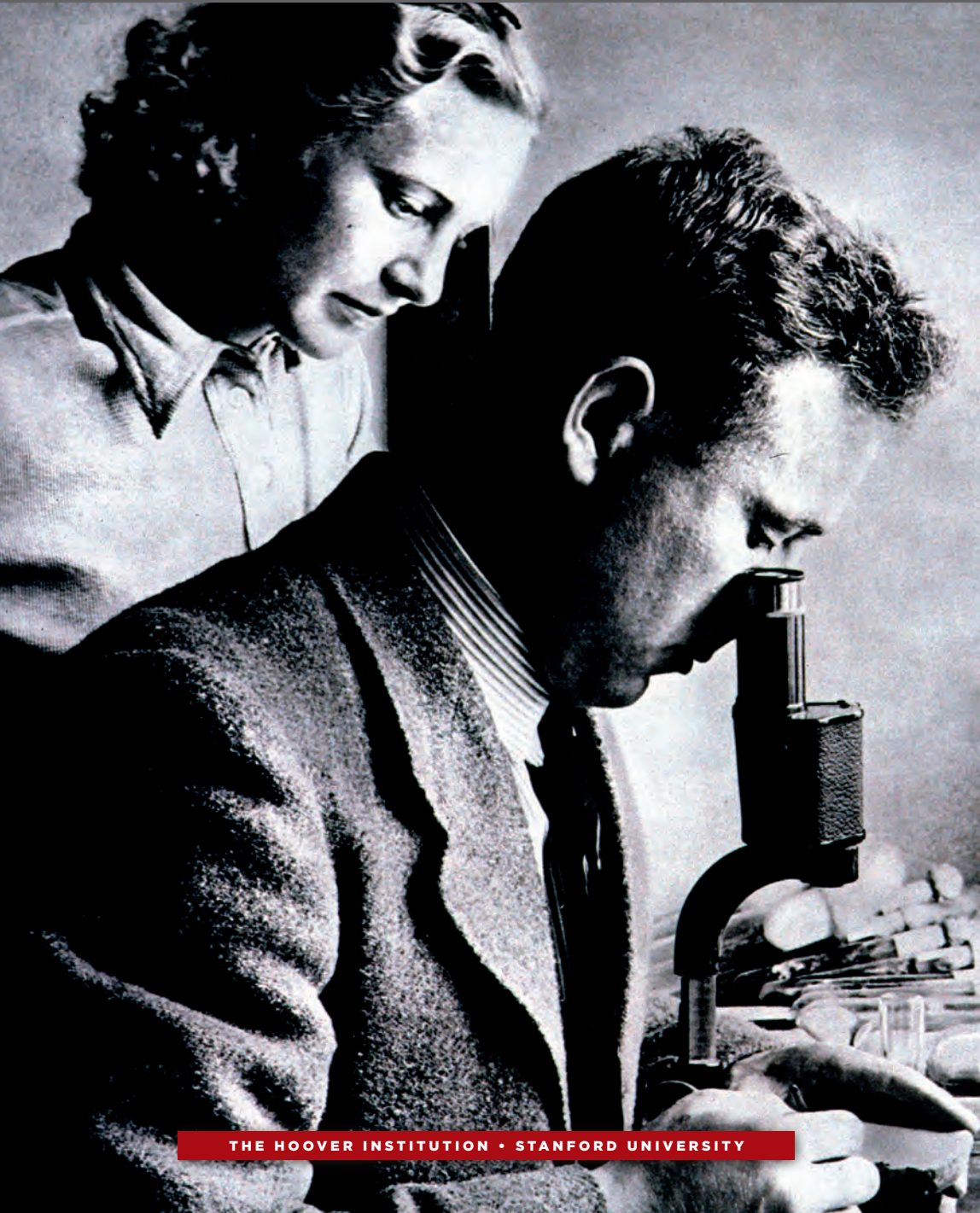


# HOOVER DIGEST

RESEARCH + OPINION ON PUBLIC POLICY

SUMMER 2020

NO. 3



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## ON THE COVER

This poster from World War II Britain is a reminder of another era in which public health took on broad importance, with implications that crossed borders and even touched on world politics and conflict. The image of two science students examining samples under a microscope was part of a campaign to woo Arab audiences with a message of democratic and scientific progress. It also dovetailed with official efforts to keep the home front well fed and healthy. See story, page 192.



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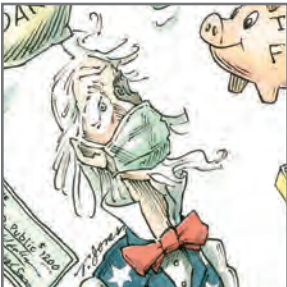
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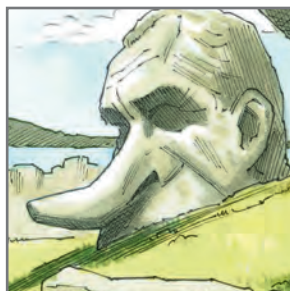
Defending the history of liberal democracy is no mere intellectual exercise—it's crucial to preserving our rights and liberties. **By Peter Berkowitz**

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# *The Careful Economy*

**There is no magic bullet against the coronavirus. Instead, defeating it will take time, wisdom, and imagination.**

---

**By John H. Cochrane**

**R**eady or not—mostly not—the reopening has begun. The economic carnage of a continued lockdown is simply too great to sustain. But the virus is still with us, so the carefully reopened economy will be less efficient than the pre-pandemic economy.

We all hoped for a smart reopening, with thoughtful workplace and social protocols and a robust public health response to stamp out the embers of the novel coronavirus. We hoped technology would save us—a vaccine, a cure, a cheap daily test. None of this is likely in the next few months. We have more tests, but we don't have the beginnings of a public health infrastructure to use our testing capacity in a productive way. Americans won't put up with Chinese-style surveillance in which an app turns red and sends people to quarantine for two weeks.

