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SUMMER 2024

EUROPE ALONE

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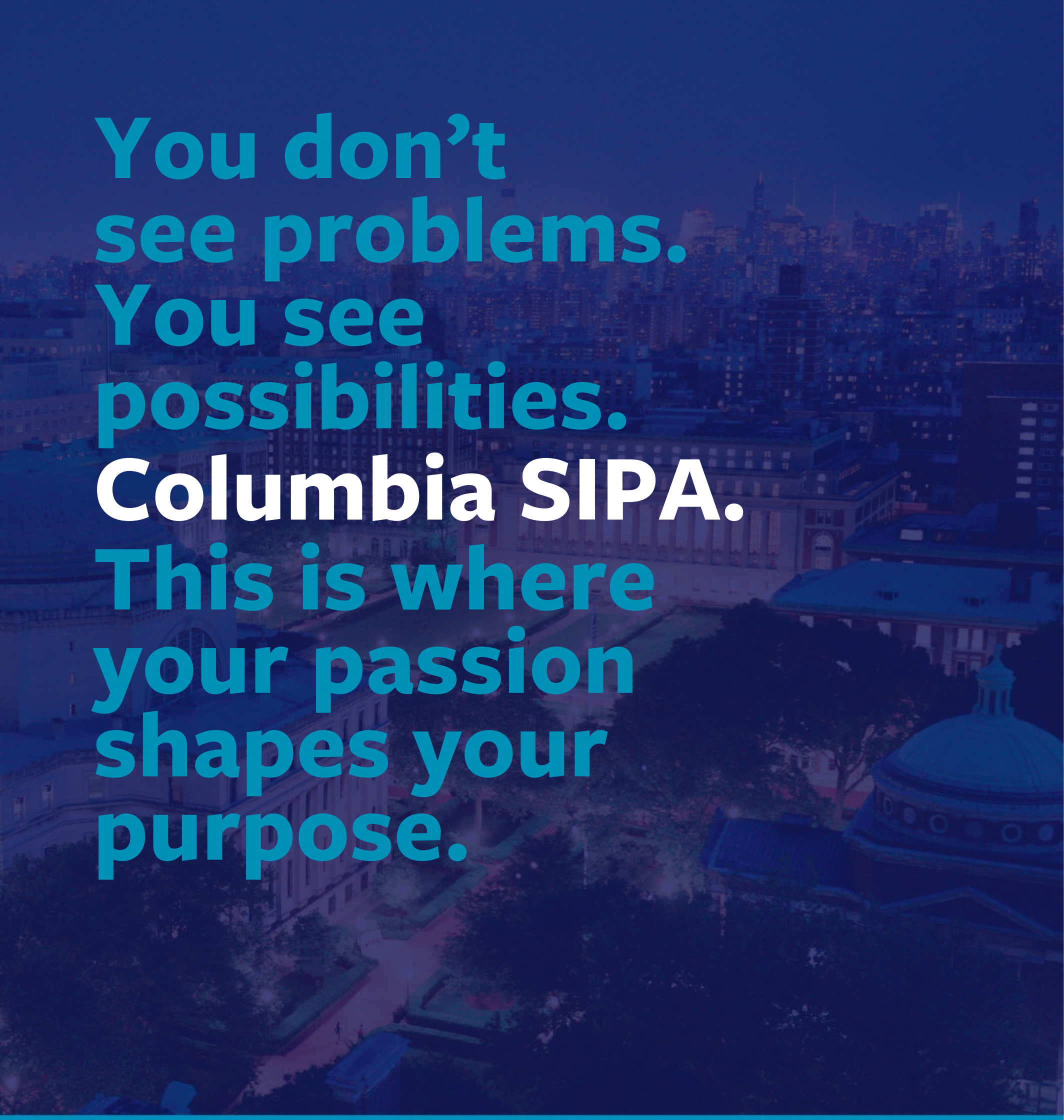

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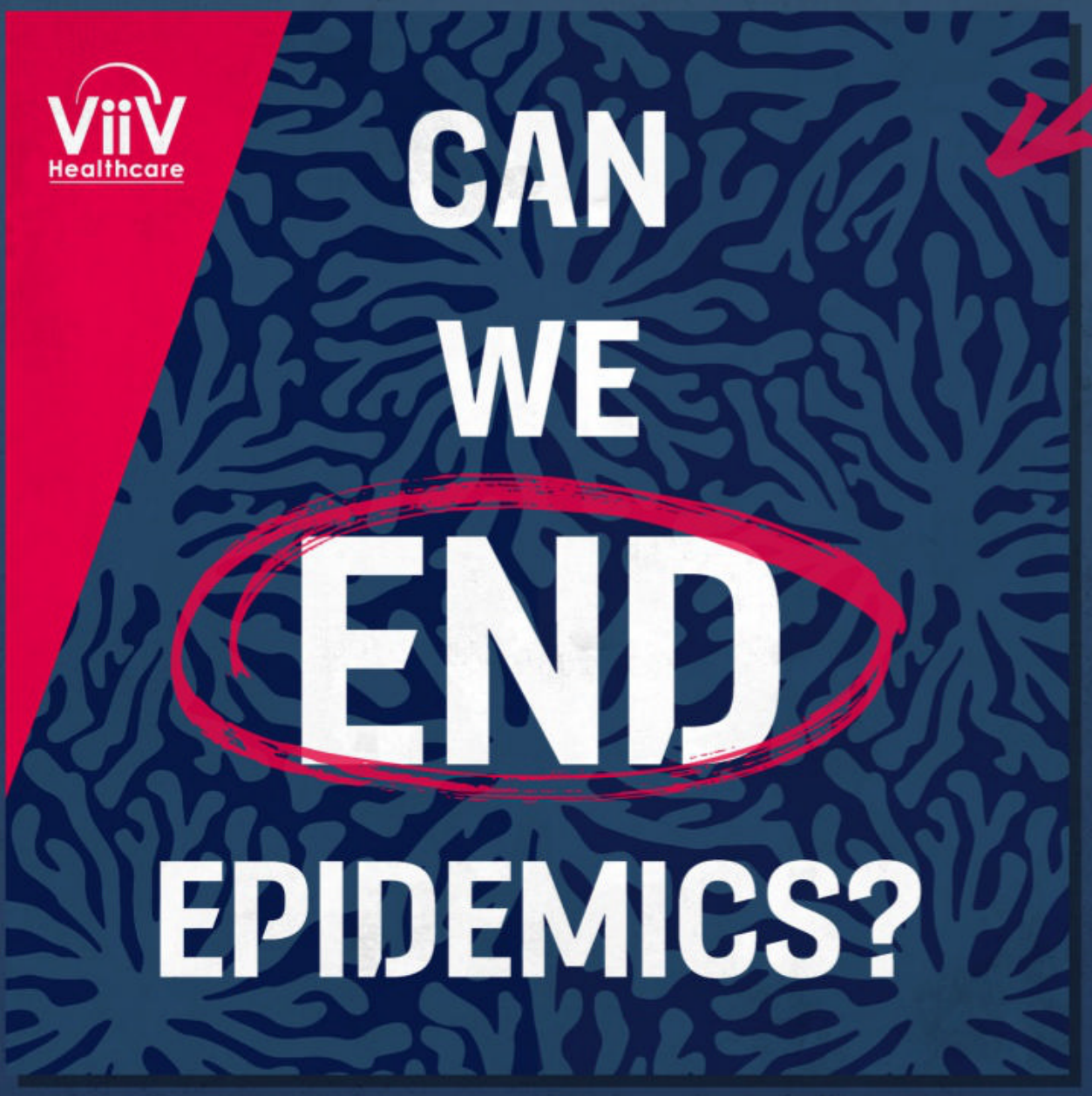

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FROM THE EDITOR

HISTORY HAS FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH EUROPE. In hindsight, the continent's long period of relative peace from 1945 to 2022 was an aberration. In any European capital today, the mood seems starkly different than before Russia invaded Ukraine. Suddenly, from Berlin to Brussels, leaders are racing to resuscitate their defense infrastructure and update their militaries—each dependent for too long on a U.S. security blanket that is no longer guaranteed. Despite the gravity of the moment, Europe's attempts to put up a united front are like a pail with several leaks: In Belgrade, Bratislava, and Budapest, leaders friendly to the Kremlin have ridden a wave of disinformation and fearmongering to get elected or stay in power. The success of far-right parties in the European Parliament elections in June only added to fears about the continent's stability.

From Europe's vantage point, the world looks menacing. If Donald Trump wins a second term as president, he may do as he says and pull the United States out of NATO, the world's biggest security alliance. Even if Trump doesn't win, Washington seems likely to focus more on Beijing and less on Brussels. Other countries are noticing the fraying of Europe's old ties and looking to take advantage. When Chinese President Xi Jinping embarked on his first European tour since 2019 in May, he visited France, Hungary, and Serbia—countries that prize their strategic autonomy or are willing to undermine European Union and NATO priorities. As Europe's hand weakens, the rest of the world will look to divide and conquer the continent.

With its security precarious and its alliances weakening, what will Europe's future look like? That's the question we posed to nine influential thinkers in this issue's cover package, "Europe Alone" (Page 35). One of our contributors, Polish Foreign Minister **Radoslaw Sikorski**, calls on his neighbors to follow Warsaw's lead and match its alliance-leading defense contribution to NATO. Europe "must spend more so that the world's democratic bloc can keep its influence and way of life," he argues. Former Swedish Prime Minister **Carl Bildt** adds to that warning: "Like the fall of Saigon and the fall of Kabul, a Russian victory in Ukraine would be seen across the world as an even more significant sign of the United States' waning power. The appetite for adventurism from numerous actors is bound to increase."

In a separate essay, political scientist **Hal Brands** offers a take from the other side of the Atlantic (Page 50). Europe has changed so much since World War II that Americans "have forgotten how hopeless the continent once seemed," he writes. Brands describes a few scenarios for Europe if the United States retreats across the Atlantic. They're not pretty. "Indeed, if there is a lesson from Europe's past, it is that the descent can come sooner and be steeper than currently seems possible to imagine," he writes.

On July 9, leaders from around Europe will gather in Washington for a summit to mark the 75th anniversary of NATO. It won't be a celebration of the past—not while the future is at stake. The essays in this issue will hopefully provide some useful context and analysis for the consequential summer and important elections ahead of us.

There is a lot more in the issue, including a selection of our signature arguments from around the world and an exploration of a confounding Portuguese word. Don't miss FP columnist **Howard W. French**'s take on Wang Feng's new book on China's rise (Page 65). French speaks Mandarin, regularly visits and has written books about China, and says he's astounded by what he learned.

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As ever,

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People walk past a billboard of a Taiwanese flag in New Taipei City on Jan. 13, the day of the island's presidential election.

SAM YEH/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

What the Western Media Gets Wrong About Taiwan

By Clarissa Wei

In September 2022, I was working as a fixer in Taipei for a U.S. news segment about cross-strait tensions, handling local logistics for a visiting producer and cameraman. Fixers are freelance staff whose role is somewhere between journalist and tour guide—they can end up doing almost anything, from arranging interviews to translation to booking hotels. One night, we arrived at an amateur radio meetup in a park, ready to shoot, and found an eccentric crew of local radio fans. One man hunched over a tangled web of equipment at the back of his truck, tapping away in Morse code; another fidgeted with an antenna, trying to get a signal. The producer told me that the group was learning how to operate radios in case of war with China.

"Why do you do this?" I asked one of the guys, expecting him to launch into a monologue about the importance of civil defense.

"Because with radio, we can communicate with anyone in the world," he replied.

"What about communicating with people in China?"

"If they pick up, sure." He shrugged.

I realized quickly that most of them weren't there because of cross-strait tensions. Although a few were interested in civil defense, the regulars were just radio nerds who liked to hang out. We left the park disappointed, and only a couple frames from that night made it to the final video.

In recent years, as tensions between China and Taiwan have reached historic highs, foreign journalists have flocked to Taiwan. More than 200 journalists from 28 countries arrived to cover the presidential election in January. Yet many of these visiting journalists distort the reality on the ground. They depict the island as the centerpiece of a drama that they've already made up their minds about, often inflating tensions for heightened effect. And the fixers are brought on as the stagehands, charged with providing the backdrop for prewritten narratives.

Because Taiwan is commonly framed as the flash point of potential world war, most television producers want access to a shooting range, bomb shelter, or military base. Many fly to the outlying islands of Kinmen or Matsu in hopes of hopping on a boat to catch a glimpse of the Chinese shore.

"It's like ordering from a menu—they see something that someone has covered before and want the same thing," said Jesse, a veteran Taiwanese fixer. (Jesse's name has been changed due to his concerns about possible impacts on his professional relationships.)

"You watch the news and see footage of war planes, and it seems like it's tense on the ground here in Taiwan," said Tina Liu, a Taiwanese journalist who took on her first fixing gig with an Italian outlet this year. "But it really isn't."

I've worked as a fixer for outlets in the United States, Australia, and Europe, and many of my clients are surprised when they realize the settings are not as bombastic as they hoped: The guns are airsoft guns, air raid shelters are just parking lots, and the view of the Chinese shore is almost always blurry. Also, the average Taiwanese voter does not think about China on a day-to-day basis, which makes for very lackluster vox pops. Although there is plenty of intergovernmental strife in the form of occasional trade bans, airspace incursions, and disinformation campaigns, daily life in Taiwan is shockingly normal.

Yet normalcy just doesn't make for good television. So I've been charged with conjuring up action-packed scenes for video, and I often have to push back. Eight other Taiwan-based fixers I spoke with also said they have, on occasion, been coerced to help produce scenes that were inappropriate, not reflective of the truth, or even flat-out sensationalist.

"I've encountered a lot of situations where people just don't respect the fixer's expertise," said Adrien Simorre, a Taipei-based stringer.

Simorre was one of a dozen local fixers and stringers who released a statement about the toxic dynamics between fixers and visiting journalists after the election in January. They cited low pay, lack of credit, and general disrespect. The fixers' grievances are not endemic to Taiwan, but the issue of parachute journalists "imposing their own perspective and preconceived narratives" is particularly pronounced on the island.

Fixers have told me stories about foreign producers swimming in the spike-infested waters of Kinmen, near the Chinese shore, for dramatic effect; requests to film Chinese missile launches from Taiwan, which is logistically impossible; and clients being disappointed when man-on-the-street interviews don't elicit strong reactions on China.

"I've heard of journalists pushing interviewees to answer certain questions about China-Taiwan relations," said Alicia Chen, a Taiwanese freelance journalist who spoke out on X (formerly Twitter) about the disrespect, lack of credit, and poor communication she experienced with a visiting correspondent in January. "And if the interviewee didn't want to comment, they would keep repeating or rephrasing the question until the interviewee said the words they wanted to hear."

Boan Wang, a documentary filmmaker, said that in the spring of 2023, a European client of his asked to take the ferry from Kinmen to the Chinese city of Xiamen. Wang told them tickets were only available for Taiwanese citizens and their Chinese spouses. "They asked if I could talk to a captain to let them on—basically asking me to smuggle them across international borders," he said. "How is that appropriate?"

One of the most frequent requests I get is whether I can secure access to a gun range where civilians are learning to shoot for self-defense. The problem is that gun enthusiasts are a small fringe group. Guns are illegal in Taiwan, so in the event of an actual war, the average Taiwanese person would not have access to one. The scenes that end up on television are either just airsoft hobby ranges or kids running around an abandoned building with BB guns.

The most popular civil defense programs on the island are instead based in the classroom, hosted by a nonprofit called Kuma Academy. These courses largely focus on identifying disinformation, learning first aid, and practicing evacuation drills—all practical ways for the average citizen to prepare for war. But footage from these lectures is often sidelined in favor of the guns.

The pursuit of a good sound bite often trumps a balanced story. Taipei-based stringer and photographer Annabelle Chih said many visiting producers falsely assume that Taiwanese people are divided into two camps: pro-unification and pro-independence. Yet neither of the island's two major political parties—the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Kuomintang (KMT)—

endorse a declaration of independence, nor are they advocates for unification. The DPP assumes that Taiwan is already independent, while the KMT has a more conciliatory approach and insists on peaceful dialogue with Beijing.

"Producers will ask me if they can interview the White Wolf," Chih said. The White Wolf, whose real name is Chang An-lo, is a convicted criminal and gang leader who is outspoken about his desire to unify Taiwan with China. Although he is a newsworthy figure, Chih said it is misleading to use him as a counterbalance to the DPP's views. "I explained to them he's not the right person to interview," she said. "He's the minority, and he's quite controversial."

Not all experiences with international media are negative. Many of my clients, for instance, have listened to my feedback and adjusted their angles accordingly. Chih said one of her clients also eventually came around and killed the story about the White Wolf.

Still, the appetite for dramatic scenes out of Taiwan has increased as media outlets compete for the most attention-grabbing narratives. Jesse said that before then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's historic visit to Taiwan in August 2022, most of the journalists who hired him took a more nuanced approach to stories. Then Pelosi's visit created a media frenzy because of how much it irritated Beijing and sparked a growing interest in stories related to Taiwan—but only if they fit into the story of an angry China and an island under threat.

This year, a lot of Jesse's clients have been war correspondents—fresh out of Ukraine or Israel and looking for action. "Some were visibly disappointed when they realized life was normal," he said.

By speaking up, the fixers hope for a more accurate and even-keeled portrayal of Taiwan.

"I know a lot of people come here because of our relationship with China," Liu said. "Everyone says Taiwan is the next Hong Kong or the next Ukraine. But our history is different from these places." ■

CLARISSA WEI is a Taiwanese American freelance journalist based in Taipei.

Vietnam's Leadership Will Soon Be Tested

By Dien Luong

In March, a delegation of around 50 U.S. businesses—among them major players such as Boeing and Meta—traveled to Vietnam to explore investment opportunities. Their visit was overshadowed by the abrupt resignation of Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong on March 20, two days after meetings began.

But Ted Osius, who led the delegation and served as the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam from 2014 to 2017, is no stranger to Hanoi's political landscape, known for its relative consistency but sometimes colored by unpredictability.

In recent years, Vietnam has emerged as a preferred alternative to China and successfully wooed foreign investment. It has also walked a fine line between Beijing and Washington on the global stage, securing upgrades in bilateral ties with other global powers. But the sudden resignation of a second president in a little over a year suggests some political uncertainty. An intensifying anti-corruption campaign has ensnared a slew of high-ranking officials, contributing to bureaucratic stagnation and unnerving foreign investors.

In his inaugural speech last year, Thuong highlighted the importance of revitalizing ideology for the party-state, citing the collapse of the Soviet Union as a cautionary tale. The emphasis on ideology was not unusual, but its prominence in the speech marked a departure from Thuong's predecessors. The message appeared directed at a notable figure in the audience: Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) chief Nguyen Phu Trong, a conservative ideologue.

Thuong soon came to be seen as a potential heir apparent to Trong, but almost exactly a year later, Thuong was gone—seemingly ousted in a move that caught many observers off guard. In a typically cryptic statement, the VCP cited Thuong's violations of party regulations and failure to set an

NHAC NGUYEN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Front row, from left: Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, Vietnamese Communist Party leader Nguyen Phu Trong, and then–President Vo Van Thuong arrive at a session of the National Assembly in Hanoi on Jan. 15.

exemplary standard as a top leader. His actions "caused negative public opinion, besmirching the reputation of the party, the state, and him personally," the statement said, stopping short of naming specific transgressions.

State media uniformly reported that the party accepted Thuong's resignation, but questions abounded in Vietnam, where high-ranking leaders seldom step down voluntarily. Did Thuong resign of his own accord? Or was he, like his predecessor Nguyen Xuan Phuc, ousted after falling out of political favor amid fierce infighting?

Trong spearheaded a comprehensive reform of Vietnam's anti-corruption initiatives in 2011 and accelerated these efforts after his reelection as party chief in 2016. This has led to significant changes in how the VCP combats graft. The campaign hit a crescendo in January 2023, when Phuc, two deputy prime ministers, and three ministers were purged for their involvement in scandals over the allocation of COVID-19 testing kits and the coordination of repatriations during the pandemic.

Some analysts say the anti-corruption campaign is also a tool for settling political scores, a characterization that the state has bristled at. Political infighting is common in Vietnam and often intensifies in the leadup to the VCP's National Congress, which is held every five years to select the country's new leadership. Although the next Congress is not scheduled until 2026, the power struggles began as early as two years ago, fueled in part by health concerns about Trong and uncertainty over the next leadership transition.

The recent actions against high-ranking figures underscore the nuances of the campaign. It is not baseless to assume that their adversaries capitalized on the anti-corruption drive to orchestrate their ousters. On the other hand, it is naive to see them only as casualties of political rivalry: Just before his resignation, Thuong was implicated in a bribery scandal stemming from his days as a local leader more than a decade ago. Regardless, his departure has clearly telegraphed the message that no one is safe, amplifying a sense of uncertainty among the political class.

Deepening uncertainty could risk policy paralysis. Both diplomats and investors have lamented that the anti-corruption campaign has contributed to the inertia plaguing Vietnam's bureaucracy. The removal of Thuong is likely to exacerbate this stagnation: Officials, increasingly fearful of making missteps, may become more hesitant to act. Such caution has already led to delays in approving procurement contracts and disbursing public funds, with many analysts attributing these holdups to the overzealousness of the anti-corruption drive.

Foreign investors, often lured by Vietnam's reputation as having a more stable political environment than its neighbors, could see the defenestration of two presidents in a short period of time as a red flag. After all, the predictability and operational dynamics of Vietnam's governance are critical pillars for sound investment decisions.

However, Vietnam's ability to draw strong foreign direct investment flows amid global economic shifts has positioned it as a competitive manufacturing and export hub, a trend that is expected to continue. The country's focus on industrialization, along with an increasingly educated workforce and low labor costs, has made it an appealing alternative in the global supply chain as companies look for options beyond China. The Vietnamese government has announced an ambitious economic growth target of between 6 and 6.5 percent for this year.

As foreign investment continues to flow into Vietnam, especially in high-tech manufacturing, the country is poised to become the next so-called Asian tiger economy. Because multinational companies play a vital role in the country's manufacturing sector, maintaining investor confidence is crucial for sustaining Vietnam's economic growth, which in turn reinforces the regime's legitimacy.

A day after Thuong's ouster, Vietnam's legislature appointed Vice President Vo Thi Anh Xuan as acting president, projecting stability; the VCP's Central Committee nominated Public Security Minister To Lam to become Vietnam's 13th president in May. In a political landscape where collective leadership rules, the ousting of even high-profile figures does not typically herald major shake-ups in policy. The resilience of Vietnam's political system is likely to remain intact.

As a result, Vietnam's foreign policy isn't likely to change, particularly its bilateral ties with the United States. There is a delicate balance between Vietnam's internal political maneuvering and its external diplomatic objectives. The elevation of U.S.-Vietnamese relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership during U.S. President Joe Biden's visit last September marks a significant milestone—and one that has surprised many observers given that it was orchestrated by Trong, the party chief.

During Biden's visit, Thuong celebrated the historic upgrade in U.S.-Vietnamese relations and described it in the context of "unprecedented quantum leaps" in the countries' bilateral ties over the decades. He highlighted Trong's skill in navigating between Beijing and Washington.

Trong seemed an unlikely candidate to spearhead such a move. Just a year before the upgrade, he reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment to socialism and close ties with China during an official visit to Beijing. Trong's anti-corruption campaign, which bore some resemblance to that of Chinese President Xi Jinping, also led to the removal of some Vietnamese leaders considered to be Western-oriented, suggesting a preference for Beijing over Washington.

Given the lack of a clear leadership succession plan, there is no end in sight to political infighting before the next Congress in 2026, and uncertainty

will likely continue to cloud Vietnam's political landscape. But for both foreign investors and international partners, the key is to stay the course. Hanoi's political processes, although turbulent, have a way of self-correcting over time. A long-term perspective is essential, as the country's strategic importance and economic potential remain compelling.

The coming years present a litmus test for Vietnam's leadership. Whoever holds power must balance the drive to root out corruption with the need for political stability and economic growth. The outcome of this balancing act will have implications not only for Vietnam's domestic affairs but also for its role on the world stage amid global power rivalry. ■

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Lawrence Wong, then Singapore's deputy prime minister, delivers a speech in Paris on April 10.

JULIEN DE ROSA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Singapore Knows Its Stability Can't Last Forever

By Joseph Rachman

It's a little startling when a senior civil servant begins to casually ruminate about the inevitability of the end for any nation and political order and, in the *longue durée*, the finite lifespan of the one that they serve. If this were the Second French Empire as Prussians besieged Paris and the Commune ran the streets or Myanmar today, one could understand. But what does Singapore have to worry about?

On April 15, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the son of Singapore's revered first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, announced that he would be stepping down. The succession is proceeding with a smoothness that is near-soporific. Lawrence Wong, a deputy prime minister and finance minister, succeeded him on May 15. He is now Singapore's fourth prime minister from the People's Action Party (PAP), which has led the country uninterruptedly since independence in 1965.

Yet even at its most confident, there is an edge of insecurity over Singapore's fate as a small, ethnically diverse nation. The younger Lee in a valedictory address on May 1 declared: "The system does not have to fail outright for Singapore to get into trouble. Even if we just become ordinary, average, we will already be in serious trouble." He added: "Graver still, if our system malfunctions—becomes beset by populism, tribalism, nativism, or obsessed by short-term gains like some other countries—then we will certainly be sunk. … It is crucial that we maintain political stability."

The rhetoric perhaps sounds stark, but Singapore's leaders have long liked to remind citizens that the country is a "little red dot," vulnerable even in times of plenty to larger powers and global events. Underlying this, critics are quick to point out, is also the message that Singaporeans need a strong and competent PAP government to protect them.

Now, as the global geopolitical situation grows precarious, some feel storm clouds may be on the horizon once more, even as Singaporean citizens seem increasingly open to alternatives to the PAP political monopoly.

In the short term, few expect any major changes. Wong has an impeccable Singaporean political pedigree, working in the civil service and as Lee's private secretary before being handpicked to become a member of Parliament and minister. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he oversaw a government response that was positively viewed by most of the country's citizens, a rare phenomenon globally.

Security is another perpetual PAP promise. Unlike all of its neighbors since independence, Singapore has not faced major race riots, coups, or pervasive corruption. Many see tight social controls—including strict laws regulating speech that see Singapore ranked 126th on the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index, lower than Zimbabwe—as part of the bargain.

However, there are signs of changing views among voters. In 2020, the PAP won just over 61 percent of votes—a total that parties elsewhere would kill for. But the PAP is used to numbers in the mid-60s or above. The major opposition party took 10 seats, the most since 1968. Lee even expressed his disappointment at the time, saying,

"We have a clear mandate, but the percentage of the popular vote is not as high as I had hoped for." The next election could see another dip.

Research suggests a growing number of voters desire a wider range of political options and are more tolerant of more robust discussion of sensitive social issues such as race. While these views are not confined to the young, they are more pronounced among Millennial and Gen Z voters.

Sotto voce, some older Singaporeans think younger citizens could benefit from a bit of a scare and some hardship to remind them of the value of PAP leadership. But the old PAP tactics may be losing traction. The PAP in the past has sometimes benefited politically from crises, with voters fleeing to the perceived safety of its stewardship. But in 2020, calling a snap election as the island locked down in the face of the pandemic did not stop the PAP vote share from dropping.

The PAP's often ferocious criticism of its opponents has also at times backfired. Condemnation and a subsequent police investigation into Workers' Party candidate Raeesah Khan over comments she made alleging police discrimination against minorities in Singapore seem to have mainly had the effect of stirring public sympathy, with many younger voters feeling she was unfairly targeted.

Some suggest that the government's issues stem partly from simply having been in power too long and losing touch with the population. "The leadership today is selected from a very narrow Brahmin social structure," said Lee Hsien Yang, Lee Hsien Loong's brother, who now lives in London and is a notable critic of PAP leadership. Top leaders often rise via the civil service before entering politics and are picked for technocratic rather than political skills. "They are not politicians born out of the cut and thrust of free and fair elections, so they aren't charismatic."

This may be an issue for Wong. A recent YouGov poll of Singaporean voters showed that while 53 percent saw him as competent, only 28 percent saw him as honest and 21 percent as charismatic. There may be room to improve, with a recent media push to present Wong as down to earth and likable, often focusing on his guitar playing. And interestingly, Gen Z voters tended to rate him a bit more highly than older voters in a variety of areas including charisma—but lower on likability.

Cracks have also occasionally shown in the PAP's usually rock-solid unity and promise of scandal-free government. In the past year, Singapore has seen two major corruption scandals: one involving money laundering and the other gifts that former Transport Minister Subramaniam Iswaran received from various corporate sources. Some think Iswaran's resignation and trial will reassure voters that Singapore remains intolerant of graft, but others are nervous.

There has also been grumbling over news that two ministers were renting prime residential properties owned by the government's Singapore Land Authority and that said authority had spent considerable sums refurbishing them. Both were cleared of any wrongdoing by Singapore's anti-corruption body. But the country's expensive property market, where most people live in small flats, makes the issue very sensitive.

Even more embarrassing has been the row within the Lee family over the will of Lee Kuan Yew, who died in 2015. The row centered on whether to demolish the family home that Lee Kuan Yew had lived in. Lee Hsien Yang and his sister, Lee Wei Ling, said their father had been firm in his desire to demolish the house to prevent undue veneration. They accused their brother of misusing the prime minister's office to prevent this and looking to profit from their father's political legacy and help lay the groundwork for a political career for his own son. Lee Hsien Loong firmly denied their allegations, having recused himself from all government matters relating to the house since April 2015.

Lee Hsien Yang now lives in exile, moving to the United Kingdom after he faced a police investigation into whether he and his wife had lied under oath about the handling of the will. But he has thrown his weight behind the Progress Singapore Party (PSP), which is mainly made up of people formerly close to the PAP like himself. The party has attracted former political heavyweights and voters disaffected with the PAP.

"The reality there is there are many promises unkept in terms of things like a more open society and engagement with people," Lee Hsien Yang told me. "The last four, five years you have seen quite a number of legislative moves which are quite draconian." In recent years, Singapore has passed new laws on fake news and foreign interference, which have been condemned by various human rights organizations.

Some have welcomed the rise of the PSP. Others, however, worry about its rhetoric on migration—aimed not at poorer migrants but those in well-heeled international professions in finance, law, and other professional services who some Singaporeans feel compete with them for jobs and drive up local house prices.

For a country as open to global finance and migration as Singapore, any ructions in globalization will be felt domestically. U.S.-China tensions are viewed nervously in a city-state that is an international hub for finance and logistics and has long maintained excellent ties with both countries. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have also worried policymakers. And a second term for former U.S. President Donald Trump looms large as another potential big disruptor to global stability. Over the past six months, the government has taken the unusual step of offering high-level briefings to international banks on these issues to reassure them that Singapore will remain the safest and most reliable financial hub in the region.

Equally worrying is the prospect that these global developments could impact the social unity and stability that the PAP so prizes. There is particular worry about potential influence operations by China, mainly aimed at playing up ideas of ethnic solidarity with Singapore's majority ethnically Chinese population. In February, the government made first use of a new law against foreign interference to place restrictions on the activities of Philip Chan Man Ping, a naturalized citizen from Hong Kong. Gaza is also a concern given the country's significant Muslim population and long-standing security ties to Israel. Public events related to the war in Gaza are not allowed.

All of this has created a difficult dilemma for the PAP. Popular desire for a greater degree of social liberalism may have played a role in the city-state finally decriminalizing sex between men in 2022. Yet worries about potential domestic disruptions and an increasingly difficult geopolitical situation seem to push it in more conservative directions on issues such as free speech. Singapore can change—but only at the PAP's pace.

The jitters from the ruling party may be overblown. The government's occasional tendency toward existential angst has also underpinned its focus on effective delivery. Still, a growing number of citizens are open to exploring new ideas beyond the PAP's promises of security and good governance—and even to the possibility of rethinking the model of governance altogether. ■

JOSEPH RACHMAN is a freelance journalist covering Southeast Asia.

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Xi Believes China Can Win a Scientific Revolution

By Tanner Greer and Nancy Yu

In early March, global investors turned their eyes toward Beijing, where 2,977 delegates from across China had gathered for the annual session of the National People's Congress. Here, Chinese Premier Li Qiang would deliver the annual "Report on the Work of the Government." Here, the priorities that must guide the activities of the Chinese state over the coming year would be proclaimed. Here—or so financiers at home and abroad badly hoped—the Chinese government would declare its plan to rescue China's economy.

