HOOVER DIGEST

RESEARCH + COMMENTARY ON PUBLIC POLICY

SPRING 2023 NO.2

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ON THE COVER

Historians call it the golden age of flight. A hundred years ago, shaped by war and commerce, aviation was capturing the imagination of people all around the globe. This British poster depicts airmail as a glamorous, high-tech innovation. Routine today, flying the mails was adventurous, competitive—and dangerous. California played a key part in the establishment of safe, reliable air transportation across the United States. One huge mountaintop beacon built to guide night-flying aircraft still glows today—but only once a year. **See story, page 196.**

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Spring 2023

HOOVER DIGEST

Recession, Inflation, and the Long View

"Recessions are painful interruptions," says Hoover fellow John H. Cochrane, "but we should be paying much more attention to long-run growth."

By Melissa De Witte

While recessions are painful, they are only temporary interruptions to the economy, says John H. Cochrane, an economist at the Hoover Institution, arguing that people should pay more attention to long-term economic growth, which in the United States is stagnating.

Here, Cochrane discusses what people understand and don't understand about recessions, what is over- and underestimated about them, and why it's important to look at the bigger picture. Rather than a focus on quarterly changes to the growth rate, which is how recessions are currently gauged,

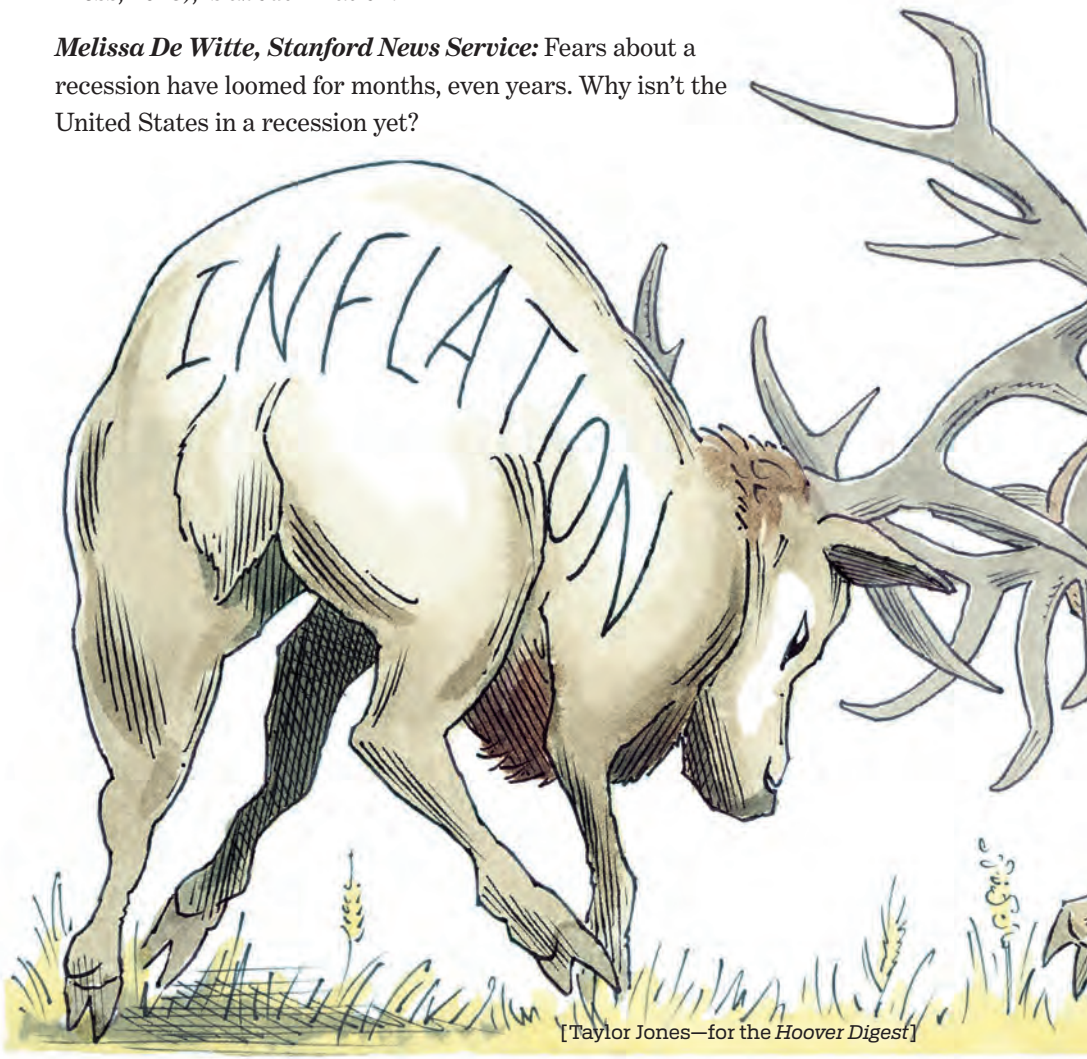
***John H. Cochrane** is the Rose-Marie and Jack Anderson Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of Hoover's Working Group on Economic Policy, and a contributor to Hoover's Conte Initiative on Immigration Reform. He is also a senior fellow at the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR), a research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research, and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute. **Melissa De Witte** is deputy director, social science communications, for Stanford University Communications.*

the long-run growth of the economy matters more. Moreover, the causes of recessions are not entirely clear, Cochrane says.

He also addresses the relationship between inflation and recession, stagflation—a recession with inflation—the role the Federal Reserve plays in managing the health of the economy, and what other factors people should use to assess that health. For instance, labor force participation, the number of people employed or actively seeking employment, is a more useful gauge than unemployment rates.

Cochrane specializes in financial economics and macroeconomics. His most recent book, *The Fiscal Theory of the Price Level* (Princeton University Press, 2023), is about inflation.

Melissa De Witte, Stanford News Service: Fears about a recession have loomed for months, even years. Why isn't the United States in a recession yet?



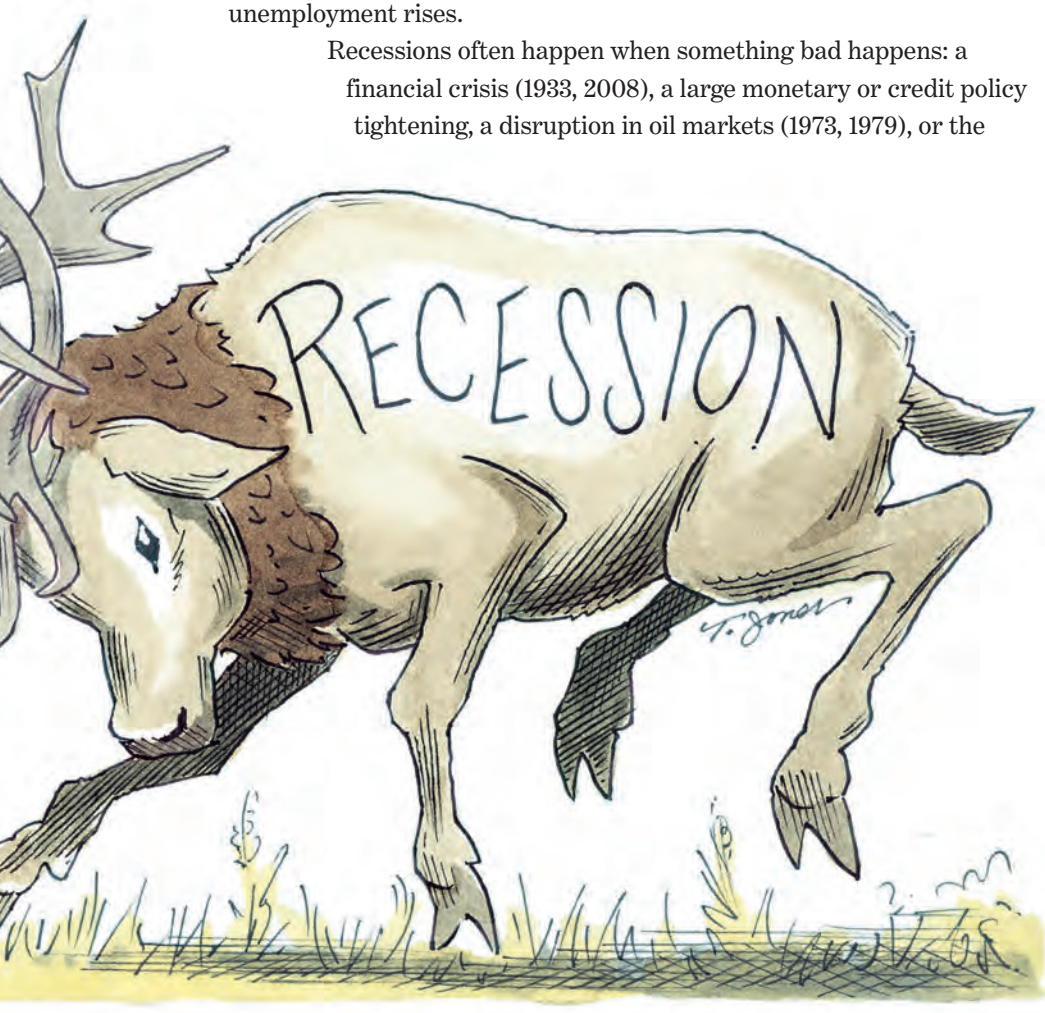
[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

John H. Cochrane: One might say that fears about a recession have loomed for centuries! But, like disease, fear of recession does not itself cause a recession.

De Witte: What do people—economists included—understand and don't understand about recessions?

Cochrane: We know they happen and seem to be a regular phenomenon. In some sense, recessions look much alike. Economic activity declines throughout the economy and all over the country, unlike, say, a bad snowstorm that affects only one area or a boom in one industry, like tech. Durable goods, investment, housing, and things you borrow to finance, all get hurt much more; services and nondurable goods (food) fall much less. Employment falls, unemployment rises.

Recessions often happen when something bad happens: a financial crisis (1933, 2008), a large monetary or credit policy tightening, a disruption in oil markets (1973, 1979), or the



moment we find out that a boom has run its course (1929, 1999). But those are often amplifying factors rather than complete causes, as those events sometimes don't lead to recessions.

De Witte: What causes recessions?

Cochrane: Just what causes recessions and drives these mechanisms is a bit contentious. The fact that every business falls at the same time leads to the Keynesian idea that "lack of demand" is at fault. But why should people wake up one day and just want to spend less? Why should that be the same everywhere in the country? The economy is surely more complex than a one-dimensional "stimulus" theory describes.

One cause of recession is the natural turbulence of some businesses expanding and others contracting. In 2008, it was a bit due to the fact that, no, we aren't all going to move to Las Vegas, so we need to stop building houses there. In 1999, in part the end of the first round of the Internet. It seems pretty clear the end of this round of Internet development is at hand, and as big bets on endless growth go bust, and as people move away from one kind of job to another, there can be at least a slowdown.

"In my view, we have a one-time inflation caused by the one-time fiscal blowout of the pandemic."

Even famous recessions in 2008 and 1929 show a decided slowing of economic activity before the financial panic. The financial panic is at least partly caused by the growth slowdown. Risky companies betting on years of continued growth are suddenly worth less, as we're seeing right now in tech. If banks are overexposed to those businesses, that feedback can make matters worse.

De Witte: What else do people often misunderstand about recessions?

Cochrane: People also misunderstand the nature of unemployment. Even in recessions, most people get jobs relatively quickly. The real issue is labor force participation, the declining number of people who are even looking for work, in good times and bad.

"Recessions" are when income is going down, and the unemployment rate is rising. But we are still in "bad times" when income is low and unemployment is high. That persists a good bit past a "recession." I think if we could do it over again, we'd define recessions in terms of low levels of GDP and high levels of unemployment, not growth rates.

The other thing most people get wrong is to dramatically overstate recessions, painful as they are, in the big scheme of things. A bad recession might lower income by 5 percent for a few years. But long-run growth overwhelms such changes. In 1950, average income was under $15,000 per year, in 2012 dollars. Now, it's $60,000, in 2012 dollars. That's huge.

Currently, stagnant growth is our big problem. Long-run growth of the economy matters much more than year-to-year growth rates. Recessions are painful interruptions, but we should be paying much more attention to long-run growth.

"The economy is surely more complex than a one-dimensional 'stimulus' theory describes."

De Witte: I asked [Hoover senior fellow] John B. Taylor this a few months ago, and I'd be curious to get your take on it too: What is the relationship between inflation and recession? Why does the Fed have to aggressively raise interest rates to end inflation?

Cochrane: There is definitely a correlation between inflation and recessions. Inflation tends to ease in a recession and accelerate in a boom. The Fed is counting on this effect, as inducing a bit of recession is its only tool right now. (Or, inflation really comes from fiscal policy, and the Fed is being asked to counteract that.) But that's not always and everywhere. Sometimes we have stagflation: a recession with inflation. That is much more common across the rest of the world than in the United States. Countries in trouble—that often includes fiscal trouble for their governments—tend to have inflation in bad times, not just in good times. That mechanism could be coming to the United States soon.

Right now, the worry is that the Fed and other central banks, in their efforts to fight inflation, will tighten money and credit to the point that it causes a recession. That is, indeed, much of the point of the Fed's actions. The standard story for how the Fed affects the economy is that the Fed slows the economy down, pushing it toward recession, and specifically slowing down parts of the economy that depend on cheap credit, and that this economic slowdown reduces inflation. The hope is that the Fed can add just enough recessionary force to offset inflation, but not so much as to actually see a recession. The fear is that it will overshoot.

But lots of other forces can go wrong. Rising interest rates cause a lot of financial trouble for businesses that, once again, have set themselves up hoping for perpetually free borrowing.

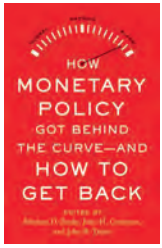
There are lots of other episodes in which inflation does go away on its own. In my view, we have a one-time inflation caused by the one-time fiscal blowout of the pandemic. If nothing bad happens, in particular no additional fiscal blowout, inflation will slowly ease without the Fed having to cause a recession like we saw in the early 1980s. If the United States returned to a strong supply-side growth policy, that would help, too. But I may be wrong, and bad shocks could surely come.

"Risky companies betting on years of continued growth are suddenly worth less."

De Witte: Could there be any spillover effects if there is a recession elsewhere in the world, such as in the eurozone, the United Kingdom, or China?

Cochrane: Yes. We live in a global economy, like it or not. China seems in danger [of recession], and surely there will be some spillover. In Europe, both energy problems and its government debt problems could cause trouble and spill over to the United States.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. Reprinted by permission of Stanford News Service.



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"Wasteful and Extravagant"

When congressional committees proliferate, so does entitlement spending. The solution, as it was in the past, is to consolidate control of the purse.

By John F. Cogan

At the start of the year, the US Treasury began taking steps to avoid default on the nation's $31.4 trillion national debt. The government had been there before. It will keep arriving there until Congress finds a way to control its voracious appetite for spending. The political will to cut spending is hard to muster, and congressional history shows that the budget process itself creates incentives for excessive spending and budget deficits.

Entitlement programs have accounted for all the growth in federal spending relative to gross domestic product in the past sixty years, causing the persistent budget deficits during that period. Entitlement expenditures are determined

Key points

» Entitlement programs have accounted for all the growth in federal spending relative to gross domestic product over the past sixty years.

» In the past, a single committee in the House and another in the Senate controlled spending.

» A return to consolidated appropriations would be a step toward restraining the growth of the federal budget.

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differently from so-called discretionary programs. Spending on the latter programs is set by fixed appropriations of money. Entitlement expenditures aren't fixed in advance but determined by the program's level of benefits, its eligibility rules, and economic factors.

Jurisdiction for entitlement legislation is dispersed among more than a dozen committees in each congressional chamber. In the House, the Agriculture Committee has jurisdiction over farm-support payments and food stamps; the Education and Workforce Committee over student loans and grants; the Ways and Means Committee over Social Security, Medicare hospital insurance, and welfare programs; and the Energy and Commerce Committee over Medicaid (sharing responsibility for ObamaCare and Medicare Part B with Ways and Means).

"You will enter upon a path of extravagance . . . until we find the treasury of the country bankrupt."

In this system, no committee is accountable for total spending. Each committee has a reason to expand its programs and resist attempts to restrain them, but none has an incentive to keep overall spending down.

It's analogous to the classic tragedy of the commons. Imagine a situation in which many fishermen have access to a commonly owned body of water. Each fisherman has an incentive to catch as many fish as possible, and no fisherman has a reason to restrain his catch. The area is eventually depleted of fish. But there's one notable difference: unlike the fisherman, once Congress has exhausted its supply of tax revenue, it can borrow from the future.

Earlier Congresses saw the consequences of dispersed spending authority and used expert committees with specialized knowledge (called authorizing committees) to create programs and their rules of operation. For most of the nineteenth century, a single committee in each chamber determined the total annual budget. The use of a single committee provided accountability and made possible the necessary funding trade-offs among programs. Except during wars and recessions, annual budgets were balanced with a suitable allowance.

But in the late 1870s to the mid-1880s, the House began dispersing spending authority. Former speaker Samuel Randall delivered a prophetic warning in 1885: "If you undertake to divide all these appropriations and have many committees where there ought to be but one, you will enter upon a path of extravagance that you cannot foresee the length of or the depth of, until we find the treasury of the country bankrupt."

The House dismissed these warnings and dispersed appropriations jurisdiction to eight committees. The Senate later followed suit. The new incentives caused expenditures to grow rapidly. From the 1890s to World War I, budget deficits were more frequent and larger than ever before in US peacetime history.

After World War I, Congress recognized the source of its budget problem and solved it. A House select committee, established to create a process in which the president would submit his own comprehensive budget request to Congress, recommended that the chamber consolidate all appropriation authority into a single committee. The remarkable resolution stripped seven House committees of their spending authority. Citing past support from some of its most respected former members, including Appropriations Committee Chairman James Garfield (1871–75) and Speaker Joseph Cannon (1903–11), the select committee urged members to "submerge personal ambition for the public good." The House did so and consolidated appropriations in 1920. Two years later, the Senate changed its rules to match.

No committee is accountable for total spending. And none has any incentive to keep overall spending down.

That restored budget accountability and eliminated the system's incentives for higher spending. From 1921 to 1930, when the Great Depression hit, federal spending was restrained and the annual budget balanced.

Starting in the 1930s, however, Congress began creating entitlement programs for people other than those who had performed some government service related to defense. (The only previous entitlements were pensions for servicemen.) The consequence is the return of dispersed committee jurisdiction in which entitlements now account for two-thirds of federal program spending.

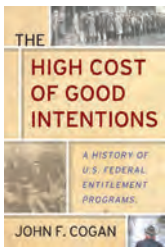
Since the 1970s, Congress has made several failed attempts to change the budget process, most notably the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act and discretionary appropriations caps and pay-go rules under the 1990 Budget Enforcement Act and subsequent laws. None of these reforms has overcome the powerful spending incentives created by the current system.

Many other ideas have been floated by individual lawmakers. In June 1979, Senator Joe Biden urged that almost all spending be subject to annual approval by the Appropriations Committee. Biden said in a floor speech that his bill would make "new and existing entitlements subject to the

appropriation of funds, thus effectively ending their entitlement status," with exceptions only for then-existing Social Security and Medicare benefits.

In the current arrangement, the House and Senate Budget Committees may appear to provide accountability, but they have no independent authority to change entitlements. Similarly, the omnibus appropriations laws of recent years may give the appearance that the congressional leadership is in charge. But these bloated bills fund only discretionary spending and represent a failure of the appropriations process.

In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson advised Congress that "it will be impossible to deal in any but a very wasteful and extravagant fashion with the enormous appropriation of public moneys . . . unless the House will consent to return to its former practice of initiating and preparing all appropriations bills through a single committee." The same is true more than a century later. Consolidating appropriations will be difficult for Congress, but no more difficult than it was in 1920. Lawmakers should again "submerge personal ambition for the public good." ■



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Rebooting the Fed

The Federal Reserve's monetary policy is broken. Do we have to wait two more years before it's fixed?

By Mickey D. Levy and Charles Plosser

As the Federal Reserve continues to debate how much to raise interest rates, it is sidestepping a fundamental problem: its lack of a viable monetary-policy strategy. The new strategic framework embraced in 2020, widely recognized as flawed from the beginning, is now in tatters as the Fed struggles to control inflation without causing a recession. Yet Chairman Jerome Powell recently stated that the central bank won't undertake a new strategy review until at least 2025. Until then, what will guide monetary policy?

The Fed's Statement on Longer-Run Goals and Monetary Policy Strategy, published in 2012, established a balanced approach to its dual mandate of price stability and maximum employment. It set a target of 2 percent inflation but made clear that a numeric employment target is inappropriate because labor-market conditions are determined by factors beyond the scope of monetary policy. Each January, until 2020, the Fed reaffirmed this strategy.

The Fed's 2020 strategic plan was misguided. It was heavily influenced by fears that the effective lower-bound interest rate was dragging down inflation expectations and that rates could fall to zero, creating challenges for

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monetary policy. Few within the Fed questioned the presumption that low inflation was harming economic performance and would persist.

This led the Fed to adopt an overly complex and unworkable new scheme of flexible average inflation targeting that favored higher inflation and prioritized an enhanced mandate of maximizing "inclusive" employment. The approach eschewed pre-emptive monetary tightening when higher inflation appeared imminent, which seems at odds with the Fed's goal of managing inflationary expectations.

The new 2020 framework was a sharp departure from the 2012 statement and the practices with which the Fed had succeeded in the past. Lost was Paul Volcker and Alan Greenspan's fundamental theme that price stability is the most important contribution monetary policy can make for sustained economic growth and job creation. The benefits of the Fed's balanced approach were cast aside for asymmetries and greater reliance on the Fed's discretion and judgment.

Things began to unravel even quicker than we had anticipated after our early published critique of the plan. As inflation soared, the Fed kept interest rates at zero and continued massive asset purchases, dismissing inflation risks to support employment. Eschewing pre-emptive tightening proved costly as aggregate demand soared and employment rapidly recovered.

Amid its policy missteps of the past two years, the Fed has reaffirmed its 2020 plan. Continuing to do so would highlight the lack of a viable strategy and reconfirm that the Fed is adrift, further denting its credibility. Instead, the Fed should announce that it is immediately reassessing its strategy.

The Fed's review should address the inherent weaknesses of the current strategy and consider the appropriate roles of systematic guidelines and rules that could help avoid major policy mistakes. It is essential to replace the unnecessarily complex framework of flexible average inflation targeting, which lacks any numeric guideposts for how high or long the Fed should tolerate inflation higher than 2 percent after a period of sub–2 percent inflation or what it should do after high inflation. Restoring a simple 2 percent inflation target with numeric tolerance bands, or even a simple average inflation target of 2 percent that addresses overshoots and shortfalls, would clarify monetary policy and Fed communications.

The Fed seemingly forgot a critically important lesson from the 1970s.

The strategic review must also assess the Fed's monetary policy tools. Reinstating pre-emptive monetary tightening is essential to maintaining the Fed's credibility and keeping inflation expectations anchored at 2 percent. This would reduce the risk that higher inflation becomes entrenched or self-sustaining. In 2021 and 2022, the Fed seemingly forgot this critically important lesson from the 1970s.

The use of forward guidance as a policy tool in place of actual policy changes also deserves scrutiny. Forward guidance presumes that the Fed has the credibility to manage expectations through words alone, which is dubious. Policy changes speak louder than words. The Fed must also reassess the costs and benefits of its balance-sheet policies. If the balance sheet is deemed an important monetary-policy tool, it should be integrated more closely into the bank's traditional interest-rate decisions and objectives.

Restoring a simple 2 percent inflation target would clarify monetary policy and Fed communications.

Mission creep continues to create problems for the Fed. While the enhanced mandate of maximum inclusive employment is a laudable goal, the Fed must emphasize that it cannot be quantified and that fine-tuning the labor market is beyond the scope of monetary policy.

Finally, the Fed must consider the potential contributions the Taylor Rule and other such systematic rules could play in the conduct and communication of monetary policy. These valuable benchmarks would be more helpful than forward guidance and help avoid major policy mistakes.

If the Fed tackles a review and takes steps to acknowledge and correct the shortcomings of its 2020 strategy, it can strengthen its credibility and improve future monetary policy. ◼

It Takes More *than a Village . . .*

Even if "all politics is local," the economy and the environment are not. That's why the rush to deglobalize—things like "friend-shoring" and protectionism—threatens both wealth and climate.

By Raghuram G. Rajan

The deliberations at November's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) suggested that while policy makers realize the urgency of combating climate change, they are unlikely to reach a comprehensive collective agreement to address it. But there is still a way for the world to improve the chances of more effective action in the future: hit the brakes on deglobalization. Otherwise, the possibilities for climate action will be set back by the shrinkage of cross-border trade and investment flows and by the accompanying rise of increasingly isolated regional trading blocs.

Key points

» Global diversification is a recipe for greater resilience.

» The more local or regional a market, the harder it will be hit by severe weather or a malevolent supplier.

» International agreements will be easier to reach and enforce in a world that has not fragmented economically.

Raghuram G. Rajan *is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Katherine Dusak Miller Distinguished Service Professor of Finance at the University of Chicago's Booth School.*

CHARGED UP: Jagjit Nanda assembles a lithium ion battery for testing at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. Deglobalization would hinder the production, investment, and innovation needed to replace carbon-intensive processes with climate-friendly ones such as battery production. [Oak Ridge National Laboratory]

Deglobalization is being accelerated through a combination of old-fashioned protectionism, newfangled "friend-shoring" (limiting trade to countries with shared values), and geostrategically motivated bans and sanctions. To see why this trend will frustrate global responses to climate change, consider the three categories of climate action: mitigation (emissions reduction), adaptation, and migration to better conditions. The sequence here is important, because the challenges implied by each category will become more difficult if less is done in the category preceding it. If we do too little on mitigation, we will need more adaptation; and if we do too little on adaptation, we will see more climate refugees fleeing their increasingly uninhabitable homelands.

New international agreements are needed to manage each of these problems. But rising geopolitical rivalries will make mitigation agreements more difficult. How can China and the United States agree to meaningful emission cuts when they both suspect that the other's top priority is to secure an economic, and hence strategic, advantage?

Agreements will be easier to reach and enforce in a world that has not fragmented economically. When there is ongoing bilateral trade and investment, both China and the United States will have more reasons and occasions to talk to each other, and there will be more chips (literally!) with which to barter—a technology transfer here in exchange for an emissions commitment there, for example. Mutual openness, including the free movement of businesspeople, tourists, and officials, will also make it easier to monitor climate action, whereas further isolation will only breed more suspicion, misinformation, and mutual incomprehension.

Deglobalization will also hinder the production, investment, and innovation needed to replace carbon-intensive production processes with climate-friendly ones. Consider battery production, necessary to store power from renewable energy sources. The key inputs for batteries—lithium, nickel, and cobalt—are projected to be in short supply within the decade, as are the rare earths used for electrodes. Global battery production will suffer if manufacturers have to "friend-shore" these commodities. After all, most of these resources are mined in unstable or conflict-ridden countries, like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and much of the existing refining is done in China and Russia.

The surest way for developing countries to create new jobs is to export.

Yes, some supply chains could be altered over time to pass through friendly countries. But businesses will struggle to determine who counts as a friend and who will remain so over the duration of a thirty-year investment. It was not so long ago that a US president raged even at Canada. Moreover, in the short run, reshuffling supply chains would severely limit production capacity and increase costs, reducing the world's chances of keeping global average temperatures below critical thresholds within the narrowing timeframe we have left.

Adaptation to climate change will also be harder in a deglobalized world. Higher temperatures and changing weather patterns will make traditional agriculture unviable in many places. New crops and technologies can help, but these will require innovation, investment, and financing. Many

MORE POWER: Worldwide demand is growing for lithium (opposite page) and other critical inputs such as cobalt and nickel. More flexible supply chains and greater international cooperation would help smooth over disruptions.
[Milda 444—Creative Commons]

developing countries outside major regional blocs will be shut out from such flows. And even the most heroic efforts at adaptation will not preserve agriculture's viability in the tropics. Many farmers will have to look for new livelihoods.

The surest way for developing countries to create new jobs is to export, tapping into the dependable demand in more highly developed (and less heat-affected) countries. Yet rising protectionist barriers in more developed regions will impede such growth, thereby limiting adaptation. Meanwhile, isolation will not necessarily give developed countries the security they seek. While possibly diminishing some political risks, confining supply chains within one's own country or region will increase their exposure to climate catastrophes and other risks. Just look at how higher energy costs are currently affecting all of Europe, but not North America.

Global diversification, by contrast, would bring greater resilience. Ideally, a supply chain would have multiple suppliers across different regions and continents in every segment, enabling it to shift quickly from a climate-hit supplier to a supplier elsewhere. Similarly, in the case of commodities, the best insurance is a well-connected, freely accessible global market where disruptions can be smoothed over, and where no producer has undue leverage. The more local or regional the market, the more adversely it will be affected by severe weather or a malevolent supplier.

The world will need to manage three tasks, in order: mitigation (emissions reduction), adaptation, and migration to better conditions.

If mitigation and adaptation fail, people in badly affected areas will be forced to migrate. Those in less-affected regions should not myopically assume that they can continue to live comfortably behind border walls. Not only will the humanitarian tragedy outside be hard to ignore, but desperate climate refugees will scale or break down any wall.

It would be far better to forge new global agreements to direct climate refugees toward the countries that can absorb them, and to provide potential migrants with the job and language training they need to be productive on arrival. Deglobalization will only hamper such efforts.

Globalization may have fallen out of favor in recent years, but preserving it is imperative. Even if countries have a legitimate security interest in restricting trade and investment in strategic and sensitive sectors, we must prevent these policies from degenerating into isolationism.

At a minimum, the international community should negotiate a Geneva Convention–style pact to create safe spheres of continued global interaction that are protected from sanctions and bans in most circumstances. These should include trade in food, energy, medicines, and other essential goods, such as those needed for climate mitigation and adaptation. We should set stringent conditions for denying countries access to the global payment infrastructure and for applying secondary sanctions (sanctions against sanction breakers).

Confining supply chains within one's own country or region will increase exposure to climate catastrophes and other risks.

Even if we cannot currently agree on a global climate action plan, we still must preserve the basis for cooperation. There can be no effective climate action without continued globalization.

Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Adapt and Be Adept: Market Responses to Climate Change,*** *edited by Terry L. Anderson. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

"Later" Is Too Late

Time is Ukraine's enemy. The West must arm Kyiv to push back the invaders—and deter Russia from future aggression.

By Condoleezza Rice and Robert M. Gates

When it comes to the war in Ukraine, about the only thing that's certain now is that the fighting and destruction will continue.

Both of us have dealt with Russian leader Vladimir Putin on a number of occasions, and we are convinced that he believes time is on his side: that he can wear down the Ukrainians and that US and European unity and support for Ukraine will eventually erode and fracture. To be sure, the Russian economy and people will suffer as the war continues, but Russians have endured far worse.

For Putin, defeat is not an option. He cannot cede to Ukraine the four eastern provinces he has declared part of Russia. If he cannot be militarily successful this year, he must retain control of positions in eastern and southern Ukraine that provide future jumping-off points for renewed offensives to

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take the rest of Ukraine's Black Sea coast, control the entire Donbas region, and then move west. Eight years separated Russia's seizure of Crimea and the Russian invasion a year ago. Count on Putin to be patient to achieve his destiny.

Meanwhile, although Ukraine's response to the invasion has been heroic and its military has performed brilliantly, the country's economy is in a shambles, millions of its people have fled, its infrastructure is being destroyed, and much of its mineral wealth, industrial capacity, and agricultural land are under Russian control. Ukraine's military capability and economy now depend almost entirely on lifelines from the West—primarily, the United States. Absent another major Ukrainian breakthrough and success against Russian forces, Western pressures on Ukraine to negotiate a cease-fire will grow as months of military stalemate pass. Under current circumstances, any negotiated cease-fire would leave Russian forces in a strong position to resume their invasion whenever they are ready. That is unacceptable.

It was clear in 1914, 1941, and 2001 that unprovoked aggression and attacks on the rule of law and the international order cannot be ignored.

The only way to avoid such a scenario is for the United States and its allies to urgently provide Ukraine with a dramatic increase in military supplies and capability—sufficient to deter a renewed Russian offensive and to enable Ukraine to push back Russian forces in the east and south. Congress has provided enough money to pay for such reinforcement; what is needed now are decisions by the United States and its allies to provide the Ukrainians the additional military equipment they need—above all, mobile armor. The US agreement to provide Stryker and Bradley armored vehicles is commendable, if overdue. American Abrams heavy tanks, along with German Leopard tanks, have also been committed to fill this need. NATO members also should provide the Ukrainians with longer-range missiles, advanced drones, significant ammunition stocks (including artillery shells), more reconnaissance and surveillance capability, and other equipment. These capabilities are needed in weeks, not months.

It's better to stop Putin now, before more is demanded of the United States and NATO.

