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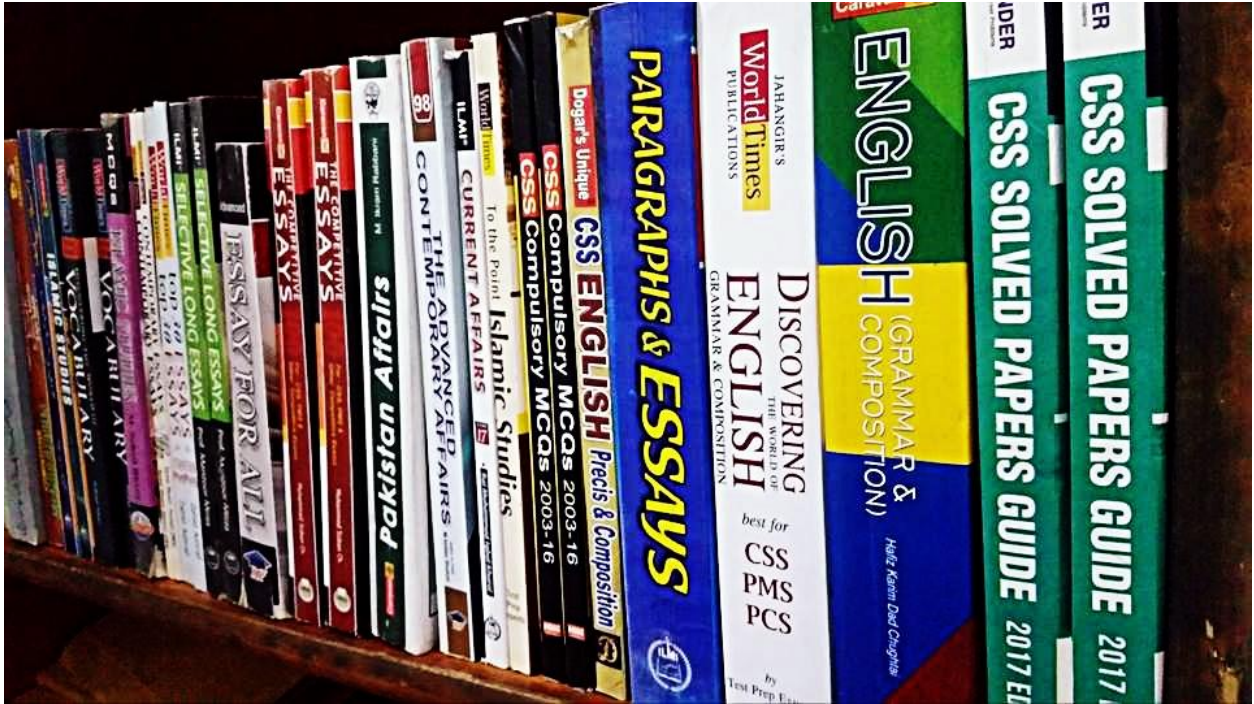
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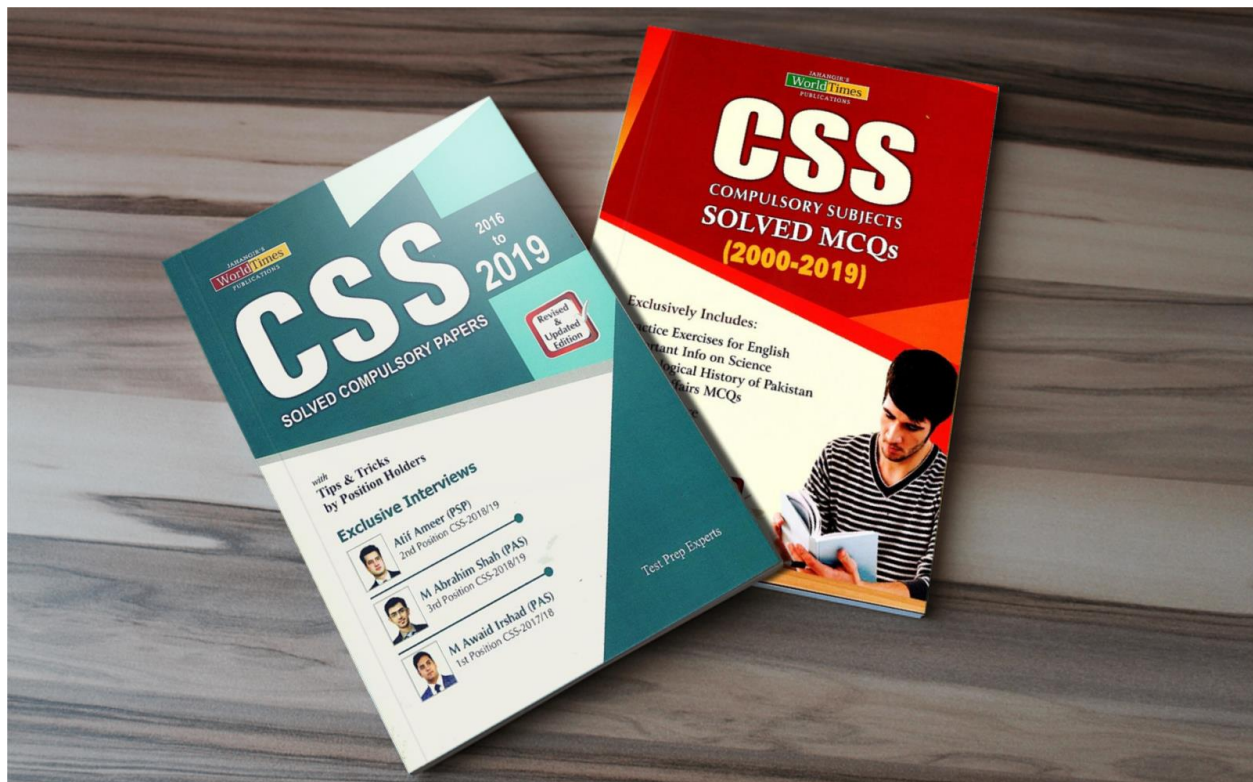
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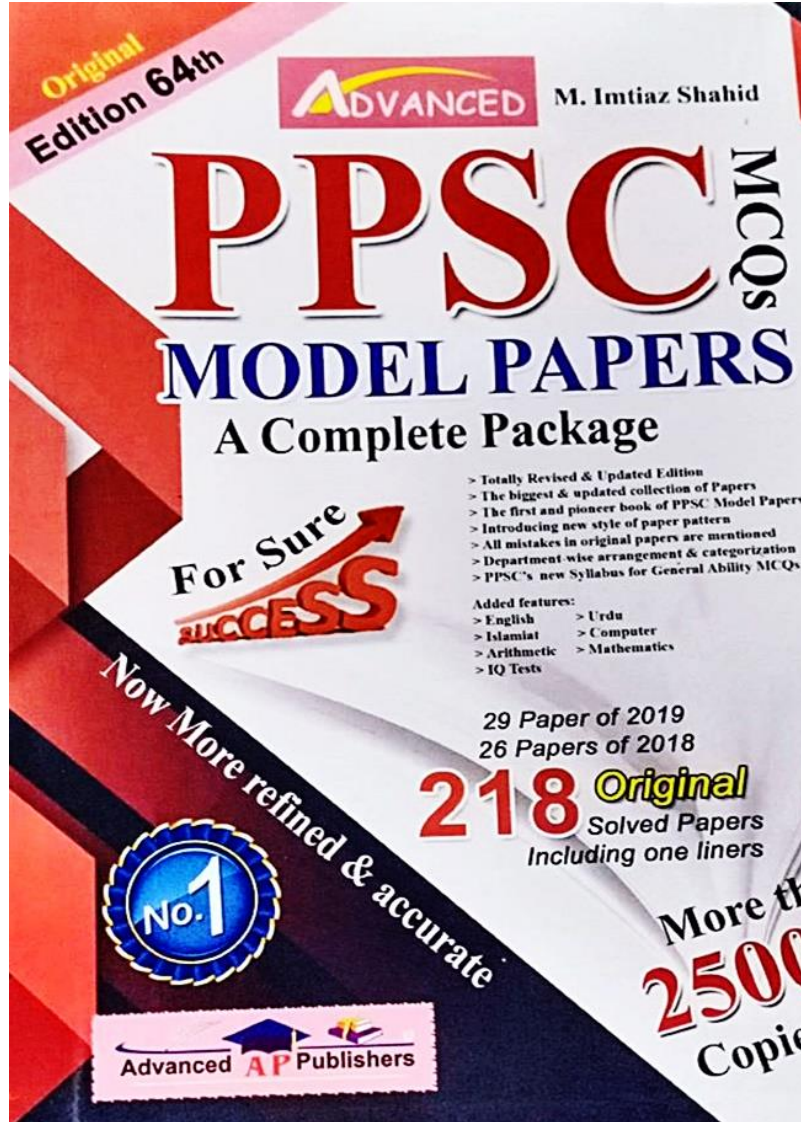
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## In focus: The Paris Peace Forum as a space for solutions, debates and innovations

Körber-Stiftung is a founding member of the Paris Peace Forum, an annual platform to promote global governance. At the second meeting, held from 11–13 November 2019, Körber-Stiftung partnered with Foreign Policy to bring the PeaceGame series to Paris. In three simulations, 75 participants discussed potential solutions to a hypothetical yet plausible climate, migration and security crisis in the Middle East and North Africa in 2030.

## Participant voices and key takeaways:

- › “We all know what is going to happen but we still did not come up with a solution. That is an interesting but shocking thing to realise.” – The climate crisis is already underway, but we lack ideas on how to tackle it. Creative formats and approaches in order to develop new solutions are urgently needed.
- › “Sustainable solutions require that local actors are involved.” – Many participants stressed the importance of listening to and cooperating with (non-state) actors on the ground.
- › “We all went for the private sector.” – Throughout the PeaceGames, participants emphasised the critical yet largely untapped potential of the private sector to tackle climate change.
- › “You cannot de-politicise climate change and migration.” – Many participants agreed that technical solutions are key, but that the international community also needs to examine and respond to the power politics in the affected regions.

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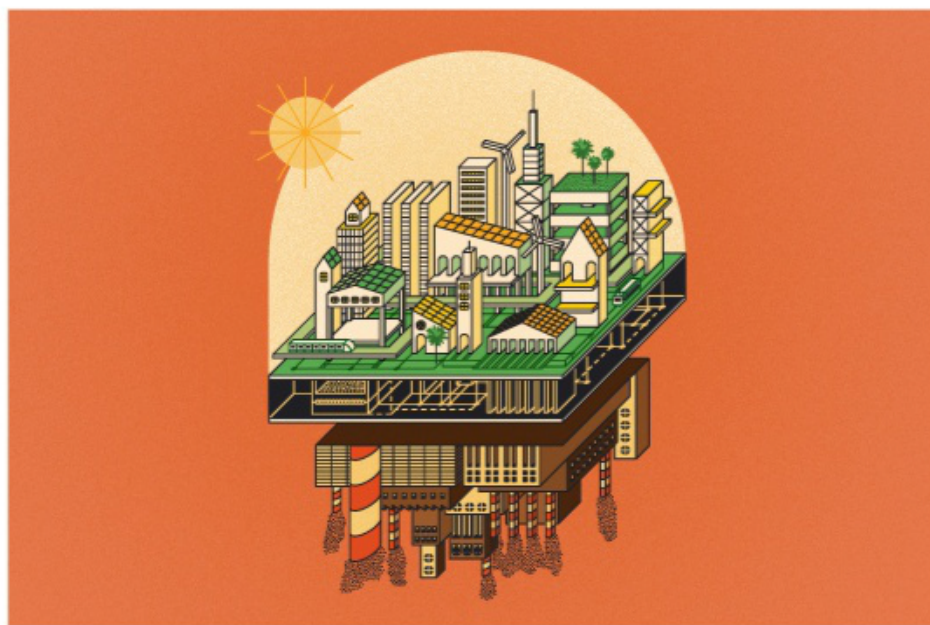
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**Sheri Berman** is a professor of political science at Barnard College, researching European history and politics, the development of democracy, and the history of the left. Her latest book is *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancien Régime to the Present Day*.



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insights

## Puncturing the Myth of Putin's Genius

Moscow is losing ground in the Middle East, Africa, and its own backyard. *By Rajan Menon*



**IN THE WEST, LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES ALIKE** seem to agree that Russia has reemerged as a great power with a global reach. And in Russia itself, well-known foreign-policy experts assert that the West had best get used to their country's resurgence.

But such appraisals, some of which tend toward alarmism, don't hold up under the bright light of evidence. For one, Russia's GDP is just a little larger than Spain's—a country with a population less than a third of Russia's. And Russia's military budget is less than a 10th of the United States', about a fifth of China's, and smaller than Japan's.

Furthermore, Russia's foreign-policy successes have been overblown. Consider Syria. According to the standard narrative, in 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin took advantage of then-U.S. President Barack Obama's vacillation on Syria to intervene militarily, which gave him the upper hand in the ensuing conflict.

In truth, Putin's moves had little to do with Obama. Syria has been Moscow's strategic partner since 1956. Soviet-bloc arms sales started that year, as did the training of Syrian soldiers and pilots in Soviet-allied Czechoslovakia and Poland. Syria also made its first request for a deployment of Soviet bombers and fighter planes—which the Kremlin turned down—that same year, in the wake of the Suez crisis and as a counter to Israel and Turkey. In the ensuing Cold War decades, the Soviet Union became Syria's primary source for economic aid and weaponry. In 1971, Soviet warships and submarines started using Syria's deep-water port at Tartus. And in 1980, Damascus and Moscow signed a treaty that contained provisions for strategic cooperation.

Seen against this background, Putin's gambit in Syria had more to do with safeguarding a long-standing strategic investment that appeared imperiled than with outmaneuvering the United States. As he saw it, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's fall would have resulted in either prolonged chaos or victory for radical Islamist groups, the strongest of Assad's armed adversaries. Either outcome would have been a blow for Russia.

Even so, Russian air power alone couldn't have enabled Assad to retake most of Syria; only ground forces can really conquer territory. And although Russian contract troops have fought—and died, some on account of U.S. airstrikes—in Syria, the foreign boots on the ground were provided mainly by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp and Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon.

Iran and Hezbollah's decision to fight in Syria didn't result from a Russian-designed division of labor; they backed Assad for reasons of their own. Their vision for Syria's future doesn't by any means mirror Russia's. Nor, having shed so



## DEBUNKER

CONVENTIONAL  
WISDOM,  
UPENDED

much blood, will they let Russia shape Syria's politics singlehandedly.

In other words, Russia hasn't really won Syria. And in any event, it wouldn't be much of a prize. The price for rebuilding the country, much of which has been reduced to rubble, has been estimated at \$250 billion—four times Syria's 2010 GDP, according to the World Bank. That sum is way beyond what Russia can afford. As for future lucrative Russian arms sales to Syria, well, there's the minor matter of how Assad will pay for them.

Russia's gains in the rest of the Middle East have also been overblown. Moscow has, of course, been active in the conflict in Libya. But bringing order to, let alone achieving predominant influence in, a war-torn country featuring two rival governments, an ambitious military strongman named Khalifa Haftar, and a constellation of armed militias



Russian troops raise a flag while on patrol in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province on Nov. 1, 2019.



will prove a Sisyphean undertaking. Already, one of Libya's governments has condemned Russia's use of mercenaries there. Besides, Russia is just one of several states seeking clout there, and some (Haftar's prime backers, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for example) are nearer and have a bigger stake in Libya's trajectory.

Russia's diplomatic nimbleness in Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia has drawn much attention, and Putin has certainly played his cards well. When push comes to shove, though, all of these countries will continue to depend on, and be far more closely tied to, the United States. None would trade the American connection, despite its imperfections, for the Russian option.

In Africa, the story isn't much better for Russia. Of course, Putin did host a much-ballyhooed summit of 43 African heads of state in Sochi in late

October. It's impressive that so many leaders turned up. But it's not clear what the conclave will yield for Moscow beyond symbolism. Russia has a steep climb if it wants to become a major player in Africa, where, in terms of trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), its presence is overshadowed by the United States, Europe, China, Turkey, and India.

It is true that Moscow has made some gains on the continent lately, especially in trade. African imports from the United States, for example, increased by only 7 percent between 2006 and 2016, while exports fell by 66 percent. For Russia, they increased by 142 percent and 168 percent, respectively. But that rise comes on top of a pitifully small base line. For sub-Saharan Africa, trade totaled about \$3 billion in 2017, compared with about \$55 billion for China. As for Russian FDI in Africa, Moscow doesn't even place in the top 10.

Russia does a little better when it comes to arms sales. In North Africa, it is the largest supplier for Algeria, although its market share fell from 90 percent in 2009-2013 to 66 percent in 2014-2018. Yet Morocco, the region's other main arms buyer, looks to the United States and France for 98 percent of its needs. Russia fulfilled 28 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's military purchases in 2014-2018 and 35 percent of arms exports to Nigeria, the region's largest importer.

Even in its own backyard, Russia has come up short. For example, Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and backing

of insurgents in Ukraine's east have turned the country—for Moscow, by far historically the most strategically and culturally important of the post-Soviet states—into a sworn enemy. For now, Kyiv will be aligned with the West even if its dream of NATO membership proves elusive. Moreover, while contemporary Ukrainian nationalism has many facets, one is anti-Russian sentiment.

Developments in Central Asia also reveal the superficiality of painting Putin's Russia as a country marching from one victory to another. In that part of the world, which was once part of imperial Russia and later the Soviet Union, China has eroded, if not displaced, Russia's historic preponderance. The change is especially notable in the economic realm, where China has become the region's principal trade partner and source of investment. One sign of the transformation: The bulk of Central Asia's oil and gas now flows eastward to China rather than northward to Russia—and in Chinese-built pipelines.

Of course, Russia still matters. A country with 144 million people, thousands of nuclear warheads, a million active troops, vast oil and gas reserves, and a U.N. Security Council seat will always matter, and observers shouldn't be surprised when it vigorously pursues its interests abroad and in ways that challenge the West.

That said, Moscow's strategic acumen and tangible gains aren't nearly as dazzling as the consensus suggests. Understanding that requires a clear-eyed look at both sides of the ledger. ■

**Russia hasn't really won Syria. And in any event, it wouldn't be much of a prize.**

**RAJAN MENON** is the Anne and Bernard Spitzer professor of international relations at the City College of New York/City University of New York and the author of *The Conceit of Humanitarian Intervention*.



## Is Liberal Democracy Always the Answer? Guinea-Bissau challenges the imposition of Western forms of government. *By Ricci Shryock*

**AFTER A LONG DAY OF CAMPAIGNING FOR PRESIDENT** in rural Guinea-Bissau in November 2019, Domingos Simões Pereira sat down for a late dinner.

Various leaders of his African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, known by the Portuguese acronym PAIGC, joined him around the table. A couple of them fought during the country's 11-year war of independence against Portugal—which was waged in rural, isolated areas throughout the West African country and ended in 1974.

Pereira gestured to the Cacheu River, invisible in the darkness but just a few yards away. As a young boy during the war, Pereira watched artillery explode over the Cacheu; it seemed like fireworks to an 8-year-old, he recalled. Now he looked out at the same river as the potential next president of an independent Guinea-Bissau.

Pereira and other leaders have argued that after independence, in the rush to implement a democratic constitution and unify dozens of ethnic groups under one national identity, local governing practices were not incorporated into the new system. As a result, the country faces a political dilemma: How do you forge a new national identity that unites people without also acknowledging what divides them?

**GUINEA-BISSAU HAS ENDURED 10 COUPS** in its 45 years of independence. That instability, and the country's 88 barely patrolled Atlantic islands, has helped make it an ideal transit point for drugs on their way from South America to Europe and turned it into Africa's first narco-state. Last year, authorities conducted the country's biggest-ever drug bust, seizing more than 1.8 tons of cocaine on the coast. Guinea-Bissau also ranks among the bottom 15 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index. (The mortality rate for children under the age of 5 is 84 per 1,000—more than double the global average of 39.)



### PROFILE

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2019 marked the first time in the country's independent history that a democratically elected president, José Mário Vaz, peacefully finished a term. But Vaz, who was elected in 2014, hardly presided over a stable government. In August 2015, Vaz fired Pereira from the prime minister's post, and a political crisis ensued over who would fill the position. Due to the impasse, the country lost a \$1.1 billion pledge made that year by international donors.

Guinea-Bissau's constitution dictates that the ruling party (currently PAIGC) appoints the prime minister





Domingos Simões Pereira campaigns in São Domingos, Guinea-Bissau, on Nov. 9, 2019.

and the president confirms him. When Vaz fired Pereira one year into his term, the PAIGC and Vaz could not agree on a replacement, and the country cycled through seven prime ministers and a paralyzed parliament. Vaz was eliminated in the first round of the presidential election last November, and at the time this issue went to press, Pereira was preparing to compete in a Dec. 29 runoff against Umaro Sissoco Embaló from the Movement for Democratic Alternation, whom Vaz supports.

Given the country's many problems, international donors and scholars have

taken to asking, "What's wrong with Guinea-Bissau?" But some Guinean intellectuals, Pereira among them, have begun asking a more daring question: Is there something wrong with Western models of liberal democracy?

**UNTIL RECENTLY, PEREIRA WAS WRITING** a Ph.D. dissertation in political science at the Catholic University of Portugal on this very question: "Are liberal democracies with Western values applicable to sub-Saharan Africa?" (He put the thesis on hold while he sought to win the election.)

So far, his answer leans toward "yes" but falls somewhere in the gray area. "Liberal democracy is based on Western culture, which has become a worldwide culture, but we have to acknowledge we have some challenges that the Western world is not facing," Pereira told *FOREIGN POLICY*. "The levels of literacy and the level of poverty—you have to find a way to overcome these challenges." But Pereira is also curious about what comes first: economic growth or a healthy democracy?

Questioning democracy does not mean rejecting it, he insists. If leaders dare to ask if an imported model of democracy is the best form of governance, that does not necessarily mean they will favor an autocratic one. In Western parlance, democratic is always a synonym for good, but Pereira wants Guinea-Bissau's residents to take more ownership of their democracy rather than simply adhere to a system hastily put in place at the end of the colonial era. "The thing I most appreciate about this definition of liberal democracy is that it acknowledges that it's not a perfect system," Pereira said. "You should be improving it all the time."

**IN 1973, GUINEA-BISSAU CREATED** its constitution—before independence was formally achieved—based on the Portuguese system. Since then, the constitution has been revised multiple times—most notably introducing a multiparty system in 1991. But the Portuguese-based structure remains. Pereira argues that there are some aspects of the current system that simply do not fit the reality of Guinea-Bissau.



“We have 36,000 square kilometers. We have more than 31 social groups with their own language trying to have their own territory,” he said. Some groups have a more egalitarian hierarchy, in which women, traditional leaders, and others have an equal say at one table. Others have a more top-down approach, in which a chief gives the orders. “If you come from the perspective that every social group will try to influence [the government], then you have to acknowledge that not everyone has the democratic tools they need to do that,” which complicates the process.

For instance, the Balanta ethnic group in Guinea-Bissau makes up about a quarter of the population and “about 95 percent of the army,” Pereira said. “But then you go to government, and they are less than 1 percent, so the army is their way of being close to power.”

Liberal democracies tend to intentionally put distance between the armed forces and civilian governments. While “some social structures in Guinea-Bissau are very happy with that,” Pereira explained, “others will look at that as exclusion.” Of course, if the second largest ethnic group sees the army as its sphere of influence because it is not represented in the government, that can also cause problems. In the most recent coup, in 2012, when the government proposed military reforms, the army intervened, and elections were delayed for two years. Eventually the country held elections, ushering Vaz into office in 2014.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has mandated that Guinea-Bissau seek constitutional reforms that establish “stable relations between the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary” because the current system has led to such chronic dysfunction.

While Pereira acknowledges the need for reforms, he wants to implement policies that reflect the needs of the country—a government built by its citizens

that addresses problems like poverty, illiteracy, rural-urban divides, and the need for decentralization and consideration of traditional and religious leaders—rather than merely regurgitating the priorities and ideals of foreign donors.

One essential element of the reforms proposed by Pereira and his party is the decentralization of development. Pereira hopes to build a “confidence index” system that creates a network of monitors to ensure citizens’ understanding and support of any reforms that are put forward.

Otherwise, he said, it’s too easy for Guineans to reject their government because it will be seen as coming from the outside. If the system of governance evolves to include more input from citizens and leaders, he added, then “if you make a mistake, it’s your mistake. It’s not a mistake of the system.”

After all, more than many countries, Guinea-Bissau excels when it comes to one of the most important indicators of democracy: In the election’s first round, there was a 74 percent voter turnout rate and no documented incidents of fraud. But even if illiteracy and poverty rates remain high, most of the country’s citizens do not have the time or the means to invest in holding the government accountable beyond the single day every few years when they cast their vote.

International donors place such great value on this single democratic act that true participatory government in Guinea-Bissau has been sacrificed for years at the altar of free and fair elections. Voters

## True participatory government in Guinea-Bissau has been sacrificed for years at the altar of free and fair elections.



simply elect a leader who is obliged to adhere to an imported constitution that fails to address the gap in resources and literacy and doesn’t take into account widely varying approaches to political authority and decision-making among the country’s dozens of ethnic groups.

