking fish would represent to an ichthyologist: a miraculous communicator of the secrets of an alien world.

It was a great mistake, Amalrik continued, to believe that one could make political predictions about a country by surveying its main ideological currents. People might cleave themselves into rival camps or be sorted into them by outside experts: hard-line leftists, nationalists, liberals, and the like. But these groups are always amorphous. Their constituents display little real agreement among themselves about what constitutes orthodox belief or a coherent political program.

A better way to think about political cleavages was to observe which portions of society are most threatened by change and which ones seek to hasten it—and then to imagine how states might manage the differences between the two. Bureaucrats and politicians want to keep their jobs. Workers want a better standard of living. Intellectuals question old verities of national identity. These divides can create a survival problem for the institutions of state power. “Self-preservation is clearly the dominant drive,” Amalrik wrote. “The only thing [the government] wants is for everything to go on as before: authorities to be recognized, the intelligentsia to keep quiet, no rocking of the system by dangerous and unfamiliar reforms.” But what happens in times of rapid disruption, when economic transition, social evolution, and generational shifts make it impossible for things to go on as before? Repression is always an option, but smart rulers will use their power selectively—prosecuting a writer, say, or dismissing a senior official who has fallen afoul of the leadership. Even more enlightened authorities might ensure self-preservation “through gradual changes and piecemeal reforms, as well as by replacing the old bureaucratic elite with a more intelligent and reasonable group.”

But one should be skeptical about the degree to which leaders who trumpet reform are in fact committed to enacting it. Governments are good at recognizing the faults in other places and times, but they are terrible judges of the injustices built into their own foundations. This was especially the case for great powers such as the Soviet Union, Amalrik believed. If a country could sail the seas unrivaled and put humans into outer space, it had little incentive to look inward at what was rotten at the core. “The regime considers itself the acme of perfection and therefore has no wish to change its ways either of its own free will or, still less, by making concessions to anyone or anything.” Meanwhile, the old tools of repression (all-out Stalinism in the Soviet case) had been given up as backward and inhuman and were now too rusty to be functional. Society was becoming more complicated, more riven with differ-

ence, more demanding of the state but less convinced that the state could deliver. What was left was a political system far weaker than anyone—even those committed to its renewal—was able to recognize.

Of course, no one ever thinks their society is on the precipice. When he talked to his comrades, Amalrik reported that they just wanted things to calm down a bit, without really knowing how that might be achieved. Citizens tended to take their government as a given, as if there were no real alternative to the institutions and processes they had always known. Public discontent, where it existed, was most often directed not against the government as such but merely against certain of its faults. “Everybody is angered by the great inequalities in wealth, the low wages, the austere housing conditions, [and] the lack of essential consumer goods,” Amalrik wrote. So long as people believed that, by and large, things were getting better, they were content to hold fast to the ideology of reformism and the hope of gradual, positive change.

Up to this point in his argument, Amalrik was following an analytic line that would have been familiar to Sakharov and other dissidents. Stability and internal reform were always in tension. But he then made a leap by asking a simple question: Where is the breaking point? How long can a political system seek to remake itself before triggering one of two reactions—a devastating backlash from those most threatened by change or a realization by the change makers that their goals can no longer be realized within the institutions and ideologies of the present order? Here, Amalrik warned, great powers’ proclivity for self-delusion and self-isolation puts them at a particular disadvantage. They set themselves apart from the world, learning little from the accumulated stock of human experience. They imagine themselves immune to the ills affecting other places and systems. This same predisposition might trickle down through society. The various social strata could come to feel isolated from their regime and separated from one another. “This isolation has created for all—from the bureaucratic elite to the lowest social levels—an almost surrealistic picture of the world and of their place in it,” Amalrik concluded. “Yet the longer this state of affairs helps to perpetuate the status quo, the more rapid and decisive will be its collapse when confrontation with reality becomes inevitable.”

There was no reason to believe such a reckoning would threaten only a particular set of elites. Given the right circumstances, the country as a whole could be its ultimate casualty. In his own society, Amalrik identified four drivers of this process. One was the “moral weariness”

engendered by an expansionist, interventionist foreign policy and the never-ending warfare that ensued. Another was the economic hardship that a prolonged military conflict—in Amalrik’s imagination, a coming Soviet-Chinese war—would produce. A third was the fact that the government would grow increasingly intolerant of public expressions of discontent and violently suppress “sporadic eruptions of popular dissatisfaction, or local riots.” These crackdowns were likely to be especially brutal, he argued, when the suppressors—police or internal security troops—were “of a nationality other than that of the population that is rioting,” which would in turn “sharpen enmities among the nationalities.”

It was a fourth tendency, however, that would spell the real end of the Soviet Union: the calculation, by some significant portion of the political elite, that it could best guarantee its own future by jettisoning its relationship to the national capital. Amalrik supposed that this might occur among Soviet ethnic minorities, “first in the Baltic area, the Caucasus and the Ukraine, then in Central Asia and along the Volga”—a sequence that turned out to be exactly correct. His more general point was that in times of severe crisis, institutional elites face a decision point. Do they cling to the system that gives them power or recast themselves as visionaries who understand that the ship is sinking? Especially if the regime is seen to be “losing control over the country and even contact with reality,” canny leaders on the periphery have an incentive to preserve themselves and, in the process, simply ignore the directives of the higher-ups. In such an unstable moment, Amalrik said, some sort of major defeat—for example, “a serious eruption of popular discontent in the capital, such as strikes or an armed clash”—would be enough “to topple the regime.” In the Soviet Union, he concluded, this “will occur sometime between 1980 and 1985.”