We seem fated instead to a dumb reopening, relaxing the increasingly untenable government-imposed blanket shutdowns and hoping for the best.

---

*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 research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute.*



***IN PURSUIT: Scientist Linqi Zhang researches coronavirus antibodies in his lab in Beijing. As yet there are no proven therapies to treat an infection of that virus, and no vaccine.*** [Thomas Peter—Reuters]

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Many doctors and epidemiologists are sounding the alarm, warning of a massive second wave of infections. But they were wrong last time. The dire forecasts may well be wrong again. Those models left out two crucial facts: people are smart and places are different.

Smart people knew there was a dangerous virus about and started social distancing long before the government told them to. The spread of a virus always depends on myriad little decisions people make every day, and most Americans made smart decisions.

Some places are more conducive to virus-spreading than others. The virus spreads best in indoor gatherings where people can breathe on each other for an extended time—restaurants, choirs, birthday parties, dances, nursing homes, cruise ships, aircraft carriers. Most of this virus is spread by a few “superspreading” events, not casual contact. People quickly avoided these places and occasions on their own. They will continue to do so. Nursing homes won’t make the same mistakes twice.

New York was singularly designed to spread the virus. Austin, Texas, doesn’t have a subway. There isn’t another New York to light up.

## HARD LESSONS

If infections increase, people will quickly become more careful again. If infections continue to decrease, people will become less careful, and the pandemic will drag out. The number of new cases will decline slowly as better knowledge and testing reduce the costs of being careful.

Apart from a robust test-and-trace program, the most important thing government can give us is accurate and timely information on how wide-spread the virus is in each community—how dangerous it really is to go out—something we don't have now. If people don't know the danger, there will be second and third waves, and crashes. A little random testing would go a long way. Better research on how the disease spreads—and how it doesn't—would help a lot.

The virus will be with us for a long time, and it will hobble the economy more than most people realize. Restaurants that serve every other table,

and airlines with every other seat empty, must charge twice as much or halve wages. Workplaces with six feet between employees need to rent more space. Every business that has to disinfect once an hour must pass that cost along.

Efficiency is the secret of the American economy. The careful economy scales back that efficiency. There can be lots of jobs, but different jobs, and jobs that pay less. If the virus provokes a greater trade war, a “reshoring” of production, that makes everything less efficient and more expensive as well. Gross domestic product and average wages must decline even if everyone is working.

Smart people and businesses will figure out which costly steps matter and which ones don't, and come slowly to a more efficient careful economy. But that will take time too.

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***The spread of a virus always depends on myriad little decisions people make every day. Most Americans made smart decisions.***

## INNOVATION, NOT REGULATION

Government will be tempted to make everything worse. If we have lots of people unemployed from jobs that aren't coming back, and we have big needs for lower-paid work in a less efficient economy, paying people to stay home at yesterday's wages will be counterproductive. Paying yesterday's businesses to hang on will likewise be counterproductive.

Adapting business practices to the careful economy will take lots of inventive thought. There are calls for long lists of new regulations. At best, such

rules would enshrine ideas that seemed good at the time but turn out to be costly, unproductive, or unsuited later. We got here in part because of a

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***Paying people to stay home at yesterday's wages will be counterproductive. So will paying yesterday's businesses to hang on.***

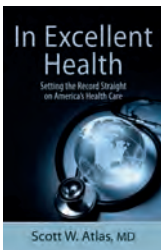
catastrophic failure of our regulatory state—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention testing foul-ups, Food and Drug Administration mask regulations, anti-price-

gouging regulations, and more. Tying up an economy that needs to adapt via more regulations only makes matters worse.

The wide-open US Internet has been the healthiest part of the pandemic response so far. Any of us can read models and studies in real time, and their tweeted criticisms. If experts tell us masks don't help, and then that they do, we can quickly debate the evidence. All of us, even the experts, are learning in real time. You can't do that in China.

The fast-moving community of ideas is a joy to watch. But the desire to enforce an information monopoly of so-called experts and public officials remains. Twitter announced that it plans to censor tweets that "conflict with guidance from public health experts." YouTube has banned any coronavirus-related content that contradicts World Health Organization advice. Fake news and rumors have been with us forever, and experts are often wrong. The freedom to debate is essential. ■

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# Address the Supply Shock

**The Fed has done right by Wall Street. Now it's Main Street's turn.**

**By Kevin Warsh**

Unexpected shocks have become unexpectedly common. The pandemic of 2020 is the third economic shock to strike the United States in the twenty-first century, after 9/11 and the financial crisis of 2008. In each case, policy makers were caught off guard. Yet while the precise nature and timing of major shocks are unpredictable, their occurrence is foreseeable.

Policy makers would do well to buy insurance against adverse shocks. At the very least, they should be prepared for a typical recession. The credible pre-positioning of strong fiscal and monetary support could ride to the rescue to reduce the harm to the real economy.

On the eve of the pandemic several months ago, the US economy was experiencing solid economic

## **Key points**

- » Policy makers must prepare for disruptions.
- » The design of Washington's pandemic response is much more important than its size.
- » This period of relative calm is a time to assess the past months' lending, spending, and asset purchases.
- » Capital and labor now need to move quickly to the business models and jobs of the post-pandemic era.

---

**Kevin Warsh** is the Shepard Family Distinguished Visiting Fellow in Economics at the Hoover Institution.

growth and stable prices, with unemployment near a fifty-year low. Yet fiscal and monetary policies were more attuned to the crisis of a decade ago. The fiscal deficit and consolidated debt were growing at record rates to record levels. Real interest rates were near zero, and the Federal Reserve's balance sheet was bloated and its imprimatur on financial markets undiminished. Many corporations were highly leveraged and highly vulnerable.