Increasingly, members of Congress and others in our public discourse ask, "Why should we care? This is not our fight." But the United States has learned

the hard way—in 1914, 1941, and 2001—that unprovoked aggression and attacks on the rule of law and the international order cannot be ignored. Eventually, our security was threatened, and we were pulled into conflict. This time, the economies of the world—ours included—are already seeing the inflationary impact and the drag on growth caused by Putin's single-minded aggression. It is better to stop him now, before more is demanded of the United States and NATO as a whole.

We have a determined partner in Ukraine that is willing to bear the consequences of war so that we do not have to do so ourselves in the future.

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

President Volodymyr Zelensky's speech before Congress reminded us of Winston Churchill's plea in February 1941: "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job." We agree with the Biden administration's determination to avoid direct confrontation with Russia. However, an emboldened Putin might not give us that choice. The way to avoid confrontation with Russia in the future is to help Ukraine push back the invader now. That is the lesson of history that should guide us, and it lends urgency to the actions that must be taken—before it is too late. H

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History as Bludgeon

Russia's history represents a mix of ideology, moral squalor, and force. Hoover fellow Stephen Kotkin traces the background of the war in Ukraine.

By Andrew Roberts

***Andrew Roberts,* Secrets of Statecraft:** Stephen Kotkin is a world-class historian and perhaps the foremost expert on the history of the Soviet Union and Russia alive today. So that's what we spoke about—Josef Stalin, Russian history, the way it's viewed in the West, and of course, Vladimir Putin and his invasion of Ukraine.

Stephen, who taught you history? And when do you remember thinking that you'd like to be a historian?

Stephen Kotkin: Well, that question is slightly involved, because I went to university in the sciences. But I was unable to endure the sight of blood in medical school and my medical career ended with very high grades but in

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my own vomit on the floor of the operating room in the University of Rochester hospital as a sophomore.

Roberts: Is that literally true?

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

Kotkin: Yes, it is.

Roberts: Wow.

Kotkin: I was in organic chemistry, did really well, and was admitted to a molecular biology class which had a field work component at the hospital. Then, at the end of my sophomore year, I was supposed to be admitted into medical school in this special program. University of Rochester, where I went for my undergraduate degree, had an admission to medical school early. But the operation, which was a right carotid artery scrape because we didn't have Lipitor yet, and so to remove the plaque from the arteries you actually had to open up the jugular and clean it out. I had never seen anything like that before and I've never seen anything like that since and I didn't make it to the restroom. And my medical career ended, and I majored in British poetry.

Roberts: Where there's not that much blood. But you wound up writing the biography of the man of blood, Josef Stalin.

Kotkin: I ended up double majoring in history and going to graduate school for history rather than English, but not in Russian history.

Roberts: When did that come into your life?

Kotkin: That was my third year of the PhD program at Berkeley, when I was kind of floundering for an adviser. I started in French history. Everyone had a goatee and drank a lot of coffee. I've never had a cup of coffee in my life.

Roberts: Neither have I actually, funny enough.

Kotkin: I don't have facial hair and I'm also not favorably disposed towards leftist revolution. So, I didn't fit. As a result of which, I abandoned French history for Hobsbawm history, but the adviser for Hobsbawm history, after I had learned Czech in order to impress him, told me he doesn't take PhD students. So, that was a bit of a dilemma.

The short answer is Martin Malia, the great historian of intellectual history, was at Berkeley and I gravitated towards him and started learning Russian language, and then Michel Foucault also had an influence on me, the French philosopher, who told me it would be interesting to apply his ideas to the study of Stalin. So, I ended up crazily beginning to learn Russian, third year of the PhD program, instead of taking my exams, which I put off. I had a crash course in Russian, and four years later I was an assistant professor of Russian history at Princeton University.

"The belief in communist ideals was very pervasive and we did not take it seriously enough."

Roberts: And Martin Malia, whom you mentioned, argued in his book *The Soviet Tragedy* that because of the Soviet system's need for political and economic totalitarian control, it couldn't tap the full reservoir of human potential regardless of the propaganda and ideology claiming that it could. How do you feel that that theory has stood up in the past quarter century?

Kotkin: I think we've come to understand that totalitarianism, not in the strawman version but in the sophisticated version, is a very powerful theory and it's also a very powerful analytical concept in our response to such regimes. So, I think Malia won that debate.

Mostly what you see is a Friedrich/Brzezinski simplistic strawman version of totalitarianism; you can smell the straw burning on the page as they are getting ready to undo that theory. They portray it as simplistic and idiotic, which it was, unfortunately, in their version, and then they think they're done with it. But Malia's version, Jan Gross's version especially, which came a little bit later, was absolutely spectacular. And that's the version that I believe I helped advance and adhere to to this day.

EXPOSING TYRANNY

Roberts: Tell us about Paul Gregory's Soviet archives workshop here at Hoover. What did the opening of the Russian archives after the fall of communism tell us about Stalin that we didn't know already?

Kotkin: Well, Robert Conquest got most of this right. He was here at the Hoover Institution for decades.

Roberts: Great man, great man.

Kotkin: He wrote the most important books in the Sixties. He later became an adviser to Prime Minister Thatcher, as you know. He wrote poetry. Conquest got the system more or less right. It's not like we got into the archives and we discovered "oh my word, it turns out it's a constitutional-rule-of-law order. It turns out there's separation of powers and freedoms and civil liberties and protection of private property; we got it all wrong." We discovered it was the tyranny that Conquest and a few others like my adviser Martin Malia had written about before the opening of the Soviet archives. Because here we had the anticommunist Hoover archives put together by the emigration, which are just spectacular. It's still valuable to this day, even after the opening of the Soviet Union.

"Their oppression was extreme. And yet people, not all but many, in fact probably a majority, felt that they were building a new world."

I guess I would say some of the main things we learned have to do with the belief in communist ideals that was very pervasive and we did not take seriously enough. That includes the elite and it includes Stalin personally. The communists turned out to be communists. Just like the Nazis were Nazis. Just like the communist regime in China today means what it says. We sometimes have a tendency to tone down, wish away deeply held ideological

beliefs that make us uncomfortable or that we don't hold ourselves. That was the main thing.

The other is how deep the moral squalor was at the same time. So, you have these convictions, deeply held convictions on one side, and then you have all of these means to enact those convictions that are more than squalor, honestly. And you learn it and you see it, and still, it makes a very profound impression on you.

Roberts: Give us an example of what you mean.

Kotkin: Well, they would go to a meeting and talk about social justice and enacting social justice and ending slavery and wage slavery, as they called it—meaning just the ability to hire people—destroying parliaments, which of course means representatives of the people. They would go on in this vein, and then they'd have a follow-up discussion about murdering this person and murdering that person without due process, in the name of these very ideals. And so you see them in their moral universe made up of both the convictions and the moral squalor simultaneously, and it's not a show. It's not something they're acting. They actually are very ready, willing, and eager to put in practice the horrors that Conquest and others documented and that we know even more about in the name of those very ideals.

Roberts: In 1995, you wrote *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization,* which exposed the realities of everyday life in the Soviet city of Magnitogorsk in the 1930s. Was the life of ordinary people there as dreadful as one might imagine it to have been?

Kotkin: It was. But they didn't all think that. The paradox of the 1930s in the rise of the Stalinist system was that the deprivation was very severe, their oppression was extreme. And yet people, not all but many, in fact probably a majority, felt that they were building a new world. A new world of peace, justice, abundance. Despite the obvious deprivation. Despite the arbitrary unjust oppression around them. They were willing to suspend, as it were, the disbelief in the reality that they were seeing in order to believe in or hope for this radiant future.

But remember, they were young. The Soviet Union was the youngest country in the world at the time, as far as major economies go. A huge proportion of its population was under the age of twenty-five. Which is another reason that confronting the Nazi land army proved to be a lot easier for the Soviets than people understood. But these young people, instead of having mundane lives, instead of waiting to climb the ladder forever in career terms, they

***A "GREAT MAN" DOES EVIL:** Allied leaders Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Josef Stalin gather for the 1945 Yalta Conference. Stephen Kotkin says of the Soviet leader: "Personalities are complex. Evil is human. And Stalin was an enormous talent. That's not to say I share his values, or I share any admiration for his methods. But we cannot dismiss the fact that he was a talented individual and recognized as such by all those closest to him in the inner circle."* [UK National Archives]

were building this new world. So, you screw in a bolt or a rivet and it's not just a bolt or a rivet but it's a strike against the international bourgeoisie. So, this mundane activity suddenly becomes world-historical—and of course, you're bathed completely in all of the propaganda about who you are and what you're doing in building this new world. And despite everything they saw going on around them, which could have led to doubts, many of them believe all through the end of their life . . . Lev Kopelev is the best example. Your listeners would enjoy his *Education of a True Believer,* which is probably the single best book to understand the phenomenon of the rise of Stalinism that I've described in *Magnetic Mountain*.

Kopelev was a Germanist, and forced into emigration like Solzhenitsyn. Solzhenitsyn, of course, came here to Hoover and then settled in Vermont. Kopelev settled in Germany. He's less well-known to the Anglo-American sphere. But Kopelev's *Education of a True Believer* charts this youthful acceptance, desire to believe, and participation in mass crimes, and then there's a regret later on in his life, while he's an émigré writing his memoirs, but truthfully writing about the fact that he did believe in this and did participate in it.

POWER AND VIOLENCE

Roberts: In September 1931, when Stalin discovered that his seventy-three-year-old history teacher from seminary was in prison in Tiflis, he ordered Beria to release him. Did Stalin's sense of Russian and Georgian history come from his reading in the Tiflis seminary? Before he discovered Marxism and Leninism?

Kotkin: He discovered Marxism, Leninism, of course, at the seminary. So, I would argue for simultaneity in his development. The seminary is clearly enormously influential on him. He's not allowed to go to university. There are restrictions on people from the provinces, who can attend university and other restrictions. He does make it to the seminary. He's an excellent student. He has some good teachers. He reads a lot of books, including eventually underground or forbidden literature that circulates secretly among the students. He doesn't quite finish the seminary. Misses the final exams of his last year. So, he actually didn't graduate. And of course, he didn't become a priest or monk, as his mother lamented later on.

But nonetheless, what's interesting about it is he began a process of continual self-improvement where he got some formal education. Not a small amount for someone in his time period and that region. Quite a lot of

education, relative to the rest of the population: an autodidact, teaching himself and acquiring a lifelong passion for books.

Roberts: You point out that both Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great had far tougher early years than Stalin. Which czars did Stalin admire and why?

Kotkin: Stalin was about power. And the more power you accumulated, the more power you exercised, especially on behalf of reasons of state and the advance of Russian imperial power, the more he admired you. If you had pangs of conscience, if you worried about arresting, let alone assassinating, people, summarily executing them, he had less respect for you. So, the waffflers, those who hesitated, those who potentially set Russia back, bothered him.

He loved the czars who were powerful and showed their teeth. So of course, Ivan the Terrible. He had a fascination with Ivan all the way to the end of his life. Peter the Great, as you mentioned; Alexander. Of course, Alexander I got to Paris, as Stalin pointed out when they congratulated him when he alighted in Berlin in 1945. And we should remember that there were monarchs or shahs of the Persian empire, of medieval Georgia. He was very familiar with that history as well, and he admired many of those figures who would be less well known to your listeners.

"The communists turned out to be communists. Just like the Nazis were Nazis."

Roberts: Did he admire Catherine the Great for the extension of the empire under her?

Kotkin: Yes, of course he did. He had a Marxist-Leninist worldview. So, he felt that Catherine, like Peter, served the interests solely of the capitalist class. So, he differentiated: his admiration for Peter or Catherine was always limited by his class analysis.

Roberts: You write of Stalin having "an uncanny fusion of Marxist convictions and great-power sensibilities, sociopathic tendencies, and exceptional diligence and resolve." How do you explain these seeming contradictions?

Kotkin: Most people are not flat characters, but they're round characters, as E. M. Forster once famously described characters in a good novel. Real life is complex. Personalities are complex. Evil is human. And Stalin was an enormous talent. That's not to say I share his values, or I share any admiration for

his methods. But we cannot dismiss the fact that he was a talented individual and recognized as such by all those closest to him in the inner circle.

Let's remember he resigned half a dozen times in the 1920s, either orally or in writing. And every single time, the rest of the leadership, the rest of the people in the central committee, rose up and declined to accept his resignation. If they had perceived that he was a threat to them personally or that he was incapable of carrying that state on his back, they would have gladly accepted his resignation.

Stalin was a figure that we should not underestimate. Trotsky spent his entire life, until Stalin had him assassinated, belittling Stalin from afar. And too much of the Trotsky viewpoint on Stalin has entered the literature and entered our consciousness: that Stalin could never have been an intellectual of the class of Trotsky. He could never have written well or been smart enough to have outperformed Trotsky. This critique, of course, is false.

THE REAL STALIN

Roberts: You write of the problem of addressing the role of a single individual, even Stalin, in the gigantic sweep of history in the great debate over the importance of great men and women in history, versus vast impersonal forces, as T. S. Eliot put it. What does Stalin's career tell us?

Kotkin: It's not a prejudice to do something called "great man" history. Not great in the sense of morally great, but great in the sense of enormous leverage on the system. We know this from your work on Churchill or on Napoleon. And one could mention many other people. So, it's very important to understand where that leverage comes from and to understand the agency that they exercised in these colossal structures.

Roberts: You write of Stalin that he offers little help in getting to the bottom of his character and decision making. In 1953, he was called the most famous and at the same time the most unknown person in the world. How does a historian like you go about getting to the real Stalin under those circumstances?

Kotkin: Well, the real Stalin is his life work, which is this accumulation, an exercise of power over life and death, over hundreds of millions of people. He became Stalin in the process of acquiring that power and exercising it. He didn't become Stalin because of how he was treated by his mother and father or by his teachers in school or by any other major events in his childhood. He became Stalin because he was in a position of absolute power for decades in

STAYING THE COURSE: A poster shows Stalin shadowed by Lenin, an image stressing a continuity of revolutionary goals. Kotkin points out, "We sometimes have a tendency to tone down, wish away deeply held ideological beliefs that make us uncomfortable or that we don't hold ourselves." [Public domain]

a major country. And in a major country that had ambitions to be in the first rank of powers but didn't have the capabilities, necessarily, and resorted—as they always do in Russia—to coercion to try to manage or make up the gap with the West.

But if you're talking about what we might call his innermost thoughts—Did he have pangs of conscience? How did he understand the fact that he was accusing all of these people of participating in treason and conspiracies which on the face of it was just improbable?—that's the Stalin that remains enigmatic for us. Right?

Evidently, Stalin was persuaded of conspiracies that you and I would dismiss out of hand, so we have to look at the world from his point of view, less from ours. But even then, we have trouble because there's so much of the propaganda, both pro- and anti-Stalin, that got in the way. Few of his minions survived to write about it. And of course, Stalin, unlike Hitler, never delivered those recorded table talks.

A DELUSION THAT WILL NOT DIE

Roberts: In 2017, in the *Wall Street Journal,* you wrote, "Though communism has killed huge numbers of people intentionally, even more of its victims have died from starvation as a result of its cruel projects of social engineering." You put the number of deaths from communism at sixty-five million people between 1917 and 2017. Under those murderous circumstances, Stephen, why are there still people in American, British, and European universities who still propagate Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism, and various other offshoots of this political philosophy?

Kotkin: Well, you'd have to ask them.

Roberts: What do you suspect?

Kotkin: I think here we would want to introduce the concept of perverse and unintended consequences, which is also a synonym for history. People believe that their intentions are pure, and that the outcome is necessary for the survival of the human race. And so, if you just try harder, if you just exert more, if you just do it better the next time, you'll get to that paradise on earth that you didn't get to the first time or the second time, in the case of Mao. We have this problem where too much is put on intentions and not enough is put on how those intentions play out in the real world.

Stalin "loved the czars who were powerful and showed their teeth."

So, there's this eternal appeal to "let's get another try, let's do it better the next time," rather than "let's examine the perverse and unintended consequences." The road to hell is paved with the best intentions. I think that explains a lot of it.

We have injustices. There were injustices in czarist Russia. That's why Stalin joined the underground. He spent his entire adult life through the age of thirty-nine without a profession, without a legal job, in exile, in prison, escaping from exile in prison, being harassed and worse by the czar's secret police, because there were injustices in czarist Russia and they were real and he dedicated his life to overcoming those injustices. The problem, of course, is that the system he presided over was worse. And the injustices, instead of being transcended, were deepened and made more pervasive. So Stalin is the ultimate example of perverse and unintended consequences.

Roberts: Which brings us, of course, to the modern totalitarians, to Vladimir Putin and President Xi. In Putin we see a leader who uses history a good deal to justify his actions, especially with the invasion of Ukraine. How good a historian is he?

Kotkin: He's right that there are tendentious interpretations which inflict upon Russian interests some distortions. So, there's some truth to his critique about the 1930s leading to World War II, about the role of Poland in some of the 1930s machinations. There is a small kernel of truth in some of what Putin is saying. But of course, the larger story is his own distortions and manipulations on behalf of the criminal war that he unleashed against Ukraine beginning in 2014 and then expanded in February 2022.

However, he's taught us a lesson here. Which is to say, we need to know and use our history well, because others will use it if we don't. And if we don't know the history that he's manipulating, we won't understand that he is manipulating that history.

Xi Jinping has learned that lesson as well, but in the Putin sense of the term. Xi Jinping certainly is manipulating history like Putin in the sense that Deng Xiaoping is almost, not quite but almost, being erased from Chinese history. Mao remains elevated because without Mao, you wouldn't have that system. And Xi's elevation of himself on a level with Mao right before our eyes should . . . let's put it this way, we should understand the connection between those manipulations of history and his alteration of the status quo in East Asia right now. ◘

This conversation was edited for length and clarity. Adapted from* Secrets of Statecraft with Andrew Roberts, *a Hoover Institution podcast. © 2023 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University.

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Think the Unthinkable

Why would Moscow use a tactical nuclear weapon? Not to terrorize Ukraine. To terrorize *us*.

By Jakub Grygiel

Moscow regularly engages in nuclear saber rattling, and its battlefield problems in Ukraine have only increased the tempo and volume of Russian rhetorical reliance on nuclear weapons. Using nuclear weapons, even on a very limited, tactical level, would not be cost-free. The global consequences in particular may be counterproductive for Russia.

Even though tactical nuclear weapons are meant to alter the dynamics on the battlefield—in this case, in Ukraine—their use by Russia would target the West as the primary audience. The tactical target is Ukraine and

Key points

» The principal effect sought by Russia: to demonstrate to the Western alliance Moscow's willingness to use the "absolute weapon."

» The outcome of any use of nuclear weapons would be complex, helping Vladimir Putin's cause in some areas and weakening it in others.

» Putin may even see the use of nuclear weapons as a desperate bid for personal self-preservation.

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its forces, but the *strategic* audience is the West. Russia could launch a tactical nuclear weapon to block a Ukrainian offensive, to destroy an urban center, or even to simply signal the willingness of further escalation by exploding it over an uninhabited area far from the front lines. Regardless of the immediate target, the principal effect sought would be to demonstrate to the Western alliance that Russia was willing to use the "absolute weapon," breaking an alleged international taboo, and above all threatening to escalate a local war on the eastern steppes of Europe into a wider conflagration with devastating consequences for the whole continent, if not more.

Instead of unifying Europe, a Russian use of nuclear weapons would deepen the divergent strategic postures across the continent.

The purpose of using nuclear weapons in Ukraine would be to terrorize the West, compelling it through the fear of further nuclear escalation to stop its military backing of Kyiv. Russian leader Vladimir Putin may be calculating that because of this fear, the West would cease the cautious but so far consistent and very effective logistical support of Ukrainian forces, thus letting Russian manpower and artillery dominate the battlefield.

SHAKEN EUROPE

Russia could be partially correct in such an assessment because the immediate benefit would likely be a disintegration of the Western unity in support of Kyiv. In some European capitals (Berlin, Paris, Rome), while criticizing Putin for the use of nuclear weapons, a lot of voices on every side of the political spectrum would call for the end of hostilities, putting enormous pressure on Ukraine to end its military operations and to acquiesce to a diplomatic deal favorable to Moscow.

Furthermore, there would be a growing chorus of European critics blaming Russia's use of nuclear weapons on the strongly pro-Ukrainian positions of countries like Poland and the United States that are the primary sources of arms for Kyiv, and thus that would be seen as responsible for the escalation of violence. Such a posture would satisfy two broad strategic approaches always present in Western capitals: one is the continued search for "strategic autonomy" (the French version) or more simply a deep skepticism toward the United States; and second is the dislike of Poland and other Central European countries that are seen in Germany and Italy as overly anti-Russian and thus an obstacle to efforts to reach some sort of grand reconciliation with Moscow.

It is possible that the Western European response would differ if the Russians used a nuclear weapon over a Ukrainian city, causing thousands, or tens of thousands, of civilian casualties (as opposed, for instance, to using it on a sparsely populated battlefield). In that case, there might be a popular moral opprobrium, spurred by decades of anti-nuclear movements. The outcome, however, might be not a firmer posture against Russia but instead a more generic call for some version of "nuclear zero," targeting equally Russia and the United States (especially, again, in Germany and Italy, where the anti-nuclear movements have been most successful). In either case, the end result would be that American nuclear presence in Europe (i.e., through nuclear sharing) would be politically more difficult.

A Russian use of nuclear weapons would increase the risk of dragging Beijing and Tehran into a wider, potentially even nuclear, conflict.

The response to a Russian use of tactical nuclear weapons would likely be very different in Central Europe. Both because of a heightened sense of threat and because of Western European opposition to nuclear weapons, Poland would renew its requests to participate in nuclear sharing and to store tactical nuclear warheads on its territory. Moreover, as the pacifist pressures grew in Berlin, Central European capitals would increase their demands that Germany use its financial resources to aid them in defensive efforts as well as in helping another, likely larger, wave of Ukrainian refugees. This would exacerbate an already tense intra-European relationship.

In brief, instead of catalyzing a unified European response, a Russian use of nuclear weapons would deepen the divergent strategic postures in Europe—overall, a mildly positive outcome for Moscow, especially if the anti-nuclear, pacifist factions won the argument in Western European capitals.

WHAT DOES PUTIN THINK?

But the picture is more mixed in the rest of the world. A Russian use of nuclear weapons would in fact be likely to result in much weaker support for Moscow from China and Iran (as well as states, such as India, that are sitting on the sidelines). These two states have in practice backed Russia, including by supplying it with weapons such as Iranian drones and North Korean artillery shells, calculating that a Russian victory in Ukraine would continue to upend the existing international order. Conversely, they reckon that a Russian defeat would strengthen the West and allow the United States to focus

exclusively on Asia. But a Russian use of nuclear weapons would elevate the risk of dragging Beijing and Tehran into a wider, potentially even nuclear, war that could directly affect their interests and their territories.

In other words, these states fear entrapment by Russia and consequently would detach themselves from Moscow the moment it used a nuclear weapon.

Obviously, Putin may make a different calculation, leading him to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. He may privilege a divided West over Chinese support. Or he may think that his domestic base demands a punishing act against Ukraine, a nation that has been presented to Russians as inferior, perhaps nonexistent, and certainly full of fascists. Or, in an act of desperation, he may order a nuclear attack in Ukraine for personal self-preservation, to forestall a military loss of a "special military operation" that was supposed to be short and glorious. But in the end, the effects would likely be detrimental to Russia—both for its narrow objective of dominating Ukraine and for the wider goal of restoring Russian global grandeur. ■

The tactical target is Ukraine and its forces, but the strategic audience is the West.

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Russians' Worst Enemy

Vladimir Putin has wrecked his nation's prestige, its military, and its hopes.

By Timothy Garton Ash

The time has come to ask whether, objectively speaking, Vladimir Putin is an agent of American imperialism. For no American has ever done half as much damage to what Putin calls the "Russian world" as the Russian leader himself has.

This thought came to me recently when I was in the Ukrainian city of Lviv, talking to Ukrainians made refugees in their own country by Putin's war. "I was a Russian speaker until 24 February," said Adeline, an art student from the now Russian-occupied town of Nova Kakhovka, referencing the date of Russia's full-scale invasion last year. Russia has failed to take over Ukrainian culture, she said, so now it has set out to kill it. Several other Ukrainian students told

Key points

» Since the invasion of Ukraine, hostility toward neoimperial Russia has erupted among large numbers of people in the former Soviet states.

» The idea of a "Russian world" was revived in the 1990s as a soft-power initiative. Vladimir Putin weaponized it.

» Russian culture is a collateral victim of Putin's self-devouring cannibalism.

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me they find "the spirit of freedom" in Ukrainian literature, but of subservience to power in Russian literature.

Tetiana, a refugee from the ruthlessly bombed and destroyed city of Mariupol, had suffered without heat, light, or water in a cellar under constant bombardment, seen her best friend killed by a Russian missile, and then had a traumatic odyssey of escape. Tetiana not only speaks much better Russian than Ukrainian; her mother is actually from Russia, as are her parents-in-law. The Russian president would consider her a Russian. So I asked her for her message to Putin. She replied that she would like to kill him.

Wherever I turned, in every conversation, there was a total rejection not just of the Russian dictator, not merely of the Russian Federation as a state, but of everything and almost everyone Russian. Polling by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology shows that some 80 percent of Ukrainians had a positive attitude to Russia in 2013; by May 2022, the figure was just 2 percent. A university lecturer told me that his students now write "russia" with a small initial letter. "I don't correct them."

This may be unsurprising in Ukraine, a country suffering from a Russian war that is now primarily directed against the civilian population. But the same thing is happening across much of the territory of the former Russian (and subsequently Soviet) empire—which, since the early 2000s, Moscow has tried to reimagine as the *russkiy mir,* or Russian world.

In Georgia, a strong resentment of neoimperial Russia is more than understandable, since Russia has occupied roughly a fifth of the country's sovereign territory (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) since 2008. But after the invasion of Ukraine, that hostility has enveloped almost all Russians. Ironically enough, this impacts the many tens of thousands of Russians who have fled to Georgia precisely to avoid being conscripted into fighting in Putin's war against Ukraine. Georgians ask: why don't you protest back home? Or as one banner put it, "Putin is killing people in Ukraine while Russians eat khachapuri in Georgia." (Khachapuri is the distinctive Georgian cheese bread.)

Those who justify their wars in terms of culture will find their culture treated as an enemy.

The revulsion is also found in central Asian states that still have very close ties to Moscow. On YouTube, you can watch a magnificent excoriation of the bullying Russian ambassador to Kazakhstan, Alexey Borodavkin, delivered in fluent Russian by the Kazakh journalist Arman Shuraev. "Russophobia is all

that you have achieved with your stupid actions," he says. If Russia invades Kazakhstan as it has Ukraine, "the entire Kazakh steppe will be strewn with the corpses of your conscripts. . . . You are idiots. You are cannibals who eat themselves."

"Borodavkin," he concludes, directly addressing the ambassador, "if you want to see Nazis and fascists in Kazakhstan, look in the mirror and you will see the main Nazi and fascist. Glory to Ukraine! Forward Kazakhstan!"

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the Ukrainian journalist Olha Vorozhbyt tried to explain to an Indian public what was going on. "Could you imagine a Britain that claims India is in its empire?" she wrote in the *Indian Express*. "That is what Russia is doing now." One can extend the analogy. Imagine that a revanchist, militarist British dictatorship instrumentalized the cultural notion of an "English-speaking world" to justify its reinvasion of India. That's exactly what Putin has done.

Wherever I turned, there was total rejection not just of the Russian dictator, or of the Russian state, but of everything and almost everyone Russian.

The notion of *russkiy mir* was revived and repackaged in the late 1990s as a kind of Russian soft-power initiative (*mir* means peace as well as world). In 2007, a Russkiy Mir Foundation was created by presidential decree. This was presented as a Russian counterpart to the British Council or Germany's Goethe-Institut, but the concept was then weaponized by Putin to justify his war of recolonization in Ukraine. He explicitly mentioned the term in a speech justifying the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The entirely predictable result: revulsion against his recolonization wars has extended to the whole broader notion of a Russian-speaking world. Obviously, a comparison with the English-speaking world points up big differences as well. Britain's empire was overseas, Russia's a contiguous land empire. The ideology of a Russian world was always closely associated with the Russian imperial project, the Russian Orthodox Church (now headed by the ecclesiastical warmonger Patriarch Kirill), and autocracy. But if Britain had reinvaded India, the British Council wouldn't be very popular either. Those who justify their wars in terms of culture will find their culture treated as an enemy.

Russian culture is thus a collateral victim of Putin's self-devouring cannibalism. There was an alternative future in which Russian-speaking culture,

like today's English-speaking culture, might have become multiculturally enriched by authors and artists from all its former colonies. What would contemporary English-language literature be without authors from India, Africa, and Oceania? And, after all, fine contemporary Ukrainian writers such as Andrey Kurkov write—or should I say wrote?—in Russian.

But we must keep our eyes on the main tragedy. Putin is trying to recover parts of the Russian empire by brute force and terror. He recently boasted that the Azov Sea has become an internal Russian sea, adding that even Peter the Great "had still to fight to gain access to [it]." About fourteen million Ukrainians, a staggering one-third of the country's population, have been made homeless. Europe has seen nothing like this since 1945.

Even in Lviv, in the far west of Ukraine, I encountered frequent multi-hour power cuts, because Russia has destroyed about 50 percent of the country's energy infrastructure. What does Ukraine need most? Every single person I spoke to gave the same answer: weapons, weapons, weapons. Give us the tools, they say, and we will finish the job. And so we should.

In the end, Vladimir Putin will go down in history not merely as the man who failed to restore the Russian empire, but as the destroyer of the Russian world. ■

Atrocity Foretold

Robert Conquest's 1986 book *Harvest of Sorrow* proved entirely correct about Russia's cruel exploitation of Ukraine in the 1930s—behavior Russia is now repeating. What's different now is Ukraine. This time it will not submit.

By Josef Joffe

Trigger warning: Robert Conquest's 1986 book, *Harvest of Sorrow,* will shock and depress. The book is about the Ukrainian "Holodomor," Stalin's genocide-by-starvation in the early 1930s, which claimed the lives of some five million, at the low end, and ten million, according to the highest estimate. Though published a generation ago, this meticulously researched work by the late Hoover fellow is as relevant (and heartbreaking) today as we watch Vladimir Putin's pitiless war against Ukrainian cities and civilians. The cruise missiles are new, the purpose is the same: breaking the country's will to resist the Russian Behemoth next door.

An ancient poem sets the tone of *Harvest:*

> The black earth
> Was sown with bones
> And watered with blood
> For a harvest of sorrow
> On the land of Rus.

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ECHOES: A pro-Ukraine protest sign in London draws a parallel between Vladimir Putin's assault on Ukraine and the famine-ravaged Soviet years. The late Hoover fellow Robert Conquest wrote that millions of Ukrainians starved in the service of Soviet revolutionary orders—and that cultural and physical violence continued even afterward. [Alisdare Hickson—Creative Commons]

(Rus was not "Russia," but the multiethnic creation of invading Norsemen.)

Now listen to Lenin: "The interests of socialism are above the right of nations to self-determination." Cut the "socialism" and you can hear Putin.

After centuries of revolt against voracious neighbors, Ukraine was at last subdued for good by the Soviets in 1920. Conquest notes that the nation "was the first East-European state to be successfully taken over by the Kremlin." Ukraine was not the only victim of oppression across the Russian empire, yet it paid the highest price of Stalin's murderous campaign against the kulaks, the landholding peasantry. As a 1934 Russian novel had it, "Not one

of them was guilty of anything, but they belonged to a class that was guilty of everything."

So was the nation as such. The forcible collectivization of agriculture, an *ukase* proclaimed, was to destroy the "social base of Ukrainian nationalism—the individual landholdings." In Europe's "breadbasket" there was food aplenty, but grain was piled up in the open to rot. Desperate Ukrainians who gleaned the fields or dug up potatoes were shot. An eyewitness wrote, "The most terrifying sights were the little children with skeleton limbs dangling from balloon-like abdomens. . . . Everywhere, we found men and women lying prone, their faces and bellies bloated." According to the Bolsheviks, it was not the systematic terror that caused the Great Famine, but kulak sabotage of the harvest.

The cruise missiles are new, but the purpose is the same: breaking the country's will to resist the Russian Behemoth.

Conquest drew a gruesome parallel to Bergen-Belsen, with "well-fed police and party units" supervising the terror, which claimed the lives of one-quarter of the rural population. Those still alive were so weakened that they could not bury their family members, Conquest wrote. Meanwhile, Ukrainian grain was being exported abroad. Fast-forward to today: the *Wall Street Journal* reports, "Vessels linked to Russia's largest grain trader shipped thousands of tons of stolen Ukrainian grain to global buyers, using a sophisticated system of feeder vessels and floating cranes."