ALL COUNTRIES END

Amalrik missed the precise date of his country’s disintegration by seven years. Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempt to liberalize and democratize the state unleashed a set of forces that caused the Soviet Union to disappear, piecemeal, over the course of 1991. At the end of that year, Gorbachev stepped down as president of a country that had faded away beneath him. Still, in the annals of political prognoses of world-historical events, Amalrik’s accuracy probably deserves a prize. He was certainly right about the big picture. In the Soviet case, reform was ultimately incompatible with the continuation of the state itself.

Amalrik was dead by the time Western academics and policy experts began to write their own late-century big histories: Paul Kennedy's warning of the perils of imperial overstretch, Francis Fukuyama's millenarian paean to liberal democracy, and Samuel Huntington's neo-racist clash of civilizations. But in the early 1990s, Amalrik's work finally came into its own. He turned out to be especially insightful on what would emerge after the Soviet demise: a congeries of independent countries, a new quasi commonwealth dominated by Russia, the entry of the Baltic republics into "a Pan-European federation," and, in Central Asia, a renewed version of the old system, combining bits of Soviet-style ritual with local despotism. American conservatives came to cite him as a kind of Cassandra of the steppe. While globalists and antinuclear campaigners were stroking Sakharov and feeding their own fantasies of coexistence with a tyrannical empire, the argument went, they should have heeded Amalrik. Doing so might have forced an earlier confrontation with the teetering Soviet state—"Mr. Brezhnev, tear down this wall!"—and hastened the collapse of communism.

There was also much that Amalrik got wrong. He misjudged the likelihood of a Soviet-Chinese war, which was one of the pillars of his analysis (although one might say the Soviet-Afghan conflict was a good stand-in: a drawn-out, exhausting war, prosecuted by decrepit leaders, which drained the Soviet government of resources and legitimacy). He overstated the violence associated with the Soviet collapse. It was far more peaceful than anyone might have expected, especially given the panoply of border disputes, clashing nationalisms, and elite rivalries churning through the world's largest country. Within three decades, one of its successors, Russia, had even reconstituted itself as a great power with the ability to do something the Soviets never managed: to understand and exploit the principal social divisions of its rivals, from the United States to the United Kingdom, with significant political and strategic effect. Amalrik also failed to foresee the possibility of East-West convergence of a different kind: toward capitalist oligarchies that were surveillance obsessed, deeply unequal, selectively observant of human rights, dependent on global supply chains, and structurally vulnerable to both markets and microbes. He might have been surprised to learn that this was the form that Sakharov's "peaceful coexistence" eventually took, at least for a while.

"Soviet rockets have reached Venus," Amalrik wrote toward the end of his 1970 essay, "while in the village where I live potatoes are still dug

by hand.” His country had invested in catching up to its rivals. It had worked hard to compete as a global superpower. But fundamental things had gone unattended. Its citizens were stuck at different way stations along the path of economic development, poorly understood by one another and by their rulers. In such a situation, a future of gradual democratization and fruitful cooperation with the West was a chimera, Amalrik felt. Faced with a series of external shocks and internal crises, and pursued by more dynamic and adaptable competitors abroad, his country had far less life in it than anyone at the time could see.

All countries end. Every society has its own rock bottom, obscured by darkness until impact is imminent. Already in the sixth century, Amalrik wrote, goats were grazing in the Roman Forum. As a theorist of his own condition, he was in many ways a fatalist. He believed that the Soviet Union lacked the nimbleness to engage in system-shaking reform and still survive, and he was correct. But his broader contribution was to show the citizens of other, differently structured countries how to worry well. He offered a technique for suspending one’s deepest political mythologies and posing questions that might seem, here and now, to lie at the frontier of crankery.

This method won’t reveal the secret of political immortality. (Remember those goats in the Forum.) But in working systematically through the potential causes of the worst outcome imaginable, one might get smarter about the difficult, power-altering choices that need to be made now—those that will make politics more responsive to social change and one’s country more worthy of its time on the historical stage. The powerful aren’t accustomed to thinking this way. But in the lesser places, among the dissidents and the displaced, people have had to be skilled in the art of self-inquiry. How much longer should we stay? What do we put in the suitcase? Here or there, how can I be of use? In life, as in politics, the antidote to hopelessness isn’t hope. It’s planning. 🌐

The Revolutionary Guards Are Poised to Take Over Iran

But Does the Paramilitary Force Have
What It Takes to Govern?

Ali Reza Eshraghi and Amir Hossein Mahdavi

AUGUST 27, 2020

A new saying is making the rounds in Iran: power is being sucked away from heads to toes, which is to say, from men who wear turbans to men who wear boots. Iran's new parliament furnishes the most recent evidence. Its speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, is a former brigadier general of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Two-thirds of the parliament's presiding board are either former members or still affiliated with the IRGC and its auxiliary organizations. Many in Iran and in the United States have long foreseen an IRGC takeover of the Iranian government; the next step toward that outcome would be for a candidate affiliated with the IRGC to be elected president in 2021.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a bifurcated state, with elected institutions running the daily affairs of state in the shadow of the more powerful office of the supreme leader, to which security organizations, including the IRGC, ultimately answer. For more than two decades,

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reformists inside the Iranian political establishment struggled to consolidate the power of elected institutions against that of the parallel state. Now, they are coming to terms with the failure of that project—and preparing for leaders of the parallel state to conquer the elective bodies and consolidate power for themselves.