**PEREIRA IS A TRAINED CIVIL ENGINEER** who left Guinea-Bissau just before he turned 19, studying first in the Soviet Union and then in the United States. After finishing his master’s degree in engineering at California State University, Fresno in 1994, he found himself bored with what he saw as the unchallenging job of overseeing the construction of sound barriers on a California highway. He left his post and eventually returned to Guinea-Bissau to use his construction abilities back home.

In a country with a population of just 1.8 million, most people have personal connections with everyone else through family, school, or their job. Politicians





Supporters for Pereira in São Domingos on Nov. 9 and 10, 2019. At left, 26-year-old Fatoumata wears a dress bearing Pereira's face, part of campaign gear used to boost candidate recognition in towns where literacy rates are often low.

regularly exchange promises for political support, showing respect for liberation fighters is mandatory, and complex unspoken social mores dictate campaign rituals in a nation with 31 different ethnic groups.

Pereira—with his international education, charismatic persona, and pragmatic drive—has emerged as a potential savior for his impoverished and coup-ridden homeland. Many residents said they planned to vote for him because of his intelligence. At village rallies, he carried a black notebook, in which he occasionally scribbled notes as residents told him their concerns. Some critics, however, have contended that he is already entangled too deeply in the political trenches of Guinea-Bissau and that he has accepted the support of compromised politicians. These critics argue that his debtors could come calling if he becomes president, undermining his ability to push for genuine change.

**MANY OF GUINEA-BISSAU'S ELITE** give off a professorial vibe; four of the 16 current ministers are sociologists by profession, and the country's intellectuals seem to enjoy abstract conversations with more questions than answers. Dautarin Monteiro da Costa, the current minister of national and higher education, explains that Guinea-Bissau has always functioned in two realms—the formal central government and the informal decentralized structures that existed long before colonialism. Two weeks before the first round of the election, da Costa was staring down the threat of a teacher's strike when he brought the informal power of religious leaders to the table.

“The unions scheduled a strike for today, but they changed their mind. Why? Because in our process of negotiation, I [called on] the religious leaders to mediate,” he explained. Their presence adds “an important variable,” da Costa said. “When they understand my

point of view, and they transport that point of view to the unions, they understand better. That is a strong example of African democracy.”

Da Costa contends that Guinea-Bissau needs a system that includes its own governance traditions, such as the influence of those traditional religious leaders, and incorporates them into the formal system of government. While such influences are very much a part of current everyday government decision-making, they are still mostly informal. That informality, coupled with weak checks and balances at central government institutions such as the judiciary, makes it hard to hold officials or traditional leaders to account. When everyone plays by a different set of rules, no one can really be held accountable.

**DESPITE THE HOPE PLACED IN PEREIRA**, it's essential to look past the man and ask whether the flaw is in Guinea-Bissau's system of governance and not the leaders elected to govern it. Analysts point to gray areas when it comes to delineations of power between the president and the prime minister in the country's constitution—for example, the constitution says the president can lead a ministerial meeting whenever he wants. He can also fire the government in the “case of serious political crisis,” but the constitution does not define what a serious crisis is.

Unlike in the past, the military has remained out of the fray during the country's latest bout of political instability—thanks in large part to mediation from and sanctions applied by international organizations. Indeed, in the recent presidential election, external actors such as ECOWAS and delegations from the United States kept the electoral process on track.

But when international organizations provide support to Guinea-Bissau, they also feel entitled to make their own demands on the country and its leaders. As a result, outside support can quickly become outside pressure.

“The foreign pressure is so high that it doesn’t let us have enough time to develop our own process,” da Costa said, while acknowledging that such pressure does help keep the peace. We “have to conform our political actions, our political decisions, with these big Western concepts.” Rather than relying on imported ideas, he argued, “our political system should align the formal with the traditional, because we feel the state as an entity only here in [the capital of] Bissau. When you pass Safine,” an area on the outskirts of the capital, “what you see is a regulation of social life through the traditional mechanisms,” he added.

Pereira insists that there needs to be more input from the country’s grassroots. “For the most part, we let people come in to help decide what’s good and what’s bad because we are presented as the bad student,” he said. “By teaching you, people sometimes will impose.”

It doesn’t help that international donors tend to bristle at any challenge to their models and values, which place a high premium on successful democratic elections.

Indeed, even questioning the supremacy of democracy as a form of government can make some international partners anxious. But Oumar Ba, who grew up in neighboring Senegal and is now an assistant professor of political science at Morehouse College in the United States, says such debates are necessary.

“The freedom of assembly, freedom of press, freedom to choose their leaders, these are important things that African states owe to their citizens,” he argued. But it’s also vital to have “a system that places the well-being and the dignity of the citizen at its center.” And that, in turn, requires “having an economic system that allows the citizens to have

access to education, access to health, and [that protects] the citizens from the predatory economic system of global capital.”

It’s a point on which Pereira seems to agree. “It has not been proven that liberal democracy necessarily favors the market economy,” Pereira said. “It’s not a prerequisite in my understanding.”

Ba points to the origins of liberal democracy and the whitewashing that has occurred around its history as one reason that the model should not be accepted uncritically. “The Enlightenment philosophers who were debating freedom and liberty were writing at a time when slavery was how Europe was governing the world,” he said. “They did not write about that. They did not discuss that.” Such oversights, Ba argues, undermine the legitimacy of the so-called liberal values that Europe and the United States export to other nations in the name of progress.

**BEFORE HE PUT HIS PH.D. ON HOLD**, Pereira was studying three African countries: Botswana, Cape Verde, and Rwanda. He deliberately chose countries that varied ideologically and in terms of wealth. He admires Cape Verdean leaders such as Pedro Pires, who once said, “A poor country cannot afford to adopt policies from the rich.” Pereira was awed when, in 2007, Botswana’s then-president, Festus Mogae, turned down an offer for an official state visit to Guinea-Bissau so that his anointed successor could go instead. As for Rwanda’s Paul Kagame, Pereira sees him as a good example of consistency. “He’s very tough, but he’s a man of his word, and he’s implicated in the

**If liberal democracy were framed as a homegrown African concept rather than an import, the conversation would be different.**

process. He’s not someone who looks at the country from a distance.” All of these models, he says, are helping him form an idea of what kind of government might work best in Guinea-Bissau.

If liberal democracy were framed as a homegrown African concept rather than an import, the conversation would be different, he insists. “I believe that if we had more appropriation of democracy ... Africans could point out things that don’t work in the Western world. But we take it as an outside construction imposed by Westerners and for the most part accept it as a counterpart for investment.” In other words, some leaders go through the motions of democracy without really believing in it.

After weeks on the campaign trail, where Pereira extolled the virtues of voting, he returned over and over to the issue of illiteracy. He even proposed giving veterans of the independence struggle pensions with a requirement that some of it be spent on their descendants’ education. “I’ll give you money, but I’ll use half of it to invest in your children so you get out of the cycle [of illiteracy],” he said.

While it’s clear that low literacy rates don’t mean low political participation—mobilization efforts in rural, remote islands and villages demonstrated the widespread desire to participate in the process—Pereira is adamant that the country needs a democratic system that acknowledges the toll of poverty, complex ethnic power dynamics, and the power and influence of traditional leaders.

In a country where many people live on less than a dollar per day, “If you have 60 percent of your people who don’t know how to read and to write,” Pereira said, “you need to make sure the way you exercise democracy does consider this very important side of your population.” ■

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## Not One of Us

### The United Kingdom's upper classes retain a grip on power.

By Josh Glancy

**AS A BRITISH JOURNALIST LIVING ABROAD**, I get asked many questions, from the role of the queen to the peculiarities of Parliament. But one theme comes up again and again: poshness. What does it really mean? What's posh, and what isn't? Outsiders think they know the term, but they don't understand it viscerally. And they often miss that when the British deploy the term, it comes with an edge whetted on the stone of class.

Understanding poshness matters, especially since it is in the air again: Like the damp in an old country house, it never truly goes away. And it's back now with the current British prime minister, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, an alumni of Eton College, the University of Oxford, and the Bullingdon Club. It can be seen plainly in the leader of the House of Commons, Jacob Rees-Mogg, a man whose aristocratic self-fashioning is so risibly parodic he's been labeled the "honorable member for the 18th century."

Americans, in particular, lap it up. The notion of poshness seems to stir in them a kind of longing for the orderly hierarchies of the old world. They think of it as classy. They

chuckle at those Brits and their cute accents, or they gasp in admiration or bewilderment at *Downton Abbey*. In fact, outsiders everywhere seem to admire it—but they miss the underlying complexities of class, and, as a result, they misunderstand Britain.

Poshness has frayed and faded over the years, but it lives on in a series of customs and habits, many of them inherited from feudal times: riding to hounds; murdering pheasants, rabbits, foxes, squirrels, and really anything with a pulse in the right season; drinking too much wine; and occasionally bonking each other's spouses. It's an attitude better suited to times of indulgence than ones of moral rectitude; the Victorian era, with its great surge of the middle class, was distinctly anti-posh, until it swung back the other way with the bulgy sybarite Edward VII.

More than anything else, to be posh is to reside at the top end of an ancient caste system. This is what outsiders all too often miss about class. They admire the aesthetics and the charm of what appears posh but miss the unforgiving

#### DECODER

INTERPRETING  
THE ESSENTIAL  
WORDS  
THAT HELP  
EXPLAIN THE  
WORLD

social stratification that class imposes on Britain.

Johnson is the 20th prime minister to have attended Eton—a single astonishingly dominant school. Under Boris and his Etonian predecessor David Cameron, homelessness in the United Kingdom nearly tripled. Posh people, meanwhile, still own much of the country. Research published in 2019 found that some 25,000 people—and a few corporations—own more than 50 percent of land in the U.K. The Duke of Buccleuch’s estates, for example, extend to nearly half a percent of the entire country. And even when working-class people break into the professions, they earn 17 percent less a year than their posh contemporaries.

At the core of poshness is a network, a tapestry of titled aristocrats, gentry, and the fanciest of the upper-upper-middle classes. They attend the same schools (Eton, Harrow, Downe House, Marlborough, Winchester) and universities (Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Bristol, St. Andrews) and eventually intermarry to keep the whole show on the road. Poshness derives much of its power from educational hegemony. Even as the number of privately educated pupils at Oxbridge has declined, the grip of the elite high schools has tightened. A 2018 report revealed that eight top schools in the U.K. get as many pupils into Oxford and Cambridge as three-quarters of all schools and colleges put together.

And that’s key to poshness: It’s not just about money. It’s about signaling your access to wellsprings of power that have flowed through the U.K. for centuries—to being “the right kind of person.” Poshness usually comes with wealth but not always. You can be posh but not rich, though it’s difficult to sustain indefinitely, and you can certainly be rich but not posh. Self-made moguls such as Philip Green (of Topshop) and Alan Sugar (of Amstrad) are seen as decidedly gauche. What poshness guarantees is access to wealth, even when you’re broke: the ability, for example,

to bum around friends’ house parties and borrow holiday homes in Italy or France. And it can catapult you into the top; going to the right school makes you 94 times more likely to reach the country’s professional elite.

Posh is also an aesthetic, the original shabby chic—one that signals not just possession of land but also the antiquity and confidence of its ownership. Grand houses, yes, but with fraying rugs and dreadful central heating, full of tweed jackets and Wellington boots that don’t belong to anyone in particular but line up muddily by the front door for whoever is nominated to take the dogs out.

Poshness is a voice, sometimes described as cut glass—pronounced clearly and carefully. And with the voice comes a dialect: Say loo, not toilet; scent, not perfume; and napkin, not serviette. The forbidden terms are French and thus associated with middle-class social climbers striving to use seemingly classy language.

Many foreigners think posh is a compliment, but only posh people view it as such—and even then not always. Everyone else in Britain uses it as an insult. To be called posh outside of the houses of the posh is to be called spoiled, entitled, or pretentious.

The British monitor class carefully. And maybe that gives them an edge, a certain realism, especially over their trans-Atlantic cousins. Class is not the story America chooses to tell about itself today. People don’t write about it. They

**Poshness is about signaling your access to wellsprings of power that have flowed through the U.K. for centuries—to being “the right kind of person.”**

don’t make movies about it. The national myth is founded on the idea of freedom, wealth, and opportunity unshackled from the conventions of the old world. And if one doesn’t like that story, well, then there’s a far gloomier one to tell about racial oppression and native genocide. Class doesn’t usually come into it, much as the British often overlook race.

But when you examine the numbers, the British have a slight edge on social mobility over Americans. A child born into a family in the bottom 20th percentile of income levels has an 11.4 percent chance of making it to the top 20th percentile in the U.K.—as compared with a 7.8 percent chance in the United States. Tellingly, Americans are much more likely to overestimate social mobility in their country, even though the middle class has grown in Britain while it has shrunk in the United States. Much of Britain’s relative success on that front has been driven by traditional equalizers such as universal health care and low-cost higher education. Yet those systems were in fact created in part because of poshness—the middle-class politicians who created them despised and campaigned against the aristocracy. So too, ironically enough, was the Thatcherite revolution of the 1980s—a grocer’s daughter who taught herself a posh accent but whose contempt for antique institutions was legendary. A country that thinks about class so obsessively also understands its power better.

The specifics of British poshness might be unique, but to understand its core, take a look at the people who have power almost anywhere in the world—and examine whose kids they are and what schools they went to. They might speak with a different accent, be less charming, and have less of a fondness for dogs and horses—but they will likely embody the inherited privilege that comes with being posh. ■

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# arguments



A local resident confronts a protester at a roadblock in Hong Kong on Nov. 16, 2019.

## Hao, Boomer!

American millennials may resent their elders for ruining the world, but generational politics in mainland China and Hong Kong are a lot more complicated. *By Salvatore Babones*

**W**

**WHILE COLLEGE KIDS ARE OUT ON THE STREETS** of Hong Kong demanding freedom and winning local council elections, many of their parents are at home counseling caution. Millennials want positive change, and they want it now. Their baby boomer parents also want a better future for their children, but they are worried about the economic impact of the protests and the risk of a possible military crackdown. This may turn out to be Hong Kong's "OK, boomer" moment.

Born in the United States, the "OK, boomer" meme has spread around the world, to the New Zealand Parliament, and

back again. It is a dismissive jab by millennials—born 1981-1996—at their baby boomer parents—born 1946-1964. Its implication is that boomers have ruined the world and have no right to talk down (boomsplain?) to their millennial children, who have big, ambitious, and idealistic plans to make things right again.

Whatever the validity of the accusation, the demographic categories behind



it don't necessarily travel overseas. Baby boomers are called baby boomers because the U.S. birthrate boomed 30 percent in the years after World War II. There were two reasons: First, many couples who were prevented from conceiving during the war suddenly had the opportunity to do so when the troops came home, and second, postwar prosperity sparked a culture change that brought the median age at first marriage down by more than a year.

That was the American pattern, and other Western developed countries experienced similar trends. So did the Soviet Union. But some Asian developing countries had later baby booms, while many countries had none at all. In most of the poorest countries of the world, fertility rates simply continued their long, slow declines from the very high levels of the colonial era. Indeed, every nation has a different demographic profile, although that doesn't seem to change the fact that intergenerational conflict is as close to a universal phenomenon as human society gets.

**HONG KONG DID HAVE** a small postwar baby boom, but it came a bit later than the American one. The years immediately following the Chinese Civil War, which ended in 1950, were tough times in the territory, which saw its population swell with people displaced by the fighting and with refugees from the Communist takeover. To the extent that Hong Kong had a baby boom at all, it was during the years 1955-1968. Thus, although America's boomers started to turn 65 in 2011, Hong Kong's will only start turning 65 next year.

Other Northeast Asian countries also had late baby booms. Like Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan faced difficulty immediately after the war, followed by modest baby booms in the 1950s. Northeast Asia's latest baby boom happened in Japan. If you think Japan has an aging crisis now, just wait until its boomers start turning 65 in 2032 and bow out of the workforce.



Demonstrators fill Tiananmen Square in Beijing on April 1, 1989.

But the biggest baby boom of all happened in mainland China—and it had nothing to do with war. China's baby boom was a response to the Great Famine of 1959-1961, and it lasted until the tightening of fertility controls in the mid-1970s, when China started down the road toward the one-child policy. In many ways, China's post-famine baby boom might be seen as the "great replacement" of children who died or were never born because of the hardships of the famine years, during which the birthrate plunged by 50 percent and the death rate roughly doubled.

China's post-famine baby boom was so big that, today, the number of people aged 50 is double the number who are 10 years older—and 40 percent greater than the number of those 10 years younger. Currently aged 43-57, China's boomers are a huge generation of 343 million people. In fact, people born in the years between 1962 and 1976 make up very nearly one-quarter of China's entire population.

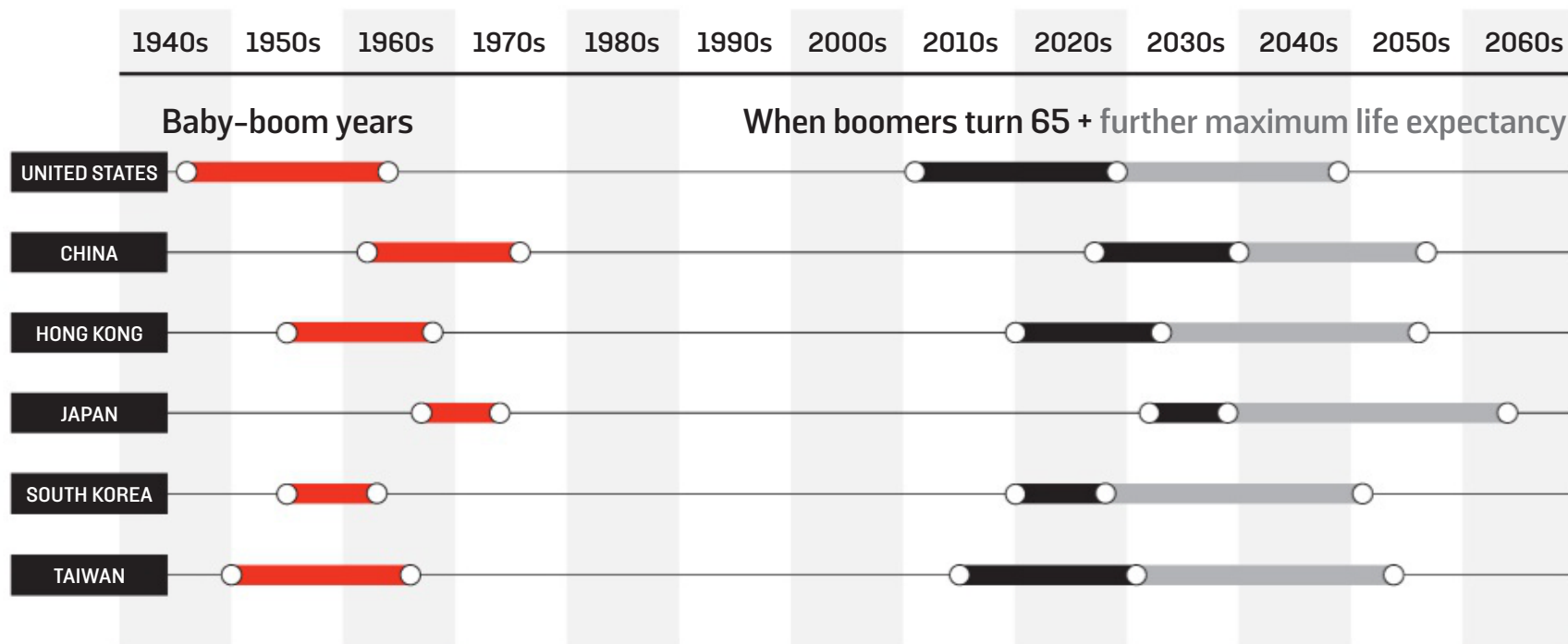
These boomers were 13 to 27 years old in 1989. They're the ones who filled Tiananmen Square to demand freedom

and democracy and who faced the consequences of Deng Xiaoping's repression. Most of them are now middle-aged careerists saving for retirement. Like America's baby boomers before them, China's baby boomers are a relatively privileged generation that traded youthful ideals for adult materialism—and that is now viewed by many Chinese millennials as an obstacle to positive social change. Mainland Chinese boomers are not so different from their Hong Kong counterparts; in fact, many of Hong Kong's boomers are themselves immigrants from mainland China. As many as 1.5 million mainlanders have taken up residency in Hong Kong since 1997.

**IF "HAO, BOOMER" EVER MAKES IT** to the Chinese cultural area, it will have a strikingly familiar ring. *Hao* is the Chinese equivalent of "OK"; it's the second half of the ubiquitous Chinese greeting *ni hao*, which literally means "you OK." And most of China's baby boomers are very OK. The more educated ones may have suffered severe police state repression in their university days, but they have matured into the richest generation in Chinese history. The kids who filled Tiananmen Square in 1989 are now filling the ranks of middle



## The Timing of Northeast Asia's Baby Booms



managers. They're the ones who own multiple apartments while their children can barely afford to rent.

China's boomers are not as old as America's, and they're not yet in charge of their country. The last four U.S. presidents have all been baby boomers, but China is still ruled by its smaller postwar generation, who are roughly the same age as America's boomers: Chinese President Xi Jinping is 66 years old; his premier, Li Keqiang, is 64. As it clings to power, China's postwar generation has, in effect, tried to buy off boomers through economic opportunity while keeping down millennials through state control of the media, internet, and education. In exchange, China's aging leaders have gotten the stable society they yearned for during the upheavals of Mao Zedong's time in power.

But eventually the postwar generation will pass from the scene, and the boomers will take over. China's leadership won't skip a generation, as the United States is likely to skip Generation X, because in China the children of the 1960s and 1970s are plentiful and powerful, not scarce and indebted as in the United States. Thus, while American millennials fully expect to be in charge in the not-too-distant future, China's

young will be waiting for decades. Their retreat into social media and video games may be fully justified.

This is not to say that mainland China's millennials are all passive, complacent consumerists. They may not be marching in the streets like their Hong Kong cousins, but they are pushing for meaningful social change in areas like gender equality and LGBT rights. Obviously, in the Chinese context, these movements must operate much more quietly than they would in Hong Kong or the West. But they exist, and they are likely to change attitudes—if not immediately and in public, then at least behind the scenes for future generations in power.

That brighter tomorrow may come eventually, but it won't come fast enough for Hong Kong's millennial street protesters. Reform candidates swept local council elections in late

**China's boomers are not as old as America's, and they're not yet in charge of their country.**

November, but that is little more than a symbolic victory for democracy. The real decisions continue to be made in the thoroughly pro-regime Legislative Council—and in Beijing. With China's People's Liberation Army and People's Armed Police barracking some 12,000 troops in Hong Kong (and, at times, thousands more just across the border in Guangdong), the democratic reformers have little room for maneuver.

Mainland millennials might be sympathetic to Hong Kong's demands for reform or at least indifferent. But China's baby boomers, having lost their own bid to reform the country 30 years ago, are unlikely to offer concessions to Hong Kong—even if they could, since they aren't in power. When Hong Kong's millennials think "Hao, boomer," it might be directed at their parents' generation, but their parents understand who is really in charge. Hong Kong isn't ruled by Carrie Lam and her baby boomer colleagues. It is ruled from Beijing, where older preferences prevail. ■

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## Avoiding Autarky

For some nations, trade and cooperation are becoming less attractive. But the world needs more coordination, not less. *By Klaus Schwab*



**W**

WITH THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER APPARENTLY CRUMBLING, it may seem increasingly sensible for individual countries to adopt protectionist policies. But the effects of climate change, the erosion of national corporate tax bases, and the splintering of global supply chains mean that the world really needs more economic cooperation—not less. The question then, is how.

There are three areas ripe for coordination. First, governments could strengthen their collaboration on international taxation. For example, they could agree to tax consumption rather than production, which would allow citizens to benefit from taxes emanating from economic activity in their country, instead of the current system, which allows companies to pay minimal taxes only where they manufacture goods—an increasingly unsatisfactory method in a digital world. Second, companies could strengthen their efforts to create a circular, or “regenerative,” economy that better recycles the resources it uses. And third, the United Nations, International Labor Organization (ILO), and their partners could create a supply chain human rights charter to guarantee the basic rights of workers around the world.

**FOR ALMOST 75 YEARS, A NATION'S OPTIMAL STRATEGY** in the global economy was to collaborate, and it seemed likely that economic forces would surpass domestic political ones. The Cold War, in this framework, was an economic war, won on

the well-stocked supermarket shelves of West Berlin. Wherever goods, jobs, and aspirations went, politics followed. Economic cooperation eclipsed geopolitical competition, and for a long time, it seemed as if the system would forever lead to greater integration.

But politics no longer lag behind global economic forces. As workers in the West saw their wages drop and their jobs disappear, many turned their backs on collaborative trade and clamored for change. The United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union was perhaps the greatest setback for economic integration in the bloc's six-and-a-half-decade history. And the United States, meanwhile, pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, started a trade war with China, levied tariffs on European goods, and blocked World Trade Organization arbitration.

As the West's appetite for integration changed, other countries had to question their own strategies. The trend is clear in the statistics: From 1945 until





U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Jean-Claude Juncker, then-president of the European Commission, in Brussels on Oct. 17, 2019.