But there were few comforting signs. The 2023 report had placed "expanding domestic demand" as the top priority for that year, responding to the damage done by zero-COVID policies, a bureaucracy paralyzed by purges and confused by an unfavorable economic environment, and a property bubble too large to pop. The 2024 report did not follow suit. Instead, it laid out a road map not for economic recovery but for wider, and more aggressive, targets.

Ahead of "expanding domestic demand," the new report prioritizes two other goals. First, the Chinese government must "[strive] to modernize the industrial system and [develop] new quality productive forces at a faster pace." Second, it must "[invigorate] China through science and education and [consolidate] the foundations for high-quality development."

Put in blunter language: The central task of the Chinese state is to build an industrial and scientific system capable of pushing humanity to new technological frontiers.

This strategy has left Western observers incredulous, struggling to understand how any techno-nationalist industrial policy could engage with any of the economic problems they identify. To understand the Politburo's plans, one must first understand the historical narrative that informs them. This narrative is downstream from several sources: the historical materialism of Karl Marx; attempts by early 20th-century "New Culture" intellectuals to explain why China had fallen victim to imperialism; triumphal propaganda accounts of China's modern rise; and a close study of Western scholarship on the rise and fall of great powers.

Endorsed by President Xi Jinping and popular among Chinese policy elites, this set of ideas argues that there are hinge points to human history. In these rare moments, the Chinese leadership believes, emerging technologies can topple an existing economic order. Grand changes mean grand opportunities: The foundations of global economic growth are about to be transformed—and Xi is determined that China will lead this transformation.

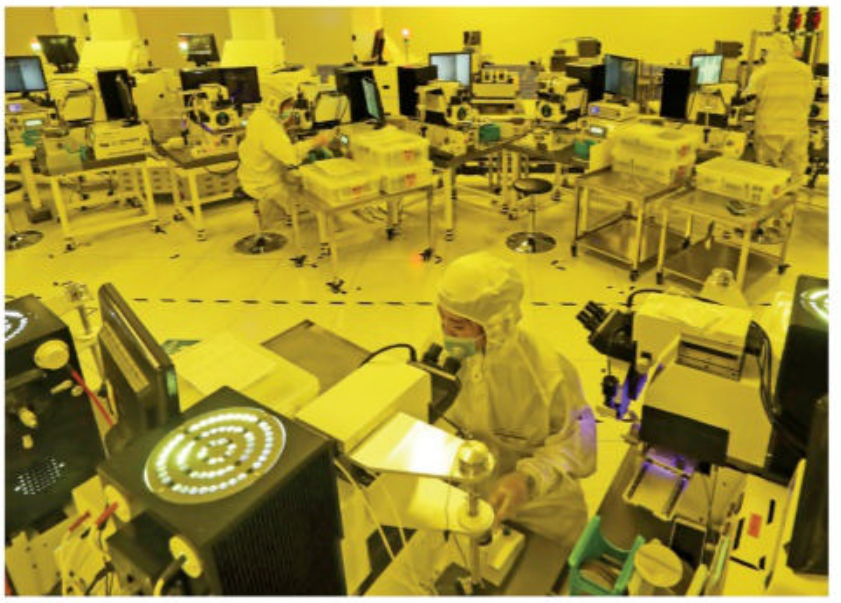
In the words of a 2016 top-level planning document, China now aims to be the "leading scientific power in the world." Xi explained the logic behind this goal to a gathering of Chinese scientists held that year. He presented technological

strength as a choice that begins with a moment of historical recognition. There are points in history when "major technological breakthroughs" promise to "greatly enhance humanity's ability to understand and utilize nature" as well as to increase "societal productivity."

Xi argued that "historical experience shows that [these] technological revolutions profoundly change the global development pattern." Some states "seize" this "rare opportunity." Others do not. Those that recognize the revolution before them and actively take advantage of it "rapidly increase their economic strength, scientific and technological strength, and defense capabilities, thereby quickly enhancing their composite national strength."

If the Qing dynasty stands in for any powerful state that falls behind in the technological race, the United States is a living symbol of technological potential. Ever since Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping formally identified the United States as the benchmark for China's modernization, Chinese thinkers have seen it as the embodiment of scientific strength. Wang Huning, the fourth-ranking member of the Politburo Standing Committee and Xi's favored court intellectual, made this point repeatedly in his 1991 book, *America Against America*. Shocked by the "awe-inspiring material civilization" he found in the United States, Wang insists that "if the Americans are to be overtaken, one thing must be done: surpass them in science and technology."

These ideas are explored in some depth in a recent textbook written by analysts from the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR). CICIR is staffed and run by China's premier intelligence agency, the Ministry of State Security. The book, titled *National Security and the Rise and Fall of Great Powers*, is one in a series of titles intended to distill the consensus views of China's civilian security analysts into a curriculum for Chinese undergraduates who aspire to a career in state security.



Employees make chips at a semiconductor factory in Nantong, China, on March 17, 2021.

How did Britain and the United States secure "their status as unprecedented global superpowers"? The CICIR analysts insist that it is neither strategic genius nor diplomatic acumen that leads to hegemony. Instead, they point to London's and Washington's "outstanding advantages" in "scientific innovation" and "their respective leadership of the First and Second Industrial Revolutions."

Favorable demographics, natural resource stocks, and geographic locale are all foundational to national strength, but under modern conditions, power comes from holding "the dominant position in economics, science, and technology." Under this schema, "scientific and technological innovation … serves as a crucial indicator of the actual strength of a great power." Thus, the rising great power must first integrate itself with the "center of global markets and core technologies," then become a "major manufacturing power," and finally "take the initiative in innovation" and "lead in high-technology industries" if it wishes to rise to the top.

On this count, the authors concede that "China still has a not insignificant gap to close with the United States in the fields of science and technology." They are confident, however, that China has an "opportunity to become the center of global science and technology and the world leader in techno-scientific development." This is because "a new round of techno-scientific revolution and industrial transformation is currently fermenting."

The phrase "new round of techno-scientific revolution and industrial transformation" is a stock slogan in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) speak. It is tied closely to another of Xi's favored phrases: "great changes unseen in a century."

These changes are often associated with populist disruptions in the West and the growing prosperity of the "rest." But for many Chinese analysts, they also include the revolutionary potential of emerging technologies. These analysts point to three previous waves of industrial transformation—steam-powered mechanization in the 18th century, electrification in the 19th, and digitalization in the 20th—as forming a pattern that the future will follow. The difference this time, Renmin University professor Jin Canrong noted in 2019, is that "the competition for the Fourth Industrial Revolution will be held between China and the United States." As previous contests for industrial supremacy occurred only between Western powers, "this is a great change unseen in five centuries."

In Xi's eyes, this new industrial revolution is "rapidly progressing." As he declared in a 2021 address to Chinese

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

scientists and engineers, "scientific and technological innovation has accelerated exponentially, with emerging technologies represented by information technology and artificial intelligence at the forefront." This has caused "paradigm shifts in humanity's understanding of nature." These revolutionary advances are "rapidly being translated into social and economic life."

In addition to AI, the CCP identifies the fields of materials science, genetics, neuroscience, quantum computing, green energy, and aerospace engineering as pillars of this revolution. Xi argued in 2021 that China "has the foundation, the confidence, the belief, and the capability to seize the opportunities presented by the new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation" in each of these fields. "We are poised to rise with this tide and achieve great ambitions."

For Xi, this revolution occurs at a critical moment. In 2018, he told party cadres that the "the new round of technoscientific revolution and industrial transformation coincides with the transformation of China's development model." Xi has long urged the CCP to orient itself around a "new development concept" that emphasizes higher-quality growth over the infrastructure spending that powered the Chinese economy in the years after the Great Recession. High-tech manufacturing promises an alternative engine of growth. These are the "new quality productive forces" referenced in the 2024 work report.

As a recent essay in the CCP's flagship theory journal explains, "new quality productive forces represent the [direction of] the new round of technoscientific revolution and industrial transformation. Accelerating the formation of new quality productive forces means obtaining a leading position in the progress of these productive forces … and gaining the initiative in a fierce international competition" over the "commanding heights" of the emerging global economy.

Much of Chinese policy over the last few years—from the decision to elevate industrial technocrats to positions of high leadership in the party to the 14th Five-Year Plan's commitment to construct a "whole-of-nation system" for technological innovation—only makes sense in light of this larger narrative. Already, these efforts have borne some fruit. China is now the world leader in electric vehicle sales. Huawei's industrial chain is building advanced chips. Bloomberg Economics estimates that by 2026, the high-tech sector's contribution to the Chinese economy could outpace real estate's. If forecasts about the explosive growth potential of AI are remotely accurate, it is plausible that advancing technology might just provide China with the alternate growth engine it needs.

Yet this is a risky gamble. The Chinese strategy rests on two bets: first, that the world truly is on the cusp of an economic transition comparable to the Industrial Revolution in scale, and second, that if this new technological revolution occurs, China will lead it. Neither bet is certain.

Here, the fate of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc should stand as a warning to Beijing. This is not the first time a communist regime hoped that investments in new technologies and industrial processes might reverse slowing growth. The communist parties of Europe made a similar set of bets in the mid-20th century. The Soviet Union hoped to lead the computer revolution; the Eastern Bloc as a whole aimed to become the world's greatest high-end manufacturing hub. These bets did not pay off. New industries were not successfully developed, new technologies did not successfully diffuse, and new products were not price competitive with their counterparts in East Asia or the West. Soon, the bills came due. By the 1980s, one communist regime after another was forced first into austerity and then to outright collapse.

In the CCP's telling, the fall of the Soviet Union is part of a very different narrative—a story about the perilous threat posed by internal corruption, liberal ideology, and foreign subversion. Chinese propagandists have little to say about economies that floundered because their leaders put too much hope in technology's latest wave. The story of the "new round of techno-scientific revolution and industrial transformation" is not a story about those who floundered. It is a story about those who won. Time will tell which story the Chinese leadership should have been paying most attention to. ■

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Biden Picks the Wrong Moment to Challenge Beijing

By Andrei Lungu

The same decision can be smart at the right time or disastrous at the wrong time. The bill that forces Chinese company ByteDance to divest from TikTok or face a ban on the video-sharing app in the United States is one such case.

One of the main arguments for the bill, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden in late April, was based on the long-held worry that ByteDance could use TikTok—especially under the influence or direction of the Chinese Communist Party or the Chinese government—to

spread propaganda and influence its American users and maybe even interfere in U.S. elections. At first, it might seem like a good idea to ban TikTok before the November elections to prevent any kind of interference.

But the new law doesn't ban TikTok—it just gives the app's Chinese parent company until January 2025, two months after the U.S. elections, to sell TikTok. TikTok will be around, under the control of a Chinese company, for another round of elections. Recent rumors seem to indicate that ByteDance would even prefer to shut down TikTok in the United States rather than sell it.

But the gravest threat is that former President Donald Trump, who is neck and neck with Biden in the polls, has come out publicly opposing a ban—even though he supported it in 2020. With TikTok's operations safe before the elections but facing the end of the road under a second Biden administration, the law creates a logical incentive for ByteDance—or the Chinese government itself—to do whatever it can to help the candidate who opposes the ban get elected, in the hope that it might get a better deal than certain demise.

Ironically, this pernicious incentive comes before a presidential election that has been described by Biden as make or break for U.S. democracy and that Beijing has already tried to influence, according to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

In the past few years, the U.S. government has taken firm measures against many Chinese companies, such as its sanctions against Huawei, the creation of the Chinese Military-Industrial Complex Companies List, and the restrictions on exports of advanced chips to China. But it avoided a final decision regarding the most important Chinese company operating in the United States; it took years of behind-the-scenes efforts to slowly and unsuccessfully deal with TikTok—only to fast-forward the entire process in a pivotal election year, with the ban scheduled for just after the elections, creating new risks in the meantime.

What might have been a good idea one or two years ago ended up being a dangerous gamble six months before a presidential election. Nobody knows if ByteDance or China will engage in any election interference, but the law creates a natural incentive for the company to favor one candidate over the other.

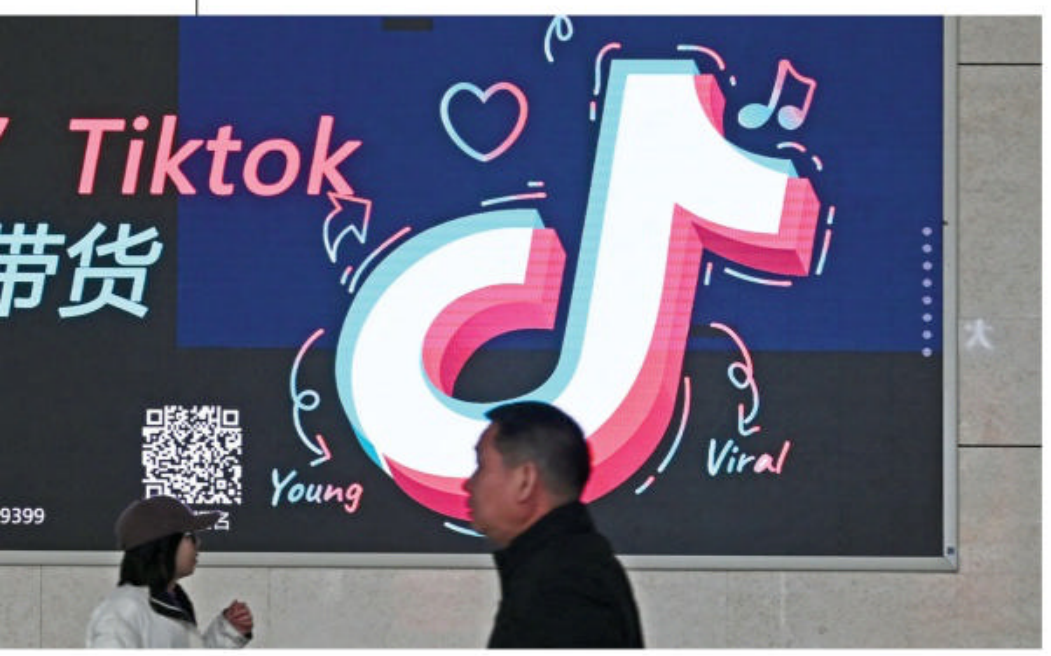
ByteDance, through TikTok, doesn't even have to do much—it could simply promote messages to its U.S. users that inform them of the opposing positions of the two candidates, similarly to how it called on users to reach out to their elected representatives to express opposition to the bill. Or it could stop policing certain types of misinformation. Or, in the worst-case scenario, the fears of its opponents could come true if it decides to use TikTok's famed recommendation algorithm to promote certain videos to select users. Considering that the presidential election will probably be decided by a few tens of thousands of votes in a handful of states, it could be tempting—and feasible—to try to influence the final result.

Once Trump's new opposition to the bill became public, the logical thing to do was for Congress to abandon the bill and try again after the elections, without incentivizing ByteDance or even Beijing to support a candidate. Instead of preventing election interference, the law makes it more likely, at least for 2024.

Any evaluation of this law also cannot ignore the historical context. TikTok was launched internationally in 2017 and got a boost through ByteDance's acquisition of Musical.ly that same year, which already had a sizable U.S. user base. The Trump administration didn't take any effective measures while TikTok attracted tens of millions of U.S. users over the next two years. This wasn't inevitable: In the same period, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States signaled its opposition to a takeover of MoneyGram by a Chinese company and forced a different Chinese company to sell Grindr after it was already acquired. By the time the United States entered an election year in 2020 and TikTok had become a cultural force, it finally became a political subject, and the Trump administration tried to force a sale while threatening a ban.

Once the Biden administration came into office, the threat to TikTok dissipated. For three years, work went on behind the scenes but without any urgency and without bringing it into public view and public debate. Once another U.S. election was on the horizon, Washington finally took firm action, and TikTok again became a political controversy. Time and again, Washington picks the wrong moment to deal with a serious subject.

The desire to appear tough on China



People walk past an advertisement featuring the TikTok logo at a train station in Zhengzhou, China, on Jan. 21.

GREG BAKER/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

and on issues of national security and to leave a legacy seems to have overtaken the importance of a careful analysis of the risks and benefits—or that of public debate, as it took less than two months for a proposal to become law, after almost seven years of slow-walking.

This isn't an exception when it comes to how Washington has handled issues regarding China—preferring to avoid certain tough or costly decisions but rushing ahead without any caution on others. For example, more than five years after "decoupling" became a buzzword, China and the United States are still very much economically entangled, and Washington has avoided taking the measures necessary to reduce import dependencies on China for critical or important goods. In the case of rare-earth elements, it has been more than a decade since this critical dependency has come under the public spotlight, but only recently have some shy steps been taken.

While there has been a lot of talk about economic competition with China, the United States has abandoned efforts to strengthen trade ties with allies and partners through free trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which are apparently seen as a political third rail. Talk of the threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is constant, but Washington has avoided the considerable investments necessary to boost deterrence while providing Taiwan with only token funding for its defenses. It is difficult to look at this entire seven-year process and find something that worked well.

If things turn out OK in TikTok's case, it will be a consequence of luck, not strategy. And a strategy—one that is coherent, comprehensive, and long term—is what the United States needs in its rivalry with China, as ad hoc, hurried efforts cannot make up for years of avoiding tough decisions. ■

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China's Public Wants to Make a Living, Not War

By Tao Wang

"I am opposed to war, unless in self-defense." This was the most liked comment on Douyin—the Chinese counterpart to TikTok—in reaction to a speech delivered by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Jan. 9. In his address, Wang previewed China's top diplomatic goals for 2024 and emphasized "the unwavering resolve of all 1.4 billion Chinese citizens to achieve reunification with Taiwan," a statement made just days prior to the island's general elections.

The broader reaction to Wang's remarks likely wasn't what the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had hoped for: Tens of thousands of Chinese social media users responded, many of them with grievances, sarcasm, and defiance, widely questioning the costs of a potential war.

One man from Shanghai complained, "Who is going to fight the war? If I die, who is going to pay my mortgage or my car loan?" Wang's speech framed "national unification" as one of "China's core interests," but as one user from Hunan rebutted, China's "core interests are that every Chinese can be treated equally and have access to elder care and health care." The pushback went beyond economic and social grievances. Some posters were even bolder, suggesting that Taiwan's democracy may demonstrate a political alternative: "The fact that Taiwanese choose their own way of life," one commentator from Shandong said, "might show that Chinese people can take a different route."

The mood among social media users was a sharp departure from past elections. After almost every Taiwanese general election since 2016, a wave of pro-war fever has swept the Chinese internet. After Taiwan's 2020 elections, for example, upbeat war enthusiasts in China produced oil paintings that illustrated wild fantasies of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) capturing then-Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen after landing in Taiwan and forcing her to sign an official surrender document onboard a Chinese aircraft carrier—a scene reminiscent of the 1945 Japanese surrender that ended World War II.

In 2021, one of the most popular songs to go viral on Chinese social media was "Take a Bullet Train to Taiwan in 2035." Its allusion to a high-speed rail line connecting Beijing and Taipei was a dog whistle to nationalists who hoped that unification was on the horizon—by force, if necessary.

Absent from these fantasies, however, was the blood and violence that accompany real war. At the time, China's star was rising on the international stage, and public confidence was riding high on China's success in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic within its borders. As such, the sentiments surrounding unification and the use of military force were quite romantic; many people believed that victory over Taiwan would be easy, that the Taiwanese would surrender voluntarily if the PLA simply blockaded the island.

In 2024, however, things have changed. The most recent Taiwanese presidential election—in which the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won a repeat victory—served as an uncomfortable reminder to the Chinese public that neither Taiwanese politicians nor voters are interested in Beijing's plans for political unification. Although the forceful unification narrative still exists, any push from nationalists to reignite war fever has now run into a wall of skepticism following the DPP victory.

"Wake up," one Weibo user wrote in opposition to the broader online calls for forceful unification. "Stop dreaming," another echoed. The defiant voices are becoming a common reaction to the suggested use of military force to an extent rarely seen, given the massive culture of censorship on Chinese social media.

A clear reason for this change is China's economic slowdown. As Taiwan went to the polls in January, China was grappling with a youth unemployment rate above 20 percent, a housing market crisis with sales down 45 percent, and a stock market in free fall that had lost $6 trillion in just three years, the likes of which hadn't been seen in almost a decade. News about Taiwanese elections failed to arouse the same nationalistic reactions among the preoccupied Chinese public that had occurred in the previous two contests.

Instead, the 2024 elections triggered a flood of complaints: "Sort out our own economy, what a mess," a Shanghai resident said angrily. "Look at our stock market," an apparently frustrated investor from Hunan grieved. "It'd be better to keep the status quo and leave Taiwanese alone." The gloomy economy has made some commenters question the underlying justification for war: "With low-income people making less than 1,000 yuan [about $140] a month, and the national insurance tax going up, huge medical bills, and unaffordable apartments, why do you want forceful unification? I don't get it."

"It is the economy that really matters," another person from Tianjin pointed out. Taiwan "being independent or not has nothing to do with ordinary people."

The changing attitudes toward Taiwan's elections reflect a broader shift in public sentiment in China's online space. Discontent about the country's poor economic reality has been growing louder, drowning out calls for a military takeover.

Ironically, the CCP's own past propaganda efforts contributed to this cooling effect. Right before then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022, official and semiofficial rhetoric in China was so belligerent that it led many Chinese to believe that the day of unification had finally arrived and that the military would shoot down her plane and launch its attack on Taiwan imminently.

Passengers arrive at a train station during peak travel ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday in Hengyang, China, on Jan. 31.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

This was the peak of forceful unification hysteria, but it only left its crusaders disappointed. In the end, there was not only no shootdown of Pelosi's plane, but there also weren't even military exercises conducted before she left Taiwan. Many Chinese, especially forceful unification advocates, felt betrayed and disillusioned by their government's failure to follow through on its belligerent rhetoric, and the aftereffects of this letdown are still being felt today.

During Taiwan's 2024 elections, war enthusiasts were continuously reminded of China's military inaction following Pelosi's trip to Taiwan. "Have you guys forgotten Pelosi?" one said. One commonly repeated joke, observing the lack of military action, scoffed that the only thing that was fired up when Pelosi visited was the stove in her hotel. The kinds of threats that once resonated with nationalists now drew widespread ridicule online: "delusion," "talking a big game," "an unrealistic fantasy," and "all hat, no cattle."

Meanwhile, at the other end of the Chinese political spectrum, the 2024 elections prompted the resurgence of the view among many liberals that Taiwan's democracy represents a desirable political model. In the early 2010s, many Chinese saw Taiwan as a beacon of hope for Chinese society—a liberal, civic, and democratic alternative to the one-party state. The liberal Chinese writer Han Han coined a popular phrase that encapsulated the view of how trustworthy and free a people can become under democracy: "The most beautiful scenery of Taiwan is its people."

But after the crackdown on liberal intellectuals and online speech under Chinese President Xi Jinping, the honeymoon did not last long and was gradually replaced by a climate of xenophobia, jingoism, war euphoria, and a longing for unification by force. Making matters worse, a growing nationalist mood in Taiwan led many

to believe that Taiwanese looked down on Chinese.

The 2024 elections, however, renewed interest among the Chinese public about their neighbor, home to the world's only Chinese-speaking democracy. News about Taiwanese elections aroused great curiosity on Weibo about the nuts and bolts of the electoral process—what a ballot looks like, how many ballots one can cast, how votes are counted, and how candidates are selected. When a few Taiwanese Weibo users answered these questions, they were liked and retweeted by thousands of Chinese accounts, drawing genuine admiration and blessings from many.

"Are we going to see one day like this?" one user from Gansu wondered with a crying emoji. "Maybe this is accumulating experience for our own future: giving speeches, holding debates, and counting votes," another from Tianjin commented.

China's shifting public sentiment is bound to have repercussions for cross-strait relations, but it would probably be a bridge too far to infer that the Chinese public will fiercely oppose a war in the Taiwan Strait. Ultimately, the nationalist base remains. At present, the euphoria about forceful unification is quieting down, mainly because the party's over-the-top propaganda failed to meet the expectations of its most ardent supporters. But if aggressive rhetoric were followed by military action in the future, war fever could easily be fanned again.

Despite the prevalence of extreme nationalism, Chinese public opinion is more divided on Taiwan than it seems, and these divisions are only likely to increase. What concern most ordinary Chinese are decent jobs, good income, accumulating savings for retirement, and getting affordable access to health care and housing.

So long as the economy is struggling and people's livelihoods are threatened, there is no guarantee that the CCP's attempts to exploit nationalism will work; quite the opposite, it could be faced with plenty of pushback. ■

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MIDDLE EAST

Turkey's Democracy Is Down but Not Out

By Kate Johnston and Gibbs McKinley

March's local election results in Turkey delivered a harsh blow to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Just under a year since the presidential election, in which Erdogan won another five years in power, Turkey's main opposition party—the Republican People's Party (CHP)—won big victories in a majority of the country's largest cities, including Istanbul, the economic powerhouse of Turkey. Thirty-five provincial capitals (out of a total of 81) now have a CHP mayor, while the AKP-led People's Alliance has just 24. The CHP also scraped past Erdogan's party in the country overall, garnering 37.8 percent of the votes compared with 35.5 percent for the AKP.

The CHP's victory is a hopeful signal of the resilience of Turkish democracy and its electoral system. After the CHP's disappointing results in last year's presidential election, where it managed a little over 47 percent of the vote, its share of the national vote came as a shock to many experts. It was a surprising achievement, not least because nearly 90 percent of Turkey's media is in the hands of the government or its supporters, granting the ruling party a lopsided advantage when campaigning.

For years, analysts have argued that Turkey has slid away from democracy and given way to authoritarian politics—with Erdogan leading the way. A single election does not erase years of calculated efforts to centralize power and remove checks and balances on the president. Yet, despite an uneven playing field, the opposition largely prevailed. Even Erdogan himself acknowledged that "regardless of the results, the winner of this election is primarily democracy."

There may or may not be any real feeling behind the president's statement. But the fact that he gave these conciliatory remarks on the night of the election is, in itself, surprising. Erdogan is not in immediate political peril himself. The next presidential election will not take place until 2028. But it turns out that he has less space in which to maneuver than some analysts previously assumed.

At present, Erdogan is constitutionally limited from running for election in 2028. There has been speculation that a new constitution could lift that limit. But the uncertainty introduced by the recent opposition victories makes that

much less likely, buying democratic forces in Turkey more time.

It's not clear what would be in a new constitution, but it could include an end to current term limits on the president, a move away from Turkey's long-enshrined status as a secular state, and the strengthening of the central government's power over the judiciary. However, introducing a new constitution—which the president has stated he intends to do—would require a public referendum. Moving forward with it after these election results could risk strong public rebuke, and Erdogan may now feel far less confident in a referendum victory.

The requirement to hold a referendum for amendments to the constitution (enshrined in the document since 1982) provides a level of protection for Turkish democracy. Compare this to Hungary, where the erosion of democracy has largely been carried out through legal means. Hungary's original constitution tipped the balance in favor of large parties, and in 2010, when Fidesz (Prime Minister Viktor Orban's right-wing populist party) won 53 percent of the vote, it was able to convert its small majority into 68 percent of the seats in the parliament. Subsequently, though the bar for writing a new Hungarian constitution was set at a four-fifths majority, the rule itself could be overturned by a two-thirds majority—which Fidesz did, and then it immediately began drafting a constitution that gave the government significant new powers.

In contrast, Turkey's constitution means that Erdogan is still beholden to the public. He has already made significant changes to the constitution, including amending it in 2017 to shift from a parliamentary system to a presidential one. Those amendments were accepted both by the parliament and—narrowly—through a referendum. Further revisions, and the introduction of a new document, will require significant public support the president may not have.

Turkey's democracy also benefits from its decentralized voting process, which makes manipulating results on election day more difficult—and voter turnout is consistently high, at around 76 percent in March's election. Allegations of election fraud are not unheard of, but the diffuse, paper-based nature of the process makes systematic fraud harder to accomplish.

In another indication of the resilience of the Turkish electoral system, election authorities overturned a decision by the local election board in Van, which had handed the mayoralty to the AKP candidate despite the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party candidate besting him by 28 percentage points. This may be a small victory for democracy but is an unusual outcome in the Kurdish-dominated southeast, given that the central government is traditionally not disposed to side with Kurdish voters.

Critically, Turkey's political opposition is still an effective force and has not been excised from the electoral system, as it has been in other countries. Closing political and civic spaces is a common tactic for authoritarian leaders—such as in Venezuela, where arbitrary arrests and the criminalization of opposition parties' activities were reported during regional and municipal elections in 2021. The disproportionate resources at the AKP's disposal have made campaigns increasingly unbalanced, and the government has taken advantage of the legal system to jail and disqualify opposition candidates. Still, the CHP's victory in seven of the 10 most populous Turkish cities and its overall share of the vote show that real political

Supporters of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) celebrate in Istanbul on March 31, following local elections.

YASIN AKGUL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

opposition, key to a functioning democracy, can still operate.

A single, if surprising, election doesn't mean Turkey's democracy is thriving or even on the mend. It may be difficult for the opposition to sustain its current approach for the next four years. Ekrem Imamoglu—Istanbul's mayor, often touted as a potential CHP presidential candidate—faces multiple court cases that could be used to bar him from running for president. Erdogan may turn to more authoritarian tactics to hold on to power, and how he chooses to respond politically could impact the future of Turkish democracy. If he doubles down on restricting the political space, including by following up on the outstanding court cases against opposition candidates, it will be for the worse.

But first, Erdogan will have to start by addressing his country's economic woes. Inflation climbed to nearly 70 percent in March, and interest rates hit 50 percent. Though the crisis hardly touched Erdogan's popularity in the presidential election last year, the same does not seem to be true for his party. To have any hope of recouping the AKP's political losses, Erdogan will have to improve the outlook for millions of Turks hit hard by the economic crisis.

If he succeeds, it would be a win for the general population—though it may also mean he seizes the opportunity to capitalize on any upswing in public opinion to introduce a new constitution. He may also seek the support he needs for a referendum by pursuing a closer relationship with right-wing nationalists and Islamists. By tempting traditionally conservative AKP voters back into the fold, he could regain those he lost to the Islamist New Welfare Party in March's election.

Turkey has a long way to go before it can be considered a liberal democratic country. Its democracy has declined precipitously in the past 15 years, but this election signals that there are pockets of resilience. That's worth paying attention to. A more resilient Turkish democracy merits encouragement and hope—not least because, as a global swing state, the choices that Turkey makes may have an impact beyond its borders. ■

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The Problem Isn't Just Netanyahu

By Mairav Zonszein

When U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer effectively called for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ouster on the Senate floor in mid-March, it was a watershed moment for anyone following Israel's role in U.S. politics.

But the Senate leader's stance is fairly mainstream among Israelis. There's consensus—even within Netanyahu's own party—that elections should be held early. It seems like conventional wisdom in Israel that Netanyahu is dragging out the war for his own political survival, since he knows the moment it comes to a halt, Israelis will focus even more resolutely on investigating the failures of Oct. 7 and pushing for early elections to vote him out of office.

The focus on Netanyahu is a convenient distraction from the fact that the war in Gaza is not Netanyahu's war—it is Israel's war. And the problem isn't only Netanyahu—it's the Israeli electorate.

Blaming Netanyahu has eclipsed the fact that when it comes to Israeli policies on Gaza in particular, and the Palestinians in general, many Israelis are broadly aligned with him. By a large margin, they support the current military campaign in Gaza and the government's goal of destroying Hamas, whatever the human toll for Palestinians.

For years, Israelis have been able—through military and economic domination—to disregard the single most pressing issue facing the country: its control over millions of Palestinians. The shock and trauma inflicted by the Oct. 7 attack opened the floodgates even further on what is considered acceptable.

A large majority—88 percent—of Jewish Israelis polled in January believed the astounding number of Palestinian deaths, which had surpassed 25,000 at the time, was justified. A large majority of the Jewish public also thinks that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are using adequate or even too little force in Gaza. Couched in the idea that Hamas forced this "war of no choice" upon Israel and the people of Gaza and that Hamas must be destroyed as a matter of Israeli survival, even the threat of imminent famine in Gaza has not provoked opposition to the campaign.