That Iran will soon have a military-run government is not a foregone conclusion, but it seems increasingly to be the most likely. Iranians are frustrated with partisan tensions and compounding crises. U.S. sanctions have drained the country's economic lifeblood: purchasing power parity has decreased to two-thirds of what it was a decade ago, even as the public's obsession with wealth has grown exponentially. Wounded pride and resentment that Iranians cannot enjoy the international prestige they deserve is giving rise to a novel form of nationalism.

President Hassan Rouhani, unable to deliver on either his domestic or foreign policy promises, has apparently thrown in the towel, as his recent management of the pandemic indicates. He was reluctant to recognize the novel coronavirus as a national threat until it was too late, and his contradictory messages on the subject confused the public and even garnered criticism from the supreme leader. By comparison, the IRGC holds a strong hand that is growing only stronger. But the very nature of its advantages may militate against its becoming the custodian of the state.

FEAR AND LOVE

The IRGC became a focus of national and international attention starting in the late 1990s, when political reformists took the reins of Iran's elected government. A highly circulated reformist news media began zealously monitoring and criticizing the IRGC. In response, the corps began to build a media holding of its own that sought to control the narrative and project a largely exaggerated image of itself.

The IRGC presents itself as the cure for Iran's national malaise, but it is in fact a big contributor to the problem. Its regional exploits dim the country's prospects for sustained and steady development. Under U.S. sanctions, the IRGC expanded an underground economy, complete with a new corrupt elite of "smuggling entrepreneurs." The IRGC prevents the government from recruiting experts whom it deems politically unfit, and it derails government policies and projects at will. All the while, it issues propaganda insisting that politicians and bureaucrats are to blame.

The IRGC used to seek to discredit only its rivals, such as members of Rouhani's administration, whom it has regularly labeled as "compromis-

ers,” “inept,” and “pro-West.” Now, its propaganda blames all political factions for the country’s straits. Over the past decade, the IRGC has invested in producing a revisionist history through documentaries, feature films, and TV series made to appeal to young audiences without firsthand memories of the 1979 revolution and its aftermath. This media present a narrative in which the IRGC cared for the people and fought for the homeland while political elites fought among themselves and often acted against the nation’s interests for personal or partisan gain.

In present-day affairs, too, the IRGC presents itself as Iran’s only reliable protector—the force that defeated the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, and prevented foreigners and their “subversive agents” from penetrating and sabotaging the country. It boasts of its technological expertise: Rouhani’s government tried and failed four times to launch a small earth-imaging satellite, while the IRGC sent a military satellite into orbit on its first attempt. Even in philanthropy, the IRGC touts its role as the country’s savior. During the pandemic, it claimed to have distributed aid and food packages to 3.5 million underserved Iranian families. Its “jihadi camps” engage in community-building activities to help the underprivileged. Independent civil society organizations question the depth and impact of these interventions—but none has as effective a media operation as the IRGC.

Such humanitarian rebranding does not blot out the IRGC’s reputation as the agent of violent repression. Liberal-minded, middle-class citizens in Tehran still remember its show of force during the 2009 Green Movement protests, and the IRGC’s crackdown on last year’s demonstrations had fatal consequences for poor and lower-class Iranians elsewhere. Pace Machiavelli, the IRGC seems to wish to inspire fear and win love at the same time.

Barring either, it will settle for habituating economic and cultural elites to its presence and getting them comfortable with being co-opted. The IRGC’s economic role can be overstated, but the opacity of the country’s business sector makes the facts difficult to ascertain. A recent study has documented that up until 2014, the IRGC and other parastate organizations had no single majority ownership in any of the top 22 economic sectors of Iran. But there is no straight relationship between ownership and control in Iran’s economic system. Companies owned by Iran’s secular bourgeoisie sometimes recruit board members and directors affiliated with the IRGC in order to facilitate business maneuvers. The IRGC also sometimes establishes comprador companies in order to

operate under a private-sector disguise. By these and other means, the IRGC has become an indispensable employer and one of the country's biggest general contractors in construction projects. But it lacks the human resources and expertise to run multimillion-dollar businesses in the communications, banking, shipbuilding, and petrochemical industries. Thus, a significant portion of Iran's secular bourgeoisie works either directly or as subcontractors for the military organization.

Only a decade ago, cultural elites considered working on projects that the IRGC commissioned or funded to be taboo. Now, that is no longer the case. For instance, Masoud Kimiai, a renowned filmmaker whose movies from before the revolution have maintained cult status, recently worked with a producer affiliated with the IRGC. The director Mohammad Hossein Mahdavian—a staunch supporter of Rouhani—has made award-winning documentaries and blockbuster feature films backed by the IRGC.

ELUSIVE RESPECT

The IRGC has many advantages in the contest for power in the Islamic Republic, but it is hardly an unstoppable monolith. Despite the large economic stake that the IRGC now holds, Iran's executive branch still governs the economy in all critical domains. The government makes fiscal and monetary policy, controls oil and gas resources, and runs the country's treasury. The government also dominates social welfare and humanitarian aid, on which the IRGC increasingly relies to build its own networks of patronage.