2008, trade grew faster than GDP almost without exception, with exports as a percentage of GDP reaching a record high of 26 percent in 2008. But that figure has been on a downward curve ever since, meaning trade is losing in relative importance.

The trend raises a question: If trade and cooperation are becoming less attractive, and leading countries are moving toward autarky, should others follow suit? No. There are some even bigger, countervailing trends on the horizon. And they will increase the incentive for globalization and more cooperation.

First, climate change will continue to accelerate. To avoid its worst effects, everyone is better off working together. Second, digital trade is exploding, increasing the need for a new international tax paradigm that can cover digital services—something that existing frameworks leave out. And third, global supply chains may be changing, but they are not disappearing. If the world

wants to guarantee a fair economic system for workers, protecting the rights of those working in global supply chains could go a long way.

**FIRST, TAKE THE ISSUE OF CLIMATE CHANGE.**

To halt its progress and restore nature's ability to provide humanity with resources, we need an overhaul of the entire economic system. Both production and consumption must become more sustainable, and the way to do that is to make them circular and regenerative. "Circular" means closing the loop between production and consumption, that is, reusing the waste of one economic cycle as input for the next. "Regenerative" means ensuring that the natural capital the global economy relies on—the Earth and its atmosphere—isn't depleted but rather can restore itself.

National governments cannot make this happen by themselves. Much of what the average Westerner consumes travels halfway around the world before it arrives in stores. And in free

market economies, consumers continue to have the last word, even when governments offer carrots and sticks to guide them toward greener choices. A better solution would be for those companies that are the heaviest users of natural resources and the largest producers of global emissions to enforce circular and regenerative best practices across their entire supply chains.

One example is the Loop initiative by the U.S.-based recycling company TerraCycle. The company works with major multinationals to promote responsible consumption and eliminate waste. It allows any consumer to obtain refillable steel containers for their favorite products. It works much as how milk sellers used to go door to door to pick up and refill customers' glass bottles. The approach would eliminate single-use plastic, still prevalent in so many consumer goods, and help make the consumption economy more circular.

Second, there's taxation. Currently, the international tax system creates



competition among countries to attract and retain companies' legal global headquarters. But in a world where the production of goods and services is increasingly digital, having a headquarters is becoming less relevant. In some cases, only a few dozen executives are located in the actual headquarters, with all back offices, production, and sales based elsewhere.

The result is a tax race to the bottom, with ever-decreasing revenue for most countries. A better outcome is possible. If governments agreed to change the tax paradigm so that it focuses on consumption, almost all countries could gain. Especially for digital services, such a system could lead to a major boost in tax revenues, since those aren't currently taxed consistently, without taking away incentives for companies to operate globally. New treaties could ensure that one country doesn't tax consumption while the other imposes a levy on production.

An example comes from France. In the summer of 2019, France introduced a digital services tax on the advertising revenues of companies generating at least 750 million euros (\$827 million) in digital services worldwide, of which a minimum of 25 million euros (\$28 million)

### **There are some even bigger, countervailing trends on the horizon. And they will increase the incentive for globalization and more cooperation.**

were earned in France. So far, coordination efforts on the European level have failed, but the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is building a potential worldwide framework that could lead to net gains for all involved.

Finally, there are supply chains. Despite a decrease in relative importance, global trade continues to play a very significant role in almost every economy. The benefits that come from importing goods—namely access to more affordable products—could outweigh the costs in terms of job losses. But to make the system work better for all, and to create a level playing field, the

world needs to make more of an effort to secure the rights of those working in supply chains around the world.

In a previous era, workers in Western economies united and used their power to push through social and labor reforms. Today, that same struggle continues in many emerging markets, where workers lag far behind on rights and pay. At the same time, some of the progress that workers in Western economies made has been lost as jobs disappeared overseas and as their collective bargaining power decreased.

The economic system already has the answers it needs. Organizations like the ILO (after World War I) and the United Nations (after World War II) long ago established codes for humane working conditions, namely the ILO core labor standards and the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If countries engaged in the world's deadliest wars could agree to these commitments, why couldn't countries living in relative peace work together to fully realize them?

Collaborating on these three priority areas—taxation, climate change, and workers' rights—would go a long way in improving the lives of everyone across the world. Working together would rescue us from the negative Nash equilibrium that the world is now heading toward, in which each party has incentives not to collaborate, and set us on a course for a much more positive outcome. Cooperation could again become the norm.

It won't be easy. But if a few important stakeholders again show the way, they may well inspire others to follow suit. The payoff would be significant: the achievement, for the first time in history, of an inclusive and sustainable equilibrium in the global economic system. ■

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Workers weld parts on an auto assembly line at a factory in Qingdao, China, on April 29, 2019.







Children learn how to use an insecticide-treated net to prevent malaria exposure in South Sudan on April 2, 2009.

## How to Reverse the World's Trust Deficit Disorder

Public-private partnerships can solve the planet's most vexing problems—but they need to focus on systemic change rather than single issues to succeed.

*By Sebastian Buckup and Dominic Waughray*

**I**N THE SUMMER OF 1999, a small and little-known think tank attached to the United Nations Development Programme published a book that transformed the global development discourse: *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*. Runaway globalization had created a “global public domain,” the authors argued. A shared pool of resources was being either undersupplied or overexploited. In a globalized world, advancing sustainable development became more than a moral obligation; it was in everybody’s

enlightened self-interest. If the world has a glut of cheap palm oil but no forests, nobody thrives in the long term.

The idea of a global public domain caught the zeitgeist in an era of falling walls and regimes. At the beginning of the 1990s, the collapse of communism stigmatized big government, but then breakneck liberalization, privatization,



and deregulation ended in a series of financial crises, humbling market maximalists, too. The experience of both government and market failure gave rise to a core pillar of the new narrative for international cooperation: Neither states nor markets had the means to build a functioning global public domain on their own; only a combined effort of all stakeholders would make a difference.

Public-private partnerships—already extensively used at the national level by governments in their quest for better public services at lower cost—became the new mantra for meeting the U.N. Millennium Development Goals. Yet, two decades into the new millennium, public-private partnerships still have not broken through into the mainstream. They are needed more than ever at a time where international cooperation is in crisis.

As U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres put it in his opening address to the General Assembly in 2018, the world is suffering from “trust deficit disorder”: Within countries, people are losing faith in political establishments, and polarization is on the rise; among countries, cooperation is ever less certain and more difficult. National interests are dictating foreign diplomacy, and at the grassroots level, young activists have little confidence in large corporations as a force for positive change.

In the early 2000s, public-private partnerships emerged as a potential win-win combination; they gave business a higher purpose and equipped advocacy organizations with business excellence. They were the centrist architecture of choice for fixing the trust deficit disorder of the hyperglobalization era. As Hillary Clinton explained in her farewell address as U.S. secretary of state, “Where once a few strong columns could hold up the weight of the world, today we need a dynamic mix of materials and structures.”

Today, public-private partnerships have lost some of their luster. The technocratic and top-down nature of

many initiatives is seen by vocal critics as marginalizing their alleged benefactors, raising questions about their true intent. The mixed track record of the mechanism raises doubts about its effectiveness. According to the Sustainable Development Goals partnerships platform, only 290 of 3,900 initiatives currently registered—less than 8 percent—report being on track to reach their goals. Poor intervention strategies, failure to include key actors, and a lack of mandates and clear goals that could be monitored and governed have all been cited as reasons why many of these first-wave partnerships tended to fail.

Emboldened by rapid technological progress and financed by the entrepreneurs behind the digital revolution of the early 21st century, first-wave partnerships deliberately pivoted from a systems paradigm that was seen by economists like Jeffrey Sachs as bureaucratic and ineffective toward more targeted interventions.

The first wave of partnerships was characterized by a move away from existing national and international institutions toward bespoke bodies with narrow issue-specific mandates. The idea was to break a complex challenge (such as public health) into its component parts; single out specific parts (such as children dying of malaria); define clear, measurable metrics of success (such as reducing infection rates); identify means

**In the corporate world, the platform approach is well established. The online retailer Alibaba does not own any warehouses, and Airbnb does not rent or own any real estate.**

to improve on these metrics (by using insecticide-treated bed nets, for example); and assemble the right experts and resources to tackle the problem.

Issue-centered approaches did deliver impressive results in confronting complicated problems such as the development of drugs or vaccines through organizations like the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. However, these kinds of partnerships have not been able to solve more complex challenges such as strengthening the effectiveness and inclusiveness of health care systems.

For a new generation of public-private partnerships to become more effective, the mechanism needs to rebalance from an approach that focuses on issues in isolation toward a more systemic approach that looks at the global public domain as a complex web of political, social, institutional, and technological factors and not just as a complicated engineering challenge. First and foremost, this will require a paradigm shift from a rigid top-down project architecture toward platforms and protocols. In a project paradigm, problem-solving is centralized. In a platform paradigm, actors unite behind a shared purpose and a joint mission but operate independently.

In the corporate world, the platform approach is well established. The online retailer Alibaba, for instance, does not own any warehouses, and the room-booking service Airbnb does not rent or own any real estate. Both focus on enabling the interaction between the components of the system without owning them.

An illustrative platform partnership example is the Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy (PACE), co-chaired by the CEO of the Global Environment Facility, Naoko Ishii, and the CEO of the electronics manufacturer Philips, Frans van Houten. It brings together more than 50 partners and related initiatives under the





Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates speaks at the conference for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Lyon, France, on Oct. 10, 2019.

common vision of creating a circular economy, in which waste and pollution are minimized and products and resources are recycled and regenerated. Though still nascent, platforms and protocols like PACE could help overcome the ideological divide between technocratic supply-side approaches to sustainable development and bottom-up demand-side strategies.

In a protocol paradigm, decision-making is even more decentralized. Protocols merely create a common means for otherwise unrelated efforts to interact, the way traffic signs help drivers move without bumping into one another. The so-called Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), for instance, is the foundation of data communication for the World Wide Web without any prescription on who should apply it or to what end.

The first generation of partnerships emerged in an era when global government was considered by many a feasible option and when big supranational organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the

European Union were equipped with powers that limited and transcended the sovereignty of nation-states. Today, the WTO is facing imminent crisis; the dominant narrative of the European Union has been one of fragmentation, with large portions of electorates backing anti-EU policies; and since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the number of physical barriers delineating international borders has grown from 15 to 77.

**First-generation partnerships emerged at a time when the internet was slow, smartphones did not exist, and artificial intelligence was merely science fiction.**

As a result, partnerships today inevitably must grapple with a more disjointed political landscape and with global challenges that have grown in severity and complexity, making the turn-of-the-century brand of technocratic top-down transnationalism neither feasible nor practical.

In the transition toward a more decentralized model of public-private partnerships, technology will play an important role, too. First-generation partnerships emerged at a time when the internet was slow, smartphones did not exist, and artificial intelligence was merely science fiction. Their solutions were shaped by the possibilities of their time.

Today's global public domain is more than a theoretical concept. It is something citizens can increasingly see and measure in real time with smart sensors, big data, and AI, while technologies like blockchain allow people to establish trust in all this data without creating large third-party organizations. While such technologies are already playing a pivotal role in commercial settings, their massive potential for solving global challenges is yet to be realized.

Global problems have proliferated, but the spectrum of solutions has vastly expanded, too. The world is facing overwhelming transnational challenges, and hence there is no choice but to find effective transnational solutions. Public-private partnerships that are enabled by platforms and protocols can bend the disruptive power of technological innovations toward positive ends. ■

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A Venezuelan opposition activist in Caracas in 2017

RONALDO SCHEMIDT/  
AFP via Getty Images



# FP PEACEGAME

## PeaceGame Venezuela: Pathways to Peace

In October 2019, PeaceGame Venezuela convened global leaders in Washington, D.C. to advance thinking around how Venezuelans and the international community should prepare for the potential of complete state collapse in Venezuela. This undesirable scenario must be considered as the domestic situation and the regional and global implications further deteriorate.

This high-level crisis simulation was a collaboration between *Foreign Policy*, the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center, and Florida International University.

PeaceGame Venezuela considered alternative, actionable strategies that could be taken by the international coalition of countries supporting democracy and multilateral organizations as well as how actors such as Russia, Cuba, and illegal armed groups may respond. Critically, the simulation played out how the Maduro regime may seek to leverage its influence and new actions that could be taken by Venezuela's democratic forces. The outcomes and recommendations from the simulation will help inform real-world strategy.

Among the findings:

- » International stakeholders who support democracy must develop a coordinated and agile action plan now that can prevent, or, if collapse occurs, mitigate the very real regional and global impacts.
- » Democratic forces in Venezuela must be strategic in planning how to mitigate the influence of poorly intentioned external actors who could accelerate and take advantage of state collapse.
- » Communicable disease outbreaks and contagion represent real risks, necessitating preparation and coordination among regional health ministries and experts to contain potential outbreaks.
- » Island nations are among the most vulnerable to spill-over effects from the crisis, requiring economic, humanitarian, and security assistance from multilateral development banks or regional institutions.

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# CAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS SAVE THE WORLD [AGAIN]?

COMMUNISM AND DEMOCRATIC  
SOCIALISM WON'T HEAL  
TODAY'S POLITICAL DIVISIONS.  
BUT SOCIAL DEMOCRACY—  
WHICH HELPED WARD OFF  
EXTREMISM FOLLOWING  
WORLD WAR II—COULD.

BY SHERI BERMAN



**SOCIALISM IS EXPERIENCING A RESURGENCE.** Polls reveal its growing popularity in the United States, particularly among young people. Popular politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez proudly refer to themselves as socialists. And the press and public intellectuals can't seem to stop talking about it.

The main reason for socialism's resurgence is capitalism—or rather, its negative consequences. Economic growth has slowed over the past decades, and its gains have become more unevenly distributed: Income inequality in the United States today is at its highest point since the Census Bureau began tracking it, and the top 1 percent of Americans control almost as much of the nation's wealth as the entire middle class, according to the Federal Reserve. Rising inequality has been accompanied by rising insecurity.

As the Yale University professor Jacob Hacker has argued, income volatility has increased, as has the “distance that people slip down the ladder when they lose their financial footing.” Globalization and technological change, meanwhile, have made citizens across the West more uncertain about their and their children's futures. Social mobility has also declined, particularly in the United States, threatening to turn “have” and “have-not” into hereditary categories. Today's have-nots, moreover, are not only more economically distant from the haves and more likely to stay that way than in the past, but they are also more likely to lead shorter lives, have physical and mental health problems, fall prey to alcoholism and addiction, and live in broken communities. These developments have created deep divisions and growing frustration in Western societies and provided fertile ground for nativism, polarization, and populism.

Contemporary capitalism's negative consequences are extensive and disturbing. They are not, however, new. It is only because of the relative prosperity and democratic stability of the decades after World War II that Americans and Europeans have forgotten how disruptive capitalism can be.

Indeed, during the 19th and early 20th centuries it was commonly believed that capitalism and democracy could not be reconciled. Many liberals and conservatives feared that by empowering the masses, democracy would lead to what John Stuart Mill, for example, called “tyranny of the majority”—as well as prove incompatible, as James Madison put it, with “personal security or the rights of property.” In order

to protect against threats to economic freedom, it might be necessary, as Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and others suggested, to suspend democracy in favor of some sort of authoritarian liberalism. Many socialists, meanwhile, assumed that capitalists would quickly discard democracy—“resort to bayonets,” as Fredrik Sterky, a late 19th-century Swedish socialist and trade union leader, wrote—rather than allow a democratically elected government to threaten their economic power and privileges.

Yet during the 1930s and especially after 1945, a so-called great transformation occurred across the West, enabling democracy and capitalism to be reconciled. One critical reason for this was the triumph of a social democratic understanding of the relationship between the two.

Social democracy is a variant of socialism distinguished by a conviction that democracy makes it both possible and desirable to take advantage of capitalism's upsides while addressing its downsides by regulating markets and implementing social policies that insulate citizens from those markets' most destabilizing and destructive consequences.

Since the world is currently in the midst of another backlash against capitalism and resurgence of socialism, it is worth reviewing what this earlier transformation entailed, how the social democratic principles on which it was built differed from those favored by other socialists, and what this all tells us about the problems we face today.



#### **THE SPREAD OF CAPITALISM DURING THE 19TH CENTURY**

led to unprecedented economic growth and innovation but also dramatic inequality, social dislocation, and cultural upheaval. Not surprisingly, a backlash against these conditions quickly developed. During the last decades of the century, Karl Marx emerged as capitalism's most powerful critic, establishing his ideas as the dominant ideology of a growing international socialist movement. Marxism's power came from its ability to combine a scathing critique of capitalism's nature and consequences with a conviction that they were leading inexorably to its collapse. It was, as Marx put it, “a question of ... laws [and] ... tendencies working with iron necessity toward inevitable results.”

Even after a long depression at the end of the 19th century, however, capitalism showed no signs



of the inevitable collapse that Marx predicted. This raised the question: What was to be done? If capitalism was not going to disappear on its own, how should socialists bring a better world into existence?

Some argued that if capitalism was not going to disappear on its own, socialists should eliminate it by force. The Russian revolutionary and eventual Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin was the most important advocate of this view, and his heirs became known as communists. In Lenin's day, however, most socialists rejected his answer and remained committed to a peaceful, democratic path to socialism.

The democratic camp was split as well. Democratic socialists believed that while Marx might have been wrong about the imminence of capitalism's collapse, he was right that its inherently inequalitarian nature and devastating consequences for workers and the poor meant it could not and should not persist indefinitely. Reforms of capitalism, in this view, had limited value since they could not fundamentally alter the system. The Polish German activist Rosa Luxemburg was equally opposed to social democracy and Leninist communism, for example, but believed that attempts to "reduce capitalist exploitation" were doomed to fail, while Jules Guesde, a leading French socialist, insisted, "In multiplying reforms, one only multiplies shams"—since as long as capitalism existed, workers would always be exploited.

Another democratic faction, the progenitors of social democracy, rejected the view that capitalism was bound to collapse in the foreseeable future and argued instead that socialism's goal, rather than trying to transcend capitalism, should be to harness its immense productive capacity while ensuring that it worked toward progressive rather than destructive ends. They were reformers, but they didn't see reform as an end in itself; they had broader goals.

Eduard Bernstein, a German political theorist and politician who was this group's most influential early advocate, famously argued, "What is usually termed the final goal of socialism is nothing to me. The movement is everything." By this he meant that talking about some abstract future was of little value; instead, the goal should be implementing concrete reforms that could cumulatively create a better world.

The story of socialism during the last century is a story of the battle between these alternatives: communism, democratic socialism, and social democracy.

This battle reached a crescendo in the West during the interwar years. In Europe, socialists confronted a political landscape transformed by World War I and growing economic problems, culminating in the Great Depression. One consequence of this chaotic period was growing political extremism, which drew on the suffering of many citizens and their frustration with the inability or unwillingness of democratic governments to address their needs.

Recognizing the dangers—for democracy and the left—of ignoring this suffering and frustration, social democrats argued that the left's most important goal must be using the state to reform and perhaps even transform capitalism. Democratic socialists did not believe this could or should be done, since they viewed capitalism as unable to be fundamentally reformed and doomed to collapse.

Communists, meanwhile, gleefully welcomed the Great Depression, since it weakened the democratic-capitalist system they were determined to overthrow. Indeed, in some cases, most tragically Germany, communists allied with fascists to try to hurry its demise. (In addition to working with the Nazis to disrupt the German parliament, the Communists also joined them in a vote of no confidence in September 1932, toppling the existing government and ushering in an election, that November, that ultimately brought Adolf Hitler to power and set Europe on the path toward fascism and war.)

In the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt reached many of the same conclusions as European social democrats. Alongside Germany, the United States was hardest hit by the Great Depression, and although democracy was more deeply rooted there than in Europe, during the early 1930s the number of disaffected American citizens grew, support for populist and racist movements increased, and a surprising number of citizens and politicians, including Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and the Rev. Charles Coughlin, openly praised Hitler.

Roosevelt recognized that if the Depression were not forcefully addressed, threats to democracy would increase. He accordingly promised "a new deal for the American people" that would address the economic suffering ravaging the

**IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF THE RELATIVE PROSPERITY AND DEMOCRATIC STABILITY OF THE DECADES AFTER WORLD WAR II THAT AMERICANS AND EUROPEANS HAVE FORGOTTEN HOW DISRUPTIVE CAPITALISM CAN BE.**

country and menacing the social order. By showing citizens that government could protect them from the suffering, risks, and insecurity generated by capitalism, the New Deal was designed to restore faith in it and democracy. (As one New Dealer noted, “We socialists are trying to save capitalism, and the damned capitalists won’t let us.”)

By the mid-1930s, in short, social democracy had a clear political profile and program grounded in a belief that democratic governments could and should confront capitalism’s negative consequences. During the interwar years, social democrats were unable to implement their agenda—except in Scandinavia and, to a lesser degree, in the United States. With the collapse of democracy across Europe during the 1930s and then World War II, however, came an opportunity to shift toward a social democratic understanding of the relationship between capitalism and democracy.



**WHEN THE DUST SETTLED AFTER 1945**, the devastating consequences of fascism became clear, and Europe began to rebuild. There was widespread agreement that for democracy to flourish, the social conflicts and divisions that had destabilized Western societies during the interwar years would have to be confronted head-on. In addition, the experience of the Great Depression—during which capitalism’s failures provided fertile ground for extremism—led to a broad acceptance that finding a way to ensure both economic prosperity and social stability was necessary if democracy was going to succeed.

Social democrats had traditionally insisted on the need to use democracy to address capitalism’s negative consequences; what changed after 1945 was that this view came to dominate the left and other political parties as well.

The 1947 program of the center-right German Christian Democrats, for example, argued, “The new structure of the German economy must start from the realization that the period of uncurtailed rule by private capitalism is over.” In France, meanwhile, the center-right Catholic Popular Republican

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Movement declared in its first manifesto in 1944 that it supported a “revolution” to create a state “liberated from the power of those who possess wealth.”

Key American figures also accepted this social democratic view. They understood that for democracy to succeed in Western Europe, preventing the economic crises, class conflict, and political extremism that had plagued interwar Europe was absolutely necessary. Reflecting this, in his opening speech to the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau noted, “All of us have seen the great economic tragedy of our time. We saw the worldwide depression of the 1930s. ... We saw bewilderment and bitterness become the breeders of fascism and finally of war.” To prevent a recurrence of this phenomenon, Morgenthau argued, national governments would have to be able to do more to protect people from capitalism’s “malign effects.”

After 1945, accordingly, Western European nations began constructing a new order designed to ensure economic growth while at the same time protecting citizens from capitalism’s negative consequences. So extensive were the reforms, and the shift in expectations accompanying them, that many wondered, as Andrew Shonfield—perhaps the most influential chronicler of postwar European capitalism—put it, whether the “order under which we now live and the social structure that goes with it are so different from what preceded them that it [has become] misleading ... to use the word ‘capitalism’ to describe them.”

Of course, capitalism did remain, unlike what communists and democratic socialists had hoped, but it was a capitalism tempered by democratic governments, disappointing classical liberals as well.

This social democratic order worked remarkably well: The 30 years after 1945 were the West’s fastest period of growth ever. During this period, class conflict and support for extremism declined, and for the first time in Western European history, democracy became the norm.

Despite this remarkable success, the social democratic order began to falter during the late 20th century. Economic difficulties beginning in the 1970s provided an opening for attacks on the system, and after 1989, the collapse of its main competitor—Soviet communism—undermined it further.

With the communist threat gone, the right in the United States and Western Europe was emboldened to attack the social democratic order that it had previously viewed as the lesser evil. More



generally, in a tragic inversion of the postwar pattern where a recognition of the dangers of uncontrolled capitalism was widely accepted, communism's collapse led to a triumphalist belief across the political spectrum in the inherent superiority and stability of capitalist democracy.

By the late 20th century, economists on both sides of the Atlantic broadly agreed that key macroeconomic problems, including depression prevention, had been solved due to their advanced understanding of the economy and a general conviction that modern capitalism, rather than being inherently troubled—as their postwar predecessors, inspired by the British economist John Maynard Keynes, had viewed it—needed fine-tuning at best. Politicians, even those ostensibly on the left like British Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, argued that the “old battles between state and market” had become outdated and that rather than being wary overlords of capitalism, as their social democratic predecessors had understood themselves, politicians were now essentially technocrats, managing a system that more or less worked well. U.S. President Bill Clinton reached similar conclusions.

The results of this shift were predictable but unpredicted. The decline of the social democratic order brought a return of precisely the problems it had been designed to address: Economic inequality and insecurity increased, social divisions and conflicts grew, faith in democracy declined, and extremism spread. As these problems returned, so too did a backlash against the system viewed as responsible for them. Given that communism had been discredited by its violence, authoritarianism, and inefficiency, the contemporary backlash against capitalism has returned to the themes and arguments of democratic socialism instead.

## 4

**TODAY, AS IN THE PAST, DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS ARGUE** that capitalism is inherently unjust, unstable, and unable to be reconciled with democracy. As the German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck, perhaps the most forceful of capitalism's contemporary critics, put it, “disequilibrium and instability” are the “rule rather than the exception” in capitalist societies. There is a “basic underlying tension” between capitalism and democracy—and it is “utopian” to assume they can be reconciled.