When the pandemic arrived in force, policy makers felt obliged to cross red lines to provide a boost. Among other things, Congress spent trillions and the Fed offered price support to some of Wall Street's more indebted companies and the country's more troubled municipalities.

If policy makers don't prepare for disruptions, it's harder to manage the economic reckoning and chart a robust recovery. This is a defining moment. The panic of the pandemic has subsided, but the economy's path isn't determined. This period of relative calm provides an opportunity to assess the efficacy of the past few months' lending, spending, and asset-purchase decisions.

If policy makers get the next steps wrong, economic developments in 2020 may resemble those of 2008, when the relative calm of early summer was interrupted by autumn turmoil. If they get it right, a more prosperous future is likely.

## MAIN STREET NEEDS ATTENTION

The economic crisis is principally a supply-side shock to businesses on Main Street. Because of the pandemic and lockdown, workers have been forcibly distanced from their jobs and new capital has been scared to the sidelines. Service businesses—representing the bulk of the US economy—are at risk of becoming the greatest casualties.

There are downstream effects from the supply shock on aggregate demand, including weak consumer spending, and from the Main Street

carnage on listed securities on Wall Street. The bulk of the government's largesse to date has been devoted downstream. To right the balance—and

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***American-style dynamism isn't an obstacle to recovery; it's the essential element.***

avoid a slower, weaker recovery—policy makers should direct their attention upstream, to the supply side of the economy and Main Street.

The Fed's Wall Street-directed programs have proved timely and aggressive. Its Main Street Credit Facility, in contrast, is delayed, complicated, and

encumbered. Its appeal to borrowers or lenders, as currently outlined, is limited. This mismatch threatens to turn a liquidity crunch into a solvency crisis. Policy makers need to act expeditiously to reopen Main Street and allow workers to get back to work.

Three further observations to inform the choices ahead:

» **Congress is understandably tempted to try to re-create the status quo ante, but this is not feasible.** The pandemic wasn't the fault of our citizens, so shouldn't government simply and fully replenish the coffers of those harmed, as if the crisis never happened?

The depth and duration of the recession are unknown. Businesses and households can't be made whole when the economic hole is still deepening. And it is impossible to know what would have happened absent the pandemic. A prosperous future is possible only if capital and labor move with due speed to the business models and jobs of the post-pandemic era. American-style dynamism isn't an obstacle to recovery; it's the essential element.

The US economy isn't a pop-up store. It's a complex organism built on relationships—between supplier and business, employee and employer, customer and company. Relationship capital is the most precious and, at present, the most precarious. As the economy reopens, the after-tax rewards for work and new capital investment should increase. Otherwise, relationships will atrophy and the economy will suffer.

» **When the government puts out a shingle offering money, the line tends to get long and the opportunity for mischief multiplies.** The Treasury and Fed are working in a difficult environment to support businesses affected by the pandemic. They should resist the temptation to play favorites. Bailouts don't age well, especially when they are bespoke.

The ink of the Cares Act was barely dry before the recriminations against disfavored beneficiaries began. Liquidity for all solvent comers—without fear or favor, without strings or restrictions—should be the guiding ethos. We should trust the good sense of businesses and households to know what to do with the money.

» **There are limits to government spending.** (Humor me.) The debt markets may seem to have infinite capacity to fund Washington's fiscal profligacy. But it's not a good time to bet on the perpetual kindness of strangers. Economists didn't forecast the striking fall in real and nominal interest rates over the past thirty years. Nor is there accord on what would change the direction. The pandemic should remind us of tail risks, including sovereign risk.

## GOODBYE, STATUS QUO ANTE

The design of Washington's pandemic response is far more important than its size. The strength of the post-pandemic recovery is not chiefly about the

magnitude of new government spending. The preoccupation with managing aggregate demand is misplaced, especially in this crisis.

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***When the pandemic hit, policy makers felt obliged to cross red lines. Now it's time to take stock.***

The speed and contour of the recovery will be driven by progress against the virus, and by the choices of our fellow citizens. New government programs should provide the right incentives for new capital providers to invest and workers to find new opportunities. The only way out is forward. ■

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# *Nimbler, Smaller Solutions*

**Communities, not big government, should take the lead in repairing the damage from this crisis—and preparing for the next one.**

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***By Raghuram G. Rajan***

**E**ven with Covid-19 still raging, speculation has turned to what society will look like after the virus is checked. People shocked by how easily their lives can be upended will want to reduce risk. According to the emerging consensus, they will favor more government intervention to stimulate demand (by pumping trillions of dollars into the economy), protect workers, expand health care, and, of course, tackle climate change.

But every country has many layers of government, so which one should expand? Clearly, in the United States, only the federal government has the resources and mandate for nationwide decisions on issues such as health care and climate change. Yet it doesn't necessarily follow that this level of government should grow larger still. After all, it could adopt policies that protect some constituencies while increasing the risks faced by others.

In the case of Covid-19, some countries have centralized decision-making about when to impose and lift lockdown measures, whereas others have

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[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



left these choices to state governments or even municipalities. (Others, like India, are in transition between these approaches.) What has become clear is that not all localities face the same trade-offs.

## DOES THE CENTER HOLD?

In crowded New York City, a strict lockdown may have been the only way to get people off the streets, and its economic impact may have been softened by the fact that many there work in skilled services like finance, which can be performed remotely. Laid-off waiters and hotel workers know they won't get their jobs back until the public feels safe going out again. Health concerns seem to be paramount.

In contrast, in Farmington, New Mexico, the *New York Times* reports that “few people know anyone who was ill from the coronavirus, but almost everyone knows someone unemployed by it.”

The lockdown, imposed by the state's Democratic governor, seemed to be unpopular across a com-

munity that was already in serious economic decline before the pandemic. In this case, economic concerns trumped more modest health worries.