Moreover, the IRGC is internally far more fragmented and less disciplined than is commonly presumed. Tensions have been present from the beginning, when conflicts arose between high-ranking commanders during the Iran-Iraq War. Disenchanted officers who left the IRGC during the 1980s became prominent advocates for political reform. Some left the corps during one rift in the early 1990s; others left in the early 2000s.

Today, scholars have documented generation gaps within the IRGC, and the young generation is even divided within itself. The IRGC's prolific media reflect these differences. Its Owj Arts and Media Organization, for example, has recently stopped casting the antagonists in its films as ugly, caricatured enemies of the regime. The characters are instead complex—even relatable. At the same time, another IRGC media branch produced a television show called *Gando*, which justified the arrest of the *Washington Post* correspondent Jason Rezaian

and told the story in typically black-and-white terms. The tensions between these two young IRGC media groups sometimes reach the public. In February, the second group harshly criticized the way Owj makes movies, accusing it of “wasting the regime’s own money and resources to hurt the regime.”

When it comes to persuading the public, neither the helping hand nor the brutal fist has fully brought the IRGC the respect it desires. The U.S. assassination of Major General Qasem Soleimani in January produced a brief moment of solidarity as outraged Iranians blacked out their profile pictures on social media in protest and mourning. Days later, however, the IRGC struck down a Ukrainian passenger plane, and the same people kept their profile pictures black to express a different outrage. Kimiai threatened to withdraw his film from the country’s premier festival, and national television censored Mahdavian’s speech at the festival’s closing ceremony because he publicly sympathized with the fathers of protesters killed during the 2019 unrest.

The IRGC continues to threaten opponents and quash dissent, but fear does not always carry the day. In April, amid pomp and circumstance, the commander in chief of the IRGC claimed that the group had invented a device that could detect the novel coronavirus from 328 feet away. A spontaneous wave of ridicule washed across media platforms. The Physics Society of Iran, a strictly scientific and highly conservative association that has never before made any political statement, called the claim “a science fiction story.”

IDEOLOGY ISN’T GOVERNANCE

At the moment, the IRGC’s greatest political strength may be the weakness of its opponents. Rouhani won elections in 2013 and 2017 on the promise of restoring hope to the Iranian people. He now finishes his term amid widespread, paralytic despair. Nationwide protests erupted in 2018 and 2019, and the IRGC crushed them. Rouhani’s government—a coalition of moderate conservatives, mediocre reformist bureaucrats, and laissez-faire technocrats with wavering political allegiances—either actively helped the security forces or passively looked on. The administration now lacks the credibility to mobilize its social base against the IRGC at the ballot box or in the streets.

Whether the IRGC really wishes to run the government, however, is a more complicated question. The political and economic resources the government holds are surely tempting. But experience has shown

that whoever takes over the executive branch, regardless of political affiliation, is likely to become a thorn in the IRGC's side—even former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who came in with the organization's full backing, soon enough went rogue. The history of the Islamic Republic has repeatedly demonstrated that those who assume executive and administrative roles become invested in promoting normalization, even at the expense of revolutionary enthusiasm. The latter, however, is the IRGC's stock in trade.

As a parastatal organization, the IRGC can enjoy the best of both worlds, keeping its distance from the quotidian business of governance and interfering only when it so desires. If the organization instead ran the daily affairs of the country, it would be forced to make constant adjustments and compromises that could damage its revolutionary reputation. For example, after Soleimani was killed, some IRGC fighters called for “harsh revenge”—but the promised catharsis never came. IRGC commanders have not borne the brunt of the fighters' anger because they could instead redirect it toward “coward politicians.”

Standing outside of government, IRGC commanders have found many occasions for photo ops: they empathize with workers striking for unpaid wages, participate in rescue and relief efforts after floods and earthquakes, and console retirees who blame the government for losing their savings (although in fact it was the financial institutions linked to the IRGC that stole their money). The government has a duty to serve, but the IRGC can present its service as a favor. To take over the executive branch would be to trade occasional courtesy for perpetual responsibility.

Iran's upcoming presidential election is widely expected to herald the return of hard-liners to power. The reformists have lost most of their social capital and their standing. But 2021 will not mark the end of politics in Iran. On the contrary, it will only add a new chapter to an open-ended book. The conflict among Iran's political elites has existed since the founding of the Islamic Republic and will continue to produce opportunities for change—change even of a kind and in a manner that may appeal to neither the opposition nor the ruling elites. The IRGC may crave control, but it may not be pleased with the result. 🌐

The World Is Becoming More Equal

Even as Globalization Hurts Middle-Class Westerners

Branko Milanovic

AUGUST 28, 2020

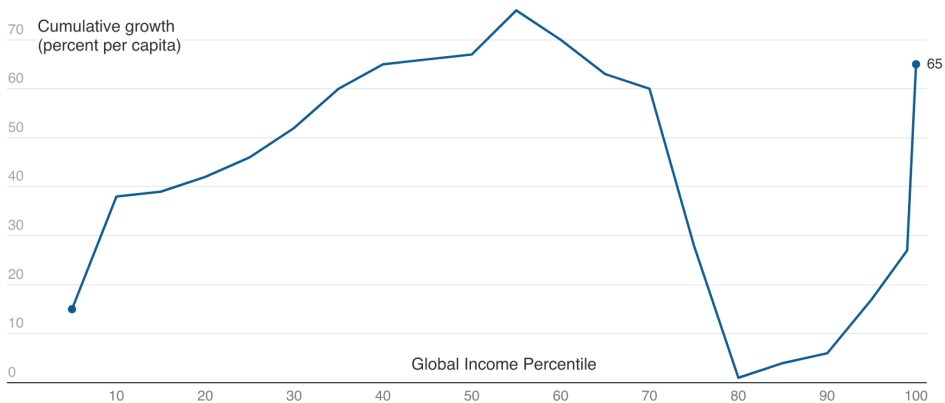
Opponents of economic globalization often point to the ways it has widened inequality within nations in recent decades. In the United States, for instance, wages have remained fairly stagnant since 1980 while the wealthiest Americans have taken home an ever greater share of income. But globalization has had another important effect: it has reduced overall global inequality. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty in recent decades. The world became more equal between the end of the Cold War and the 2008 global financial crisis—a period often referred to as “high globalization.”