Given capitalism's inherently destabilizing effects, democratic socialists deny the feasibility

## ANYONE INTERESTED IN DEFENDING CAPITALISM AND DEMOCRACY TODAY SHOULD UNDERSTAND WHAT IT TOOK IN THE PAST TO MAKE THEM SUSTAINABLE AND COMPATIBLE.

of fundamentally reforming it, calling instead for its abolition. As in the past, democratic socialists' goal, as prominent advocates like Bhaskar Sunkara (see his article on Page 34) proclaim, is socialism, not social democracy or a new New Deal, since in their view it is only once capitalism is transcended that healthy societies and democracies are possible.

In response to such attacks on capitalism, few on the right have gone as far as their prewar predecessors in openly calling for an end to democracy, but some have edged in that direction, questioning democracy in books such as David Van Reybrouck's *Against Elections*, Jason Brennan's *Against Democracy*, and David Harsanyi's *The People Have Spoken (And They are Wrong)*. Others have supported populists who disdain and degrade democracy, such as U.S. President Donald Trump. As the *Financial Times*'s Edward Luce put it, some of today's elites “see Trump as a shelter from the populist hurricanes battering at their estates.” (When asked how he could justify supporting a politician with clearly illiberal and anti-democratic tendencies, former Goldman Sachs CEO and current senior chairman Lloyd Blankfein replied, “At least Trump has been good for the economy.”)

Anyone interested in defending capitalism and democracy today should understand what it took in the past to make them sustainable and compatible. The postwar social democratic order was predicated on a commitment to maintaining capitalism's upsides while at the same time ensuring that citizens were protected from its negative consequences. Turning this conviction into reality required a difficult compromise. Workers and the disadvantaged gave up calls for the abolition of capitalism in return for a more equitable distribution of its rewards, protection from the risk and insecurity it generated, and policies that ensured they had the opportunity to rise up the economic ladder.

The elite, on the other hand, gave up some of their wealth and privileges in return for an end to demands to abolish the system that enabled them to rise to the top in the first place. (To invert a quip from the left, what capitalism's defenders recognized after 1945 was that “the best way to end attacks on wealth was to attack poverty.”) And on the basis of this compromise, all citizens benefited from declining social

conflict and extremism and a strengthened democracy that enabled them to solve their societies' collective problems over time.

Today, as in the past, democratic socialists see only capitalism's flaws and are once again calling for its abolition, while many on the right see only capitalism's benefits and are once again supporting policies that have led these benefits to be distributed narrowly and unjustly and have undermined social and political stability.

It took the tragedies of the interwar years and World War II to get an earlier generation of European and American politicians and citizens to appreciate the dangers of capitalism, the fragility of democracy, and the need to compromise to ensure the compatibility and sustainability of both. This social democratic compromise undergirded the West's greatest period of success. Some of the policies associated with this order ran out of steam during the late 20th century, but its basic goal—promoting capitalism's upsides while protecting citizens from its downsides—remains as crucial as ever.

The world is nowhere near the situation it faced in the 1930s and 1940s, but the warning signs are clear. One can only hope it will not take another tragedy to make people across the political spectrum recognize the advantages of a social democratic solution to our contemporary crisis. ■

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# AFTER CAPITALISM

THE FUTURE DEPENDS  
ON A SOCIAL DEMOCRACY  
THAT DOESN'T RESHAPE  
CAPITALISM BUT  
TRANSCENDS IT.

**BY BHASKAR SUNKARA**



1

**IT SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISING THAT, IN 2020**, we're still talking about socialism. After all, in much of the world, just 40 years ago if someone had a political identification, it was probably as a socialist of one kind or another. Maybe they were third-world nationalists looking for a pathway to development for their long-oppressed homelands. Or defenders of the Leonid Brezhnev-era "actually existing socialism" of the Soviet Union and its satellites. Or maybe they were social democrats—no longer seeking a socialism after capitalism but committed to creating a Nordic-style "functional socialism" within it.

The past three decades haven't been kind to any of these socialisms. State socialism suddenly collapsed; Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to renovate the system only undermined the coercion that held it together. The fate of social democracy in Europe wasn't so dramatic: It ground to a halt rather than imploding. Postwar social democracy had relied on economic expansion—a boon to both capitalists and socialists alike—but when growth started to slow





over the last decades, and the wage demands of emboldened workers made deeper inroads into company profits, business owners rebelled against the model.

Mainstream social democracy responded to this crisis by halting its egalitarian advance and merely defending existing gains. Eventually it settled for tying mildly redistributive measures to neoliberal economic orthodoxy. And as for the heirs of nationalists like Jamaica's Michael Manley and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, they made a more radical U-turn, accepting neoliberal dictums from the International Monetary Fund and seeking to attract foreign investment by any means.

But popular ideas don't die so easily. In the decades after 1917, socialists went from fringe organizers to masters of much of the world. The British historian Eric Hobsbawm said there had been nothing like it since Islam's rapid advance in the seventh century. And whatever it was that morally compelled people to seek a radically different world in those days has not disappeared.

Most important, there is still plenty of material injustice to spawn new generations of socialists. Millions of people die every year of preventable diseases. Many more spend their lives mired in poverty. Even where capitalist development has been successful on its own terms, mass abundance is coupled with the unmet basic needs of the most vulnerable. There is no starker example than the United States—the richest society in history but also one where more than half a million people are homeless and 1 in 8 families battle hunger.

Indeed, inequality is not an accidental byproduct of capitalism—which divides those who own private property through which goods and services are produced from the rest, who have to put themselves at the owners' mercy to survive—it is at the core of the system. Capitalist wealth creation may not be a zero-sum game, but the struggle between bosses and workers over autonomy and power on the shop floor is. And far from dissipating, the contradictions at the heart of capitalism have become only more apparent over the last few decades.

In the 1970s, an emergent neoliberalism curbed inflation and restored profitability for the high-income countries of the global north—but only through a vicious offensive against

workers. Since then, real wages have stagnated, debt has soared, and the prospects for younger generations—still expecting to live better lives than their parents—have become bleak. In the United States and United Kingdom, as in other postindustrial economies across Europe, increased flexibility for employers has meant increased uncertainty for workers.



**ENTER, OR REENTER, SOCIALISM.** The resurgent popularity of the term “socialism” is perhaps a fluke—it is language that the movement's standard-bearers, Jeremy Corbyn in the United Kingdom and Bernie Sanders in the United States, have long used and are now making mainstream. They offer demands that are within the wheelhouse of social democracy: calls for an expansion of social services such as government job creation and action on climate change. But Corbyn and Sanders represent something far different from modern social democracy. Whereas social democracy in Europe spent the last few decades morphing into a tool to suppress class conflict in favor of friendly arrangements among business, labor, and the state, Corbyn, Sanders, and their peers encourage a renewal of class antagonism from below.

For Sanders, for example, the very path to change is through confrontation with elites. His movement is about creating a “political revolution” to get what is rightfully the people's from “millionaires and billionaires.” His rhetoric is one of polarization along class lines, and his campaign strategy is to remobilize working-class voters. Similarly, for Corbyn it's a social movement of “the many” against “the few.” Only this sort of politics, both men believe, can create an environment where a new reform program can once again be enacted.

But what's so socialist about this program, and what's to prevent it from running into the same crisis that the social democrats of the 1970s retreated in the face of?

The first question is easier to answer than the second. Beyond the means—class struggle rhetoric and democratic mass mobilization—that Sanders and Corbyn pursue, they propose an expansion of social goods in an era when welfare states around the world are in retreat. Sanders appears intent on starting with nationalizing a reviled health insurance industry worth a trillion dollars. Even more identifiably socialist are aspects of his 2020

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presidential campaign platform and parallel plans pushed by Corbyn's Labour Party to expand the cooperative sector, create community-owned enterprises, and give employees shares in the companies they work for.

The answer to the second question lies in imagining a social democracy that doesn't just try to reshape capitalism in the interests of workers but seeks to permanently restructure economic relations.

Such a system would mean attempting to transfer not just wealth but also power away from private capitalists to a revived workers' movement. This would be a difficult undertaking. Any governing democratic socialist, no matter their intentions, will always find it easier to move to the right than to the left. On one side, they find guarantees of stability from powerful political and economic interests, while on the other side are capital strikes and stubborn resistance. Today, even more so than in the 20th century, socialists face not only the problem of how to win power but the problem of how to fend off capital's attempt to undermine their program once in government. Reflecting on his years in the Harold Wilson and James Callaghan governments of the 1960s and 1970s, the former British Labour parliamentarian Tony Benn highlighted the mundane coercion that came with power: Do what vested interests want, and they'll make you look good; try to pursue your own agenda, and they'll make your life impossible.

In other words, the social democratic compromise, where wealth is redistributed but ownership is left untouched, is inherently unstable. It faces challenges in two directions. Capital seeks to control it from the outset, but if initial reforms are successful, workers have more leverage to strike, and the increased bargaining power of labor can make unsustainable inroads into businesses' profitability—something that will provoke economic crisis and the likely return to programs that can ensure a more favorable business environment.

Indeed, the welfare states of the 1960s and 1970s didn't placate workers; they made them bolder. Transitional policies such as a federal jobs guarantee proposed by Sanders and others could do the same in our own time. A true socialist agenda thus needs to figure out a way to advance rather than retreat in the face of that instability—and not just for ideological reasons but to deprive capitalists of their ability to withhold investment and roll back reforms.

## THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC COMPROMISE, WHERE WEALTH IS REDISTRIBUTED BUT OWNERSHIP IS LEFT UNTOUCHED, IS INHERENTLY UNSTABLE.



**IT IS UNCLEAR TO WHAT EXTENT SUCH AN AGENDA IS POSSIBLE** in an era when capital has been internationalized, economic growth rates have slowed in the most developed countries, and automation threatens remaining bastions of working-class strength. But it is clear that unless socialists want to re-create the social democratic arc of the 20th century (from steady advance to steady retreat), the focus from the outset must be on ownership and increasing labor's control over investment.

So what could socialism look like in the 21st century? It might mean a major extension of social and economic rights—a state that provides more than protection from destitution but positively guarantees housing, health care, child care, and education—and public ownership of natural monopolies and financial institutions. These would exist alongside a competitive, market-driven sphere where private capitalist ownership is replaced with worker ownership. That is, workers would elect their own management and have both moral and financial incentives to be productive by being real stakeholders who would receive a share of firm profits rather than fixed wages. Such shifts would represent the starting point for modernity's first truly democratic and socialist society.

But whatever the precise model of socialism after capitalism is, it should be simple and require no massive changes in human consciousness. It must be driven by a serious attempt to avoid what has failed in the past—the stifling of political pluralism and civil rights in state socialist regimes, as well as the economic problems of central planning. Instead, it should take experiments that have succeeded—universal social services and worker-owned cooperatives—and build a social system around them in its drive toward the long-deferred Enlightenment promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity. ■

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# HOW CLIMATE CHANGE HAS SUPERCHARGED THE LEFT

GLOBAL WARMING COULD LAUNCH SOCIALISTS TO UNPRECEDENTED POWER—AND EXPOSE THEIR MOVEMENT'S DEEPEST CONTRADICTIONS.

BY ADAM TOOZE





**THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY** is stirring radical politics across the world as a new spirit of environmental radicalism energizes left-wing politics. Most notably, the left wings of both the Democratic Party in the United States and the Labour Party in the United Kingdom have committed themselves to programs known as the Green New Deal. Across Europe, the Greens now rival right-wing populists in their political energy.

For the established environmental movement, this surge in attention has come as something of a shock. The original green movement of the 1960s and 1970s had strong radical elements in its social and economic vision. But for much of the 1990s and 2000s, “Big Green” went mainstream. When it came to climate change, government regulation and investment were unfashionable. Market-based solutions focused on emissions trading and carbon pricing were the flavor du jour. Global climate negotiations became a giant diplomatic roadshow.

The sudden mobilization from the left—with its calls for large-scale public investment in the green economy, bans on high-carbon industry, and nationalization of private energy interests—is a radical response to what is undeniably a dramatic situation. But the revived left faces both the old dilemmas of radical politics and the new challenges of a changed world.

## 2

**THE LEFT'S REOCCUPATION OF ENVIRONMENTALISM** is no accident. It is driven by the urgency of anti-capitalist protest in the wake of the financial crisis and the protest movement against the lopsided austerity that followed. It is energized by the extraordinary escalation of the climate crisis, as was made clear by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2018. A left-wing critique of capitalism and urgent climate activism are linked as never before.

In 2013, motivated by frustration at the limits of the Obama administration's climate change policy, the writer and activist Bill McKibben's climate campaign movement, 350.org, began to direct its fire against fossil capitalism. The huge climate protest in New York in 2014 developed a left-populist discourse, appealing to a public united against fossil capital. The denunciation of neoliberalism in Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything* gave a manifesto to the new green left. This movement includes the Fridays for Future campaign of school strikes and the Blockadia activist group, for which Klein is the figurehead,

which seeks to coordinate blockades of key sites of fossil fuel development around the world.

The new green left restates the inconvenient truth that it is not humanity as such that is responsible for the climate crisis but profit-driven, fossil-fueled capitalism. The consumption habits of a small fraction of the most affluent people worldwide fuel much of this giant machine. The extreme inequality of our age is thus an environmental issue. So is corporate power. It was ExxonMobil and its partners in the fossil fuel industries that conspired to muddy the waters of the scientific debate about climate change, even though their in-house experts had given their management a clear view of the risks.

For 30 years, the basic logic of climate change has been well understood, yet emissions have continued to surge. At this point, radical action is not so much a choice as a necessity. It is conceivable that if there had been a giant push in the 1980s and 1990s, not just into nuclear but into the full bandwidth of low-carbon technologies, we might now be in a position to avoid radical choices. But that was the age of the market revolution; the stage was set for globalization and the giant boom in emerging market growth. A glut of oil, gas, and coal sent energy prices to historic lows. Government research and development on non-fossil energy collapsed.

The world has now left things so late that drastic measures are required. Even if we do not aim for radical social transformation, even if we aim for nothing more than to preserve the status quo, the environmental movement now argues persuasively that we must go beyond the hallowed toolkit of carbon pricing and cap and trade. The climate left argues, instead, for a broad-based push, led by government and backed by a popular coalition behind decarbonization. This push will not only price carbon but ban its use. It will require fundamentally reorienting the energy sector and curbing the excessive consumption of the superrich. If capitalism's adherence to property rights and markets is allowed to dictate what is possible, the left argues, it will lead us all to disaster.

Not only are the affluent driving the crisis, but as the effects of climate change begin to make themselves felt, the impact will be most severe at the bottom of the social pile. This, too, is a driver for the new green left. After decades of neglect, the challenge is to reinvent the welfare state.

Of course, the climate emergency is not confined to national borders. It is, quintessentially, a global issue. And here, too, the left claims leadership. The



left is the only political tendency in the West that has consistently stood for cosmopolitan solidarity and has worked to recognize the legitimacy of the interests and demands of indigenous peoples and the interests of small island and least developed states. Nor is this a matter of altruism alone. If you are going to insist that the Amazon rainforest is not only a Brazilian national asset but a carbon sink for the world, how are you going to avoid the charge of ecoimperialism? Given humanity's mutual entanglement, building a platform of credible internationalism and solidarity is a political necessity.



**WHAT IS TO BE DONE?** The left has thrown itself with new vigor into the environmental struggle with a sense of both crisis and historic opportunity. The question is what tensions this new engagement will expose.

Framing the climate challenge as one of capitalism and deep structures of social inequality has given the contemporary environmental movement a powerful intellectual grip on the problem. It calls on both politicians and the public to think beyond technical fixes and gee-whiz pricing mechanisms that will properly align incentives. But it also raises the question: If the problem is capitalism, what on earth can you do about it? As the saying goes, we live in an age in which it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

It is not for nothing that the historical imagination of the climate left, at least in the Anglosphere, circles around the 1930s and 1940s. The Green New Dealers situate themselves in the narrative that spans the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, the trans-Atlantic war effort of World War II, Bretton Woods, the postwar welfare state in Britain, and the Marshall Plan. This history evokes a moment in which progressives answered a historic set of crises, from the Great Depression to fascism, with a concerted program of domestic reform, economic mobilization, and international cooperation. For a spectrum that stretches from the radicals of the Democracy in Europe Movement 2025 to a Democratic Party centrist like Al Gore, the midcentury moment demonstrates that the left can lead in devising a response to the climate crisis.

Of course, Roosevelt, John Maynard Keynes, and the postwar Labour government in Britain were not revolutionaries. They did not end capitalism. Indeed, the midcentury moment gave birth

to our modern fixation on growing gross national product. But they are also rightly credited with redistribution and a rebalancing of national priorities.

In this same spirit, the left-wing activists who captured the attention of Corbyn's Labour Party during its annual conference last September advocate their version of the Green New Deal not just as an environmental program but as a vision of a comprehensive industrial and social reconstruction. Cutting emissions will go hand in hand with ending poverty. Limiting gasoline-fueled cars will be offset with free public transport. They will address the entrenched problems of a fuel-inefficient housing stock by building green public housing projects. Likewise in the United States, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her cohorts present their version of the Green New Deal as a program to address the multiple cleavages of inequality and racism that divide American society, linking the climate agenda to the demand for health care for all.

Given prevailing beliefs on the limits of public action, these proposals are radical. But what they amount to, in fact, is a form of social democracy reborn—social democracy with all its temptations to both compromise and mission creep.

The German Greens, the most important environmental party in the world, are a case in point. In the 1980s, a basic conflict between radical "fundis" and pragmatic "realos" animated the party. Today, the realos have triumphed. At last fall's party conference, they adopted a three-pronged approach to climate change, including stepped-up public investment, which involves modifying the cap on public debt; carbon pricing of 60 euros, or \$67, per ton (one-third of the price demanded by Fridays for Future); and tougher regulations. The mere mention of the word "bans" (*Verbote*), such as on gasoline-fueled cars, was enough to set editorial writers clucking. The climate agenda was flanked by a demand for rent controls, tenants' rights, and a 12-euro (\$13) minimum wage. It is a worthy progressive agenda but hardly one suitable for a revolution—if anything, it's designed for coalition negotiations with the center-right Christian Democratic Union come the next election. And, by that measure, the compromises have worked. The Greens are riding high in the polls, attracting above all younger, college-educated, white-collar, and self-employed voters.

The political vision of Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal is quite different, at least if we take its original manifesto at face value. It appeals to an impressive array of disenfranchised and marginalized groups that it dubs "frontline communities." Both the left-wing of the Democratic Party and the U.K. Labour Party also gesture toward the well-paid, highly skilled blue-collar jobs that will be created by an energy transition.

How organized labor will respond is by no means clear. Labor unions may prefer the devil they know to a gamble on a decarbonized economy. At the Labour Party conference in September, the general secretary of the GMB trade union, Tim Roache, warned that a crash program of decarbonization

would require the “confiscation of petrol cars,” “state rationing of meat,” and “limiting families to one flight for every five years.” He concluded: “It will put entire industries and the jobs they produced in peril.” To which Tony Kearns from the Communication Workers Union offered the rejoinder: “There’s no jobs on a dead planet.”

In the meantime, what is clear is that coupling climate change politics to demands for comprehensive social restructuring will create powerful enemies. If linking climate politics to health care brings in blue-collar support for the green cause, it also makes the private insurance industry into an opponent. And this leads environmental activists to ask: Can the climate afford a policy agenda as expansive as the Green New Deal?

When the new U.S. Congress sits in 2021, according to the IPCC we will have nine more years to stave off climate disaster. Given that timeline, does it make sense to start by linking action on decarbonization to the intractable issue of American health care reform? Not if you take the experience of the Obama administration as your guide. In 2009, implacable Republican opposition in Congress forced the administration to sacrifice its environmental program to the legislative priority of health care. Cap and trade, the totemic policy of the centrist environmental movement since the 1990s, was dead on arrival.

This experience points to the deeply ambiguous logic of crisis politics. Summoning the urgency of the climate crisis gives the left a new energy. But if the evocation of crisis is more than a rhetorical device, it must also impose constraints and choices. In a foxhole, survival is paramount, and radicalism fades. Against the backdrop of decades of neoliberalism, it is easy enough to see the attraction of World War II as a historic example of government action. In both the United States and Britain, the left played an important role in the war effort. But it would be naive to imagine that this was a moment of radical opportunity. Labor union activists and social democratic promises were always subordinate to the immediate demands of the war and the entrenched influence of big business. The radicalism of the early New Deal was buried in the war.

The climate emergency is apocalyptic in its implications. Does it leave any room for other agenda items? The militants of the Extinction Rebellion movement deny that anything else matters. Their cause, they declare, is “beyond politics.” They call on their followers to start by mourning the world that is slipping away before our eyes. In Britain, they have taken to sabotaging commuter trains, and in return they have felt the fury of irate passengers. Although individual activists associated with the movement are avowedly anti-capitalist, the movement as a whole is distinctive precisely for its refusal to engage with broader political questions. Extinction Rebellion activists demand people’s assemblies, not specific political commitments. They demand decarbonization by 2025 without offering a program to get there. In this way, they take the logic of emergency anti-politics to its extreme conclusion.

Not surprisingly, there are some on the left who regard them as a millenarian sect. In the midst of a general election in which Labour was campaigning for full decarbonization by 2030, the rebels, as they like to call themselves, launched a hunger strike outside the party’s main office. “This is the first truly shared global crisis,” declared Ronan Harrington, the coordinator of Extinction Rebellion’s U.K. General Election Strategy Group. “It can’t have a left-wing solution.”

4

**NOT ONLY DO EXTREME CRISES FORCE** invidious choices. They also make strange bedfellows. In an emergency, you cannot afford to be choosy. Your enemy’s enemy is your friend. Despite the fond imaginings of Ocasio-Cortez and her cohorts, World War II was not won by the New Deal or by digging for victory. The effort on the homefront in Britain and the United States was modest in comparison with that of the other combatants. The dirty work of winning the war against Nazi Germany was done by the Soviet Union and its Stalinist regime at a cost far greater than anything the West has ever experienced.

If the American and British advocates of a Green New Deal are inspired by Roosevelt’s demand to deliver tens of thousands of warplanes, who, one must ask, will win the carbon war on the ground? The basic lesson of the mid-20th-century crisis is not that Western capitalist democracy rose to the challenge. The lesson is that whatever progress was achieved was enabled by an alliance with the protean violence of the Soviet regime, with which after 1945 we found ourselves in a lethal standoff, dividing the world and threatening nuclear annihilation.

The obvious question for the present is the relationship of the new climate left in the West to China. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Popular Front gave shape to relations between socialists, social democrats, communists, and the Soviet Union. What is the relationship of the Western left to the Chinese Communist Party regime today?

The Soviet Union was spectacular in its manipulation of nature. China is even more extreme. The present incumbents in Beijing are the inheritors of the Great Leap Forward, the one-child policy, the most spectacular burst of economic growth and the largest dam-building program in history, an agenda of abolishing poverty for all 1.4 billion of its people, the most complete surveillance system



the world has ever seen, and the most serious effort to engineer our way out of the climate crisis. It is not too much to say that the future of humanity depends on the success of Beijing's climate politics.

Since it inherited the title of the world's largest carbon dioxide emitter from the United States around 2007, the Chinese government, unlike the George W. Bush and Trump administrations, has recognized the need to act unilaterally to cut emissions. Lethal levels of air pollution and crippling congestion in rapidly growing cities have created political pressure to act. The industrial policy advantages of seizing the initiative in solar-, wind-, and electricity-powered transportation are obvious. But in China, too, the energy transition has costs. China's heavy industrial workforce is gigantic. More workers have been let go from China's steel mills in recent years than work in the entire steel industry of the West.

In a new era of geopolitical competition with the United States and fears of economic slowdown endangering national stability, the latest round of five-year planning places a new emphasis on energy security over decarbonization. In the first half of 2019, China's renewable energy investments dropped by nearly 40 percent compared with the previous year, and the next few years will see 148 gigawatts of Chinese coal energy—close to the European Union's entire output—come online. Coal may be dirty, but it is also cheap and local.

Meanwhile, U.S. and European liberals, faced with China, are divided between a desire to uphold a commitment to human rights, fading hopes of economic and political convergence, and the tug of realpolitik. What is the position of the climate left? History suggests it does not have an alternative to detente with China.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Europe and the Soviet Union built a network of gas pipelines running east-west across the continent. They did so in the face of protests from Washington and warnings that it would leave Europe dangerously dependent on a Cold War enemy. The Europeans argued that energy was if not beyond politics, then aside from it. It was a policy hedged with moral ambiguity. The gas not only flowed through states under repressive one-party rule but earned them precious hard currency. But the Europeans made the investments nevertheless. They wanted the cheap gas, and alternative sources of energy, whether shipped in from the Middle East or generated by domestic nuclear reactors, came with their own

## WERE CHINA TO RESUME

### A HIGH-CARBON, COAL-BASED GROWTH PATH, IT WOULD BE CATAclySMIC.

risks. And in the long run, the Europeans trusted that the balance of influence in their relations with Moscow would tilt their way. In 1989, West Germany reaped the benefits when Moscow acquiesced to German unification.