Further, in a February poll by the Israel Democracy Institute, around two-thirds of Jewish respondents (63 percent) said they opposed the proposal for Israel to agree in principle to the establishment of an independent, demilitarized Palestinian state. Israeli leaders have framed the governments—such as Ireland, Norway, and Spain—that moved recently to unilaterally recognize Palestine as rewarding the Palestinians for the Oct. 7 attack.

You don't need a poll to discover that support for a two-state solution, much less for Palestinian basic rights of freedom and self-determination, has been steadily declining among Jewish Israelis in recent years. You can just look at the positions of Israel's Jewish political

parties. Almost none of them endorse a two-state solution, and the ones in power actively reject it, working fastidiously to thwart it.

The thousands of Israelis who are once again turning out to march in the streets are not protesting the war. Except for a tiny handful, they are not calling for an end to the war—or for peace. They are not protesting Israel's killing of unprecedented numbers of Palestinians in Gaza or its restrictions on humanitarian aid that have led to mass starvation. (Some right-wing Israelis even go further by actively blocking aid from entering the strip.) They are certainly not invoking the need to end the military occupation, now in its 57th year. They are primarily protesting Netanyahu's refusal to step down and what they see as his reluctance to seal a hostage deal.

At a March protest in Jerusalem, "We are not our government" signs were front and center, echoing the distinction that Democrats in the United States are making between the Netanyahu government and the Israeli people.

But that distinction is misleading. Putting all the blame on the prime minister misses the point. It disregards the fact that Israelis have long advanced, enabled, or come to terms with their country's system of military occupation and dehumanization of Palestinians.

That's true of other members of the war cabinet who are often depicted as counterweights or alternatives to the prime minister. It wasn't Netanyahu but his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, who called for a total siege of Gaza after Oct. 7: "No electricity, no fuel, no food—everything will be closed." It wasn't Netanyahu but the supposedly centrist president, Isaac Herzog, who implied that every resident of Gaza was a legitimate target when he said at the outset of the war that there's an "entire nation out there that is responsible. This rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved [in the Oct. 7 onslaught]—it's absolutely not true." (He later said his words were taken out of context.)

Focusing on Netanyahu also ignores the rightward drift of the Israeli body politic, which has normalized racism and nationalism, especially evident in mainstream media's coverage of the war. Israeli news rarely shows the suffering in Gaza, almost never platforms Palestinians, and military journalists seldom challenge or scrutinize the IDF's version of events.

It also disregards the fact that Israelis are still showing up for reservist duty without question, despite distrusting Netanyahu's leadership and motives and despite having already threatened to refuse duty over the government's judicial overhaul plan.

Despite the high number of soldiers killed and wounded since Oct. 7 (not including much higher numbers suffering from post-traumatic stress), mothers of soldiers are not protesting the war, a factor that played a significant role in opposition to Israel's occupation of Lebanon and eventual withdrawal.

And a change of leadership won't necessarily mean meaningful policy changes. If Benny Gantz, Israel's former defense minister and IDF chief of the general staff who is polling well against Netanyahu, were to become prime minister, it is unlikely that he would adopt policies regarding the Palestinians that are substantially different from Netanyahu's.

In 2019, Gantz released an election campaign video boasting of sending parts of Gaza back to the Stone Age during his term as IDF chief. Now he and Netanyahu have presided over an invasion of the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where up to 1.5 million local and displaced Palestinians had been concentrated, to deal what they claim will be a final and fatal blow to Hamas.

He also rejects unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state; instead, he has at most acknowledged the possibility for Palestinians to have an "entity," not a state. Indeed, as defense minister in the short-lived Naftali Bennett government in 2021, Gantz hosted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in his home, indicating he espouses the military's deeply ingrained understanding that keeping the Palestinian Authority operational is a vital Israeli national security interest for maintaining control.

The doctrine outlined by the Biden administration to restructure the PA and send it to Gaza, along with creating

Protesters march through Jerusalem on April 2, demanding that Israel reach a deal with Hamas to free hostages in Gaza.

MARCUS YAM/LOS ANGELES TIMES

a political process that would require Israeli concessions toward a Palestinian state as part of a Saudi-Israeli normalization deal, is the only alternative to Israel's protracted destruction and occupation of Gaza currently on the table.

Some former Israeli government and security officials have also adopted this approach, since they understand it is the best option for Israel to stem further alienation from the American public and maintain some international legitimacy.

A survey among Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel in February showed that half would support a political process along these lines. In this sense, some Israelis are at least searching for a pragmatic off-ramp.

Whether this idea is realistic is also doubtful: It is unclear if the PA can be reformed sufficiently to regain legitimacy among Palestinians; likewise, it is unlikely Hamas will disappear completely from the scene in Gaza. Nor does the proposed track outline what sorts of concessions Israel would need to make.

Either way, it's notable that the U.S. administration is proposing it, not an Israeli leader or politician. For now, Israelis are largely not calling for a cease-fire.

As long as Netanyahu is in power, the war is almost sure to drag on and along with it the risk of mass death from starvation in Gaza; further regional escalation; and an Israeli public living with shrunken, insecure borders without ever knowing the fate of their loved ones held hostage in Gaza.

Putting all their energy into ousting Netanyahu, while understandable, keeps Israelis from assuming responsibility for their complicity in the prolonged military occupation, the destruction of Gaza, and their failure to outline a genuine political path out of the current crisis. In that sense, Netanyahu is a convenient scapegoat. ■

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Sudan Is Not a Lost Cause

By Suha Musa

Over the last year, the world's most influential organizations, leaders, and publications have characterized Sudan's ongoing war as catastrophic and beyond a point of no return. On paper, these terms seem reasonable in describing the dire circumstances on the ground. More than 15,000 people have been killed in war-related violence, over 8 million people have been displaced, and widespread hunger is increasing.

Though this language is attention-grabbing—and quotable—it has restricted the international community's response to the conflict. This style of language, which effectively dismisses many conflict zones as lost causes, is a constant in humanitarian crises. It is often used to suggest the international community's supposed inability to alleviate suffering. However, in the case of Sudan, as in many wars before—including Syria and now Gaza—this fatalistic rhetoric perpetuates harmful myths, distorting the reality of the conflict, keeping genuine progress at bay, and ultimately contributing to prolonged suffering.

More than a year into the conflict, which has humble prospects for a peaceful resolution, the preemptive treatment of Sudan as a deserted nation of no hope continues to permit international entities to absolve themselves of blame or attachment to the conflict.

The power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), headed by Mohamed Hamdan "Hemeti" Dagalo, has left Sudanese citizens at home and abroad desperate for a cease-fire as they brace against the threat of disease and famine.

In April, after leading unsuccessful negotiations last year alongside Saudi Arabia, Washington aimed to renew peace talks with Sudan's warring parties. The U.S. special envoy for Sudan, Tom Perriello, who is heading the efforts, has argued that because the "crisis is barreling toward a point of no return," warring parties must seek united ground to end the conflict. But that is easier said than done.

To bring an end to the war, the U.S. and Saudi governments must ensure that both the RSF and SAF, along with their foreign sponsors including the United Arab Emirates and Russia, are not just present at the talks but held responsible through levying economic sanctions and demanding civilian oversight in political transition efforts.

As Perriello evokes fear by warning that a "return of extremist elements" threatens the Sudanese people, referring to Iranian support for the SAF, we are reminded that the language is deliberate in positioning Sudan as a proxy battleground in the region. In doing so, Washington pulls focus from the growing humanitarian threats on the ground and centers the conversation on geopolitical rivalries instead.

International discussions that have made a peaceful resolution in Sudan sound impossible have further fueled internal propaganda efforts by both the RSF and SAF.

SAF Lt. Gen. Yasser al-Atta has long rejected pushes for a cease-fire and has

previously dismissed peacekeeping efforts by international entities, including the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a regional bloc of East African states.

Similarly, the RSF has condemned attacks that it attributes to the SAF and has instead used continued violence as a justification for its own military campaigns. International inaction has prolonged warfare, aided the warring parties' propagandist missions, and influenced civilian responses to the conflict, where many—both domestically and abroad—now feel pressured to choose a side as they adopt the nihilistic attitudes echoed around them.

As the Sudanese people crave some semblance of stability, the cynicism around them has led to a neglect of the conflict's root causes and pushed aside recent discussions of democratization and institution-building.

Sudan deserves the world's attention. But in labeling the conflict as hopeless, the international community has allowed apathy to take hold—making attempts to foster any resolution much less likely.

The Syrian civil war, ongoing since 2011, is an unfortunate example of how "lost cause" language harms peace efforts. By June 2012, just one year into the conflict, many international observers were quick to opine on Syria's "slow-motion collapse," questioning whether it offered "false glimmers of hope."

Today, Syria's need for humanitarian aid remains higher than ever. More than 90 percent of the country's population is now living in poverty, while inflation is skyrocketing. Hope for civilian reconstruction remains bleak as international interest has long flamed out. In hindsight, these predictions may have been correct—but they did not need to be. Had messages of sustaining humanitarian support and empowering local initiatives been front of mind, a greater willingness among international donors may have prevailed.

The conflicts in Sudan and Syria may be situated in different political complexities, but the ordinary people in both countries have suffered terribly. Continued skepticism has only obstructed peace efforts while undermining diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives. So the question becomes: How can one discuss the harsh realities of conflicts without dismissing hope of a better future?

One way of doing so is by prioritizing efforts that center on state-rebuilding. As conversations around Sudan focus on the warring parties and the role of international institutions, the work being done by community and grassroots organizations often remains neglected.

Groups within Sudan and diaspora groups have undertaken fundraising efforts and are utilizing their skills to target specific sectors, whether it be the Sudanese American Physicians Association's focus on health care infrastructure or Nas Al Sudan's commitment to education.

The work should not fall on Sudanese activists and diaspora communities alone, though. In perpetuating images of a state in disrepair, financial support for sustained humanitarian work often dwindles. Last year, U.N. funding in Sudan fell short of its proposed target, and the World Food Program faced delays in delivering aid to the country. Still, their efforts are worth publicizing and replicating.

To redirect attention to such efforts—rather than dimming the little hope that remains—humanitarian aid workers and grassroots networks require unadulterated access to resources, which cannot happen if those involved, including mediators such as Washington, believe that proposed deliberations are futile or far-fetched.

The power of international commentary, especially amid a conflict, cannot be overstated, as highlighted by the ongoing

People fleeing the war in Sudan carry their belongings as they arrive at a transit center for refugees in Renk, South Sudan, on Feb. 14.

LUIS TATO/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

discourse surrounding Israel's assault on Gaza and Washington's role in it. While U.S. President Joe Biden eventually called for an "immediate cease-fire," after six months of conflict and more than 30,000 dead, early rhetoric following Hamas's Oct. 7 attacks largely justified and empowered the Israeli offensive.

From doubting the credibility of Palestinian death counts to justifying casualties as the "price of waging a war," the U.S. president's language and continued military aid to Israel have in many ways allowed the onslaught and destruction of Gaza to go on for as long as they have.

Discourse on Gaza has been crucial in exposing the terrible price of language that minimizes the human cost of war. As calls for a cease-fire grow louder, it is essential that long-term protection of Palestinian society and the rebuilding of lost institutions are similarly prioritized, rather than language that entrenches a sense of Gaza's inevitable destruction.

Sudan has found itself under a similar assumption of cyclical violence—as a nation largely defined globally by its military coups and civil wars. However, as cautious optimism surrounding the negotiations and a possible cease-fire grows, it is imperative to challenge fatalistic attitudes while focusing efforts on resolving the ongoing crises affecting Sudan's citizens.

Sudan deserves a future of peace, stability, and growth. But first, it deserves unwavering international attention. As long as Sudanese people dream of a better Sudan, it will not be a lost cause. ■

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The Strategic Unseriousness of Olaf Scholz

By James Crabtree

When German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited China in April, the deep and enduring divisions between Europe and the United States over how best to handle the country were on full display. Although new communication channels between Washington and Beijing have stabilized a superpower relationship that only last year seemed in danger of spinning out of control, the U.S. approach remains basically competitive.

Scholz's approach was markedly different—and not in a good way. This was obvious from the moment that details of his delegation emerged. There are senior figures in Germany with a hard-headed, strategic view of China, not least Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock. But neither was in Beijing. Instead, Scholz took ministers in areas such as agriculture, who favor close cooperation with Beijing, along with a bevy of industrial CEOs promoting Sino-German trade and investment.

He also declined to make a big set-piece speech. Indeed, Scholz said remarkably little in public about issues that strike at critical European economic and security interests, from China's support for Russia to the growing risks of industrial overcapacity. China's media was understandably delighted. "I would describe the coverage as ebullient," Noah Barkin, a China advisor at Rhodium Group, wrote following the trip. "Clearly there is a sense that China dodged a bullet."

Scholz's approach is rooted in perceptions of German economic interests. These have worsened markedly over the last year. Speaking during the National People's Congress in early March, Chinese President Xi Jinping demanded that China unleash "new quality productive forces"—code for plowing huge sums into advanced manufacturing, including electric vehicles and batteries, to prop up the country's faltering economic model. Given limited domestic demand, the results will inevitably be exported, putting China on a collision course with advanced manufacturing economies in Europe and North America—as Washington's May announcement of new tariffs on Chinese EVs and other products showed.

The European Union, which is investigating whether Chinese subsidies give a competitive advantage to companies in industries including cars and solar panels, is also considering tariffs on Chinese EVs, as Scholz noted. Yet even in the exceedingly unlikely scenario of China reducing state support, its vast output and low costs make it extremely difficult for Europeans to compete. From EVs to energy transition technologies to simpler types of semiconductors, Europe now clearly risks a future dominated by Chinese-made industrial products—especially if China reroutes exports now facing higher tariffs in the United States.

Berlin faces specific challenges in the auto sector, the most important part of Germany's vaunted manufacturing industry. China has for decades been the most important and most

profitable market for companies such as BMW, Mercedes-Benz, and Volkswagen. That era is now over. China's BYD now vies with Tesla to be the world's largest EV maker, producing cars that are roughly as good as and much cheaper than those of its U.S. rival. The streets of Beijing and Shanghai throng with cars made by other Chinese EV brands, most of which are unknown to Westerners. Demand for traditional combustion engines is collapsing.

Accordingly, foreign brands' total share of the Chinese auto market has plunged from 64 percent to just 40 percent in the short time since 2020, according to Bill Russo, the former head of Chrysler in China and now head of Automobility, a consultancy. For now, VW still sells plenty of cars in China, but that won't last. "It's hard to see how these companies have a future," Russo said.

Germany has a second concern: the risk to its market back home. Almost no Chinese EVs are currently sold in the United States because of regulations targeting Chinese-made batteries and other components. Facing a wave of Chinese EV imports, Europe is likely to raise tariffs, just as the United States has done.

Scholz, however, has faced the opposite demands from his own automakers. Mercedes-Benz CEO Ola Källenius, who has invested heavily in the transition to EVs, called on Brussels to cut EV tariffs rather than raise them, arguing that competition will spur European carmakers to improve. And there is some truth to the idea that simply shutting China out of the European market is unlikely to help Germany regain competitiveness in EVs. For that, German companies need access to Chinese technology in areas such as batteries, at least until they have time to figure out how to make their own. Germany also fears that European tariffs will lead to reciprocal measures targeting German automakers in China.

Viewed charitably, therefore, Germany's approach is a variant of the famous adage by then-Citigroup CEO Chuck Prince in the run-up to the 2008 global financial crisis: "As long as the music is playing, you've got to get up and dance," he said in 2007, trying to explain why his bank kept plowing ahead with risky financial trades even as signs of impending calamity became clearer. In much the same way, Scholz hopes German companies can keep making money from what remains of their Chinese market while they try to regain their old global competitiveness.

The odds of this working out are slim, of course, given China's growing industrial might. But even if it does work, the strategy still makes the old mistake of confusing what is good for German companies with what is good for Germany and Europe.

This approach looks naive for two reasons. The first is that China's course is now set. Speaking to students in Shanghai, Scholz called for China to moderate its behavior. "Competition must be fair," he said, calling for Beijing to avoid dumping and overproduction. But China's system is now far enough down this path to make such demands impossible, even were Beijing minded to listen, which it is not.

On the contrary, China is bulking up its manufacturing sector to revive its economic model. It has no interest in allowing German car companies to thrive in its market and every interest in becoming the globally dominant leader in EVs and other industries. German automakers might labor under the misapprehension that their position in China can be saved, but there is no need for German political leaders to believe the same fiction. Scholz's softly-softly approach also does little to prepare Germany's population and companies for the massive challenges to their own economic model that come with Chinese competition.

Germany's approach comes with a second set of geopolitical costs to European and Western unity. As China's glowing media coverage shows, Scholz's trip was a gift to Beijing's long-held desire to divide Europeans among themselves—and from the United States. This division was clear enough over trade. But it was there, too, on Ukraine. Scholz's office noted that the chancellor raised Ukraine in a private meeting with Xi, arguing that Russian "rearmament" has "significant negative effects on security in Europe" and directly affects European "core interests." Yet private messages asking

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing on April 16.

MICHAEL KAPPELER/PICTURE ALLIANCE VIA GETTY IMAGES

China to cease supporting Russia seem unlikely to be effective when similar public messages have already failed.

That approach also now makes it harder for Europe to build credible ties with new partners in the broader Indo-Pacific, including India and Japan, which have each taken serious measures in recent years to reduce their dependency on China. Indian and Japanese leaders are also frank and open about the economic and security threats that China poses. Viewed from New Delhi or Tokyo, Scholz's trip will simply be taken as evidence of Europe's unreliability and strategic unseriousness.

It all seems especially odd given that there are clearly better templates. Recent trips by senior U.S. officials show that business can be done in Beijing while delivering tough messages. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen struck a similar balance on de-risking during the most recent EU-China summit in Beijing last December. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte did much the same in March, openly criticizing Chinese cyber-espionage tactics and support for Russia on Ukraine.

It is possible to imagine a different German trip, in which Scholz coordinated with European partners and Washington, arrived in Beijing with his most capable ministers, and was willing to state a joint policy firmly in public, complete with clear carrots and sticks. Instead, Germany's approach seemed to lack long-term strategic acumen. Its policymakers bristle at the notion that Germany's economic and foreign policies are set in corporate boardrooms rather than the chancellery and ministries in Berlin. But it is hard to explain Scholz's trip—and, dispiritingly, much of Germany's China policy—in any other way. ■

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Putin Is Playing a Nuclear Mind Game

By Rose Gottemoeller

Russian President Vladimir Putin's order for nuclear weapons drills went public on May 6, the day after Orthodox Easter—a bitter irony since he styles himself a fervent guardian of Christian values, which do not include the simulation of nuclear annihilation the last time I checked. I wonder whether he signed the order before or after his much-publicized attendance of Easter service at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

The exercises, centered in Russia's southern military district, are intended to simulate "theater," or regional, nuclear attacks, in contrast to "strategic" nuclear exercises simulating war with the United States—likely targeting not only Ukraine but also NATO members Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Moscow's messaging is that the exercises are in answer to talk from French President Emmanuel Macron and other NATO leaders about sending Western soldiers to Ukraine.

The Kremlin appears to be reinforcing, in no uncertain terms, a red line against NATO boots on the ground in Ukraine. Fortunately, it is a red line that most NATO leaders share, including U.S. President Joe Biden. From the very outset of Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Biden made it clear that the United States and its allies would send military assistance to Ukraine but not engage in the fighting. His goal remains crystal clear: to avoid a direct fight between Russia and NATO that could escalate to World War III and nuclear conflict.

Putin also wants to avoid a Russia-NATO fight. For him, that means avoiding strikes against NATO territory or reconnaissance aircraft patrolling the Black Sea airspace. NATO deliveries are fair game for attack once they arrive in Ukraine but not while they are still transiting NATO territory.

The United States and Russia thus agree on one thing in this terrible war: They do not want to risk a nuclear holocaust. Why, then, do the Russians keep claiming that the world is facing one?

Part of it is evidently the Kremlin's effort to derive value from this very brinkmanship—a pattern of behavior rarely seen since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, the last time the world came to the brink of a nuclear exchange. During the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union fought proxy wars in many places but rarely threatened to use nuclear arms. Neither side used such threats to achieve conventional battlefield goals, the way senior Russian officials have been doing throughout the war in Ukraine.

Instead, Washington and Moscow first built up their strategic arsenals—the long-range nuclear weapons by which they threaten each other directly—sustaining essential parity as they went. So long as neither side built significantly more than the other, and as long as both sustained a high level of readiness, the two superpowers had a nuclear deterrent that both considered stable.

This stability became so boring and reliable that people more or less forgot about nuclear annihilation. Once policymakers in Washington and Moscow began to control and limit their nuclear arsenals in the 1970s—starting with the U.S.-Soviet détente and the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty—the rest of the world was glad. No one wanted to think about what would happen if the superpowers "pressed the button." And they did not have to: The superpowers were heading in a different direction, reducing their reliance on nuclear weapons.

The war in Ukraine has ended this complacency because Putin and his minions have insisted on rattling the nuclear saber. Now the rest of the world has to think again about nuclear weapons and what Russia might do with them.

This bizarre game of nuclear look-at-me is linked to the Kremlin's equally bizarre complaint that its act of invading Ukraine has created an existential threat to Russia. In this telling, NATO support to Ukraine is tied up with Russia's strategic defeat. As commentators in Moscow claim, Russia only wanted the best for Ukraine—its liberation from a so-called Nazi regime and a fake idea of statehood. However, once NATO began to aid Kyiv, the bloc's goal was not helping Ukraine but destroying and dismembering Russia.

Some Western officials have indeed voiced Russia's strategic defeat as an objective in assisting Ukraine. But again, Biden has been clear that NATO has a limited objective that does not threaten Russia itself. In May 2022, he said: "We do not seek a war between NATO and Russia. As much as I disagree with Mr. Putin and find his actions an outrage, the United States will not try to bring about his ouster in Moscow. So long as the United States or our allies are not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict, either by sending American troops to fight in Ukraine or by attacking Russian forces."

But Putin and his chief ministers have not been mollified. They continue to go on and on about how the United States and NATO are seeking Russia's demise as a nation. Their motivation is obvious: If Russians believe that their country is facing total destruction, they will stay in the fight for the sake of survival.

So there is a lesson here for leaders not only in the United States but also in Europe and Asia: The fabric of nuclear deterrence is changing, its mind game adjusting to a new era of nuclear brinkmanship. So far, Putin and those around him have been the most active

In a photo distributed by Russian state media, President Vladimir Putin attends an Orthodox Easter service in Moscow on May 5.

practitioners, but North Korea's Kim Jong Un, whose nuclear capacity now extends beyond his regional neighbors, has not been far behind. Beijing, although it has sustained a nuclear good-guy image with a policy of no first use, could be tempted to follow Putin's example as its nuclear force structure becomes more modernized and its ambitions extend throughout Asia.

With so much loose nuclear talk in the air, the United States and its allies must think hard about how to sustain stable and strong deterrence. In other words, they are going to have to focus on how to talk responsibly to the global public about nuclear weapons. The most important audience in deterrence, of course, are the potential nuclear aggressors.

The first rule should be to maintain discipline about using terms such as "strategic defeat" so as not to pander to claims that Washington and its allies pose an existential threat. If the United States does not seek the destruction of the aggressors' regimes and the dismemberment of their countries, it should say so. If Washington has unclear objectives in a conflict, it should say nothing at all.

The second rule should be to sustain the effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear deterrent and the reliability of its command and control systems. That means consistent support for the ongoing modernization of the nuclear triad. It means continuing nuclear training and exercises in a transparent manner and testing nuclear delivery systems. All of these actions should be articulated in a nonthreatening manner—Washington should not be the one rattling the nuclear saber—but convey quiet confidence in the country's nuclear deterrence forces.

Third, Washington should pursue the mutual predictability that comes from controlling nuclear weapons at the negotiating table. Russia, China, and North Korea show little interest in coming to that table today, but the United States should not be the side that is quitting it. The global public wants to see continued progress on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, not a descent into a new nuclear arms race. And importantly, the negotiating table is a good place to deliver deterrence messages. As difficult as it may be, the United States and its allies must continue to lead in this arena.

Finally and most importantly, the United States and its allies must sustain steady progress in military assistance to Ukraine. The most serious implication of the delayed funding vote in the U.S. Congress was that Washington could be halted in its tracks by a bully brandishing nuclear weapons. U.S. leaders need to convey their confidence in the country's nuclear deterrent and keep their promises to Ukraine. Together, these two elements make up the critical message to those who might try nuclear threats to get their way.

In each of these steps, Washington has great potential to bolster its nuclear deterrent. The United States' open political system facilitates communicating deterrence messages, such as when a president addresses the nation or military and political leaders testify before Congress. The national budget process permits the country to convey clearly

VALERY SHARIFULIN/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

and openly the process of its nuclear modernization. And working together with allies, the United States can drive nuclear statecraft forward in ways that preserve predictability and strengthen deterrence. The fabric of nuclear deterrence may be changing, but determining its future must not be left to the aggressors. ■

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Mexico Has an Energy Problem

By Isidro Morales

Mexico elected its first female president on June 2. Claudia Sheinbaum, the former mayor of Mexico City, won a resounding victory with nearly 60 percent of votes. She represents outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's Morena party and is set to assume office in October.

In March, Sheinbaum presented her economic agenda before Mexico's business leadership in the city of Monterrey, where Tesla plans to build an electric vehicle plant. Sheinbaum hopes to take advantage of the opportunities offered by U.S. nearshoring efforts; Mexico has emerged as an attractive destination for U.S. companies seeking to relocate their supply chains closer to home. She has also proposed creating 10 so-called development poles throughout Mexico, which would see regions specialize in sectors such as tourism, technological innovation, and renewable energy while also satisfying various sociocultural development goals.

To achieve her ambitious economic objectives, Sheinbaum must ensure that Mexico has a stable, growing energy supply. That is easier said than done, given López Obrador's controversial steps to undo reforms that had liberalized the country's energy sector to attract private investment and meet growing electricity and fuel demands. Although Sheinbaum has defended López Obrador's energy policy so far, she is more pragmatic and less ideological than he is—and may be open to policy change.

Sheinbaum cannot guarantee Mexico's energy stability if she does not regain the trust of private investors that was shattered under López Obrador. Failing to do so would not only be detrimental for the grid but could also jeopardize Mexico's commitments under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and Paris Agreement—and derail any Mexican hopes of becoming a nearshoring haven. If former U.S. President Donald Trump returns to the White House in January 2025, failing to comply with USMCA could spell outright trouble for the U.S.-Mexico relationship.

In 2013, a constitutional reform ended the Mexican government's monopoly control of the energy sector. For the first time, state-owned oil company Pemex and power utility CFE had to compete against private firms on a regulated market. But since the first days of his administration in 2018, López Obrador has staked his presidency on reversing the reform—creating legal uncertainty that has left many investors skeptical of Mexico.

In 2021, López Obrador amended regulatory laws to privilege Pemex and CFE over private firms in their respective markets. In the petroleum sector, the government raised the requirements for private companies to maintain their fuel import and distribution permits. In the power sector, CFE would have priority over other firms in dispatching electricity. Previously, power had been routed based on cost competitiveness, which was cheaper and more efficient, as it was supplied by many private utilities. By giving CFE the upper hand, Mexico fell back on the public utility's coal-fired and other petroleum-fired plants.

López Obrador also called for a review of all existing electricity contracts with private firms. In 2022, CFE supplied just over 41 percent of Mexico's total demand; private utilities generated nearly all the rest. The president sought to impose a long-term market share for CFE at 54 percent. He canceled auctions to increase power generation from renewable energies, alleging the events had not been well planned.

López Obrador's moves to take control of the energy sector strained Mexico's investment climate, generating a broad opposition bloc of national and international companies, opposition political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and environmental advocates who sought to decarbonize Mexico's economy. All of these groups saw their varied interests under threat. Several companies called for injunctions to invalidate the amended legislation, and Mexico's Federal Economic Competition Commission asked the Supreme Court to rule on the amendments' constitutionality.

Only this year did the court judge that the reforms to the electricity sector were unconstitutional, saying they disrupted competition policies and market regulations. However, the court upheld the government's control over the

petroleum industry. Altogether, the yearslong ordeal and legal limbo strained Mexico's investment climate.

If Sheinbaum is serious about launching her proposed 10 poles, she must recognize that Mexico will not be able to expand and modernize its energy infrastructure under the primacy of two state companies.

Pemex has failed to make Mexico energy self-sufficient; around 70 percent of the country's natural gas consumption is imported from the United States, and 64 percent of gasoline consumption and 60 percent of diesel mainly come from refineries also located in the United States. The Dos Bocas refinery, one of López Obrador's flagship projects, is not yet online and has cost much more than what was originally budgeted, putting pressure on Pemex's finances. The state-owned company's external debt exceeds $100 billion. CFE, for its part, has claimed that it has close to 54 percent of the electricity market share after a government-led confrontation with Iberdrola, a Spanish electric utility that had 28 plants in Mexico. In April 2023, the government announced it would acquire 13 of Iberdrola's plants via a trust called Mexico Infrastructure Partners; the sale was finalized in February.

Canada and the United States have doubts about whether Sheinbaum's administration will allow international investors to participate in Mexico's energy industry, as is stipulated by USMCA. Chapters 14 and 22 of the trilateral agreement explicitly protect the corporate rights of investors and prohibit discriminatory treatment of a state company in its commercial relations with private companies. In mid-2022, in response to López Obrador's legislative amendments, U.S. and Canadian trade representatives began conversations with the Mexican government on the matter.

If Sheinbaum continues favoring Pemex and CFE over private utilities, as she has said she will do, she could risk a panel dispute under USMCA. That could result in severe trade sanctions on Mexico. Sheinbaum likely also won't be able to take advantage of U.S. nearshoring opportunities if she cannot reaffirm her commitments to the treaty. (The acid test will come in 2026, when USMCA is set to undergo a general review by all three participating countries.)

USMCA is not the only major international agreement to which Mexico is beholden. The country is also a state party to the Paris Agreement and has committed to generating 35 percent of its electricity from clean sources by this year. But Mexico has not yet managed to achieve this goal, even after López Obrador's government announced new climate plans at the 2022 United Nations climate conference in Egypt.

To keep Mexico on track to meet its climate commitments, Sheinbaum will have to adopt more green energy sources. She cannot do so without reviving long-term electricity auctions to attract investors who are capable of increasing Mexico's renewables supply at competitive prices.

Sheinbaum's success may depend in part on who wins the U.S. presidential race. If Joe Biden is reelected, the two leaders will need to jointly address tricky shared problems such as migration management and drug trafficking. But Sheinbaum's industrial project could fit neatly within the framework of Biden's flagship Inflation Reduction Act as well as the CHIPS and Science Act, both of which promote a green economic agenda and boost nearshoring efforts. A second Trump administration would be a different story.

During his presidency, Trump forced both Mexico and Canada to terminate the North American Free Trade Agreement and negotiate its successor,

Pemex's Olmeca oil refinery in Paraíso, Mexico, on May 20.

YURI CORTEZ/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

USMCA. The talks did not occur in a vacuum—Trump sought to pressure Mexico to end illegal migration to the United States and build a wall on the two countries' shared border. Trump also imposed taxes on steel and aluminum from Canada and Mexico, citing national security concerns. He warned that he would withdraw from USMCA negotiations if the treaty did not accommodate his interests, which included establishing a 16-year sunset clause in the agreement and instituting general review periods every six years.

In May 2019, Trump threatened to impose a 5 percent tariff on total imports from Mexico that could rise to 25 percent if the Mexican government did not stop the illegal entry of Central American migrants at Mexico's southern border. The diktat forced López Obrador to mobilize the Mexican military at its border with Guatemala, signaling Trump's leverage over the Mexican leader.

If Trump returns to the White House, tensions with Mexico are likely to escalate over migration, illegal drug trafficking, and—above all—trade relations with China. Beijing has noted Sheinbaum's industrial goals and is interested in increasing its commercial and investment ventures in Mexico.

China aims not only to supply Mexico's internal market with manufacturing but also to export to the United States, thereby circumventing tariffs that have been in place since the Trump administration. If this occurs, Trump would likely react belligerently at the USMCA revision table in 2026, alleging, among other things, that the agreement harms U.S. interests by allowing Chinese strategic supplies to leak into the United States from Mexico. Trump could even threaten to leave the agreement if Mexico does not impose tariffs and bans on China similar to those already imposed by Washington.