The economist Christoph Lakner and I distilled this trend in a diagram released in 2013. The diagram showed per capita income growth rates between 1988 and 2008 across the global distribution of income. (The horizontal axis has the poorest people on the left and the richest on the right.) The graph attracted a lot of attention because it summarized the basic features of recent decades of globalization, and it earned the moniker “the elephant graph” because its shape looked like that of an elephant with a raised trunk.

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People in the middle of the global income distribution, whose incomes grew substantially (more than doubling or tripling in many cases), overwhelmingly lived in Asia, many of them in China. People farther to the right, who were richer than the Asians but experienced much lower income growth rates, mainly lived in the advanced economies of Japan, the United States, and the countries of western Europe. Finally, people at the far right end of the graph, the richest one percent (mostly composed of citizens of industrialized countries), enjoyed high income growth rates much like those in the middle of the global income distribution.

Rates of income growth between 1988 and 2008 across global income distribution



The results highlighted two important cleavages: one between middle-class Asians and middle-class Westerners and one between middle-class Westerners and their richer compatriots. In both comparisons, the Western middle class was on the losing end. Middle-class Westerners saw less income growth than (comparatively poorer) Asians, providing further evidence of one of the defining dynamics of globalization: in the last 40 years, many jobs in Europe and North America were either outsourced to Asia or eliminated as a result of competition with Chinese industries. This was the first tension of globalization: Asian growth seems to take place on the backs of the Western middle class.

Another chasm opened between middle-class Westerners and their wealthy compatriots. Here, too, the middle class lost ground. It seemed that the wealthiest people in rich countries and almost everybody in Asia

benefited from globalization, while only the middle class of the rich world lost out in relative terms. These facts supported the notion that the rise of “populist” political parties and leaders in the West stemmed from middle-class disenchantment. Our graph became emblematic not only of the economic effects of globalization but also of its political consequences.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS, OLD TRENDS

In a new paper, I return to this question and ask whether the same or similar developments continued between 2008 and 2013–14, the years for which the latest global data from the World Bank, the Luxembourg Income Study, and other sources are available. They are more refined data than what we could access in the past. They include more than 130 countries with detailed household-level information on incomes. The results in the graph below indeed show the continuation of what I called the first tension of globalization: the income growth of the non-Western middle class far exceeds that of the Western middle class. In fact, the growth gap between the two groups has actually increased. For example, U.S. median income in 2013 was a mere four percent higher than in 2008; meanwhile, Chinese and Vietnamese median incomes more than doubled, while Thailand’s median income increased by 85 percent and India’s by 60 percent. This disparity shows how the global financial crisis, especially the initial shock that is revealed in this data, hit the West much more severely than it did Asia.

But the second tension—the growing gap between the elites and the middle classes in Western countries—is much less noticeable in this more recent period. The financial crisis reduced the growth rate of the incomes (and in some cases shrank the incomes) of the rich in Western countries who make up the bulk of the world’s top one percent. This slowdown is reflected also in the fact that income inequality within many rich countries did not increase. But if the recession interrupted the income growth of the rich, it may not have done so for long. More recent detailed global data are not yet available, but some preliminary estimates indicate that in the years following our period of study, the top one percent resumed its earlier growth pattern.

With the exception of the post-2008 slowdown in income growth among the rich, globalization in this new period continued to produce many of the same results as before, including reducing global inequality. As measured by the Gini coefficient, which ranges from zero (a hypothetical situation in which every person has the same income) to

Rates of income growth between 2008 and 2013-2014 across global income distribution



one (a hypothetical situation in which one person receives all income), global inequality fell from 0.70 in 1988 to 0.67 in 2008 and then further to 0.62 in 2013. There has probably never been an individual country with a Gini coefficient as high as 0.70, while a Gini coefficient of around 0.62 is akin to the inequality levels that are found today in Honduras, Namibia, and South Africa. (Loosely speaking, South Africa represents the best proxy for the inequality of the entire world.)

But if global inequality continued to trend downward during the new period of study, the data reveal that it did so for a new set of reasons. China, from the beginning of its market reforms in the late 1970s, has played an enormous role in lowering global inequality. The economic growth of its population of 1.4 billion people has reshaped the distribution of wealth around the world. But now China has become sufficiently wealthy that its continued growth no longer plays such an important role in lowering global inequality. In 2008, the median Chinese income was just slightly higher than the world's median income; five years later, China's median income was 50 percent higher than the world's—and it is probably even higher now. High growth in China, in global terms, is ceasing to be an equalizing force. Soon, it will contribute to rising global inequality. But India, with a population that may soon surpass China's and is still relatively poor, now plays an important role in making the world more equal. In the last 20 years, China and India have driven the reduction in global inequality. From now on, only Indian growth will perform that same function. Africa, which

boasts the world's highest rates of population growth, will become increasingly important. But if the largest African countries continue to trail behind the Asian giants, global inequality will rise.