The sources of potential conflict between the West and China are obvious and can no longer be put aside as transitional tensions. They extend to the fields of energy and climate. Were China to resume a high-carbon, coal-based growth path, it would be cataclysmic. If it opts for relatively low-carbon imported oil and liquid natural gas, this will force the issue of maritime security. And if it plunges headfirst into renewables, given its size, this will create fierce competition over rare-earth deposits and dwindling copper supplies. But faced with the existential threat of the climate crisis, there are also obvious possibilities for cooperation. A short list would include helping to green China's international investments as part of its Belt and Road Initiative, cooperating on the administrative procedures necessary to make international carbon pricing work, and defining common standards for green finance. This is humdrum stuff, but it is what a green detente could be made of. For the climate left, there is surely no other option. China today already emits more carbon dioxide than the United States and Europe combined. The West is a junior partner in whatever collective climate solution Beijing and the other emerging Asian powers can live with.

Socialism will always be defined by efforts to tame and overcome capitalism. In the 20th century, it was reshaped by total war, the struggle over decolonization, anti-racism, and the battle for women's rights. If socialism has a future in the United States and Europe today, it will be defined in relation to these twin challenges: the struggle to mitigate and adapt to climate change while adjusting to the West's junior position in a rebalanced world. None of the West's major political ideologies—conservatism, liberalism, or socialism, shaped as they are by the history of the 19th century—are particularly suited to such a future. The only sensible alternative for tomorrow may be the ideology most commonly dismissed as radical today. ■

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CAPITALISM IS STILL THE  
BEST WAY TO HANDLE RISK  
AND BOOST INNOVATION  
AND PRODUCTIVITY.

BY ALLISON SCHRAGER

**WITH INCREASINGLY UBIQUITOUS IPHONES,** internet, central air conditioning, flat-screen TVs, and indoor plumbing, few in the developed world would want to go back to life 100, 30, or even 10 years ago. Indeed, around the world, the last two centuries have brought vast improvements in material living standards; billions of people have been lifted from poverty, and life expectancy across income levels has broadly risen. Most of that progress came from capitalist economies.

Illustration by DANIEL BROKSTAD



Yet those economies are not without their problems. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the gap between the rich and poor has become intolerably large as business owners and highly educated workers in urban areas have become richer while workers' wages in rural areas have stagnated. In most rich countries, more trade has brought a bigger, better variety of goods, but it has also displaced many jobs.

With social instability in the form of mass protests, Brexit, the rise of populism, and deep polarization knocking at the capitalist economies' doors, much of the progress of the last several decades is in peril. For some pundits and policymakers, the solution is clear: socialism, which tends to be cited as a method for addressing everything from inequality and injustice to climate change.

Yet the very ills that socialists identify are best addressed through innovation, productivity gains, and better rationing of risk. And capitalism is still far and away the best, if not only, way to generate those outcomes.

## 2

**TODAY'S SOCIALISM IS DIFFICULT TO DEFINE.** Traditionally, the term meant total state ownership of capital, as in the Soviet Union, North Korea, or Maoist China. Nowadays, most people don't take such an extreme view. In Europe, social democracy means the nationalization of many industries and very generous welfare states. And today's rising socialists are rebranding the idea to mean an economic system that delivers all the best parts of capitalism (growth and rising living standards) without the bad (inequality, economic cycles).

But no perfect economic system exists; there are always trade-offs—in the most extreme form between total state ownership of capital and unfettered markets without any regulation or welfare state. Today, few would opt for either pole; what modern socialists and capitalists really disagree on is the right level of government intervention.

Modern socialists want more, but not complete, state ownership. They'd like to nationalize certain industries. In the United States, that's health care—a plan supported by Democratic presidential candidates Elizabeth Warren (who does not call herself a socialist) and Bernie Sanders (who wears the label proudly). In the United Kingdom, Labour

Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who was trounced at the polls in mid-December, has set his sights on a longer list of industries, including the water, energy, and internet providers.

Other items on the socialist wish list may include allowing the government to be the primary investor in the economy through massive infrastructure projects that aim to replace fossil fuels with renewables, as Green New Deal socialists have proposed. They've also floated plans that would make the government the employer of a majority of Americans by offering guaranteed well-paid jobs that people can't be fired from. And then there are more limited proposals, including installing more workers on the boards of private companies and instituting national rent controls and high minimum wages.

For their part, modern capitalists want some, but less, state intervention. They are skeptical of nationalization and price controls; they argue that today's economic problems are best addressed by harnessing private enterprise. In the United States, they've argued for more regulation and progressive taxation to help ease inequality, incentives to encourage private firms to use less carbon, and a more robust welfare state through tax credits. Over the past 15 years, meanwhile, capitalist Europeans have instituted reforms to improve labor market flexibility by making it easier to hire and fire people, and there have been attempts to reduce the size of pensions.

No economic system is perfect, and the exact right balance between markets and the state may never be found. But there are good reasons to believe that keeping capital in the hands of the private sector, and empowering its owners to make decisions in the pursuit of profit, is the best we've got.

## 3

**ONE REASON TO TRUST MARKETS** is that they are better at setting prices than people. If you set prices too high, many a socialist government has found, citizens will be needlessly deprived of goods. Set them too low, and there will be excessive demand and ensuing shortages. This is true for all goods, including health care and labor. And there is little reason to believe that the next batch of socialists in Washington or London would be any better at setting prices than their predecessors. In fact, government-run health care systems in Canada and European countries are plagued by long wait times. A 2018 Fraser Institute study cites a median wait time of 19.8 weeks to see a specialist physician in Canada. Socialists may argue that is a small price to pay for universal access, but a market-based approach can deliver both coverage and responsive service. A full government takeover isn't the only option, nor is it the best one.

Beyond that, markets are also good at rationing risk. Fundamentally, socialists would like to reduce risk—protect workers from any personal or economywide shock. That is a

noble goal, and some reduction through better functioning safety nets is desirable. But getting rid of all uncertainty—as state ownership of most industries would imply—is a bad idea. Risk is what fuels growth. People who take more chances tend to reap bigger rewards; that’s why the top nine names on the *Forbes* 400 list of the richest Americans are not heirs to family dynasties but are self-made entrepreneurs who took a leap to build new products and created many jobs in the process.

Some leftist economists like Mariana Mazzucato argue that governments might be able to step in and become laboratories for innovation. But that would be a historical anomaly; socialist-leaning governments have typically been less innovative than others. After all, bureaucrats and worker-corporate boards have little incentive to upset the status quo or compete to build a better widget. And even when government programs have spurred innovation—as in the case of the internet—it took the private sector to recognize the value and create a market.

And that brings us to a third reason to believe in markets: productivity. Some economists, such as Robert Gordon, have looked to today’s economic problems and suggested that productivity growth—the engine that fueled so much of the progress of the last several decades—is over. In this telling, the resources, products, and systems that underpin the world’s economy are all optimized, and little further progress is possible.

But that is hard to square with reality. Innovation helps economies do more with fewer resources—increasingly critical to addressing climate change, for example—which is a form of productivity growth. And likewise, many of the products and technologies people rely on every day did not exist a few years ago. These goods make inaccessible services more available and are changing the nature of work, often for the better. Such gains are made possible by capitalist systems that encourage invention and growing the pie, not by socialist systems that are more concerned with how the existing pie is cut. It is far too soon, in other words, to write off productivity.

Here, it is worth considering the lessons of a previous productivity boom: the Industrial Revolution. As the economist Joel Mokyr has shown, it took new innovations like the steam engine more than 100 years to appear in productivity estimates. The same could be happening today with smartphones and the internet. Meanwhile, even as that upheaval transformed the human experience, creating a more comfortable existence for most everyone, it was also messy and disruptive. The early part of that innovative cycle—like others since—displaced existing workers while the gains flowed to the owners of capital first, causing social instability.

This time around, the effects may end up being less wrenching: The divisions between owners of capital and

workers are not as clear as they used to be. More Americans than ever own stock through their workplace retirement accounts. Stock ownership is on the rise in many non-U.S. capitalist economies, too. And several other countries, such as Australia and the United Kingdom, also offer retirement accounts, making their citizens shareholders as well. Unlike 200 years ago, workers’ interests are already more aligned with those of management.

## 4

**STOCK OWNERSHIP IN RETIREMENT** accounts hints at the kinds of market-friendly policies that can share wealth while preserving innovation and risk-taking. In the United States, there is room to make taxes more progressive, especially when it comes to estate taxes, and to close tax loopholes that make it easier for companies to exploit the system. The social safety net could be expanded to include jobs retraining, an enhanced earned income tax credit, and grants to innovate or work remotely in smaller cities or more rural areas. And the health care industry is indeed in need of reform.

More generally, capitalism can be made more inclusive, and government programs can help smooth its rough edges. But none of these changes require governments to take over entire industries. Depending on the market, the reform could be a less intrusive government option, subsidy, or sometimes just better accountability.

Most fundamentally, inequality is tolerable if the poor have a shot at becoming rich, too. That shot has never been so great as the American dream in particular promised, but there is little evidence that economic mobility has actually gotten worse in recent years. Still, to avoid greater instability—and to ensure the greatest possible buy-in for the capitalist system—today’s business and political leaders can do more to make sure everyone at least has a chance to roll the dice. Here, education reform and development of rural areas are necessary to close the gap.

And that’s not socialism—it’s building off capitalism and making better use of today’s and tomorrow’s workers. ■

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# THE SOURCES OF SOCIALIST CONDUCT

WHAT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY WOULD LOOK LIKE IF SOCIALISTS RAN WASHINGTON.

BY THOMAS MEANEY



**JUST A FEW YEARS AGO**, the idea of a social democratic foreign policy—much less a democratic socialist one—in the United States would have seemed a quixotic proposition. No U.S. administration has even pretended to have one. Franklin D. Roosevelt’s foreign policy had no coherent ideological agenda. Jimmy Carter’s brief administration broke with postwar U.S. foreign policy, but it did so under the banner of human rights, not social democracy.

The political configurations now emerging in the West have dramatically reversed the recent status quo. The old consensus-oriented social democratic parties in France and Germany today lie in ruins, having paid dearly for the privilege of selling themselves out. In stark contrast, the United Kingdom, the heartland of market capitalism and monetary discipline, is now home to one of the most significant mass leftist political movements in the world, however grim its

electoral future. Portugal, once a political backwater in the European Union, shows that alternatives to austerity are as practicable as they are popular. And across the Atlantic, the idea of a democratic socialist president winning the White House is no longer the stuff of fantasy.

Such is the leftist momentum in the United States that it is once again necessary to distinguish between social democracy and democratic socialism. The first is fundamentally reformist and aims to blunt the harder edges of capitalism and make it sustainable. The second is transformative and aims to replace the capitalist system with a socialist order. Now that both these agendas have shot to prominence in U.S. politics, each with their own protagonist (Elizabeth Warren for social democracy, Bernie Sanders for democratic socialism), it’s imperative to think through how the power of the United States could be used—and changed—by these ideological formations. For the sake of convenience, the whole spectrum running from social democracy to democratic socialism will be referred to below as “left,” though it is important to

avoid collapsing all of the differences between the two visions.

Considering the forces arrayed against it—a diplomatic corps still rooted in Cold War visions of order, corporate interests that are largely determined to resist any leftward drift in Washington, and the left’s own talent for schism—any left U.S. foreign policy would likely unfold in a piecemeal fashion. But any program worthy of the name would have to be explicit about its goals. It would have to fundamentally revise the position of U.S. power in the world, from one of presumed and desired primacy to one of concerted cooperation with allies on behalf of working people across the planet.

Since the early 1940s, U.S. foreign policy has been largely premised on saving the world for capitalism—whether that has meant setting up international monetary institutions, enforcing a property-protecting legal order, keeping capital-threatening insurgencies at bay, or protecting the economies of allies to allow them to develop. Today’s left foreign-policy thinkers argue that the time has come for U.S. power to serve a different purpose: At a bare minimum, it should protect the world from the excesses of capitalism and counteract the violent implosions that U.S. policies and interventions around the world have all too often oxygenated, if not ignited. The first steps of any left foreign-policy program would be to democratize U.S. foreign policy, reduce the size of the U.S. military footprint, discipline and nationalize the defense industry, and use U.S. economic power to achieve egalitarian and environmental ends.

The tradition of social democracy in particular is haunted by its own ideals. Its triumphs have been mostly domestic: mass voter enfranchisement, the defeat of official racial discrimination, the provision of basic welfare and other rights. The movement got its start in the 19th century, together with the emergence of nation-states, when owners of corporations and factories were forced into making at least some compromises with workers. The question of how to extend social democratic principles beyond the nation has long been a vexed one. The snapshots under the heading of “foreign policy” are not the prettiest pages in the movement’s album: German Social Democrats backing the Kaiser in World War I; French Socialists insisting on holding the course in Algeria; Brazil’s Workers’ Party government sending armed forces to lead a peacekeeping mission in support of an authoritarian Haitian government in 2004 in a vain attempt to win a Brazilian seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Nevertheless, social democracy’s basic principles—the idea of a large organization of working people, not a vanguard, aspiring to better social and economic conditions—retain their force. It is often forgotten, even by social democrats themselves, that the fight is not fanatically attached to the idea of social equality but rather to the idea that genuine freedom requires certain social and economic preconditions. Social democracy starts with people using the instruments of a democratically controlled state to loosen

the grip of liberal capitalist dogma. The question for a left foreign policy is how to harness anti-elite sentiment around the world for the cause of environmental renewal, economic and social equality, and mutual political liberation.



**THE FIRST GOAL OF A LEFT FOREIGN POLICY** would focus on changing how foreign policy is forged in the first place. The priority would be to give democratic control over the basic direction of foreign policy back to the electorate. It is imperative that state power not be delegated to a cloistered elite, whether a Leninist vanguard or, as in the U.S. case, a liberal technocratic elite that has long conflated the interests of the nation with those of global capital. The U.S. foreign-policy elite has barely questioned its commitment to free trade pacts and permanent military missions abroad. That’s why a left foreign policy would need to begin by returning war-making powers to Congress (even if that involves cajoling Congress to reassume them) and rescinding the Authorization for Use of Military Force, which, since 2001, has functioned as the legal writ for wars across three administrations.

This restoration of public accountability would have the additional advantage of furthering substantive democratic goals. The U.S. electorate overwhelmingly opposes aggressive foreign wars and interventions, unmoved by the appeals to credibility that foreign-policy elites have used to guide the United States into one quagmire after another. Donald Trump won the presidency in part by acknowledging this fact. No one doubts that the United States’ current global posture is the contingent result of its extremely free hand in world affairs in the 1940s and 1950s. The maintenance of U.S. troops in Germany, Japan, and South Korea today baffles a generation that did not live through the Cold War. Recent polls suggest that 42 percent of Germans want U.S. forces to leave the country and 37 percent want them to stay, while in Japan protests and referendums have repeatedly confirmed the public’s desire for a reduction of the U.S. presence.

The problem with the existing foreign-policy culture’s prioritizing of military solutions is that it cuts off more effective policy options and stunts the diplomatic corps’ ability to pursue them. Long-term consequences on the ground have been all afterthought in recent calls—from liberals and conservatives alike—to intervene in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and



Venezuela. No matter that Washington's postwar use of force has an extremely poor record on this score. In the case of Syria, the constant airing of a military solution precluded political bargaining that could have reduced violence at a much earlier stage. A left foreign policy would mean ending the way the foreign-policy establishment and the media routinely conflate "the United States doing something" with "military intervention."

There is no ironclad rule that says a left foreign policy must reduce the size of the U.S. military footprint. One could imagine a scenario in which U.S. forces went to war to protect the global environment from climate chauvinists, slave states, or other enemies of a social democratic global order. But a genuinely left foreign policy would be a failure if it did not focus on the vast extent of U.S. economic power, which is constantly at work in the background of international politics. Social democrats would properly seek to place economic power at the center of foreign policy.

That's why a priority of a left foreign policy would be to revolutionize military industrial policy. Comprising well over half of the \$420 billion global arms industry, the U.S. armament sector considerably outstrips more visible industries such as car manufacturing and is four times the national education budget. The problem is not simply that this industry looks for customers around the world like any other. Nor is it the revolving doors between the military and weapons and security companies. The issue is that the arms industry has become a way for the ultrawealthy to siphon taxpayer dollars under the cover of the national interest. Its leading firms donate directly to avowedly pro-war candidates, especially those who sit on the Senate Armed Services Committee, with the aim of not only blocking attempts to stop U.S.-backed wars, such as support of the Saudi war on Yemen, but to create the illusion that without U.S. armed forces global capitalism itself would collapse.

There is no reason why a left administration should not demand the best possible military technology in the world, but it should impose stringent requirements on the industrial sector to integrate American defense into American society. The government should more closely regulate the management of the arms companies to which it awards public contracts, including the extent to which workers have a financial and managerial stake in their companies. The government should stop military materiel from being used in domestic policing. (It's

not uncommon for surplus tanks to end up on the streets of places like Ferguson, Missouri.) Trying to completely nationalize a company like Lockheed Martin would be a very costly engagement for a social democratic administration in the short term. In the longer term, however, it would be worth pursuing demands for partial worker ownership of such corporations.

But a left international economic agenda wouldn't end at industrial policy. It would recognize that, at least since the Dawes Plan of 1924, which managed the debt payments of Weimar Germany, the main weapon in America's arsenal has been the U.S. Treasury. The United States most commonly expresses its power by allowing and barring access to the U.S. economy. This is an area where a left administration could make a major difference. Loans (and the denial of loans), debt forgiveness, offshore tax havens, currency inflation—these affect the lives of far more people than America's missiles and bombs.

Instead of tying aid to indicators such as the protection of property rights and other rubrics designed by conservative and liberal think tanks, a left administration could instead make aid more contingent on the pursuit of a redistributive domestic agenda or the environmental record of the government in question. Carbon taxes on imports alone could encourage foreign trading partners to put in place more environmentally sustainable domestic policies. Any U.S. left agenda worth the name would need to consider the social welfare of foreign populations in conjunction with taking care of its own.



**THERE ARE UNCOMFORTABLE POLITICAL AREAS** that no left administration should shy away from. The history of social democracy's relationship with the environment has been a rocky one. Much of the movement's success in the past has been linked to enormous amounts of resource extraction, from the Ruhr in Germany, where the coal furnaces formed one of the backbones of early social democracy, to the great success of Workers' Party social programs in Brazil, which were in part insulated from right-wing attack because they relied on a vast energy boom that did not require redistributing their wealth.

Earlier generations of socialists and social democrats generally did not understand the effect they were having on the climate, but the American working class's relationship to economic growth must be rethought if its citizens are to flourish in the next century. Left foreign-policy practitioners should still prioritize the equitable distribution of resources across society, but they may need to accept that such resources won't be an ever-increasing bounty. This shift in popular values, away from the ideology of growth to the necessity of sustainability, may prove to be the left's most defining challenge.

The second dilemma for any left foreign policy is what to do with fellow movements that are affirmatively socialist in character but under threat from an internal or external power. Should

the United States intervene on behalf of the single social democratic entity in the Middle East, the Kurdish statelet of Rojava? What should a social democratic administration do about reactionary coups against social democratic regimes, such as in Brazil, or freedom movements such as Hong Kong's? Would the United States not have the responsibility to help its friends?

The problem is that, in most cases, any form of explicitly militarist intervention would spell disaster. The age-old question of whether socialism means pacifism or noninterference is unlikely to ever be resolved. But domestic clarity can provide orientation: By working toward a social transformation at home, building up the legitimacy of the American state and the moral legitimacy of its economy, the United States increases its ability to marshal diplomatic pressure on behalf of allies around the world.

There is also the inverse dilemma: What should a left administration do when nominally socialist governments such as Cuba or Venezuela repress their own people? There will always be pressure in Washington to do something in such cases, which at the bare minimum tends to mean backing the opposition, with the possibility of military intervention dangling in the background. Yet left foreign-policy practitioners must have the forbearance to recognize that such solutions generally have little practical promise. Often the opposition groups hailed in Washington have impressive storage space for liberal values but small local followings. Meanwhile, the track record of U.S. military interference in South America has mostly given rise to autocracies. A new foreign policy should instead focus on diplomatic openings, including the possibility that a figure like Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro might have opponents with large public followings to his left.

Which brings us to China. One worrying aspect of the 2020 presidential race is that every serious contender across the spectrum—from Sanders and Warren to Trump himself—have staked out a hostile stance on China. (Michael Bloomberg and Deval Patrick, the candidates most directly involved in international capitalism, may turn out to be the exceptions.) This hostility is not merely about intellectual property or American wages or the hollowing out of the U.S. industrial core or cyberwarfare. There is also a growing sense among many left-of-center Americans that China's repressions on its borderlands must be met head on. Among human rights advocates, a clear agenda is coming into view, which involves activating Uighurs and Hong Kongers and the people of Guangdong to fight Beijing and to help them balance the scales of dignity.

But pursuing such a course would be counterproductive. Chinese President Xi Jinping is in the middle of transforming an industrial-agrarian economy into a massive consumer economy—much as U.S. economists have long advised Beijing to do. The overheating of the Chinese economy has not only resulted in the Belt and Road Initiative as a way of sending excess capital out of the country but also the directed spillover of Mandarin-

speaking populations into Hong Kong (where their presence only aggravates competition over higher education and housing) and the ongoing colonization of Xinjiang. With such an economic transformation underway, it makes good sense for Xi to deflect from this hard reality with speeches about cleansing China of foreign ideologies and undergoing a new round of ideological hygiene. The idea that this world-historical development can be decently improved by any military swagger or hard-line approach seems deluded at best.

More valuable would be to recognize the United States' own role in this unfolding China of the present. The American and Chinese economies are locked in an embrace that can only be dealt with as a totality, rather than piecemeal. Only through diplomacy with China would, for instance, any attempt at forging a serious environmental pact be achievable. No human rights cause in China can be furthered by the United States if it does not use the real economic power at its disposal: fining U.S. companies for doing business in Xinjiang, forcing Apple to comply with U.S. labor regulations abroad, shifting the emphasis of World Bank loans from Chinese corporations to individual Chinese migrants leaving the countryside en masse. Meanwhile, the demonization of China will likely continue to be a profitable hypocrisy for American politicians to engage in.

Whether predominantly social democratic or democratic socialist in character, no left U.S. foreign policy can expect full implementation or success in the short term. It would be naive to believe otherwise. It is not only that the diplomatic corps itself remains embroiled in the Cold War consensus but that foreign policy is merely one domain among others that Americans would need to change and co-opt in concert, such as the judiciary, the intelligence services, and the Federal Reserve. It would be a decent enough start if a Sanders or Warren administration succeeded simply in making left diplomats an inhabitable identity at the State Department, where they are currently an extinct species. It may be that some of the most effective arms of a left U.S. foreign policy are the most mundane. Imagine if the IRS were empowered to pursue wealth taxes globally, giving the 1 percent nowhere to hide. That desk-bound agency may contain more revolutionary tinder than the U.S. Marine Corps. ■

**THOMAS MEANEY** is a fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.



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“We believe that change comes from unity, building bridges, celebrating differences, and seeking shared understanding,” says former US Ambassador Lee Feinstein, the founding dean of Indiana University’s Hamilton Lugar School. This FP Guide tells the stories of leading deans, directors, and professors who are teaching the next generation of international affairs professionals to collaborate in tackling today’s most intractable problems. They include:

- A professor with Washington, DC, experience in immigration policy who teaches an intense class about **refugees**, after a decade in which the number of refugees worldwide doubled to almost 26 million.
- As a teenage climate activist is named the 2019 *Time* Person of the Year, a new dean who has worked on **climate change** issues at the United Nations and World Bank and now aims to teach climate change as a “threat intensifier across the full range of international relations.”
- In an increasingly interconnected world economy pocked by **trade wars**, a center director who sometimes uses game theory to help students understand what makes trade agreements sustainable.
- A professor who is preparing nontechnical students to someday help create the international norms and policies that will counter ever-growing **cyber threats**.





**“I try to get our students to think about concrete problems and how to go about systematically solving them.”**

—Johannes Urpelainen, Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Professor of Energy, Resources, and Environment, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University

### Johannes Urpelainen, Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Professor of Energy, Resources, and Environment

#### Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

Johannes Urpelainen, a top energy policy expert who advises governments, international organizations, and the private sector, aims to teach “action-oriented” classes. As director of the Energy, Resources, and Environment program at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), he led a redesign of the program last year, so that students begin with a broad introductory class and then move on to more specialized courses.

“I try to get our students to think about concrete problems and how to go about systematically solving them,” explains Urpelainen, Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz professor. Exercises could include writing policy briefs, memos, or research papers that are “built around addressing a practical problem in a realistic and feasible way.”

In a class last year on energy access, the assignment was to select a country that has trouble providing energy to its population because of, say, a shortage of reliable electricity or insufficient access to clean cooking fuel. “I asked the students to come up with some concrete recommendations for how the government could address the situation,” says Urpelainen. “So instead of keeping it at a high theoretical level, I made it very concrete.”

One student conducted research to understand why the government of Angola had not succeeded with its policies for using solar power to improve energy access in rural areas. The result was “a terrific analysis of the institutional limitations of Angola’s energy policy system,” says Urpelainen. The student wrote a blog post



based on that analysis, and it was featured on the website of the 200,000-member Energy Central Power Industry Network.

There are 40 to 50 students enrolled each year in the Energy, Resources, and Environment program, and they can study at any of the school’s three campuses—in Washington, DC; Bologna, Italy; and Nanjing, China. All three locations offer the same introductory course, to provide a common foundation. Mirroring the overall approach of Johns Hopkins SAIS, the program is interdisciplinary, bringing together elements of science and technology, economics, and politics and governance.