NOT JUST DEATH—ERASURE

To kill was not enough. During the Great Famine, Russian peasants were moved into Ukraine's empty villages—colonization by Russification. Ukrainians who survived were expelled and resettled throughout the vast reaches of the Soviet Union. Today, Russians are being moved into the southeastern part of Ukraine annexed by Moscow. According to press reports, thousands of Ukrainian children have been abducted to Russia, where they will be taught to become upstanding Russian citizens.

"In our days," writes German author Christine Brinck, "Ukraine has a chance."

Back then, Ukrainian national culture was wiped out as well. Academics, theater directors, and writers were fired or shot. Today, Russia is destroying

LIFE AND DEATH: Ukrainians gather last November to commemorate the Holodomor, the 1932–33 famine induced by Soviet leaders that led to perhaps ten million deaths. The forcible collectivization of agriculture aimed to destroy the "social base of Ukrainian nationalism." [Lypovetsk Territorial Community]

memory, tearing down monuments about the Holodomor in conquered cities. To invoke this term was counterrevolutionary treason in the Soviet Union. Today, Russians end up in jail when referring to "war" in Ukraine. The correct designation is "special military operation." Falsification never stops. Was the Holodomor genocide, the famine Soviet-made? The *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* defines "genocide" as "offshoot of decaying imperialism."

In 1946, the USSR's All-Union Central Committee passed a resolution stating that "in the fields of science and literature," there had been attempts by "hostile bourgeois ideology to reinstate Ukrainian nationalist concepts." Nor were the Bolsheviks the first to shred Ukrainian nationhood. In 1863, during the reign of Alexander II, an edict asserted that there was no such thing as a "Ukrainian language"—it was just a "dialect." Ukrainian books were prohibited, schools and publishing houses were closed.

Written a generation ago, Conquest's magnificent book curdles the mind, but it sets the stage for our time by reaching back ninety years. Today, Putin

claims that no civilians are being attacked. If the facts can't be denied, they are reduced to unfortunate accidents. Back then, one *politruk* (political officer) was at least brutally honest about the Holodomor: "It was a fight between life and death." The famine had to "show them who was boss." The purpose then was "de-Ukrainianization"; today the watchword is "de-Nazification" to pretty up naked imperialism.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

"Essentialism," the idea that a nation's past is destiny—this is how the Russians were, this is how they will be—is of course nonsense. How to explain that the two most rapacious nations of the twentieth century—Germany and Japan—have renounced aggression? Yet avoiding essentialism does not eliminate all continuities, in this case between Stalin and Putin. To understand Putin's rape of Ukraine, read *Harvest of Sorrow*—a story of ruthlessness, mendacity, and enslavement. It is Stalin minus *Das Kapital*. Sometimes, history does repeat itself—not as a "farce," as Marx had it in *The Eighteenth Brumaire,* but as cruelty and cynicism.

As a 1934 Russian novel had it, "Not one of them was guilty of anything, but they belonged to a class that was guilty of everything."

In the 1930s, the world did not pay attention. Today, the West imposes ever harsher sanctions on Russia, while helping Kyiv with sophisticated weapons and billions in cash. "In our days," writes the German author Christine Brinck in Berlin's *Tagesspiegel,* "Ukraine has a chance, which it never had during the Holodomor." ◼

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China after Mao

The Communist leaders of China promised the country would rise peacefully. Hoover fellow Frank Dikötter analyzes the long march of wishful thinking that led the West to believe them.

By Michael R. Auslin

Michael R. Auslin, **The Pacific Century:** Welcome to *The Pacific Century,* a Hoover Institution podcast on China, America, and the struggle for the twenty-first century. I am really thrilled and honored to be joined by my colleague Frank Dikötter. Frank is the chair professor of humanities at the University of Hong Kong and, of course, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. He was professor of modern history of China at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, received his PhD from the University of London, and has written and published a dozen books that truly have changed the way we look at China. His "People's Trilogy" includes *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe,* which won the 2011 BBC Samuel Johnson Prize for Nonfiction. It was also the book of the year by the *Economist*, the *Independent*, the *Sunday Times,* the *London*

Frank Dikötter *is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the chair professor of humanities at the University of Hong Kong. His latest book is* ***China after Mao: The Rise of a Superpower*** *(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).* ***Michael R. Auslin*** *is the Payson J. Treat Distinguished Research Fellow in Contemporary Asia at the Hoover Institution. He is the author of* ***Asia's New Geopolitics: Essays on Reshaping the Indo-Pacific*** *(Hoover Institution Press, 2020) and the co-host of the Hoover Institution podcast* ***The Pacific Century*** *(https://www.hoover.org/publications/pacific-century). Auslin also participates in Hoover research teams studying military history, the Middle East, Taiwan, China, and the Indo-Pacific.*

Evening Standard—and I could keep going. We are here to talk with Frank about his brand-new book, *China after Mao: The Rise of a Superpower*.

There is obviously an enormous amount that has been going on in China, and an enormous amount of attention being paid to China. But let me start with a funeral—the funeral of Jiang Zemin. Those who read *China After Mao* might come away thinking that the title could just as easily have been "China, Thanks to Jiang." Is that a fair assessment?

Frank Dikötter: Well, I am not sure we should have paid more attention to his passing. [Jiang Zemin] was a dictator, to put it in a nutshell. He was not exactly a Mr. Democracy. He was a ruthless, devoted Marxist-Leninist. But I think a great deal of attention has been given to Deng Xiaoping, so-called architect of China's reform—which is a complete misnomer, of course—and less to Jiang Zemin, who seemed sort of an intermediary figure. But he really is the key person who made the China we know today, for a great many reasons.

"Jiang Zemin is a committed Marxist-Leninist. He adheres to the Marxist principle that the means of production should belong to the state."

It's a very long list. But first of all, he is put in charge after some two hundred tanks and a hundred thousand soldiers converge on Beijing to crush the population in 1989. And he is the one who right away in the summer of 1989 revised the notion of "peaceful evolution." Now, what is peaceful evolution? You, as an American, may remember a man called John Foster Dulles; he was secretary of state. He came up with the notion in 1957. It meant that the United States and other international institutions like the International Monetary Fund should help satellite states of the Soviet Union, like Poland and Hungary, in the hope that they would then somehow peacefully evolve with economic form toward a democratic model.

On the fourth of June, 1989, the democracy movement was crushed in Beijing. But on that very same day, in Poland, for the first time under a red flag, the population voted a Communist Party out of power at the ballot box. In other words, Poland became a democracy. Hungary followed very soon afterwards.

This is what horrified the leadership, and Jiang Zemin in particular. To them, this was a perfect illustration of what would happen if you weren't strong enough to resist this attempt by the so-called imperialist camp to infiltrate and subvert power through the concept of peaceful evolution. So, that

became a top item on his agenda. And it remained that all the way through his ten years in power, and is with us to this very day.

So, every time you have, in the 1990s, someone like Bill Clinton, Kevin Rudd, or George Bush say that backed with economic reform, there will be a democratic position in China, they are really offering Jiang Zemin and others all the evidence they need that the imperialists are very serious about undermining and overthrowing them.

But it goes a lot further than that. The accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 is absolutely crucial. Not everybody understands what happened. In effect, Jiang Zemin and others, Zhu Rongji, made pledges and promises about how the country, once it joined the WTO, would follow the rule of law, would have greater transparency in governance, would reform state enterprises, et cetera. None of that, of course, ever happened. But it sounded so good that the WTO allowed China to join without making its capital account convertible, without reforming its state enterprises, and without making its exchange rate flexible.

From that point onwards, the trade deficit balloons, not just with the United States, but also with Mexico. In fact, the entire WTO camp. Not even Bangladesh is able to compete in the production of garments. Why? Well, because Jiang Zemin is a committed Marxist-Leninist. Like all other such leaders, he really adheres to the Marxist principle that the means of production should belong to the state. That is what was accomplished by Mao after 1949—to take, through great violence, the land from the farmers, the banks from the bankers, the shops from the shopkeepers, and place it all in the hands of the state. So, joining the WTO is the point where China starts developing very rapidly economically.

"Xi Jinping is a difference of degree, not of kind."

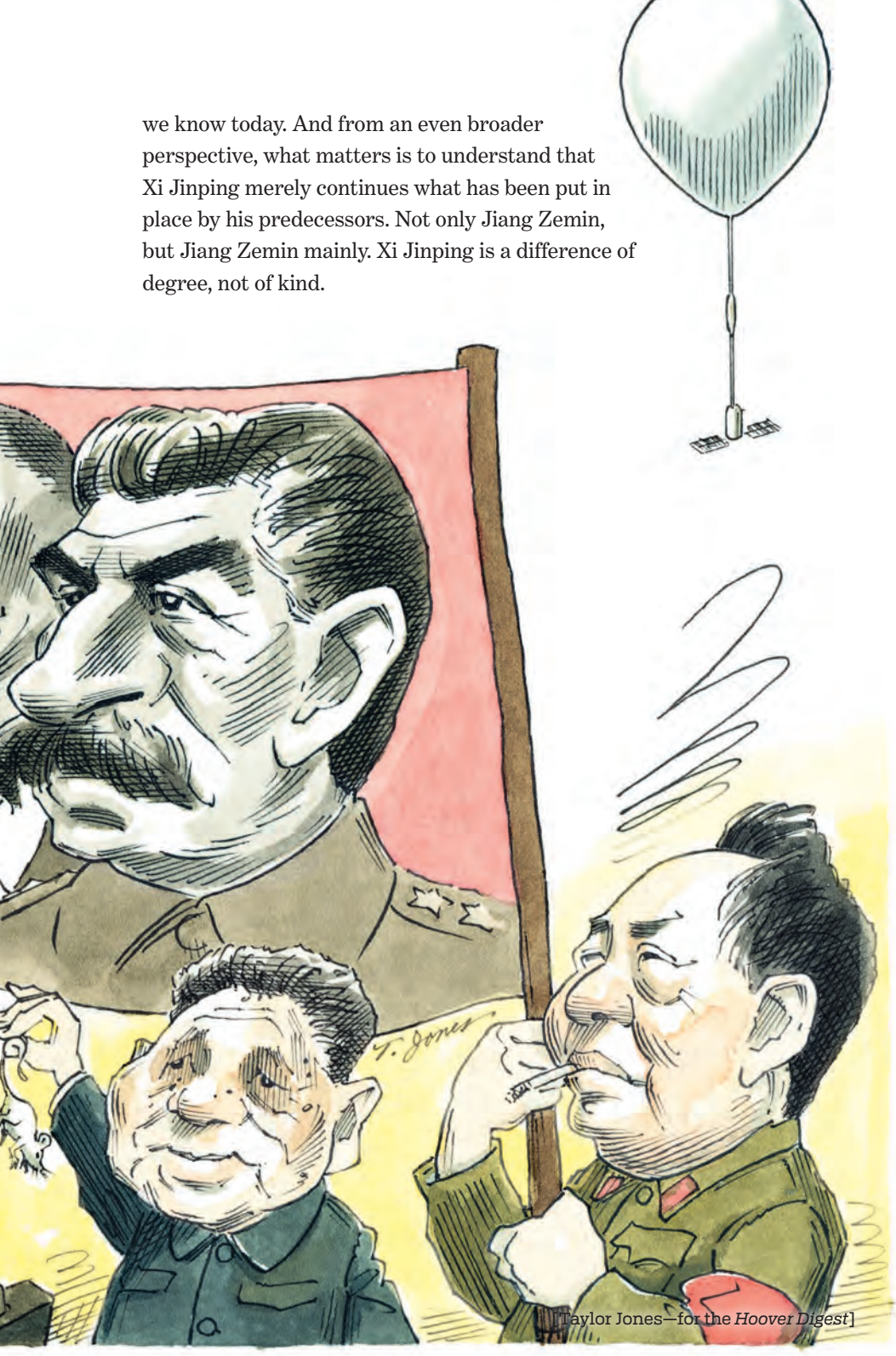
And there is so much more with Jiang Zemin, such as the attempt around 2000 to make sure that every private enterprise has a party committee. In other words, make sure that the private sector is not really private anymore. As far as I am concerned, from onwards of roughly 2000 the whole distinction between so-called private and so-called public becomes somewhat academic.

Auslin: Just so that we're all clear, in your view, the West—Washington—really fundamentally misunderstood the concept of "reform and opening up" that we attribute to Deng. And then followed by Jiang, who we think

was essentially continuing it, until Xi Jinping decided to clamp down on things. This is a misreading of history. Did we just get the big narrative wrong?

Dikötter: Yes. Well, you got pretty much everything wrong. What is important is to understand this central role that Jiang had in shaping the China

we know today. And from an even broader perspective, what matters is to understand that Xi Jinping merely continues what has been put in place by his predecessors. Not only Jiang Zemin, but Jiang Zemin mainly. Xi Jinping is a difference of degree, not of kind.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT XI

Auslin: There is a view that's increasingly popular in Washington, that our problems with China can be summed up in two words: Xi Jinping. And if Xi Jinping goes, for whatever reason, things will go back to normal. Meaning, a normal where we know how to deal with the Communist Party. We have worked with these guys for fifty years. And things will get stable. That is one view.

There is another view, that what some call hard authoritarianism really started in 2008 or so. Again, as a complete break with that Deng/Jiang period. Both of those assessments just don't match up with the evidence that you have seen, correct?

Dikötter: Yes, it is all just complete and utter nonsense. One hears a great deal of nonsense when it comes to China. I am not sure which aspect of Deng seems cuddly, you know. Is it when he has one campaign after the other against foreign cultures, spiritual pollution, and bourgeois liberalization? Or is it when he sends in tanks to crush his own people? So, Jiang Zemin: same story. Summer of 1989, peaceful evolution becomes a determined target for him. In 1999, after the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, he points out that the Americans hate the People's Republic of China. And he says to the standing committee that we must reinforce ourselves economically and militarily. But we must pretend that we are still friends. Join the WTO but don't yield to their demands.

"They are continuing the Cultural Revolution but in a very different guise, in a very different way."

When you want to understand the United States of America, it is generally a good idea to read the Constitution. And equally, it is a good idea to read the constitution of the People's Republic of China. In there are four cardinal principles which were articulated by Deng Xiaoping and enshrined in the constitution in 1982.

What are they? Uphold the socialist path—stick to a socialist economy, which we have got to this very day. Uphold the leadership of the Communist Party, which we also have to this day. Uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat. And four, uphold Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought.

I think you could reduce those to two words: Marxism, Leninism. This is the constitution. And every leader repeats the fundamental importance of

those four cardinal principles, year in, year out. The last time I heard them it was from Xi Jinping, in October 2022, at the Twentieth Party Congress.

These are committed Marxist-Leninists. There is no going back. If Xi Jinping dies of a heart attack tomorrow morning, it will be just another one. You need something much more thorough for this machine to move. This machine has gone through great trouble, including great violence, to acquire the means of production that I mentioned earlier. And it has a track record, which is not exactly an outstanding one, when it comes to embracing freedom and liberty. It is not about to abandon what it has acquired and consolidated over some sixty to seventy years.

Auslin: Why do you think we deceived ourselves?

Dikötter: I think it would be fair to say that it is hardly a misconception particular to the United States. The Germans, the Canadians, the Australians, just to name a few countries, were just about as deluded. I think at heart it is wishful thinking, but also a profound misconception, which is slightly racist if you do not mind me using the term. When we say China, what comes to mind frequently is the notion of culture, civilization, tradition. When, in fact, what we are talking about with the People's Republic of China is not Chinese culture; it is an organization called the Communist Party of China. And its date of birth is really 1917, with the Bolshevik Revolution of Lenin. So, that is what you need to study. But all too frequently, the idea is that Chinese communists are Chinese. They are not really communists.

China's view: "We must pretend that we are still friends. Join the WTO but don't yield to their demands."

The Americans make this mistake on numerous occasions. Let me give you three examples.

Before 1949, when Stalin helps Mao Zedong transform his ragtag army of guerrilla fighters into a formidable fighting machine during the civil war, until the red flag goes up over the Forbidden City, the State Department continues to describe Mao and the communists as merely agrarian reformers. Far more appealing, in fact, than the Nationalists and Chiang Kai-shek.

Then, Kissinger and Nixon, the rapprochement in 1972. Again, "this is not a communist culture, this is a Confucian culture." The idea that this is some sort of Confucian tradition is, of course, completely bonkers. The extent to which Kissinger fooled himself or was fooled can be seen in an anecdote, when he asked Zhou Enlai what he thought of the French Revolution. As

you know, Zhou Enlai said, "It is too soon to say." This was the moment where Kissinger realized that the Chinese think in terms of centuries. But, of course, Zhou Enlai had in mind the French student movement of 1968.

Auslin: People have lived on that anecdote for a half century now.

Dikötter: Yes, it is a good one.

The third example is Bill Clinton, 1994. Same story: Chinese communists are not really communists, and if we help them economically, they will peacefully evolve towards a democracy.

Auslin: Let me ask you about that point. Were they really worried about a counterrevolution? Were they really worried that this liberalization you have mentioned—Bill Clinton, among many others—that this peaceful evolution would be successful? Were they that insecure or that worried about their own fragility?

"These are committed Marxist-Leninists. There is no going back. If Xi Jinping dies of a heart attack tomorrow morning, it will be just another one."

Dikötter: No. You do not understand what revolution is. Chairman Mao said it very clearly: a mere spark will ignite the prairie. In other words, revolution always starts somewhere in a dark corner where you do not expect it.

Auslin: OK.

Dikötter: The slightest hint of change must be nipped in the bud. The merest hint of something that might undermine the monopoly of power must be resisted at all costs.

"SO MUCH INCOMPREHENSION"

Auslin: We hear it a lot that Mikhail Gorbachev, who just passed away, and the unraveling and fall of the Soviet Union have been an object lesson for the Chinese Communist Party on what not to do. Is that correct? Do they really focus on the Soviet Union and say, look, they let in McDonald's, they let in this idea that the people will have a voice, and they lost control of everything?

Dikötter: No, I do not think so. It is appealing. I am not saying that the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not have great repercussions in the People's Republic of China. Until then, the slogan was "only socialism can save China." And the moment the Soviet Union implodes, the slogan becomes

"only China can save socialism." So, there is a change. But China has done all it can to fight what is referred to as spiritual pollution, foreign things, foreign ideas. The key architect of this, the man who understood exactly what Dulles was saying in 1957, the one who understood the danger of the notion of peaceful evolution, is Mao Zedong himself. And part of the Cultural Revolution is, of course, to save communist, proletarian ideology from capitalist, bourgeois ideas that might lead to bourgeois evolution.

So, to some extent, you could say Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Xi Jinping are building on that concern that turned into a key component of the Cultural Revolution. They are continuing the Cultural Revolution but in a very different guise, in a very different way.

Auslin: Was there another path that could have been taken in the 1980s?

Dikötter: What is this different path, and who, and how? How many leaders in the 1980s indicated some sort of preference toward separation of powers? I cannot find anyone. Zhao Ziyang made it crystal clear in *Red Flag* that there would never be separation of powers. And there would never be a parliamentary system, as they have in the imperialist camp.

"I am not sure which aspect of Deng seems cuddly."

In 1987, Zhao makes an uncanny prediction. He says that in twenty or thirty years, when we will have increased the standard of living, ordinary people will be convinced of the superiority of socialism. And then we will decrease the scope of bourgeois liberalization even further. That is his vision. That is pretty much where we are today.

If you tell me that Zhao Ziyang, after 1989, when he was placed under house arrest, changed his mind, I would say, yes, he did. Absolutely. A good thing too.

Auslin: How do you assess where the United States and some of the European allies sit with regard to China? Are they more realistic? Have they figured it out?

Dikötter: Well, first of all, I am not an expert on the United States. I am not even an expert on contemporary politics and the China of today. I really am a historian. I am not trying to expert. But on the other hand, everyone is, right? Plenty of people who cannot count to three in Mandarin are China experts, so you should ask them. But you want a general impression, so I would say there has been a sea change, and not just in the United States.

But still, so much incomprehension. It is not something hugely complex. And not only that, but Europeans and Americans have a very long tradition of dealing with regimes that came out of 1917. There was something called the Cold War. Of course, it ended in Europe. It never ended here. We are still in the same Cold War. But there is an extraordinary reservoir of knowledge, insight, and techniques on how to deal with communist states. And it is as if all that knowledge and wisdom has just disappeared—as if China is some sort of strange entity and we are trying to understand what it is. It is crystal clear what it is.

***This conversation was edited for length and clarity. Adapted from* The Pacific Century, *a Hoover Institution podcast.*

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What Would Reagan Do?

The West won the Cold War through pragmatism, idealism, and strong alliances. We should respond to the China challenge in the same way.

By Peter Berkowitz

Despite the partisan enmities coursing through the American body politic, right and left in the United States have been converging over the past three years in their baleful assessment of China's conduct and aims. Like the Trump administration, the Biden administration views China as an authoritarian state and strategic competitor. And, according to a growing consensus in Congress, Beijing advances authoritarian norms and goals to reshape world order—to the detriment of American security, freedom, and prosperity.

The China challenge differs in crucial respects from the Soviet challenge. For one:

Key points

» Soviet communists saw themselves as locked in an inexorable struggle with the free, democratic, and capitalist West. So do the Chinese.

» Ronald Reagan scandalized elites by branding the Soviet Union "an evil empire" and "the focus of evil in the modern world."

» Even amid the new great-power rivalry, the United States must preserve peace and prosperity for itself and its allies.

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the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held approximately half of Europe captive for almost five decades and specialized in exporting weapons and communist revolution around the world. In contrast, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—notwithstanding its formidable military, its crushing of freedom in Hong Kong, and its threats to seize Taiwan—is largely content to let peoples and nations govern themselves. Instead, it uses its enormous commercial might and the lure of its vast consumer markets to snare other countries in relations of dependence and subservience.

At the same time, the Cold War–era Soviet Communist Party—like today's CCP, and consistent with the Marxist-Leninist tenets that they share—regarded itself as locked in an inexorable struggle over the shape of world order with the free, democratic, and capitalist West. Since Ronald Reagan played a decisive role in leading the United States to victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War, it stands to reason that his diplomatic legacy offers lessons about dealing with contemporary China, another authoritarian great power driven by the communist conviction that rights-protecting democracies must be overcome.

Events vindicated Ronald Reagan.

A VISION OF SUCCESS

One would be hard-pressed to find a better guide to Reagan's foreign policy achievements than William Inboden's recent book, *The Peacemaker: Ronald Reagan, The Cold War, and the World on the Brink*. Inboden is executive director of the Clements Center for National Security and associate professor of public policy and history at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, both at the University of Texas at Austin.

Reagan viewed nearly all US foreign policy through a Cold War lens. From China and Taiwan to Nicaragua and El Salvador, from promoting freedom, democracy, and human rights to cooperating with right-wing authoritarians, from America's disastrous intervention in Lebanon to its well-executed operation in Grenada—his every move abroad took into consideration the global chessboard. In Reagan's estimation—as in the Kremlin's—the global chessboard pitted the US-led free world against the communist world led by the Soviet Union.

In generous moments during Reagan's presidency, America's foreign policy establishment's best and brightest—along with most scholars and journalists—derided him, in Democratic Party wise man Clark Clifford's words, as an "amiable dunce." In less generous but more common moments, they

denounced Reagan as an ignorant warmonger liable to provoke the Soviets and ignite a nuclear conflagration.

Events vindicated Reagan. Ten months after he left office, in November 1989, Berliners dismantled the Berlin Wall. Just over two years later, in December 1991, the Soviet Union unilaterally dissolved itself.

Scholars will persist in debating how much credit for the West's victory in the Cold War goes to Reagan (as well as his vital partners, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Pope John Paul II) and how much to the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev, who was named CPSU general secretary in 1985 and presided over the Soviet Union's self-termination. The conventional wisdom allocates considerable credit to Gorbachev, though, as Inboden points out, its eighth and final leader sought to preserve the Soviet Union, not end it.

That Reagan largely assessed the Soviet challenge correctly and implemented policies that were swiftly followed by their intended outcomes bolsters the case for his statesmanship. Before being elected president—when détente, or the relaxation of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union instituted by Nixon and Kissinger, governed US foreign policy—Reagan succinctly stated his Cold War strategy: "We win, they lose." In a March 1983 speech delivered at the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, he scandalized elites by branding the Soviet Union "an evil empire" and, indeed, "the focus of evil in the modern world."

Fear of American progress in antimissile research drove the Soviets to the negotiating table.

In addition, and to the dismay of foreign policy authorities, Reagan backed the Strategic Defense Initiative. SDI envisaged a system of space-based antimissile weapons intended to greatly diminish if not end the threat of nuclear war. The experts insisted that SDI undermined the rationale for peace and stability based on the military doctrine of "mutually assured destruction." MAD maintained the balance of power through the shared knowledge that each side's nuclear forces could survive a first strike and inflict a devastating retaliatory blow. By giving the United States the capability of destroying incoming Soviet missiles, the foreign policy establishment argued, SDI would destabilize superpower relations and render arms control impossible.

Fanciful and dangerous as Reagan's project seemed to critics, we now know, according to Inboden, that fear of American progress in SDI research

and development not only drove the Soviets to the negotiating table but impelled Gorbachev to move beyond arms control to reach with Reagan the first arms-reduction agreement. That agreement was eventually formalized in two treaties: START I in 1991 between the United States and the Soviet Union; and, in 1993, START II (which never formally entered into effect).

FIVE PILLARS

Not all aspects of Reagan's Cold War strategy apply directly to the China challenge. Inboden stresses, for example, that from the outset Reagan pursued "negotiated surrender." Such a goal makes little sense regarding the CCP. As long as Beijing's enormous economy grows—and notwithstanding America's increasingly energetic efforts to reduce reliance on China for critical materials, technologies, and products—America must preserve peace and order in a world in which its chief great-power rival remains not only one of its major trading partners but also that of its friends and allies.

Major features of Reagan's diplomacy, however, are as pertinent to prevailing in strategic competition against China as they were to defeating the Soviet Union. Five stand out.

» ***The United States must recognize, as did Reagan in the Cold War, that the China challenge involves a global battle of ideas.*** Accordingly, America must improve its diplomats' and security analysts' understanding of the CCP's Marxist-Leninist beliefs about dictatorship and the party's ultranationalist convictions about Beijing's rightful place in the world, both of which shape the party's interests and objectives. The United States also needs to enhance through educational reform its own citizens' grasp of American constitutional principles.

» ***The United States must renovate its alliance system to address contemporary geopolitical imperatives.*** Reagan saw partners—particularly Britain, Canada, West Germany, and Japan—as crucial to prevailing in the Cold War. The same is true for meeting the China challenge. The United States must recalibrate alliances, share responsibilities among partners—where possible, nations committed to individual freedom and democratic self-government; and where necessary, friendly authoritarian regimes—and reform international institutions to fashion a multi-pronged foreign policy that combines cooperation with, and constraint and deterrence of, the CCP.

The United States has an incentive to seize opportunities to help those seeking freedom and democracy.

» ***The United States must pursue "peace through strength."*** This will blend force and diplomacy, hard and soft power, pressure and outreach. Just as Reagan persuaded the Soviets to negotiate nuclear weapons reductions by modernizing American forces, so too must the United States strengthen its military to persuade the CCP to join serious arms talks. To ensure military excellence, the United States must, as did Reagan in the 1980s, foster a thriving economy—one that grows, provides good jobs for its citizens, and leads the world in high-tech industries.

» ***The United States has an interest, consistent with its founding principles, in a freer and more democratic world.*** Reagan argued for this in his landmark 1982 Westminster speech, and showed it in seeking freedom for Poland and human rights protections for Soviet Jews and other peoples and nations suffering under Soviet oppression. That doesn't confer a license to engage in regime change or preclude partnering with authoritarian governments that share America's goals. It does provide the United States an incentive to seize opportunities to assist those who seek freedom and democracy.

The China challenge involves a global battle of ideas.

» ***The United States must operate with the awareness that geopolitics typically entails painful trade-offs, tragic choices, and alternatives ranging from bad to dreadful.*** Reagan's team also understood this. The guiding question for American diplomats should always be which of the imperfect options best secures US freedom and prosperity.

Taking Reagan's lessons to heart will fortify the heartening convergence between left and right concerning the China challenge.

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An Exile Looks at Xi

Longtime Chinese dissident Wei Jingsheng examines Xi Jinping and sees ruthlessness—but also vulnerability.

By Matthew F. Pottinger

In 1978, activist Wei Jingsheng became China's most prominent dissident when he posted a signed essay—or "big character poster," as they are called in China—on a wall in Beijing, arguing eloquently for democracy. He was imprisoned twice for his blistering criticism of the Chinese Communist Party, spending some eighteen years behind bars before relocating to the United States. Interestingly, he grew up near Xi Jinping, who would become general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012. Wei's little brother knew Xi when they were both children.

In November, I sat down for a wide-ranging interview with Wei in Washington. We discussed his indoctrination in, and then rejection of, communism as a young person, the future of political dissent in China, and Xi's reading habits, psychology, and greatest vulnerabilities, from the low-level bureaucrats who could stick gum into the party's gears to the public's lack of confidence in the regime.

Wei Jingsheng *is a human rights activist known for his participation in the Chinese democracy movement. He is the founder of the Wei Jingsheng Foundation in Washington, DC.* ***Matthew F. Pottinger*** *is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. He served as deputy White House national security adviser in 2019–21.*

Wei didn't hedge on the threats to democracy growing around the globe. "If the United States continues to choose business interests and tolerate authoritarianism—be it the Chinese Communist Party or Saudi Arabia—if they are tolerated for business profits, global democracy will inevitably wane," he said.

Matthew F. Pottinger: I know you really love reading. You've written about the fact that you read a lot of socialist theory and literature when you were a middle school student, right before the Cultural Revolution started in 1966. You read Marx and Engels and Lenin and Mao and Stalin, and you've written before that as a middle school student, you really were indoctrinated to become what you called a bona fide Maoist fanatic. But you also developed a love for philosophy in those years, and that helped equip you really for the critical skills that you applied later to go from becoming a Maoist to one of the most prominent critics of Maoism and one of the most prominent critics of the Communist Party. How did the sixteen-year-old Wei Jingsheng, the Maoist fanatic, become Wei Jingsheng, the lifelong dissident and pro-democracy activist?

"Many Communist officials are in contact with me through friends. They hope we can do more outside China to bring about changes inside China."

Wei Jingsheng: You have a good memory. I do love reading. But when I was in school, I didn't like reading books on politics and philosophy. I liked reading novels. I read so much that I was denied membership in the Young Pioneers [a Communist youth organization]. I was considered a bad student who didn't listen in class but read novels. I particularly liked the French writer Balzac, the American writer Mark Twain, etc. These are among the writers I liked. Also, there was the Russian writer Chekhov. I liked these writers very much.

Later we had a political teacher, who taught political classes. This teacher was a Rightist, loved debating with students, and often preached Marxist theories. We thought what he said wasn't necessarily true, right? So, a few students started to read on Marxism and Leninism to debate with him. I borrowed these books so often from the library, the librarian got to know me. I was given access to the book depository. We read very fast and engaged in debates with our teacher.

Later the Cultural Revolution started. At the time I still believed in Marxism. I believed Chairman Mao was right, was great, and this and that. Later,

during the Cultural Revolution, we became the first group of Red Guards. But in just a few months, we were betrayed by Mao Zedong and Jiang Qing [Madame Mao]. Suddenly it seemed we were no longer revolutionary, but anti-revolutionary. Furthermore, the parents of many of our classmates became anti-revolutionaries.

So, after the betrayal, there started a small movement among us youth, a movement to figure out if Chairman Mao was wrong, whether he strayed from the path of Marx and Lenin. During that time, including when we were sent to the countryside, we read many more books by Marx, the collected works of Marx and Engels, works of Lenin. We read closely and thought about it carefully. That was when I realized that the mistake was not made by Mao Zedong, the mistake was rooted in Marx. You can't use the most hideous, violent means to build a beautiful society. It is contradictory.

That was when I realized, that was the moment when I moved away from communism, when I no longer thought communism was good. Of course, the numerous deaths of starvation I witnessed in the countryside were also a catalyst for my change of heart.

WHAT IS XI THINKING?

Pottinger: Can you expound on Xi Jinping Thought?

Wei: Xi Jinping doesn't have much thought. Honestly, this is my little brother's impression of him. I did not know him well. There was Liu He, living upstairs from us; he is the vice premier now. Liu He lived upstairs, and he was familiar [with Xi]. Those two, my little brother and Liu He, they knew Xi Jinping relatively well. So according to their description, Xi Jinping didn't seem to like reading. Later he brags about reading this and that, but I don't think so. Those are lies to boost his image.

I think once he became the leader of the Communist Party, he came to recognize many of Mao Zedong's actions were probably more effective than those of Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin's reforms brought economic growth, but what about ideology? According to them, people became confused and no longer trusted the Communist Party and Chairman Mao as much. Xi probably considered it a bad state of affairs. He wants to re-establish the kind of authority Mao Zedong enjoyed. Everyone obeys one person; everyone follows the baton. His current position is probably why he prefers it that way. His aversion to reading and thinking probably has something to do with it, too.