Canceling USMCA is a red line that neither Sheinbaum nor Trump should cross. If that happens, neither country will see its nearshoring agenda realized. ■

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Trump Will Redefine Foreign Aid

By Laura Thornton

In April 2018, I was invited by the U.S. ambassador to a meeting at the embassy in Tbilisi, Georgia. The ambassador had assembled a group of NGO leaders in the field of disinformation to meet with a senior Trump administration official from the State Department. He asked us to describe the main narratives of Kremlin disinformation. As the director of a large international democracy organization, I highlighted Russia's manipulation of gender and LGBTQ issues to sway Georgians away from the perceived "cultural decadence" of the European Union. The official's frustration was palpable. His response, tinged with irritation, was telling: "Is that all you people can talk about? The gays?"

A year before, several international organizations partnered with Georgian parliamentarians on a gender equality assessment, supported by several government donors. This collaboration led to an internal conflict. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) wanted to scrub the original report, as it covered abortion, notably legal in Georgia, while the Swedish government and other stakeholders wanted the complete assessment. As a result, at the time of its release, two distinct reports had to be printed, one with references to abortion and one without.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump is the Republican Party's presumptive presidential nominee. His closing statement in the New Hampshire primary in January praised Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who embraces the oxymoronic term "illiberal democracy" while suppressing independent media, civil society, and the courts. Trump has repeatedly emphasized the glory of strongmen such as Orban. His foreign policy has been clear: stopping support for Ukraine, NATO, and the United States' European allies.

But while there has been plenty of analysis of the impact of Trump's America First platform on U.S. foreign policy and security, less covered is how it will also completely redefine foreign aid as well as the liberal democracy agenda. My experience with the first Trump administration as a senior leader in democracy organizations receiving funding from USAID provides some insight into the potential foreign aid agenda of a second term, but likely only scratches the surface of what is to come.

The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, established in 2022, offers a detailed road map for revamping USAID under Trump—one that will undermine, eliminate, and censor the critical work of thousands of people and organizations committed to building more just societies. The Heritage Foundation has been staffing and providing a pipeline of ideas to Republican administrations since President Ronald Reagan. Project 2025 is a plan to shape the next Republican administration, and its funders have close ties to Trump. The project's objective is to replace so-called "deep state" employees with conservative thought leaders to carry out an executive-driven agenda.

In the overview, the project articulates its goal to end what it calls USAID's "divisive political and cultural agenda that promotes abortion, climate

extremism, gender radicalism, and interventions against perceived systemic racism." A key component of the illiberal playbook is to attack marginalized communities, an early warning sign of democratic backsliding. Illiberal strongmen, such as Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russia's Vladimir Putin, exploit traditional hierarchies to divide society and create pecking orders of power. Russia refused to sign, and Turkey withdrew from, the Istanbul Convention, a commitment to protect women from domestic violence. The Narendra Modi administration in India filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court against criminalizing marital rape, arguing that it would destabilize marriage. Hungary and Poland lobbied to ban the term "gender equality" in international agreements and implemented anti-LGBTQ policies, including local municipalities adopting "LGBT-free" zones as part of a government-supported "Family Charter" in Poland.

As a first step, Trump's USAID will "dismantle" all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, which Project 2025 calls "discriminatory." This mandate includes firing the chief diversity officer and all advisors and committees. In 2016, the Obama administration issued a DEI presidential memorandum to ensure USAID, among other agencies, had a diverse and representative workforce. Trump scaled back these efforts. On Jan. 20, 2021, Biden's first day in office, he signed an executive order that demanded that government agencies devise strategies to tackle DEI issues. Pursuant to this, USAID Administrator Samantha Power signed USAID's DEI strategy on her first day in May 2021. Project 2025 would reverse this strategy, requiring USAID to "cease promotion of the DEI agenda, including the bullying LGBTQ+ agenda," which entails support for organizations overseas that work on these issues.

According to Project 2025, Trump's new USAID will also eliminate the word "gender" full stop, arguing that Democratic administrations "have nearly erased what females are." This is bizarre, as I have decades of experience receiving USAID funding for numerous programs to advance women in political life and support women's organizations.

The Heritage Foundation report also accuses USAID of "outright bias against men," an equally strange claim; in fact, gender realignment was needed and implemented. A Trump USAID will fire more than 180 gender advisors and points of contact, who work alongside USAID colleagues "to integrate gender and advance gender equality objectives in USAID's work worldwide," and scrub the words "gender," "gender equality," and "gender equity" from all documents. This would require a massive purge of decades of USAID materials and websites.

USAID has spent years incorporating gender into all aspects of its programming to ensure the agency addresses the needs of women, including the unique development obstacles they face. Removing a gender lens would take us back in time to programming that often harmed women inadvertently by failing to analyze the varying effects of programming based on gender and power dynamics in different environments. To erase all of USAID's tools, learning, and research on how to ensure best practice would have dangerous consequences.

Relatedly, a Trump USAID will remove all agency "references to 'abortion,' 'reproductive health,' and 'sexual and reproductive rights.'" Project 2025's blueprint singles out specific organizations and U.N. agencies to target and defund. Further, the president himself would have the ability to oversee programming directly: "Current law in the Foreign Assistance Act gives the President broad authority to set 'such terms and conditions as he may determine' on foreign assistance, which legally empowers the next conservative President to expand this pro-life

An activist sets up an Earth balloon decorated with orange hair and eyebrows in the likeness of U.S. President Donald Trump during a climate protest in Berlin on June 29, 2017.

SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES

policy." Previous administrations have restricted funding to organizations that provide abortions (the so-called Mexico City policy), which resulted in an increase in maternal and child mortality and unsafe abortions—exactly what the policy claimed to want to prevent. In sub-Saharan Africa, data shows the policy increased abortions by defunding clinics that provided family planning services.

A Trump USAID will not only stop funding local partner organizations that support gender, LGBTQ, and rights agendas but redirect that money to religious organizations. In fact, it will mandate training and indoctrination for all USAID staff on the link between religion and development. USAID will also ensure conservative oversight of all grantmaking to ensure against "progressive policies" and a "radical agenda." USAID already engages with faith-based partnerships, alongside secular NGOs, but Project 2025 would like to shift the balance, creating a "New Partnership Initiative" that would help prioritize religious groups.

A stated "key outcome of the transformation of USAID" under Trump will be a complete revamp of the Bureau for Democracy, Development, and Innovation, shifting its focus to trade, the private sector, and religious communities and purging staff. Importantly, all directors of each center—not just the assistant administrator—will have political leadership, not career experts. In addition, Trump's USAID will rewrite all policy "as soon as possible" to ensure a conservative agenda.

During the first Trump administration, I felt the impact in my work overseas. I worked closely with the LGBTQ community in Georgia, which faced horrific obstacles—ostracization, violence, homelessness—and which was targeted relentlessly by Kremlin disinformation operations. USAID has long been a defender of human rights and funded projects on these issues. There was a shift under Trump, though I applaud individual USAID employees for creatively trying to find workarounds and continue support—such as slightly renaming initiatives or cleverly filing them under more favorable, broader categories such as "human rights." They no doubt prevented damaging cuts to our important work.

I am far more worried about the impact of a second administration. Back then, there was no concrete, detailed road map like Project 2025 and no massive replacement of foreign aid professionals with conservative political operatives. Under a second administration, Trump has planned a sweeping political takeover of our civil service, stripping civil servants of protection, forcing them to implement his political policy agenda, and giving the president unilateral power to fire employees at will.

The organization I now work for, the German Marshall Fund, supports hundreds of civil society organizations across the Balkans, Black Sea region, Ukraine, and Central Europe—thanks to more than a decade of USAID support. USAID has encouraged our goals of promoting democracy; bolstering the rights of women, LGBTQ, and other marginalized communities; and deterring illiberalism through independent media, watchdog organizations, and information integrity efforts. We do this through grantmaking, capacity-building and technical assistance, leadership programs, and policy dialogues.

With democracy in global decline and illiberal strongmen on the rise, we need these efforts more than ever. Backsliding elsewhere affects democracy everywhere. The United States benefits from strong, free, liberal societies—it is in the U.S. national interest and key to global security and order. While few voters go to the polls with foreign aid on their minds, the consequences for millions of people worldwide are on the ballot this November. ■

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CAN EUROPE FEND FOR ITSELF?

NINE EXPERTS ON THE CONTINENT'S FUTURE IN A WORLD OF HARD POWER.

35

No bloc of countries has, for the past 75 years, been as umbilically tied to the United States as Europe. First, its western half and, since the end of the Cold War, much of its eastern half have prospered under the world's most extensive bonds in trade, finance, and investment. Europe could also depend on the U.S. military's iron commitment—enshrined in the 75-year-old NATO alliance—to come to its defense. Together with a few other nations, the United States and Europe defined many of the institutions that comprise what we call the Western-led order. The U.S.-European alliance has arguably been the bedrock of the global system as we know it today.

But the era in which Europe could count on the United States may be nearing its end. No matter who wins the U.S. presidential election in November, Washington's attention is shifting to Beijing and the Indo-Pacific. Should Donald Trump return to the White House, it's conceivable that the United States could question its commitment to NATO—or even pull out of the alliance altogether, a scenario that will hang over the bloc's 75th anniversary summit in Washington in July.

Europe could soon face its threats alone. Moscow has unleashed the first major land war in Europe since World War II with the goal of restoring its Cold War empire, which included countries that are now members of the European Union. If the war in the Middle East turns into a greater conflagration, it could send new waves of migrants into the EU. Europe has also turned into a theater of U.S.-Chinese rivalry, with the Russia-Ukraine war the first act in the contest between the Western-led order and the China-led bloc that seeks to revise or destroy it.

The problem for Europeans, as many of their leaders and thinkers will readily admit, is that they are mostly unprepared for a world of hard power. The EU was designed to banish war from the continent, and the absence of large-scale war in Europe between 1945 and 2022—a remarkably long peace, by historical standards—seemed to prove the project's success. But somewhere along the way, Europeans also began to believe that war was disappearing elsewhere as well—and if not, the Americans would always keep them safe. As EU foreign-policy chief Josep Borrell told a Georgetown University audience in March: "It was almost as if Europeans were saying, 'For war, please call the U.S.'"

In theory, the EU, with its 450 million citizens, is one of the world's major power blocs. Its collective GDP is second only to the United States and about 10 times Russia's. Many of its members, especially those geographically close to Russia, have a hard-nosed, strategic view on the world. But on the whole, Europe has not translated its economic resources into geopolitical power of the kind that could, for example, keep Moscow in check on its own.

The sense that Europe's long holiday from history is over is palpable in European capitals. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz proclaimed a *Zeitenwende*—a change of eras. More dramatically, French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that Europe "could die" if it does not adapt quickly enough.

The question thus becomes: Can Europe ensure its own security and continued prosperity with less support from the United States—and learn how to navigate what Borrell called "the forgotten harshness of the world" on its own? On the following pages, we asked nine prominent thinkers for their views on whether Europe is ready for a post-American future.

—*Stefan Theil, deputy editor at* FOREIGN POLICY

A New EU Shaped by War

By **Mark Leonard**, director of the European Council on Foreign Relations

THE U.S. CONGRESS GAVE UKRAINE AND ITS EUROPEAN ALLIES crucial breathing room when it finally passed a $61 billion aid package in late April. But what happens after the U.S. presidential election in November is anyone's guess. In the long run—no matter who wins—U.S. engagement in Europe is likely to have peaked. The upshot is that everything will soon hinge on whether Europe can step up to the plate as a geopolitical actor amid U.S. retrenchment.

Europe had many false starts since the end of the Cold War. During the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, the European Union confronted its own impotence in the face of war for the first time. For a while, it looked as if it might build up the institutions and capabilities necessary to transform itself into a bona fide geopolitical actor. It launched the Common Security and Defence Policy, set up the European Defence Agency, and launched the EU Military Staff. When nothing came of these efforts, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 seemed like another moment of truth. The years afterward saw the birth of Permanent Structured Cooperation—another framework for security collaboration—and the European Defence Fund. At every turn, however, efforts to transform the EU from a peace project into one that embraced hard power were scuppered by a lack of buy-in from EU member states. Narrow national interests always trumped bigger strategic ones.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 changed everything by bringing home the idea that there could be a full-scale war on the European continent. This is not simply a security crisis but one that goes to the heart of the EU's identity. The more than two years since have not just forced Europeans to think differently about policy, but they have also changed something more fundamental—how different states think about their identity and the purpose of the European project. For the last few decades, European integration had been conceived as a peace project with a focus on prosperity, trade, and quality of life, but now the impetus of integration is coming from war. And through these deeper changes to the identity of key European powers, the outlines of a truly geopolitical Europe are beginning to take shape for the very first time.

The EU's passage from peace to war project has a number of dimensions.

The first crucial change is taking place in Paris. After the Cold War, the EU preferred a cooperative, universal, and unipolar idea of Europe to a multipolar Europe with actors competing for spheres of influence. France was traditionally the biggest obstacle when it came to removing ambiguity around the countries stuck on the outside. It opposed Ukraine's and Georgia's proposed accession to NATO in 2008 and vetoed EU entry talks with North Macedonia and Albania in 2019. But over the past two years, French President Emmanuel Macron has undergone a complete shift in his thinking and become an enthusiastic proponent of enlarging both NATO and the EU, starting with Kyiv. The result is that for the first time, there is a pan-European consensus on the continent's strategic borders and the EU's refounding along strategic lines.

Perhaps an even bigger challenge has been Europe's reluctance to truly embrace hard power. Now, however, Europe's biggest obstacle

Previous spread and above: Illustrations by DOUG CHAYKA

to robust defense—Germany—has turned its strategy upside down. Since German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared that Russia's invasion marked a *Zeitenwende*—a change of eras—the result has been a paradigm shift not just in defense spending (Germany is set to become the fifth-biggest defense spender in the world after the United States, China, Russia, and India) but also in mentality. A tangible indication of this shift is that European NATO allies will collectively reach the target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense this year. This focus on hard power has also transformed how EU institutions in Brussels think about economic policy. Previously, the EU believed that building interdependence was the key to turning adversaries into friends. Now, the EU is looking at the nature of interdependence, is busy de-risking its economy, and sees economic power as a geopolitical tool.

Finally, the emergence of a geopolitical Europe was always caught between two competing conceptions of what it actually meant to be a geopolitical actor. On the one hand, France pushed for strategic autonomy but in doing so risked European unity. On the other hand, Britain and much of Central and Eastern Europe called for transAtlantic unity—but at the cost of European strategic independence. Now, the war in Ukraine has solved this conundrum by highlighting to the United States that its biggest problem is not an independent Europe but an overdependent one while simultaneously demonstrating to France that the United States is so critical to Ukraine's war against Russia that it would be impossible to unite the EU against Washington. Finally, if Britain's Labour Party comes to power this year as expected, London would be much likelier to band together with the EU in the event that Trump were elected. Ironically, despite the ominous consequences for Ukraine, Trump's return could conceivably create a framework for greater European cooperation.

Success in all these areas is deeply contingent and hardly guaranteed. National politics in these countries could fundamentally change their trajectories—perhaps nowhere more so than in France, where Marine Le Pen is leading polls ahead of the next presidential election. And it bears reminding that the changes in Europe's culture, mentality, and sense of identity set off by Russia's war will take time and patience to mature. But there are reasons to believe that this time will finally be different. ■

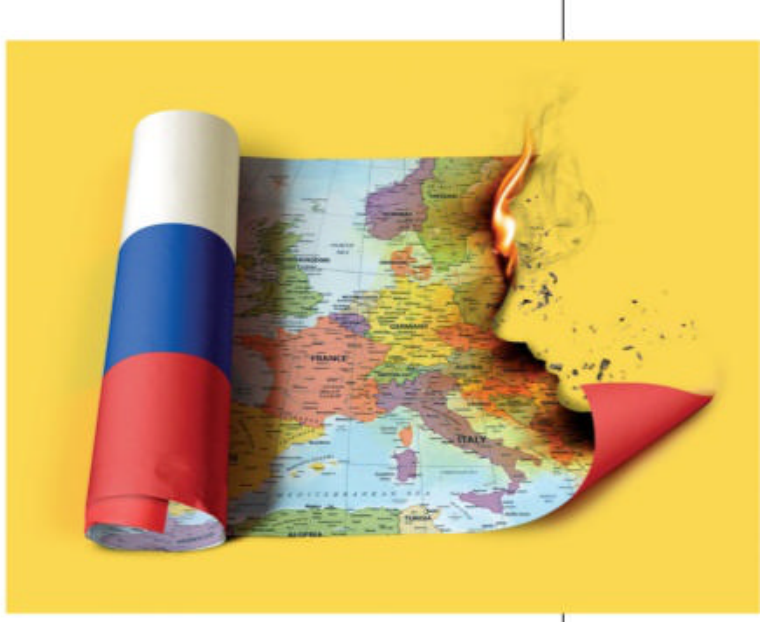
Europe in the Firestorm

By **Constanze Stelzenmüller**, director of the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution

GERMANY'S DOMESTIC INTELLIGENCE CHIEF, Thomas Haldenwang, likes to say Russia's war against Ukraine is the storm whereas China's quest for global dominance is climate change. What Europe is facing today is nothing less than a geostrategic firestorm.

Russia is not only on the offensive in Ukraine but also waging a hybrid war on Europe through weaponized corruption, assassinations, cyberattacks, espionage, disinformation, election interference, communications jamming, and sabotage of critical infrastructure. China, too, sees Europe as a strategic prize: It is buying up physical and digital infrastructure, preparing to conduct economic warfare by flooding European markets with electric vehicles, and maintaining quasi-police stations on European soil to surveil and coerce dissidents. Chinese President Xi Jinping's choice of France, Serbia, and Hungary for his European trip in May was the clearest signal yet of Beijing's strategy for Europe: divide and rule.

For Beijing, Moscow, Pyongyang, and Tehran, the war in Ukraine is merely the front line of a larger global conflict with the United States—with Europe and its environs a key theater in this conflict. In the Middle East, the Israel-Hamas war could yet explode into a larger regional conflagration, possibly setting off mass migration to Europe. Russia has opened another front in Africa, helping to push European and U.S. peacekeeping troops out of the Sahel region, stabilizing authoritarian regimes, and giving the Kremlin yet another vector for putting pressure on Europe.



All of this marks the end of Europe's holiday from history and geopolitics. It is also a colossal failure of policymaking—above all, of Germany's strategic bet on hyperglobalization, based on the assumption that trade and economic interdependence would ensure peace and cooperation.

Whether it is also the birth hour of a geopolitical Europe remains very much to be seen. The most tangible proof that Europeans have understood the gravity of the moment is that they have ransacked their budgets and weapons stores for Ukraine, are ramping up defense

Illustration by DOUG CHAYKA

spending, and are upgrading territorial defense and regional deterrence for the first time since the Cold War. There have been drastic policy shifts in key capitals: Paris now wants European Union and NATO enlargement; Berlin says it wants to build the continent's strongest conventional force; London wants to work with the EU; and after eight years of an anti-EU government, so does Warsaw. Neutral Finland and Sweden have joined NATO; even the Swiss are quietly weighing their options.

These shifts are real because they are driven by fear. And because the causes of that fear are real, the shifts are here to stay.

Yet many serious obstacles remain. National governments have not yet found ways to overcome ponderous institutional processes, budgetary constraints, and the increasing fragmentation of political decision-making; few are capable of articulating strategy and following through on it. Europe's large powers are terrible at working with one another. The smaller ones resent their larger neighbors for being overbearing or selfish but rarely challenge them with proposals and coalition-building of their own. Overcoming deep north-south, east-west, and center-periphery divides would require ideas and leadership; both are currently in short supply.

When French President Emmanuel Macron gives yet another passionate speech about the future of Europe, other EU leaders may roll their eyes—but they do not offer an alternative vision. Very few politicians have the courage to say that steering the continent safely through this dangerous period will not be cost-neutral but will require sacrifices—not just in terms of resetting spending priorities but also very literally, in terms of increasing deterrence by getting ready to fight. As for Ukraine, its European supporters regularly congratulate themselves on what they are doing—but fear of escalation keeps them from doing what is necessary for Ukraine to push Russia back on Europe's behalf. They know Ukraine's defeat would be catastrophic for European security and require even greater efforts to deter Russia in the future, but they cannot bring themselves to follow through on what they know to be true.

These failures not only keep Europe from acting on its own without relying on massive support from the United States. They also risk a splintering and renationalization of European politics based on each country's view of Russia and other threats. It would make the continent even more vulnerable to its enemies than it is now.

Meanwhile, Europe's hard right dreams of a white, illiberal, Christian Fortress Europe; these movements are receiving support from Moscow and Beijing. This hard right is praying that a second Trump administration, run by committed and well-organized ideologues, will join forces with them—even though they are more likely to be treated as vassals. Liberal, democratic Europe can only hope to survive the continent's worst geostrategic turn since 1945 with a combination of pragmatic integration, generous joint financing of defense and other costs, EU enlargement, and enlightened, unselfish leadership by a critical mass of the union's most powerful states. Otherwise, a European firestorm may be upon us. ■

Illustration by SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

Not Ready for Trump

By **Nathalie Tocci**, director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali

WHEN DONALD TRUMP WAS ELECTED U.S. PRESIDENT in 2016, it unified Europe. The continent's capitals were still reeling from the decision by British voters to leave the European Union a few months before, and leaders feared that Brexit would trigger a domino effect of other exits. The scars of the European debt crisis and bitter divisions over migration were still fresh.

Trump shook Europeans from their navel-gazing, reminding them what their union was all about: democracy, multilateralism, and the rules-based order. With Washington checked out of that order, then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel—the undisputed leader of the EU at the time—became the voice of the free world. Europeans knew they couldn't afford to be divided: Their continent was already on fire then, with Russia having annexed Crimea and nationalist populism on the rise. Faced with escalating threats and abandoned by Washington, Europeans understood they had to stick together.

The question haunting Europe today is whether it will be united once again if Trump returns to the White House. Of course, Trump is not the only reason Europe should be unified. Europe and its neighborhood are even more ablaze today than in 2016. Europe itself is at war, with Russian officials openly stating that their imperial appetites won't be sated with the subjugation of Ukraine. To the southeast of Europe, the Israel-Hamas war is teetering on the brink of a wider conflict. In Africa's vast Sahel region, European powers and the United States have been pushed out as Russia strengthens its grip—with all the options that gives the Kremlin to impact Europe, not least by weaponizing migration.

Turning farther east, Europe no longer harbors illusions that China will become a responsible stakeholder of the liberal order. Unlike in 2016, the EU is not as gullible to Chinese President Xi Jinping's claims of championing multilateralism. As Xi's visit to France, Serbia, and Hungary in May showed, Chinese divide-and-rule tactics have become blatant enough for the most naive European to see. Globally, whereas in 2016 we were wondering if a multipolar world was compatible with multilateralism and the liberal order, it's clear today that the latter two are on life support. Given all the threats facing Europe, the unifying effect Trump had on the EU in 2016 should be exponentially stronger now.

This may be wishful thinking. Europe's democracies are in the grip of similar political convulsions as the United States, with right-wing nationalism on the rise. High inflation and insufficient economic growth have blown wind in the hard right's sails once again. What's more, Europe's nationalists have changed tack—they no longer seek to emulate Britain's disastrous exit but to hollow out the EU from within. They dominate politics not only in a small number of Eastern European countries—such as Hungary and Slovakia—but have come to power in Italy and the Netherlands, and they may win in Austria later this year. And they are increasingly coordinating in Brussels, asserting their collective weight in EU affairs, and trying to drive a wedge into the broad majority of conservatives, socialists, liberals, and greens that has spearheaded European unity and integration for decades.

Trump 2.0 would enter the scene in this much more fraught and fractured Europe. This time, there is a bigger contingent of European governments that see eye to eye with Trump—and agree with his disparaging of the EU. Trump would have the same opportunity as Xi to play divide-and-rule with Europe.

The fractures extend to vast areas of European policy. With nationalists exerting their growing power—and possibly allying with Trump—it will be hard for the EU to agree on ambitious steps forward on defense, climate, energy, technology, and EU enlargement, even as the war in Ukraine and other crises make these policies increasingly urgent.

Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of the EU, predicted that the continent's union would develop through crisis. So far, his dictum has proved true, as various political and economic upheavals since 1945 have galvanized Europeans to build their ever closer union. Another Trump term—coupled with a genuine fraying of the trans-Atlantic bond in a time of growing threats to Europe—could be the crisis that breaks the EU's back. ■

What if Russia Wins?

By **Carl Bildt**, co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations and former prime minister of Sweden

IF UKRAINE AND ITS WESTERN SUPPORTERS LOSE RESOLVE, Europe may face a scenario where Russia subjugates the rest of Ukraine, installs a puppet regime, and gradually integrates most or all of the country into a new Russian empire.

In the long term, it would be a Pyrrhic victory for Moscow. The repressive empire would struggle to digest its occupied lands, subdue a restive population, and bear the burden of very high military expenditures in a new era of confrontation. Moscow would trade its medieval Mongol yoke for a 21st-century Chinese one—and be seriously left behind as the rest of the world enters a new green and digital age. Sooner or later, Russia would face its third state collapse in little more than a century.

A Russian victory and collapse of the Ukrainian state would have extremely grave consequences for Europe as well.

For starters, we can expect tens of millions of new refugees. In the Ukrainian territories Russia has occupied—first in 2014 and then since 2022—the population is now a fraction of what it was before. If a similar ratio applies to further Russian conquests, it would be realistic to count on 10 million to 15 million refugees, in addition to the slightly more than 4 million Europe is hosting already, flowing into nearby European states.

A Russian victory would transform European politics in several respects. Thoughts of an accommodation with this new Russia—something entertained until recently in Paris, Berlin, and some other European capitals—would be entirely unrealistic. A Ukrainian government-in-exile would operate from Warsaw or somewhere else in Central Europe. Defense expenditures—set to reach 4 percent of GDP in Poland this year and at least 2 percent across much of NATO—will need to double yet again in order to credibly deter threats from an increasingly desperate Russian regime.

New conflicts could be on the horizon. To which old borders would Russian President Vladimir Putin like to restore the Kremlin's empire? Finland, Poland, and the Baltic states were all once ruled from Moscow, and anyone with access to Kremlin-approved television can find Russian imperialist dreamers talking in these terms.

Restoring the empire beyond Ukraine may be an unrealistic prospect for an overburdened, struggling regime, but who dares to take that for granted in Helsinki, Riga, or Warsaw? A new age of European confrontation is certain.

Putin is waging his war both to subjugate Ukraine and to rebalance the global order away from the West and what he considers U.S. domination. For his first aim, he has lukewarm Chinese support, but for the second, he has a strong ally in Beijing, which equally sees any Western weakening as buttressing its own position.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said before the U.S. Congress in April that Ukraine today could be East Asia tomorrow. Like the fall of Saigon and the fall of Kabul, a Russian victory in Ukraine would be seen across the world as an even more significant sign of the United States' waning power. The appetite for adventurism from numerous actors is bound to increase.

The consequences of letting Russia win in Ukraine would be catastrophic for the Ukrainians, extremely serious for the security of Europe, and profoundly destabilizing for the rest of the world. In the end, it would probably lead to a collapse of Russia itself—which would present Europe with a whole other set of consequences to prepare for. ■

Illustration by DOUG CHAYKA

Deterrence Is Cheaper Than War

By **Radoslaw Sikorski**, foreign minister of Poland

"WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO PAY FOR THE MILITARY PROTECTION OF EUROPE while the NATO states are not paying their fair share," U.S. President John F. Kennedy said to the U.S. National Security Council in 1963. Since then, similar calls from both Republican and Democratic administrations for Europe to take responsibility for its own defense too often have been ignored, especially since the end of the Cold War.

For far too long, Western Europeans believed that war on the continent was no longer possible. Even today, some European politicians still seem convinced that the destructive forces ravaging Ukraine will never reach their territories.

This year, at least 20 out of 32 NATO members will spend at least 2 percent of their GDP on defense—a move in the right direction at a frustratingly slow pace. Poland reached this threshold more than 20 years ago and now leads the alliance with close to 4 percent. Others should follow our example.

Deterrence may be costly, but it is less costly than having to fight a war. The estimated cost of rebuilding Ukraine has reached almost half a trillion dollars and is growing by the day. The cost in human life and suffering is immeasurable. Spending more on defense, however, is only one part of what European NATO members need to do. We need to spend more effectively, and that means better coordination.

We should stop chasing the illusion of a joint European army. There is no political will among European Union member states to merge their national armed forces. We will not have one European army, but we can have better European armies. To start, we can set up a joint rapid reaction force—let's call it the European Legion—of at least 5,000 troops, financed from the EU budget.

Second, we need to improve the mobility of military personnel and equipment. Since the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine, we have learned how important transportation and military logistics are.

Third, Europe must make full use of the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation, an instrument that allows member states to closely cooperate to raise defense production capacity, combine investments, and improve the operational readiness of our armed forces.

Illustration by SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

These are only three examples of what Europe can do to improve defense. None of it should come at the expense of our commitment to NATO and its unique role in the European security system. Instead of advocating for Europe's "strategic autonomy," as some EU leaders suggest, it is better to push for "strategic harmony" between the EU and NATO.

Widespread fears that changing political tides in Washington might severely strain trans-Atlantic relations are understandable. Influential U.S. politicians and commentators openly argue for Washington to focus primarily on its rivalry with Beijing, countering those who maintain that a global superpower can afford to be engaged in both Europe and East Asia.

If Washington truly believes that China is its "biggest geopolitical and intelligence rival" and "most significant long-term priority," as CIA Director William Burns has said, then the United States' network of alliances should be seen not as ballast needing to be cut but as an asset the main rival lacks and is only now trying to amass.

There is no shortage of evidence that Beijing has been the moving spirit behind a coalition of authoritarian countries long engaged in undermining the existing global order and those who stand for democratic values. China's "limitless" partnership with Russia is one axis in a whole web of groupings. We know that Chinese exports of dual-use goods to Russia have increased significantly, that Russia has displaced Saudi Arabia as the main exporter of crude oil to China, and that Beijing is now an indispensable client for Russian gas. We see Iranian-made drones attacking Ukrainian cities, often assisted in the assault by North Korean artillery shells and ballistic missiles. Across Africa, South America, and other parts of the so-called global south, state-sponsored media based in China, Iran, and Russia freely spread their propaganda, often with the help of local regimes.

With the world on the brink of a global rivalry between two blocs—competing economically, militarily, and for humanity's hearts and minds—even the mightiest superpower needs allies. For all its shortcomings, Europe remains the obvious one. Yes, Europe must invest more on security but not because of any imminent rupture in its relations with the United States. It must spend more so that the world's democratic bloc can keep its influence and way of life. ■

Britain Will Recommit

By **Robin Niblett**, distinguished fellow at Chatham House

RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE IN FEBRUARY 2022 overturned the strategic calculus behind Brexit. Then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson had promised to raise Britain's sights beyond Europe—to the sunny uplands of closer trading and political relations with the United States and dynamic emerging markets in Asia. But the return of large-scale war to Europe has proved the adage that geography is destiny, bringing Britain's strategic focus squarely back to its centuries-long priority of ensuring stability on the European continent.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's brutal war does not merely threaten to erase Ukraine's independence. Russian success—despite sincere European political commitment, military aid, and financial support to Ukraine—would shred the bonds that unite the European Union's members. Combined with all the other pressures the EU already faces, this could not only collapse any emerging consensus on EU foreign policy and defense but also lead to the disintegration of the rules governing the bloc's single market, border controls, and immigration.

This is not just a deep concern in Berlin, which wholeheartedly supports Ukraine over Russia. It is not just a concern in Paris, where French President Emmanuel Macron has described preventing Russia from winning the war as the "sine qua non" of European security and even is planning to deploy European troops to Ukraine. A potential Russian victory is also a profound concern in London.

A majority of Britons might have decided in 2016 to leave the EU. But that is not the same as wanting to see it implode. Even after Britain left the single market in 2021, the EU accounts for over half of imports and more than 40 percent of exports. A disintegrating European economy would thus carry severe repercussions for Britain. A loss of close coordination with the EU over migration, crime, terrorism, and political radicalism would have dangerous spillovers as well.