Students gain experience working on projects for major corporate clients, such as BP, ExxonMobil, Google, and Tesla. In Washington, students benefit from the proximity of US government institutions, the World Bank Group, and the International Monetary Fund—all within walking distance.

“That creates all kinds of opportunities for our students, in terms of networking and practical experience,” Urpelainen says.

Urpelainen also is founding director of the school’s Initiative for Sustainable Energy Policy, which involves faculty and students in practical work on energy and the environment in emerging economies. Started two years ago, ISEP is generating support from foundations, mostly based in the United States and Europe, such as the Stichting SED Fund in the Netherlands. One effort is focused on helping India transition from coal to renewable sources, by working with civil-society organizations to conduct research and develop recommendations for the government.

“The civil-society and government partnerships that we have in India are quite deep,” Urpelainen says. “So, they give us a good opportunity to influence policy in a positive way.”



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**“The aim of the center is to study the institutions of global economic cooperation. There needs to be more dialogue between business, government, and academia to get at the problems and the solutions.”**

–Renee Bowen, Director, Center for Commerce and Diplomacy, School of Global Policy and Strategy, UC San Diego

## **Renee Bowen, Director, Center for Commerce and Diplomacy**

### **UC San Diego, School of Global Policy and Strategy**

In an increasingly interconnected world economy pocked by trade wars, redesigning globalization is the ambitious but timely goal of a new center at UC San Diego’s School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS).

The backlash against globalization stemming from populism means that it is now even more important to finetune the organizations that help countries cooperate economically, says the director of the new Center for Commerce and Diplomacy, Renee Bowen. The center will focus on research into the intersection of public policy and economics, bring together practitioners to think about how to improve cooperation, and train a cadre of future commercial diplomats who will be the foot soldiers of international commerce.

“There is no better time to be thinking about international trade agreements,” says Bowen, who is also an associate professor of economics. She teaches courses focused on political economic theory, international economics, and international trade agreements—sometimes using game theory to help students understand what makes trade agreements sustainable.

“The aim of the center is really to study the institutions of global economic cooperation,” says Bowen, who worked at the World Bank and received her PhD from Georgetown University.

Her passion is understanding how organizations such as the World Bank Group, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund support the global economic order and how they can be improved. “At the heart of this, there needs to be more dialogue between business, government, and academia to really get at the problems and the solutions,” she says.



The Center for Commerce and Diplomacy, which launched in January 2019, aims to accomplish that goal through research, seminars, and public outreach. For example, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was the speaker at the first Global Leaders Forum for the center in 2019.

In addition, the center has helped lead a pioneering teaching approach for the school by jointly creating a course on economic diplomacy with Sciences Po’s Paris School of International Affairs, HEC Montréal, and the Korea University Graduate School of International Studies in Seoul. Students on three continents will take the course simultaneously, using course materials developed by all four schools. This approach is designed to provide a common understanding to future diplomats who could negotiate trade deals together. “They have a common background, they will speak a common language, and will make that diplomatic transition much stronger,” says Bowen. The students will compete for a coveted internship at the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The Center for Commerce and Diplomacy, Bowen says, is a natural outgrowth for a school that has long focused on China, and more broadly, relationships between the Americas and Asia. One of the school’s program options is a Master of Chinese Economic and Political Affairs.

About 40 percent of GPS degree-seeking students come from abroad. Some return to their home countries after graduation for private-sector or government jobs, such as at the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry in Japan. Other graduates find jobs with private companies such as Qualcomm. Students intern all over the world, including at the United Nations, the Mitsubishi Research Institute in Tokyo, and the US Department of State.



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**“We believe that change comes from unity, building bridges, celebrating differences, and seeking shared understanding. That’s an ethos we get from the people for whom the School is named—two gentle giants of American foreign policy.”**

—Lee Feinstein,  
 Founding Dean,  
 Hamilton Lugar  
 School of Global and  
 International Studies,  
 Indiana University

## **Lee Feinstein, Founding Dean Indiana University, Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies**

The Hamilton Lugar School’s philosophy is guided by its namesakes, former Rep. Lee Hamilton and Sen. Richard Lugar, who represent a tradition of nonpartisan commitment to principled and pragmatic US global engagement, says former US Ambassador Lee Feinstein, the founding dean of the school. Hamilton and Lugar were foreign policy leaders in and out of Congress, who made their mark in establishing a trajectory for US foreign policy in the period leading out of the Cold War and into the next century.

As much as their intellect and ambition, what distinguished Hamilton and Lugar was a set of values—a commitment to unity, not division, Feinstein says. These values guide the school bearing their names.

“We believe that change comes from unity, building bridges, celebrating differences, and seeking shared understanding,” Feinstein says.

To help its students understand the world, the school offers one of the few programs in international relations that combines the study of cross-border issues with an emphasis on developing area and language expertise. This ensures that students graduate with expertise not only in global affairs, but also the regional cultures, languages, and perspectives shaping the world.

The school’s renowned program in area studies and instruction covers almost every area of the world and is central to the school’s success. It offers courses in more than 80 languages, among the most of any American university, with four Language Flagship programs specializing in



Arabic, Mandarin, Turkish, and Russian. In 2018, 11 of Hamilton Lugar’s area studies centers and programs—the most of any school in the nation—were awarded an \$18.8 million, four-year grant under the US Department of Education’s prestigious Title VI program. The program gives grants to universities that improve training in critical foreign languages.

“This gives us tremendous breadth in global research and instruction, and in languages from Arabic to Zulu,” Feinstein says.

The Hamilton Lugar School also emphasizes the skills that students need to be effective leaders in international affairs. With 120 full-time faculty members, whose expertise comes from virtually every discipline, the teacher-to-student ratio is low, allowing students to get personalized education at a large Tier 1 research university.

Feinstein has worked in and out of government and in and out of academia, at research institutes and at advocacy organizations, located in Washington, DC, and overseas. “Like people entering the field now, my career spanned different geographical areas and different professional fields,” he says. “That’s the kind of career people can expect and the kind of training we provide, grounded in the liberal arts and supported by knowledge and skills tailored to global careers.”

Hamilton Lugar students work in every field. Many pursue careers in global public health, medicine, and law, both in government and in the private sector. Post-graduate employment ranges from the US Defense, Justice, and State departments to companies including Booz Allen Hamilton, Airbnb, Eli Lilly, and Google, and organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“There’s really no career now that isn’t in some way global,” Feinstein says. “Every one of our students leaves the university with a deeper understanding of the pressing issues facing the world.”





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**“There is a lack of individuals who have a conceptual idea of the field of cybersecurity and who can communicate with leaders to develop technically informed policies and strategies.”**

–Pano Yannakogeorgos, Clinical Associate Professor and Faculty Lead, MS in Global Security, Conflict, and Cybercrime, Center for Global Affairs, NYU School of Professional Studies

## **Pano Yannakogeorgos, Clinical Associate Professor and Faculty Lead, MS in Global Security, Conflict, and Cybercrime**

### **NYU School of Professional Studies, Center for Global Affairs**

When the US Air Force saw the need to teach its nontechnical employees about the threats and strategies of the cyber world, it tapped Pano Yannakogeorgos to found the new Air Force Cyber College. Yannakogeorgos, then a research professor of cyber policy at the Air Force Research Institute, had led a study for the Air Force’s chief of staff on cyber workforce development. One of the study’s impacts was mandating the creation of the new Air Force Cyber College at Air University. Yannakogeorgos became its founding dean.

Although formally educated in philosophy and global affairs, Yannakogeorgos grew up interested in computers and networks. He managed small business and nonprofit networks and websites in his youth and earned an MA and a PhD at Rutgers University. He was working on his PhD in global affairs when terrorists and nations increasingly began using cyber tools to wreak havoc. The headlines “took my dissertation out of the realm of sci-fi” and heightened the connection between international affairs and cyberspace, he says.

During his graduate studies, Yannakogeorgos recognized that many of his social science-oriented peers were reluctant to delve into the field of cyber and how it was impacting society. “I think that’s a big part of the reason why there is a lack of individuals who have a conceptual idea of the field of cybersecurity and who can communicate with leaders to develop technically informed policies and strategies,” he says.

While Yannakogeorgos was at the Air Force Cyber College, the New York University (NYU) School of Professional Studies’ Center for



Global Affairs (CGA) recognized that leaders in business and government had a need for nontechnical individuals who understood cyber strategy and policy. Building on the success of the 15-year-old MS in Global Affairs, CGA created the new **MS in Global Security, Conflict, and Cybercrime** and recruited Yannakogeorgos. He jumped at the chance to scale up his educational entrepreneurship from the Air Force to a program that could have a worldwide impact.

“What’s different here at CGA is, we’re looking at cyber through a multidisciplinary social science lens. We don’t expect our students to have a technical background,” he says. The new cyber program, which began in the fall of 2019, develops a global student body to provide leadership, management, direction, advocacy, and analysis in support of strengthening the cyber posture of an organization to assure its mission in a contested operational environment.

With students from around the world, that cadre someday will help create the international norms and policies that will counter cyber threats. CGA students have a close relationship with the United Nations, which offers the opportunity for a consulting practicum with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate.

At CGA, in addition to the new cyber program, the MS in Global Affairs offers students a plethora of interdisciplinary concentrations: Environment/Energy Policy; Global Economy; Global Gender Studies; Human Rights and International Law; International Development and Humanitarian Assistance; International Relations/Global Futures; Peacebuilding; and Transnational Security.

CGA’s job-placement rate six months after graduation historically has been about 96 percent, with students landing in places such as the US State Department, the United Nations, and numerous private companies.





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–Rachel Kyte, Dean,  
The Fletcher School,  
Tufts University

### Rachel Kyte, Dean

#### Tufts University, The Fletcher School

“Young people—they see the world differently,” says Rachel Kyte, about what first inspired her to shift gears professionally and become the 14th dean of The Fletcher School at Tufts University and the first woman to hold the position since the school’s founding in 1933.

Kyte was working as the CEO of a United Nations clean-energy initiative and a special representative of the UN Secretary-General when she began considering the next steps in her global career. Her previous experience included serving as a World Bank Group vice president and special envoy on climate change.

Kyte also had been helping guide master’s and PhD students at The Fletcher School, analyzing global climate negotiations and advising them in their studies and career plans, as a professor of practice at Fletcher’s Center for International Environment and Resource Policy. She often recruited these bright, innovative students to serve as interns at the UN.

These students’ enthusiasm and entrepreneurship, and their determination to build a better global future, drew Kyte to the job of dean. After assuming the role in the fall of 2019, Kyte spent her early weeks on the job meeting with faculty, students, alumni, the board, and the larger Tufts family to hear their ideas. This input contributed to her vision for building on the school’s strengths and its reputation for setting the bar in preparing future leaders for the enormity of the global challenges they will face.

As an example, consider Kyte’s area of expertise: climate issues. The Fletcher School looks at climate change not only in terms of traditional



impacts on oceans and agriculture, but also in terms of how it affects security, tactics on the battlefield, economies and business, or migration flows.

That combination of complexity and the global nature of the biggest issues facing today’s world was another motivator for Kyte to take the helm of The Fletcher School, she says. She aims for the school to teach climate change as a “threat intensifier across the full range of international relations.”

One distinguishing feature of Fletcher is that it has no strict core curriculum, but rather provides “a highly customizable curriculum across more than 20 fields of study,” the new dean explains. She cites the “constellation of faculty and teaching” focused on fields such as gender and conflict, human security related to migration and refugee issues, international law, development economics, and international politics.

“The interdisciplinary nature of Fletcher matches the intersectional nature of the world as we see it today,” Kyte says, adding that employers have noted that the school’s graduates possess a holistic view of the world and the challenges its citizens must confront.

Kyte sees the school’s location in Boston as a virtue for international affairs students, offering an extraordinary academic environment and a vibrant economy in finance, biotechnology, and health, with an innovative, start-up culture.

The new dean also aims to extend the progress The Fletcher School has made in the past decade in diversifying its faculty.

“The faculty and the student body need to reflect the world we live in and the very different perspectives that come from that diversity,” she says.



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## Don't Call Donald Trump a Fascist

What it means to brand today's right-wing leaders with the F-word—and why you shouldn't. *By Eliah Bures*

**E**

**"EVERY AGE HAS ITS OWN FASCISM,"** the Italian writer Primo Levi warned in a 1974 essay. Responding to the Vietnam War and the rise of military juntas in Chile and Greece, Levi worried that the dehumanization and domination of fascist politics had survived World War II and were now being revived in forms less obvious than the mass slaughter of Auschwitz, which he had witnessed firsthand.

"There are many ways of reaching [fascism]," Levi noted, "not just through the terror of police intimidation, but by denying and distorting information, by undermining systems of justice, by paralyzing the education system, and by

spreading in a myriad subtle ways nostalgia for a world where order reigned, and where the security of a privileged few depends on the forced labor and the forced silence of the many."

Levi feared we would be blind to fascism's return. The truth, however, is that most of us are beset by the opposite affliction: We are not oblivious to the possibility of fascism; rather, we see fascism everywhere—including where it is not.





In the 45 years since Levi wrote, most U.S. presidents, for instance, have been maligned as fascists by their angriest critics. Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were routinely denounced in such terms. So was Bill Clinton. And Barack Obama's detractors had trouble deciding if he were more a secret fascist or a secret Marxist. In a December 1975 interview on *60 Minutes*, Reagan even claimed that American liberalism generally (in the left-progressive sense of that term) had fascist leanings.

The charge of fascism is always at the ready. Like the other F-word, "fascist" is marvelously flexible and emotive, but it is also an example of language that is more likely to alienate and enrage than promote dialogue—a rhetorical turn that makes people less, rather than more, open to the humanity of those they oppose. While demonization is an ancient political itch always better left unscratched, it is especially harmful to a liberal democratic political culture since it legitimizes intransigence and extremism in return. Any opponent becomes an enemy when compared to Adolf Hitler.

If the *reductio ad fascism* is inadvisable on pragmatic and even moral grounds, it is also a symptom of cloudy

Previous page: A protester holds a sign depicting U.S. President Donald Trump as Adolf Hitler in Barcelona on Jan. 21, 2019. Above: Trump waves to supporters in Alabama on Dec. 17, 2016. Right: Hitler salutes a crowd of soldiers at a rally in Germany on May 1, 1938.

thinking. Comparisons to fascism suffer from two near-fatal problems. First, they almost always have at least some validity. And second, they are almost always accompanied by enormous blind spots, often glancing past what was most salient about historical fascism—namely, its violent methods and revolutionary aims.

There are hazards, George Orwell warned, in allowing language to sink into slovenliness and gobbledygook—a hazard evident anytime we permit jargon or buzzwords to think for us. Already in 1946, Orwell could opine that fascism "has now no meaning except insofar as it signifies 'something not desirable.'"

For Orwell, the word had decomposed into the kind of ready-made verbiage that infiltrates the mind and produces the "reduced state of consciousness ... favorable to political conformity." Any habituation to careless language makes us vulnerable to ideological control. But the converse is true, too: Political

agendas promote verbal insouciance, leading us to select words (and facts) that serve our own ends.

**THE FASCIST LABEL BECOMES TRICKIER** when one considers the authoritarian populism of figures like Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. This is because studying the far-right requires a plunge into a taxonomic swamp, with few patches of firm definitional ground.

A good tour of this morass is a 1995 essay by another Italian writer, Umberto Eco, who laid out 14 traits of what he dubbed "Ur-Fascism." According to Eco, fascism in the flesh is built from a shifting assemblage of materials: the syncretism of traditionalist beliefs and primeval truths; irrationalism; action for action's sake; hostility to criticism; fear of diversity; appeals to a disgruntled and humiliated middle class; xenophobia and nationalism; an emphasis on enemies; a view of life as struggle; disdain for the weak; a cult of heroism; machismo and misogyny; an anti-parliamentary populism contemptuous of individual citizens, who exist only to accept praise and acclaim the leader; and a Newspeak-esque impoverishment of language that hinders complex thought.





In Eco's view, no actual fascist regime perfectly embodies "eternal fascism"—it merely approximates it. Other definitions of fascism stress other features, including militarism, an anti-establishment animus, disdain for human rights and civil liberties, and longing for salvation by a charismatic strongman.

The problem is that most of these traits exist on a sliding scale and are open to some degree of subjective interpretation. How much nationalism or manly bravado or fixation on enemies does it take? At what point does anti-intellectualism or a pitch to tradition cross over into demagoguery and irrationalist nostalgia? When does media-savvy political communication become propaganda? When does a politician impatient with critics become a soap-box tyrant contemptuous of opponents? Much is in the eye of the beholder.

Implicit in this symptom-spotting approach is that fascism is a disorder to be detected, like a psychiatrist consulting the diagnostic criteria for mental illness. But while the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is clear about the threshold of diagnosis for schizophrenia, fascism spotters who proceed with a welter of traits rarely tell

us how many boxes need to be ticked before we can cry fascist.

Judging contemporary politics in terms of such lists is slippery business. The partisan-minded can always pick up the odor of fascism if they sniff hard enough. The exercise easily becomes a Rorschach test, prone to confirmation bias and other forms of "motivated reasoning"—social science lingo for all the ways humans are hardwired for tribalism and susceptible to emotion-driven thinking. As the political scientist Lilliana Mason observed of recent trends in U.S. politics, "members of both parties negatively stereotype members of the opposing party. ... They view the other party as more extreme than their own, while they view their own party as not at all extreme."

The ubiquity of the fascist label bears witness to this descent into polarization and fear-based politics. There appear to be few anti-Trumpers, for instance, whose thinking is not plagued by the specter of fascism. In a November 2015 article for *Slate* titled "Donald Trump Is a Fascist," Jamelle Bouie argued that Trumpism exhibited at least seven of the traits of fascism laid out by Eco. "This is how fascism comes to America," Robert

Kagan wrote in the *Washington Post* a few months later, pointing to Trump's "aura of crude strength and machismo," his deft exploitation of resentments, and his cult of American victimhood.

**EVER SINCE HE STEPPED OFF TRUMP TOWER'S** golden escalator to announce his candidacy in June 2015, a genre of alarmist journalism has sprung up, musing on the links between Trump and fascism. Many are credible analyses of Trump's threat to American traditions of pluralism and the rule of law; they rightly warn against a politics built on grievance and nativism. But writing on fascism—especially in the title—smacks of clickbait. Digital publishing, and ad-based models above all, is built on luring eyeballs with the lurid, the upsetting, the enraging. The internet's Darwinian struggle for traffic incentivizes deployment of the F-word over more responsible language.

Sensationalism plagues the hard-copy world, as well. The Trump years have witnessed a tide of admirable books whose true subject is the global rise of authoritarianism but which cannot resist couching that discussion in the language of fascism. A case in point



is Jason Stanley's *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them*. The Yale University philosopher has his own list of fascist traits, including evocation of a mythic past, creation of a "state of unreality" based on lies and conspiracy theories, and attacks on the alleged lawless criminality of a despised out-group.

Stanley makes astute observations at every turn. He points out that "sexual anxiety" governs the right-wing imagination, which sees a country's glorious past destroyed not just by globalism and cosmopolitanism but also by "respect for 'universal values' such as equality." Masculine fears of lost status connect easily to feelings of national humiliation, and nostalgia for the father as unquestioned head of the family fits naturally with longings for authoritarian leadership. Celebrating the mythic patriarchal past is not about history, Stanley argues, but about the "imposition of hierarchy in the present."

Stanley correctly locates this mentality in Hitler's Germany and Benito Mussolini's Italy. But he then jumps about wildly, identifying similar attitudes in present-day European far-right parties (such as the Alternative for Germany and Poland's ruling Law and Justice), American neo-Nazis, the Rwandan genocidaires, the Republican Party, the Hungarian Constitution, India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, Myanmar's ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya, and the post-Civil War American South. The lack of attention to context is breathtaking. Making patriarchy and national myth definitional of fascism allows Stanley to find proto-fascisms sprouting like dandelions everywhere he looks.

True to his title, Stanley does indeed lay bare the "us vs. them" rhetoric lubricating far-flung illiberal systems. But why fascism better organizes this discussion than alternative concepts like populism, totalitarianism, or even old-fashioned tyranny is a question unasked and unanswered. Stanley tells us only that he has "chosen the label

'fascism' for ultranationalism of some variety (ethnic, religious, cultural), with the nation represented in the person of an authoritarian leader." Though troublesome, such generalization, he argues, "is necessary in the current moment." For "necessary," it is tempting to read: pleasing to publishers, since talk of fascism provokes a commercially useful frisson and garners media exposure in a way that more nuanced investigation does not. *How Fascism Works* is a strange book—a cogent and accessible exposé of the tactics used by modern authoritarians that nonetheless floats on a cloud of conceptual fuzziness one does not expect from an academic philosopher.

Even more baffling is former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's 2018 book, *Fascism: A Warning*. Albright purports to abhor the reflex that would tar as fascist "anyone or anything we find annoying." After reciting the customary list of fascist features, Albright settles on an expansive definition of fascism. A fascist, she tells us, is "someone who identifies strongly with and claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is unconcerned with the rights of others, and is willing to use whatever means are necessary—including violence—to achieve his or her goals."

This view of fascism as a devil's brew of tribalism, opportunism, and autocratic illiberalism frames Albright's real purpose: ruminating on "the toils and snares confronting democracies around the world" today. Accounts of Hitler and Mussolini are followed by chapters on present-day figures like Putin, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Hungary's Viktor Orban, and, of course, Trump. None of these leaders, however, are by Albright's reckoning actually fascist; they are merely potentially so, taking cues from a fascist playbook written by

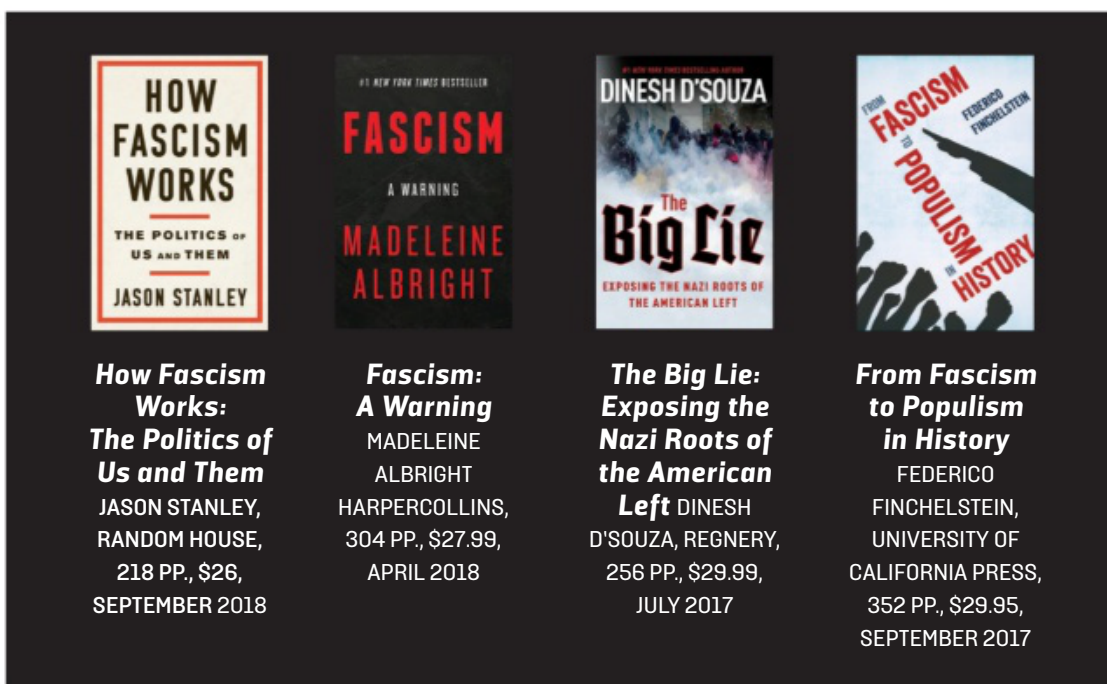
earlier despots and demagogues.

The sliding-scale nature of fascist traits—and the element of subjective interpretation involved in gauging the threat—allows fascism to haunt Albright's book, always lurking and rarely seen. Hers is the vague logic of "signposts" leading, with equal vagueness, into the abyss. The aim is to foster vigilance by implied comparisons—the Trumpian call to "drain the swamp," we learn, is an echo of Mussolini's *drenare la palude*—as much as by direct argument. Albright appears never to have considered whether fearmongering in defense of liberal internationalism is just as bad as Hitler's tirades against world Jewry or Trump's bellowing about "bad hombres" crossing the southern border of the United States. Perhaps it really is better, but it is still fearmongering.

Today's only full-blown fascist regime, Albright has declared in interviews, is North Korea—overlooking the possibility that the Kim dynasty's dictatorship is better viewed as a hold-over hybrid of anti-colonial nationalism and Stalinist state socialism. Experts debate the degree to which North Korea absorbed ideological elements—including an obsession with racial purity and cultic leader-worship—from decades of rule by imperial Japan, a system far closer to fascism. But Albright ignores crucial differences. North Korea's regime is defensive and entrenched, very different from the militant revolutionary movements of interwar fascism. Historically, its economy has been based on state-run industry and communist collective farms, something fascism, which upheld the principle of private property, never tried. Such haphazard remarks make plain that Albright's use of the F-word is rhetori-

**Real fascism is revolutionary and dictatorial, practicing a purifying brutality in furtherance of utopian goals.**





cal only, never seriously analytical.