WE DISSENT: Demonstrators hold up placards bearing democracy activist Wei Jingsheng's photo during a march in Hong Kong in the mid-1990s. Wei had been sentenced to fourteen years in prison but was released and allowed to move abroad. [Newscom]

Pottinger: I have to say, I've read a lot of Xi Jinping's speeches. When you look at the internal-facing speeches, I could still come away with the impression that he is a committed Leninist, that he is a communist, that he's not faking it. Even if you're right that he's not fully immersed in the broadest sense into Marxist theory, he certainly has shown an aptitude for grasping the essence of a Leninist system of government, the essence of Stalinism, being able to purge his enemies and to climb steadily, steadily higher up that slippery pole of power. So, I wonder if we would be underestimating him if we were to say that there really isn't an ideology there?

Wei: First, once you become a leader, it no longer matters if you don't have an ideology. Your assistants will write one for you. They will invent some for you. Why does [political theorist] Wang Huning always come up with new sayings, new thoughts for them? That is the job for people like him, right?

On the other hand, Xi Jinping's family has had its share of misfortunes. His father was persecuted at the end of the 1950s, badly persecuted. Given

his family experience, he probably has heard a lot about, or learned a lot from, the cutthroat political struggles within the party. So, he thinks Stalin's methods—Mao Zedong learned a lot from Stalin; not so much Marx and Lenin, but Stalin. Stalin's methods of purge and oppression appeal to him more. Although his family, including himself, suffered these persecutions, perhaps, comparable to the well-known Stockholm syndrome, their suffering leads them to believe these methods are correct, are effective. Now he's picked it up. He started to use these methods of persecution he suffered through on others. This is a natural progression.

"The mistake was not made by Mao Zedong. The mistake was rooted in Marx."

He has been slowly practicing these methods during his long tenure as an official. Chinese call it the "Thick Black Theory." It's about how to deal with others, how to plot against others, and how to bully others. He probably grows increasingly skilled at this with all the practice.

POWERFUL AND VULNERABLE

Pottinger: Before the Twentieth Party Congress, you had said in some of your interviews and tweets that it was possible that Xi Jinping might not get a third term. Here we are; we've now seen the outcome of that party congress. Not only did he get a third term, he hasn't identified a successor, which implies that he's going for a fourth term and maybe more. He has completely eliminated nonloyalists from the highest ranks of the Communist Party. Did you underestimate him, and what do you think this portends?

Wei: I indeed underestimated him. I did not expect him to employ such rogue methods to instigate a small coup d'état—a palace coup. He reneged on all his promises to the other members of the leadership. In addition to the third term, he promoted his own people to surround himself. That he would use such despicable tricks to remain in power, this is something I did not expect. Judging from the impression he gave me when he was little, he should not have been such a wicked person. But like we just discussed, his family education, and his decades of experiences as an official, might have led him down the path of evil and increasingly to take after Stalin and Mao Zedong, even exceeding those two in his villainy. He persecutes others with such craft.

But now, although he has achieved his goal, the outcome is very unstable, and he cannot win the acceptance of the public. Without true acceptance, he has little legitimacy. With hardly any legitimacy, he is going to have some very hard times ahead. The biggest conundrum for him is how to control this Communist Party.

Pottinger: What are Xi Jinping's vulnerabilities now? He looks all-powerful, or as close to being all-powerful as any Chinese paramount leader has been.

Wei: On the surface, to foreigners, Xi Jinping appears to be all powerful, with tremendous authority. To Americans, a president, having assumed the presidency, has corresponding powers. Others must put their trust in the president and obey orders issued by the president.

It is different in China. Occupying the office without credibility will not lead to obedience. Chinese officials are very skilled at disobeying without getting caught. There is a Chinese saying, "There are policies from the top, and there are countermeasures at the bottom." They have various ways to handle it. When others do not have faith in you, when you have no credibility and receive no acceptance, you are in big trouble. Your orders might not be carried out at all. Others might have ways to have your orders vanish into thin air.

"They, including Mao Zedong, never abandoned the banner of democracy, even though what was really implemented was dictatorship."

Under such circumstances, lacking credibility, lacking confidence from the people or authority among the people is Xi Jinping's biggest vulnerability. The Communist Party shares the same biggest vulnerability as Xi Jinping. The Communist Party has no credibility either. It agrees with you, makes promises to you, but it will not deliver.

Pottinger: You spent eighteen years in prison. And the first time you went to prison, it was because of your role, in 1978, in what became known as the Democracy Wall Movement. You pasted a manifesto onto a public wall, and you were calling for what you called the Fifth Modernization, which hadn't been included in Deng Xiaoping's description of things that China needed to modernize, like science and technology and industry and national defense. You called for a fifth modernization, which was democracy. Looking back and looking at this moment right now, do you think that China felt closer to democracy in 1978, or does it feel closer to democracy now, in late 2022?

Wei: At that time, we were very close. [Writer and activist] Bao Tong agreed with me too. According to him, the Communist Party at the time did not know what direction to take. Mao Zedong's way, Stalin's way—everyone knew that would not work. Those paths lead to the ruin of the nation. But then what instead?

At that time, Bao Tong opined, the Communist Party could have chosen the path of democracy. Because these Communist cadres, big or small, climbed up to their position under the banner of democracy when they were young. They, including Mao Zedong, never abandoned the banner of democracy, even though what was really implemented was dictatorship. The party could have chosen the path of democracy at the time. There was a real chance.

Unfortunately, Deng Xiaoping chose otherwise. He chose the traditional Chinese road, a road where the market economy is headed by authoritarian politics. He knew a market economy is superior to a planned economy. There is no doubt about it. But the debate at the time, the biggest argument within the Communist Party, was whether we should adopt Western-style parliamentary democracy or continue on the path of one-party dictatorship. There were many veteran Communist members with lifelong faith in communism who believed that the one-party rule must be upheld. At the time Deng Xiaoping proposed the "four upholds," with the cardinal principle being "uphold the leadership of the party." That was how we missed the opportunity at the time.

"Once you become a leader, it no longer matters if you don't have an ideology. Your assistants will write one for you."

In 1989, when the people rose to demand democracy, although Zhao Ziyang was not necessarily pro-democracy, at least he did not want to suppress the people; he, perhaps, advocated for compromises. That was another opportunity which we also missed.

Now, under Xi Jinping's high-handed governance, there is a new opportunity. When authoritarian politics threaten not only the masses, the dissidents, but also Communist officials themselves, people might start considering, is there a different path available? Officials in the United States don't necessarily end up in prison over just any mistakes. Meanwhile, even without making mistakes, Communist Party officials can be sent to prison simply upon Xi's displeasure. To the party officials, the American system at least provides more personal security. Given the circumstances, maybe more and more Chinese Communist Party officials would hope to choose a path to democracy.

This is not my conjecture, but a conclusion based on the information I have received. Many Communist officials are in contact with me through friends. They hope we can do more outside China to bring about changes inside China.

Although the opportunity is present, the outcome depends on what choice the international community makes. If the United States continues to choose business interests and tolerate authoritarianism, be it the Chinese Communist Party or Saudi Arabia, if they are tolerated for business profits, global democracy will inevitably wane.

IS THERE REASON FOR OPTIMISM?

Pottinger: Under Xi Jinping, Beijing has built a surveillance system that is probably more advanced than anything we have seen before. The exiled Central Party School official Cai Xia has described it as exquisite totalitarianism. Is there a path toward a moment like the Democracy Wall Movement, and the 1980s you just described?

Wei: What Cai Xia said makes a certain kind of sense, but she is rather pessimistic. The high-tech surveillance Xi Jinping employs to control society does lead to the belief that it is increasingly difficult, even impossible, to overthrow the regime using traditional tactics. But the problem is that high tech is not only accessible to Xi Jinping. The masses can master it, too. Resisters can also make use of these high-tech means. Both sides enjoy equal opportunities. The key is whether there is enough confidence to take actions to overthrow the Communist Party. But of course, Cai Xia and some others don't always share the same opinions. They are anti-Xi, but not anti-communism. They oppose Xi Jinping, but not the Communist Party. They think such a stance can be accepted by more people. But I believe we need to oppose not only Xi Jinping but also the Communist Party. If we could get rid of Xi Jinping, the Communist Party won't last long, either; the end will be near. When it comes to that, the Communist Party might reform itself, thus creating an opportunity for democracy.

"Democracy in China can be established only by the people in China."

I am still relatively optimistic. I don't believe Xi Jinping could control everything. Especially when no one trusts you and you still need people to manage the surveillance system, would they be loyal to you? So, I think there are still opportunities.

Pottinger: You reminded me that in 1999, when the United States was debating whether or not to extend permanent normal trade relations to China, paving the way for China to come into the World Trade Organization, you gave a warning at the time to members of Congress. You said China's *closed tyranny* under Mao Zedong was terrible for the Chinese people. But what you termed the *open tyranny* that had been ushered in by Deng Xiaoping would be very, very dangerous for democracies everywhere. That was in 1999. I have to say, it looks like it was a fairly prescient warning in hindsight. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Wei: The past twenty-some years have proved that an open tyranny is even better at deceiving. During these years, major Western businesses have invested in China and painted a pretty picture of China for the outside world. A lot of the American people have come to believe it, thus letting down their guard against China. A lot of academics are also advocating for China. China's infiltration of the United States has led to problems in the health of the American system. Now Americans are starting to realize how serious the infiltration is. It is close to taking control of our regime, our thinking. This situation, this is exactly the result of Deng Xiaoping's open tyranny.

On the contrary, as Xi Jinping closes up the country, more and more people might be able to see the true face of the authoritarian regime, the danger it poses to the United States and its neighboring countries. Also, without the support of the people, it might grow increasingly weak, and it's paradoxically not as dangerous as that of the open society under Deng Xiaoping. Therefore, right now is the best opportunity for the people to confront the Communist Party.

TAIWAN

Pottinger: What do you think Beijing's and Xi Jinping's intentions are with respect to Taiwan in his third five-year term?

Wei: According to the calculations of Xi Jinping and his clique, now perhaps presents the best opportunity to attack Taiwan—because the attention of the United States and other Western countries is focusing on Ukraine, where the war is unlikely to end any time soon, and where the United States would invest more aid. If he launches a war against Taiwan now, he needs to consider whether the United States and Japan would send aid to Taiwan.

Chinese leaders have been talking about "liberating Taiwan" for years, and why did they never make the move? The United States is the decisive factor

in the decision. They cannot defeat the United States. Any move against Taiwan might invite fierce retribution from the United States. But now, the United States' attention is elsewhere. This presents an important window of opportunity to Xi Jinping. Therefore, he has been desperately mobilizing for war.

On the other hand, on the domestic front, we have just talked about how much he is hated and loathed. He has no credibility—not among the people or among the bureaucrats. How would you extricate yourself from this conundrum? Those in power have always resorted to a simple method: start a foreign war, which might immediately alleviate internal conflicts. Stupid as Xi Jinping is, he understands this. If he doesn't, others will be sure to remind him. He would start a war with Taiwan if only to stabilize his regime. Therefore, we must stay vigilant, we cannot drop our guard.

Pottinger: Maybe we could close with some of your reflections on what is the role of a Chinese dissident today—a Chinese dissident in exile, like yourself.

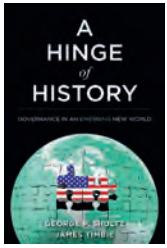
Wei: My thinking was formed even before I left China. Why did I agree to be sent out of China, to the United States? First, I believe the overseas democracy movement has paramount importance. Mobilizing international pressure gives domestic dissidents some room to maneuver. The Communist Party fears global public opinion. They always have, right from the beginning. The party talks about how it fears nothing on the international stage, but it is terrified. This is a "merit" of the Communist Party—it knows it cannot alienate the whole world. So, an important job for us overseas is to mobilize the international community to put pressure on the Communist Party.

"Chinese leaders have been talking about 'liberating Taiwan' for years, and why did they never make the move?"

Another important job is to facilitate the flow of information to the domestic audience, such as what democracy in America looks like, and why it is good. We utilize all channels. There are more and more channels nowadays, including social media. I have hundreds of thousands of followers on my Twitter, and half of them are using Twitter through a VPN. They send their greetings, so I know they come from within China. This is how we communicate information and discuss problems with people inside China, how we explain issues that they find perplexing. I think this is also very important to the future democratization.

Democracy in China can be established only by the people in China. It cannot depend on people overseas. The majority of those overseas are never able to return. The more the people in China know, the smoother the process of establishing democracy will be. So, this is an important part of our work. These two are our main tasks. H

Lin Yang translated this interview into English. This conversation was edited for length and clarity. Reprinted by permission of* Politico *(www.politico.com). © 2023 Politico SPRL. All rights reserved.



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Taiwan Doesn't Stand Alone

"Strategic ambiguity"? What Taipei needs from Washington is strategic *clarity*.

By Miles Maochun Yu

Conversations about US policy toward Taiwan often invoke "strategic ambiguity." The promotion of this concept is quixotic, provocative, and dangerous. Strategic ambiguity has never been the official US position. What has kept the Taiwan Strait peaceful and stable for the past seven decades is not strategic ambiguity, but the exact opposite. When it comes to the use of force in defense of Taiwan, America's position is consistent and unambiguous: strategic clarity.

The concept of strategic ambiguity refers to the supposed US position of not stating whether it will use force to defend Taiwan, if and when China invades the democratic nation. The policy's purported purpose is to discourage such aggression, as

Key points

» Strategic ambiguity has never been the official US position.

» Chinese leaders, for their part, have never believed that the United States is ambiguous about its intent to intervene in a Taiwan invasion.

» Strategic clarity on Taiwan should also offer clarity about the China challenge as a whole.

Miles Maochun Yu *is the Robert Alexander Mercer Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is a participant in Hoover's working group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict and Hoover's project on China's Global Sharp Power.*

well as any pretext for such aggression, namely the unilateral declaration of independence by Taiwan.

Dating back to the mid-1990s, the almost mystical thinking about "strategic ambiguity" has spread like a contagion, affecting the minds of policy makers. Proponents regard it as a balm to soothe China, and a way for Washington to engage China without engendering Beijing's wrath, which would spoil "the most important bilateral relationship in the world." But too often, strategic ambiguity becomes a convenient excuse for indolence in America's China policy.

The concept of strategic ambiguity is intellectually incoherent. It confuses strategic intent with tactical operations. In its strategic intent, the United States has always maintained a policy and practice of strategic clarity. Implicitly or explicitly, every US president since Harry Truman has upheld America's intent to intervene in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. As is the case with all military plans, the only ambiguities are tactical and operational—questions of how, not if.

Strategic ambiguity is also quixotic because Beijing has never believed that the United States is ambiguous about its intent to intervene militarily in the event of an invasion of Taiwan. This belief alone should make it obvious that talk about strategic ambiguity in Washington or elsewhere is delusional.

It is difficult to find any influential person in the government of the People's Republic of China who believes in America's strategic ambiguity. All Communist leaders, from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping, firmly believe the United States will intervene with force in the event of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, subscribing to the unwavering belief in what the Chinese Communist Party calls the John Foster Dulles Doctrine on Taiwan: that the US grand strategy for global hegemony demands and requires Taiwan to be an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for the United States, that the United States would never let a communist country like China take over Taiwan, and that the United States will unequivocally use force to intervene if the Chinese military attempts to invade the island.

Guided by its own belief in America's strategic clarity, the Communist Party has embarked on a massive military buildup targeting the US military as its preponderant threat in any Taiwan invasion scenario. Beijing's theory of victory, which informs its operations and tactics, envisions defeating the US military as a prerequisite for taking Taiwan. On this point, China is unambiguous.

Strategic ambiguity is not codified US strategic doctrine, though it has frequently been invoked by Beltway policy makers and pundits as if it were. Yet it has been repeated enough in democratic capitals that some leaders believe that it may actually be true that the United States is indecisive, undecided,

BIG STICK: Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, shoulders a battlefield weapon. Implicitly or explicitly, every American president since Harry Truman has upheld America's intent to intervene if there is a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.
[Office of the President, Republic of China]

and above all, ambiguous, when it comes to Taiwan's defense against a PLA invasion.

However, repetition does not make falsehoods true. America's long-standing strategic clarity with regard to Taiwan's defense goes back seven decades.

PRESIDENTS AGREE

This clarity dates back to June 25, 1950, the day the communist China–backed North Korean People's Army launched the Korean War. On that same day, President Truman dispatched the US Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait to protect the island nation from a possible invasion, and to neutralize the area. This strategic clarity was codified in 1955 with the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States of America and the Republic of China (Taiwan), which lasted for thirty years.

Then, on January 1, 1980, President Jimmy Carter unilaterally terminated the Mutual Defense Treaty. However, even with this change, the United Stated did not abandon its strategic intent to defend Taiwan. Since 1980,

what has followed has been a period of gradual evolution from the Carter-Reagan era of what might be called "strategic translucency," wherein the old clarity found new forms.

These new forms began with the landmark 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and President Reagan's Six Assurances. President George H. W. Bush then gave long-standing American strategic clarity on Taiwan new life, selling Taipei unprecedented numbers of high-grade American F-16 fighters.

Strategic clarity has lasted through every PRC-instigated crisis and provocation against Taiwan. Most famously, during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1995 and 1996, President Bill Clinton dispatched two US aircraft carrier battle groups to the waters near the Taiwan Strait, where the Chinese military had fired missiles to intimidate Taiwanese voters.

US warships repeatedly defy China's so-called "red line" by sailing through the Taiwan Strait.

Presidents have reiterated strategic clarity through statements and other actions. In 2001, President George W. Bush explicitly stated that he would "do whatever it takes to defend Taiwan." Later, during the Trump administration, the United States developed an extraordinarily robust US-Taiwan relationship that was entirely outside the framework of the US-China relationship. This closer relationship included dramatic increases in arms sales of critical weapons to Taiwan, as well as numerous high-level, official visits to the democratic island nation.

BE PREPARED

Today, we live in a time of enhanced US strategic clarity. It has grown in the past six years, through Republican and Democratic administrations.

We see it in US warships that have repeatedly defied China's so-called "red line" by conducting freedom-of-navigation operations through the Taiwan Strait. The frequency of these operations has dramatically increased, essentially internationalizing the crucial waterway for Taiwan's defense.

The US Congress has also achieved a historic, bipartisan consensus on the importance of defending Taiwan. We have seen this in several landmark acts passed with unanimous, or near-unanimous, support, further codifying America's strategic clarity in defense of Taiwan.

America's military leaders have reiterated the US position of strategic clarity. Admiral Samuel J. Paparo is the commander of US Pacific Fleet, with the responsibility to carry out America's military operations in the event of a

Chinese attack on Taiwan. On October 19, 2022, Admiral Paparo stated that the United States will "be prepared to thwart any invasion of Taiwan, any effort to resolve the matter by force, and on that, there is no ambiguity."

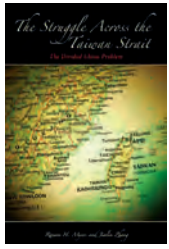
The White House has been equally clear. Since October 2021, on four separate occasions, President Joe Biden has explicitly and unambiguously stated that the United States would intervene militarily if the People's Republic of China invaded Taiwan.

Still, some in Washington refuse to give up their belief in strategic ambiguity. They invoke White House clarifications on the president's statements, calling them "pushback" or "backtracking." However, White House reiterations of the unchanged "one-China policy" are not inconsistent with American presidents' strategic clarity on the defense of Taiwan. On the contrary, they affirm it.

Reiterating America's one-China policy bolsters the US position of strategic clarity. An essential component of that policy is the long-standing US position against the use of force to settle the Taiwan issue, by either side of the Taiwan Strait. There is nothing ambiguous about this position, as multiple administrations have stated.

Strategic clarity on Taiwan should help provide strategic clarity on the China challenge as a whole. The Chinese Communist Party is a revisionist regime poised to launch a chain of aggression in the Indo-Pacific, with Taiwan as the first link in that chain. We have seen such aggression before, in the Sudetenland with Nazi Germany, and in Manchuria with Imperial Japan.

Taiwan is China's Sudetenland. Beijing is not ambiguous about this, and neither should we be. Let's avoid the dangerous and tragic "strategic ambiguity" as seen in Munich in 1938. ◘



Don't Ignore Lebanon

The United States has been indifferent to Lebanon's slow-motion collapse. Terrorism is a likely result.

By Russell A. Berman

Along the highway that leads from Beirut north to Baalbek, the ancient city of Heliopolis and the site of the spectacular ruins of the Temple of Zeus, you reach a point where suddenly a series of billboards lines the road, and the familiar face of Vladimir Putin stares down as you drive past. It would be hard to describe his expression as friendly, but the Arabic text on the signs conveys a warm greeting from Russia. Not far, across the mountains to the east, lies Syria, a Russian client state of sorts. Damascus is less than two hours away. Toward the northwest, a similar drive would get you to Tartus

Key points

» Russia's return to the Levant poses major challenges for the United States and its partners.

» Further collapse of Lebanon would unleash a new wave of refugees, foster fresh terrorism, and upset regional stability.

» Direct Hezbollah rule, if it came, would finally establish an Iranian toehold on the Mediterranean.

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and then via the Syrian coastline to Latakia, where Russia has established its naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean.

Three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is actively trying to reacquire its former spheres of influence, returning as a major player in the Levant. This assertion of power on Putin's part poses a direct challenge to the network of US partners in the region. It is therefore also a threat to US security. But this Russian encroachment takes on special significance in light of Lebanon's domestic crisis, which deserves greater attention from Washington. Let's take a closer look.

DRAINED

Lebanon's problems are legion. The financial crisis has led to a 90 percent loss of value in the Lebanese pound, and those who have money in savings accounts are prohibited from withdrawing their funds from the banks. Stories abound of armed efforts to retrieve a depositor's own savings. These "bank robbers" have become folk heroes. In the meantime, many Lebanese survive thanks primarily to remittances from relatives living abroad. As the financial system crumbles, the physical infrastructure is eroding too, notably in the northern city of Tripoli, where houses collapse for lack of attention to structural problems. Throughout the country, public utility services have also ceased to function. Electricity is available only from private generators, with the cost of fuel rising dramatically. Some consumer items, and especially many vital medical supplies, are simply not available.

ISIS and other Sunni radicals have never been far away—right across the Syrian border.

The talented personnel who used to contribute to the enviable quality of Lebanese hospitals and universities are doing their best to leave in search of stability and appropriate remuneration elsewhere, especially in the Gulf countries, increasingly in Egypt and further afield as well. Others—without capital or international networks—try desperately to flee the country illegally by boat, heading for Cyprus, but too often drowning in the Mediterranean. The country is collapsing, but the political leadership remains unwilling to take the necessary reform steps, since precisely those reforms would mean ending their own reign of corruption.

The slow-motion implosion of Lebanon deserves closer attention from Washington, not only because of the domestic human suffering, which must elicit sympathy, but also because of the potential international repercussions.

Most obvious, the further collapse of Lebanon would unleash a new wave of refugees, presumably traveling into Cyprus or Greece or otherwise into Europe. Although Europe has absorbed many fewer refugees than Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon itself, a significant increase in new arrivals is bound to exacerbate political conflicts in Italy, Germany, France, and elsewhere. An influx of refugees from Lebanon will inevitably pose a threat to the political stability of America's European allies.

In order to avoid far-right electoral victories in Europe—far right and therefore pro-Russian—the challenges in the Middle East and especially Lebanon need attention. The Biden administration's diplomats should be worrying about this connection.

Second, even a small flow of refugees from Lebanon raises the prospect of an accelerated spread of cholera. This epidemic originated in Syria, but by now more than a thousand cases have been registered in Lebanon. Cholera disseminates through unsanitary conditions in agriculture, food handling, and the water supply, precisely the sort of conditions emerging amid the collapse of Lebanese infrastructure. Of foremost importance, one should determine how to provide adequate health care to those directly affected. However, other consequences also deserve consideration: if cholera were to reach Europe in the wake of refugee arrivals, the political response would be brutal. Unfortunately, policy development in the State Department stovepipes the regions, as if the Middle East and Europe had nothing to do with each other. Because of the bureaucratic structure, US foreign policy ignores the transregional connections.

Lebanon is collapsing, but the political leadership is unwilling to embrace reform—because it would end their reign of corruption.

Third, the general collapse of order and economic security is a recipe for terrorism. ISIS and other Sunni radicals have never been far away, right across the Syrian border. In addition, the multidenominational character of Lebanon—and the proximity of Sunni and Shia communities—could invite a return to sectarian violence. A splintering of the country might ensue, with the dwindling Christian population—it is disproportionately the Christians fleeing the Lebanese disaster—opting for an autonomous regionalism or even secession. Separatist movements could reignite the civil war, with all the attendant damage to the social fabric in Lebanon, and with repercussions in the larger region likely.

Finally, the erosion of Lebanese stability will ultimately provide Hezbollah, the radical Shia movement, a proxy of Iran, an opportunity to seize power directly. To date, Hezbollah has preferred to act outside the government, while nonetheless controlling it as a kingmaker of sorts. This arrangement has allowed it to exercise control without bearing any governmental responsibility. At some point, however, Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah—or his masters in Tehran—may decide that the time has come to seize power openly. Direct Hezbollah rule, if it came, would finally establish an Iranian toehold on the Mediterranean. Already, some Lebanese refer to Hezbollah and the Iranian presence as "the occupation," i.e., the control of the country by a foreign power. A Hezbollah-ruled Lebanon would be attentive to directives from Tehran but would cooperate with Moscow as well; the remaining ties to Washington would wither.

NO UPSIDE TO INACTION

None of this is in the interests of the United States. Certainly, the rise of China means that the United States must pay greater attention to the Indo-Pacific region. Yet it would be foolish to interpret the "pivot to Asia" as abandoning other regions. The Middle East continues to be vital to American global interests. America's primary security architecture partner, Europe, is directly vulnerable to instability in the Middle East, which enhanced US engagement could counteract. At the same time, the United States has good reason to push back against the intrusion of Russian power. Nor should it be forgotten that Lebanon is located next to US partners Israel and Jordan, and within striking distance of NATO ally Turkey. A degradation of the situation in Lebanon threatens that network as well.

Russia is actively trying to reacquire its former spheres of influence.

Expect Russia to take advantage of Lebanese instability. Inaction from Washington will not make things better.

Those billboards of Putin on the road to Baalbek are clear indications of Russian ambitions and a direct challenge to American influence. Lebanon is a front in the clash with Russia: at this point, Lebanon may not be an active theater like Ukraine, but it is an important piece in the puzzle of the Russian strategy to expel the United States from the region.

To resist that effort, the United States needs to take steps to stabilize Lebanon. It should build on the many pro-American assets in Lebanese society,

while providing needed support to the vital institutions that link Lebanon to the West: the hospitals, the universities, and the army. Lebanon is a small country, but it deserves increased US attention in the context of America's global competitions.

The Portman Way

Retiring senator Rob Portman, legislative workhorse, goes home after a long and effective career. He wants to be remembered "just as somebody who tried to find common ground and move the country forward."

By Peter Robinson

***Peter Robinson,* Uncommon Knowledge:** George Will said, "The senator probably will win a second term, despite the fact that he deserves to do so." That was six years ago. The senator did win a second term, and today he's leaving public office after a dozen years in the Senate, a dozen years in the House, and several years in senior positions in the White House. What does Rob Portman, the gentleman from Ohio, want the rest of us to know about the state of our republic?

Rob Portman: Peter, thanks for having me on again.

Robinson: Actually, I should say thank *you*. We are meeting in the Hugh Scott Room in the United States Capitol, and you only get to use the Hugh Scott Room if you're a senator, so thank you. Why did you do it the way you did these past thirty years? You graduated in 1984 from a very prestigious law school; you could have stuck with the law. Just the other day, I looked up what partners in big firms in this town are pulling down these days, and it's

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$3 million to $6 million to $7 million a year. Over the past thirty years, you have forgone tens of millions of dollars in income.

Portman: Don't tell Jane that, please.

Robinson: Has it been worth it?

Portman: Oh, yeah. Look, I love public service. And, actually, when I left Dartmouth in 1979, I started a public service job, and that was my sort of opening. And I realized that although you have to go to law school to get ahead in this town, ultimately I wanted to be in public service in one way or another. I didn't know I'd be in elected office.

Robinson: You started in the White House, and you've gone up. And every time you have stood before the people of Ohio and asked for their votes, you've won. You have not lost a single election. So first I asked whether it was worth it; now my question is, why are you calling it quits?

Portman: It's a good question, because I do love what I do, and I feel truly honored to have been able to do it. And as I tell my constituents back home, you've given me the opportunity of a lifetime to help serve Ohio and our country, and get stuff done. I'm a legislator. Kind of boring, but I'm into actually getting things done, finding that common ground, moving the ball forward, and I love that. But, having said that, it's time. Twelve years in the Senate, twelve years in the House. I also served in both Bush administrations. I love my family. I love the opportunity to be back in Ohio full-time, I'm sixty-six years old, so no spring chicken.

Robinson: Don't say such things.

Portman: It's time to try something else. And it's probably going to be public service in some way, probably helping from the outside to try to encourage the country to move in a more civil, bipartisan way, because I think that's what's necessary right now and it's what's missing. And then also the private sector, I look forward to getting back to that.

Robinson: So you'll be practicing law?

Portman: Perhaps, but I like being on the business side of things rather than the law side, having done both. We have a family business back home, as you know, the historic Golden Lamb Inn, Ohio's most iconic restaurant, as it was recently named. Thirteen presidents have stayed there—all Republican, by the way. I'm proud of that place. My brother's been kind of picking up the

majority of the work there, so I'll be able to help more on that. And look, I just can't wait to be home, and to have more time to focus on the things that are really important in life, which is family and faith. And being able to go out to the farm and do a little bush hogging without worrying I'm going to get a call from my office saying you've got to respond to this pesky reporter, or whatever.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Robinson: You're a contented man. Could we talk for a moment or two about the arc of this career? I asked your staff to give me your top two or three accomplishments in the Senate. Thirteen pages, single spaced, is what they gave me. We're not going to do this again, you're only stepping down from the Senate once, so let's go through this, if you don't mind.

Portman: Well, George H. W. Bush was my mentor. He's the one who I looked up to—a decent, honorable guy, and he moved me from the council's office to the legislative affairs job, and I will be very grateful for that, because I really wasn't qualified. He put me at the table. George H. W. Bush was well liked by the staff, and well respected by members of Congress, but he also had this passion for how to find that middle ground. For that he was punished politically. I was proud of him. I think he was an incredibly effective executive. He'd already been vice president; he knew what he was doing. He was very good on the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, extremely effective at dealing with Gorbachev and the realities of that seismic shift. But he also was the guy who early on said, "We've got to figure out a way to find that common ground." And for that. I think he didn't win re-election.

"I wanted to be in public service in one way or another. I didn't know I'd be in elected office."

Robinson: Right. More than a dozen years in the House of Representatives, what stands out?

Portman: As I look back on those days, the things that stand out to me are where you can change the culture or change the approach that our country takes to an issue. I was involved in the budget and trade and tax issues; those were my things. Early on, I developed a passion for two things. One


T. Jones
COMMON GROUND

was unfunded mandates on the states, and I ended up being the Republican author of the unfunded-mandates legislation.

Robinson: You'd better explain what an unfunded mandate means.

Portman: It's where the federal government puts a mandate on state or local government but doesn't pay for it. It used to be really out of control. We put in place legislation that allowed for the first time—and this was a big fight within Congress at the Rules Committee level—the ability for any member to raise a point of order if there was an unfunded mandate being placed on a state or local government. As a result, all of a sudden, unfunded mandates started to disappear, because no one wanted to be subject to the point of order and have to explain themselves publicly as to why they were telling their constituents back home, "We're going to force you to do this a certain way, but we're not going to pay anything for it." That was a change in attitude, where the federal government had to pull back a little bit rather than keep dumping things on state and local taxpayers and saying, "We know best." That was very satisfying.

The second thing I'll mention pertained to the drug issue. In particular, I took a stance that we had to change our focus from the so-called supply side of drugs to the demand side.

Robinson: Right.

Portman: Republicans at that time were very good, in my view, on interdiction of drugs, on going to places like Colombia and

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

helping them rid themselves of some of their drugs, poppy fields and so on, and good on the prosecution side. But where we were missing the boat, in my view, was on the demand side. And therefore prevention, education, treatment, and longer-term recovery. So I passed into law, with Speaker Gingrich's help, something called the Drug-Free Communities Act. It said that we ought to encourage more prevention and we ought to help let communities start community coalitions around the country that deal with the demand side of this, not just the supply side. Over two thousand community coalitions later, including one in my hometown that I founded, we began to shift the emphasis from focusing on the supply side only to saying ultimately what drives us is the demand. It's a very Adam Smith kind of Republican approach, I thought.

We really changed the trajectory in the 1990s: we made great progress and reduced substance abuse. But it's like the ocean; the waves keep coming in, it never stops. And then later, in the Senate, I was the lead on the legislation called the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, which took it to the next level, which is to say not only should we focus more on the demand side, but we should focus more on treating substance abuse as a disease. You put more emphasis on getting people into treatment and recovery, knowing that you can't just lock people up and expect this to go away, that an addiction has to be addressed. So, again, not a very Republican approach at the time, but now is fairly well acknowledged, I think, as the right way to do it.