These differences show the drawbacks of a centralized, one-size-fits-all approach. But decentralization can also be problematic. If regions have contained the virus to different degrees, is travel between them still possible?

It stands to reason that safer regions would want

to bar visitors from potential hot zones—or at least subject them to lengthy quarantines. A fast, cheap, reliable testing system might solve the problem, but that is currently unavailable.

Some degree of harmonization between regions can therefore be beneficial, not least in the procurement of medical supplies. In the absence of federal coordination, US states engaged in a bidding war with one another over scarce medical supplies from China. In normal times, competitive markets would allocate such goods most efficiently. But in a health emergency, markets may perform poorly, allocating goods according to buyers'

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***Every country has many layers of government, so which, if any, should expand?***

ability to pay rather than their need; rich states would buy up all the ventilators and testing kits, leaving poorer states with none. The country's ability to contain the pandemic would suffer.

In this situation, centralized procurement could keep prices lower, potentially enabling more need-based allocation. But “could” and “potentially” are the operative words. If a central government has questionable motives or simply is incompetent, the calculus changes. As we have seen in Brazil, Mexico, Tanzania, and the United States, when heads of government minimize the dangers of the pandemic, they can do considerable harm to their country's response.

Among other failures, Brazil's federal government seems to have had difficulty distributing ventilators it bought. In India, the central government

imposed a stringent lockdown without making the necessary arrangements for millions of migrant workers, who were forced to flee the cities for their

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***In the future, we should think about who will make the decisions and where.***

home villages. Families with children walked hundreds of miles, helped only by the kindness of strangers and local authorities, and potentially carrying the virus with them. A decentralized decision-making process might have allowed states that locked down later (because they initially had fewer cases) to learn better management from those that went first.

## **COMMUNITIES OF WISDOM**

Given that extremes of centralization and decentralization can both be problematic, a coordinated middle ground may work best. The federal government might establish minimal standards for closing down and opening up, while leaving the actual decision to states and municipalities. That said, if there is to be a bias, it should be toward decentralization, following the principle of subsidiarity, whereby powers are delegated to the lowest-possible administrative level that will be effective.

There are important reasons to favor a carefully managed decentralization. Not only do members of smaller political entities tend to face similar problems; they also typically demonstrate greater social and political solidarity, which makes it easier for them to engage with one another and find solutions.

While local politics might occasionally resemble the Hatfield-McCoy feud of nineteenth-century Kentucky and West Virginia, it generally suffers less

gridlock and antagonism than what one finds in central legislatures today. And people feel a greater sense of ownership over decisions taken by their locally elected or appointed bodies. This empowerment can help them devise policies to benefit from national and global markets, rather than being at their mercy.

This is why, as we shape policies to aid the recovery and strengthen post-pandemic health, education, and regulatory systems, we should also think about who will make the decisions and where. For example, a fair share of stimulus spending on infrastructure should

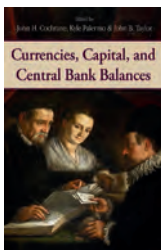
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***If there is to be a bias, it should be toward decentralization.***

take the form of block grants to communities, which are in the best position to allocate funds according to need. And while national climate policies cannot be determined separately in every community, they can at least reflect a bottom-up consensus.

Rising authoritarianism around the world reflects widespread yearning for charismatic political leaders with whom ordinary people can identify. Such demagogues have used their popular support to avoid constitutional checks and balances, taking their countries down ruinous paths. Expanding government further while limiting the risk of authoritarianism requires independently powerful bodies that also enjoy popular support. Constitutionally decentralizing more powers to regional and local government may be the way forward. ■

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# *Not in the Same Boat*

**Who took the biggest hit from the pandemic? The young, the low earners, and the small businesses.**

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***By Edward Paul Lazear***

**T**he pernicious health effects of Covid-19 are concentrated among older people, but it is the young and especially low-income Americans who have suffered the greatest harm from the country's disease-mitigating shutdown policies. The bleak jobs data released in early May, showing that more than twenty million Americans were thrown out of work in April, were among a series of reports highlighting the enormous nationwide pain. But a more detailed look at current economic statistics reveals how disproportionately the young and poor are bearing the burden.

During recessions, unemployment rates rise the most among the young, minorities, and the least-educated. April jobs numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the unemployment rate for those between the ages of sixteen and nineteen jumped by nearly 18 percentage points, to 31.9 percent, between March and April, while the rate for workers of all ages taken together rose 10 percentage points, to 14.7 percent. Hispanics took a harder hit (plus-13 percentage points) than whites (10.2 percentage points)

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*Edward P. Lazear is the Morris Arnold and Nona Jean Cox Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, chair of Hoover's Conte Initiative on Immigration Reform, and the Davies Family Professor of Economics at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business.*

and African-Americans (10 percentage points). For those without a high school diploma, the unemployment rate increased 14.4 points, to 21.2 percent; the rate for college graduates bumped up less than 6 points, to 8.4 percent.

Employment contraction was most pronounced among low-wage jobs. Of the 20.5 million jobs lost in April, almost half were in the leisure and hospitality industry and in retail, where average wages are around \$17 and \$19 per hour, respectively. The average wage in the country as a whole is about \$29 per hour. Unemployment supplements clearly help, but when benefits run out, those without work will need to rely on their savings—if they have any.

Because individuals accumulate assets over their lifetimes, the young lack significant buffers. A Federal Reserve study reports that in 2016, households with a head under age thirty-five had a median net worth of \$11,000; those with a head between thirty-five and forty-four years old had median net worth of about \$60,000; with a head between sixty-five and seventy-four years old, \$224,000. Among all workers, the lowest-earning 20 percent, who suffer disproportionate increases in unemployment, have only \$7,000 in net worth, some of which is illiquid assets such as automobiles or furniture.