Moreover, if Europeans failed to uphold Ukraine's sovereignty, many in the United States would conclude that Europe was a lost cause—and that it was time for the United States to turn its attention away. Washington might then sustain only a basic defensive deterrent in Europe and focus on the bigger strategic threat of a rising China, leaving Britain and its European neighbors to fend mainly for themselves in confronting Russia.

This long-term strategic view, shared by the major British political parties, is why Britain will remain one of Europe's biggest military supporters of Ukraine. It also explains why London has been willing to give the Ukrainians weapons that the more cautious Biden administration had long withheld, such as long-range air-launched

cruise missiles, which have been used against Russian targets to devastating effect.

It is also why, in January 2024, Britain was the first European country to sign a bilateral security agreement with Ukraine, which commits British military assistance for the next 10 years. Britain is also one of the most avid supporters of future NATO membership for Ukraine. And in the meantime, Britain is helping Ukraine's forces and defense industry to become more interoperable with their NATO peers.

This view is why Britain now has 1,000 troops deployed continuously in Estonia, leading a multinational battlegroup as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence to deter future Russian aggression.

But like most countries in Europe, Britain is struggling to match resources with commitments. The size of its armed forces—around 130,000 regular, full-time forces across all services, as of April—has shrunk by almost one-third since 2000. Britain will need to help Europe develop more integrated approaches to security, combining each country's specialties rather than continuing with today's wasteful duplication. Britain's defensive and offensive cyber-capabilities, as well as its world-leading electronic surveillance capabilities, will prove especially valuable.

Since Russia stopped most of its gas exports to Europe, Britain's extensive regasification infrastructure and North Sea pipelines have enabled it to serve as a land bridge for liquefied natural gas exports from the United States and elsewhere to continental Europe. Britain is also woven into Europe's increasingly important web of wind farms and subsea electricity interconnectors, which will need better protection from Russian sabotage. In January 2023, David Lammy, the Labour Party's shadow foreign secretary, said the next Labour government would seek a formal security pact with the EU that would cement coordination across these areas, complementing NATO. With snap elections called for July 4, Labour will likely have that opportunity.

London's return to focusing on European security, alongside its gentle tilt to the Indo-Pacific, aligns with Washington's current policies. The question is what will happen after the November U.S. elections. Former U.S. President Donald Trump has made clear that the EU, which ran a surplus of more than $200 billion in its goods trade with the United States in 2023, will feel the full force of his retaliatory trade policy, of which Britain may be spared. While some in the Conservative Party may still favor a quixotic attempt to build a new bilateral partnership with the United States, don't expect a Labour government—all but certain to be in power soon—to abandon the idea of a new strategic partnership with the EU. ■

Illustration by DOUG CHAYKA

Europe's Vulnerable Economy

By **Guntram Wolff**, senior fellow at Bruegel and professor at the University of Erfurt's Willy Brandt School of Public Policy

THE CHALLENGE OF A MORE GEOPOLITICALLY TURBULENT WORLD comes as Europe's economic model is showing signs of stress. GDP growth has lagged that of the United States since the 2010 European debt crisis. Within the EU, markets fragmented along national lines, the lack of a well-functioning financial system, inadequate macroeconomic policies, and an underdeveloped high-tech industry have all meant subpar growth. Externally, the decoupling from Russian energy supplies and uncertain prospects for trade with China weigh on the highly globalized European economy as well. China's economic model, with its high subsidies for the manufacturing industry—which then exports its growing overcapacity abroad—represents a particular challenge for many European economies, especially those, such as Germany's, that compete with China in the same industries.

A more America First president in the White House and a more aggressive stance from China as it seeks to dominate Taiwan would further undermine the stability of global trade and hit Europe hard. That said, for all the talk of economic de-risking, both the United States' and Europe's trade with China remains strong. A decoupling is not visible in the data, still documenting the benefits of trade.

For Europe, the shift to more antagonistic, security-driven economic relations will not be easy—not least because the European Union has no tradition of incorporating security strategy into economic policy. Assessing security risks remains the domain of national governments with diverging views on what constitutes such risks, whereas economic policy is largely handled by the EU.

Despite these odds, Europe has made some progress in preparing for a new era of geopolitical conflict and increased weaponization of economic interdependence, including creating programs to build advanced semiconductors, promote domestic mining of critical minerals, and advance green supply chains. Still, the work of diversifying trade relations, including away from China, is progressing too slowly. Too often, vested interests in member states block critical policies. One such victim is the proposed trade agreement with the South American customs union Mercosur, which would greatly help the EU diversify trade but has been scuttled by opposition from French farmers and others.

Illustration by SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

Europe needs to address its vulnerabilities with three major policy agendas. First, it needs to focus on growth. Advancing EU-wide capital markets and other ways to secure funding for growth will be crucial for Europe to catch up on technology and project economic power. Second, the bloc needs to address vulnerabilities in its digital infrastructure and services. Cloud computing, in particular, is extremely dependent on U.S. companies—a major vulnerability if a new U.S. president escalates the conflict over data privacy rules. Finally, and perhaps most existentially, Europe needs to strengthen its defense industry and improve the efficiency of military procurement. There is an acute scarcity of weapons and ammunition, and production still has not reached necessary levels after more than two years of war in Ukraine. A major EU push to boost the defense industry would not only help make Europe more secure but advance European technology as well.

Europe will remain dependent on the United States for security and strategic leadership for some time. But the EU will need to steer its own course instead of copying a U.S. protectionist agenda that will only hurt its citizens. Instead of leaving the profitable China market, it needs to incentivize firms to organize their business in such a way as to withstand possible geopolitically driven disruptions. Tariffs are part of the toolbox and should be based on the EU's own assessment of the harms caused by subsidies. Even more importantly, Europe needs to break taboos on debt financing to boost strategic industries and prioritize growth while sustaining its social model. Finally, it needs to partner with countries that share its interest in maintaining global trade openness while improving its capacity to project power to protect trade and the international rules-based order. ■

Asia Sees Confusion

By **Bilahari Kausikan**, chairman of the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute and former Singaporean diplomat

EUROPE FACES NO GREATER STRATEGIC CHALLENGE than dealing with Russian aggression but remains incapable of dealing with it without the United States at its back. NATO without Washington is hollow—a prospect relished by countries around the world that wish to see a weaker West.

The problem for all U.S. allies—not only in Europe—is that the United States does not face an existential threat anywhere in the world. China has become a peer competitor, post-Cold War Russia is dangerous, and the ability of North Korea and Iran to disrupt should not be underestimated. But none of them is an existential threat.

That means there is no longer any vital reason for Americans to "pay any price, bear any burden," as former U.S. President John F. Kennedy said, to uphold the international order. Consequently, every U.S. administration since the end of the Cold War has focused on domestic priorities, with the George W. Bush administration an exception forced by 9/11.

This is not the retreat from the world that some have claimed. But Washington has certainly become more discriminating about whether and how it will intervene abroad. It demands more of its allies, partners, and friends. U.S. President Joe Biden may be more consultative than his predecessor—he is, however, not consulting you to inquire after your health but to see what you are prepared to do to help further the United States' strategic goals. And those priorities are now in the Indo-Pacific, where only a handful of European countries are marginal strategic players. When U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the United States would aid Ukraine to weaken Russia so that it could never invade another country, the message was directed as much at Beijing as at Moscow.

This misalignment of strategic priorities confronts Europe with a dilemma. French President Emmanuel Macron put his finger on a very fundamental issue when he pressed Europe to consider an independent nuclear deterrent. But will Paris—the only European Union member with such weapons—risk annihilation to save Berlin? Is Europe ready to consider a nuclear-armed Poland or Germany?

Despite what its boosters say, the EU is not a security actor. The bloc's so-called common foreign and security policy is hardly taken seriously in Asian capitals—or, for that matter, in European ones. A European defense force is only talk, with no prospect of materializing for the foreseeable future.

Europe is now paying the price of decades of post-Cold War neglect of defense. Ukraine was a wake-up call, but has it really brought about the *Zeitenwende*, or change of eras, that German Chancellor Olaf Scholz claimed? The nuclear question aside, building the capacity to conventionally deter Russia will require much higher defense spending by all EU members sustained not just for a few years but for a decade or longer.

When considering whether Europe can provide its own security without the United States at its back, the continent's core issue is that its social model is unsustainable—a simple matter of demographic certainty. For three decades, most EU members preferred to shrink defense spending rather than make politically risky cuts in social spending. This soft option is no longer possible: It is now unavoidable that some butter be relinquished for guns. For all the claims by European leaders of having heard the wake-up call, they have not even begun to seriously confront this decision, which cannot be postponed indefinitely.

The EU is in for a period of additional political turmoil as it collectively and nationally debates what and how much social spending needs to be sacrificed for defense and how the burdens are to be distributed between Northern and Central Europe—which feels the Russia threat

most keenly—and Southern Europe. In theory, Europe could grow its way to affording both guns and butter. But given Europe's aging population, growth will require immigration on a scale that will only add to political stresses.

Will European unity and resolve hold, particularly if right-wing movements use the coming turmoil to make further political gains? Russian President Vladimir Putin probably does not think so, as he prepares to fight a long war of attrition in Ukraine. It is difficult to dismiss his calculation.

The fallout for Asia is that Europe's strategic dependence on the United States will limit its ability to chart an independent course on China. With the partial exception of Britain and France, Europe's ability to contribute in any way but ad hoc and symbolically to the Indo-Pacific strategic balance will remain similarly constrained. For Europe to contribute meaningfully to Indo-Pacific security, to which its economic security is intimately tied, it needs to pull its own weight defending itself and free U.S. military assets for redeployment. But even this modest contribution will take many more years to materialize—if it ever does. ■

Who Will Fight for Europe?

By **Ivan Krastev**, chairman of the Centre for Liberal Strategies

IN DECEMBER 1989, STANDING IN VIENNA'S MAIN RAILWAY TERMINUS and looking at the trains full of people arriving from the collapsing communist states to the east, the British American historian Tony Judt decided that a new history of 20th-century Europe needed to be written. He called his opus *Postwar*—not simply to show how the European present was still shaped by the memories and legacies of World War II but also to demonstrate that Europe had become a place where, for most people, a major war on their continent had become unthinkable.

A book on Europe's 21st century, unfortunately, will require a different title. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has woken Europeans up to the reality that they are living in a prewar world, not a postwar one. Their long-held assumptions about war and peace in Europe are now a smoldering ruin, like so many Ukrainian cities.

Take the German political class under the 16-year chancellorship of Angela Merkel. Unable to imagine anything but the continued success of Europe's post-World War II integration, it believed that

Illustrations by SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

FP

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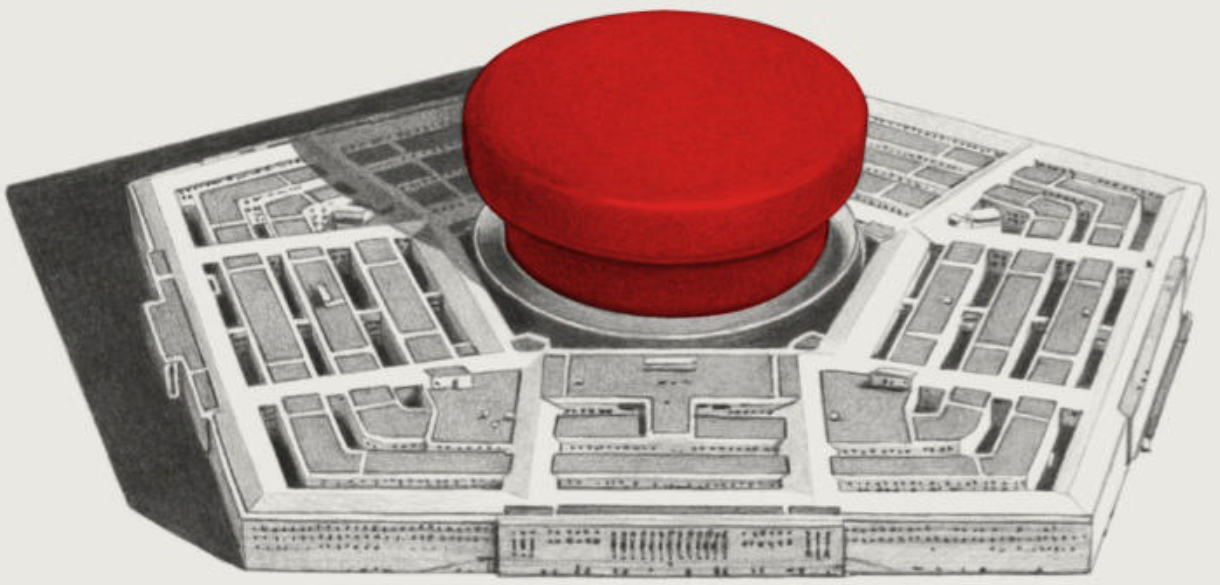

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Europe buying most of its gas from Russia would guarantee a peaceful and cooperative Moscow. In reality, of course, Europe's economic interdependence with Russia did not curb the Kremlin's imperial ambitions; on the contrary, German energy dependence, in particular, allowed Russian President Vladimir Putin to believe he had a free hand for war. What many Western Europeans thought was a source of security brought vulnerability instead.

Faced with Russia's aggression, Europeans have also been forced to realize that their long-standing unwillingness to invest in their military capabilities has imperiled them—and that Europe is totally dependent on the United States for its security at the very moment when the U.S. security umbrella can no longer be taken for granted. Washington's rising economic protectionism, born out of its growing confrontation with Beijing, feels like an attack on European prosperity. The reality is that even if Europeans take the current security threats seriously—and it is not yet entirely clear that the major countries do—the European Union and its member states will need a decade to restructure their defense industries and build a continent-size war economy.

What's more, Ukraine's heroic resistance to a brutal invasion reminiscent of the continent's bloody past has shattered Europeans' romantic belief in the notion of a post-heroic society—where war was uncivilized, conflicts could be negotiated away, and the only dispute was over who gets which share of the growing economic pie. By the end of the 20th century, "death was no longer seen as being part of the social contract," as the great English military historian Michael Howard wrote. Now, as Europeans face the reality of a much more hostile and volatile world, it is dawning on them that the old social contract may no longer be valid.

The war has also exposed deep divides in Europe, based largely on collective memory. In February 2022, while the Germans and French were shocked by Russia's invasion, Eastern Europeans were shocked by Western naivety. While Paris and Berlin were afraid of nuclear escalation, Poles and Balts feared renewed occupation. But with the passing of time, even the EU's east is no longer unified. While Poland opened its borders for millions of Ukrainian refugees, Hungary ended up being Putin's closest EU ally. While Poles, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians are among Ukraine's most ardent supporters, other Eastern Europeans—Bulgarians, Hungarians, Romanians, and Slovaks—are more reluctant. The war has divided the east from the west—as well as the east itself.

The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have also forced Europeans to rethink their relations with the non-Western world. The hope that Russia's aggression would make the so-called global south stand in defense of the liberal order turned out to be an illusion. Instead, non-Western countries chose to follow their economic interests instead of joining a new cold war between the free world and the world of rising authoritarianism. In making sense of international relations, the post-colonial narrative has replaced the cold war framing; as a result, many non-Western societies view the EU less as a laboratory of the world to come and more as a collection of the old colonial powers.

A decade ago, Europeans considered the fact that war had become unthinkable a major success of the European project. Historians were asking, "Where have all the soldiers gone?" and celebrated Europeans' unwillingness to fight wars. Now, as Europe's new reality of war and rearmament sets in, the question becomes: Where will all the soldiers come from, given Europe's aging population and decades-long demilitarization? After centuries of horrific wars, the pacification of the European mind was the major political achievement of the post-World War II period. Now, it has become a security vulnerability. ■

Ukraine's heroic resistance has shattered Europeans' romantic beliefs that war was uncivilized, conflicts could be negotiated away, and the only dispute was over who gets which share of the growing economic pie.

Illustration by SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

TRUMP'S RETURN WOULD TRANSFORM EUROPE

Without Washington's embrace, the continent could revert to an anarchic and illiberal past.

BY HAL BRANDS

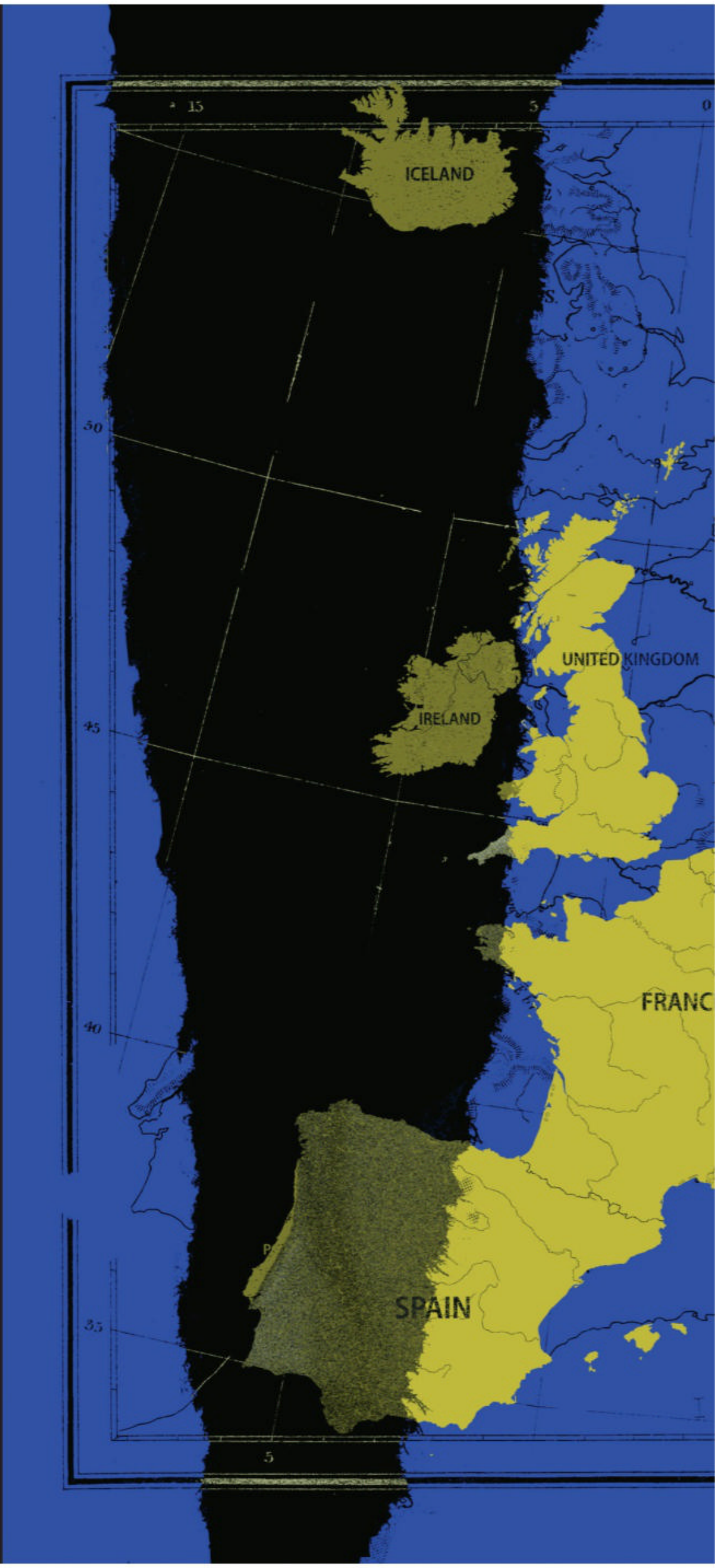

Illustration by JOAN WONG


FINLAND
ESTONIA
LATVIA
LITHUANIA
BELARUS
UKRAINE
MOLDOVA
ROMANIA
BULGARIA
GREECE
BELGIUM
5
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25

Which is the real Europe? The mostly peaceful, democratic, and united continent of the past few decades? Or the fragmented, volatile, and conflict-ridden Europe that existed for centuries before that? If Donald Trump wins the U.S. presidential election in November, we may soon find out.

Trump flirted with pulling the United States out of NATO during his first term as president. Some of his former aides believe he might really do it if he gets a second. And it's not just Trump talking this way: As U.S. Sen. J.D. Vance, one of the leading America First acolytes, has argued, "[The] time has come for Europe to stand on its own feet." Even among those who don't explicitly subscribe to the America First ethos, the pull of competing priorities—particularly in Asia—is growing stronger. A post-American Europe is becoming ever more thinkable. It's worth asking what kind of place that might be.

Optimists hope that Europe can keep on thriving—even if it loses the U.S. security umbrella that NATO leaders will celebrate at the alliance's 75th anniversary summit in Washington in July. The United States might go home, in this view, but a Europe that has grown wealthy, stable, and reliably democratic over the past 80 years is ready to act as a constructive, independent force in a multipolar world.

More likely, however, a post-American Europe would struggle to meet the threats it faces—and might even revert, eventually, to the darker, more anarchic, more illiberal patterns of its past. "Our Europe today is mortal. It can die," French President Emmanuel Macron warned in late April. In an America First world, it just might.

EUROPE HAS CHANGED SO DRAMATICALLY since World War II that many people—Americans especially—have forgotten how hopeless the continent once seemed. Old Europe produced some of history's greatest aggressors and most ambitious tyrants; its imperial ambitions and internal rivalries touched off conflicts that pulled in countries around the world. Europe was the land of "eternal wars" and endless troubles, the aviator and prominent isolationist Charles Lindbergh said in 1941—better for the United States to keep clear of that cursed continent.

The fundamental issue was a geography that cramped too many powerful contenders into a single space. The only way to survive in this environment was to expand at the expense of others; this dynamic condemned Europe to cycles of catastrophic conflict. After 1870, the emergence of a unified Germany as the industrial and military juggernaut at the region's center turned this brew even more toxic. The continent's politics were as volatile as its geopolitics: From the French Revolution onward, Europe experienced wild swings between liberalism and some of history's most grotesque forms of tyranny.

There was no reason to think, in the late 1940s, that World War II had broken the cycle. Old rivalries lingered: France was terrified that Germany would rise up and ravage its neighbors again. New radicalisms threatened in the form of the Soviet Union and the European communists it controlled, while right-wing dictatorships remained entrenched in Portugal and Spain. Democracy was in danger in many countries; economic deprivation was accelerating rivalry and fragmentation.

> The U.S. role in Europe brought extraordinary benefits but also imposed extraordinary costs.

The birth of a new Europe was hardly inevitable: It took a radical, unprecedented intervention by the same country that had long sought to avoid the continent's quarrels. That intervention was caused by the Cold War, which threatened to make another collapse of the European equilibrium unbearable even for a distant superpower. It came together gradually, in often chaotic circumstances, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. And it featured a set of interlocking commitments with revolutionary effects.

Most vital was the U.S. security commitment, via NATO and the troop deployments that substantiated it. U.S. military protection broke the doom loop of violence by safeguarding Western Europe from Moscow—and from its own self-destructive instincts. With the United States protecting the region, old enemies no longer had to fear each other: NATO, one British official said in 1948, would make the "age-long trouble between Germany and France … disappear." The countries of Western Europe could finally achieve security without denying it to others. That, in turn, short-circuited the political competitions and arms races that had plagued the region, allowing its members to lock arms against a common threat.

U.S. policy thus enabled a second change: unprecedented economic and political cooperation. Through the Marshall Plan, the United States aggressively pushed for intra-European cooperation as a condition for recovery aid, midwifing the transnational structures that later became the European Economic Community and European Union. The U.S. military presence facilitated this collaboration by allowing former enemies to pool their resources without compromising their security. Americans are the "best Europeans," West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer remarked in 1949. Washington's presence, in other words, allowed its European allies to bury the rivalries of the past.

The third change was political: If aggression was rooted in autocracy, then transforming Europe's geopolitics required transforming its politics. That transformation began with the forced democratization of West Germany under the Allied occupation. It involved using Marshall Plan aid to revitalize and stabilize fragile democracies. And this change, too, was made possible by the U.S. military presence—which staved off a Soviet hegemony that would have snuffed out European democracies, while also allowing countries to invest in generous welfare programs that marginalized the radical left and right.

This was a uniquely U.S. solution to Europe's problems. Only the United States was powerful enough to protect Europe from its enemies—yet distant enough that it posed no real threat of conquering and permanently subordinating the region. Only the United States had the resources to help rebuild a devastated region and bring it into a thriving free-world economy. Only the United States could smother

A Marshall Plan poster shows a windmill with the flags of various European countries as spokes and the U.S. flag as the rudder.

Europe's rivalries while protecting, and even strengthening, its democratic liberties. Indeed, the U.S. project in Western Europe proved so mind-blowingly successful that, once the Cold War ended, it was simply extended eastward.

U.S. intervention helped turn a "dark continent," as historian Mark Mazower called Europe, into a post-historical paradise at the heart of an expanding liberal order. It was a world-changing achievement—which some Americans now seem determined to put at risk.

THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO EUROPE was never meant to last forever. Paul Hoffman, who oversaw the Marshall Plan, liked to quip that his goal was to "get Europe on its feet and off our backs." In the 1950s, U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower wondered when the Europeans could step forward so Washington could "sit back and relax somewhat." On numerous occasions, the United States considered slashing or even eliminating its troop presence.

This shouldn't be surprising: The U.S. role in Europe brought extraordinary benefits but also imposed extraordinary costs. The United States pledged to defend, even at the risk of nuclear war, countries thousands of miles away. By providing foreign aid and allowing asymmetric access to its vast home market, it rebuilt a continent and helped foreign countries grow faster than the United States itself.

It tolerated allied leaders, such as French President Charles de Gaulle, who sometimes seemed positively indignant at

the protection the United States provided. And Washington discarded one of its most venerated diplomatic traditions—a hostility to encumbering alliances—to become custodian of a continent that had long been nothing but trouble.

The resulting ambivalence was kept in check by the exigencies of the Cold War—and because the critics could never offer a workable concept of European security without the United States. But today, as old irritants persist and new challenges pull Washington's attention in other directions, U.S. skepticism toward Europe is stronger than ever. Its embodiment is Trump.

Trump has long lamented the burdens Washington bears in NATO; he has threatened to let marauding Russians do "whatever the hell they want" to free-riding European allies. He clearly loathes the EU, which he views not as the culmination of continental unity but as a cutthroat economic competitor. As an illiberal populist, he is indifferent—if not outright hostile—to the fortunes of liberal democracy in Europe. Why must Americans take care of Europe, he asks, when there is an "ocean between us"? When Trump touts his America First foreign policy, he means a foreign policy in which the United States finally sheds the unusual obligations it has taken on since World War II.

To be clear, no one knows precisely what Trump might do in office. A full-on withdrawal from NATO, which would enrage the remaining Republican internationalists, might not be worth the political price. But with Trump contending for the presidency and his acolytes gaining strength among Republicans—and the threat that China poses to U.S. interests in Asia growing ever more severe—it is time to take seriously the possibility that the United States might really leave Europe someday and consider what might happen next.

IN AN OPTIMISTIC SCENARIO, Europe would remain democratic, cohesive, and unified against its enemies. A U.S. withdrawal could compel the EU to sustain Ukraine during the present war, give Kyiv meaningful security guarantees after the peace, and turn itself into a world-class military actor in order to fend off Russia and other threats previously warded off by the United States. Europe would thus emerge as a strong, independent pillar of a liberal world order. Washington would be free to focus on other priorities, creating a more efficient division of labor in the democratic world.

Europe certainly has the resources to fend for itself. It isn't the fragile, immiserated place of the late 1940s but a rich, potentially powerful community where democracy and cooperation have become the norm. The EU's GDP is about 10 times that of Russia. Since 2022, EU countries have collectively given more military and other aid to Ukraine than the United States, and they are finally reinvesting in defense industries that atrophied after the Cold War. European leaders, moreover, are already preparing for the post-American future, whether by turning their countries into serious military powers, as Poland is doing, or by advocating a renewed push for European strategic autonomy, the perennial priority in Paris. It is past time to build a "more united, more sovereign, more democratic" continent, Macron—the leader who seems most bullish about Europe's post-American prospects—declared in April.

Polish soldiers take part in a multinational training exercise in Nowa Deba, Poland, on May 6, 2023.

ARTUR WIDAK/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

The problems with the optimistic scenario are easy to spot. When Macron touts European integration as a substitute for U.S. leadership, he seems to forget that Europe has been unified and cohesive precisely because of the climate of reassurance Washington has provided. In previous instances in which the United States stepped back to allow European powers to step forward—at the beginning of the Balkan Wars in the early 1990s, for instance—the result was often chaos rather than strategic cohesion. The EU was deeply split on how to handle Russian aggression right up to February 2022—until Washington took an early lead in supplying Ukraine. The lesson is that it is devilishly hard to coordinate collective action among dozens of countries with distinct interests and strategic cultures, unless someone is gently knocking heads together and providing hegemonic leadership.

It is devilishly hard to coordinate collective action among dozens of countries with distinct interests and cultures, unless someone is gently knocking heads together.

If an independent, geopolitically powerful Europe sounds great, no one can agree who should lead it. France is always quick to volunteer—much to the discomfort of states, particularly in Eastern Europe, that don't really believe that Paris has the inclination or capabilities to treat their security as its own. Berlin has the economic wherewithal to lead the continent, but its political class has long worried that doing so would simply revive fears of German power. They're probably right: Germany's unification after the Cold War was tolerable to its neighbors only because they were assured that Berlin, bear-hugged by the United States and NATO, would *not* be allowed to pursue European primacy. It is hard to escape the conclusion that Europeans have been willing to tolerate U.S. leadership precisely because the United States is *not* European—so it can exercise power without renewing the tensions that once ripped the continent apart.

This relates to a final problem. A Europe that can handle its own security affairs would be much more heavily armed than it is today. Defense spending would have to rise two- or threefold in many countries. European states would invest heavily in the world's deadliest weapons—missiles, attack aircraft, and sophisticated power projection capabilities. With the loss of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, front-line states hoping to deter Russia—above all, Poland—could even seek their own nuclear weapons.

Suppose Europe does arm up in a serious way. Absent the U.S. security blanket, the very act of European countries developing the capabilities they need to confront threats from without could reawaken fears created by military imbalances within. Put differently, in a Europe protected by U.S. power, German tanks are a contribution to the common security. In a post-American Europe, they might look a lot more menacing.

A SECOND SCENARIO is that of a weak and divided post-American Europe—a continent whose countries aren't at one another's throats but don't have one another's backs. This version of Europe would be less of a return to anarchy than a continuation of lethargy. The EU would fail to generate the military power to liberate Ukraine and protect its own eastern front-line states. It would struggle to cope with the economic and geopolitical threat posed by China. In fact, this Europe could find itself caught between an aggressive Russia, a predatory China, and—under Trump—a hostile United States. Europe might no longer be the epicenter of geopolitical rivalry. But it would lose influence and security in a disordered world.

This is the precise scenario that worries Macron and other European leaders. Many European defense initiatives already underway or under consideration are meant to avoid it. In the near term, however, a weak and disunited Europe would be a near certainty.

That's because a U.S. withdrawal would rip the guts out of NATO. The alliance would lose its strongest, most battle-tested member—the country that possesses the lion's share of its advanced capabilities and dominates its command and control arrangements. Indeed, the United States is the only country in NATO that has the strategic reach and logistical prowess to intervene decisively on Europe's eastern front and beyond. What remains of the bloc would be a mishmash of European militaries that have largely been designed to fight in concert with U.S. forces and lack the ability to operate effectively without them. They would be supported by a weak and fragmented defense-industrial base—European NATO members field an overlapping hodgepodge of more than 170 major weapons systems—that is incapable of supporting a rapid, coordinated buildup.

Following a U.S. withdrawal, a militarily debilitated Europe would face a Russia that has reached a higher pitch of mobilization than at any time in decades, with few options for Europe to redress its weakness anytime soon.

Balancing Russia without U.S. power would require enormous, fiscally onerous increases in European military outlays—even more so if Russia succeeds in subjugating Ukraine and integrating its population and economy into the Kremlin's military machine. Lacking the U.S. government's "exorbitant privilege" of running massive deficits indefinitely, European countries would have to impose huge, unpopular tax increases or slash social welfare programs. Some countries, like Poland and the Baltic states, might pay that price to preserve their independence. Others might decide that military readiness isn't worth rupturing the social contract—and that accommodating an aggressive Russia is the wiser course.