"There are plenty of workhorses here who don't focus on the cable shows, and don't give fiery speeches on the floor, don't throw out the red meat."

Now we need to ensure that we're coming up with new strategies. Because once again, after making tremendous progress—a couple years after our legislation passed, you had a reduction of 22 percent, for instance, in opioid overdoses in Ohio—we were hit with COVID, and those rates went back up again. But that's something that I'm proud of because it shifted people's paradigm and made a difference.

A CLOSE EYE ON TRADE

Robinson: You served as United States trade representative. I suspect that's a position not well understood outside Washington, but it's huge. The elite

negotiator for the country on trade. And then you served as director of the Office of Management and Budget, and it's the director of OMB who produces the budget and looks at it all and has a chance to try to do sensible things. What comes to mind there? What are you proud of in those?

Portman: Well, US trade rep is actually my favorite job, in the sense that I was kind of on my own. And I wouldn't have left, except that I was asked to come over to OMB, which was fascinating too in its own way. As you said, it's a difficult job, it's a grind. I had three teenagers at home, it was difficult to balance it.

On the trade job, I would say the biggest change we made was with regard to China. I started a top-to-bottom review of US-China trade policy. It hadn't been done in years, if ever. And we were able to be tougher on China, and we were sort of ahead of our time in that sense. At that point, we had a permanent trade relationship with China in place, which brought them into the world trading system through the World Trade Organization. But China was not following the rules. And so we were able not just to point that out but to do more enforcement actions than had ever been done before, including taking China to the WTO for the first time for a successful case.

Robinson: I can remember it in the Reagan White House: the thinking in this town for years was that if we bring China into the world trading system, first they'll free up their economy and experience economic growth, and then eventually, once they achieve a certain level of wealth, the next thing that happens—it happened in South Korea and it happened in Taiwan—is that they'll move toward democracy.

Portman: Absolutely.

Robinson: And Rob Portman was one of the first people in the town who spotted what was really happening, and it wasn't what we hoped or thought or wanted, correct?

Portman: That's correct. Prior to President Xi, I think they were making some progress along those lines. But back when I was US trade rep in 2006, they were backsliding on the commitments that they had made. Now they're back to a much more protectionist approach, meaning subsidizing their industries, dumping products in the United States at below their cost. I had been a trade lawyer early in my career in Washington, and I felt strongly that we weren't calling China to account. We were assuming there'd be this miraculous transformation.

Robinson: It was a reasonable hope.

Portman: But they didn't play by the rules, and I think that was important.

INFRASTRUCTURE BREAKTHROUGH

Robinson: This brings us to this body, the United States Senate. What are you proudest of here?

Portman: I think we've had sixty-some bills passed under President Obama and eighty-some under President Trump, and then about forty under this president, so there's been a lot. I guess I'd mention two things. One seems a little obscure, but I think it's really important, and that's how you deal with US companies relative to the international tax systems. It's very complicated. I really dug into that. I was the lead on that in the tax reform efforts. And what happened was a change in the rules to say that we weren't going to disadvantage American companies, which to me means American workers. Second, I guess I have to mention the infrastructure bill.

Robinson: The infrastructure bill that just passed a few months ago.

Portman: Yes. It had been talked about for literally five administrations, including the Bush administration where I'd worked, not just the second Bush, but the first Bush administration. President Trump had talked about it. People were saying: "Can't we get back to the days of Dwight Eisenhower, when we started the Interstate Highway System? Can't we make a serious investment in infrastructure over the long haul?" And so, when President Biden got elected, he proposed such a bill. We looked at it on our side of the aisle and said: "This is full of huge new taxes, the biggest tax increase in American history. And much of the spending is not about infrastructure, it's about so-called soft infrastructure."

"I'm a legislator. Kind of boring, but I'm into actually getting things done."

Robinson: Right.

Portman: This would be child care, health care, and so on. And so [Arizona] Senator Sinema and I looked at this as an opportunity to pull out the core infrastructure—think roads, bridges, railroads, and ports, but also digital infrastructure, broadband—and just do that part, not all this soft stuff that you might want to do in another bill. That doesn't belong with infrastructure.

And at the same time, take out the tax increases that would hurt American workers. And by trimming it down and taking out the tax increases, we were able to come together with a compromise. We then went to five Republicans and five Democrats, then ten Republicans and ten Democrats, and grew it out from the center. Eventually, it passed the US Senate with a more than two-thirds majority, and both the minority leader and the majority leader supported it.

Now, is it perfect? No, it's not exactly what I would've written, but it does move us forward. Long-term economic growth will depend on that.

SERVICE OR PERFORMANCE?

Robinson: Here's what you haven't said. We just went across three decades, and I didn't hear you say, "I gave an especially memorable speech," or "I sponsored legislation that got a splashy headline in the *New York Times,"* or "I moved my state or my party or my caucus in a certain ideological direction." Here's what you said over and over again: I found a Democrat to work with. We found out what we could accomplish. Carl Hayden, the great seven-term senator from Arizona, once said, "If you want to get ahead here in the United States Senate, you have to be a workhorse and not a show horse." And Rob Portman has been a workhorse, and proud of it, correct?

Portman: Yes.

Robinson: But here's a quotation from Yuval Levin's book of a year or two ago, *A Time to Build*. Today legislators seek "a prominent role in the theater of our national politics, and they view the institution of Congress as a particularly prominent stage in that theater, a way to raise their profiles . . . and to establish themselves as celebrities." Is that now the way to get ahead in the US Senate?

Portman: I think you've analyzed it pretty well. But I don't know that it's a necessary part of doing the job, because there are plenty of workhorses here who don't focus on the cable shows, and don't give fiery speeches on the floor, don't throw out the red meat, on the right or the left, but instead focus on finding common ground because you have to get sixty votes in the Senate for just about anything. And I think that's good, by the way—I support the filibuster. This is helping our democracy to achieve things that are sustainable, bipartisan—as opposed to jerking back and forth between extremes, which is what would happen otherwise. There are plenty of members who continue to be workhorses. They're very important for the people they represent. My

view's really pretty simple, and I've had this since I got involved in public service. I think it's an honor to serve, because you get to make a difference in people's lives. And you were hired to get something done, to make people's lives better. You weren't hired to be a talk show host and a star.

I think your job as a senator ought to be how to find common ground between yourself and your colleagues on the other side. Ben Cardin, for instance, one of my best friends, from Maryland. We've done more on retirement security than has been done for decades around here. We've done four bills together over twenty-five years. We've got another one right now that helps people save more through their IRAs and their 401(k), and helps small businesses be able to have a 401(k) for their employees. Very important stuff for my constituents, but not the sort of thing that lends itself to a controversial talk show host.

"That's how the founders intended it. They didn't intend for unelected representatives to decide big issues."

MY FELLOW AMERICANS

Robinson: There is a view that the Congress of the United States, to which you have devoted the prime years of your life, has abdicated responsibility to the permanent bureaucracy or the deep state.

Portman: I agree.

Robinson: You're supposed to cheer me up a little.

Portman: Well, here's one solution, which is bipartisan. It's a bill that Senator Mark Warner, who's a Democrat, and I have proposed over the years, and it says that independent agencies should be subject to the same regulatory review process as an executive branch agency. Because these independent agencies—think of all the alphabet soups, the FECs and FTCs and SECs and so on—are able to regulate in ways that often are taking power from the executive branch and significantly from the legislative branch. So we think they should be subject to the rule-making function within the Office of Management and Budget. It's a place where you look at new regulations and say this meets the cost-benefit analysis or doesn't. Often these independent agencies put rules out that have huge costs and relatively small benefits. So I think they should be brought in to this process, that's part of the answer.

And part of the answer also is for Congress to legislate with more precision. We pass legislation that is often very broad and gives enormous powers to the agencies. We should instead be saying, "This is our clear intent." It requires us to do more work here, to have more experts. But that's how the founders intended it. They didn't intend for unelected representatives to decide big issues.

Robinson: Would you agree that there's an opportunity here? I'm trying to talk you into sticking around.

Portman: There's definitely an opportunity.

Robinson: Because the Supreme Court is now in a mood to backstop it, isn't that right?

Portman: Yeah, absolutely. But my strong view is this needs to come back to Congress, because we're the elected representatives, we should do our work. There are some who say that our economy and our society generally are so much more complicated today that it's impossible for Congress to do this job. I feel that the answer to that is to provide Congress with the wherewithal to do it and to be held accountable for it.

Robinson: There's a kind of feeling in the air—well, compared to the 1980s, when you and I were both kids in this town. The United States is richer, a lot richer in per capita GDP and constant dollars. This country does know how to create wealth, but in all kinds of other ways—family life, drug use, the state of our schools, our standing in the world, the competence of the government—the United States is worse off than it was when you got your job in the administration of George H. W. Bush. Do you buy that? Are our best days behind us?

"What social media has done and what cable TV has done is whip up this frenzy that makes it more difficult to solve our problems in America and to make progress."

Portman: No, absolutely not. American people are incredibly resilient, but also entrepreneurial, hardworking. When given the chance, people do pretty darn well on their own. It doesn't mean government doesn't have a role to establish the parameters, the structure for success. But it does mean that we are very blessed to live in a country where people are willing to take a risk and grow something for themselves and their family, but also for others. I

saw my dad do this. He was a young guy in his late thirties, started his own business, lost money the first few years, and had five employees. My mom was the bookkeeper. They ended up with a company of almost three hundred people. What motivated him? Helping those people develop their careers and help their families. And that's still out there. That's the America I grew up in. That's the America that I think is still there.

But there is an issue we've got to resolve: making fellow Americans an enemy. We can have opposing political views, that's fine. But what social media has done and what cable TV has done is whip up this frenzy that makes it more difficult to solve our problems in America and to make progress. We have to calm things down a little bit. And I don't think COVID helped, by the way. But as long as we can figure out how to talk to each other and continue to have that national sense of pride in our country and who we are, we'll be fine.

Robinson: Dan Balz of the *Washington Post* wrote this about you: "Portman was not built for these political times."

Portman: I just respectfully disagree.

In Case of Emergency

The politics of COVID-19 led to bitter debates over a fundamental value: the consent of the governed. Were the emergency measures fair? Were they justified? Did they even work?

By Morris P. Fiorina

No large-scale society operates under unanimity rules. Consequently, in real world democracies, some interests win and some lose in normal policy making. But at a minimum, democracy demands that all significant interests have a chance to be heard—to have a seat at the table. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic raises questions about whether that has been the case.

A prima facie question concerns the fact that a single public health official in some cases can assume near-dictatorial powers. One public health official can partially shut down the economy or suspend civil liberties in his or her jurisdiction. If elected, like mayors or governors, a single decision maker would be less of a problem—elected officials represent and are accountable to the constituencies that elected them. But public health officials are selected, not elected, and they are selected on the basis of their expertise, not because they represent the community. Concentrating such power in the

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hands of a single unelected official raises an immediate concern about the absence of representation.

A second problem of representation that arises from the experience of the coronavirus pandemic is that the officials who promulgated emergency orders did not experience the costs of those orders. This is not a reference to the numerous reported cases in which public officials attended dinners, wedding receptions, and other social functions that were disallowed under existing regulations. Rather, no matter how stringent the policies that public health officials imposed, they continued to draw their salaries and accumulate their benefits. They suffered no personal cost from the shutdowns and other restrictions that damaged or destroyed the livelihoods of people who owned or worked in nonessential businesses. Probably their higher economic status allowed many of them to send their children to in-person schools more than was the case for the average citizen, or to engage paid help to make remote schooling easier. As a Harvard Medical School doctor dryly commented in *City Journal:*

> Lockdowns have protected the laptop class of young, low-risk journalists, scientists, teachers, politicians and lawyers, while throwing children, the working class, and high-risk older people under the bus.

Academic research documented the unequal economic and other costs associated with the pandemic. The unequal impact of lockdowns and similar restrictions possibly contributed to the notable partisan difference in support for such policies. A higher proportion of Democrats than Republicans are public sector workers, with millions employed in education, government, and the nonprofit sector, parts of the economy generally less subject to pay cuts and layoffs—not to mention bankruptcies—than private sector workers.

Former French prime minister Georges Clemenceau once said that "war is too important to be left to the generals." Much the same sentiment applies to the decisions by public health officials in pandemics. In the early days of the COVID pandemic, economics and business commentators argued that the public health benefits of shutdowns should be weighed against the likely economic costs. Civil libertarians raised the same concerns about trade-offs between shutdowns and civil liberties. My impression is that few public health officials gave more than lip service to the recognition of such trade-offs. Instead, most discounted them.

Public health officials are chosen on the basis of expertise, not representativeness. Like all specialists, they exhibit a degree of tunnel vision, focusing

OBEY: A worker in protective clothing emerges from a building during a COVID lockdown in Beijing. In the United States, the pandemic created near-dictatorial powers for public health officials, giving them the power to shut down the economy or suspend civil liberties. [Newscom]

on the variable their professional training emphasizes—public health, in this case—and discounting much else. Doctor Sara Cody, the Santa Clara County health officer, remarked in a June 2021 lecture, "It's clear that public health officials have a singular focus and a duty and commitment to protect the public health; that's why we're in the field. I think it's immensely more complicated for elected officials." Depending on your point of view, Cody is identifying a feature or a bug.

Doctor Anthony Fauci, who by most accounts performed admirably throughout the crisis, provided a striking illustration of the specialist perspective after a testy exchange with Representative Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) at

a congressional hearing in April 2021, where Jordan charged that pandemic guidelines "trampled" on Americans' liberties. Fauci told CNN's Dana Bash: "This has *nothing* to do with liberties, Dana. We're talking about the fact that 560,000 people in our country have died. We're talking about [60,000] to 70,000 new infections per day. That's the issue. This is a public health issue. It's not a civil liberties issue" [my emphasis]. Probably most Americans would agree with Fauci that public health considerations often outweighed civil liberties infringements during the pandemic, but not that the latter are completely ignorable.

Concentrating power in the hands of a single unelected official raises an immediate concern about the lack of representation.

Public health officials were not alone in this regard. Some elected officials saw the issues raised by the pandemic similarly as one-sided as Fauci did. Democratic governors in blue states such as New York and California tended to issue more stringent restrictions than Republican governors in red states such as Florida and Texas did. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo famously commented that "if everything we do saves just one life, I'll be happy." No one really believes that, of course; if they did, they would lobby for five-mile-per-hour speed limits so almost no one would die in car accidents. As Doctor Scott Morrow, the San Mateo County health officer, commented on his profession's focus on infection rates, "When you only look at one thing, you only see one thing."

Regardless of whether emergency orders are issued by elected or appointed officials, their issuance and maintenance would have greater legitimacy if done by collective bodies more representative of the community, bodies that include health officers but also others—economists, business leaders, educators, psychologists, clergy, and politicians who would articulate other interests held by community members. Indeed, according to the Santa Clara County health officer, "This unilateral decision making is really a breathtaking departure from normal public health practice because normal public health practice is all about stakeholder engagement and shared decision making. . . . So this was quite different." Perhaps after the initial response to the emergency there

Few public health officials gave more than lip service to the trade-offs involving economic costs and civil liberties.

should be a greater emphasis on returning to the more normal public health practice where a "more holistic" approach is adopted.

In his remarks, Cuomo went on to comment that "no American is going to say accelerate the economy at the cost of human life. Because no American is going to say how much a life is worth." Actually, of course, many Americans say just that virtually every day—personally and professionally. As Glenn Greenwald, a dissenting commentator on the political left, observes:

> In virtually every realm of public policy, Americans embrace policies which they know will kill people, sometimes large numbers of people. They do so not because they are psychopaths but because they are rational: they assess that those deaths that will inevitably result from the policies they support are worth it in exchange for the benefits those policies provide. This rational cost-benefit analysis, even when not expressed in such explicit or crude terms, is foundational to public policy debates—except when it comes to COVID, where it has been bizarrely declared off-limits.

Program analysts evaluate the value of human lives when they do cost-benefit analyses of environmental, health and safety, and other regulations. Insurance companies and Medicare actuaries assign a value to human lives when they decide what drugs and procedures to cover. Courts decide how much lives are worth when they determine damages in lawsuits involving loss of lives. And speaking personally, as a reasonably healthy senior citizen, I may have some productive years left, but my life certainly is not worth anywhere near as much as the lives of my grandchildren, even less so if I had a serious illness or dementia. Treating all lives as equally valuable is a political decision, not a public health decision. In asserting that he would do anything to save one life, Cuomo was attempting to camouflage a political decision as a public health decision.

Emergency powers are more complex and consequential than day-to-day political decision making, but they still demand a weighing of costs and benefits.

In responding to criticism that her department's response to the pandemic was too heavily focused on the pandemic itself and not on the other economic and social harms that accompanied it, Cody commented that it was a "fair criticism" to ask, "Why weren't we looking at health in a more holistic way?" She went on to say, in her 2021 lecture,

> My challenge and the tension that I have felt over the last year and a half has been one, feeling constrained, like as far as an order, I should really just think about communicable disease and I also know that all of these economic social (sic) harms translate to health harms. And it's like, I wished that I could take the economic and social harms and magically convert them to some health harm scale, right? And then compare trade-offs. But that little formula, it doesn't exist, best I know.

Unfortunately, Cody is correct. Such a scale does not exist. And lacking such a scale, the comparison of trade-offs is a matter of judgment, and in a democratic society, that judgment is a political one. The essence of political decision making is weighing benefits and costs—on whom they accrue, how much, when, and where. The case of emergency powers is more complex and consequential than day-to-day political decision making, but it cannot escape this basic fact. As such, the use of emergency powers should be studied and evaluated in the context of democratic governance, not set over and above it.

"This rational cost-benefit analysis . . . is foundational to public policy debates—except when it comes to COVID, where it has been bizarrely declared off-limits."

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A Minor Miracle

A bipartisan majority has passed the Electoral Count Reform Act—proof that political differences can indeed be bridged. Herewith three more areas where a constructive spirit might prevail.

By Bob Bauer and Jack Goldsmith

The Electoral Count Reform Act (ECRA), which President Biden signed into law in December, is nothing short of a miracle in the annals of democracy reform. It would merit that recognition at any time. But that it found a path through the highly polarized politics and pressures of the times makes the achievement all the more remarkable. Already we have seen retrospectives that rightly note key factors contributing to its success, such as strong congressional leadership and the constructive use of bipartisan expertise on complex technical and constitutional questions. There is much credit to go around.

The ECRA experience also presents a possible model for thinking about what might be feasible in the next phase of federal-level democracy reform.

Key points

» The 1887 statute governing the electoral-vote counting was a shambles. The events of January 6, 2021, made clear that the statute would have to be reformed.

» There was bipartisan agreement that Congress and the states should not be allowed, at the whim of a partisan majority, to simply throw out votes.

» The Electoral Count Reform Act privileges neither party.

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Of course, the divided 118th Congress will make for much tougher sledding for all such endeavors. In the best of times, reform is caught up in party and other politics. This is even more true in a presidential election cycle in this sharply divided polity. But what worked in the Electoral Count Act case may help shape the reform agenda for the near future.

DESPERATE NEED

First, nobody seriously disputed the merits of Electoral Count Act reform. The 1887 statute was a shambles in desperate need of fixing. Its weaknesses were papered over by widespread observance of norms governing the congressional vote count for longer than a century. Then the times caught up with it. The calamitous January 6–7, 2021, session left no doubt that failure to amend the statute before the next presidential election posed unacceptable risks.

Second, and this strength is not to be underestimated, the case on the merits was entirely compatible with commonsense intuition. By and large, there was agreement that Congress should not be able, on the whim of a partisan majority, to simply chuck out votes for president that some wished had been cast differently, and that the states should not be able to change the outcome of an election by changing the law after Election Day. There were a few voices to suggest that perhaps the vice president did have the unilateral authority to reject election results or suspend the proceedings. But this was always a distinctly minority view on both sides of the aisle.

The reform succeeded because of common sense and a shared recognition of the problem.

Third, nobody could argue that reform of the Electoral Count Act would have the effect of advantaging one party over the other. Each party understands perfectly well that control of Congress will shift, as will the identity of the vice president. And the same is true of control of state legislatures that might be preparing "alternative slates of electors" to substitute for the ones approved by the voters. So, the ECRA was blessedly free of the perceived danger of political engineering that would somehow sculpt the competitive landscape favorably for one party or the other into the future.

Fourth, the ECRA was not part of an ambitious package of electoral reforms (like the sprawling and ill-fated Protecting Our Democracy Act) that linked the success of any one type of relatively uncontroversial reform to the fate of many other somewhat more controversial reforms. To be sure, the

ECRA was in the same Senate bill as presidential transition reform, but the latter discrete reform was related to the ECRA and relatively uncontroversial. When the fate of one reform is tied to a much more ambitious, controversial, and disconnected set of other reforms, reaching consensus obviously becomes much harder.

Fifth, the issues that needed to be worked through for passage of the ECRA lent themselves to the constructive support and participation of a bipartisan community of legal experts. The aim of reform was to work with baseline agreements, such as the need to raise the thresholds for objections or clarify the role of the vice president, and then tackle more controversial questions, such as the role for the courts in resolving disputes over the actions of state legislatures and officials.

This could be done—and was done—without igniting the fatal objection that Congress was somehow radically altering institutional roles within the federalist structure.

Each party understands perfectly well that control of Congress will shift, as will the identity of the vice president.

In testimony before Congress, and on call to support the outstanding congressional staff in the drafting process, legal experts of different backgrounds, party affiliations, and ideological orientations could help work through these details. In the end, for example, the federal courts were afforded a significant role, but within existing authorities, in hearing cases brought by presidential and vice presidential candidates. A meaningful reform that would not draw fire as "radical" in design stood the best chance of maintaining bipartisan support.

Many of these criteria, by the way, were the key to other governance reforms late last year—on presidential transitions, inspectors general, and presidential transparency about international agreements. In our view, these criteria for reform suggest the potential for agreement in the next Congress on reform in at least three areas: emergency powers, vacancies, and war powers.

FURTHER PROGRESS

The need for emergency powers reform has been explained in detail elsewhere. In a nutshell, the problem is that Congress has authorized a wide array of presidential emergency powers that presidents of both parties have invoked aggressively in situations that are not real emergencies—and that presidents can renew indefinitely under the National Emergencies Act,

subject only to veto-overriding supermajorities in Congress. (Congress originally sought to control emergency powers in the National Emergencies Act with legislative vetoes, but the Supreme Court's invalidation of such vetoes shifted emergency power enormously to the president.)

The good news is that emergency powers reform has bipartisan support in both houses of Congress. There is even bipartisan agreement on the shape such reform should take. National emergency powers reform with bipartisan support came close to passage last year. The consensus position, in brief, is that new presidential assertions of emergency powers should terminate after thirty or so legislative days unless Congress approves the emergency using expedited procedures. The emergency could then last one year, subject to renewals by the president that are approved by Congress using the same expedited procedures. The consensus proposals exempted the president's most vital emergency power—the International Emergency Economic Powers Act.

When the fate of one reform is tied to a much more ambitious, controversial, and disconnected reform, consensus becomes much harder.

This sensible reform is teed up to succeed. No one seriously doubts that the president's array of emergency powers, as they have come to be practiced, are too excessive and undisciplined. Common sense dictates that emergency powers should be limited to real emergencies and not confer timeless power. The reform is neutral in the sense that it would impact the practices of presidents of both parties. And, as noted, there is a sensible consensus on what reform should look like.

As for vacancies reform, the 1998 Federal Vacancies Reform Act (FVRA) has allowed presidents of both parties to exercise broad discretion to skirt the Senate confirmation process by filling vacant senior executive branch slots with "acting" officials who can serve for two hundred days and sometimes longer. Any sensible reform here must have two elements. First, it must curb the president's authority to fill vacant senior executive branch positions in a way that skirts the Senate's check and other public accountability mechanisms. Second, and just as important, Congress must give the executive branch something in return.

The flip side of presidential abuse of vacancies is that a recalcitrant Senate controlled by a party that opposes the president can block effective governance through its refusal to confirm nominees. There are good reasons to think that Congress requires confirmation of way too many executive branch

officials, and that the Senate could use this power over confirmations to hamstring the executive if the latter's power over vacancies is narrowed. There needs to be some compromise on this question. We have proposed reducing the number of Senate-confirmed appointments, but there may be other solutions.

The current legal regime on vacancies is obviously suboptimal. A reform like this should be able to attract bipartisan support in Congress, since it responds to past excesses by presidents of both parties and will apply with equal force to presidents of both parties.

Finally, war powers reform. There are three basic elements: abrogating the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force related to Iraq; updating the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force; and amending the War Powers Resolution. The first is easiest to achieve and has come close to happening several times in the past few years. It meets all the criteria that made Electoral Count Act reform possible. The second is harder. But there is a consensus across the parties and the political branches that some reform here is needed. Reforming the War Powers Resolution will be much harder because there are stark differences within Congress and between Congress and the White House.

The passage of the ECRA suggests there are achievable goals of democracy reform even as polarization retains its grip, we now have a divided government, and a presidential election is less than two years away. The way forward will not, of course, be easy, and a broad agenda will have to be trimmed as circumstances require. But success of any one reform invites consideration of the next steps. It keeps the entire reform enterprise going. ◘

Managing War

It's never been easy to harmonize military power with civilian control, but our democracy demands no less.

By Bruce S. Thornton

In *The Gathering Storm,* the opening volume of his memoirs of the World War II era, Winston Churchill catalogues the causes of the conflict. Among them he lists "the structures and habits of democratic states," which "lack those elements of persistence and convictions which can alone give security to the humble masses. . . . Even in matters of self-preservation, no policy is pursued even for ten or fifteen years at a time." From the birth of democracy in ancient Athens until the present, the political institutions that protect the freedom and rights of citizens have also been potentially dangerous in times of war—by complicating and interfering with the policies and decisions that, during a conflict, require swift execution, decisiveness, and persistence.

The "structures and habits" Churchill notes include regularly scheduled elections, by which the citizens hold their elected leaders accountable; the right of all citizens to speak openly and freely on all matters, including the conduct of foreign policy and the management of war; and the voicing of dissent against the war itself and the reasons for conducting it. Most important,

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in democratic states the military establishment and war are subordinated to the civilian institutions and offices accountable to the citizens through elections.

VOTERS ARE IN CHARGE

Regular elections, in the United States held every two years, make long-term military strategies vulnerable to the shifting moods of the electorate, which are expressed in frequent turnovers in Congress and the presidency. On the other hand, this critical instrument of political accountability can also change a dangerous course.

The iconic example in recent American history is the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. His predecessor, Jimmy Carter, elected after the disastrous abandonment of Vietnam, counseled that we should get over our "inordinate fear of communism" and prioritize human rights in US foreign policy rather than containing and pushing back on the Soviet Union's adventurism in Latin America, Afghanistan, and Central Africa. Reagan, in contrast, announced that it was "morning in America," exuded confidence and faith in America's goodness, increased the military budget, pushed back against Soviet interventions in Latin America, and summed up his strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union as "we win, they lose."

Thanks to regular elections, military decisions are always subject to what voters want.

Similarly, Donald Trump's election in 2016 led to a change in military policy from Barack Obama's foreign policy of retreat, diplomatic engagement, and "leading from behind." Obama had sought a "reset" with Russia, with promises of "flexibility" made indirectly to Vladimir Putin. He also rejected planned antimissile batteries for Poland and Czechoslovakia and Javelin antitank weapons for Ukraine, and in October 2011 withdrew US forces from Iraq. This latter move created a power vacuum quickly filled by Iran, ISIS, and other jihadist organizations, and exacerbated the brutal civil war in Syria by enabling Russia and Iran to take a larger role in that conflict and the wider region.

Responding to voter displeasure, Trump had campaigned against the "endless wars" in Afghanistan and Iraq and near the end of his term negotiated with the Taliban for withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. The Biden administration campaigned on the same aim, which ultimately was carried out in 2021, with the loss of thirteen American lives, the abandonment of

many Afghans who had worked for US authorities, and the loss of billions of dollars in weapons and materiel.

Some policies are disliked by voters of both parties, which compels Democrat and Republican candidates to promise to address their concerns even if doing so might compromise long-term strategies for short-term political gain. In democratic societies, voters can end both a politician's career and a party's control of government.

DISSENT

Relations between civilian governments and the military have often been contentious, especially over the management of a conflict, its tactics, and its purposes. The constitutional right to free speech allows citizens to criticize and protest publicly how a war is conducted, which complicates military planning and puts pressure on the elected officials who are held accountable on election day for setbacks and failures.

Since the Sixties and the war in Vietnam, antiwar organizations have proliferated, and protests have accompanied every conflict. These constitutionally protected events bolster enemy morale even as they intimidate presidents, legislators, and candidates for elected office. Such demonstrations, often extensively covered in the news, also affect domestic politics.

In 2004, the US presidential primary overlapped with a violent guerrilla resistance in Iraq to the American occupation. Democratic Vermont governor Howard Dean leveraged antiwar protests to mount a grass-roots campaign for his party's nomination, gaining surprising support. Dean's brief success spooked the frontrunners for the nomination, Senators John Kerry, John Edwards, and Hillary Clinton, who reversed their support for the war, even though they had earlier voted for the Authorization for Use of Military Force that sanctioned it, based on the same intelligence regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that was one of President George W. Bush's predicates for the war. For the Democrats, opposition to the war became an important plank in the party's platform and eventually in candidate Kerry's campaign.

To America's founders, the centuries of chronic European warfare typified an abuse of power they were at pains to avoid.

Obama's 2008 presidential campaign also incorporated the antiwar movement's interpretation of the Iraq War as unnecessary and based on false, if not manufactured, evidence for Saddam Hussein's arsenal. By then, voters

were tiring of the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, both still troubled by violence and seemingly making little progress toward fulfilling Bush's aim of creating liberal democracies in nations culturally unsuited for Western political ideals.

In 2007, with the antiwar movement still active, then-senator Obama responded to the "surge" of troops to Iraq, which eventually reduced the violence, by calling it a "reckless escalation," and introduced legislation to remove all US combat forces by March 31, 2008. Obama's presidential campaign also framed the war in Iraq as predicated on fabricated intelligence and dubious strategic aims.

The "military-industrial complex" is vulnerable to manipulation, bureaucracy, and conflicts of interest.

Eventually, the Biden administration withdrew all US troops from Afghanistan in 2021. The fallout from the withdrawal, driven by people exercising their First Amendment right, reflects the price Americans pay for the foundational freedom of our political order.

THREATS TO CIVILIAN CONTROL

In the United States, Congress possesses the power to declare war, and the president serves as commander in chief of the military even if he has no military experience or training. These provisions give the people the power, through the representatives they elect, to make war and to hold the military accountable for how it conducts it.

These guardrails were designed to protect citizens and their freedoms from the national institution made up of those who are trained in warfare and have access to the materiel for making war. The founders checked military institutions with elected officeholders because European history was replete with examples of powerful military leaders, autocrats, and kings who commanded armies without accountability to the people. Those figures often turned against civilian political institutions to create some form of tyranny. The founders saw the centuries of chronic European warfare as typifying abuse of power and heedless destruction of defenseless people.

During the American revolutionary and founding period, one of the premier historical examples of this danger was Julius Caesar, who abused the terms of his imperium, the right granted by the Roman senate to wage war on behalf of the republic, by marching his legions into the city of Rome and its territory in violation of the law, thus becoming a tyrant not accountable

to the people or the Senate. For the American colonists chafing against the governance of the British parliament and king, Romans who resisted Caesar embodied the defense of freedom against tyranny.

This distrust of the military and fear of standing armies has been a perennial feature of American history. And then came the Cold War—with its nuclear face-off and its proxy struggles around the globe—which required a much larger military, and more sophisticated weapons, than Americans had been accustomed to. The strategy of "containment" demanded a permanent security and defense establishment, and the cost of that establishment began to take up more and more of the national budget, leading to clashes over civilian and military funding.

Since the Sixties, antiwar organizations have proliferated, and protests have accompanied every conflict.

The modern wariness of the military is reflected in the warning by president and former general Dwight Eisenhower, in his 1961 farewell address, of the "military-industrial complex." He painted a picture of a "conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry" whose "influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the federal government," encompassing "the very structure of our society." He cautioned,

> In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

One factor underlying Eisenhower's warning is that our military and security establishment is housed in large federal agencies concentrated in Washington and close to Congress, which decides their funding levels. Moreover, such large, hierarchically organized bureaucracies, especially ones not accountable to the market or the voters, are prone to professional deformation. The aims and interests of the agency shift from the functions they were created to perform to the interests of the agency itself. And the proximity to the Capitol and the White House, and the consulting, advocacy, and lobbying firms clustered around both, leave such agencies open to their influence.

These large agencies also offer top military leaders opportunities to serve in a president's cabinet. Or, upon retirement, retired brass can take lucrative seats on corporate boards of armament manufacturers, or billets with

lobbying firms, where contacts from their years of service are useful in securing government contracts.