Small businesses, especially in retailing and hospitality, have been badly hurt. The gross domestic product report for the January–March quarter revealed an economywide decline of 4.8 percent. In food service and accom-

modations, the decline was about double that. Contrast that with software development, much of which can be done remotely, where output

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***Because individuals accumulate assets over their lifetimes, the young lack significant buffers.***

actually increased. Small-business owners in the hardest-hit sectors are also among the least well-off among owners. The clothing and footwear sector suffered the largest percentage decline in output during that quarter. The owners of small businesses in that sector earn 68 percent as much as the typical small-business owner.

Suspending K–12 education with school closures and moving toward online classes reduces learning for all students, but it is most detrimental to those who need the most help. Children with educated parents who have computers and good Internet access can continue to learn during shutdowns. Those in less-advantaged households face a much tougher task. When all return to school, there will be an even bigger disparity in knowledge and acquired skills than there was when schools closed, making classroom education more difficult.

Older Americans like me are the primary beneficiaries of the shutdown policies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports death rates from Covid-19 by age. Of all Covid-19 deaths reported by May 2, almost 80 percent were among those sixty-five or older, and 59 percent were among those seventy-five and older. Only 0.1 percent of the deaths were among those under twenty-five and fewer than 3 percent were among those forty-five and younger. By comparison, auto accidents inflict their harm on a much younger population. Of driving deaths, only about 18 percent occur among those sixty-five and older, while 53 percent of deaths are among those forty-five and younger. The comparison with auto deaths is relevant because auto deaths are also partly determined by the nation's policy choices regarding speed limits, safety regulations, and road quality.

I think I can speak for my fellow baby boomers in saying we are grateful that the country wants to protect our health and extend our lives. At the same time, we cannot ignore that most of the costs are being borne by our children and grandchildren, particularly the poorest among them. ■

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***Small-business owners in the hardest-hit sectors are also among the least well-off among owners.***



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# *Advantage: Democracy*

**Why free nations emerge from crises stronger than do repressive regimes.**

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**By Peter Berkowitz**

**T**he smart money should be on liberal democracies—governments based on consent and devoted to securing citizens' rights—to most effectively weather the Covid-19 storm.

Owing to the use of new artificial-intelligence technology and the ability to monitor and command its population, the Communist Party of China (CCP) may have arrested the spread of the new and highly contagious virus within its own borders. But it has been in suppressing information about the coronavirus—which originated late last year in the city of Wuhan—that the CCP has truly demonstrated speed and efficiency. That baleful accomplishment, which owes everything to China's autocratic system, has had calamitous worldwide consequences.

By punishing doctors and journalists who sought to warn about the virus born in Wuhan, the Chinese government ensured the swift spread of disease in the city, then throughout central China's Hubei province, and soon around the globe. The pandemic, which went on to shut down great swaths of public life and the private sector in a multitude of nations, is a direct result of the

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CCP's despotism, which polices speech, punishes dissent, and promulgates rank propaganda.

Praise for China by World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus reflects a common conviction about autocracy's strong points. As *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman opined in 2009, "One-party autocracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages." The singular advantage of what Friedman refers to as "one-party autocracy"—contrary to his suggestion, there is no other sort—is its ability, he asserted, to simply "impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the twenty-first century."

Over the past hundred years, Carl Schmitt—"the 'crown jurist' of National Socialism"—has advanced the most learned arguments for autocracy's advantages. In "The Concept of the Political" (1927), Schmitt maintained that it is a mistake to believe, as the American political tradition teaches, that the purpose of government is to secure unalienable rights—those rights inherent in all persons. Properly understood, asserts Schmitt, politics is grounded

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***In one view, only a sovereign dictator—scorning the notion that all human beings are by nature free and equal—can effectively defend the nation.***

not in what human beings share but in the fundamental distinction between friend and enemy: that is, those who are willing to risk their lives by fighting at your side and those who wish

to kill you and those at your side. In Schmitt's view, only a sovereign dictator—unhobbled by the conviction that all human beings are by nature free and equal—can draw the distinction between friend and enemy accurately and resolutely act on it to defend the nation.

It borders on conventional wisdom that autocracy possesses advantages in undertaking the decisive, ruthless, and far-seeing action that politics demands at home and abroad. Even liberal democracy's loyal proponents are given to wondering whether the very principles and institutions that enable governments grounded in freedom and equality to safeguard human rights impair their ability to handle domestic emergencies and hold their own in foreign affairs against autocratic powers unfettered by respect for the dignity of the individual.

In an era of heightened great-power competition, the question of how liberal democracy stacks up against autocracy takes on heightened significance.

## DEMOCRATIC STRENGTHS

Matthew Kroenig thinks that the conventional wisdom that gives the advantage to autocracy is deeply mistaken. In *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy Versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the US and China*, he advances a “democratic advantage thesis.” According to Kroenig, “democracies enjoy a built-in advantage in long-run geopolitical competition.”

They outperform autocracies, moreover, not despite their distinguishing commitments—to religious liberty and free speech, private property and free markets, separation of powers and checks and balances—but because of them. “The very constraints on government power and a strict rule-of-law system that

some may see as signs of democratic weakness are, in fact, democracy’s greatest strengths,”

he asserts. Drawing on political philosophy, empirical political science, and history, Kroenig makes a compelling case.

A professor of government and foreign service at Georgetown University and deputy director of the Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security at the Atlantic Council, Kroenig understands democracy not merely to be rule by the people, but also a regime in which the people elect representatives to serve in government and in which freedom flourishes because government sets limits on the will of the majority. Consequently, liberal democracy coupled with a market economy appears to be, from Kroenig’s perspective, the fully developed form of democracy.