Or perhaps European states would just disagree on what threats to counter. Even during the Cold War, the Soviet Union threatened West Germany far more severely than it threatened, say, Portugal. As the EU has grown, this problem of divergent threat perceptions has become even more acute. Countries in the east and north are rightly terrified of Vladimir Putin's Russia and might well join forces to defend one another. But countries farther west and south might worry more about terrorism, mass migration, and other nontraditional threats. Washington has long played honest broker in such disputes within NATO or simply provided the margin of power that allows a diverse trans-Atlantic community to do multiple things at once. Without that leadership, Europe could fragment and flounder.

THAT'S AN UGLY OUTCOME—but not the ugliest one. In a third scenario, Europe's future might look a lot like its past.

In this Europe, weakness is a temporary condition, and a failure to overcome collective-action problems such as EU security is just the beginning. For as Washington's stabilizing influence recedes, long-suppressed national antagonisms begin to reemerge—perhaps slowly at first. The European project fractures as fights break out for economic and political leadership on the continent. Revanchist behavior resurges, egged on by domestic populists and foreign interference. The lack of a benign hegemon brings old territorial disputes and geopolitical grudges back to the fore. In a self-help environment, European countries start to arm themselves more heavily; some seek the security only nuclear weapons can provide. Democracy retreats as an illiberal, often xenophobic nationalism runs wild. Over time—it may take years, perhaps decades—a post-American Europe becomes a hothouse of radicalism and rivalry.

This is what some prominent observers expected in the early 1990s. It is the future that ethnic wars in the Balkans, tensions around the reunification of Germany, and a vacuum of instability in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet bloc all seemed to herald. That future was averted, largely because the United States enlarged, rather than

> Don't make the mistake of thinking that Europe's transformation into today's peaceful EU can never be undone.

contracted, its European influence after the Cold War ended—intervening in Bosnia and Kosovo to snuff out ethnic conflicts while also taking Eastern Europe into the NATO fold as the EU dithered and delayed on eastward expansion. But that doesn't mean Europe's demons can never return.

Today, the flames of violent nationalism still flicker in the Balkans. Revisionist grievances and autocratic instincts animate leaders in Turkey and Hungary. The fallout from the 2009 European debt crisis and the years of hardship and austerity that followed showed that resentment of German influence—in this case, economic influence—is never deeply buried. Even today, as Putin gives European states every reason to work together, tensions between Ukraine and Poland or between France and Germany occasionally flare.

There are worrying political trends, as well. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has spent years deconstructing Hungarian democracy and touting the rise of the "illiberal state." Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is carrying out a similar project in his country. Parties such as the National Rally in France are rising in the polls and trafficking in a hard-edged nationalism that can easily turn into zero-sum geopolitical thinking, with centuries of historical grievances ready to be awakened. The far-right Alternative for Germany remains a political contender even as it becomes more extreme. The triumph of these movements might well be aided by a Russia assiduously waging political warfare, all too eager to set European states against one another.

A fractured Europe gripped by its ancient demons is a nightmare scenario, and nightmares usually don't come true. But what is crucial to understand is that a post-American Europe would be fundamentally unlike the Europe we have come to know. The geopolitical shock absorbers provided by U.S. power and its umbrella over Europe will be gone. The destabilizing uncertainty over status and security will return. Countries will no longer feel so confident that they can ensure their survival without resorting to the behavior—the military buildups, the intense rivalries—that characterized earlier eras. Today's Europe is the product of a historically unique, unprecedented configuration of power and influence created by the United States. Can we really be so sure that the bad old ways won't reassert themselves once the very safeguards that have suppressed them for 75 years are withdrawn?

Don't make the mistake of thinking that Europe's transformation into today's peaceful EU can never be undone. After all, Europe experienced stretches of relative peace before 1945—in the decades after Napoleon's defeat, for instance—only for that peace to collapse once the balance of power shifted. And don't think that tragedy can't befall a continent that seems so enlightened: The history of Europe, prior to U.S. engagement, was the history of the world's most economically advanced, most thoroughly modern continent repeatedly tearing itself to shreds. Indeed, if there is a lesson from Europe's past, it is that the descent can come sooner and be steeper than currently seems possible to imagine.

In the 1920s, the forces of liberalism seemed ascendant: British writer James Bryce hailed the "universal acceptance of democracy as the normal and natural form of government." The newly founded League of Nations was offering novel mechanisms for crisis management. Countries were slashing their militaries and settling outstanding grievances from World War I. Just a decade later, it was the forces of fascism that had the momentum as the continent careened toward another world war. Europe's own history is testament to how quickly and completely things can all fall apart.

AMERICA FIRSTERS MAY THINK that the United States can have all the benefits of a stable Europe without paying any of the costs. In reality, their policies risk reminding us that Europe has a far nastier historical norm. That would be a calamity—and not just for Europe. A weaker, more fragmented Europe would make it harder for the democratic world to cope with challenges from Russia, China, or Iran. A violent, hypercompetitive Europe could cause fallout on a global scale.

If Europe has benefited from being part of a thriving liberal order in recent decades, that liberal order has benefited from having a peaceful, gradually expanding EU at its core. If Europe turns dark and vicious again, it might once more export its conflicts to the world. On the day that the United States retreats across the Atlantic, it will be placing far more than the future of Europe at risk. ■

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REVIEW

Revisiting Habermas

The German philosopher is starting to outlive his liberal legacy.

By Jan-Werner Müller

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Illustration by RICCARDO VECCHIO

It is hard to convey to people outside Germany the extraordinary role Jürgen Habermas has played in the country. To be sure, his name inevitably appears on the more or less silly lists of world's most influential philosophers. But there are no other instances of a public intellectual having been important in every major debate—in fact, often having started such debates—over six decades.

A new book by Berlin-based cultural historian Philipp Felsch, translated from German simply as *The Philosopher* with the clever subtitle *Habermas and Us*, argues that Habermas has always been perfectly in sync with different eras of postwar German political culture. This is a remarkable achievement for someone of his longevity: Habermas turns 95 this year. As Felsch observes, had Michel Foucault lived that long, he could have commented on Donald Trump's presidency; had Hannah Arendt reached that age, she could have extended her reflections on terrorism to 9/11.

It also makes a confession on the philosopher's part at the end of the book all the more remarkable: Felsch reports that, after adverse reactions to his articles on the Russia-Ukraine war, Habermas feels, for the very first time, as if he no longer understands German public opinion. Has Habermas changed, or is the country changing, turning away from the pacificism and "post-nationalism" the philosopher has championed for decades?

HABERMAS HAS LONG BEEN A POLARIZING FIGURE. For many in the English-speaking world, this is somewhat baffling, for they think they know him as the philosopher of successful communication and even consensus; they probably also think of him as the author of lengthy, hard-to-comprehend theoretical works.

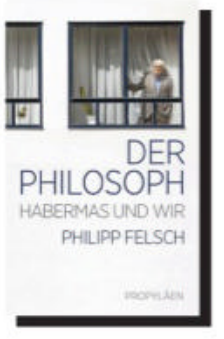
Ironically, it's Habermas's gift as a writer that often makes it difficult to translate his ideas. Habermas was a freelance journalist before he became an academic, and his public interventions—always in writing, never on TV or radio—are stylistically brilliant polemics rich in metaphors. The academic volumes can be hard to translate precisely because suggestive metaphors also do philosophical work.

Among them is a book originally published in 1962 that, to this day, has sold the most copies of all of Habermas's works. It has an unwieldy title—*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*—but its main thesis appears straightforward: Democracy is not just about free and fair elections; it also crucially requires open processes of forming public opinion. In Habermas's stylized account, the 18th century had seen an increasing number of bourgeois readers come together freely to discuss novels in salons and coffeehouses. Eventually, discussions turned to political questions. Whereas monarchs had presented themselves before the people, citizens (at least male and propertied ones) now started to expect states to represent their views and act for them.

It is often forgotten that Habermas's book tells a story of decline and fall: Capitalism, with its increasing reliance on manipulative advertising techniques, and the rise of a complex administrative state had destroyed a free and open public sphere. Yet, in retrospect, the 1960s would appear to be a golden age of mass media, a point Habermas conceded in a 2022 essay on "the novel transformation of the public sphere." There, he contrasted our era of supposed "filter bubbles" and "post-truth" with a world characterized by widely respected and economically successful newspapers as well as TV news, around which entire nations could congregate each evening.

As Felsch notes, the book as well as Habermas's subsequent more philosophical work on communication contained just the right kind of message for a postwar age when West Germans, emerging from the Nazi dictatorship and older traditions of obedience to state authority, began learning how to discuss freely. Like many on the left, Habermas experienced the atmosphere of the early Federal Republic as stultifying: Konrad Adenauer, the rabidly anti-communist chancellor, promised "no experiments," tacitly incorporated former Nazis into the new state, and had little tolerance for a critical press—let alone critical intellectuals.

Today, the country is characterized by an unusually large number of talk shows on evening TV that receive extensive



Der Philosoph: Habermas und wir

PHILIPP FELSCH,
PROPYLÄEN VERLAG,
256 PP., €24,
FEBRUARY 2024

Jürgen Habermas in the auditorium of the philosophical faculty of Frankfurt University in 1969.

MAX SCHELER/SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG

newspaper commentary the next morning, by public discussion forums that are often subsidized by the state, and by newspapers devoting many columns to weekslong debates among professors. Habermas, contrary to the cliché of a rationalist philosopher of deliberation who would ideally like to make parliaments into seminar rooms, has explicitly called for a public sphere that is "wild" and in which all kinds of views can be voiced. At the same time, such forums are meant to function like "sewage treatment plants," filtering out false information as well as plainly anti-democratic views.

Habermas's endorsement of liberal democratic procedures—often derided by Marxists as merely "formal democracy"—made him hostile to postwar intellectual trends in France, which he suspected of promoting irrationalism and an aestheticized politics that lacked all normative standards. Felsch recounts Habermas and Foucault dining together in Paris in an "icy atmosphere" in the early 1980s. Apparently, the only real common topic of conversation was German films: Habermas, Felsch tells us, professed his preference for Alexander Kluge's movies dealing with the German past in a reliably pedagogical manner, while Foucault liked Werner Herzog's celebration of "ecstatic truth" in his explorations of Africa and Latin America, with the evidently irrational Klaus Kinski in the lead.

Rather than being a bureaucrat of pure reason pedantically administering legacies of the Enlightenment, Habermas is best understood as a thoroughly political animal.

It is not an accident that Habermas has always been careful not to cultivate anything like a traditional German *Geniekult*, or cult of the towering genius—nor that he sometimes serves as Exhibit A for French observers who claim that, compared with Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, contemporary German philosophy has become thoroughly boring, dominated by what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze called "bureaucrats of pure reason."

But Felsch, who interviewed the philosopher twice in his modernist bungalow in Bavaria, gets Habermas to reveal something surprising: Every single one of his newspaper articles, Habermas claims, was written out of anger. Indeed, rather than being a bureaucrat of pure reason pedantically administering legacies of the Enlightenment, Habermas is best understood as a thoroughly political animal—even as a somewhat impulsive man, but with reliable left-liberal political instincts. Beyond a general commitment to dialogue and cooperation, his political vision entails an evolution beyond inherited ideas of ethnic nationalism and toward a cosmopolitan international legal order, each aspect of which is now increasingly under threat.

In the early 1980s, his political impulses led him to a subject he had previously doubted was "capable of theory": history. In 1986, in a polemical piece that provoked one of the most important debates in postwar Germany, he accused four historians of trying to "normalize" the German past—as well as the German present. It was crucial, he wrote, to resist any relativization of the Holocaust by conservatives who supposedly thought the Federal Republic should adopt something like a "normal" nationalism. Instead, he suggested, Germans might have learned something special from their uniquely problematic past by adopting what Habermas termed "constitutional patriotism." Rather than being proud of cultural

traditions and heroic deeds by great national heroes, Germans had learned to take a critical stance vis-à-vis history, from the vantage point of universal principles enshrined in a liberal democratic constitution.

This patriotism was often dismissed by conservatives as fit merely for seminar rooms: too abstract and, with a particularly inappropriate metaphor, too "bloodless." Yet there is little doubt that Habermas emerged as the victor in what came to be known as the *Historikerstreit*, or historians' dispute, and that his suggestion of a "post-national political culture" was in fact, if not in name, adopted by ever more German politicians. In the end, Habermas and Adenauer had converged on the same goal: a Germany firmly anchored in the West, except that Habermas began to see it as a possible *avant-garde* in the move toward a more cosmopolitan future.

That achievement was put into doubt by the biggest shock to Habermas's political world before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine: the entirely unexpected unification of East and West Germany, overseen by Helmut Kohl, a trained historian who, according to Habermas, had been central to attempts at "normalizing" the past. Habermas had been skeptical of unification as long ago as the 1950s, when Social Democrats pushed for overcoming the Cold War division. In 1989, the push for re-creating the German nation-state appeared likely to replace the hard-won achievement of constitutional patriotism with ethnic nationalism.

WHEN THE BERLIN WALL FELL, Habermas confessed that he simply felt no "relationship" with the East. According to what many saw as a patronizing stance, he claimed the revolutions in Central Europe had not created any novel political ideas but were simply about "catching up" with the West. He was also concerned that Central European nation-states, with their heightened sensitivity about newly regained sovereignty, might weaken the imperative to deepen a cosmopolitan order.

Subsequently, Habermas became a fervent supporter of European integration. In the late 1970s, he was still saying he was "not a fan of Europe," since what was then called the European Economic Community had been initiated by Christian Democrats such as Adenauer and operated mostly as a common market. But the European Union became a kind of political life insurance policy for those anxious about any post-Cold War resurgence of German nationalism. To the extent that Europe would become a polity, it seemed reasonable to think that the community, with its variety of national cultures, would have to be one held together by abstract political principles—a European constitutional patriotism of sorts. In the early 2000s, Habermas, together with then-Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer of the German Greens, campaigned for a European constitution—an effort that turned out to be a failure.

Habermas also came to think that Europe's identity could

If Habermas's legacy is indeed slipping away, it has less to do with the way Habermas has changed than the way the world around him has.

be defined by its commitment to international law—and as a counterweight in that way to a United States that, after 9/11, appeared to lose its normative bearings. In 2003, he co-wrote a passionate appeal for European unity with Jacques Derrida, an erstwhile philosophical adversary whom Habermas suspected of irrationalism and conservative tendencies, like so many French theorists. Europe was to define itself as law-abiding and humane, on account of its welfare states—in opposition to George W. Bush's America breaking through the shackles of international law. The hubris of U.S. neoconservatives proved a personal disappointment for an intellectual who had formative stints in the United States ever since first being welcomed to New York by Arendt.

Another central part of Habermas's proposed European identity was a commitment to pacifism. Felsch argues convincingly that Habermas has remained remarkably consistent in his pacifist instincts: as an opponent of rearming the Bundeswehr in the 1950s, as a critic of the Vietnam War in the '60s, and as an advocate for those blockading sites where nuclear-capable missiles had been stationed in the early 1980s. (Habermas had been the first prominent theorist to justify civil disobedience in a country where law-breaking in the name of moral principles seemed deeply suspect.)

At the same time, Felsch reminds us that Habermas justified all of Germany's crucial foreign-policy decisions of the post-unification period: its support for the Gulf War, its participation in the intervention in Kosovo, the refusal of the Social Democratic-Green government to join the United States' "coalition of the willing" in 2002. For Habermas, a war was justifiable as long as it foreshadowed a cosmopolitan legal order, which left plenty of room for interpretation. (That seemed at least a somewhat plausible account for military action authorized by the United Nations; it was a much harder case to make for NATO's bombing of Belgrade in 1999.)

But the room for interpretation in Habermas's framework seems not to be able to accommodate the ways that war in Ukraine is now changing political culture in Germany and Europe. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Habermas wrote in the center-left *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in support of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's cautious approach to supplying military aid. Habermas had always been close to Scholz's Social Democratic Party; its leaders sought his advice, though

he would on occasion also pressure them to rethink what he regarded as mistaken policies, such as the diktat of austerity during the European debt crisis. And there had long been a connection between certain factions of the party and the philosopher in their shared affinity for anti-militarism.

Yet Habermas's call for negotiations with Moscow in 2023 was widely attacked, including by some on the left. Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrii Melnyk tweeted that his interventions constituted a "disgrace for German philosophy." Germany, like much of Europe, had arrived at a new political imperative prompted by *Zeitenwende*—Scholz's phrase for the major turning point in history marked by a recommitment to military self-defense. For Habermas, who has always argued that politics should err on the side of seeking peace and mutual understanding, this turn has been impossible to support. By the book's end, Habermas confesses to Felsch that he no longer understands the reactions of the German public.

CRITICS OF HABERMAS OFTEN CLAIM that he has given up his long-standing commitment to a radical democratic and socialist agenda. He supposedly was acting merely as an EU cheerleader; he had let go of any Marxist legacy, had given up on democratizing the economy, and, maybe most damning, was becoming what Germans call *staatstragend*: a pillar of the political establishment. When he received one of the country's most prestigious cultural prizes in 2001, much of the federal cabinet was in attendance.

But Felsch suggests that if Habermas's legacy is indeed slipping away, it has less to do with the way Habermas has changed than the way the world around him has. Habermas's fears of a more nationalist Germany appear confirmed with a rising far right that flaunts its historical revisionism in ways unimaginable after the Historikerstreit. The EU is hardly a paragon of post-nationalism, its aspirations to be a global "normative power" in shambles—it cannot even get its act together in stopping far-right leaders such as Hungary's Viktor Orban from undermining liberal democracy. The hopes for a cosmopolitan legal order have been dashed in a new age of great-power rivalries. To be sure, Habermas had never committed to anything remotely resembling an end-of-history thesis, but his basic impulse that a world of *freundliches Zusammenleben*—friendly coexistence—was a realistic utopia has certainly been called into question.

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that Habermas's thought only made sense in the "safe space" of bygone West Germany. The case for something like constitutional patriotism is, if anything, more urgent in the face of a resurgent hard right. The EU is failing in all sorts of ways, but its structures remain available for politically and morally more ambitious undertakings. (Evidently, Habermas has failed to persuade German leaders to take up French President Emmanuel Macron's invitation to build a sovereign Europe.) As disillusioned as Habermas is with the United States—long the tacit guarantor of his worldview, one is tempted to say—the best of its universalist founding ideals have hardly been invalidated.

Habermas was never like certain naive liberals of the '90s: History does not simply prove ideas right or wrong; rather, history is an ongoing fight in the wilderness of the public sphere. The task for intellectuals is not to be either optimistic or pessimistic, which was the way for old-style anti-modern thinkers in Germany to prove depth. Instead, it is to be and to stay irritable. ■

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Habermas at his home in Starnberg, Germany, in August 1981.

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What Made the China Miracle?

Challenging conventional wisdom about Beijing's rise.

By Howard W. French

What should one make of China—of its extraordinary rise, its enormous global ambitions, and its future—now that the breathtaking first phase of its ascendance seems to have ended and forces of gravity linked to its aging population and increasingly outdated economic and political models are taking over? There are few more important questions in today's world and few, moreover, that are harder to answer.

One of the most impressive attempts to address these questions that I've come across in years is a slim new book that isn't the product, as one might expect, of an economist, a historian, or a political scientist. This work, *China's Age of Abundance: Origins, Ascendance, and Aftermath*, is of course informed by all of these fields but is written by Wang Feng, a Chinese-born sociologist at the University of California, Irvine.

Illustration by EOIN RYAN

Young people gather for a birthday picnic at the Children's Palace in Shanghai in May 1987.

JEAN-MARC CHARLES/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Reading Wang's new book was humbling for me. I lived in China during the booming first decade of this century, covering it for the *New York Times*, and I've continued to visit the country, write books about it, and read innumerable works on its affairs, often reviewing them. Yet China's *Age of Abundance* astounded me—not least for this argument, made indirectly in the book but stated squarely in a recent public talk that Wang gave at my university, Columbia: China's economic takeoff since Mao Zedong died in 1976 is an event of human importance that deserves consideration alongside the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution as one of the most impactful phenomena of the past millennium.

In light of the evidence that Wang, who was recently awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, marshals for this argument, I am a little embarrassed not just for myself but also for my own profession that this frame hasn't taken hold in the public imagination before. How many other events have affected for the better such a large swath of humanity? Throughout its recent period of reform, which began in 1978, China accounted for roughly one-fifth of the world's population. And when one considers the speed of the country's ascent, including a 25-fold increase in per capita income, even those Western historical parallels begin to look inadequate.

DRAWING ON HIS SCHOLARLY ROOTS in sociology, Wang takes readers far beyond the questionable accuracy and abstractions inherent to the measurement of GDP to deliver much more tangible benchmarks on the impact of China's economic rise on ordinary people's lives, and they are breathtaking.

Early in his book, Wang tells the story of an unnamed child who one suspects might be the author himself. In 1972, feeling hungry, this boy precipitated a mini family crisis by snatching a boiled egg and swallowing it before his screaming grandmother could catch him. Later, the child learned that the egg had been procured as a nutritional supplement, prescribed amid dire national scarcity, for his father, who was suffering from liver disease. Back then, when roughly 80 percent of its population was occupied in agriculture, China only managed to produce less than one egg per person each week to feed its citizens.

Wang documents the exploding supply of one staple after another to illustrate just how tough conditions were early in his lifetime and how dramatically the situation has reversed since then, with most of the country long since delivered into abundance or even, as he writes, commonplace gluttony. With eggs, that began with a 50 percent increase in consumption between 1978 and 1983 and another threefold increase by 1988, followed by subsequent increases. The story was much the same for other major foodstuffs. According to data Wang presents, from 1978 to 1983, per capita pork consumption rose by 61 percent, vegetable oil by 151 percent, and poultry by 268 percent, with each (and pretty much all other food production) continuing to rise sharply thereafter.

This abundance had a clear impact on the average height of Chinese people, a rough proxy for overall health. Life expectancy, which had already risen substantially during the Maoist period, continued to grow as China quickly became richer. "In just 20 years, children in China grew at a historic pace," Wang writes. "At age 7, upon entering primary school, a boy in urban China was 5.2 cm taller in 2002 than in 1992, and a girl was 5.7 cm taller. Height increases among the less well-off rural children were even more notable."

In 1981, Wang writes, the average Chinese person bought one pair of cheap cotton shoes, along with 1.3 pairs of socks and one pair of underwear. By 2000, though, China was exporting 1.56 billion pairs of shoes, more than half of them leather; five years later, that figure had reached 2.48 billion,

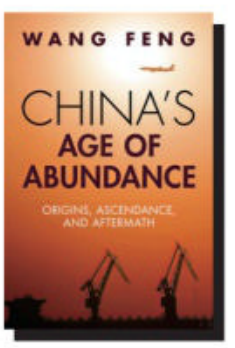
and China was well on its way to becoming the world's biggest clothing manufacturer.

Nowadays, nearly everyone, expert and layman, is aware that China is the globe's dominant manufacturing power. Think, though, about some less familiar metrics for the country's rise: At the end of the 1980s, Wang writes, China had about 620,000 miles of roads but hardly any highways. By 2000, it had built 10,100 miles of highway. Two decades later, China boasted a 100,000-mile highway network. Today, these freeways course with electric vehicles, including those made by the Chinese company BYD, which has traded off the title of the world's largest EV manufacturer with Tesla over the past year. Today, as the United States and other Western nations seek to protect themselves from cheap (and often heavily subsidized) Chinese goods such as EVs, they warn of a second "China shock."

The Beijing subway, one of many new urban transportation systems in the country, likewise grew more in the 2010s than the London Underground had in 150 years. During the first decade of this century—the peak period of growth and transformation in China's history—I witnessed the utter remaking of one of the world's biggest cities, Shanghai. Week after week, for a book I produced, I photographed the old neighborhoods with long-established residents that were razed and converted with breathtaking speed into new districts full of glimmering high-rises.

In 1980, Wang writes, when annual air passenger traffic barely reached 3.5 million flights for a population of nearly 1 billion, most Chinese people had never seen an airplane. By 1990, total air trips had risen to 16.6 million. Air travel continued to multiply, and by 2017, Chinese passengers took 552 million trips by air. One consequence of this was the parallel explosion in overseas travel: In the 1990s, when I visited China for the first time, traveling abroad was still extremely rare; in 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese people undertook 162 million trips overseas for private reasons.

Wang believes that this widespread travel contributed to the opening of the Chinese mind, which he sees as even more crucial to the country's extraordinary growth and attendant social transformation than any conventional economic policy measure.



China's Age of Abundance: Origins, Ascendance, and Aftermath

WANG FENG, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 272 PP., $34.99 (PB.), APRIL 2024

China's economic takeoff since Mao Zedong died is an event of human importance that deserves consideration alongside the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution.

The violent and politically turbulent Mao era was marked by stifling political and social conformity, as British journalist Tania Branigan details at length in another impressive recent book on China, *Red Memory: The Afterlives of China's Cultural Revolution*. Branigan quotes Chinese philosopher Xu Youyu, who has described the China of those years as a nation controlled by one mind, Mao's. A common quip about that era, cited by Branigan, is that there were only eight approved operas for a country of 800 million people because of Maoism's suffocating ideological controls on the arts.

After Mao's death, though, education and the circulation of ideas took off. Wang writes that the number of books published annually increased from under 13,000 in 1977 to about 32,000 in 1982 and then more than doubled again by 1990. School enrollment also exploded. Senior high school enrollment, Wang writes, increased more than 300 percent between 1995 and 2010, with vocational education also growing fast. Most impressive, though, were China's achievements in higher education. In just a decade, between 1995 and 2005, annual enrollment in colleges and universities increased fivefold, reaching 5 million. At the turn of the century, only 1 in 50 college-aged Chinese people were enrolled in higher education. By 2020, that figure had risen to more than half.

China had come a long way from the time when, as one source told Branigan, the country produced so many billions of small aluminum lapel pins bearing Mao's image that the amount of metal used to make them would have sufficed to manufacture 40,000 aircraft instead.

THE TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS FOR CHINA'S BREAKOUT from poverty and underdevelopment have never been fully satisfying and sometimes border on intellectual laziness. (I say this as someone who has drawn on elements of them myself.) Some analysts say that in outperforming other major economies since the 1980s, China is merely returning to its longer-term historical trajectory and regaining the leading position in the world economy that it had held for much of the last millennium, until the early 19th century. To stop there, though, means to believe in teleology, or determinism, which to me (and most historians) doesn't explain much at all.

Another popular explanation holds that after Mao, the Chinese Communist Party stopped making so many egregious mistakes and simply got out of the way of economic progress. A popular variant of this thesis credits famous government reforms, including the creation of special economic zones, or SEZs, such as in the southern city of Shenzhen. After Deng Xiaoping designated Shenzhen an SEZ in 1980, as it has been endlessly recounted, the unremarkable fishing village went on to become one of China's largest and richest cities, a metropolis that increasingly casts a shadow over nearby Hong Kong. Proponents of this theory also cite other signal reforms, first undertaken in the early 1980s, that involved attracting foreign investments and generating exports.

Many other analyses have emphasized China's sheer historical good fortune. Around 1980, China was embarking on a demographic dividend—simply put, a youth bulge—just as Western corporations were looking to base manufacturing operations in cheaper places overseas. By being a first mover among developing countries in embracing outsourced industries such as textiles, plastics, and simple assembly, China became the biggest beneficiary of this new trend of globalization. And China's dominance, whether by design or not, made it enormously difficult for any would-be emulators to hoist themselves up the rungs of the same development ladder in its wake.

To be sure, some of these explanations have elements of truth. But to help understand why they are all overly facile, if not altogether wrong, Wang demonstrates just how hard it was to foresee the extent of China's successes early in the reform era. He does so in part by sharing the projections of many of the world's leading economists in 2004. That year, the *Wall Street Journal* asked 12 Nobel laureates in economics whether they thought the United States, the European Union, or China would boast the world's largest economy 75 years later, in 2079. By then, China had already been booming for more than two decades, but only half of the economists named it as the winner. The others either equivocated or doubted that China could close the gap with the West.

As it happens, judging by purchasing power parity, a measurement of wealth that reflects what a unit of national currency can buy in a given country, China became the world's largest economy a mere 12 years after the survey. Going by the more widely cited but arguably less accurate nominal GDP, China today still ranks second behind the United States—but with an economy that's about 64 percent of the size of the U.S. economy, it has dramatically closed the gap. By comparison, the Soviet Union's economy peaked at around 57 percent of the U.S. economy in the mid-1970s.

Even China's own leaders—who often take credit for "lifting" hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, a characterization the World Bank and many journalists naively echo—have persistently underestimated their country's economic performance and in doing so betrayed little understanding of its phenomenal growth. This record of lowball misjudgments began, but by no means concluded, with the leader who is almost universally credited with engineering China's rise, Deng himself.

In 1979, Deng speculated that with some difficulty, China could achieve a per capita income of $1,000 by the end of the century; it would take another 30 to 50 years, he believed, for China to approach the ranks of a developed country. By 1982, though, he was already publicly worrying that his target for 2000 was too high. And this is no idle historical fact: Inflation nearly ran out of control in China later in that decade and became a leading source of the ferment that led to the 1989 Tiananmen protests and their deadly suppression.

At the age of 87 in 1992, Deng once again attempted to gaze into the future. By 2049, the centennial of the founding of the People's Republic of China, he said, his nation could enter the ranks of middle-income countries, which would constitute a remarkable achievement. Instead of a 57-year wait, as Wang notes dryly, Deng, who died five years later, lived to see this goal attained. From 1980 to 1997, China's per capita income had more than quadrupled.

The tendency of China's leaders to underestimate the forces of change at play in powering the country's economic rise long survived Deng. For example, in 1995, Beijing announced a goal to double GDP between 2000 and 2010. Yet, in that decade, Wang writes, "following China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 and despite the worst global financial crisis in seven decades, the country grew its economy by more than 270 percent, from $2.77 trillion to $7.55 trillion. Per capita income rose 2.57 times from $2,194 to $5,647 and 29 percent above the goal." China's leaders had such a hard time catching up with reality because it was not their policies that were most responsible for the change in national fortunes. Beijing, Wang argues, never had a coherent road map for reaching the kind of economic success it attained.

SO, WHAT DOES EXPLAIN CHINA'S PHENOMENAL SUCCESS? Here is where Wang's work becomes most valuable. Rather than emphasizing any single factor, *China's Age of Abundance*

Even China's own leaders have persistently underestimated their country's economic performance and in doing so betrayed little understanding of its phenomenal growth.

Villagers parade a dragon through a tunnel under a highway in the fields near Gutian village in China's eastern Fujian province on Feb. 11, 2017.

JOHANNES EISELE/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

lays out a series of interlocking causes that contributed in complex and unanticipated ways to the country's takeoff.

China's well-known experiments in agriculture, which freed peasants from the obligation to produce only for rural communes, have long been trotted out as a key reform. To this, Wang adds another decisive change that has received far less attention: a formidable wave of early industrialization in the countryside. In its first phase, Wang writes, industrialization "took off in situ." Rather than moving to cities, farmers began to work as industrial laborers in their villages. "By the mid-1990s, 40 percent of China's rural labor force was producing industrial goods in the Chinese countryside," he writes. "In 1995, China's rural laborers generated *more than half of all China's industrial output*." In 1987, Deng revealed his surprise over this to a visitor from Yugoslavia: "In the rural reforms our greatest success—and it is one we had by no means anticipated—has been the emergence of a large number of enterprises run by villages and townships. They were like a new force that just came into being spontaneously."

It was only in the second half of the 1990s, well after the onset of rural industrialization, that an exodus to China's cities took off in earnest. Historically, urbanization has been a key feature of many economic takeoffs, including that of Japan and, much earlier, of the United States. In China, though, urbanization had two special features. Because so many newcomers to cities had industrial experience, they were much better prepared to step directly into factory jobs. Secondly, because China enforces a two-track social structure under the *hukou* (household registration) system—a kind of soft-apartheid that favors long-standing urban residents—the new industrial workers migrating from the countryside could be given lower wages and far less generous social benefits than preexisting city dwellers. Moreover, factory workers enjoyed few protections from labor unions, which are toothless and government-controlled.

What has just been described fits with the theory that China simply had a vast pool of cheap labor during its takeoff period. But Wang rightly notes that this greatly oversimplifies things. It is undeniable that the hukou system discriminates against people who are not from rich metropolises. But urban newcomers nonetheless arrived with special attributes that were crucial in fueling the country's fast growth: They boasted high literacy rates and generally good health.