INEQUALITY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has so far not disrupted these trends and in fact might lead to their intensification. The remarkable deceleration of global growth resulting from the novel coronavirus will not be uniform. Chinese economic growth, while much lower now than in any year since the 1980s, will still outpace economic growth in the West. This will accelerate the closing of the income gap between Asia and the Western world. If China's growth continues to exceed Western countries' growth by two to three percentage points annually, within the next decade many middle-class Chinese will become wealthier than their middle-class counterparts in the West. For the first time in two centuries, Westerners with middling incomes within their own nations will no longer be part of the global elite—that is, in the top quintile (20 percent) of global incomes. This will be a truly remarkable development. From the 1820s onward—when national economic data of this kind were first collected—the West has consistently been wealthier than any other part of the world. By the middle of the nineteenth century, even members of the working class in the West were well-off in global terms. That period is now coming to an end.

The United States remains a much richer country than China. In 2013, the gap between the median income of an American and a Chinese person was 4.7 to 1 (and 3.4 to 1 when set against the median income of an urban Chinese resident). That gap has shrunk a little since 2013 and will further diminish in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, but it will take some time to narrow. If China continues to outperform the United States by about two to three percentage points of per capita income growth every year, the average income gap between the two countries will still take about two generations to close.

In the long term, the most optimistic scenario would see continued high growth rates in Asia and an acceleration of economic growth in Africa, coupled with a narrowing of income differences within rich and poor countries alike through more activist social policies (higher taxes on the rich, better public education, and greater equality of opportunity). Some economists, from Adam Smith onward, hoped that this rosy scenario of growing global equality would follow from the even

spread of technological progress around the globe and the increasingly rational implementation of domestic policies.

Unfortunately, much gloomier forecasts seem more plausible. The trade and technology war between China and the United States, while perhaps understandable from a narrow U.S. strategic point of view, is fundamentally pernicious from the global point of view. It will prevent the spread of technology and hamper improvements in living standards across large swaths of the world. Slowing growth will make it harder to eradicate poverty and likely preserve current levels of global inequality. In other words, something like the opposite of the initial dynamic of globalization might come to be: the gap between American and Chinese middle classes may be preserved, but at the cost of the slower (or negative) income growth in both the United States and China. Improvements in real income would be sacrificed in order to freeze the pecking order of the global income distribution. The net real income gain for all concerned would be zero. 🌐

Fighting a Pandemic Requires Trust

Governments Have to Earn It

*Thomas J. Bollyky, Sawyer Crosby, and
Samantha Kiernan*

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“**G**overnment exists to protect us from each other,” U.S. President Ronald Reagan once famously said, but goes “beyond its limits . . . in deciding to protect us from ourselves.”

When applied to pandemic threats, Reagan’s view was wrong, and so are the views of the many policymakers in the United States and abroad who have adopted it. Confronted with a novel, contagious virus, for which there is no effective treatment and against which people have no preexisting immunity, the only way for government to effectively protect citizens from one another is by convincing them to take the necessary measures to protect themselves. Especially in free societies, the success of that effort depends on the trust between the government and its people.

Some national leaders have failed to appreciate the importance of having a government that citizens trust and listen to. That failure has contributed to vast differences in countries’ performances in this pan-

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demic and threatens to make everyone less safe when the next pandemic threat emerges, as it inevitably will.

A CHAIN OF TRUST

Effective treatments for infectious diseases are a recent development in human history. The widespread availability of antibiotics and the development of most vaccines came only after World War II. The tactics prevalent in today's effort to stifle the novel coronavirus, however, are anything but new: protective masks, quarantines, isolation, and social distancing emerged in response to the Black Death pandemic in the fourteenth century. Contact tracing originated over a hundred years ago as a tool for tracking the spread of syphilis among sex workers and their patrons.

Historians such as Mark Harrison have argued that the need to coordinate and enforce measures such as quarantines, isolation, and social distancing created the conditions from which the modern state and the machinery of government emerged. For this purpose, Italian city-states created the first boards of health and developed detailed public health protocols. A regular naval presence enforced quarantines. Governments throughout northwestern Europe later imitated Italy's approach.

Otherwise predatory elites were compelled to assume greater responsibility for their constituents' lives and collective well-being in order to protect themselves and their workforces. But the reverse was also true: the fight against infectious diseases deepened people's relationship with their government. Measures such as quarantines and social distancing must be deployed quickly and consistently to be effective. Only government can accomplish that, and only if constituents trust and fund it to do so.

Trust enters the chain at every link. Ailing individuals must report their symptoms to health-care workers, identify those with whom they have come into contact, and submit to isolation and treatment. Their potentially infected contacts must abide by quarantine. For this process to work, the public has to trust the government to communicate reliable information about its investigation of the outbreak; the public then must accept the advice and mandates of government officials on measures that will prevent further spread. The promise of reliable information and competent, supportive medical care is what convinces those who are suffering symptoms to come forward so that new cases can be identified, tracked, and treated.

BREAKDOWN AND VIRAL SPREAD

One need not go back to medieval times to find examples of past breakdowns in government trust that helped infections spread. Conspiracy theories and raging resentment of government mandates thwarted efforts to control the Ebola virus in the early months of the epidemic in West Africa in 2014.