Thanks to their freedom, argues Kroenig, democracies are better than autocracies at fostering the industriousness, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and promoting the commerce and international trade, that generate economic growth. Democracies fare better in diplomacy because they are more dependable allies. And democracies surpass autocracies in military might because their more diversified and efficient economies enable them to produce more, and more sophisticated, weapons, and because, unlike autocracies, democracies are not compelled to divert military resources to the domestic sphere to defend the regime from its own, typically repressed and resentful, population.

According to Kroenig, Machiavelli—no stranger to the harsh realities of politics—grasped the logic of the democratic advantage. In the *Discourses*

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***A democracy doesn’t have to divert military resources to defend itself from its own repressed and resentful population.***

on *Livy*, he advises the wise prince to establish a republic. By promoting the well-being of the people, Machiavelli explains, a prince can gain the security and glory to which he rightly aspires: “For it is seen through experience that cities have never expanded either in dominion or in riches if they have not been in freedom.”

Empirical research confirms Machiavelli’s assessment. Kroenig presents data about the international system covering 1816 to 2007 indicating that democracies tend to acquire more economic, diplomatic, and military strength than autocracies. They “are also more likely to rank among the ‘major powers’ ” and “are more likely to become the most powerful state in the system.” The results are all the more striking, Kroenig notes, considering the limited number of democracies: “Democracies’ stranglehold on global hegemony occurs despite the fact that, throughout this time period, democracies have been rarer than autocracies, making up only about 35 percent of all the observations in the data.”

## HISTORICAL TESTIMONY

History provides still more dramatic evidence for Kroenig’s democratic-advantage thesis. Case studies are limited because until the second half of the twentieth century, democracies were rare. Nevertheless, Kroenig identi-

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***Many times throughout history, republics prevailed because of free and open political institutions, more prosperous economies, better networks of allies, and stronger militaries.***

fies seven seminal great-power rivalries stretching across more than two millennia pitting democracy against autocracy: classic Athens against Persia and then Sparta; the

Roman Republic against Carthage and then Macedon; in the Middle Ages and stretching to the dawn of modernity, the Venetian Republic against the Byzantine empire and then the Duchy of Milan; the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch Republic against the Spanish empire; the nineteenth-century clash between Great Britain and France; and, in the twentieth century, the United Kingdom against Germany and the United States against the Soviet Union.

With the exception of Sparta’s triumph over Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the democracies prevailed in these landmark confrontations. In each instance—including Athens’ defeat of Persia—victory was owed to free and open political institutions, which produced a more prosperous economy, a

more extensive and reliable network of allies, and a more formidable military force. When democracies do lose their great-power status, Kroenig's case studies suggest, it is the result of departure from their principles or breakdown of their defining political institutions.

The lesson for the United States, concludes Kroenig, is the importance of nurturing "its greatest source of strength." That source is not "its innovative economy" or "its global network of alliances" or "its military dominance." Rather, these critical strengths are themselves the product of liberal democracy in America.

Kroenig's analysis also suggests that it was dedication to free and democratic political institutions at home that, in the post-World War II era, enabled the United States to take the lead in building a free and open international order that favors nations devoted to democracy and human rights. And that such dedication will be critical to preserving the US-led international order in the face of twenty-first-century threats and opportunities.

The worldwide pandemic unleashed by autocratic China does not alter the analysis of liberal democracy's advantages in dealing with global challenges. If anything, it redoubles the significance of the analysis. ■

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# Totalitarian Temptation

**Of all the falsehoods spawned by the world's struggle, the most dangerous might be this: that China handled it best.**

*By Josef Joffe*

**T**otalitarianism is Stalin and Hitler, the NKVD and the Gestapo, the gulag and the death camp. Correct, but take another look. It is also an eternal temptation that has infected Western minds great and small—from Martin “Sieg Heil!” Heidegger to Jean-Paul Sartre, who pitched for communism until the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution. Among the lesser minds, Charles Lindbergh cozied up to Hitler, and Joseph Davies, the US Ambassador to the USSR, penned a ringing apologia

## Key points

- » Totalitarians hate bad news. Instead, they blame the messengers and suppress the truth.
- » Authoritarians love crises—or regularly manufacture them—because these justify untrammelled power.
- » Three viruses are in play: one infects the human body, the second the body politic, and the third the economy.
- » Free media are powerfully useful in national emergencies, exposing error, mismanagement, and falsehood.

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*Josef Joffe is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of Hoover's Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict, and a senior fellow at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. He serves on the editorial council of *Die Zeit* in Hamburg and the executive committee of *The American Interest*.*





[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

*T. Jones*





for Stalin's Great Terror in *Mission to Moscow*, a book that spawned an even more awful movie. Add a herd of Western devotees and camp followers who cheered Mussolini, Mao, Castro, Che, and, lately, the Stalinist caudillo Hugo Chávez.

Which takes us to China's President Xi Jinping and an up-to-date example of cheerleading for the almighty state. While in Beijing, the World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus extolled China as a model in the war against SARS-CoV-2, better known as the coronavirus. According to China's state media, he gushed that "China's speed . . . and efficiency . . . is the advantage of China's system." The country deserved "praise" and "admiration" for its methods in routing the silent enemy that has spread the Covid-19 epidemic from Wuhan to Milan, from Alberta to Auckland.