This is not to say that serving in such positions is necessarily about politics or greed, or that those who do so are not serving honorably. But this state of affairs is rife with moral hazard, contributing to the disaffection with the military shared by many citizens. And it leads to distrust of powerful institutions and their perceived careerist or politicized leaders who pursue political aims like the "war on carbon" or critical race theory training instead of military preparedness.

Institutional orthodoxy, received wisdom, and unchallenged paradigms transform the military and security establishment into the proverbial "box" we are supposed to "think outside of." And the lessons of history often cannot penetrate these silos of orthodoxy.

Smaller, Faster, Deadlier

The supply chain for "energetics," the essential chemicals in bombs, shells, and missiles, is surprisingly tenuous. Without prompt new investments, we'll be placing our national security at risk.

By Nadia Schadlow

As the war in Ukraine continues to take its tragic toll, US defense strategists are questioning the nation's ability to fight a protracted conflict. US stockpiles of critical munitions are being depleted as Washington supplies Kyiv with Javelin antitank and Stinger antiaircraft missiles. For months now, US policy makers and experts have sounded warnings. Over the past year, Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas) warned that the national stockpile of munitions is dangerously low. NATO officials are also worried, and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has urged allied countries to "dig deep and provide additional capability" to Ukraine.

But the problem is more complicated than the supply of finished weapons. Not only is the United States lagging in the production of the missile bodies and artillery shells, but it faces a shortage of the chemicals that these

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and other systems depend on for their lethality. These chemicals are called *energetics*, and they come in three main forms: explosives, which create the lethal effects in warheads; propellants, which produce thrust for missiles and rockets; and pyrotechnics, such as fireworks, which illuminate or mark targets for military and civilian applications.

Two decades ago, the US National Academy of Sciences observed that there was "no modern defense system or type of weaponry that does not rely on energetic materials." This remains the case today, with nearly every weapon on the modern battlefield depending on energetic materials.

THE ELEMENTS OF WAR

Not only are energetics relevant to the current munitions pipeline problem, but they are also critical to advancing the operational concepts that the US military is developing to deter and counter threats around the world. Advancements in energetics translate directly into advantages on the battlefield because they allow for increased range, increased lethality, and decreased weapon size. All these capabilities are important to counter the anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) challenges, which refers to the Chinese military's ability to hold US and allied forces at risk in the South and East China Seas and elsewhere.

More efficient fuels also mean more mass can be put into orbit or sent to the moon or Mars.

Increased range, for instance, allows a rocket or missile to target an adversary from a safer distance, helping reduce the danger to friendly forces. Moreover, for advanced systems, including hypersonic weapons, advanced energetics can allow hypersonic glide vehicles to achieve greater range while sustaining higher speeds.

Energetics are also central to lethality, which is the ability to destroy enemy systems and personnel. More explosive power per weapon increases the likelihood that a target will be disabled or destroyed on the first shot.

And advanced energetics allow for smaller munitions. For example, the Defense Department can build smaller bombs with greater lethality. Smaller and lighter weapons mean US platforms could bring a greater number into the fight and spend less time restocking. Recent discussions around contested logistics in high-intensity conflict point to the importance of making everything smaller, lighter, faster, and more portable.

TAKE THAT: An M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) is fired during joint training in Sweden. The United States has provided HIMARS equipment to Ukraine, and the battlefield drain is depleting many critical supplies. The National Academy of Sciences pointed out that there exists "no modern defense system or type of weaponry that does not rely on energetic materials." [Spc. Devin Klecan—US Army]

Moreover, energetics are essential to other areas as well, particularly in the commercial and military space domain. More efficient energetic fuels mean more mass can be put into orbit or transferred to the moon or Mars. Just as energy-dense propellants increase weapons range and speed, increased density can provide spacecraft longer range, better maneuverability (important for repairs in space), and increased engagement speeds.

FORGING A NEW CHAIN

For more than a decade, the US energetics supply chain has been brittle. Although the United States developed key compounds—such as CL-20, one of the world's most powerful non-nuclear explosives—in the late 1980s, the United States never produced it at scale. In contrast, China began producing

CL-20 at scale a decade ago, and Russia added the compound to its arsenal. Recent assessments of the industrial base have found that the Pentagon imports roughly a third of its energetic materials from foreign sources, with a significant portion coming from China. Domestic production relies on a handful of aging production facilities and suffers from a lack of surge capacity.

The most widely used energetic materials come from a small number of government-owned and -operated facilities that produce, mix, load, and pack them into weapon systems. Much of this takes place at the Holston and Radford Army Ammunition Plants. Both are government-owned contractor-operated facilities that produce energetics which fulfill joint service requirements. Holston Army Ammunition Plant is also the only producer of RDX and HMX, two of the most common energetics in US munitions.

Extensive government regulation for facilities that produce and handle explosive compounds also means that new ones have not been built. Even if companies are interested in producing energetics, they face high barriers to entry.

The good news is that attention to the issue has increased in the past year. Most recently, with White House support, the Defense Department has used the Defense Production Act to work with one company that develops an important chemical (aminoguanidine bicarbonate) and to initiate more collaboration between the Pentagon and other suppliers of critical chemicals. In addition, the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act calls for an additional $3 billion for munitions. The NDAA will also allow for longer-term contracts, encouraging manufacturers to invest some of their own capital.

While the Defense Department is rightly focused on Ukraine's immediate needs and on replenishing US stocks, it should also look to the future and not merely invest in legacy munitions production. Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Bill LaPlante recently observed that the Ukraine conflict is an opportunity to modernize the supply chains of the US defense industrial base. He is right: the Pentagon now has a big opportunity to tackle the underlying problems in the energetics enterprise by advancing the development of new compounds produced at home, with twenty-first-century manufacturing methods. The Chinese government is already doing so, both in this sector and in many others.

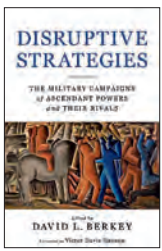
Advancements in energetics translate directly into battlefield advantage.

Given the relatively "bounded" arena of energetics, the Pentagon has a chance to align strategically many of the programs designed to promote public-private partnerships over the past decade.

At each stage of the energetics capital stack, the Defense Department can target its nondilutive investment capital, loans, loan guarantees, prototyping contracts, and production contracts to ensure that the energetics sector has the right incentives to develop in the United States. Companies in this sector must be willing to take the necessary R&D risks, and they will only do that if they are confident of an enduring marketplace. This would include tapping into programs across the DoD enterprise, such as DARPA's Embedded Entrepreneurship Initiative; the Defense Innovation Unit's National Security Innovation Capital; AFWERX (part of the Air Force Research Laboratory); the Small Business Innovation Research; the Rapid Defense Experimentation Reserve; and the newly established Office of Strategic Capital.

Recent discussions about high-intensity conflict point to the importance of making everything smaller, lighter, faster, and more portable.

Wars are rarely short, and the Department of Defense is currently providing necessary lethal aid to Ukraine and preparing for the possibility of war with China in the western Pacific. It should be inconceivable for the "arsenal of democracy" to run short of the very chemicals responsible for military weapons' propulsion and lethality. By focusing investment on building new, more lethal energetic compounds, and replacing twentieth-century facilities with twenty-first-century plants, the Department of Defense can position itself to deter—and if needed, fight—the nation's next war.



Bringing Japan Aboard

To confront Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific, the United States, Australia, and Britain are forging new security bonds. It would make abundant sense to extend those bonds to Japan.

By Michael R. Auslin

A new quad is coalescing in the Indo-Pacific, and it is likely to have an even greater impact than the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a grouping that brings together Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. The new alignment is coming about as Australia, Britain, Japan, and the United States increasingly align their security interests against the growth of China's influence and power. The prospect of adding Japan to the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) defense cooperation pact, established in 2021—which would turn the group into JAUKUS—could transform security cooperation among liberal democracies in the Indo-Pacific in a way no previous alliance or quasi-alliance has done.

Such a partnership was not preordained. Indeed, reports last year that Japan was quietly being asked about joining AUKUS were quickly denied by

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Tokyo; then–White House press secretary Jen Psaki also dismissed the idea. But Japan looks to be aligning itself with the trio nonetheless, part of a strategic revolution that has not only transformed Tokyo's security posture but also turned it into an increasingly important actor in the Indo-Pacific.

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

Under former Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, who was assassinated last July, Japan dropped most restrictions on joint weapons development, steadily increased its military budget, and embraced a more active defense posture, including allowing its military forces to engage in collective self-defense with partners.

Since taking power in October 2021, current prime minister Fumio Kishida has not only built on Abe's foreign and security policies but also expanded and enhanced Japan's ties with leading liberal nations in Asia and beyond. Kishida immediately joined Washington and European capitals in sanctioning Russia after it invaded Ukraine. He has deepened Japan's engagement with NATO, becoming in June the first Japanese leader to attend a NATO summit. At home, Kishida has continued to increase Japan's defense budget, with the possibility of doubling it to nearly $100 billion, and in December published a new national security strategy.

The takeaway for Asia watchers is that Japan's strategic revolution is not tied to political personalities but rather to evolving Chinese and North Korean threats. Tokyo will continue to develop its capabilities and expand its partnerships as long as Asia's security environment remains unstable.

A core element of Kishida's approach is a steady alignment with the three AUKUS nations. In late October, Canberra and Tokyo signed a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. Although it is not a formal mutual defense pact, the agreement enhances Japan and Australia's "special strategic partnership" while reiterating their support for global norms and regional openness. They had already signed a military reciprocal access agreement, which eases the procedures for visiting forces and allows the Australian and Japanese militaries to hold joint exercises and work together on disaster relief, including with the United States.

With their new security cooperation declaration, the two countries pledge to "deepen practical cooperation and further enhance interoperability" between their militaries while sharing intelligence, cooperating on cyber defense, and working to secure their supply chains, among other actions. If fully implemented, the proposed scope of cooperation would make the partnership among the most important for each nation.

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

In January, Britain and Japan signed a reciprocal access agreement similar to the one Japan already has with Australia, easing the entry of troops into each other's countries and enhancing joint military exercises and logistics cooperation. This follows a July announcement that Tokyo and London will cooperate (with Italy) on developing a next-generation fighter jet. The British Royal Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force held joint exercises in the English Channel the previous month, just a year after Britain's new *Queen Elizabeth* aircraft carrier and a strike group visited Japan.

For Britain, the access agreement with Japan puts more meat on the bones of London's "tilt" toward the Indo-Pacific region, a strategic shift first outlined by the government of former prime minister Boris Johnson. A deepening of British-Japanese defense ties, along with current prime minister Rishi Sunak's expected revision of London's most important public strategic document, its "integrated review," to focus more clearly on the Chinese threat, sets the stage for greater formal cooperation with Canberra, Tokyo, and Washington in the Indo-Pacific.

A NATURAL EVOLUTION

Even before the four countries reach any formal agreement, however, an informal JAUKUS is already emerging, thanks to an alignment of actions aimed at balancing Chinese advances. In October 2021, the four countries' navies conducted joint training in the Indian Ocean. In August 2022, Japan announced it would research hypersonic missiles, shortly after AUKUS stated it would focus on developing both hypersonic and counter-hypersonic technology. Similarly, Japan is increasing its investment in quantum computing, to be carried out in part by Fujitsu, owner of the world's second-fastest supercomputer. This initiative meshes with AUKUS's commitment to jointly develop quantum and artificial intelligence technologies with potential military implications.

Japan's strategic revolution is not tied to political personalities but to evolving Chinese and North Korean threats.

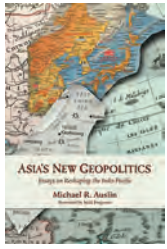
Similarly, the four nations are increasingly aligned on domestic security issues. All four have banned Huawei from their domestic telecommunications networks, especially 6G, although implementation has been uneven. Furthermore, British Security Minister Tom Tugendhat's announcement that Britain would close all remaining Confucius Institutes means that each of the four nations is moving to reduce the presence and influence of the Beijing-funded

organization, which has exerted pressure on universities around the world to mute criticism of China and push narratives that benefit the interests of the Chinese state.

The next step in creating an actual JAUKUS would be to consider how to slowly formalize Japan's participation. It could begin by inviting Japanese officials to observe some of the seventeen AUKUS working groups on areas of common interest, such as quantum computing and hypersonic development. A next stage would be to explore modified JAUKUS status for Japan or regular attendance at meetings of joint steering groups, which set policy on the two core topics that AUKUS is focused on—submarines and advanced capabilities—while longer-term membership is discussed. Throughout, quietly exploring how Tokyo might participate in AUKUS's core effort to supply nuclear-powered submarines to Australia could help map out potential diplomatic and political landmines, not least in Japanese domestic politics, where the opposition to nuclear technology for any military use remains strong.

Britain's access agreement with Japan puts more meat on the bones of London's "tilt" toward the Indo-Pacific region.

Regardless of the process by which it happens and its ultimate status—whether it is an alliance, a pact, or something more informal—JAUKUS is a natural evolution of converging security concerns and initiatives by four leading liberal nations with a will and ability to think strategically about the Indo-Pacific. As the commonality of their policies and goals becomes ever more apparent, the JAUKUS nations are likely to see the benefit of further coordinating and joining their efforts, all of which promises to help maintain stability in the Indo-Pacific region. ◘



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A New York State of Panic

Yes, the sea is up and the Battery's down. But New York City isn't even close to sinking.

By Steven E. Koonin

A recent National Aeronautics and Space Administration report yet again raises alarm that New Yorkers are about to be inundated by rapidly rising seas. But a review of the data suggests that such warnings need to be taken with more than a few grains of sea salt.

The record of sea level measured at the southern tip of Manhattan, known as the Battery, begins in 1856. It shows that today's waters are 19 inches higher than they were 167 years ago, rising an average of 3.5 inches every 30 years. The geologic record shows that this rise began some 20,000 years ago as the last great glaciers melted, causing the New York coastline to move inland more than 50 miles.

There is no question that sea level at the Battery will continue to rise in coming decades, if only because the land has been steadily sinking about 2 inches every 30 years because of factors including tectonic motion, rebound from the mass of the glaciers, and local subsidence. Rather, the question is whether growing human influences on the climate will cause the sea level

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to rise more rapidly. To judge that, we can compare recent rates of rise with those in the past, when human influences were much smaller.

The rise in sea level over each 30-year period since 1920 has varied between 1.5 and 6 inches. The 5-inch rise over the most recent 30 years is higher than the century-long average, but it isn't unprecedented and shows no sign of increasing.

As the Earth warms, changes in sea level at the Battery will depend in part on global changes. These include the loss of ice from mountain glaciers, Greenland, and Antarctica, as well as the ocean's expansion as it warms. It's very difficult to predict these changes—many factors influence ice loss, and the oceans absorb only 0.25 percent of the heat flowing through the Earth's climate system. The 30-year rises in the latter half of the twentieth century were diminished by about an inch because of the filling of reservoirs behind dams and changes in groundwater around the world.

The waters around New York City began rising some 20,000 years ago as the last great glaciers melted.

The Battery's sea level also depends on local changes in the sea and the sinking of the land. Most important is the natural variability of winds, currents such as the Gulf Stream, salinity, and temperatures of the North Atlantic, which cause variations in sea level along the entire Northeast coast of the United States. Because of these many variables, climate models can't account for the ups and downs.

Despite this, the recent NASA report echoes a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration report predicting more than a foot of rise at the Battery by 2050. Such a rise during the coming 30 years would be more than double the rise over the past 30 years and more than triple the past century's average. Even more remarkably, the NOAA report says this rise will happen regardless of future greenhouse-gas emissions. There is no way of knowing if this prediction is correct.

The Battery's sea level hasn't done anything in recent decades that it hasn't done over the past century.

So while New Yorkers should watch the waters around them, there is no need to dash to higher ground. The Battery's sea level hasn't done anything in recent decades that it hasn't done over the past century. And although

we'll have to wait three decades to test the predicted one-foot rise, measurements over the next decade should tell us how quickly we'll need to raise the seawalls.

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Truly Fair

What stands in the way of **genuine equity in schools?** Not bigotry. Mediocrity.

By Michael J. Petrilli

Last fall, Stephen Sawchuk published an *Education Week* article exploring why "educational equity" had become a "trigger word"—even though the notion has been baked into federal policy for decades. "Equity may be the law," he wrote, "but we don't agree on what it means."

I can understand Sawchuk's confusion because, properly construed, the call for greater equity can and should command widespread support from Americans across the ideological spectrum.

A potentially unifying argument might go something like the following.

A WIN-WIN PROPOSAL

In a great country like ours, we should aspire for every child to grow up to achieve his or her full potential. Anything less is a waste of talent and a blemish on human dignity and flourishing.

Schools have a particular role to play in helping children achieve their full academic potential, and have supporting roles in helping children develop socially, emotionally, artistically, and athletically.

Yet we know that our country is failing to live up to this aspiration because millions of boys and girls are failing to live up to their full potential. And we know that most of the reasons have to do with what happens between conception and kindergarten—that the strains of poverty, family instability, parental

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substance abuse, and other social ills mean that many children enter schools far behind what their cognitive trajectory otherwise could have been.

We know this in part because of the evidence of achievement gaps that can be measured at school entry, if not before. If we reject the notion that genetic differences drive racial achievement gaps as morally and empirically dubious—which we absolutely should—then the explanation for their existence as early as age five must be differing life circumstances, including the gaping chasms in socioeconomic status and its associated opportunities.

A major focus of "equity work," then, is to close these gaps in the zero-to-five years—both because it's the right thing to do, and so that all children have the opportunity to achieve their full potential—cognitively, academically, and otherwise.

This project has tended to be the domain of the political left, with its calls for better pre- and post-natal health care; the eradication of environmental pollutants like lead paint; direct financial supports for families with young children, like 2021's expanded and fully refundable child tax credits; and expanded public support for high quality child care. Yet the political right has contributions to make as well, with its calls for greater personal responsibility; greater family stability, especially via married, two-parent families; and for welfare programs that encourage—rather than discourage—marriage and work, which have been shown to lead to better outcomes for kids.

Schools also have a critical role to play, especially at the elementary level, where students are still young enough for a great education to make a significant difference in their academic trajectories. Schools may not be able to overcome all the damage of poverty, family instability, and their associated ills, but they can do a lot, as we know from the markedly different achievement trajectories of children in the highest-performing high-poverty schools—many of them public charter schools—compared to kids in more typical school settings.

Educational equity, then, means providing children, especially poor children, with excellence—excellent instruction, excellent curricula, excellent teachers, excellent tutoring, excellent enrichment. Some of that costs more money in high-poverty settings, so yes, educational equity demands that we spend more public dollars on the students who need it most.

The greatest enemy of equity, then, is mediocrity. It's the everyday bureaucratic dysfunction that remains all too common in American education. It's the decisions that public officials take that block excellent schools, including excellent public charter schools, from growing or replicating. It's the inertia that keeps traditional public schools from retaining many of their best young teachers. It's the refusal to intervene when a principal is not up to the task of creating a culture of excellence.

Note what is *not* an enemy of equity: excellence. Indeed, far from it—excellence is the antidote to inequity.

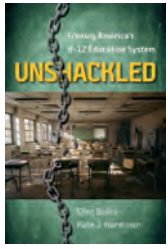
A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE

And yet—back to the puzzle that Sawchuk presented in his article—some "equity advocates" have turned the notion into a "trigger word" by arguing that excellence is indeed the enemy. By their line of thinking, anything that helps a subgroup of children achieve at high levels, or even just celebrates that achievement—such as gifted-and-talented programs, exam schools, or National Merit Scholarships—is at war with equity. These advocates see equity as a zero-sum game. Rather than focusing on helping every child achieve his or her potential, potential that inevitably varies from individual to individual, they seek a world in which the outcomes children achieve are closer to equal—even if that equality comes by leveling-down the high achievers.

Needless to say, this conception of equity is highly unpopular, and not just on the political right. As well it should be, because it's also morally bankrupt. It is simply wrong to embrace policies and practices that seek to put a ceiling on any child's achievement—just as it is wrong to block efforts to get all students to a floor of basic literacy and numeracy.

John Gardner once asked if we can "be equal and excellent too." The answer is an unequivocal yes. And in the domain of racial equity, the way to do that is to ensure that all children, from every racial and ethnic group, get what they need to live up to their full potential. And for high-potential children from underrepresented groups in particular, it means identifying their talent early, cultivating it through gifted-and-talented programs and the like, and keeping them on a trajectory of high achievement all the way through high school and beyond.

It bears repeating: Excellence is not the enemy of equity; it is the antidote to inequity. Equity advocates would do well to keep that in mind. ◘



Newsom's Nothingburger

A government panel has been given the power to control the fast-food industry. The thoroughly predictable outcome? Feast for unions, and a famine for job-seekers.

By Lee E. Ohanian

California's new fast-food law, signed last September, aims to establish a politically appointed council with unprecedented power to regulate the industry by setting worker wages, hours, and other working conditions. A successful signature-gathering campaign has temporarily put the brakes on the law, pending a statewide referendum to be held next year, but it's worth taking a close look at legislation that is not merely government overreach on steroids. This law would essentially kill the franchisor-franchisee model within the industry and would almost certainly destroy thousands of jobs by driving up the cost of doing business and increasing the level of automation in the industry.

The law couldn't have come at a worse time. According to the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in California's fast-food industry remains nearly 20 percent below its pre-pandemic level (representing a loss of more than seventy-five thousand jobs). Even

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more disturbing is that industry employment continued to decline even after the height of the pandemic, losing an additional twenty-five thousand jobs between the spring of 2020 and the spring of 2021 (data for 2022 are unavailable).

The law applies to any fast-food chain in California that has at least one hundred stores nationwide sharing a common brand. The average fast-food restaurant is marginally profitable, with profit margins averaging between 6 and 9 percent in normal times. Franchisee capital requirements are large, sometimes requiring $2 million or more to get a franchise up and running. Most fast-food workers are young, and many work part time, which tends to lead to high turnover, as high as 143 percent annually. This means that over the course of a year, a workplace that begins the year with a hundred employees will need to hire one hundred and forty-three workers over the course of that year to finish the year with a hundred employees. Not surprising, 78 percent of fast-food restaurant operators indicate that recruiting and retaining workers is their top priority.

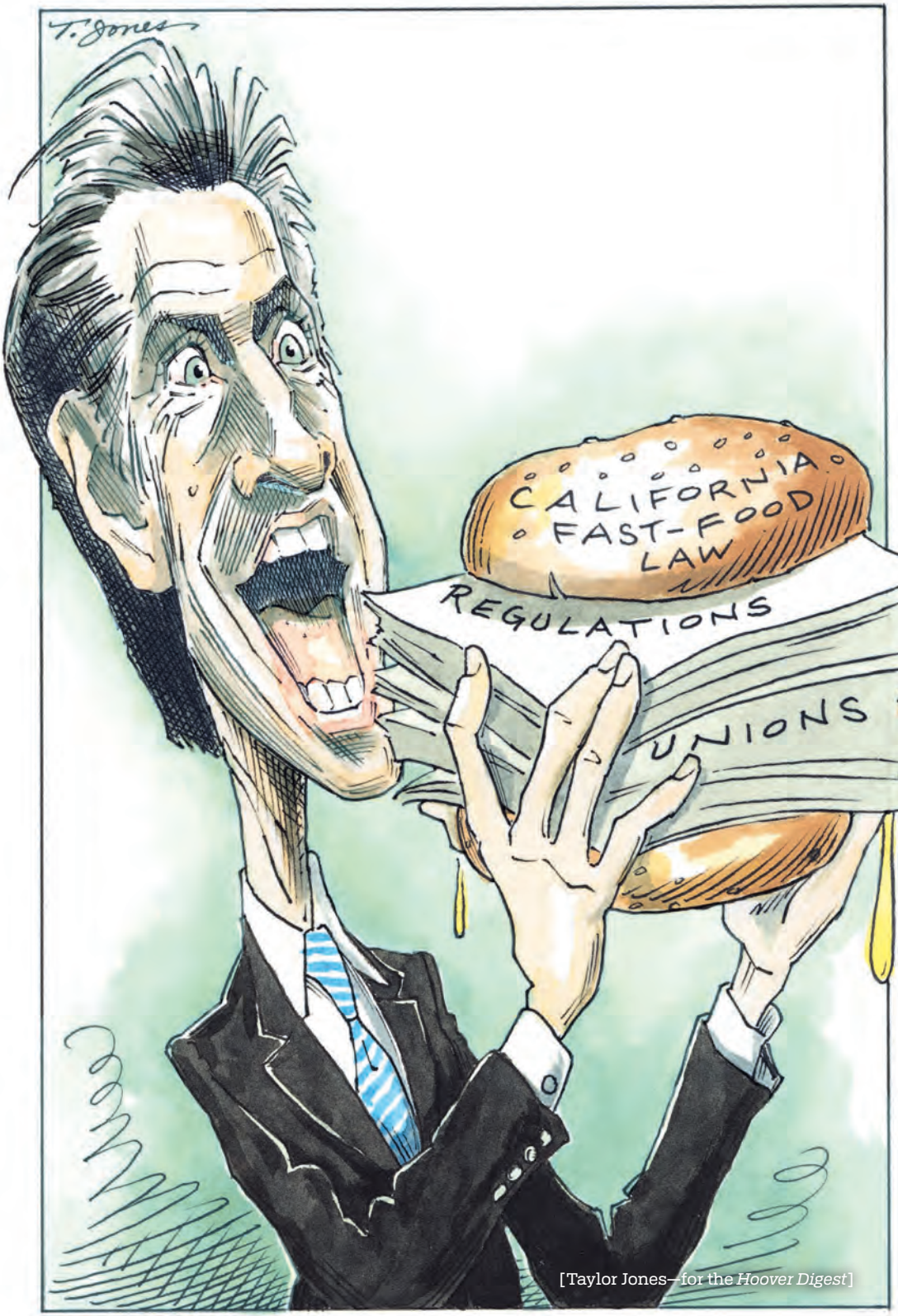
Unionized businesses are exempt from the new law.

The bill passed both the eighty-member state Assembly and the forty-member state Senate by only one vote in each chamber, despite the state's having a 60–20 Democratic supermajority in the Assembly and a 31–9 supermajority in the Senate. No Republican lawmakers supported the bill.

SOMETHING SWEET FOR THE UNIONS

Why was such an extreme law passed and signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom, whose own finance department opposed the bill? The bill was marketed as necessary to protect worker health and safety and to fight employer wage theft. But there are, of course, already laws at the federal and state level that protect worker safety and health, and California passed a law in 2021 that makes wage theft a criminal offense in the state. Former Clinton administration labor secretary Robert Reich remarked that California is home to the "nation's foremost set of laws to protect workers."

The new fast-food law is not about protecting its workers. It is an under-the-radar attempt by politicians to increase unionization. Union fingerprints are all over this law. Unionized businesses—those operating under a collective bargaining agreement—are in fact exempt from the new law. Like so many other recent California bills, the law has the goal of increasing the likelihood that a business will be unionized—as it raises the cost of not being



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

unionized. The council will have substantial latitude to punish nonunion businesses de facto, as the bill allows the council to set wages as high as $22 per hour, along with wielding the right to dictate working hours and other conditions of employment. Suddenly, collective bargaining looks so much better than it did before, but only because the new law makes running a nonunion business remarkably more expensive.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was one of the strongest supporters of the bill. No surprise there. The SEIU has spent about $100 million since 2012 to raise the state's minimum wage, which is another indirect way of increasing unionization. The SEIU will be the main beneficiary of the new law should restaurants cave and accept collective bargaining. Lorena Gonzalez, the chief officer of the California Labor Federation, which is the umbrella organization of more than twelve hundred labor unions within the state, was the original author of the bill when she was in the California Assembly. Gonzalez believes that every workplace should be unionized and uses, shall we say, colorful language to characterize those who question the role of unions in today's economy.

Private sector unionization has been dropping for more than fifty years. At one time, 40 percent of California workers belonged to a union. Today, fewer than 8 percent of private sector workers in the state are unionized. There are two reasons unionization rates have plummeted. One is that many of today's workers wish to have the independence and flexibility to negotiate their own work arrangements rather than be subject to the terms of a collective bargaining, one-size-fits-all agreement. The other is that most US unions have an awful track record of representing the interests of their members. Major American unionized industries, including autos, steel, and rubber, have collapsed over time as chronic industrial conflict, including strikes and work slowdowns, resulted in American industries falling behind foreign producers, becoming uncompetitive, and losing hundreds of thousands of jobs in the process.

CHANGES ARE ON THE MENU

Job loss now looms large in the fast-food industry, an industry already transitioning from employees to machines. Robots and other forms of artificial intelligence are taking the place of workers in fast-food restaurants, and California's new law will only accelerate this process.

Nala Robotics has introduced the "Wingman," a robot that can bread, season, and perfectly fry chicken wings for $2,999 per month. It can also prepare other fried foods, including french fries and onion rings. Assuming a ten-hour

restaurant operating day, the Wingman costs about $10 per hour to operate. Miso Robotics has developed "Flippy," a robotic arm that can flip a burger or any other food that is cooked on a flat grill. Flippy, which cost Miso $50 million to create, rents for $3,500 per month, which includes on-site maintenance, or can be purchased for $30,000 per unit. Self-ordering kiosks, which sell for about $50,000, are taking the place of workers in many restaurants. These devices are just the beginning. As AI technologies advance, even more sophisticated and cost-effective devices and software will appear and will take the place of any worker who cannot deliver a comparable profit to the employer.

The new law makes running a non-union business remarkably more expensive.

California's new law is in essence legislating away thousands of future jobs by preventing workers and employers from reaching employment agreements on their own terms. The law places failed union leadership above the interests of individuals who wish to work and business owners who wish to hire. And don't be surprised if similar councils are formed in the future to organize workers in other industries. Unions are desperate for new recruits. After decades of losses, it appears that the only way that they can grow is by having legislators take away the freedoms that are crucial for individual prosperity and economic growth. ◘

Read* California on Your Mind, *the online Hoover Institution journal that probes the politics and economics of the Golden State (www.hoover.org/publications/californiaonyourmind).

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Electric Sheep

Are computers leading us astray? Psychologist **Gerd Gigerenzer** insists that human brains still trump artificial intelligence (just not at chess).

By Russ Roberts

***Russ Roberts,* EconTalk:** You write a lot about artificial intelligence, and you say at one point that AI—artificial intelligence—lacks common sense.

Gerd Gigerenzer: Yes. Common sense has been underestimated in psychology and in philosophy. It's a great contribution of AI to show how difficult it is to model common sense.

For instance, [computer program] AlphaZero can beat every human in chess and Go, but it doesn't know that there *is* a game that's called chess or Go. A deep neural network, in order to learn, to distinguish pictures of, say school buses, from other objects on the street, needs ten thousand pictures of school buses to learn that. If you have a four-year-old and point to a school bus, you may have to point another time, but then the kid has gotten it.

So, what I'm saying is that artificial intelligence, as in deep neural networks, has a very different kind of intelligence that does not resemble, much, human intelligence. Deep neural networks are statistical machines that can do a very powerful look for correlations. That's not the greatest ability of the

Gerd Gigerenzer *is the author of* ***How to Stay Smart in a Smart World: Why Human Intelligence Still Beats Algorithms*** *(MIT Press, 2022) and director emeritus of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development.* ***Russ Roberts*** *is the John and Jean De Nault Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project, host of the podcast* ***EconTalk****, and the president of Shalem College in Jerusalem.*

human mind. We are strong in *causal* stories. We invent, we are looking. A little child just asks, "Why? Why? Why? Why do I have to eat broccoli? Why are the neighbors so much richer than we?" It wants causal stories.

Another aspect of human intelligence is intuitive psychology. How can a deep neural network know about these things?

Finally, there's intuitive physics. Already, children understand that an object that disappears behind a screen is not gone. How does a neural network know that? It's very difficult. It's a big challenge to get common sense into neural networks.

Roberts: So, a big issue in computer science is this: Is the brain a computer? Is the computer a brain? They both have electricity. They both have on/off switches. There's a tendency in human thought, which is utterly fascinating and I think underappreciated, that we tend to use whatever is the most advanced technology as our model for how the brain works. It used to be a clock. Now, of course, it's a computer. And there is a presumption that when a computer learns to recognize the school bus, it's mimicking the brain. But, as you point out, it's not mimicking the brain.

"If we want to invest in better AI, smarter AI—we also should invest in smarter people."

There's a lot of utopian thinking about what computers will be capable of in the coming years. Are you skeptical of those promises?

Gigerenzer: There's certainly a lot of marketing hype out there. When IBM had this great success with Watson in the game *Jeopardy!* everyone was amazed. But it's a game—again, a well-defined structure. And even the rules of *Jeopardy!* had to be adapted to the capabilities of Watson.

Here we have an example of a general principle: if the world is stable, like a game, then algorithms will most likely beat us, performing much better. But if it's lots of uncertainty, as in cancer treatment or investment, then you need to be very cautious.