Like Stanley, Albright is responding not just to the global resurgence of the far-right but to the decay of political norms and trust in government that has gripped the United States since the Vietnam War. Worries about authoritarianism and nativist populism are surely justified. But these concepts exist already, and we need not invoke fascism to talk about them.

Stanley and Albright are emblematic of a failure to see that resorting to the F-word is too often a symptom of the very political dangers the word warns against. As Orwell recognized, sloppy language and shoddy reasoning cooperate with destructive politics in a snug symbiosis. Surrendering to caricatures and hackneyed phrases promotes the embattled thinking typical of fascism.

**CARELESS TALK OF FASCISM** is no less pervasive on the right. Leftist readers would do well to spend time with right-wing books that claim to identify fascist tendencies in the left's own camp—not because such diatribes are persuasive but because the exercise makes clear how easily (and misleadingly) an image of fascism can be created that allows tendentious comparisons to be made.

Dinesh D'Souza's *The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American*

*Left* is a good example of a conservative work that exploits fascism's murky meaning. A former advisor in the Reagan White House who was convicted of a felony campaign finance violation in 2014 and later pardoned by Trump, D'Souza equates fascism with statism, racism, and a bullying "politics of hate."

The argument is simple: The Nazis did such things; the Democrats have sometimes done such things (the Jim Crow South was a Democratic stronghold, after all); thus "they are the real fascists." Like many who toss the F-word around for partisan ends, D'Souza assures us that "[t]he topics of Nazism and fascism must be approached with the greatest care." D'Souza then perversely calls Trayvon Martin, the unarmed teenager whose killing helped launch Black Lives Matter, a "leftist thug" and likens him to Horst Wessel, the slaughtered storm trooper who was celebrated as a Nazi martyr after his death in 1930. Fastidious indeed.

D'Souza's hackery follows a script laid down by Jonah Goldberg's 2008 book, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, From Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning*. Angry at being labeled a Nazi by American liberals, Goldberg, formerly a longtime editor at the *National Review*, turns the tables, linking the American left to fascism as

twin offshoots of an early 20th-century progressive movement that was eager to use state power to build a better society. "[M]odern liberalism," he bluntly proclaims, "shares intellectual roots with European fascism." Like D'Souza, Goldberg stresses both fascism's and progressivism's tawdry involvement in empire, eugenics, and social engineering. This allows Goldberg to brand everything from Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to modern environmentalism, organic foods, Medicare, and smoking bans as forms of "incipient fascism."

The point is not that D'Souza and Goldberg (or Stanley and Albright) are wrong in every case to find similarities between fascism and their respective objects of loathing. Comparisons to fascism, after all, nearly always have some validity. The trouble is their definition of fascism in terms of a ragbag of ambiguous attributes like "statism," "tribalism," or "propaganda"—definitions that work backward from the desire to expose fascists in their own midst.

A smokescreen of scholarly purpose masks narrow polemicism. D'Souza, for instance, makes much of Planned Parenthood's early ties to the eugenics movement, noting that Margaret Sanger, who founded what later became Planned Parenthood, gave a speech to the Ku Klux Klan and that Hitler praised progressive-era American laws permitting forced sterilization. But D'Souza's aim is not to tease out complex historical relationships; it is to stretch the Nazi label to encompass present-day Democrats. As the sociologist Michael Mann scathingly remarked of similar claims in Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism*: "The only thing these links prove is that fascism contained elements that were in the mainstream of 20th-century politics."

These books are not equally bad—D'Souza's guilt-by-association screed is by far the worst—but they are equivalently lazy in their attention to what made fascism distinct. They all exemplify the tendency in today's public sphere for talk of the F-word to fall



prey to the fallacy of the undistributed middle: If Hitler did something, and Hillary Clinton (or Trump) also did it, then Clinton (or Trump) is a fascist.

The error is so basic and so dumb that only emotion-driven partisanship, helped along by cynical marketing, can explain it. More often than not, the urge to affix the fascist label reveals the ghosts and cobwebs in our own heads. Indeed, the mind that wanders naturally to Kristallnacht or the Gestapo each time it's confronted with a political opponent is a mind polarized and fearful of the future.

**SCHOLARS OF FASCISM** exercise more caution when applying the F-word to today's politics. This is because they recognize that Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had millenarian dreams and system-destroying ambitions far in excess of most of today's far-right. The historian Robert Paxton offers the following definition in his 2004 book, *The Anatomy of Fascism*. "Fascism," Paxton argues, is "a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood." These are familiar chords among today's authoritarians, to be sure. But, Paxton adds, fascism also "abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion."

Real fascism is revolutionary and dictatorial, practicing a purifying brutality in furtherance of utopian goals. Hitler's aim was not to build a wall and "Make Germany Great Again." It was much bolder: the reorganization of the world along hierarchical racial lines and the military conquest of a vast new German empire, in which the biologically unworthy would be killed or enslaved. Trump's plutocratic tax cuts, enigmatic foreign policy, regulatory rollback, and weakening of federal agencies are hard to square with Hitler's fascism, his authoritarian personality notwithstanding. Any list of fascist hallmarks



that does not put this radically aggressive dimension front and center is more likely to mislead than illuminate.

Serious historians and political scientists generally speak of today's far-right surge not as the return of fascism but as a swing toward "ethnocratic liberalism," "apartheid liberalism," or "illiberal democracy." All of these terms name an ideology that longs for a xenophobic strongman to restrict rights and political participation to one's own demographic group and that utilizes media manipulation and a stacked judiciary as means to rig electoral politics in the strongman's favor and combat perceived threats at home or abroad.

That there are echoes of fascism here is clear enough. But there are echoes of fascism in statist public health measures, too—as conservatives are quick to point out. Echoes are not enough to use the F-word responsibly. Roger Griffin, a scholar of fascism who is not shy about applying the label to neo-Nazis and truly radical anti-modernists, nonetheless balks at applying it to nativist populists like Trump and the Brexit engineer Nigel Farage. "You can be a total xenophobic racist male chauvinist bastard," Griffin colorfully noted to *Vox*, "and still not be a fascist."

**SO WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP** between interwar fascism and today's right-wing populists? A convincing account is provided by the Argentine historian Federico Finchelstein. In *From Fascism to Populism in History*, Finchelstein argues that today's populism evolved out of fascism after 1945, expressing the same energies and impulses but repackaged for more democratic times.

Finchelstein leaves no doubt that the F-word can still be applied to segments of today's far-right—the longing for purifying violence is plain in neofascist movements like Greece's Golden Dawn—but applying it to the likes of Orban, for example, fails to recognize how his politics reflect an adaptation to democracy.

To grasp the genealogy linking fascism and populism, one must recognize that historical context matters. Wider democratic legitimacy and rapid economic growth after 1945 caused the ghost of fascism to find a new host in a hybridized "authoritarian form of democracy," Finchelstein writes.

Pioneered by Argentina's Juan Perón, this populism was distinctly postfascist since it looked back on the World War II legacy of violence and shrewdly rejected dictatorship,





Left: Neo-Nazis march through the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville on Aug. 11, 2017. Right: Activists of the Ukrainian far-right party National Corps rally in Kyiv on March 16, 2019.

concentration camps, and wars of conquest. Postwar populism embraced electoral politics but in an anti-pluralist vein, as the organ through which the true people could acclaim the leader as their singular voice. Like fascism before, populism retained a fondness for threats and a fixation on enemies, though now mostly at the level of bombast rather than outright assault.

Today's populists tap into the emotional world of Hitler and Mussolini—a continuity better captured by Stanley's notion of fascism as an "us vs. them" politics than by those, like Goldberg, who present fascism as a totalitarianism of social improvement. But that does not mean all populists are emergent fascists. Indeed, barring a crisis of capitalism and democratic representation on the scale of the 1920s and '30s, there is no reason to expect today's populism to revert to fascism.

A complex phenomenon such as fascism rarely repeats exactly because historical conditions are forever in flux. In *From Fascism to Populism in History*, Finchelstein writes that they "are different chapters in the same transnational history of illiberal resistance to modern constitutional democracy." Here he points to the real master category

uniting today's right-wing populists and yesterday's goose-stepping militants. All are cases of what we might call "anti-liberalism of a non-Marxist and ethnonationalist stripe." (Admittedly, the phrase is less striking than "fascism" on a book jacket.)

Anti-liberalism of this sort views the openness, diversity, and secularism of modern society with horror. It sees cosmopolitanism as chaos, social change as deracination, and individualism as atomization. Ever since the French Revolution, this anti-liberal tradition has clamored for a restoration of the authority—law and order, a self-evident culture, social hierarchies, transcendent beliefs, communal belonging—supposedly corrupted by liberal selfishness and global markets.

Anti-liberals experience modernity as an ongoing political and spiritual crisis. Though in many ways conservative by instinct, they believe the rot has advanced so far that there is little left to conserve, and thus reactionary return or radical regeneration (or a mix of both) is needed. Under this big anti-liberal tent, there is ample room for Steve Bannon and Putin, Hitler and Francisco Franco, Augusto Pinochet and Pat Buchanan.

Fascism belongs to this right-wing,

anti-liberal tradition as a species belongs to a genus. But it is a bloody and savage species, hungry for destruction and fiery rebirth. "Whether the other races live in comfort or perish of hunger interests me only in so far as we need them as slaves for our culture," SS leader Heinrich Himmler declared in 1943.

Whatever supposed fascist traits one finds in Putin or Trump—or in "snowflake" campus agitators and "nanny state" progressives—one does not find such barbarity. Avoiding careless use of the F-word does not normalize the far-right; what it resists is the normalization of thoughtless and demonizing political discourse.

Today is not the 1930s. We do not face a crisis on the scale of the Great Depression or a legacy of aroused passions, thwarted hopes, and unprecedented violence to rival the aftermath of the Great War. And while liberal democracy is an anomaly in human history and should not be taken for granted, liberal democratic norms still enjoy wider legitimacy than they did a century ago.

There is, however, one respect in which our time resembles the interwar years. It remains true, as Orwell argued of his own day, "that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end." Then as now, open societies are still best defended by the willingness to think and speak clearly—not hyperbolically and manipulatively—about the challenges they face. ■

**ELIAH BURES** is a historian of modern Europe and a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley's Center for Right-Wing Studies. His forthcoming book is *Friends and Enemies: Ernst Jünger and the Countercultural Survival of the German Far-Right*.



## When the Green New Deal Goes Global

The left's increasingly ambitious environmental agenda is rethinking the mechanics of the international economy.

*By Quinn Slobodian*

**A**AFTER DONALD TRUMP'S VICTORY in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, a woman in her late 20s drove west from her home in New York City. She passed through Flint, Michigan, and ended up on the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota, where protesters had camped out to block the Dakota Access Pipeline, which they said posed a threat to local water supplies.

Inspired by what she saw, she returned to New York to oppose the incumbent Democrat in a congressional primary, beating him to become the youngest woman ever elected to the U.S. Congress. On the first day of her orientation, she joined the youth-led civic Sunrise Movement in occupying the office of the speaker of the House of Representatives, the highest-ranking member of her own party. Three months later, she followed up by proposing her first piece of legislation with veteran Massachusetts Sen. Ed Markey: the Green New Deal, a multitrillion-dollar plan to decarbonize the U.S. economy on the path to global net-zero emissions by 2050.

The person is, of course, New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a self-described democratic socialist. Her origin story tells us much about the present moment—and the West's future politics.

First, there is the centrality of climate change, which keeps this variety of socialism blissfully distant from that of the Cold War. Ocasio-Cortez was less than a month old when the Berlin Wall fell and has no vestigial defensive reflex to the red-baiting that she still faces from her U.S. opponents.

Second, there is the will to be guided by projects originating at the grassroots and the margins—a lesson taken from the abject mismanagement of the insular and centrally controlled Democratic machine of the 2016 presidential campaign.

Third, and most expansively, there is a focus on how power runs not just through money and government—Wall Street and Washington—but through the soil, the turbine, and the mortgage lender's redline and in places distant from influence, like North Dakota in Ocasio-Cortez's case, although it might just as well have been Puerto Rico or Ferguson, Missouri. These are places whose stories are not told in the intervals of four-year terms but in centuries of conquest, enslavement, and resistance.

Most instructive in Ocasio-Cortez's rise is the way it charts the whiplash pace of change in public discourse. If her election was a tremor in the political landscape, the surprisingly high levels of public support for the Green New Deal on its release have been an earthquake. A 30-year-old "former bartender," as right-wing voices tried haplessly to smear her, is now setting the national and even international agenda. Nearly all Democratic candidates support the resolution, and the European Commission proposed its own Green Deal in December 2019. The Overton window hasn't just shifted; it has fallen off its hinges.

Other activists and intellectuals of Ocasio-Cortez's generation are keen not to let the moment pass. Think tanks like Common Wealth and the Institute for Public Policy Research in the U.K. and the Roosevelt Institute and People's Policy Project in the United States are not only preparing to protest; they are preparing to govern.





**WHAT MIGHT THE REIGN** of young green socialists look like? We catch a first glimpse in the book *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal*, co-written by one journalist and three academics—Kate Aronoff, Alyssa Battistoni, Daniel Aldana Cohen, and Thea Riofrancos—and published in November 2019 by the storied left-wing press Verso on its imprint run by *Jacobin*, the U.S. magazine itself closely linked to the rise of millennial socialism. If the future looks anything like that described in the book’s pages, the answer to the question of whether the center and right have something to fear is: absolutely.

The authors take the insight of Naomi Klein from her 2007 book, *The*

*Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, that catastrophes, both natural and man-made, are often used to ram through policies that expose populations to ever greater risk. But they reverse it. “[T]he Right plans for crises meticulously,” they write. “We should, too. If we can organize in advance, we can use the openings created by the next crises to directly attack their root causes. No more crises wasted.” Whether planning for climate disaster, Brexit, or an even deeper political fracture, some leftists have proposed “disaster communism” in place of Klein’s “disaster capitalism.”

So can an open catastrophe be used to roll out large-scale transformations

of property and collective life? The authors’ battle-ready tone on this score breaks with the often moralistic and soul-searching mode of some of the higher-profile climate books of the last few years. Think here of books by Jonathan Safran Foer, David Wallace-Wells, Roy Scranton, and Nathaniel Rich. Probing, informative, and often paralyzingly depressing, these books shy away from the directness of the authors of *A Planet to Win*. Closer to “shut it down” than “we are screwed,” their radicalism is worn proudly, born of a post-2000 era of Occupy, graduate student unionization, and Black Lives Matter. One of the authors is on the steering committee of the Ecosocialist Working Group of the Democratic Socialists of America, of which Ocasio-Cortez is also a member—an organization that has seen its rolls increase nearly sevenfold since Trump’s election.

In place of the vague sentiment that “the enemy is us,” *A Planet to Win*’s authors seek out real culprits. They take for granted that we are not equally guilty for climate change. Responsibility is distributed as unevenly as the rewards of the carbon economy. It stands to reason the burden of climate repair must also fall unevenly. They draw their first concentric circle of culpability around the United States, which they refer to as “the belly of the beast” because it “remains the world’s second-largest carbon emitter, behind China. In per-capita terms, US emissions are over twice as high.” Drawing a second, smaller circle in the spirit of what could be called left-climate populism, they argue that “[f]or ethical and practical reasons, a just transition also requires naming and shaming our enemies, focusing the climate movement’s



rage where it belongs: on fossil fuel CEOs and private utility executives.”

After World War II, many European governments carried out projects of lustration, purging and punishing those who had collaborated with fascist regimes. The authors of *A Planet to Win* seem motivated by the same spirit. Their targets of expropriation, however, are not only players in fossil fuels. The book’s lead author tweeted recently that “the green new deal doesn’t need bill gates’s money but it’s gonna feel sooo good to take it.” The pugnacious rhetoric ricochets through the book, even surfacing as direct threats: “Fossil fuel executives in particular should consider themselves lucky if all we do is take their companies,” they write. “They should be tried for crimes against humanity.”

The authors also offer a dazzling array of constructive projects to accompany the green transition’s doling out of economic retribution. Perhaps most vividly depicted is their vision of the future city. They call for “10 million public, beautiful, mixed-income, no-carbon homes” over the next 10 years. The building industries, widely considered a natural enemy of green concerns, are treated by the authors as the opposite—they are potential beneficiaries of new publicly funded projects like windmills and solar arrays that fuel local demand for their skills. So-called “sunflower homes” on smart grids will turn off electricity “for short blips to lower energy use at peak times.” Publicly owned “fleets of nimble electric minivans” will “accommodate late-night lovers, strollers, wheelchairs, and walkers”; “limited equity cooperatives and community land trusts” will emerge “alongside housing built and governed by local authorities,”

and abandoned buildings in places like Baltimore and Philadelphia will be rehabbed and turned into “locally managed land trusts.”

As grand as some of the schemes can sound, the authors use compelling historical analogies to defend their plausibility. Like Klein, they recall the era between the New Deal and wartime mobilization. They offer the astounding example of the world’s largest factory being built in Michigan in less than a year in the 1940s, eventually producing a B-24 bomber every hour. They are aware that the missing element in redirecting the enormous ship of the U.S. economy is less technological capacity than political will—a commodity that can be neither produced and distributed from above nor accumulated adequately through small acts of conscientiousness or consumer choice. “Herculean change,” they point out, “isn’t the specialty of market nudges.” It will have to be big, and it will have to be collective.

**ALL MOMENTS OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC** transformation look impossible until they happen. That does not make them inevitable, but it does mean strategy is paramount, as the authors recognize. Rather than putting the onus on individuals to change their personal habits to slow climate change and then blaming them when they fail, the authors know that scapegoating the poor and underresourced leads only to backlash of the kind seen in the yellow vest movement in France. Conditions need to be created first where people have the access to services that allow them to lead greener lives.

Moral superiority, they point out, is often misplaced anyway. The rich do

more harm than the poor. Per capita carbon footprints in New York City’s affluent Greenwich Village are two to three times higher than those in the Bronx. Part of the struggle is identifying previously neglected allies. “[T]he working class women of color who populate the housing movements that are fighting against gentrification and demanding *affordable* density,” they write, “are in fact low-carbon protagonists—whether they talk about climate or not.”

Time and again, the authors find their solutions in collective rather than individual action. They oppose the impulse to opt out, breaking with the libertarian dreams of clean energy islands that are often the shared endpoint of ecopolitics on both the left and right. The hyperlocal ex-hippie in Vermont mirrors the survivalist in Idaho; neither is a viable standard-bearer for the climate left. Instead, the challenge can only be confronted at scale. The authors offer a vision of flexibility. Microgrids nested inside a continental power grid will gather green energy where it is sunny or windy and then disperse it to cloudier or calmer places. Public ownership of the national energy grid is one of the book’s many concrete demands and should be a signature proposal for any leftist U.S. politician.

Based on the book’s front end, one could quibble that the authors’ discussion stays too close to the United States, looking abroad primarily to admire the people’s palaces of Red Vienna and the public buses of Helsinki, in the familiar mode of Sanders’s paeans to Scandinavia. The focus shifts drastically, though, in a final chapter on “recharging internationalism” based on Riofrancos’s ethnographic research in Chile’s lithium fields. Here, the book confronts some of the deepest difficulties of climate transition but also offers an inspiring new way of thinking about global politics and organizing social movements.

The key phrase for this chapter is “supply chain justice.” Think of it as a globalization of the Standing Rock

**The authors are aware that the missing element in redirecting the enormous ship of the U.S. economy is less technological capacity than political will.**



model that inspired both Ocasio-Cortez and the book's authors. Because the territory of the Oceti Sakowin people is, all at once, a place of human residence, a transit point for mineral resources, an ecosystem, and a site of fraught overlapping forms of governance, any pursuit of social justice must follow all the threads: the gas, the groundwater, the history, the lines of legal redress, the future means of redistributing profit, and the past means of absconding with it.

The authors directly confront the fact that a renewable energy transition will mean less of some forms of extraction but more of others, including the cobalt, lithium, nickel, and graphite required for batteries. How then to avoid past patterns whereby tapping new reservoirs of energy has deepened, rather than reversed, inequalities? Whether through damming, drilling, or logging, historically marginalized populations have seen their territory devastated with little compensation beyond poorly paid menial labor. "More than half the world's supply [of cobalt] is currently sourced from the Democratic Republic of Congo," the authors offer as one example, "from hand-dug mines worked by children, with scant protection of workers' safety." The authors believe this is unnecessary. "Our core premise," they write, "is that nodes of the vast supply chains of the renewable transition are potential sites of solidarity across borders."

This is not straightforward, they acknowledge. Many residents of Chile's capital city of Santiago are enthusiastic about efforts to expand extraction of the country's lithium deposits as part of a project of "resource nationalism"; many indigenous groups, by contrast, would prefer no lithium extraction at all because of its disruptive effects on their homes. The task for a properly socialist policy is formidable: It requires addressing the needs and demands of actors all along the global value chain, rather than focusing only on the demand-side solution of subsidizing middle-class con-



**A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal**

KATE ARONOFF, ALYSSA BATTISTONI, DANIEL ALDANA COHEN, AND THEA RIOFRANCOS, VERSO, 208 PP., \$19.95, NOVEMBER 2019

sumers to opt for a new Tesla instead of a Subaru.

The authors have some suggestions about how to create a more egalitarian redistribution along a value chain that usually tilts to the developed countries of the global north. They follow other progressives in calling for a revision of intellectual property law to force U.S. companies to share technology with Chilean firms, for example, and adopt extraction methods that do not damage the local biosphere. They suggest using the Alien Tort Claims Act to try U.S. firms in domestic courts for violations of environmental law and indigenous rights abroad. They recognize that strengthening ties between climate activists in the global north and south is necessary to gain larger visibility.

**THE AUTHORS' VISION IN THE BOOK** is bracing. But given their laudable desire to write a point-by-point program for the climate left, some questions are left hanging. Perhaps the biggest matter is that of enforcement. Who will be the green cop for the global Green New Deal? Although the authors pay little attention to the alter-globalization movement of the 1990s, there are many ways in which the world has been here before. It is instructive to compare the two moments, as the climate left is, in many ways, the alter-globaliza-

tion movement's rightful heir. This is signaled most clearly in the foreword written by Klein, the patron saint of the earlier wave of activists in Seattle; Porto Alegre, Brazil; and Quebec City. Klein was the *enfant terrible* then, writing the book *No Logo* when she was 29 years old. That book also took a pugilist's stance, with the subtitle "taking aim at the brand bullies." She was also a pioneer of the climate left with her 2014 book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*.

Like *A Planet to Win*, the alter-globalization movement of the 1990s called for stronger labor and environmental standards to be added to revised trade agreements. Such rhetoric, although ritualistically invoked by Democratic lawmakers, has had little effect against the overwhelming impulse of the multilateral institutions of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement to liberalize trade after the 1990s. Pursuing the climate left's vision will require thinking more concretely about what state-to-state institutions beyond the nation will be required to secure it. Just as some commentators have begun to demand green quantitative easing from the world's central banks, should we also be bold enough to imagine a green WTO, which would use the tools of dispute settlement and punitive countermeasures to police the behavior of individual states according to their carbon emissions? This is what Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann have called for in their recent book, *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*.

Yet recall that some of the strongest opponents of labor and environmental standards from the 1990s onward came from the same quarter: the global south itself, whose national representatives protested that talk of green and fair trade was code for suppressing the growth dreams of the poorer nations. In the 1990s, as in *A Planet to Win*, the conundrum was often solved by



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appealing beyond the border to indigent actors. In the 1990s, it was the insurgents of Chiapas in southern Mexico; here, it is the residents of Chile's Atacama Desert. The authors cite the 1970s demands for a New International Economic Order as an example of a different way of organizing the world economy. Emboldened by the vulnerability of Western nations to the oil embargo, a coalition of poorer nations in the United Nations attempted to leverage resource power, passing a 1974 resolution in the United Nations General Assembly demanding commodity stabilization agreements, drastically increased development aid flows, and colonial reparations. The defeat of demands for a new, more equal world economy is often remembered as a historic failure. Yet the New International Economic Order's demands, however egalitarian at a state-to-state level, were premised entirely on the dream of endless carbon-fueled growth we now see as folly and paid no attention to inequality within their own borders.

Acknowledging the aspirations of the poorer nations in an era of decarbonization will require confronting matters of both consent and constraint. The world's population at large will have to be persuaded of the urgency of the threat and the possibility of a better future. Then sovereign leaders will have to be convinced to make commitments far beyond those of the risibly inadequate Paris and Kyoto agreements—themselves, of course, symbols for the right-wing of scandalously betrayed sovereignty. It makes sense that the fraught history of decades of climate negotiation that culminated in those agreements is not surveyed in the book—it's depressing and stops

miles short of the authors' expansive vision of rethinking state capacity and property relations.

Yet staring the problem of global governance in the face may not be avoidable. International lawyers often appeal to a scene in Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus is lashed to the mast to prevent seduction by the sirens. They speak of the need for governments likewise to be "bound to the mast" to prevent them from straying from past commitments, whether it be to human rights or free trade. Must governments be lashed more tightly to a green mast now? If not, how to discipline the actions of climate rogues? If so, how to prepare for and even preempt the inevitable backlash against green supranationalism? Much depends on the unpredicted and unpredictable transformations of the Ocasio-Cortez moment rolling onward—a movement that the authors are both staking their hopes on and to which they are adding their own formidable force.