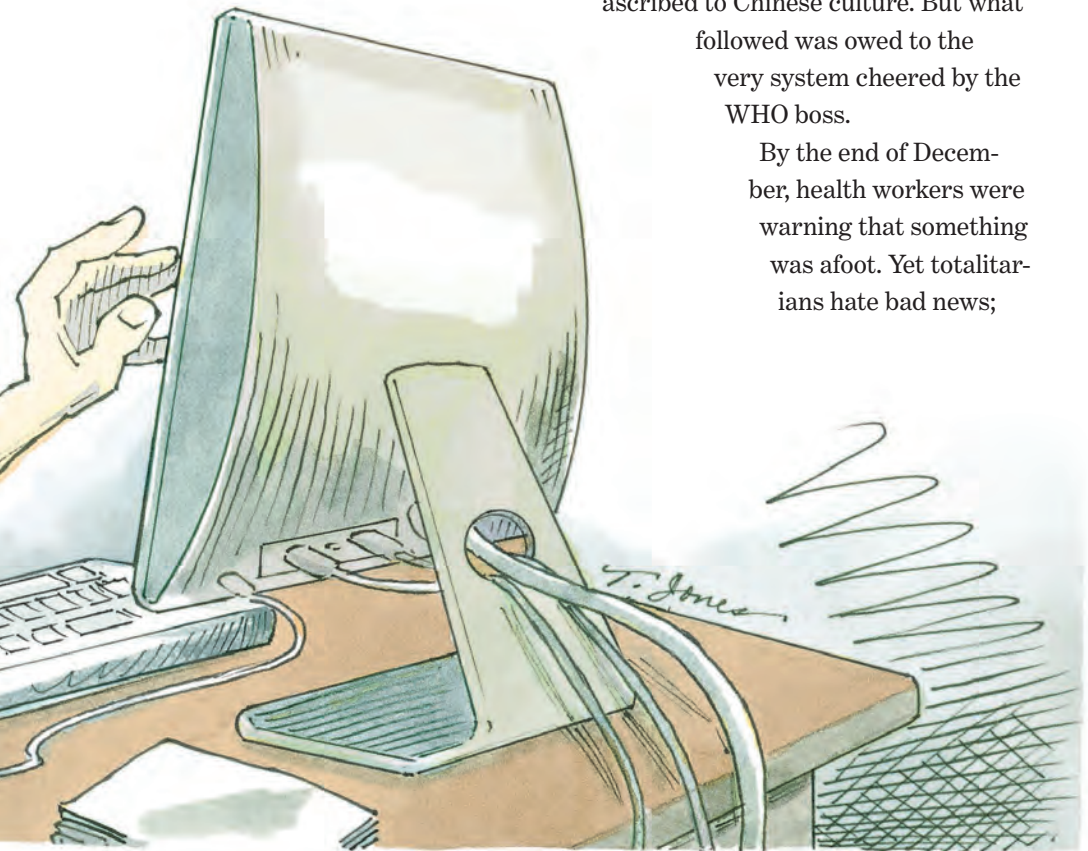
Such an éloge needs to be tempered. First of all, the world owes the most recent iteration of the coronavirus to China, more precisely to Wuhan and

its "wet markets" whence it apparently sprang forth from bats, a delicacy of the local cuisine. That calamity may be

ascribed to Chinese culture. But what

followed was owed to the very system cheered by the WHO boss.

By the end of December, health workers were warning that something was afoot. Yet totalitarians hate bad news;



that's in their DNA. Suppressing the reports, they blamed the messengers and detained them. There was indeed "speed," but the wrong kind. Instead of locking up the doctors, the regime might have closed down Wuhan's airport, which was serving thirty-two cities around the world, including Paris, London, Rome, Seoul, Tokyo, and Sydney. With flights operating into February, the virus forged ahead while precious time was lost. In mid-March, the regime tried fake news, a classic agitprop tool, with the foreign ministry insinuating that the "US Army had brought the epidemic to Wuhan."

So, why would the WHO director (and plenty of others) applaud the

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***State control of information is a bridge to oppression that democracies must never cross.***

Communist emperor Xi? Because of political expediency, for one. You don't bite the hand you need to feed in order to contain the Wuhan virus.

Reported cases in China are plummeting, though, so should we send up three cheers for the superiority of a totalitarian system? Yet South Korea is the world's number one when it comes to testing, which is critical for controlling the virus. Taiwan, too, slowed its spread. In Iran, though, a harsh theocracy whose tentacles reach deeply into society, infections swept across the country. So it's clear that totalitarian systems aren't necessarily super-efficient, while supposedly chaotic democracies are hardly doomed.

## **IN DEMOCRACIES, LIVES (AND RIGHTS) MATTER**

The price of what Xi calls a "people's war" is horrendous. To boot, Beijing's strategy can be pursued only by a totalitarian state, not a democracy. Essentially, the state locked up half a billion people, most harshly in and around

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***It was the absence of free media in China that enabled the regime to muzzle the whistleblowers of Wuhan.***

Wuhan. It dispatched armies of enforcers to guard the access to residential compounds and to restrict movement within. The regime

deployed digital surveillance systems no liberal polity would or could countenance. It tapped into data from state-run mobile companies as well as from payment apps that record who, when, and where, so that fugitives could be traced and collared. Regime minions intruded on what is known in the West as "my home is my castle" to record body temperatures, presumably hauling



***WATCHED: A woman wearing a protective mask passes a poster of Xi Jinping in Shanghai. The dark side of China's "people's war" against Covid-19 has been repression, inducing silencing of information sources, armies of enforcers, and pervasive electronic monitoring. [Aly Song—Reuters]***

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suspects off to detention facilities—for their own good, of course. Guards blocked movement at railroad stations and traffic nodes.

The darkest side of the “people’s war” is sheer repression. Ren Zhiqiang, a prominent Beijing tycoon, had been blasting Xi for extinguishing free speech. Too bad for him that he ran afoul of an all-out party campaign to quash criticism about the government’s fake- or no-news strategy. Ren accused the state of having accelerated the epidemic that had claimed innumerable lives. He might as well have committed treason. So, Ren suddenly disappeared, a swift and classic way to silence “enemies of the people.”

State control of information is a bridge to oppression that democracies must never cross. Freedom of expression is among the holiest of holies in a liberal polity. An indispensable check on arbitrary power, free media also happen to be eminently useful in national emergencies, exposing error, mismanagement, and falsehood. It was the absence of free media in China that

enabled the regime to muzzle the whistleblowers of Wuhan at such a murderous price.