These were both tangible fruits of the emphasis on social equality during the otherwise punishing Mao years. For Wang, this means that China's urban newcomers were not just a cheap source of labor. They were also capable of performing complex tasks—a factor he believes was as important as their cost. This helps explain how China had around 3 million people, most of them urban newcomers, working for Apple, a company making advanced products, and its manufacturing partners in the late 2010s.

None of these transformations were initiated by the state. "Instead, they were all born out of the strong desires of the population, who were desperate and determined to improve their lives," Wang writes. "Such grassroot initiatives were often resisted by the government at first, before being accepted and embraced by them." It was the Chinese people, and not their leaders, he argues time and time again, that produced the "China miracle."

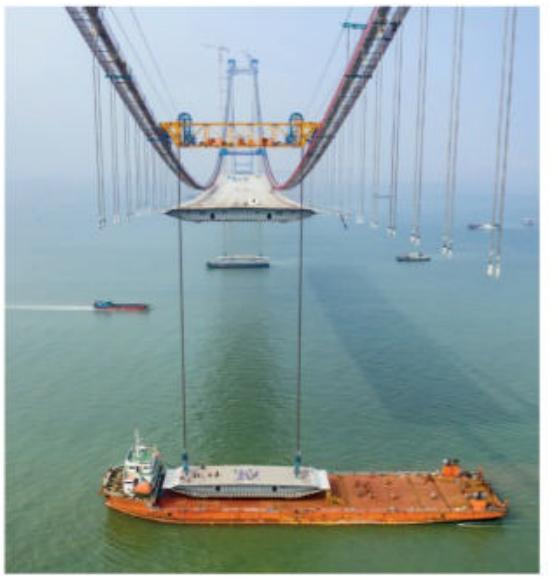
Two other factors in China's rise, which I find particularly interesting, involve history and culture. Wang argues persuasively that the violence and disarray of the Cultural Revolution played a powerful role in driving fast growth in the years that came after 1976. "At the close of this tumultuous decade, ending with Mao's death, the Chinese people were profoundly disoriented, disappointed, and utterly exhausted," Wang writes. "They yearned for change, for a life with greater material prosperity, social stability, and human decency." Deng, we learn, seems to have loosely agreed. Wang quotes

him as saying that the Cultural Revolution "looked like a bad thing. But ultimately it was a good thing. It made people think, to realize the problems we had. We could implement the policies in the 1970s and 1980s exactly because we learned the lessons from [that era]."

The final piece of Wang's explanatory puzzle involves an openness to new ideas, debate, and varied discourse, which flourished in relative terms in China's reform period. Wang writes that China's economic growth peaked in 2007, and its openness and tolerance peaked the following decade. Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, both growth and intellectual freedoms have been in sharp decline.

THE OVERWHELMING RESURGENCE OF THE PARTY-STATE as the driving force in Chinese society, along with the premature curtailment of a kind of Chinese enlightenment, does not bode well for the country's future. The relatively brief portions of Wang's book that look to the coming decades make clear that China will face strong headwinds. This does not amount to a prediction of collapse or decline. But Wang believes that high growth rates are a thing of the past. One of the most important headwinds falls directly under Wang's field of expertise: demographics. There will be no reversing the monumental trend toward population decline. According to the median projection of the United Nations Population Division, by 2100, China's population, which is roughly 1.4 billion today, will have shrunk to less than 800 million.

The accelerated aging of the population will bring staggering social costs related to retirement, chronic illness, and elder care. By 2030, Wang projects, the Chinese government will need to spend nearly half of all its revenue on education, health care, and pensions, assuming no increase in the generosity of these programs. If, say, China wanted to provide a level of health care and pension support commensurate with the 2009 average of countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, it would have to spend two-thirds of all government revenue just for these services by 2030 and more than 100 percent by 2050. As China's recent decision to dramatically raise passenger fares for its enormous high-speed rail networks foretells, even maintenance costs for new transportation infrastructure could become a major financial liability, as the user base shrinks along with the population.



A steel box girder is hoisted at the construction site of Lingdingyang Bridge in Shenzhen on Feb. 22, 2023.

QIU XINSHENG/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

> The overwhelming resurgence of the party-state as the driving force in Chinese society, along with the premature curtailment of a kind of Chinese enlightenment, does not bode well for the country's future.

This demographic future and its harsh consequences—which are topics I have written about for years—imply daunting political decisions that will sorely test a starkly undemocratic system that withholds information from the public and shields it from meaningful debate.

Recently, Chinese students on my campus questioned me with wonderment about the era when I lived in China, particularly its relative freedoms of expression and association that are now almost unimaginable. With the internet (even a heavily policed one such as China's), broad access to higher education, and international travel, there can never be a return to a situation where one leader utterly dominates the minds of a nation so large, as Mao once did. But this has not prevented Xi from trying. In the past, China's leaders were slow to grasp the potential of their society and its growth. Now, if anything, Wang seems to think they are severely underestimating the downside of the resurgence of a domineering state.

"Having achieved a level of material abundance unimaginable merely a generation ago, China has traveled through an age of abundance and entered a new phase of complacence," he concludes. "In the absence of legal-rational authority, state power bureaucratization with its opaque policy setting will lead to stagnation, a recurrent theme throughout Chinese history. Nearly a half-century after bidding farewell to the godlike leader Mao, the country seems to be once again willing to put up with another era of charismatic authority." ■

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A show poster for *Fallout*.

The Apocalypse, Now

An adaptation of the dystopian game *Fallout*.

By Syrus Solo Jin

The year is 2077. Resources are scarce, and global inequality is at an all-time high. Long-simmering tensions between the United States and China erupt into active warfare when Chinese paratroopers land in Alaska to seize its oil reserves and the United States, in return, launches a counteroffensive into the Chinese mainland. Under the looming threat of nuclear escalation, a few lucky citizens enter underground shelters, bracing for the fallout. There's a flash on the horizon, as what was once just a war spirals into the Great War—a nuclear apocalypse.

This is the premise of *Fallout*, one of the most popular video game series of the past 30 years. Set in a post-apocalyptic United States, the *Fallout* universe is equal parts absurd, philosophical, and alarmingly realistic. Players are just as likely to have conversations about Hegelian dialectics as they are to encounter giant robots satirically devoted to squashing communism.

Now, the beloved series is getting the silver screen treatment. The television

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

adaptation of *Fallout*, released on Prime Video on April 10, has been an instant success—Amazon's most watched U.S. television premiere of all time.

The show follows a path familiar to those who played the games: A protagonist ventures out into the blasted Wasteland of the future and must navigate the perils of vicious mutated bears, radiation exposure, and the messy politics of survivor factions warring for power. However, it makes one major, telling departure, providing a new answer to the question of who to blame for starting nuclear Armageddon. In doing so, it puts forth an incisive argument about the growing disharmony between U.S. politics and what Americans actually believe could threaten their way of life. (Warning: Major spoilers ahead.)

Prime Video's *Fallout* adaptation is mostly set two centuries after the Great War, in the year 2296. We follow Lucy (Ella Purnell), a kindhearted, resilient young woman who has spent her entire life living in a vault, one of many massive subterranean fallout shelters built under a government contract by the powerful company Vault-Tec that enabled human civilization to survive the Great War.

Lucy lives in the seemingly idyllic Vault 33 with a small, meritocratic community of residents clad in matching blue jumpsuits. But when her father is kidnapped by mysterious intruders from the surface, she chooses to leave the vault and search for him among the ruins of what was once California. What she finds, however, is a Wasteland dotted with struggling communities where pure water is a precious commodity and human life is cheap.

It is in this world where viewers meet the Ghoul (Walton Goggins), a ruthless bounty hunter who survived the apocalypse but has a tortured form of immortality due to radiation exposure. He now roams the Wasteland, hunting for clues about the fate of his family. Eventually, however, it is revealed that the Ghoul was once known as Cooper Howard, an actor who starred in Western movies. Through his flashbacks, we are provided the most sustained look in the entire *Fallout* series of what life was like before the bombs were dropped.

The United States of the 2070s is in many ways a retro-futurist fusion with the 1950s. Housewives have jet-powered helper robots yet take photos of their children with flashbulb cameras. Soldiers drive vintage Chevy pickups yet are equipped with advanced armor that grants them super strength. The United States is a racially diverse society, its social problems instead defined by income inequality and the loss of individual freedom in the face of a Fordist-like garrison state, yet McCarthyist posters warning of Communist infiltration abound.

The latest installation in the series makes clear that the end of the world is a product of the worst aspects of ourselves, not from some malevolent anti-American force.

In *Fallout* canon, "Communist" has always been a reference to China, the unmistakable primary antagonist of the United States. There is plenty of evidence for this. A resource war between the two countries is what eventually precipitates nuclear exchange. In two of the more recent games in the series, the player encounters human and material leftovers of this conflict. In *Fallout 4*, the player meets a surviving Chinese submarine captain who describes carrying out orders to nuke Boston. In *Fallout 76*, rusty Chinese drones are among the first hostile characters the player meets. (Although a creator of the original 1997 *Fallout* game did, decades later, eventually claim that China was the "first" to drop the bombs, none of the games intend to point a finger at who caused the end of the world.) The conflict between China and the United States is ultimately background noise, an accepted context for a narrative experience that, if anything, positions both governments as culpable for its horrors.

Yet in the television adaptation, the showrunners have offered up a clear culprit for the apocalypse—and it's not China. As Howard's storyline carries the viewer through the prewar United States, the show is keen to highlight the Red Scare sweeping his Hollywood circles and to linger on fleeting news clips about faltering peace negotiations. But unlike the video games, the United States' enemy in this war is never identified beyond terms like "Communists" and "the Reds." The audience never hears "China" once in the show's eight hourlong episodes.

After a conversation with a blacklisted former costar, Charles Whiteknife (Dallas Goldtooth), Howard eventually discovers a conspiracy that reveals the true power pulling the strings. Vault-Tec, a gluttonous partner of a contract state, had taken advantage of the U.S. government's privatization of its core function—ensuring the survival of its citizenry—and realized its monopoly over fallout shelters would be most lucrative if there were nowhere else to live. As Whiteknife put it, they have a "fiduciary responsibility to keep the war going." Knowing this, not only did Vault-Tec actively stop research that could have alleviated the energy shortages driving the world to war in the first place, but it also planned to drop the bomb itself to ensure its return on investment.

In the video game series, Vault-Tec was merely one of many unscrupulous companies that operated prior to the apocalypse, occupying a supporting antagonistic role. But now, the television version of *Fallout* pins the blame for

the apocalypse solely on a U.S. company—rather than on a Chinese government that presumably ordered a nuclear strike.

Given the current state of U.S.-China relations, and China's place in the *Fallout* canon up to this point, the move is a little confusing. In a world beset by anarchy and slavery, why turn Vault-Tec into the villain when it had been previously implied that governments were responsible for the apocalypse? Why completely omit China from any mention of conflict?

The cynics among us may be quick to assume that this move indicates the showrunners' desire to appeal to Chinese audiences, as is the case with many Hollywood films that have sought to access the Chinese box office. But China already blocks Prime Video, and Amazon MGM—the studio behind *Fallout*—has no known corporate links to Chinese investment. Considering that, there's reason to believe something more interesting is potentially underway, particularly given the current political climate in the United States.

Over the past decade, political rhetoric against China has become totalizing, and the 2024 U.S. presidential election is poised to become a competition of which candidate will be "tougher on China." Commentators have long noted that the U.S. discourse on China is unproductive, can limit diplomatic options for de-escalation, and may contribute to anti-Asian racism. Yet both Democrats and Republicans, especially in battleground states, continue to frame beating China as a central tenet of their foreign-policy agendas.

If both U.S. President Joe Biden's and former President Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric is to be taken at face value, Americans should theoretically be primed for a story that implicates China in the downfall of American well-being.

Instead, *Fallout*'s choice of villain may be tapping into an uncomfortable truth: Americans appear to be far less anxious about threats coming from beyond their borders than governance failures at home.

While public concerns about China have undoubtedly risen, most Americans are actually more worried about domestic issues. In its 2023 survey, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that a significant majority—81 percent of those surveyed—expressed greater concern about internal threats than external ones. Chapman University's annual Survey of American Fears found in 2023 that Americans' top fears were "corrupt government officials" and "economic/financial collapse."

Almost a decade after its hazy origins in the 2016 presidential election cycle, it seems that the political fixation on China is misplaced in the eyes of voters. Pew Research Center polling from this year found that, despite their otherwise polarized views, both Democratic- and Republican-leaning respondents agreed that making Social Security more financially sound, creating more jobs, reducing the influence of money in politics, and improving education should be among the United States' top policy priorities.

Fallout's narratives have often resonated as political critique. *Fallout 3*, released in 2008, made remnants of the U.S. government the villains of its story, explicitly describing how U.S. leaders left their citizens to die while they hid in bunkers. It was a villain appropriately reflective of its own time, amid tumbling public trust in a Bush administration that had repeatedly lied to justify the Iraq War and also appeared incapable of correcting the impending financial crisis. Amid real-life, high-profile scandals in the tech and science communities that made clear the hollowness of technocratic utopian messaging, the antagonists of 2015's *Fallout 4* were, appropriately, a secretive faction of scientists that ran experiments on residents of the Wasteland.

By choosing Vault-Tec, a rapacious corporation feasting on defense contracts, as the show's true antagonist—particularly while public perceptions of corporations are at historic lows—*Fallout* offers an acute reading of the current political moment. The latest installation in the series makes clear that the end of the world, in all its bizarre humor, is a product of the worst aspects of ourselves, not from some malevolent anti-American force. Even China, as an equal participant in the nuclear exchange that underwrites the entire premise of *Fallout*, is ultimately a distraction from the true horseman of the apocalypse: a private, unregulated capitalist body with every appalling feature of present-day U.S. corporations rolled into one.

As U.S. politicians make opposing China the foreign-policy mule to which they pin their election hopes, they will encounter a persistent, uncomfortable truth—that Americans in this decade might be more afraid of the failures of their own country than they are of the world. ■

Aaron Moten plays Maximus, a member of the Brotherhood of Steel, in *Fallout*.

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO

SYRUS SOLO JIN is a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Chicago and national fellow for the Jefferson Scholars Foundation.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Not All Rats

The rodent's reputation, revamped.

By Bronwen Everill

At Tanzania's Sokoine University of Agriculture, about 125 miles west of Dar es Salaam, there is a small memorial to Magawa, an awardee of the PDSA Gold Medal, known as the "animals' George Cross," for "life-saving devotion to duty." Magawa was a rat who worked for the Tanzania-based demining charity Apopo and was responsible for sniffing out more than 100 land mines in Cambodia. The NGO's "HeroRATs" are now expanding their remit, detecting cases of tuberculosis in samples sent from across Tanzania to Sokoine's laboratories. Magawa and his fellow African giant pouched rats clearly confound humanity's aversion to the rodents. Journalist Joe Shute uses Magawa's story to show that people who just want to eradicate rats have got it wrong. His new book, *Stowaway: The Disreputable Exploits of the Rat*, hopes to redefine the relationship between rats and people across continents and centuries.

Stowaway taps into a growing market for books that use an animal as a lens for exploring the Anthropocene—the most recent period of geological time, one marked by humanity's impact on the climate and natural ecosystems. These books, such as Leila Philip's recent *Beaverland*, can have aspects in common with

Posters released by government departments in Alberta, Canada, circa 1948.

the earlier trend in commodity histories (Mark Kurlansky's *Cod*, for instance). Human hunting, fishing, and exploitation affect where animals live and how many of them there are, but these human processes also shape what it means to be human. In *Cod* and *Beaverland*, the overexploitation of these animal populations for industrial production and international competition means that cod fishing and beaver trapping are also declining as industries in which people with specialized skills and knowledge can find work. Whole ways of life are disappearing or require interventions and protections from government agencies.

Stowaway is different, though some aspects of the genre remain, including both the occasionally wistful tone and the investigative journalist's keen eye for a compelling paradox. Shute opens with a striking provocation: that everyone has a rat story. Unlike more exotic animals that have shaped and been shaped by human history, rats, he points out, are everywhere (though, as becomes clear over the course of the book, not as prevalent as we tend to think they are). The Norway rat, or brown rat, certainly seems to be wherever humans tend to be. And this is a major component of Shute's story. Humans and rats are, in fact, very similar. Shute speculates that we may be "symbiotic"—there are plenty of indications throughout the book that the worst of rat behavior is merely a mirror for the worst of human behavior. This reflection of ourselves is, perhaps, why we find them so distasteful. But, Shute argues, we should be redirecting our distaste away from rats to the human processes that enable them.

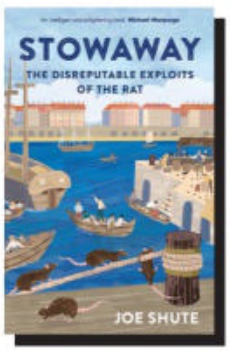
Take the bubonic plague. Responsible for the deaths of an estimated 25 million people in the 14th century, this event, which comes up frequently in the book, was historically blamed on rats traveling aboard ships from China that then snuck out at port after port across the Mediterranean and throughout Europe. We know now that it wasn't the rats but fleas they carried that brought the plague. It was nonetheless a human technology, and human trade, that made the transport of both the rats and the fleas possible. Rats, Shute implies, took the blame for human globalization and urbanization. In a 2018 study he cites, "researchers claimed the speed at which the disease spread meant human-borne fleas and lice were more likely responsible for causing so many millions of deaths."

As with the cod fisherman and the beaver trapper, Shute's narrative also alights on the dying art of rat catching. Some of the most colorful sections of the book follow rat catchers as they explain their relationships with the animals they seek to exterminate. The rat catchers, the fancy rat enthusiasts, the scientists, the obsessive rat writers: These people are the varied and strange colonies that Shute's book opens up as much as the rat colonies themselves.

Rats, however, are no cute, weird, trapped-to-near-extinction

Shute opens with a striking provocation: that everyone has a rat story.

PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF ALBERTA



Stowaway: The Disreputable Exploits of the Rat

JOE SHUTE, BLOOMSBURY PUBLISHING, 272 PP., $26, JUNE 2024

beavers. They are not the once abundant, now endangered cod. Rats follow human habitation. Shute argues that one reason for their proliferation in cities and farms is that, in those areas, humans have wiped out or pushed away their natural predators. Humanity offers an unusual protection for rats by becoming the apex predator itself—which means that humans alone are responsible for both the spread of rats and their control. Shute argues that the "intelligence, adaptability and willingness to work to our benefit" make the rat a great partner, as the example of Magawa shows. "The main hurdle" to the development of this partnership, Shute writes, "is human prejudice."

This sounds straightforward enough. Humanity surely has a painful track record in allowing prejudice—particularly against other humans—to impede progress. And Shute has plenty of ready proof that rats are not straightforwardly the nightmarish animal that Winston faces in George Orwell's *1984* or that terrorizes Indiana Jones in the catacombs below Venice or that die ominously on the streets of Oran in Albert Camus's *The Plague*. The life and death of Shute's own fancy rats, Molly and Ermintrude, form a domestic narrative arc to his book. The black rats of Britain may only exist in a few remaining colonies. And in Alberta, Canada, rats have been entirely and purposefully wiped out.

Despite these efforts to redeem the rats' reputation, the community around Sokoine in Morogoro, Tanzania, provides more than enough evidence for understanding the "human prejudice" that faces rats. While they may not have been the cause of the bubonic plague, rats "are responsible for causing more than 400 million infections in people each year spread through bites, the fleas they transport, urine and their breath," Shute writes. The problem, he explains, "is getting worse" as cities grow. One Tanzanian man told Shute that his wife had been diagnosed with typhus because of the rats that burrow into their houses, bite their children, and steal their food. One scientist, a self-described "lover of rats," still argued that if "we spent the same amount of money on rodent control as malaria control it would have a hundred times the impact on people's lives."

In Edmonton, Alberta's capital, Shute finds his most fitting rat-human metaphor. Right after World War II, Alberta declared war on the rat. The population of rats in the agricultural province had come in with the railroad. Colonies had sprung up in the 1920s across the plains in neighboring Saskatchewan, Canada's breadbasket, and began to spread toward Alberta at an estimated rate of "15 miles every year." With the growth of commercial agriculture in Alberta, officials decided to tackle the problem at the province's borders before it was too late. New advancements in chemical warfare were turned on the rat population: warfarin, strychnine, and anticoagulant poisons. These spread, *Silent Spring* style, through the general wildlife population, causing collateral damage far beyond the intended brown rats. Wartime propaganda outlets were also turned to this new enemy: "Rats are coming!" "Let's keep 'em out!" "The only good rat is a dead rat." But rats are not the only victims of the region's monoculture, nor are they the only victims of poison. In the tunnels beneath Edmonton, the city is rat-free, but fentanyl, carried to Canada through global trade, ravages the human population.

THE RAT IS AN INTERESTING SUBJECT FOR A BOOK. As Shute details, they are most certainly widely misunderstood. Rats are not threatened by human interactions but depend on them. And people rely on rats—particularly for waste disposal—more than they realize. I'd probably still shudder if a rat ever crossed my path, but in bringing all of these stories together, *Stowaway* succeeds in challenging some of the most pervasive rat stereotypes.

But this book also exemplifies a much more interesting take on animal history: that rats might not strike us as "nature" and certainly not the kind of nature that we wish were protected as we reconsider the effects of the Anthropocene. What rats actually remind us—intentionally or not, as Shute frames it—is that people act like this. The equivalence throughout the book often feels uneven, though. "Not all rats" seems to be the book's refrain. But a more interesting takeaway might come through extending the rat-human metaphor, offering the same grace to humans as to rats, understanding humanity as a problematic and misunderstood species: our needs and follies, our predatory and parasitic nature, our kindness and intelligence.

Humanity may have shaped the planet, adjusting it to our will. But we are a perpetually misunderstood species of animal, too, and if we are going to survive climate change, poison, warfare, and dehumanization, we must extend the same compassion to ourselves that we increasingly see the need for among the cuter, or more obviously useful, animals. ■

BRONWEN EVERILL is a lecturer in history and fellow of Gonville & Caius College at the University of Cambridge and the author of *Not Made by Slaves: Ethical Capitalism in the Age of Abolition*.

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The Rich Drama of *Shogun*

A spectacular TV reboot of James Clavell's 1975 doorstopper.

By Jordan Hoffman

How do you say "Winter is coming" in Japanese?

It's hardly a criticism to say FX's new series *Shogun*, available on Hulu in the United States and Disney+ elsewhere, may remind audiences of *Game of Thrones*. The HBO spectacle based on George R.R. Martin's novels was one of the more transformative television events of our age, inspiring several close-but-no-scimitar imitators. Netflix has *The Witcher*, Amazon has the preposterously expensive *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, and HBO has the *Game of Thrones* prequel *House of the Dragon*, all of which have their charms, but none have quite caught the wildfire-in-a-bottle of the original.

Hiroto Kanai (foreground) as Kashigi Omi in *Shogun*.

It is with great joy, however, that I can report an heir is finally here. The wannabes prove it wasn't the wizards and winged beasts that ignited our collective passions: It was the palette of complex characters at cross purposes, the knotty alliances, and the inscrutable schemes that conquered our imaginations. *Shogun*, based on James Clavell's bestselling 1975 doorstopper—which was previously adapted for television in 1980—is a fictionalized version of a power struggle in early 17th-century Japan, in which five regional lords vie for control after the death of a leader who maintained stability but whose son is too

FX PHOTO

young to rule. Adding spice to the stew are Portuguese Jesuits (whose black ships are building a secret base in Macao) and the arrival of a crafty English pilot sailing under the Dutch flag with a secret mission to destabilize Portugal's foothold in the region—but maybe to also make a buck or two. That's the very shortened version, anyway, but hopefully enough to hook you.

Shogun is that rare television series that demands extra mental effort but truly rewards for the work. Moreover, its roots in history and genuine customs lend it a great deal of gravitas. Truth, as we know, is often stranger than fiction.

But "strangeness" is a wobbly term these days, particularly for a Hollywood-based production about another nation's history. As soon as the series was announced in August 2018, producers made it clear it would deviate from the earlier, NBC television event. The 1980 iteration of *Shogun*, which featured Richard Chamberlain, the legendary Toshiro Mifune, Welsh character actor John Rhys-Davies chomping it up as a strapping Spaniard, and narration from Orson Welles, was arguably the apogee of the big-budget miniseries trend that included *Roots*, *Jesus of Nazareth*, *The Winds of War*, and *North and South* and was a ratings juggernaut perfectly timed for a growing American interest in all things Japanese. And it was very much told from the perspective of its Western protagonist, deploying a classic white savior trope.

That storyline—loosely based on the real life of William Adams, the first Englishman to navigate to Japan—is still core to *Shogun*, but the new series, developed by the husband-and-wife team of Justin Marks and Rachel Kondo, takes what Clavell wrote and broadens it. The Adams character, John Blackthorne, played by Cosmo Jarvis, is now one of three equally important main characters, including Lord Yoshii Toranaga (Hiroyuki Sanada) and Toda Mariko (Anna Sawai). Indeed, it is Sanada who gets top billing in the opening credits.

One indicator of the new telling is this: In the 1980 version, when characters spoke Japanese, it went untranslated. "The viewer will be in the same situation as Blackthorne and will learn what is going on just as he does," a producer boasted of this creative choice at the time. In the current version, spoken Japanese has subtitles; it is text, not ornamentation. What's more, while I didn't use a stopwatch, I'd say about three-quarters of the show is in Japanese.

While some of the producers are Japanese, the writers are not (though some are of Japanese heritage), so the dialogue

> For all the exoticism and complicated history, it's the inner hopes and desires of these characters that will linger.

Anna Sawai as Toda Mariko in *Shogun*.

was written in English, then rigidly translated into Japanese, then handed off to a Japanese playwright who spoke no English but had expertise in this time period, and then translated back for subtitles. Many of the scenes involve tense conferences in which language is translated on the spot, which is incredibly fertile soil for a brilliant performer like Sawai to say one thing with her voice but mean something else with her expression. (Not to make this too complicated, but within the story, no one is speaking English; however, some characters do speak Portuguese, which we at home hear as English—trust me, this makes sense when you watch it.)

This is just one reason why *Shogun* is not passive viewing. Those who watch television with one eye on Instagram are going to have problems with this one. (And they should—put down the damn phone!) Not only is there a cascade of characters with different shifting alignments, but one of the central themes is deception and delayed revelation. This is a story in which not really knowing what the hell anyone is thinking is essential to its success. This is symbolized by the "eightfold fence," a Japanese philosophy of isolation that has played into its political maneuvers over the years but in a rich drama like *Shogun* means that when a woman is professing her undying love to her husband, she may secretly wish nothing more than to be dead.

The new series's decision to broaden the perspective (and also beef up the women's roles) may have been a red flag for some worried that it would sand down some of the material that, let's face it, makes 17th-century Japanese culture look a little, well, intense. To put it bluntly: Could a series for our overly sensitive age show a character boiling a prisoner alive just so he can zone out to the sound of his anguished screams in a prurient haze? The answer is yes. And while that sadistic character isn't exactly a good guy, you kind of end up liking him a little bit by the end.

Even more extreme (and also in the first episode) is when a character accepts that an underling, who spoke in his defense but did it in a way that defied protocol, must not only commit ritual suicide but also have his infant child killed so as to ensure his family line is obliterated. What's more, the guy who approves of this is our hero, Sanada's Toranaga.

Indeed, the frequent act of seppuku is just one of the Japanese customs that is baffling to Blackthorne's Western eyes, and his character remains a stand-in for the audience in that regard. (Far more benign is the belief that it is disrespectful to step on moss—OK, note taken!) But an important change from Chamberlain's Blackthorne is that Jarvis's version is frequently a whiny, nasty jerk. Jarvis's performance, which owes a bit to Tom Hardy at his most energetic, is a spitting, cursing blowhard with a short fuse who would probably have a much easier go of things at first if he would just chill out. (It is, at times, meant to be funny, and it is.) The Japanese call him "The Barbarian," and given English attitudes at the time toward bathing compared with the much tidier Japanese, you can see why. One of the best compliments I can give *Shogun* is that, periodically, you will think, "Wait, why am I rooting for any of these people?!" but still feel a lot is at stake in the drama.

While there is a great deal of gore in the series (now I know what a computer-generated horse looks like when hit by a cannonball), there is an overwhelming amount of beauty. The kimono budget must have been through the roof on this thing. Even scenes that clearly include additional greenscreen are lit with care. This is key for a culture that, despite some shocking violence, places importance on order and grace. With 10 one-hour episodes, there is time to linger on how tea is properly served, how sake is poured, or how a geisha who takes pride in her trade can elevate it to artistry.

But none of that would matter if the storyline weren't compelling, and I suppose Clavell would not have sold 21 million books if he weren't on to something. *Shogun* is probably his most famous, but I recall seeing his name on covers everywhere as a Gen X kid. My own mother dragged around the enormous *Noble House*, split into two volumes in hardcover, for what seemed like months. Most of his works fit into a larger "Asian Saga," though he had enough clout in the early 1980s to direct a television special based on a dystopian short story (*The Children's Story*) and get parodied on *Late Night With David Letterman*.

For all the exoticism and complicated history, however, it's the inner hopes and desires of these characters that will linger. "Flowers are only flowers because they fall" might seem like a corny line out of context, but in the delicate world of *Shogun*, it is a moment of perfection and one of several in this extraordinary series. ■

JORDAN HOFFMAN is a New York-based film critic and entertainment journalist.

FX PHOTO


Guatemala City.

GUATEMALA

STRIDING FROM CRISIS TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Having undergone an historic institutional crisis, Guatemala's new administration is plotting a path to boost inward investment and usher in a new era of stability to drive forward the region's largest economy

After coming through the deepest institutional crisis of its history, Guatemala is preparing a strategy in order to start living up to its promise as Central America's largest economy by reasserting its democratic principles and encouraging investment flows to unlock its full potential.

Despite boasting macroeconomic stability, a strategic location, and a plethora of investment opportunities, the country has historically grappled with a lack of foreign direct investment (FDI). However, recent developments signal a shift in this narrative, with Guatemala readying itself to emerge as a beacon of economic opportunity in the region.

In January Bernardo Arévalo was sworn in as Guatemala's president with the backing of the international community after overcoming concerted efforts to derail the transfer of power and prevent his inauguration. Now, Arévalo's administration is focused on restoring prestige to the country's institutions and using its legitimate power to bring improvements to the lives of Guatemala's 18 million inhabitants.

Now, Arévalo's administration is focused on restoring prestige to the country's institutions and using its legitimate power to bring improvements to the lives of Guatemala's 18 million inhabitants.

"We are implanting what I call the three R's: rescuing our institutions from the asphyxiating embrace of corrupt appropriation; rebuilding those institutions so they can perform the function for which they were intended; and responding to the needs of the population," said Arévalo

"If the fight against corruption is the most urgent task, the most important one is to provide solutions for the country's development"

Bernardo Arévalo
President of Guatemala

And there are increasing signs that the economy is moving in the right direction. According to data released by Guatemala's Central Bank, foreign direct investment (FDI) rose to $1.55 billion in 2023, marking an 8% increase from the previous year and the second highest inflow since 2008. For 2024 the government has reaffirmed its commitment to create the necessary conditions to encourage more private investment from within and outside the country.

Invest Guatemala, the country's private investment promotion agency, is generating tailored strategies to attract investments in key sectors, including apparel and textiles, light manufacturing, pharmaceuticals and medical devices, biotech, electronic manufacturing services, BPO and IT outsourcing, as well as sustainable tourism. The goal is to grow annual FDI beyond the $2-billion mark in the short term.

In terms of economic performance, Guatemala's trajectory is equally promising. Despite global headwinds, GDP grew by an encouraging 3.5% in 2023. Looking ahead, growth drivers for 2024 encompass a spectrum of sectors, including banking and financial services, real estate and mining, underpinning the nation's diversified economic landscape.

Investors can count on Guatemala's robust financial system, coupled with the lowest government debt in Central America at 27.2% of GDP. Prudent fiscal management is also evident in Guatemala's fiscal deficit, which stood at a mere 1.3% of GDP in 2023. Other hallmarks of Guatemala's financial system are low levels of non-performing loans, ample liquidity, and robust solvency.