Residents of virus-ravaged communities opposed school closures and curfews. They resented the searching inquiries about their contacts and whereabouts, the orders to forgo physical contact and caring for infected loved ones at home, and the instructions to stop their customary practice of washing the dead before burial. With no cure in sight, some opted for poisonous miracle remedies that witch doctors and local leaders promoted.

In part because of low compliance with public health mandates, the epidemic spiraled out of control, killing in three years more than five times the number of people who had died from Ebola in the 28 previous outbreaks since the virus was first identified in 1976. And compliance is related to trust: surveys in Liberia during the 2014 epidemic and after a subsequent outbreak in Congo showed that those who trusted their government were likelier to keep social distance and accept the Ebola vaccines that the government identified as helpful.

The post-conflict, impoverished countries most affected in recent Ebola epidemics may seem exceptional, but the lesson their experience offers is not. In the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, surveys in Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland also found that trust in government was associated with more widespread adoption of recommended behaviors, such as handwashing, social distancing, and vaccination. The same was true in Hong Kong during the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic.

Government trust assumes an outsize role when the threat is new to a population that does not perceive itself as vulnerable. People in Asian countries that had directly experienced SARS in 2003 reported feeling much more vulnerable to another outbreak in a 2009 survey than did respondents in unaffected European nations. In settings without that prior experience, people are likely to adopt protective behavior, such as wearing facemasks or social distancing, only when public health officials and government leaders have increased their awareness of the risk, as well as of the need and efficacy of such precautionary measures. Governments must earn and maintain public trust for these efforts to succeed.

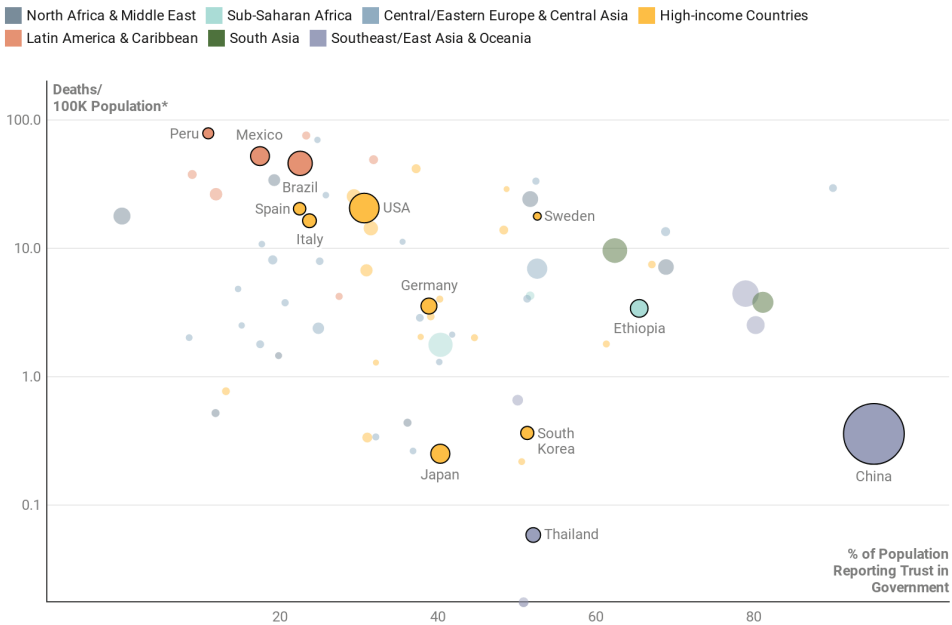
Accordingly, trust in government has played a significant role in determining how different countries have performed in containing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in those countries that had not recently experienced deadly outbreaks of other coronaviruses or emerging infections. Better appreciating the role of government trust can help countries prepare for and respond to not only the current pandemic but also those still to come.

THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

News media and commentators have nominated a host of different governmental and societal characteristics to explain why some countries have been so much more successful than others in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic. Women leaders, a lack of populism, more equal economies, and universal health coverage may all be desirable, but there is no empirical evidence that any of these factors has increased the odds of containing this deadly new virus. Nine out of the ten nations with the highest number of cumulative reported cases of the coronavirus are democracies, but so are many of the countries that acted quickly to contain the pandemic,

Countries Without Government Trust Have Performed Poorly

A comparison of government trust and cumulative COVID-19 death rates



*Cumulative age-standardized deaths per 100,000, 150 days after first death
 Chart: Foreign Affairs Magazine

such as New Zealand, South Korea, and Uruguay. Autocracies, which include Iran, Russia, and Venezuela, have done little better in this crisis.

Recent commentators have tut-tutted the breakdown of social trust—meaning trust between people—citing it as a major reason that the coronavirus runs amok in the United States. But a leading survey ranks Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States in the top 20 percent of nations on interpersonal trust, better than Japan and many of the other success stories in this pandemic.

So far, the experts have not fared much better than the pundits. There has been no correlation between the leading measures of pandemic preparedness—the World Health Organization’s Joint External Evaluation and Global Health Security (GHS) Index—and performance in the pandemic (see Figure 1). Some of the nations that fared best by these metrics, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, have had higher death rates than those that ranked poorly, even accounting for differences in population age structure and size, as well as the timing of their first reported fatality.