*A Planet to Win* is the American kernel of a vision for a post-carbon future, and its optimism is inspiring. But taking the Green New Deal global will also mean entering the scrum of state-to-state politics, where national leaders are less likely to be moved by visions of fleets of electric buses and more likely to be wary of green as a new shade of U.S. empire. Finding the hinge between supply chain justice and international diplomacy will be a task hard enough to keep us all busy for as long as our heads remain above water. ■

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## ***A Planet to Win* is the American kernel of a vision for a post-carbon future, and its optimism is inspiring.**





## 1.4 Billion People and No Good Bands Why is China's modern music so bad while Mongolia's rocks? *By Lauren Teixeira*

**T**HE MOST SUCCESSFUL MONGOLIAN CONQUERORS since Genghis Khan aren't on horseback but on the drums. They're called the Hu, and over the past year their bone-vibrating hard rock, which combines traditional Mongolian instruments and throat singing with Western rock and metal, has become a breakout hit with fans around the world—and made them official cultural ambassadors for the country.

The Hu first started gaining attention more than a year ago with the music videos for two songs—"Wolf Totem" and "Yuve Yuve Yu"—which blew up on YouTube thanks to their fist-pumping instrumentals and stunning steppe visuals. At a recent count, the two videos had a combined 61 million views on YouTube—20 times the number of people in Mongolia.

Fans attribute the success of the Hu to the group's

blending of Western metal with local styles. But it's only the most well-packaged instance of an ongoing phenomenon. Mongolia has a strong tradition of rock groups working to modernize traditional sounds. Altan Urag, a Mongolian folk rock group from the capital of Ulaanbaatar, first succeeded in electrifying traditional Mongolian instruments almost 15 years ago. And it gave heavy metal the distinctive growl of throat singing with its seminal 2006 album, *Made In Altan Urag*. Mongolian bands like Khusugtun, Altain Orgil, Jonon, and Mohanik have all tweaked folk music to modern ends.

That's a stark contrast with Mongolia's neighbor China. Despite having 1.4 billion people to Mongolia's mere 3 million, there's no such thing as a distinctive Chinese national sound that mixes tradition and modernity in the same way Mongolians do—at least none that has become a serious



commercial player. Instead, China has been left churning out a stream of pale imitations of other countries' genres. That raises a big question: Why does Mongolian music slap so hard and Chinese music (with a few exceptions) suck?

The answers are partially historical. In the 20th century, Mongolia was a Soviet satellite state. The Soviet policy toward music was to promote folk music that represented the national consciousness while remaining wary of foreign imports. Folk songs were collected, recorded, and performed to create a sense of anti-imperial multiculturalism. It helped that Mongolia didn't suffer the same level of cultural destruction as some communist states. While there were brutal purges in the 1930s, Mongolia's nomadic and dispersed culture allowed its music to survive under a softer form of communist rule.

Unfortunately, the kids wanted blue jeans and rock. Noticing the passion that Ulaanbaatar teenagers held for their secret recordings of Western music in the 1970s, the Mongolian culture ministry embarked on a campaign to blend the mandatory folk music with rock 'n' roll. But this Mongolian rock wasn't really popular at the time.

"It was very watered down and safe," said Lauren Knapp, the director of the 2015 documentary *Live From UB*, which tells the story of rock music in the new Mongolia.

Yet the state-backed rock of the 1970s gave young Mongolians enough of a ground that in the 1980s, when students started pushing for democracy, rock music became an important force. The new wave was straightforward Western-style protest rock, akin to that of other dissident artists like Russia's Viktor Tsoi and China's Cui Jian. Songs like "The Ringing of the Bell" united Mongolians as they gathered in Ulaanbaatar to demand democracy.

Its political weight meant that Mongolians took music seriously. Fights between fans of different genres wrecked clubs in the early 2000s, with

hip-hop aficionados swinging at metalheads. In the new millennium, though, musicians in Ulaanbaatar's growing rock scene regained interest in developing a distinctively Mongolian sound. The pioneers included Altan Urag, conservatory-trained folk musicians who thought they might be able to get more of their friends to come to their concerts if they gave their music a harder edge.

They successfully electrified the *morin khuur*, the traditional Mongolian horsehead fiddle, and started experimenting with a new style. It was a hit, and the band remains beloved. A few years later, the group Mohanik, which is followed throughout *Live From UB*, decided to abandon its pop-punk beginnings and return to its roots. Even though the band members were all born and bred city kids, they say in the documentary, they believed they had the ability to create something fundamentally Mongolian.

"It's not like we grew up riding horses," Mohanik bassist Enerelt Otgonbaatar tells the camera in *Live From UB*. "But it's there, we think."

Knapp says the sense of a shared cultural music remains strong. Musicians are highly respected and play a role in the daily life of Mongolians. People still hire morin khuur ensembles to play at the opening of their new businesses or at their children's coming of age ceremonies, she points out.

And maybe it helps that Mongolians are angry. The country's economic boom ended sharply in 2016 after a slowdown of demand from China caused a hard crash in the minerals market. Local rage comes out in the country's thriving hip-hop scene, where the most popular songs have often been violently racist toward Chinese. Young Mongolians are acutely

aware that their country was once a world-spanning power but is now dominated and threatened by neighbors. Mongolia's traditional sports—horseback riding, archery, and wrestling—are almost inherently metal.

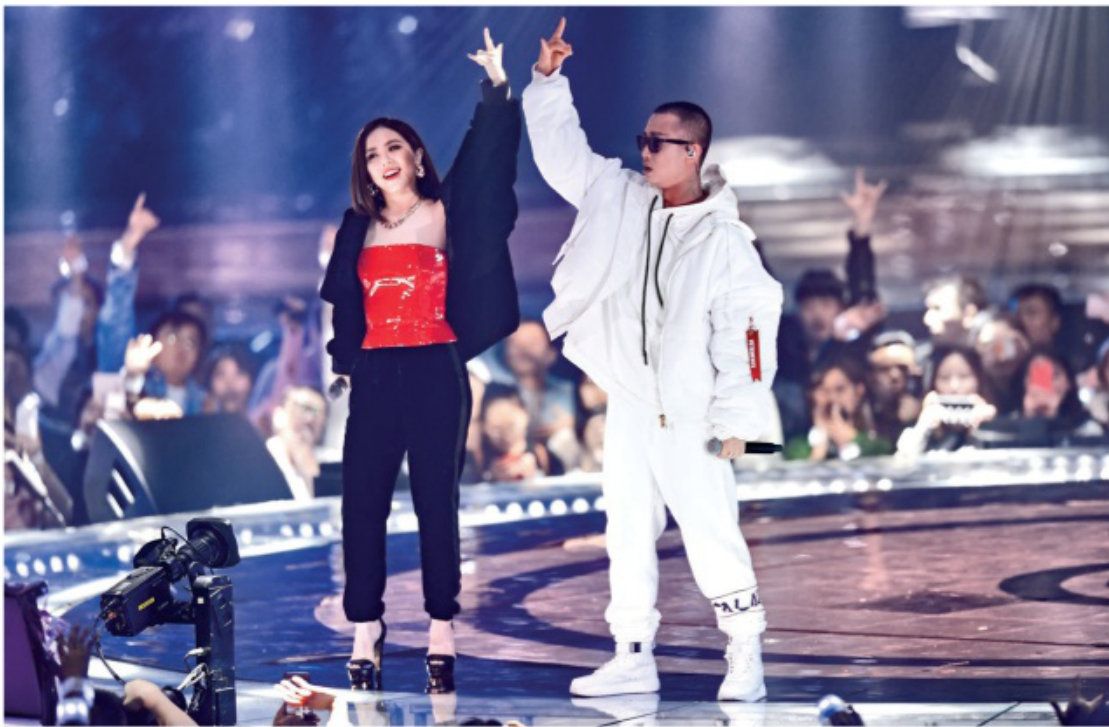
### **MOST YOUNG CHINESE WOULDN'T RECOGNIZE**

their own folk music if it were blaring right in front of them. Of course, just what comprises traditional music in China isn't anywhere near as clear as it is in Mongolia, with its small population and strong sense of culture. Confucius famously disdained all music except the ceremonial tunes of the past state of Zhou, which had vanished before his time. And nobody actually knew what those were, though earnest attempts to re-create them were made over the centuries. The music that ordinary Chinese actually preferred, on the other hand, was a product of globalization even back in the days of the Silk Road. The *erhu*, one of the instruments central to Chinese music, originated in the Central Asian steppe, while the four-stringed *pipa* came to China via the Middle East during the Tang Dynasty. Ninth-century Chinese kids slammed to "the whirl," a dance craze that temporarily seized the capital of Changan. Literati penned flute tunes in their spare time.

And in a country as vast as China, there was also intense regional variation. Folk music in the southern canal city of Suzhou differed significantly from that in the mountainous region of Shaanxi, a thousand miles away—and even from that in Wuxi, just 15 miles away. Even within Chinese opera—a younger tradition than Western opera, mostly dating back only to the turn of the 19th century—there were plenty of local variations, with the shrill trilling

**The music that ordinary Chinese actually preferred was a product of globalization even back in the days of the Silk Road.**





The Chinese rapper Gai, right, who tied for first place on *The Rap of China*, performs with the Hong Kong singer G.E.M. in Guangzhou, southern China, on Dec. 31, 2017.

of Peking opera only the most famous. Folk music collectors loved picking through local traditions for unknown tunes and rare instruments.

China's varied musical tradition, as with almost every other part of Chinese culture, was gutted during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Most forms of traditional music struggled to survive during the decades in which politics dictated art and culture.

The onset of the Cultural Revolution demanded that all art be revolutionary art. Peking opera and Chinese folk traditions were explicitly banned. A few pieces survived in repackaged form. One of the most famous songs from this era, "The East Is Red"—briefly the Chinese national anthem—is set to the tune of an old Shaanxi folk song.

For a little while after Mao Zedong died, it seemed young Chinese people might regain interest in Chinese folk. As a generation struggled to make sense of the changes of the 1980s, China was swept by the *xibeifeng* ("northwest wind") sound. Drawing on the folk traditions of the hardscrabble northwestern Shaanxi province and using traditional instruments played over forceful beats and loud, rough vocal delivery, *xibeifeng* music at once gave voice to defiant Chinese nationalism and increasingly bitter

dissatisfaction. It was part of the larger *xungen* ("searching for roots") movement of the era, when young Chinese tried to rediscover their own lost traditions. In songs like "My Old Hometown," *xibeifeng* musicians drew on the imagery of the barren windswept plateau to reflect their bitterness over the bleak prospects for youth of their generation. It wasn't quite rock 'n' roll, but it was close, and indeed some *xibeifeng* tunes became popular anthems during the Tiananmen Square democracy movement.

This authentic and organic Chinese sound was crushed along with the student movement after the tanks rolled in on June 4, 1989. Rock 'n' roll, which was closely associated with *xibeifeng*, was briefly banned. More importantly, culture itself became dangerous to a generation that had seen hope end in blood. Throughout the 1990s, Chinese were more interested in getting rich than searching for their roots. At the same time, with hundreds of millions of people leaving their villages to work in cities, regional music and traditions were diluted—or lost forever. And even though new wealth created a vast commercial demand for music, the last thing it could be was dangerous. Instead the 2000s saw a vast expansion of musical banality, from twee pop numbers and

nostalgic revolutionary songs to the repackaging of ethnic music as a harmless fancy rather than an expression of cultural passion. Han Chinese Singers such as Peng Liyuan, President Xi Jinping's wife, became famous for singing Uighur and Tibetan music.

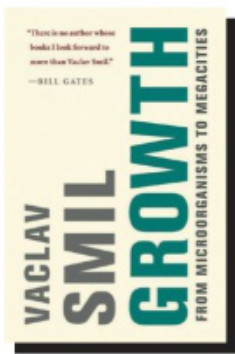
There were small local scenes, such as metal in Wuhan and punk in Beijing, but they spluttered and died, unable to reach the national stage thanks to censorship. Anything that did make it through was carefully neutered, as witnessed by the recent purging of hip-hop—hugely popular among Chinese born after 1995. After an uncomfortably authentic (and beloved) first season of the hit online show *The Rap of China* that got several of the most popular contestants banned, the second season went to great lengths not only to adhere strictly to nationalism and cut out any mention of sex, drugs, or cops but to overcompensate by encouraging contestants, including several Uighurs, to adopt a "Chinese style" (*zhongguofeng*) in their raps.

The main proponent of this style throughout the season was the show's host, the former K-pop idol and infamously poor rapper Wu Yifan aka Kris Wu. For his performance of "Young OG," Wu came out clad in a retooled Mandarin jacket backed up by a quivering orchestra of Chinese string instruments. At the climactic moment of the show, he seized a hammer and smashed it into an enormous gong, cuing a burst of fog from which emerged a half-dozen Peking opera performers in full traditional garb.

Put this Disneyfied version of Chinese music up against raging Mongolians on horseback, and it's no wonder the northern barbarians come out the victor. ■

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## *Growth: From Microorganisms to Megacities*

VACLAV SMIL, MIT PRESS, 664 PP., \$39.95, SEPTEMBER 2019

**THE BEST WAY TO APPRECIATE** Vaclav Smil's latest doorstopper is to take a deep breath, walk across the room, and pick up the book from wherever it landed after being tossed away for the umpteenth time as impenetrable, incomprehensible mush.

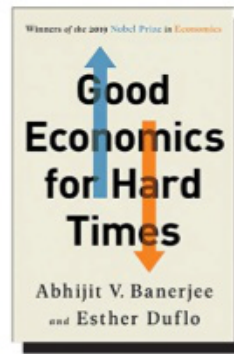
Because it does get a lot better—and much more interesting. Smil's *Growth: From Microorganisms to Megacities* never approaches anything like a beach read, or even a pleasure read, in much the same way that hacking through untracked jungle never quite approaches an indulgence. Yet Smil's encyclopedic recounting of the story of growth is fascinating, compelling—and ultimately convincing.

Smil's basic thrust is that growth is finite. The growth of individual microbes—and animals and plants and humans—has limits. So does the growth of their populations. So, too, does the growth of nearly every other thing in the history of humanity, from cranes to steam turbines to jetliner cruising speeds to the length of German autobahns to empires, all of which are documented—with graphs—in Smil's relentless quest to build his case. Things—whether broiler chickens or wind turbines or wheat yields—are small for a while, then undergo a period of vertiginous growth, and then stabilize at a bigger size. And then they can't really get bigger.

Except there's one thing that everybody expects to keep growing: the economy. That's what government policies everywhere seek to do, with more or less success. The problem, Smil notes, is that we live in a real world with finite resources. Economic growth requires more energy, more food, and more raw materials; efficiency gains only nibble around the edges.

Smil contends that there is ultimately an even bigger constraint to infinite growth: the sustainability of the environment, a problem that is especially pressing due to climate change. "Continuous material growth, based on ever greater extraction of the Earth's inorganic and organic resources and on increased degradation of the biosphere's finite stocks and services, is impossible," as Smil puts it in one of his pithier moments.

The upshot? Smil, who has no truck with techno-optimists who expect miraculous exceptions to the laws of thermodynamics, ends his journey by concluding that a "fundamental departure from the long-established pattern of maximizing growth and promoting material consumption cannot be delayed by another century," if humanity wants to have a place to live.—*Keith Johnson*



## *Good Economics for Hard Times*

ABHIJIT V. BANERJEE AND ESTHER DUFLO, PUBLICAFFAIRS, 432 PP., \$17.99, NOVEMBER 2019

**ALMOST A DECADE AGO**, the economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo made a splash with their first book, a detailed, evidence-based look at policies that could improve life for poor people in poor countries. Now, the 2019 Nobel-winning couple are back with their take on policies that could improve life for poor people in rich countries.

*Good Economics for Hard Times* starts with the premise that many of the West's social and political problems over the last decade—from rising xenophobia and fears of migration to confusion over trade and globalization—had economic causes, which means that they also have economic solutions.

"Good economics alone cannot save us," they write. "But without it, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of yesterday. Ignorance, intuitions, ideology, and inertia combine to give us answers that look plausible, promise much, and predictably betray us."

There are plenty of insightful, thought-provoking sections in their new book, which is geared to a broader audience than their first was. Their chapter on misconceptions about migration—and especially the impact it has on low-skilled wages (zero)—is particularly interesting, as is their deep dive into economic growth, why it stagnated in much of the developed world more than 40 years ago, and how (or even whether) to kick-start that growth again. Other bits, including a look at the harm trade does to certain people in certain places, are less convincing and gloss over many of the well-documented benefits that liberalized trade has brought the world over the past half-century.

*Good Economics for Hard Times* makes important policy connections and suggestions. For example, the same forces account for why migration is less common than most people think and why trade hits some areas harder than economists expect: People and economies are "sticky." Economic models may suggest that workers in trade-threatened industries will simply migrate to other jobs or other regions, but few really do. Banerjee and Duflo explore traditional remedies (tariffs sure aren't the answer, they

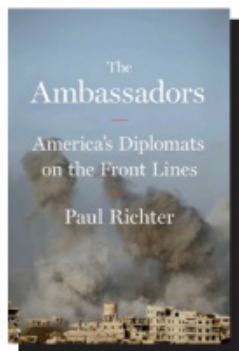
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find, and job retraining and other trade adjustment tools are too narrow and take too long) and suggest some novel ideas. Why not subsidize older workers in dying, trade-threatened industries to keep Rust Belt towns from falling into decay and despair? The social and political payoff would be well worth the tax dollars, they argue.

Intriguing as the book is at some points, it seems dogged by a fatal flaw not of the authors' making. In crafting their carefully reasoned arguments, they marshal evidence assembled over decades from all sorts of areas—the fight against malaria, past efforts at tax reform, previous waves of migration—and propose commonsense solutions.

But in a world in which many people, and many policymakers, willfully inhabit a fact-free, conspiracy-tinged alternate reality, it's hard to see even good ideas gaining traction. Which is a pity because, as they note, hard times demand hard thinking.—*KJ*



## *The Ambassadors: America's Diplomats on the Front Lines*

PAUL RICHTER, SIMON &  
SCHUSTER, 352 PP., \$28,  
NOVEMBER 2019

**COUNTLESS BOOKS HAVE PICKED APART** how the United States stumbled into its so-called forever wars in the greater Middle East. But nearly all of them focus on either the presidents and their inner circles in Washington who signed off on the conflicts or the military they sent in to fight them.

Paul Richter fills a glaring absence in the literature with his book *The Ambassadors*. U.S. diplomats represent a small fraction of millions of Americans who have cycled through conflict zones from Iraq to Afghanistan to Syria, but they have played an outsized role in the trenches of U.S. policy: the rare triumphs, the common tragedies, and the muddled, messy stalemates in between.

Richter profiles four veteran foreign service officers who chose to spend the bulk of their careers in some of the world's most dangerous places and in its costliest and most complex wars. They are Ryan Crocker, the former ambassador to Afghanistan and Iraq; Robert Ford, the former ambassador to Syria; Anne Patterson, the former ambassador to Pakistan and Egypt; and J. Christopher Stephens, the former ambassador to

Libya who was killed in a terrorist attack in Benghazi in 2012.

The book is a compelling and poignant glimpse at an often overlooked and misunderstood profession. It is also, if by happenstance, timely. The U.S. State Department finds itself besieged by partisan vitriol in a heated impeachment investigation and by a president who is distrustful, if not downright scornful, of professional diplomats. Despite its central role in ongoing wars that appear to have no end date, the department also faces budget cuts and a hemorrhaging of top talent that will take it years to recover from.

Richter, a former longtime diplomatic correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, succinctly weaves the complex history of U.S. involvement in the greater Middle East through his profiles of the ambassadors and their grueling, thankless, and sometimes nearly impossible jobs. Given how much ground he has to cover—the bungling of the Iraq War, the chaos of Libya, the fraught relationship with Pakistan as a conflict raged in Afghanistan—that is no small feat. The book is easily digestible and meticulously researched, with scores of interviews from the ambassadors and their former colleagues.

One of the most important themes he touches on is the slow death of expeditionary diplomacy, exemplified by the aftermath of Stephens's tragic death. During his tenure, Stephens was an effective ambassador because of his eagerness to leave security perimeters and engage with Libyans outside the embassy. But that drive ultimately contributed to his death at the hands of terrorists who attacked a lightly defended U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi.

Stephens's killing, alongside the deaths of another State Department official and two CIA contractors, sparked a grueling partisan battle on Capitol Hill over what went wrong. It led the State Department to strengthen security in its fortress-like embassies and further restrict the freedoms diplomats need—even in the world's most dangerous countries—to do their jobs.

Even curtailed and under pressure as diplomats may be, Richter's book reminds us of their importance. The times that Washington ignored or overrode their advice, Washington was often proved wrong. Ford, for example, tried to raise alarm bells and stave off sectarian violence in central Iraq. His warnings went unheeded, and violence exploded across the country in 2007.

Former U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis once said: "If you don't fund the State Department fully, I need to buy more ammunition." There is truth in his words. Richter's book shows that alongside the military, one of the best weapons the United States has is its veteran diplomats.—*Robbie Gramer*

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## Why the Berlin Wall Still Matters

Fragments of the wall have become museum pieces. But with the rise of extremist parties in Germany, the debate over the barrier's legacy is anything but history. *By Justin Jampol*

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**THE NEWSEUM IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**—which closed in December—had long featured a BT-9, the iconic and infamous guard tower that loomed over the death strip behind the Berlin Wall, its wardens watching for any potential escapees from the East or provocations from the West.

BT stands for *Beobachtungsturm*, or observation tower. The succeeding number refers to the height. BT-9 meant the structure was nine meters (some 30 feet) high. The tower featured a semi-automated spotlight, rifle racks, flares, Carl Zeiss Jena optics, communications equipment, and even heating for cold Berlin nights.

This particular tower design, unveiled in 1975, represented years of research and advancements, transforming the border from cinder blocks with barbed wire to a sophisticated surveillance system of walls, tank traps, mines, towers, motion sensors, and guard dogs.

And it worked.

Relatively few people made it across to West Berlin by traversing the death strip and overcoming the wall. Border guards were sworn to shoot at would-be escapees. Some did. Most never had to. The numbers are disputed, but most historians believe that around 200 people were killed during escape attempts during the lifespan of the Berlin Wall, from 1961 to 1989.

The guard tower cast a long shadow, literally and figuratively. It was a totem of authority and security, warning against escape attempts and telegraphing to the world that the East German authorities were prepared to defend a border that most of the world saw as illegitimate and immoral. Symbolism was always important to the East German regime, and the Berlin Wall, along with its ominous towers, represented a particularly challenging public relations problem.

The East German authorities called it the *antifaschistischer*



*Schutzwall*, or anti-fascist protective barrier. In other words, they were eager to convey that it wasn't meant to keep the East Germans in but rather to keep those land-grabbing fascists in the West *out*.

Of course, when the Berlin Wall was brought down on Nov. 9, 1989, not by the West but rather by a peaceful revolution initiated by East Germans themselves, the jig was up, finally and completely.

But that wasn't the end of the road for the BT-9 guard tower.

Due to the modular and standardized construction of the concrete block





The BT-9 guard tower, part of the Berlin Wall exhibit at the Newseum in Washington before its closure in December.

tower, which meant that it could be manufactured off-site and installed within a day, the BT-9 could also be just as quickly disassembled and transported.

Similarly, the fourth and final iteration of the Berlin Wall was modular and standard—the 2.6-ton segments were designed to be moved into place in haste and with incredible precision.

Whereas other, older portions of the Berlin Wall couldn't be moved and had to be knocked down to get them out of the way, the fourth generation of the

Berlin Wall, which was unveiled in 1975 alongside the BT-9, is now on display all over the world.

The Berlin Wall's segments are perfectly weighted so that a crane can lift them, as if they were designed for a future as portable monuments. Ten such segments owned by the Wende Museum are presently installed across from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, surrounded by those whom East German officials would have called *Klassenfeind*, or class enemies. For its part, the Newseum had eight segments, which,

along with the BT-9 tower, formed a kind of monument of oppression.

And that's the thing with both the fourth generation of the Berlin Wall and the BT-9 tower. They started their lives as intimidating structures that symbolized separation, surveillance, and repression. While they've never changed in form, their meaning became something very different after 1989.

In the last 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, these structures have been presented as physical witnesses to authoritarianism.

But there's a catch. Authoritarianism never disappeared, and now new despots are wreaking political havoc throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

The last 30 years have not been smooth sailing for German reunification, and particularly in the last few years, the narrative of the West's joyful victory seems to have become a relic in its own right.

Economic and social issues plague the relationship between the former East and West Germany. The rise of grievance-fueled parties in what used to be East Germany has occurred partly in response to what is perceived as western Germans' arrogance and attacks on the identity of eastern Germans, who, after all, were not all Stasi informers. All of these tensions have forced a new, more complicated narrative about the wall and its meaning.

The Newseum closed for good on Dec. 31, and, along with it, the BT-9 tower will need to find a new home. It won't be difficult to move—at least physically. But the future of its meaning is already in flux. ■

**JUSTIN JAMPOL** is the founder and executive director of the Wende Museum in Culver City, California, and host of the television show *Lost Secrets* on Travel Channel.