Free trade agreements encompassing over 40 countries and including the DR-CAFTA accord

with the US mean Guatemala provides a base with broad access to global markets, facilitating seamless trade and commerce. Guatemala also offers a suite of fiscal incentives and special regimes aimed at bolstering investment attractiveness, including income tax exemptions, VAT and tariff duty exemptions, and a foreign investment law guaranteeing equal treatment for both domestic and foreign investors.

President Arévalo believes the drive to provide legal stability will in turn encourage much-needed investment and enable his administration to boost Guatemala's infrastructure and human capital, citing plans to roll out public-private partnerships (PPPs) for growth.

"We are convinced that the state needs to boost significantly the levels of public investment in infrastructure for our development," he said.

Through initiatives like the Guatemala Moving Forward (Guatemala No Se Detiene) plan, which fosters collaboration between the private sector, government, and academia, Guatemala is charting a course towards enhanced competitiveness and a more favorable business climate. Improvements to Guatemala City's airport, major and minor highways, and the country's ports are seen as key developments in a more dynamic future economy.

In terms of energy, more than 70% of Guatemala's electricity is generated from renewable sources,

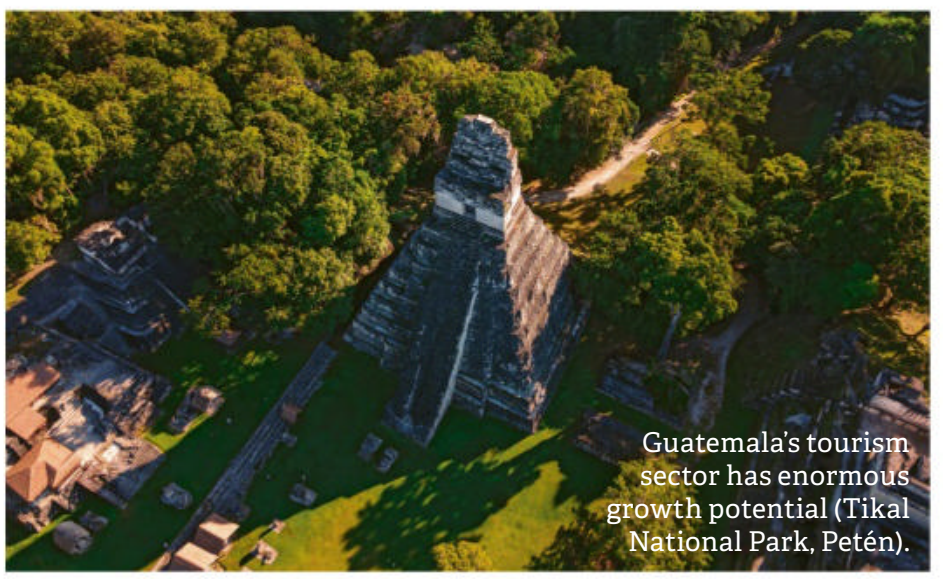
Guatemala is committed to multilateralism and an international system based on the rule of law to advance the causes of democracy, peace and development

underscoring the nation's commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship.

Arévalo's presidency has received support from the US Administration, with Guatemala's leader present at the White House for a bilateral meeting in March. Noting that the "will of the Guatemalan people, by our observation, has triumphed," Vice President Kamala Harris announced an additional $170 million in US funding for development, economic, health, and security assistance in Guatemala.

Arévalo claimed "a new foundation had been laid" for US-Guatemala relations, part of the country's strategy of becoming a bigger player on the international stage as a reliable partner for economic partnership and human development.

"What the international community can expect to find in Guatemala is a transparent and open partner for any collaborative strategy that leads to the improvement of the conditions for the development of both democratic institutions and the well-being of the people who live in our countries," Arévalo concluded. ■



Guatemala's tourism sector has enormous growth potential (Tikal National Park, Petén).

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A virtual rendering of an AeroMetro station.

HIGH-IMPACT INFRASTRUCTURE

Large-scale projects already underway are poised to transform connectivity in Guatemala's urban centers and foster economic diversification

Guatemala is moving forward through plans for high-impact infrastructure in which collaboration between the private sector and the country's administrations is key to developing projects that will boost competitiveness and employment.

Two stand-out projects are set to transform mobility and spur economic and social development in Guatemala City. AeroMetro is an urban cable car system aimed at revolutionizing transportation in Guatemala's capital, while the Belice 2 Bridge is a road and rail project that will improve traffic distribution and boost connections with a light railway system between the southern and northern parts of the city.

AeroMetro, a public-private partnership project, comprises two sections covering nine kilometers that will allow commuters to transfer onto existing and future Transmetro lines, as well as the planned MetroRiel light railway. The $225m Belice 2 Bridge will help to connect the center of Guatemala City with the main Atlantic highway and zone 18, a neighborhood with a population of 350,000 people.

"The cable car system and the bridge will reduce travel times and congestion by streamlining intermodal and sustainable transportation. Commuters will enjoy faster and more seamless travel, bringing a productivity boost to the capital," said Juan Carlos Zapata, executive director of FUNDESA, a non-profit business organization that promotes Guatemala's economic and social development.

Outside the capital, the department of Escuintla in the country's south has seen the launch of construction on Synergy Industrial Park, the biggest project of its kind in Central America. Synergy's innovative plan combines state-of-the-art business units, housing, commerce, hotels and entertainment complexes as well as hospitals, universities and schools over 4,700 hectares that will also include natural green spaces.

The combined impact of these projects and a growing spirit of partnership brings with it a promise of modernization and diversification for Guatemala's economy. ■

125 YEARS BUILDING COMMUNITY WITH SOLID FOUNDATIONS

Progreso, Guatemala's leading construction materials and solutions company, wants to align its values of social and environmental sustainability with a new drive to boost the country's infrastructure

Progreso leads HogaRES, replacing dirt floors with concrete floors, improving families' wellbeing.

Construction industry leader Progreso has a proud 125-year history of driving Guatemala's social and economic development. Now, CEO José Raúl González is positive about what promises to be the start of a new era of opportunities for the country to advance much-needed infrastructure programs.

When Carlos F. Novella returned to Guatemala after studying civil engineering at Louvain in Belgium, he brought with him knowledge of more advanced building techniques and a heartfelt desire to help develop the nation with this science. In 1899 "Don Carlos" founded the company that would eventually become Progreso, starting to produce cement for construction in 1901. The business found itself frequently flirting with bankruptcy until the great 1917-18 series of earthquakes, when Don Carlos's modern constructions proved resilient.

José Raúl González, who leads the fourth generation of the company as CEO, sees potential for another epoch-making moment in Guatemala under a new government that has stated its commitment to development and improving public services and infrastructure.

The company is part of group of enterprises supporting the "Guatemala Moving Forward" initiative, which plans to bring to fruition infrastructure projects worth more than $7 billion that would transform the country's transport networks and connect the metropolitan area with the country's other cities and ports while generating 574,000 jobs, increasing productivity and social inclusion in Guatemala.

"Now we have a great opportunity with our products, technical know-how and quality of service to make a difference, faced with the current state of our national infrastructure and the poor standard of housing in much of Latin America," says González. The matter is of vital importance. For example, millions of Latin American families live in housing with dirt floors, meaning that children are constantly exposed to respiratory, intestinal, and skin disease risks. Progreso has responded with its 'healthy (concrete) floors' project to end this situation.

Progreso is also optimistic about reforms the new government is promoting

"This political moment has the possibility of transforming into economic oportunity so we can build a country for everyone to live in"

José Raúl González
Chief Executive Officer

González explains that Progreso has stated its commitment to working with Guatemala's new administration as long as promises to reinforce the public sector and combat the blight of corruption within government are honored. "The private sector must align itself with a commitment to restore the prestige of Guatemala's public institutions. This political moment has the possibility of transforming into economic opportunity so we can build a country for everyone to live in."

Progreso is also optimistic about another possible reform under the new government, a proposed Competition Law, which the company says will be a positive thing as long as it truly improves competitive market conditions by eliminating artificial barriers.

"Any competition legislation must have as its sole purpose the promotion of free competition, seeking to increase the economic efficiency of our market and, therefore, grow our country's economy," remarks González.

Progreso has expanded regionally and now operates in six countries beyond Guatemala's borders: Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia. By 2030 it plans on being the largest building materials and solutions company in the region and a major player in the infrastructure development of the countries where it is present.

For Progreso's CEO, the company's expansion is a matter of pride, but not for the expected financial reasons. "For us, growth is not an end but merely the means; the end is to create value through our products and services, as well as the application of our principles."

Progreso's competitive edge is honed by the work done in the company's labs and R&D center seeking constant innovation and technological development of construction materials, such as the development of a 3D-printed home prototype. Research is helping Progreso move toward more sustainable products and services that have seen the business increase its efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint in recent years. The company also invests in reforestation and the expansion of renewable energy.

In terms of human and social values, the Ethisphere institute has recognized Progreso as one of the Most Ethical Companies in the World in each of the past 11 years, and the business submits its occupational health and safety standards to the auditing process of the British Safety Council.

"Our slogan is 'Progreso (progress) in everything we do'. Creating economic value is what gives us financial sustainability, but also environmental and social value," says González. "With these three complementary values, we believe we can guarantee the sustainability of our business for another 125 years." ■


Guatemalan Sugar Mills have built over 2,000 roadways to transport sugarcane.

SUGARCANE SECTOR TAKES LEAD ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The sugarcane industry is of vital importance to Guatemala's prosperity, a fact that obliges the sector's leaders to act responsibly and promote sustainable development for the Central American country's population

Guatemala's sugar agroindustry, Latin America's third-largest producer, generates almost $700 million in foreign exchange annually and provides more than 55,000 direct jobs and 278,000 indirect jobs in the country. The sector is served by 6,000 small, medium-sized and large enterprises, in turn generating more employment.

Although only 2.97% of the cultivable land in Guatemala is used for sugarcane production, the industry has the capacity to be transformative for the developing nation. Asazgua, the Association of Sugar Producers of Guatemala, is committed to generating opportunities and prosperity as part of the country's sustainable development.

Created in 1957, Asazgua includes 10 sugar mills and five technical organizations specialized in research, climate change, innovation, sugar exportation and social responsibility. In 2022 it created its own Innovation Hub to develop a program of innovative projects through the identification and optimization of products, activities, processes and business models in the sugar agroindustry.

In 2023 Asazgua became the first organization of its kind worldwide to present case studies documenting the sector's contribution toward compliance with the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study was made in coordination with Asazgua by Dr. Iván Vera, a senior United Nations consultant on energy, water and sustainable development.

In analyzing Asazgua's performance in contributing to Guatemala's progress towards meeting the 17 SDGs, Dr. Vera stressed the importance of public-private collaboration in industrialization processes in order to make advances in the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development. "It is very important to involve all stakeholders: political and institutional leaders, business leaders and community members, who all have a great deal to contribute to accelerate the process of implementing the Development Goals," he said.

An example of such collaboration is the clinic run by Fundazúcar, Asazgua's social arm for health, education and development programs. According to the case study referring to SDG number three, Good Health and Wellbeing, Fundazúcar Medical Clinic in Escuintla provides medical attention to over 45,000 patients per year across five medical specialties: general medicine, pediatrics, dermatology, ophthalmology and odontology.

Regarding SDG number six on safeguarding a clean water supply, the study reveals that Guatemala's sugar agroindustry has reduced its water footprint by an extraordinary degree. Thanks in part to advances by Cengicaña, Asazgua's sugarcane research body and its development of new crop varieties and more efficient cultivation processes, water consumption per tonne is 45% below the world average.

Water conservation has also been boosted by the research institute's Cengiriegos software tool, which advises growers on the volume of irrigation to devote to each specific plot of land based on analysis of the crop, moisture levels, the soil, and weather conditions.

On SDG number seven regarding clean and affordable energy,

> ***"The sugarcane agribusiness in Guatemala is clearly implementing an integrated sustainability strategy, aligning its objectives as an industry with the SDGs."***
>
> **Dr. Iván Vera**
> United Nations Senior Consultant

Asazgua includes 10 sugar mills and five technical organizations specialized in research, climate change, innovation, sugar exportation and social responsibility

Guatemala's sugar agroindustry has made major strides in making more efficient use of sugarcane biomass to generate electricity. During the 2021-2022 harvest season, 91% of the electricity used for the sugar agroindustry came from the waste product known as bagasse, an energy resource that accounts for as much as 27% of national electricity generation during the November-May harvest season.

SDG number nine refers to industry and infrastructure, with the case study noting that Asazgua's members operate 10 power plants that generate electricity and heat, nine of which provide electricity to the country's national grid. The Guatemala sugar agroindustry's boarding terminal, Expogranel, launched in 1994 to store, inspect and ship sugar from all of Guatemala's sugar mills is considered one of the most efficient terminals for loading sugar in the world.

Finally, in pursuit of the vital SDG 13 on the need for climate action, in 2010 Asazgua created the Private Institute for Climate Change Research (ICC), active in Guatemala and El Salvador in research programs that contribute to the design of strategies to reduce vulnerability, mitigation and adaptation to climate change in communities and productive systems.

Of the ICC, Dr. Vera says that it "has become a catalyst for climate action, setting an example in the region and globally".

The UN consultant concludes that Guatemala's sugar agribusiness is performing work that supports the 17 SDGs. "In my view, these good practices should serve as an example for other countries, other industries and other private companies and organizations." ■

CREATING DEEP ROOTS FOR LONG-TERM POSITIVE IMPACT

Driven by its culture of innovation and commitment to the country, Banco Industrial promotes initiatives that seek to create value, inclusion and opportunities to prosper

With more than five decades of experience, Banco Industrial has established itself as Guatemala's leading financial institution. Thanks to its deep roots and love for the country, the bank seeks out and encourages initiatives for sustainable development to create better opportunities for the future.

After its 1968 foundation, Banco Industrial started on a path of permanent innovation with Guatemalan essence and regional vision. Today it provides solutions to two million clients in the country and three million in the Central American region, thanks to the reach of Bicapital Corporation and its subsidiaries.

"With our strategic vision and strong collective commitment, we focus on creating value and connecting initiatives that allow everyone to take root, grow and reach new heights," says Luis Lara Grojec, CEO of the corporation and of Banco Industrial (Bi).

Banco Industrial is conscious of the fact that the creation of digital financial products facilitates inclusion

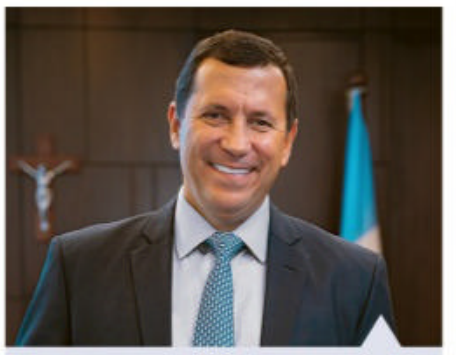
The bank's strategy not only aims to contribute to economic wellbeing but also to generate a positive impact on society and the environment. This conviction that much can be done "together, always moving forward", as its motto states, goes hand in hand with Guatemalan culture, where it is essential to root, establish and build a community in order to prosper.

That is why the bank stimulates the growth of Guatemalan companies and key sectors (such as commerce, industry, energy and construction) to dynamize the economy, because this is what boosts productivity and job creation. In the last year, the bank's general loan portfolio grew by 14.7% and its microfinance portfolio by 18.2%.

The bank especially serves small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for approximately 70% of total employment in Guatemala. Banco Industrial recently received $220 million in financing from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, to support SMEs and strengthen their capacities.

Additionally, the promotion of financial programs for entrepreneurship focuses on ensuring that the projects of new generations of entrepreneurs are consolidated, opening spaces to Guatemalan talent and creativity to build community and nourish a sense of belonging.

> ***"The goal is to ensure that Guatemala reaches a banking and financial inclusion level of around 80% of the population before the end of this decade."***



Luis Lara Grojec
Chief Executive Officer

Headquarters of Banco Industrial in Guatemala City.

But none of this is possible if people are unaware of the benefits that banking products and services provide, which is why Banco Industrial – conscious of the fact that the creation of digital financial products facilitates inclusion – has emphasized this line of work, which fits closely with the innovative culture that characterizes the institution.

"The goal is to ensure that Guatemala reaches a banking and financial inclusion level of around 80% of the population before the end of this decade, a mission that the bank takes very seriously," says Lara Grojec. To this end, Banco Industrial is advancing rapidly in its digital transformation with new functionalities and solutions such as ZIGI, a platform that allows financial operations to be carried out through a cell phone number.

It has also built a successful regional experience with some 5,000 banking agents, who provide remote communities with various financial services and products. Simultaneously, the small businesses that have joined this network of agents have achieved growth, thus fulfilling their own dreams and contributing to the economic dynamics of their home areas.

"To reinforce our performance as a leader in the national financial sector, we will continue to focus on generating long-term value, based on our ethical approach and sustainable vision, making it possible to take root and grow," Lara Grojec concludes. ■

BANCO INDUSTRIAL

At Banco Industrial, we **promote development and innovation,** supporting entrepreneurs who are **transforming the regional economy.**

Together, always moving forward

BIG DATA TO UNLOCK A DREAM DESTINATION

Tourism is Guatemala's flagship economic sector, and plans are being drawn up to harness the country's world-famous visitor appeal with modern technology and improved infrastructure to play a vital role as a catalyzer of social development

While Guatemala's well-known volcanoes and Mayan archeological treasures will continue to pull in the crowds, the country's tourism authorities say it is time to modernize the approach to attracting tourists to boost visitor numbers and "change the narrative" in a positive way as the country embarks on a new era.

"Technology is going to be our secret weapon," said Harris Whitbeck, the new director general of INGUAT, Guatemala's tourism institute, revealing plans to use big data in the push for a bigger share of the international tourism market.

"Having access to big data and artificial intelligence will be absolutely key in order to make more informed decisions about how to use the digital realm to communicate better."

Whitbeck, a journalist by profession, is confident that he has a spectacular product to market. In Guatemala, ancient history is still living and breathing; 3,000 years of culture can be witnessed through the 22 different Mayan ethnic groups that make up half the country's population, and the territory boasts 37 volcanoes, four of which remain active.

"We have the advantage that our product is different. We can offer adventure like Costa Rica, but we can also offer pre-Hispanic culture. We can offer gastronomy as Mexico does, but we also have volcanoes. So, we have to sell it. The issue is how to communicate, how to sell," Whitbeck explained.

With such extraordinary heritage comes great responsibility. Guatemala's authorities are aware that the country's archaeological sites – 4,000 and counting as LiDAR technology continually uncovers new treasures beneath the thick jungle canopy – must also be conserved and ancient communities benefited by the impact of tourism. For INGUAT, the key to a sustainable approach is harnessing local knowledge and working with, not against, the communities concerned.


La Antigua Guatemala, Sacatepéquez.

Guatemala is a memorable country for its cultural richness, megadiversity, natural beauty and the warmth of its people

"We want to work closely with communities, to seek out and create the conditions so that they can discover innovation in their approach to tourism. They are the ones who know best how to protect the sites and to maintain their relationship with the forest," Whitbeck noted.

The idea of integration extends to other stakeholders in Guatemala. INGUAT's director general is opening a period of consultation with representatives of the public and private sectors, with a focus on improving infrastructure to improve access to the country's "megadiverse" tourism offering.

First and foremost, improving Guatemala's international airport will be a key step in serving the new markets INGUAT's communication strategy is aimed at reaching. INGUAT hopes to see improved connectivity with North America, as well as boost visitor numbers from Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and Arab countries, which are increasingly rich in untapped tourism potential.

Public-private cooperation is also behind the development of a convention center project, which Whitbeck believes will boost Guatemala's potential to become a major player in MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) tourism, broadening Guatemala's brand as a destination.

As Whitbeck summed up: "Guatemala is a memorable country. Whoever comes here never forgets the surprise that comes from discovering so much cultural wealth, so much diversity, so much natural beauty, and the warmth of the people. Countries that offer you all of that are rare, but here it is true." ■


Semuc Champey, Alta Verapaz.

"Having access to big data and artificial intelligence will be absolutely key in order to make more informed decisions about how to use the digital realm to communicate better."

Harris Whitbeck
Director general of INGUAT

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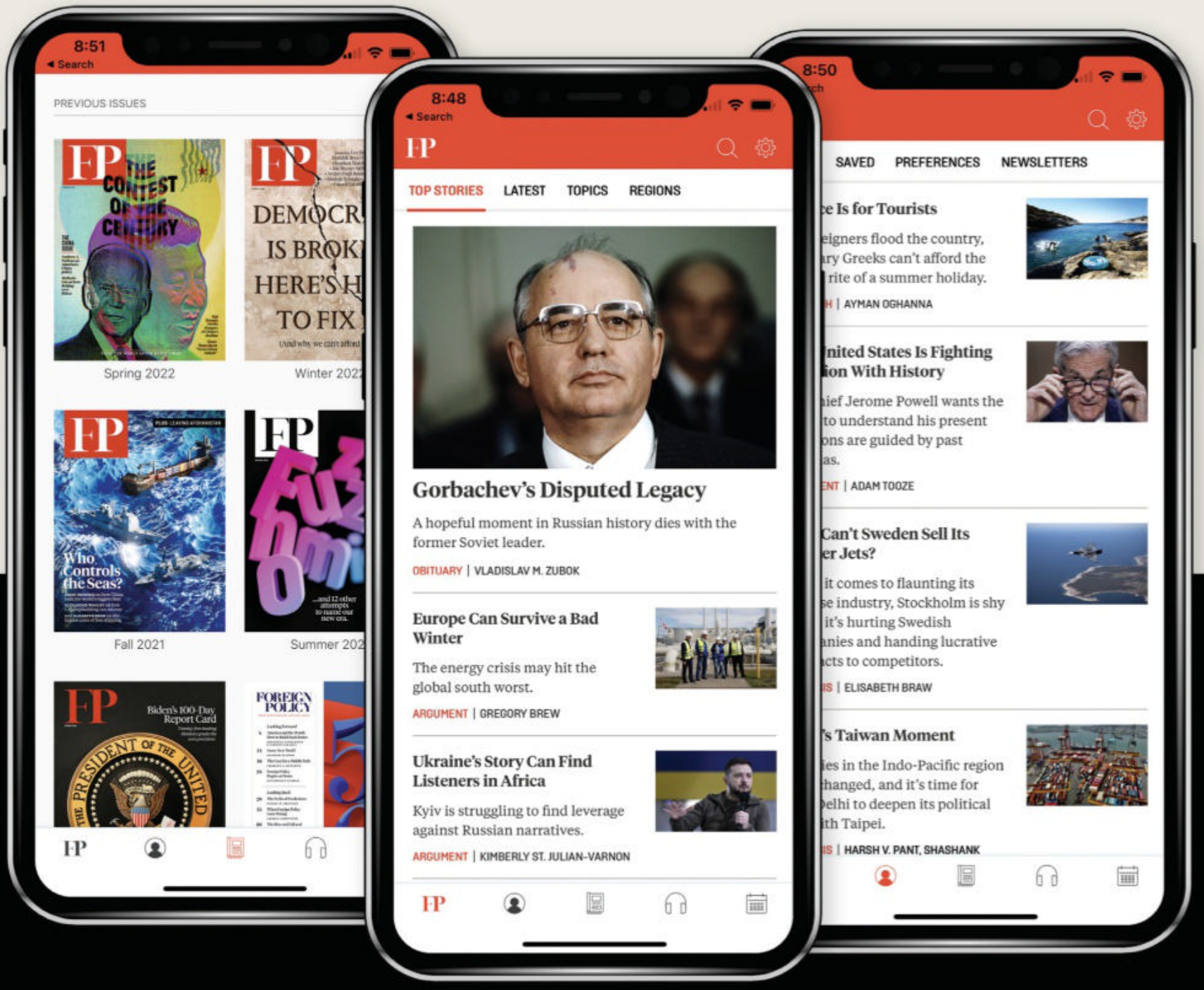

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An Atrevida Is Best Avoided

The Portuguese word that exposes the country's lingering double standards on gender.

By Kitty Greenwald

On April 25, 1974, a left-leaning military coup overthrew Portugal's 48-year dictatorship. The uprising, known as the Carnation Revolution, represented the country's pivot to democracy after decades under António Salazar's oppressive rule and a boost for women's rights. In 1976, a new constitution afforded equal rights to men and women. More recently, in 2011, Portugal signed the Istanbul Convention, a treaty addressing violence against women and domestic violence; it was ratified in 2013. But as is often the case with gender, Portugal's laws and norms do not sync up. "Some things are the same as they were before the 25th of April," journalist Fernanda Câncio said. "Machismo is one of them."

As a Portuguese American woman, I've rubbed against that machismo for as long as I can remember. During a visit to Lisbon last summer, I was reminded yet again of the country's confining gender roles as I hosted a visiting American. During lunch one day, an older friend described the ex-girlfriend of a mutual acquaintance, saying, "*Ela é muito atrevida*." The American, who didn't speak Portuguese but had a keen ear for gossip, asked what was said. Here I fumbled: The direct translation is, "She's very sassy," but "precocious," "bold," and "cheeky" were also trotted out. Though all are technically correct, they missed the point. Finally, I offered "boundary-pushing," but even then my translation failed.

Part of the problem is that atrevida means something different when applied to a woman than a man. For a man, as with the word's English counterparts, the gendered *atrevido* easily serves as a compliment. But any Portuguese speaker would have known the comment at lunch was not kindly meant. The woman we were discussing, my friend had intimated, was a troublemaker who pushed against norms, perhaps even for pleasure. As such, she is best avoided.

I asked Anália Torres, a sociologist at the University of Lisbon and the director

Illustration by JOÃO NEVES

of its Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies, to articulate my misgivings. "The word atrevida for a woman is not positive," she said. "It is different when applied to a man. For a woman, you're implying that she is too forward, that she has a flirty personality. It means she says things that are a little provocative, in the sense that she is offering herself. It has a sexual implication." For a man, Torres said, "it is not negative. It can mean he says things that are provocative but he is amusing. It implies he is bold, has a sense of humor, and is open."

In considering the negative connotations of atrevida, and especially its sexual dimensions, I wondered if concern over the label might help explain why the #MeToo movement has floundered in Portugal. Since the movement took off seven years ago, very few Portuguese women have put their names on sexual harassment allegations that detail abusive acts while naming the perpetrators outright.

Perhaps because of this, few investigations have run in the Portuguese press. While one could assume there aren't many #MeToo stories to report—as a Portuguese man suggested to me—a host of anonymous complaints have surfaced that suggest otherwise. In fact, Câncio said, she was recently investigating sexual harassment claims against a famous media personality. Despite looking into credible allegations for months, she gave up on the story when none of the five women interviewed were willing to go on the record. "If I didn't," she said, "I'd be at risk of defamation." The reason for their silence? Fear.

Last spring, Câncio helped break Portugal's most significant #MeToo story yet with an article that named Boaventura de Sousa Santos as the professor accused of sexual harassment by anonymous former students at the prestigious University of Coimbra. Santos admitted to Câncio that he had been accused but said the allegations had no merit. Days later, two other women—one from Brazil and one from Argentina—went on the record and shared their stories in detail. No Portuguese women joined them in speaking out with specifics. (This year, the university released a report on its investigation into allegations within the department where Santos served as director emeritus.)

In my own #MeToo reporting in the United States, I've also encountered reluctance from women when it comes time to go public. But the explanations I've received pertain mostly to concerns of professional blacklisting or legal jeopardy. While the process is not simple, I never felt that any woman was concerned with being thought of as atrevida in the Portuguese sense. I have spoken to well over 100 women, and societal perceptions were not raised. That is not the case for Câncio. "Of course I think women are worried about how they're going to be perceived by society," she said. "They don't want to be talked about."

She understands their reluctance. For 36 years, Câncio has reported on gender issues in Portugal, and she believes that women's silence around #MeToo reflects their standing within the country. "The feminist movement never really took off here," she said, "especially compared to what's happened elsewhere in Western Europe or even right next door in Spain."

One reason for the lag may relate to Salazarism, which, until the 1974 revolution, was enshrined in the nation's laws. Anne Cova, who, along with António Costa Pinto, co-wrote the chapter "Women and Salazarism" in *Political and Historical Encyclopedia of Women*, explained that the ideology is based on the motto "*Deus, pátria e família*" (God, Fatherland, and Family). Women, she and Pinto wrote, had limited freedoms when Salazar was in power, and only a few—such as widows and heads of family—had suffrage. Married women, Cova wrote in an email, were especially powerless and were "prohibited from working in the judiciary, in diplomacy, and in public administration."

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality's 2023 Gender Equality Index, Portugal still ranks below the average European Union member state. A separate 2014 survey, conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, found that from the age of 15 onward, 24 percent of women in Portugal experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and 9 percent reported stalking.

In 2017, the same year #MeToo took off in the United States, a different story made headlines in Portugal. That year, a male and female judge in an appeals court in Porto, the country's second-largest city, upheld a light sentence—15 months of suspended jail time and a fine—for an assailant who violently beat his ex-wife with a nail-spiked club. The *Washington Post* reported that he coordinated with the woman's former lover, who kidnapped and held her down during the attack. In their ruling, the judges wrote, "Adultery by a woman is a very serious attack on a man's honor and dignity," adding that "society has always strongly condemned adultery by a woman and therefore sees the violence by a betrayed, vexed, and humiliated man with some understanding." Reuters, which also reported on the case, provided context: "Ultra-orthodox patriarchy—one of the cornerstones of the fascist dictatorship of Antonio Salazar up until the 1974 revolution—still survives in parts of Portugal."

Fifty years have passed since the Carnation Revolution and seven since #MeToo forced an international reckoning on the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in the workplace. To ensure that the goals of Portugal's democratic revolution come closer to actualization, perhaps it is time for atrevida to finally serve as a compliment, just as it does for men in Portugal. After all, change requires boldness, and it won't come for Portuguese women until the descriptor is embraced. ■

KITTY GREENWALD is a freelance reporter and writer.

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What great minds can do.

What in the World?

By Drew Gorman

The following is adapted from past editions of FP's weekly online news quiz.
Test yourself every week at ForeignPolicy.com.

1. Zimbabwe introduced a new currency in April. The ZiG is backed up by what?

a. The euro
b. Diamonds
c. Gold
d. The U.S. dollar

2. Approximately how many missiles and drones did Iran launch at Israel in mid-April?

a. 100
b. 320
c. 570
d. 680

3. Which party won the most seats in South Korea's April legislative elections?

a. The progressive Rebuilding Korea Party
b. The centrist New Reform Party
c. The conservative ruling People Power Party
d. The center-left Democratic Party

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4. German authorities said in late April that they had arrested three German citizens suspected of spying for which country?

a. China
b. Russia
c. Iran
d. Cuba

5. Who was elected as the Solomon Islands' prime minister in May?

a. Opposition leader Matthew Wale
b. Former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele
c. Incumbent Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare
d. United Party candidate Peter Kenilorea Jr.

6. Argentine President Javier Milei announced on April 22 that his country had produced its first quarterly budget surplus since what year?

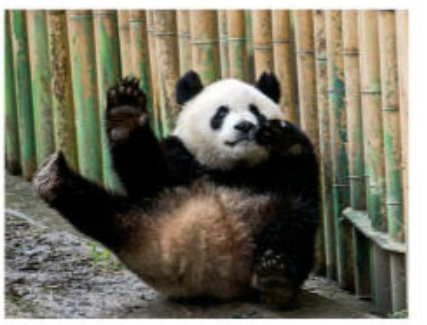
a. 1989
b. 2000
c. 2008
d. 2016

7. Who won Panama's May 5 presidential election?

a. José Raúl Mulino
b. Ricardo Lombana
c. Martín Torrijos
d. Rómulo Roux

8. Along with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, which high-level government minister died in a helicopter crash on May 19?

a. Intelligence Minister Esmaeil Khatib
b. Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian
c. Defense Minister Mohammad-Reza Gharaei Ashtiani
d. Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian



9. In late April, two pandas from China arrived at which European zoo?

a. Tierpark Berlin
b. Dublin Zoo
c. Prague Zoo
d. Zoo Aquarium Madrid

10. In a shocking upset, Spanish tennis player Rafael Nadal lost in the first round of the French Open to which player?

a. Francisco Cerúndolo of Argentina
b. Taylor Fritz of the United States
c. Alexander Zverev of Germany
d. Sumit Nagal of India

ANSWERS: 1. c; 2. b; 3. d; 4. a; 5. b; 6. c; 7. a; 8. d; 9. d; 10. c

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