A single geographic, demographic, or societal factor is unlikely to explain the successes of Canada, New Zealand, Norway, Rwanda, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam in mounting robust, rapid responses to the pandemic. One feature that many, but not all, of these earliest responding nations shared was direct experience with previous outbreaks, such as SARS or Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), or a high level of endemic infectious disease.

But if no one factor explains the success stories, there is a factor that is clearly associated with nearly all the countries that have suffered the most deaths, even accounting for differences in population age structure and size and the timing of the pandemic: low government trust, as defined by the World Values Survey (see Figure 2). A recent 23-country study, currently under peer review, accords with this conclusion, finding that those in countries with higher trust in government were significantly likelier to wash their hands, avoid crowded places, and make personal sacrifices to stop the spread of the virus. A smaller survey focused on the United Kingdom yielded similar results.

AN HONEST APPRAISAL OF RISK

Fortunately, trust is something that governments can earn in a crisis. A public that trusts its government is likelier to accept that the risks the government identifies are real and to follow its guidance; the

government builds and maintains that trust by issuing advice and assessing risk in a manner that is timely, honest, and based on science. Such a positive feedback loop is essential for sustaining people’s compliance with public health measures.

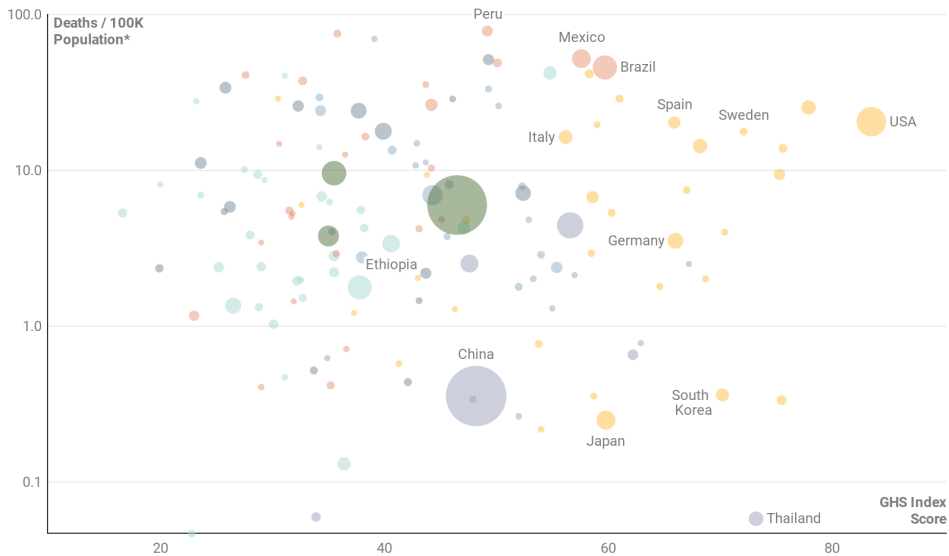
“It is not only the ‘what’ that matters” in risk communication, as the global health experts Heidi Larson and David Heymann once wrote, “but ‘who’ is conveying the information or concerns and ‘how’ it is communicated.”

To bring the Ebola epidemic in West Africa under control required governments and their supporters to painstakingly build public trust in the response to the virus. In Liberia, the government showcased Ebola survivors to communities to demonstrate the role that treatment units played in saving lives. Anthropologists helped the World Health Organization work with local people to find safe burial practices that still incorporated their traditions. Local officials and nongovernmental organizations trained youth leaders, pastors, and imams to conduct daily door-to-door surveillance and identify the sick. The Ebola vaccine trials in Sierra Leone during and after the outbreak included local liaison teams.

Pandemic Preparedness Has Not Matched Pandemic Performance

A comparison of Global Health Security (GHS) index scores and cumulative COVID-19 death rates.

■ North Africa & Middle East ■ Sub-Saharan Africa ■ Central/Eastern Europe & Central Asia ■ High-income Countries
■ Latin America & Caribbean ■ South Asia ■ Southeast/East Asia & Oceania



*Cumulative age-standardized deaths per 100,000, 150 days after first death
Chart: Foreign Affairs Magazine

For some time, the United States—much like Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—has also suffered from low government trust. After the Vietnam War and the resignation of President Richard Nixon, Americans' trust in government precipitously declined. It fell further still after the 2008 financial crisis. Today, fewer than one out of five Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right. Among Black Americans, that figure is closer to one out of ten.

Research shows that in a pandemic, governments maintain the public's trust by providing complete information, even when data are limited, and by never downplaying real risk in order to reduce public fear. Past surveys had found that the most trusted sources of information in a health crisis were Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) officials, followed by state and local public health officials, with elected officials typically less trusted. Accordingly, the inaugural U.S. National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza Implementation Plan, first issued in 2006, admonished that “the need for timely, accurate, credible, and consistent information that is tailored to specific audiences cannot be overstated.”

But U.S. officials—President Donald Trump, in particular—have taken the opposite course. Despite understanding that the coronavirus was “deadly stuff” and “the roughest thing” in early February, Trump told the public that it was comparable to the flu, “under control,” and “going to disappear.” The White House kept the CDC from briefing the public, took away its responsibilities related to data, and watered down its recommendations.

The president chose politics over promoting trust in public health measures in this crisis, going so far as to share a tweet that read, “Everyone is lying. The CDC, Media, Democrats, our Doctors, not all but most, that we are told to trust.” The results—eight million Americans infected and 220,000 dead—sadly, speak for themselves. 🌐