Roberts: But isn't the hope that, "OK, Watson today is a first-year medical student, but give it enough data, it'll become a second-year medical student. And in a few years, it'll be the best doctor in the world"? And we can all go to it for diagnosis. We'll just do a body scan, or our smartwatch will tell Watson something about our heartbeat, and so on. It will be able to do anything better than any doctor. And you won't have to wait in line because it can do this instantly.

Gigerenzer: That's rhetoric. If you read Yuval Harari, or many other prophets of AI, that's what they preach.

Now, I have studied psychology and statistics, and I know what a statistical machine can do. A deep neural network is about correlations and it's a powerful version of a nonlinear multiple regression, or a discriminant analysis. Nobody has ever talked about multiple regressions as intelligence. We should not bluff away into the story of super-intelligence.

Deep neural networks can do something that we cannot do. And we can do something that they cannot do. We should, if we want to invest in better AI, smarter AI—we also should invest in smarter people. That's what we really need. So, smarter doctors, more experts who can tell the difference, and no wasting lots of money on things that don't work. If Watson could be this great investor, then IBM wouldn't be in the financial troubles it is.

Roberts: There's a more general principle, and I think it's in your book, which is that fundamentally, when we're looking at correlations in Big Data, we're presuming that the past will tell us what the future will be like. And sometimes it can. But in most human environments, it can't. Past *EconTalk* guest Ed Leamer likes to say, "We are storytelling, pattern-seeking animals." The computer doesn't have any common sense to examine whether a correlation is just a correlation or a causation.

"AlphaZero can beat every human in chess and Go, but it doesn't know that there is a game that's called chess or Go."

Gigerenzer: The general lesson is: there's a difference between stable worlds and uncertainty, unstable worlds. Particularly, if the future is not like the past, then Big Data doesn't help you.

WHAT PRICE PRIVACY?

Roberts: Now, you are a strong and I think eloquent promoter of human abilities and a counterweight to the view that we're going to be dominated by machines, that they're going to take over because they'll be able to do everything—everything. Our brains are really amazing. Yet at the same time, there's a paradox in your book, which is that you're very worried about the ability of tech companies to use Big Data to manipulate us. How do you resolve that paradox?

Gigerenzer: The statement that you made is right on point. It's not about AI by itself. It's about the people behind AI and their motives. We usually talk about whether AI will be omniscient, or AI will be just an assistant tool; but we need to talk about those behind it. That is what really worries me.

It's certain that we are in a situation where a few tech companies, and mostly a few relatively young white males who are immensely rich, shape the emotions and the values, and also control the time, of almost everyone else. Google gets 80 percent of its revenue from advertisement. Facebook, 97 percent. And that makes the customer—the user—no longer the customer.

Roberts: There is something creepy about it. On the other hand, you could argue, and sometimes I argue like this, because it's interesting and it may be true, "OK. So those sales people interrupt my conversation every once in a while. They don't literally shut me up." And I find that somewhat annoying. But actually, it's kind of useful, because sometimes it's something I actually want, because they know a lot about me. I'm playing a little bit of rhetoric here now. But I'm increasingly scared, so take a shot.

Gigerenzer: There are two kinds of personal information that need to be distinguished. One, for instance, comes from collecting information about what books you buy and recommending other books. The other is taking all the information such as whether you're depressed today, whether you are pregnant, whether you have had heart failure or cancer, and using that information to target you in the right moment with the right advertisement. That's the part that we do not need. I'm living in Berlin. And East Germany had the Stasi.

"Deep neural networks can do something that we cannot do. And we can do something that they cannot do."

Roberts: The secret police.

Gigerenzer: If the Stasi had had these methods, they would have been overenthusiastic.

The final point I want to make is that people underestimate how closely tech companies are interrelated with governments. So, they say, "Oh, it doesn't matter whether Zuckerberg knows what I'm doing because the government doesn't know." No. Edward Snowden, a few years ago, showed how close the connection is in the United States.

***THINK DIFFERENT:** Gerd Gigerenzer, former chief of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, argues that "the idea of education—understanding the world, having control over the world, and also over oneself—it seems to be fading. We need to steer against that."* [Stephan Röhl—Creative Commons]

Roberts: I think a lot of people don't realize what they're actually being surveilled about, how widespread it is. But you're also arguing that even if they knew, they go, "Eh, what's the big deal? I get a lot of products that I'm interested in. It's actually pretty good."

Gigerenzer: There's the so-called privacy paradox. In many countries, people say their greatest concern about the digital life is that they don't know where the data is going and what's done with it. If that's the greatest concern, then you would expect they would be willing to pay something. That's the economic view. Germany is a good case. Germans would be a good candidate for a people who are worried about their privacy and would be willing to pay.

That's what I thought.

So, I have done now three surveys since 2018, a representative sample of all Germans over eighteen. I asked them, "How much would you be willing to pay for all social media if you could keep your data?" We are talking about

the data about whether you are depressed, whether you're pregnant, and all those things that they really don't need. "How much are you willing to pay to get your privacy back?"

Seventy-five percent of Germans said, "Nothing." Not a single euro.

Roberts: I found that fascinating. I think the privacy paradox includes the fact that, when you tell me that my data is available on the web, I think, "Well, no one person is really looking at it." But they can: there are individuals who could look at it. We kind of ignore the possibility that it might not be anonymous, really.

SLEEPERS, AWAKE

Gigerenzer: I see people sleepwalking into surveillance. So, for instance, in the studies we have done, most people are not aware that a smart TV may record every personal conversation people have in front of it, whether it's in the living room or in the bedroom. At least in the German data, 85 percent are not aware about that, although it can be found in some of the user notes, but who is reading these things?

And here is another dimension: that the potential of algorithms for surveillance changes our own values. We are no longer concerned so much about privacy. We still say we are concerned, but not really. And then, we'll get a new generation of people.

And that's why I think an important partial solution is: make people smart. Open their eyes and make them think about what's happening.

"If Watson could be this great investor, then IBM wouldn't be in the financial troubles it is."

Roberts: I've always liked that solution, which you could call more information, raising awareness. A simple way to describe it is education. I spent a good chunk of my life thinking about, say, confirmation bias and similar problems. And when you make people aware of it, it's pretty cool. It's a good thing to be aware of, that you're easily fooled.

I think you quoted Richard Feynman: "The first principle is not to fool yourself, and you're the easiest person to fool." So, the more we make people aware of that, you think it'd make a better world.

I've become a little bit skeptical of people's desire for truth. I think they like comfort more than they like truth. So, the education—here I am, I'm

a president of a college and I run a weekly podcast that tries to educate people—it's a quixotic mission, I'm afraid. It may not be the road to real success. But I would say it's the only road I want to go down—and I think it's the right road, to encourage people to be aware of these things and to be more sensitive to them.

Gigerenzer: I think there's an obligation to be optimistic and do something. And one can really point to blind spots. For instance, the most recent international PISA [Program for International Student Assessment] study, which tests the fifteen-year-olds . . .

Roberts: In math, right?

Gigerenzer: . . . in math, in language, in the sciences; and this time, they also had a component about digital understanding. To make it short, 90 percent of fifteen-year-olds, the digital natives, do not know how to tell facts from fakes. Governments spend billions for tablets and whiteboards for technology in schools. They spend almost nothing on making teachers smart and pupils smart. And by smart, I mean that they understand these concepts.

"The future of a democracy is in people who think—who want to think."

Roberts: I think you're pointing out something really profound, which is: if we don't think about how the world works, if you don't know how the world works, you will be the customer. If you don't know who the sucker is at the poker table, it's you. And most of us are the sucker at the poker table.

Gigerenzer: The idea of education—understanding the world, having control over the world, and also over oneself—it seems to be fading. We need to steer against that. And we can do something. We can start in the schools and open the eyes. In the same way as we can teach risk literacy in general. It's still not happening in schools, except in Finland.

NEW WORLDS

Roberts: Late in my life, I've become very aware of how complex uncertainty and risk are. Which is ironic: I'm an economist, trained in statistics, econometrics, and so on. And I think people are starting to realize: "Yeah, most people don't really understand risk and they don't understand probability. So,

what we need to do is introduce statistics into the high school curriculum." So they have. And it's mostly horrible. It's cookbook, teaching people how to calculate means and medians—things you can test on an exam. What's the standard deviation?

The subtle, deep, commonsense ideas of how to think about the fact that the world is unpredictable—there's not a curriculum for that. That's the challenge, I think: creating educational material that would help open people's eyes.

Your argument—which you make very persuasively in the book—is that we spend a lot of time teaching people how to use technology, right? We don't spend any time thinking about what this does to us. And it might be OK, but you should think about that. It's weird that we don't.

Gigerenzer: Particularly in the digital age, one thing becomes clear: that people should think a little bit more. The future of a democracy is in people who think—who want to think. And not just follow some message.

There is another world out there which I do not want, but I could understand that some people think it is a great option. It's a world where we all are surveilled, predicted, and controlled, where the good guys—good guys defined by a government—get goodies. Such as in China, where in a hospital you're treated first if you have a high social score. Those with a lower score have to wait. And those with the lowest score get punished.

"And here is another dimension: that the potential of algorithms for surveillance changes our own values."

And, as far as we know, many people in China find this a good system. What I see in Germany is that the number of people who think a social-credit system would be a good idea in Germany is increasing. What do you think: higher among the young or among the old?

Roberts: Young.

Gigerenzer: Yes. Among the young, it's 28 percent. One other group, which I found striking, are people who have a lifelong career working for the government: 37 percent of them think it would be a good idea. They probably believe they're on the right side anyhow: they are obedient to the government, why not collect a few goodies?

Roberts: All of what you've written in this book is deeply alarming in an authoritarian state, but in a way, it's even more alarming in a democracy.

Gigerenzer: But it's not destiny. We can change that. There are lots of things to do to create a better world, a world where the Internet is more like it was once meant to be.

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"The Soul of a Killer"

As a youth, Hoover fellow Paul R. Gregory came to know the future assassin of President Kennedy intimately. In his new memoir, he describes Lee Harvey Oswald's narcissism, Marxist beliefs, and angry ambitions.

By Melissa De Witte

Those alive when John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news that the president had been shot. For Hoover fellow Paul R. Gregory, then a twenty-one-year-old college student at the University of Oklahoma, the day became particularly memorable—life-changing, even—when he saw television news footage of Kennedy's killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, being escorted into police headquarters.

"I know that guy," he said to himself, confused and in disbelief. Gregory had gotten to know Oswald and his Russian wife, Marina, from whom he had taken Russian language lessons. For much of the summer of 1962, Gregory

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had been, outside of Lee's family, the couple's only friend. Gregory's new book, *The Oswalds: An Untold Account of Marina and Lee* (Diversion Books, 2022), details a story he has kept largely private (with the exception of speaking to the authorities at the time).

Gregory spoke about what he knew of Oswald and how the assassination has captivated conspiracy theorists for sixty years.

***Melissa De Witte,* Stanford News Service:** After the assassination, you and your family were able to remain beneath the radar; in their public records, the Secret Service referred to you as a "known associate" of Lee Harvey Oswald. Why share your story now?

Paul Gregory: My father and I were immediately known to the Secret Service by the night of the assassination. We did not want our association with a Marine deserter and avowed communist to be known in our community. Decades after the assassination, I still have no desire to tell my story, even among friends and colleagues. It was only when I became convinced that my account adds to the limited historical record did I sit down and write.

De Witte: How did you get to know the Oswalds?

Gregory: When Lee and Marina returned to Fort Worth in June of 1962, Lee thought he could get a job using his Russian language skills. My father, born in Siberia, taught Russian at the local library. Lee came to visit my father in his office to get a certificate of language proficiency. Lee invited my father to visit him and Marina at his brother's house. As a Russian speaker (far from perfect), I went along and met Lee and Marina. Shortly thereafter, we visited them in their duplex, and we agreed that I would come regularly for language lessons from Marina, who spoke no English whatsoever. Thus began regular meetings until mid-September.

"He wished to pay back society for not recognizing his exceptionalism."

De Witte: Much has been written and said about Oswald. How do your experiences shed new light on who he was and what he was like?

Gregory: I show that Oswald had all the characteristics to kill a major political figure—the means, the motive, and the soul of a killer.

In the period from Oswald's return to Texas with his wife, Marina, to their move to Dallas, I was the only one who broke through the cocoon in which Lee had Marina living. I saw them on a regular basis for conversation,

shopping, and driving around Fort Worth. I observed Lee as a manipulative loner who concealed himself from others and guarded the strict boundaries he erected around his troubled marriage with Marina. Similarly, Lee maintained a barrier of secrecy around himself. He had the habit of deflecting questions about himself. They were his business and not for others to know. By inviting Lee and Marina to our house to introduce Marina to [other Russians living in Dallas], we unwittingly ended Marina's isolation—to Lee's distress.

De Witte: There are several theories about who killed JFK, including the belief that Oswald did not do it. Why is JFK's murder shrouded in so much mystery? Why do people think that Oswald was not his killer?

Gregory: We cannot believe that history can be changed by a random set of circumstances. It's hard for people to accept that a "little guy"—Lee's mother referred to him as "the boy"—of no known accomplishments could kill the most guarded person in America on his own. This leaves [them] two explanations for JFK's murder. Either Oswald was a "patsy," or he was a willing cog in a well-organized conspiracy in which he was an unlikely "follower." There is simply no way he could have pulled this off on his own, conspiracy theorists would say. Judging by the most recent polls, the American public still buys this story.

"It is a shame that so few have carefully researched the material in the voluminous Warren Report."

De Witte: What do you think was Oswald's motive for assassinating JFK?

Gregory: Oswald dreamed of going into the history books, where he had learned from his mother that he belonged. He wished to pay back society for not recognizing his exceptionalism. He wanted to punish Marina for her ridicule of his ideas and her scorn of his manhood.

De Witte: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Gregory: It is a shame that so few have carefully researched the material in the voluminous Warren Report [a culmination of findings from the commission, chaired by then–chief justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren, to investigate the assassination], to understand the evidence which prompted the sole-gunman conclusion. Instead, critics glom onto bits and pieces and minor contradictions to build mountains out of molehills. Among the

multitude of conspiracy theories is even one that places my father and me among the conspirators.

The JFK assassination marks an end of national innocence; namely, our readiness to accept the word of our most distinguished public figures. On the day the Warren Commission issued its report to the American people, two-thirds of the public believed its findings. Now that figure has dropped to one-third. ■

Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Women of the Gulag: Portraits of Five Remarkable Lives,*** *by Paul R. Gregory. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

Grover Cleveland, Classical Liberal

He was "a political purgative"—the remedy for the political corruption of his day. So says Troy Senik, author of a new biography of an unlikely figure who found a political need and filled it.

By Peter Robinson

Peter Robinson, **Uncommon Knowledge:** A former president is ready for a comeback. Despite being a political novice and facing a sex scandal that nearly ended his campaign, he took down a titan of the political establishment in a first bid for the White House, squeezing into office by the slimmest of margins. After four years of disrupting business as usual in Washington, he was denied re-election in a close race that some of his supporters claimed was stolen from him. And now he looks poised for a third presidential run at a historic restoration to office. The year is 1892, and the former president in question is not Donald Trump or anyone even remotely like him: it's Grover Cleveland.

Troy Senik is the author of a splendid new biography of Cleveland. A graduate of Belmont University and Pepperdine, Troy served as a speechwriter for President George W. Bush. He has written extensively on politics, served

Troy Senik *is the author of* ***A Man of Iron: The Turbulent Life and Improbable Presidency of Grover Cleveland*** *(Threshold Editions, 2022), a former presidential speechwriter for George W. Bush, and co-founder of Kite & Key Media.* ***Peter Robinson*** *is the editor of the* ***Hoover Digest,*** *the host of* ***Uncommon Knowledge,*** *and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

as vice president of the Manhattan Institute, and hosts Hoover's *Law Talk* podcast. He is also a founder of Kite & Key, a digital media company devoted to public policy. Troy, welcome.

Troy Senik: Peter, delighted to be with you.

Robinson: All right, I'm going to begin with the back of this book, the acknowledgments. You write about your pals Matt Latimer and Keith Urbahn, who run something called Javelin, a literary agency, and you mention that "during a purely social visit they told you there was a market for a new Grover Cleveland biography." By the way, that strikes me as an odd conversation right there. But it gets stranger. "Neither of them realizing that they were sitting across the table from someone who had been nursing that ambition for the better part of two decades." You spent almost twenty years wanting to write a book about Grover Cleveland. Explain this.

Senik: That does not sound like a sign of mental well-being, is what you're suggesting.

Robinson: Your words, not mine, but yes.

Senik: I had an interest in Grover Cleveland that went back to my childhood. And the only way that I can explain it is that I developed an interest in American history, specifically the presidency. Why does this antique figure from the late nineteenth century stand out to me? For a lot of the same reasons that I wrote the book: he is a man who is very much counter to his era in American politics. This is a guy who comes in and breaks furniture, totally moving against the tide of that era.

And I suppose maybe biography informs ideology a bit. I'm a guy who grew up in a very rural part of Southern California. When you hear "Southern California," you are not thinking of the place where I grew up, which looks like Arizona and feels like Oklahoma. We rode horses, not bicycles. We lived off a dirt road. As I got interested in politics, it's funny, the first political figure I can ever remember being compelled by, not that I had any sense for the substance of what he was doing, was Ross Perot. Because of this outsider sensibility. For somebody who came from a social milieu like mine, the defining feature of politics as a young kid was the falseness of it, you know. You'd watch somebody on a Sunday show and they'd be speaking in this strange language that was only accessible to politicians.

Robinson: And so, there you were, leading a life of the kind that for decades, a couple of centuries, at least, Americans have thought of as the authentic

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

American way of life. And just two hours away was Hollywood and a Universal theme park and Disneyland and that all seemed garish and fake and yet dominant.

Senik: That's basically right. Although I have to say, it wasn't driven by resentment. I didn't begrudge them this. It just felt false. So, as I looked back through American history, I suppose that I had a weakness for these figures like Grover Cleveland who kind of emerge *ex nihilo*.

ANOTHER TIME

Robinson: I'm persuaded, actually. All right, Grover Cleveland, the inaccessible man, he's born in 1837. He was born just a couple of weeks after Martin Van Buren became president. Cleveland goes on to become our twenty-second and twenty-fourth president, serving from 1885 to 1889 and then again from 1893 to 1897. I'm quoting you: "If Cleveland seems like an inaccessible figure, it's in large part because we don't understand the America he inhabited, a country somehow more

alien to us than the more distant ones of the Civil War or even the founding fathers."

Senik: When you're thinking about the Civil War or the founding generation, the principles at play in those eras are quite simple, quite accessible for a modern audience because they're so fundamental. Here, you're talking about the late nineteenth century. We could go through the list of some of the issues that Grover Cleveland dealt with during his presidency and, my God, do they seem foreign. We're talking about pensions for military veterans. We're talking about civil service protections. We're talking about the role of silver in the monetary supply.

Robinson: The issues are not war and peace, or slavery and freedom—the issues are economic growth, the emergence of new industries, the adjustment of the government to a much bigger country and economy, and it's complicated.

Senik: It's hard for Americans to get a bead on any of these issues, which is why, as I go through the book, I keep trying to draw analogies. For instance, there are huge fights about tariffs during the Cleveland years. You know, when I was a kid and we got the two days of American history that are dedicated to this period in the country's history, I always thought, "Why did they care about tariffs so much?" Because all you knew is that they fought about tariffs. Well, they cared about tariffs because fighting about tariffs during those days would be the equivalent to fighting about individual income tax rates today. That's where all the money came from.

Robinson: For the federal government.

Senik: With a few exceptions; there are excise taxes for liquor and things like Western land sales. But that's the reason that it has that salience in his era. And in large measure this is first and foremost a biography, but I am trying to sneak in there, for Americans who had the same kind of education that I did, sort of a remedial course in what mattered during this era and why, because it is so faint to us now.

Robinson: We'll work our way into the era and into what the man was like by talking about the pre-presidential Cleveland, who's pretty interesting. He's the son of a Presbyterian minister who dies when Cleveland is still a teen. Cleveland moves to Buffalo, where he has an uncle, and takes up the law. At the age of thirty-three, he's elected as a Democrat, as sheriff of Erie County. OK, why Buffalo, why the law, why does upstate New York matter

in a way that it hasn't mattered in about one hundred and twenty years? Fill us in.

Senik: It's relevant to know that he's from a very large family. He's the fifth of nine children, and the second-oldest son, so a lot of the financial responsibility for caring for his widowed mother and his younger sisters falls on his shoulders. And he goes to New York City for a year, teaches in a school for the blind, hates it, returns home to upstate New York with a mindset that he has to go somewhere to make himself. He does not set out to go to Buffalo. He sets out to go to Cleveland, Ohio, named after a distant relative, and it seems like that was at least part of the consideration. Buffalo happens as a sort of happy accident, because he stops off there on the way to Cleveland. He has an uncle by marriage there, Lewis Allen, who's prominent in the community. He's a wealthy real estate developer, is involved in politics, though he's a Whig and does not share Grover's politics. But he sees in his nephew some potential that he feels is going to go to waste if he follows through on this kind of half-thought-through plan to go to Cleveland.

"I am trying to sneak in there, for Americans who had the same kind of education that I did, sort of a remedial course in what mattered during this era."

Allen gets him installed in a local law firm. We really don't have any evidence as to why the law, other than a sense that Cleveland clearly wanted to make something of himself, and this was the thing that he seemed best calibrated for. He gets some distinction as a lawyer in Buffalo, but it's not because he's Perry Mason. This is not somebody who is known for courtroom theatrics; this is somebody who barely sees the inside of a courtroom. He is constantly being paired with lawyers who *do* fit that description. Lawyers who, it's worth mentioning, are usually pretty politically connected. This is a subtle part of his rise. But Grover Cleveland's the guy in the office until two o'clock in the morning going through every footnote, figuring out every detail.

Robinson: Hardworking. Meticulous.

Senik: Hardworking to a point that, even by today's standards, we would regard as excessive. The normal work hours for Grover Cleveland throughout his career are always attested to be 8 a.m. to 3 a.m. or so. And this is where he starts generating attention. But even then, he's not the guy that you look

at and think, "Well, someday he's going to be the mayor of the city; someday he's going to be governor."

Robinson: Of course, but it's worth noting, as you do, that Buffalo was the happening town. The Erie Canal has cut across upstate New York, and Buffalo is right there. On the Erie Canal you can go from Buffalo down to New York City. And so, Grover Cleveland, through this happenstance of an uncle, ends up a lawyer doing the sort of legal infrastructure of a growing town in a growing American economy, correct?

Senik: Yes, and it's a great place to be if your profile is Grover Cleveland's. This is a city that is emerging and coming into its own but doesn't have an old caste of social elites.

Robinson: There are no Vanderbilts or Rensselaers. There's no old Dutch, Roosevelts, as there are in New York.

Senik: That's right. There's a path that there never would've been had he stayed in Manhattan when he was eighteen years old.

IMPROBABLE RISE

Robinson: By the way, he's a Democrat. How did that happen?

Senik: Grover Cleveland is not an introspective man. There are no voluminous diary entries explaining his thinking. Weirdly, particularly because his political career starts relatively late, he almost emerges sort of fully formed, so we don't have anything in his own hand that explains this. Remember, a Democrat of Cleveland's era and of his particular caste is a classical-liberal Democrat out of the Jeffersonian tradition: limited government, constitutionalism, light touch on economic matters.

"We could go through the list of some of the issues that Grover Cleveland dealt with during his presidency and, my God, do they seem foreign."

Robinson: He anticipates the Reagan Democrats by a little more than a century.

Senik: And this is all consistent with something that you see throughout his life and his lineage: this is a family, even though he's born in New Jersey, of New England Puritans. People who really believe in the value of

self-discipline and hard work. The earliest writing we have in his hand, from when he's in elementary school, has him writing admiringly about George Washington and Andrew Jackson as children because he respects the fact that they applied their time wisely and that was the thing that made them successes later on in life. A deeply Puritan sentiment. And that has always been my supposition about how you get the classical-liberal Democrat that Grover Cleveland is.

Robinson: All right, now comes the rise. He becomes sheriff of Erie County for a couple of years in his thirties, then gets back out of politics and devotes himself to the law. But then, as you write, "he would become the mayor of Buffalo, the governor of New York, and the twenty-second president of the United States." From obscurity to the White House in four years, how?

Senik: The early part of his career, up through this mayor's race, is sort of distinguished by his being asked to do jobs nobody else wants to do. He's a reliable party regular, nobody thinks that highly of him, but he's got this reputation for integrity, and they think that's good for some Republican cross-over votes. Very valuable at the time, because Buffalo is still a slightly more Republican than Democratic town, and this is the story behind his recruitment to run for mayor. The Democratic apparatus in Buffalo couldn't find anybody else.

"Fighting about tariffs during those days would be the equivalent to fighting about individual income tax rates today. That's where all the money came from."

I tried very hard in this book . . . there are hagiographic accounts of Cleveland that make him seem like the starlet in the drugstore who's just discovered, and this sweet wind sweeps him up all the way to the Oval Office. That's not correct. The real, genuine ambition doesn't come until a little later down the road.

So, how does this happen so quickly? The context is really important. Post–Civil War, you're in an environment where the Republican Party, as a result of the war, is in control of almost everything for a very long period. And in the book, I refer to what follows as something like the equivalent of political gout. They had it too good for too long. And the federal government, in particular, is rife with corruption. At this moment, you have a huge, party-splitting fight within the Republican Party over party patronage and the civil service, whether this is just the way you do business. You give the job to your guy, whether he's doing it honestly or not.

MAN OF THE MOMENT: An 1893 print depicts President Grover Cleveland, his wife, Frances, and their daughter, Ruth. "Grover Cleveland is not an introspective man," observes biographer Troy Senik. "There are no voluminous diary entries explaining his thinking. Weirdly, particularly because his political career starts relatively late, he almost emerges sort of fully formed." [Library of Congress]

You have a guy who is able to unify the Democratic Party behind him but also attract this reformist contingent of Republicans without making them feel like they're betraying their Republicanism. He is a political purgative. He is the remedy for this corruption. This is how he is viewed everywhere. Early on, he says two important things. One is, "There's no difference between a Democratic thief and a Republican thief." And the second, which is one of the few philosophical constants throughout his career, is that any time the government spends a cent more than is required for the basic necessities of government, that is tantamount to theft. So, he is putting the political class on notice from the start.

Robinson: So, this is the kind of man who would not appeal at all to the party pros, except that, in his very person, he solves a serious problem for them.

Senik: Yes. He can get the votes. So, the machine will back him, and Republicans will turn, and off he goes. It's not a detailed set of policies.

SEEDS AND SILVER

Robinson: The first term. He's elected in 1884, he takes office in March of 1885, and he serves for four years. The Texas Seed Bill. In 1887, there's a drought in Texas. The drought is so bad these farmers have eaten their seed corn, so to speak. They've got nothing. And Congress says, "Well, let's just get them started. We'll pass a bill that'll give them enough to buy some seed corn." And Grover Cleveland vetoes it. He writes this in his veto message: "I can find no warrant for such an appropriation in the Constitution." He goes to the Constitution. "Though the people support the government the government should not support the people." Make that intelligible.

Senik: Isn't that amazing? The first line of that always gets quoted by libertarians. The libertarians can't bear to quote the next line because it is so unpalatable, the way he puts it. But within the confines of its own era, and trying to explain the way Grover Cleveland thought about it, there is something interesting about that veto message if you read it further. His message is that when you do these sorts of things, it creates an expectation amongst the citizenry that something's always going to be forthcoming from the government when something goes bad, and that what they actually need to do is rely on the bonds of civil society. That the fundamentally American thing to do is to help your neighbor.

Robinson: Silver: this gets complicated. It's monetary policy. I'm going to put it very briefly, and you're going to tell me why Cleveland took the stand he did. The currency was based on gold. And the argument was that we should also mint coins out of silver, which was in effect arguing that we should expand the money supply.

Senik: Yes.

Robinson: Which would benefit debtors, farmers, new enterprises, people who needed to borrow money. By the way, this was a position popular in the Democratic Party, and William Jennings Bryan, who's a major figure for the rest of the nineteenth century—the Democrats nominate him three times—is a silver man. And Cleveland says, "No, gold and gold alone." Why?

Senik: This is a real lawyer's mind, somebody who cares about precision, who cares about principle. As I write in the book, he never says this

explicitly, but I think it's pretty clear if you read between the lines: there is a violation of principle here that bothers him. If you are changing the terms of the monetary supply, you are changing what every contract in America is denominated in. Again, this seems antique to modern audience . . .

Robinson: The sanctity of contract.

Senik: The sanctity of contract. As a classical liberal, he just cannot get his head around this. We have to have—this is a consistent theme throughout his presidency and throughout his life—one set of rules for everybody. If you had to distill his political philosophy into one sentence, it would be that.

Robinson: All right: tariffs. Again, these are issues.

Senik: Yes.

Robinson: High tariffs—in effect, taxes on imported goods—had been introduced during the Civil War, and the argument supporting them was that it protected American industry. It made it possible for American manufacturers to sell their goods in the United States and made it much harder, much more difficult, or unlikely that a foreign entity would be able to undercut Americans. Now, sometime after the Civil War, Republicans want to keep the tariffs high, and Grover Cleveland wants to cut them. Why?

Senik: The way that the tariff issue plays out in Grover Cleveland's era is very different from the way that we think of it now. Cleveland's position is not just lower tariffs for the sake of what we call tax relief, even though he believes that cutting tariffs is the populist position. He looks at the tariff system and sees a system of collusion. He says, "Well, who *gets* the tariffs?" Whoever the corporate interests are, or whoever has Congress wired.

And it's important to note that nobody is talking about free trade. We're talking about lower tariffs versus higher tariffs. At this point, in the American political context, free trade was absolutely toxic. One of the reasons was that the Democratic Party had a big contingent of Irish voters, and free trade was regarded as suspiciously English, so one was never to flirt with free trade. Cleveland wants to jump-start the economy. There also is a massive surplus

"A LAWYER'S MIND": Biographer Troy Senik (opposite) says Grover Cleveland resisted the idea that "something's always going to be forthcoming from the government when something goes bad," instead acting as if "the fundamentally American thing to do is to help your neighbor." [Joseph Spiteri]

at this time. And for the guy who says any extra cent is theft, that's morally offensive: the idea that you're taking in this level of tariffs at the same time you've got all this money sitting in the vaults. But it all goes back to this—

Robinson: The amazing thing is you just get this again and again. It really is a living idea in his head that that money belongs to people. It is not the government's money. It's not just tax revenues; it belongs to his neighbors in Buffalo, it belongs to poor struggling people like his own siblings when they were young.

"Grover Cleveland's the guy in the office until two o'clock in the morning going through every footnote, figuring out every detail."

Senik: He talks about it in these terms. There are several speeches where he refers to the public official's responsibility as that of a fiduciary. What would you do if you knew the person whose money you were holding? You would fear their judgment if you had betrayed their trust in the way that you did business. For somebody who ends up in the White House, all of his characteristics are the ones that you would want from somebody who ran the local general store.

SCANDAL

Robinson: We've been talking about probity, integrity, and principle, and this brings us to his personal life.

Senik: Yes, it does.

Robinson: Which was a little odd.

Senik: Yes.

Robinson: You say he was from old Puritan New England stock, and indeed he was, but I'm quoting the book again, "Cleveland came to office having endured a sex scandal during the 1884 presidential campaign, when he was accused of having fathered a child out of wedlock during his years as a Buffalo bachelor and subsequently of having had the mother institutionalized." He "was accused," the passive voice there. Was it true?

Senik: Elements of it were true. . . .

Robinson: That's a rather lawyerly answer yourself, there.

Senik: Without getting fully into the forensics, which people can read in the book if they want to get an account at that depth . . . Cleveland, shortly after he gets the nomination in 1884, is accused of having fathered a child out of wedlock about a decade before, back in Buffalo. The allegations that run in the newspaper start with that basic fact and build into this grand soap opera of allegations. The child is abducted from her, she is institutionalized—all this, it is alleged, because he is so nervous about how this is going to affect his potential political prospects. So, what do we actually know about what happened? Well, not everything; a lot of this has been lost to history. But the real fireworks in this story, we now know, are products of the partisan press at the time.

It is a little strange because there are admiring accounts that point to him telling his campaign associates, "Whatever you do, tell the truth." And the story always stops there. They never tell you what the truth actually was. This does not happen in the way that it would in a campaign in the year 2024. There is no expectation that Grover Cleveland is going to go in front of a bank of cameras and tell you exactly what happened.

"All of his characteristics are the ones that you would want from somebody who ran the local general store."

He just makes the decision, "I have to take my lumps." So, he just sticks with it throughout the campaign, doesn't really say much, and he is right. It does go away.

Robinson: All right. Midway through his first term, the still-single forty-nine-year-old Grover Cleveland marries Frances Folsom. The twenty-one-year-old daughter of Cleveland's deceased best friend, Oscar Folsom. That is icky. That's just unsettling.

Senik: Stipulated.

Robinson: And they have children. They have what appears to be a perfectly happy life together.

Senik: On all accounts. . . . I don't know, I actually researched this and couldn't find a satisfactory answer. I doubt that it was dramatically less icky in the era, but it seems to have been somewhat less. It's amazing how little of the press coverage at the time is focused on this. Now, this is partially because the press adores this woman. Frances Cleveland is Jackie Kennedy before her time.

Robinson: Yes, right.

Senik: But a couple of elements of this story get distorted in the popular telling. One is that Grover Cleveland essentially raised this woman, that she was his legal ward because her father, his former law partner, had passed away in a carriage accident. And so, you'll read these stories kind of suggesting that he was grooming her all along. But this is missing vital context, which I only discovered in the writing of this book. This has mostly been elided by historians. When Oscar Folsom, his law partner, passes away, Frances Folsom *is* made his legal ward, but in a somewhat unusual legal arrangement for the day he is essentially just kind of the executor of the state; he has a fiduciary responsibility to her and her mother. Not only does he not raise her, they live in different states for a big chunk of this time, and when she comes back to New York, she's actually engaged to somebody else.

"They never tell you what the truth actually was. This does not happen in the way that it would in a campaign in the year 2024."

A BULWARK

Robinson: Aside from Troy Senik, to whom is Grover Cleveland a hero? I served in the Reagan White House, and Ronald Reagan actually loved Calvin Coolidge. Who loved Grover Cleveland?

Senik: In his era, or today?

Robinson: Just name anybody aside from you. I don't recall that FDR ever said of Cleveland, "Now *there* was a man," or "*There* was a president."

Senik: I was told the other day, and I haven't verified this, that Harry Truman was actually a deep admirer.

Robinson: That, I could believe.

Senik: And Bill Clinton apparently had a modest obsession with him during his own presidency.

Robinson: There is nothing modest about Bill Clinton's obsessions.

Cleveland is born in one country, and then we have the Civil War, which changes the entire relationship of the federal government to the states and to the people, and then we have economic growth. During this man's lifetime,

we go from an overwhelmingly agrarian economy where the big innovation in trade is the Erie Canal—a ditch narrower than this studio that cuts across upstate New York—and by the time he becomes president, the country is crisscrossed with railroad lines and shipyards are building enormous steamers, and John D. Rockefeller has struck oil in Western Pennsylvania. It's a new country, even as the old America struggles to come to grips with this new country that is aborning.

Senik: That's the essence of it. Although it is worth noting that even in his own time, he's a little bit yesterday's man. It's like the line, I can't remember who it comes from, you sometimes hear about Churchill: it's not just that he seems old-fashioned now, he seemed old-fashioned in that era. You're seeing the rest of American politics start to turn the corner into the twentieth century, and Cleveland is sort of the last holdout of the old one. I don't think he could be anything else, though, because there is nothing, and I don't mean this as an epithet, but there is nothing visionary about this man. He does not have an idea of how to recast American society. He doesn't think that's the job. He thinks the job is to be a bulwark for the American people. He is there to keep the government from getting into your wallet, getting into your rights. The idea that he's going to restructure the entirety of the federal government never would have occurred to him.

"He does not have an idea of how to recast American society. He doesn't think that's the job. He thinks the job is to be a bulwark for the American people."

Wisdom to Know the Difference

We can't fix all the world's problems at once—but we *can* fix some of the worst ones now. If we stop wasting time, that is, on big ideas with small payoffs.

By Bjorn Lomborg and Jordan B. Peterson

In 2015, the world's leaders attempted to address the major problems facing humanity by setting the Sustainable Development Goals, a compilation of one hundred and sixty-nine targets to be hit by 2030. Every admirable pursuit imaginable, in some real sense, made the list: eradicating poverty and disease; stopping war; protecting biodiversity; improving education—and, of course, ameliorating climate change.

In 2023, we're at the halfway point, given the 2016–30 time-horizon, but we will be far from halfway toward hitting our putative targets. Given current trends, we will achieve them half a century late (and that estimate does not factor in the COVID-19 disruption).

What is the main cause of our failure? Our inability to prioritize.

There is little difference between having one hundred and sixty-nine goals and having none. That is simply too many directions to travel in,

Bjorn Lomborg *is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, and a visiting professor at the Copenhagen Business School.* ***Jordan B. Peterson*** *is professor emeritus at the University of Toronto. His latest book is* ***Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*** *(Portfolio, 2021).*

simultaneously—too many projects to track; too much fragmenting of attention; too many constituencies all asking for additional resources. Targets of clear fundamental importance (reducing infant mortality; ensuring basic education) are put on equal footing with well-intentioned but comparatively trivial targets such as boosting recycling and promoting lifestyles in harmony with nature.

In consequence, we have dithered away eight years and spent a lot of effort and money doing so. It is long past time to identify and prioritize our most crucial goals.

SOLVING HUNGER

The Copenhagen Consensus has ranked the Sustainable Development Goals by return on investment. What does this mean? Determining where the most progress can be made, in the most efficient manner, for the most beneficial return.

The think tank brought together several Nobel laureates with more than a hundred leading economists and divided them into teams, each charged with determining where our dollars, rupees, and shillings might be devoted to do the most good. This careful exercise is already delivering compelling results.

We could, for example, truly hasten an end to hunger.

Imagine that, for example, as priority one: no more emaciated, desperate, permanently damaged children; no more starving or malnourished people. We have seen a dramatic decline in hunger over the past century, reducing the proportion of humanity living in a permanent state of nutritional shortage from two-thirds to less than 10 percent. Nonetheless, more than eight hundred million people still don't have enough food, and three million mothers and their children will die from hunger this year.

Essential nutrients for pregnant mothers would cost just a bit over $2 per pregnancy.

Progress toward the UN targets for food provision is occurring so slowly that we won't achieve our putative goals until the *next* century—in no small part because of our abject failure to prioritize. This is morally unacceptable, and pragmatically unnecessary.

Hunger is a problem we know how to fix. In the longer run, we need freer trade that can allow the world's malnourished to lift themselves out of poverty. In the medium term, we need more agricultural innovation, which has clearly made its value known over the past century and more.

DON'T DELAY: Food workers distribute aid in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "Hunger is a problem we know how to fix," write Bjorn Lomborg and Jordan B. Peterson, who stress that immediate action to provide nutrients and vitamins helps not only children but also the societies in which they will grow up. [International Committee of the Red Cross]

This would drive higher crop yields, increase the food supply, and reduce hunger.

However, we also need solutions that can help now. And the economic research helps identify ingenious, effective, and implementable solutions.

Hunger hits hardest in the first thousand days of a child's life, beginning with conception and proceeding over the next two years. Boys and girls who face a shortage of essential nutrients and vitamins grow more slowly. It compromises their bodies, and their brains develop less optimally, resulting in a decrease in the general cognitive ability (IQ) so crucial to long-term success. Children deprived in this manner attend school less often (and learn less effectively when they do attend) and achieve lower grades, and are less productive and poorer as adults.

The damage done in the earliest period of childhood deprives starved individuals of their potential, making us all much poorer than we might have been.

We could and should deliver essential nutrients to pregnant mothers. The provision of a daily multivitamin/mineral supplement would cost just a bit

over $2 per pregnancy. When babies so provisioned are born, they are much less likely to suffer the estimated average five-point IQ loss. Such babies will be more productive, personally and socially, for the entire course of their lives.

SMARTER SCHOOLS

Why would we not prioritize this path?

Because, instead, we are trying foolishly to please everyone and failing to think carefully and clearly while doing so. We spend too little, too unwisely, on everything and ignore the most effective solutions. We are therefore depriving the world's poor and humankind as a whole of the result of the intelligence and productivity that would otherwise be available to us.

Rather than concentrating on what we could and should do, we frighten and demoralize our young people.

Consider, also, what we could accomplish in education. The world has finally managed to get almost all children in school. Unfortunately, the schools are too often of low quality, and many students still learn almost nothing. More than half the children in poor countries cannot read and understand a simple text by the age of ten.

Schools typically group children by age. This is a significant problem because age and ability are not the same thing. Any random group of twenty or sixty children of the same age will be very diverse in their domain knowledge. This means that the struggling children will be lost and the competent children bored and restless, no matter at what level their instructors pitch their teaching.

The innovative solution, research-tested around the world? Let each child spend one hour a day with a tablet that adapts teaching exactly to the level of that child. Even as the rest of the school day is unchanged, this will over a year produce learning equivalent to three years of typical education.

What would this cost? (And, of course, what would it cost not to do it?) The shared tablet, charging costs (often solar panels), and extra teacher instruction cost about $26 per student, per year. But tripling the rate of learning for just one year makes each student more productive in adulthood.

This straightforward and implementable solution means that each dollar so invested would deliver $65 in long-term benefits. Why in the world would we fail to so invest, given that return?

VIRTUE IS CHEAP

There are many other areas where small, careful, wisely targeted investments can deliver truly transformative change.

We could, for example, forthrightly tackle the terrible but still too-invisible killer diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria. We could address the problems of corruption that still bedevil far too many countries, particularly in the developing world. We could focus on formulating and cooperating on trade deals that would enable the economic growth that is a proven antidote to absolute poverty.

Instead, we are fragmenting our attention by attending to far too many goals, each with its own noisy constituency, whose reactions to necessary prioritization make us afraid. We are, simultaneously and paradoxically, focused instead on problems that have simple solutions and make us feel virtuous (like recycling).

We insist on spending trillions on inefficient climate solutions—witness the $400 billion Germany is about to have spent since 2010, delivering an underwhelming reduction in fossil-fuel use from 79 percent to 77 percent. We alarm ourselves with unwarranted, apocalyptic prophecies, ignoring the fact, for example, that increased wealth and resilience have actually reduced death risks from climate-related catastrophes like floods and storms by more than 99 percent over the past century.

People who no longer need to worry about starvation can turn their attention to such comparative luxuries as environmental management.

Our excessive focus on some problems and our scattered attention in relationship to the rest mean we are dooming people who could have been efficiently lifted out of their terrible poverty and ignorance.

Rather than concentrating on what we could and should do, with laser-like precision, we demoralize our young people, carelessly portraying all expansive economic activity as intrinsically damaging to the planet (which it is not) and typifying their ambition as nothing but the latest manifestation of an endless pattern of universal oppression.

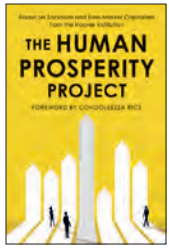
Imagine, instead, that we determined to act wisely.

With a comparatively minor investment, we could dramatically reduce hunger and improve education. The newly secure and informed people so produced would now have the capacity and opportunity to adopt the long-term view. This is exactly what happens when poverty is reduced and

schooling provided: people who no longer need to worry about their starving children can turn their attention to such comparative luxuries as broader environmental management.

Let's resolve to do the best things first. We could make that our resolution for the future, striving to do better than we have in the past—as our young people express their desperation for a more compelling vision of the path forward, and instead of dooming the poor to their misery in our insistence on attending to all problems, often with poor and inefficient policies.

The world will not deliver on the promises made by its too-careless leaders in 2015, but it is by no means too late to do better. What world might we collectively strive to bring into being if we resolved to help the poor and desperate in the ways we know to be most efficient, effective, and morally compelling? ◼



Always in Pursuit

Equality in America is a treasured goal forever awaiting further refinement. The debate over how to achieve it has never ended.

By David Davenport and Gordon Lloyd

For at least a hundred years and counting, Americans have debated what equality of opportunity means. To some, it is closely tied to freedom, centering on the right of each individual to pursue whatever life or calling he or she may choose. To others, it is more a question of circumstances and the limits those may place on one's ability to make life choices. Are all Americans born with equality of opportunity and therefore free to choose their own paths? Or is equality of opportunity something that must be created by evening out inequalities innate in each person's abilities as well as those defined by economic and social circumstances?

Soon this debate turns to the role of government in equality of opportunity. If equality of opportunity is primarily a question of legal and political rights, the government's role would involve setting forth and defending individual rights and the freedom to choose. If, on the other hand, equality of opportunity is about a level playing field, the government's responsibility would expand to include education and policies designed to achieve economic and social equality. The former implies a more limited role for government, essentially leaving the individual free to pursue his or her own opportunities. The latter brings the government directly onto the playing

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field, passing laws and enacting policies in an attempt to create greater equality and opportunity.

Focusing this debate narrowly on equality of opportunity is a challenge, because this was not a term America's founders used. In fact, the founders felt that equality, broadly speaking, was something Americans already had as a natural right, and the government's role was to defend and protect it. The Progressives, on the other hand, called out equality of opportunity specifically as something that had been lost. For the founders, then, equality was something you moved *from,* and for the Progressives, it was something to move *toward*. Even with these differences, however, reconstructing the debate over equality of opportunity proves to be a useful and important exercise.

This is still a debate today. Is equality of opportunity something for each individual to pursue as best he or she can, under a limited government? Or is equality of opportunity something the government itself can and should seek to create?

GENIUS OF THE FOUNDING

In order to comprehend the nature of the equality that James Madison and his fellow founders wanted to pursue in the new world, we must begin by understanding the nature of the inequality of opportunity that existed in the Old World they had left behind. Indeed, since inequality of opportunity per se was not extensively debated by the founders and the Progressives, we must look for strong clues about it in two places: the inequality each sought to overcome and the form of government each saw as likely to create appropriate equality.

For all of its advanced thinking about governance, the Britain that was home to the founding generation was socially and politically a class system. One was born into a certain position in life, perhaps a monarch or aristocrat, more likely a worker or a serf, with very little mobility among the groups. These practices were extended to Britain's colonies as well, leaving the American colonies vulnerable to this sort of continuation of European inequality. Monarchy and aristocracy should not, the founders agreed, have any place in the New World. Indeed, when understanding the nature of the equality of opportunity that the founders sought to create, the rejection of monarchy and class was at the heart of the matter.

Therefore, it was vital that the Declaration of Independence state, in its second paragraph, the "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal." Further, the Declaration continued, all are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Clearly in the New World, the old notions that people were born by nature to be inevitably an aristocrat or a peasant, a monarch or

a subject, would not be part of the new order of things. Rather, people were created equal and had the unalienable right to pursue happiness each in his own way. Put differently, human beings not only had an inherent ability to govern themselves but they had the right, by "the Laws of Nature," to do so.

With citizens possessing the liberty to pursue equality of opportunity, the question then arises: what form of government would best assure the equality of opportunity claimed by the Declaration of Independence? It is on this question, especially, that the thinking of Madison would come to the fore. For Madison and his fellow founders, the government that would best protect both liberty and equality was a *republican* form, one that would allow no place for monarchy or aristocracy. As Benjamin Franklin put it in response to the question of what kind of government the founders had established: "A republic, if you can keep it."

By the eighteenth century, republicanism was embraced as the preferred alternative to monarchy, or rule by one for private benefit; aristocracy, or rule by the few who are better than the rest of us; and democracy, or direct rule of the many. The republican form of government had been tested successfully at the state level before the adoption of the national Constitution. All forms appealed to "the people" as the only legitimate source of authority. Common features were representative government with regular elections, no titles of nobility or primogeniture, fewer restraints on who could vote and run for office, and protection of freedom of the press and liberty of conscience. Even though the Declaration of Independence had left open the particular form of government to be chosen, each state selected a democratic republican form to secure the twin goals of liberty and equality.

Yet between 1781 and 1787, leaders such as Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington argued that something had gone wrong with the American experiment in self-government. They saw the principles of the American Revolution at risk because state legislatures were dominant and the majorities were passing laws that undermined both the liberty of individuals and the public good. Each state had the power and equal opportunity to go its own way, and the federal government under the Articles of Confederation had only the limited powers that were explicitly expressed. There was no federal champion capable of guarding liberty and equality.

Madison then focused on the American challenge that is still with us today: how to protect both liberty and equality. He saw the question as how to protect majority rule, that is to say equality, as well as minority rights, or liberty. The assumption was that the rights of the majority are protected by the principle of majority rule. The challenge, then, of the republican form is to protect the liberty and rights of the minority also. In a sense this is a

"EQUAL LAWS": Writing in* Federalist *No. 10, James Madison helped formulate the idea that equality could be achieved by upholding liberty and constructing a republican form of government to protect it. [John Vanderlyn (1775–1852)]

fundamental dilemma of American political life: Can we have both majority rule and minority rights? Or: Can we have equality and liberty too?

Madison took up these questions in *Federalist* No. 10, the most famous of the *Federalist Papers*. He argued that part of the reconciliation between equality and liberty requires an understanding of human nature, which—unlike the later Progressives—he thought was fixed and not malleable. Human beings are quarrelsome and contentious by nature—or, as Madison famously put it, faction is "sown in the nature of man."

To pursue equality to its fullest form, to quote Madison in *Federalist* No. 10, would mean giving "to every citizen the same opinions, passions, and interests," something both unrealistic and, with individual liberty, undesirable. Hamilton agreed with Madison: "The door" to advancement in society "ought to be equally open to all." But human nature informs us that "there are strong minds in every walk of life, that will rise superior to the disadvantages of the situation, and will commend the tribute due to their merit."

The formula by which equality would be achieved for Madison and the founders was through these two powerful ideas: liberty as the philosophical base, and the republican form of government as the system to protect it. Liberty affords each individual the right to make his or her own choices, unconstrained by any political power such as a monarchy or aristocracy. A republic provides the opportunity for both majority rights, or equality, and for minority rights, or liberty. Thomas Jefferson described this combination, in his first inaugural address, as a "sacred principle," that "the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail" but the minority possesses "their equal rights which equal law must protect." Or, as Madison succinctly put it: "equal laws protecting equal rights." Equality, liberty, and the republican form: these three summarize the Madisonian approach of the founders.

A PERENNIAL DEBATE

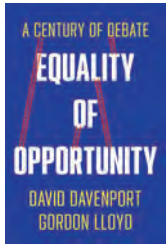
The founders or the Progressives? Madison or Wilson? Or perhaps we are required to accept some compromise of the two? Which view of equality of opportunity will be the basis for American domestic policy in the twenty-first century? That is still very much the debate today. As the founders stated in the Declaration, "all men are created equal," and, armed with individual liberty, Americans were free to pursue equality of opportunity as they saw fit. It was the role of government to defend these political freedoms through the constitutional republic created by the Constitution.

To all this, the Progressives said that that might have been sufficient in the eighteenth century, but equality of opportunity in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries required more of government. With the closing of the American frontier and the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, American "rugged individualism" was no longer enough. People had to prepare to live in closer quarters in urban areas, requiring both more government regulation and assistance. The federal government needed to play a much larger role in the economy, in the regulation of business, and in social programs to aid those less able to provide for themselves. This, the Progressives argued, was the new path to equality of opportunity: more government, more regulation, and greater security.

The founders felt that equality was something Americans already had as a natural right. The government's role was to defend and protect it.

In his book *The Conservative Sensibility,* George Will correctly argues that the whole liberal-versus-conservative debate today still boils down to whose model we follow: the founders or the Progressives. He argues that what conservatives seek to conserve is the founding, whereas Wilson and the Progressives find Madison's ideas anachronistic and out of touch. It is this debate, and the policies its proponents sought to implement, that we now follow in the modern era, from the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt, to the Great Society of Lyndon Johnson, through the Reagan Revolution of the 1980s, to today. And then we ask the question: for the future, is there room for both the founders and the Progressives as we pursue equality of opportunity, or must we choose only one? ◘



Forthcoming from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Equality of Opportunity: A Century of Debate,*** *by David Davenport and Gordon Lloyd. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

Window on a Revolution

Hoover now houses the collection of the Chinese communist thinker Li Rui, confidant of Mao Zedong. The story of a man who was both rewarded and brutalized by the movement he served.

By Matthew Krest Lowenstein

Li Rui (1917–2019) was a senior cadre in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the former personal secretary to Chairman Mao Zedong. His tumultuous career was in many ways iconic of the many idealists who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s. He assisted the party's propaganda efforts in the war against Japan (1937–45) and then against the Nationalists (1945–49). After the Communist victory and the founding of the People's Republic of China, he threw himself into building socialism—first in a propaganda capacity, later in the hydropower system. His career reached its apex in 1958, with his appointment as Mao's personal secretary. But with the outbreak of the Great Leap Forward and, later, the Cultural Revolution, he found his devotion to the cause repaid in decades of brutal political persecution.

The Hoover Institution Library & Archives has acquired the Li Rui papers, an exciting new collection now available to scholars. Li's personal collection

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offers an insider's view into the upper echelons of the CCP not available anywhere else in the world—especially not in Xi Jinping's China.

The Li Rui collection is vast. It comprises more than forty-nine boxes of archival material spanning 1938 to 2018 and contains Li Rui's personal and official correspondence, diaries, transcripts of high-level party meetings, photographs from throughout the Mao era, and other miscellaneous documents. This collection will be broadly useful to historians, political scientists, and other scholars interested in the Chinese Communist Party.

The opening of the archive is timely. COVID-19 restrictions have made travel to China increasingly difficult, and access to archives is irregular. For foreigners, archives may be entirely inaccessible, with pandemic restrictions effectively banning foreign nationals from reviewing them.

ARCHIVAL TREASURES

Among the Li Rui collection are high-level party documents, which scholars of the CCP and high politics will find especially useful. His detailed notes from the Central Party Committee Dongbei Conference on Land Reform in 1948 offer a look into the senior leadership's early views of land reform. It is fascinating to read Li Lisan (no relation) complaining about "peasant egalitarianism" and the peasants' inability to understand class distinctions, which he feared was leading to revolutionary excess. Notes on the back and forth between senior cadres such as Li Lisan, Huang Kecheng, Zhang Wentian, and others allow a first-person understanding of how senior cadres' ideological faith in Marxism determined national policy.

Li's personal diaries offer a rare portrait of how members of a communist family devoted themselves to making a revolution, which would ultimately tear them apart.

Li Rui's papers relating to the infamous Lushan Conference in 1959—which affirmed the Great Leap Forward and purged many of its opponents, including Peng Dehuai and Li Rui himself—are similarly illuminating. These records contain meeting minutes as well as Li Rui's attempts to rebut Kang Sheng's accusations of disloyalty.

Li Rui's diaries constitute the largest part of the collection. They span the years 1945 to 2018. Helpfully, many of these have been transcribed, which makes for faster reading than the original handwriting. Moreover, the seven-decade scope of these diaries means they offer something to scholars of

virtually all fields. Historians of the Cold War may be interested in Li Rui's diaries from his trip to the Soviet Union, while analysts of Xi Jinping's administration can peruse his entries from the late 2000s. In addition to Li Rui's own diaries, the collection includes the diaries of Fan Yuanzhen—Li's first wife—from 1938 to 1947. They thus give us a rare portrait of how a communist family devoted themselves to making a revolution that would ultimately tear them apart.

Li's correspondence is largely personal. The bulk of it consists of correspondence with Fan Yuanzhen as well as his other family members. These span the length of his adulthood, from 1938 to 1988. His early letters to his wife burn with youthful idealism. In one letter penned in 1939, Li Rui urges Fan to abandon her bourgeois fantasies about finding "her ideal career" and to focus on her work as a journalist. Li Rui explains, "Today, our goal is to forge ourselves into firm and bold, and absolutely unyielding, Bolsheviks! I believe that this line of work [journalism] suits you. It can develop your talents." This is typical of Li Rui's early letters, which often proclaim his ardent desire to self-improve and to temper himself into the ideal communist.

EXPELLED AND RESTORED

Li Rui was born in 1917 in Beijing, where his father was serving as a representative to the National Assembly from Hunan province. When the Beiyang warlords disbanded the National Assembly later that year, the family returned to their native Hunan, where Li would spend the rest of his youth. A student at Wuhan University, he displayed an early interest in literature and politics. Li published in student newspapers and headed propaganda efforts of student political movements. Eventually he became a founding member of Wuhan University's Communist Party cell.

After the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), the CCP put Li to work on its wartime propaganda efforts, editing party publications in Hunan. In 1939, Fan became a reporter for Xinhua media, the CCP's official news network, in the Nationalist wartime capital of Chongqing. Later that year, Li left with several senior party members for the CCP's guerrilla

CENTER OF POWER: The Li Rui collection helps to illuminate how Mao Zedong (opposite, shown in 1966) and his senior cadres' ideological faith in Marxism determined national policy. Mao appointed Li his personal secretary in 1958. Only a year later, Li was expelled from the party and sentenced to labor on a farm—not the first punishment inflicted on him by the party, or the last. [Wikimedia Commons]

REVOLUTIONARY: A soldier stands guard next to a portrait of Mao Zedong at the Tiananmen Gate. Through the vast Li Rui collection now held at the Hoover Institution, a deep view of the Mao era comes into focus. [Creative Commons]

headquarters in Yan'an. There, he continued to serve the party's propaganda efforts, editing *Liberation Daily* and following Mao's orders to focus the paper on promoting the Communist Party.

During his wartime experience in Yan'an, Li got his first taste of a Communist Party purge. He was jailed briefly after being accused of spying for the Nationalists. In 1945, Japanese surrender set the stage for the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. Li was against sent to assist propaganda efforts, this time editing party publications near the front lines in what was then Rehe province (now part of Hebei province).

After the Communist victory and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Li began to serve in a number of prominent roles in the propaganda and industrial "systems," eventually serving as director of the hydropower construction agency.

In 1958, Li reached the apex of his career. At the Central Conference in Nanning, Mao Zedong appointed him his personal secretary. Several months later, Li was promoted to vice minister of hydropower. But the turmoil of the

IDEALIST: Li Rui kept diaries for more than seven decades, and Hoover's collection also includes the diaries of his first wife, Fan Yuanzhen. Li's early letters burn with youthful idealism. "Today, our goal is to forge ourselves into firm and bold, and absolutely unyielding, Bolsheviks!" he wrote in a 1939 letter to Fan. [Li Nanyang]

UNQUESTIONED: A postage stamp shows Mao Zedong exhorting workers during the Cultural Revolution, a movement that gave the Chinese leader complete power to purge his opponents and establish a cult of personality.
[Wikimedia Commons]

Great Leap Forward soon led to serious reverses. At the Lushan Conference in 1959, Li was labeled a member of an "anti-party clique" for opposition to aggressive hydropower construction. He was expelled from the party and sentenced to labor reform at a farm, where he almost starved. After this stint in reform through labor, he was allowed to resume work as a cultural officer in the hydropower sector.

But more political troubles were soon to come. The outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 once again made Li a target. In 1967, he was imprisoned in solitary confinement without conviction or even an accusation. He would not be freed from prison for eight more years.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, Li's party membership was reinstated, and he again began to hold prominent positions in the party. In 1982, he was appointed to the extremely powerful Organization Department in charge of party *nomenklatura,* rising to regular vice minister the following year. In 1984, he was relieved from this position owing to opposition from old political enemies, and went into retirement.

PERSECUTION: The Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966, claiming prominent victims such as Liu Shaoqi, the head of state, shown here in a 1967 televised image. Purged by Mao, Liu was publicly humiliated and sent to prison, where he died (he was officially rehabilitated nine years later). During the Cultural Revolution, Li Rui also was a target of the government, imprisoned in solitary confinement without conviction or even charge. [Wikimedia Commons]

Yet his "retirement" was an active one. He continued to serve on the Central Consultative Committee. In 1989, during the Tiananmen Square protests, he sided with party liberals and called publicly for a compromise between the students and the military. For this position, he was severely criticized in the wake of the June 4 massacre. In 1992, the Central Consultative Committee was disbanded, and Li ceased to hold a formal position in government. Nevertheless, he continued to play an active role in the political life of the country.

He worked for liberalizing reforms—first in his official capacity and later as patron of *Yanhuang Chunqiu,* the house journal of the embattled reformist and liberal-minded faction of the party. Li's "consultancy" consisted, in fact, of running interference for the journal and allowing it to publish critical scholarship and essays until 2016, when it was taken over by Xi Jinping loyalists.

"REFORM AND OPENING": Li Rui continually worked for reforms, in later years as patron of the house journal of the embattled reformist and liberal-minded faction of the Communist Party—until Xi Jinping loyalists took it over. Li's archives will allow scholars of China to access detailed, truthful information about the history of China's government. [Li Nanyang]

He told the BBC in 2017, "Whenever there's a clash between the party and humanity. I insist on humanity."

ROADS NOT TAKEN

The Li Rui archives are the subject of some controversy. Starting in 2014, his daughter, Li Nanyang, brought the documents from China to the Hoover Institution on her father's behalf. But Li's widow, Zhang Yuzhen, is contesting ownership of the diaries, claiming they were brought to the United States improperly.

Li Rui died on February 16, 2019, and was given a state funeral, which took place under tight security and with a degree of official honor that his daughter said Li did not want. According to an obituary in the BBC, "the fact that Mr. Li was one of the original revolutionaries meant that he occupied a special place in contemporary China—one that allowed him a degree of freedom to talk about the ruling party's many issues, and how he felt things should be done differently."

Li Rui was given a state funeral, with a degree of official honor that his daughter said Li would have refused.

In donating his personal papers to the Hoover Archives, Li Rui expressed the wish that they would serve as a resource for people seeking to understand why China has failed to achieve a constitutional system. His gift helps keep alive the flame of reform and opening in China. By giving scholars access to the party's internal documents, he has made it possible for scholars to write about the Chinese Communist Party in a way that is empirically rigorous and boldly truthful. ◼

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On the Cover

Historians call it the golden age of flight. A hundred years ago, shaped by war and commerce, aviation was capturing the imagination of people all around the globe. There were barnstormers, wing walkers, embryonic passenger airlines, and airmail pioneers. This British poster by artist Frank Newbould (1887–1951) depicts airmail as a glamorous innovation. Routine today, flying the mails in those years was adventurous, competitive, and dangerous. California played a key part in the establishment of safe, reliable air links across the United States. One huge mountaintop beacon built to guide night-flying aircraft still glows above the Bay Area today—but only once a year.

The Post Office Department began scheduled airmail service between New York and Washington in 1918, but it was expensive and spotty. In February 1921, four planes set out in the dead of winter in an attempt to swap mail between New York and San Francisco. Three were forced down, one pilot died, and the mail barely made it through, but Congress was impressed enough by the stunt to bestow funding for a proper cross-country airmail network. It wasn't until 1923 that two Army pilots carried out the first nonstop transcontinental flight, traveling east to west so their plane could burn off enough fuel to climb over the Western mountains. Lieutenants John Arthur Macready and Oakley George Kelly flew from Long Island to San Diego in a blistering 26 hours, 50 minutes, and 38.8 seconds. Their bulky Fokker T-2 monoplane resides at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum.

Curious relics of that improvised era remain scattered around the country, including in the Bay Area: big concrete arrows, placed at strategic points to direct pilots to nearby airports. If the pilots could see them, of course.

The next step was night flight. A steel tower atop Mount Diablo, east of Oakland, went up in 1928, along with another in the San Gabriel Valley. Both were built by the Standard Oil Corporation of California, today's Chevron, which had an interest in promoting the sale of aviation fuel. On April 16, 1928, Charles Lindbergh himself pressed a telegraph key in Denver to switch on

the ten-million-candlepower Mount Diablo lamp. According to the *Oakland Tribune,* Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover said over the radio—another tech innovation, and one Hoover favored—that "tonight we are using the newest method of communication to dedicate a service to the newest method of transportation. Private enterprise, in a contribution to the development of aviation, has erected two mammoth beacons to guide the flyers over our national airways at night." On clear nights the rotating light was powerful enough to be seen from Reno in the east, Redding in the north, and Bakersfield in the south.

The second light tower, in the Merced Hills (today's Montebello), looked down on an area where Standard had struck oil in 1917. It was dismantled in 1965 and the site in recent years has been swallowed up by Metro Heights, a luxury homes development that boasts "incredible views."

But the Mount Diablo tower, with its own incredible views, remains. The light was moved to its current stone structure, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, in 1939. The beacon went dark after Pearl Harbor, amid fears that it might attract enemy aircraft. After the war, it was deemed obsolete. Radar and radio, not giant lamps, guided airplanes now. But after a Pearl Harbor Day commemoration in 1964, when the light was rekindled by Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, hero of the Pacific theater, keepers of the light arranged for it to be illuminated once a year. It shines every December 7, a memorial to those lost in World War II.

—Charles Lindsey

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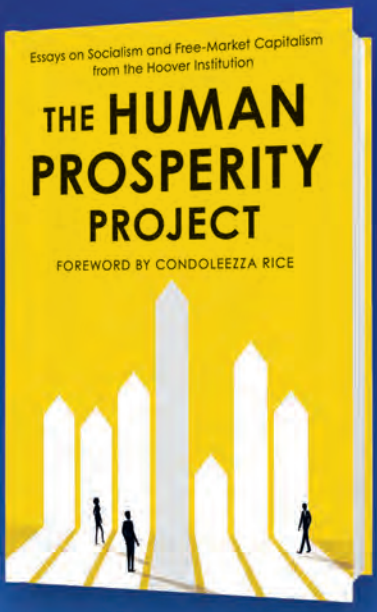

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