How are those bungling democracies doing? European Union members have been successively dismantling “Schengenland,” the EU’s borderless realm, reasserting national control. Yet such constraints have been imposed without the totalitarian tools of the Chinese. In deploying the powers of the state, Western governments have illuminated a peculiar advantage of democracies. To combat crises, they need not resort to police-state tactics.

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***Let China be China, but take a daily dose of vaccine against the virus of state supremacy.***

self-quarantine at home and stay away from large crowds. They accept curbs on their freedom such as closed bars, restaurants, theaters, and stores. They keep social distance and walk alone rather than in pairs. Competitive sports unfold in empty stadiums from which games are broadcast. Operas and concerts are streamed. Companies shift to home office work and videoconferencing on their own. Schools close according to local determination.

It isn’t all voluntary, of course, but there is still a difference between Wuhan and Milan. Carabinieri don’t act as prison guards, but ask for receipts that prove a trip to the pharmacy. Citizens are not manhandled or dragged

If governments communicate truthfully with the people, the ruled do what needs to be done voluntarily. Look around the democratic world. People

off to jail. Those who feel mistreated can appeal to the courts. The rule of law does not give way to unchecked power. In Munich, for instance,

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***We must defy the pied pipers who stoke panic and hysteria to deconstruct the liberal state.***

stores that must lock up for a while enjoy the benefits of the welfare state. Rules on short-time work kick in. The social security system makes up for reduced wages.

Beyond such anecdotes, there is a larger theme: the trade-off between freedom and safety, something despots don’t have to consider. For them, the security of the state—and their regime—is *über alles*. Let the people pay the price. Authoritarians love crises—or regularly manufacture them—because these justify untrammelled power. The logic is all too familiar. Posit a supreme evil, and all other values must be betrayed: freedom of expression and movement, property rights, judicial review,

individual autonomy, political competition, due process. Rule of law? Not when the enemy is at the gate, and certainly not when he is already roaming the land.

## HOW TO DEFY AUTHORITARIANISM

Liberal polities, alas, are not immune to the temptation. Listen to the prophets of planetary doom who want an all-powerful state that would do away with constitutional restraints and unfettered politics for the sake of the earth. Don't quibble when the house is on fire; seek salvation in "eco-dictatorship."

All the more reason to resolve to resist the authoritarian temptation. What are the antidotes? All emergency measures must come with a sunset clause. Protect the freedom of the press at all costs. Set new dates for postponed elections now. Keep holding officials accountable. Secure the separation of powers. The rule is to persuade, not to impose. Defy the pied pipers who stoke panic and hysteria in order to deconstruct the liberal state.

Don't forget that three viruses are in play. One infects the human body, the second the body politic, and the third the economy. This is not a financial crisis as in 2008, which is why infusing trillions of liquidity is not the solution. As a result of sequestration and insulation, production is plunging, and so are consumption and jobs—the life forces of the economy. These are real, not virtual phenomena like stock market busts.

Disease and death are real, too. But if the economy grinds to a halt as a consequence of a progressive shutdown, material misery creeps forward. Its relentless advance will also cause sorrow and distress, unleashing a kind of epidemic not seen since the Great Depression when people could no longer pay their bills or keep their homes. Thus the imperative is to balance not only freedom and safety, but also antivirus warfare and economic well-being. There is no either-or.

A system based on the consent of the governed is messy, but it is working throughout the West. The democracies are far better equipped to strike the right balance between health, wealth, and liberty. China's Xi need not lose any sleep over this three-cornered conflict of values. Yet Western leaders must crack the trilemma for a simple but compelling

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***If governments communicate truthfully with their people, the ruled do what needs to be done voluntarily.***



reason, which is to keep the state of emergency from escalating into a panic and then jelling into a new normal. Let China be China, but take a daily dose of vaccine against the virus of state supremacy. As seductive as the authoritarian therapy may look, it may cripple the patient known as liberal democracy. ■

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# Fatally Vulnerable

**The world should never have become so dependent on China's favor and its factories.**

**By Michael R. Auslin**

While the world fights the coronavirus pandemic, China is fighting a propaganda war. Beijing's war aim is simple: shift away from China all blame for the outbreak, the botched initial response, and its early spread into the broader world. At stake is China's global reputation, as well as the potential of a fundamental shift away from China for trade and manufacturing. Also at risk is the personal legacy of General Secretary Xi Jinping, who has staked his legitimacy on his technocratic competence. After dealing with the first great global crisis of the twenty-first century, the world must fundamentally rethink its dependence on China.

## Key points

- » Instead of acting with speed and transparency, the party-state looked to its own reputation and legitimacy.
- » China's propaganda machine continues to shape the global narrative.
- » America and the world have a prudential responsibility to reconsider their dependence on China.
- » Nations must prudently reshape their economies in the expectation of crises yet to come.

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After months of staying holed up in the Forbidden City, Xi finally ventured to Wuhan, the center of the viral outbreak, to declare victory over the virus as all the makeshift hospitals have been closed. Yet no one knows if Beijing's claims that new indigenous cases are slowing down are true or not, given long-standing doubt about the veracity of any official Chinese statistics, and the party's failure to act in the early days of the coronavirus.

The communist government is claiming that it has largely controlled the epidemic even as it suspiciously blames "foreign arrivals" for new cases of illness. What Beijing cares about is clear from its sustained war on global

public opinion. Chinese propaganda mouthpieces have launched a broad array of attacks against the facts, attempting to

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### ***Xi Jinping has staked his legitimacy on his technocratic competence.***

create a new narrative about China's historic victory over the Wuhan virus. Chinese state media are praising the government's "effective, responsible governance," but in truth Beijing is culpable for the spread of the pathogen around China and the world.

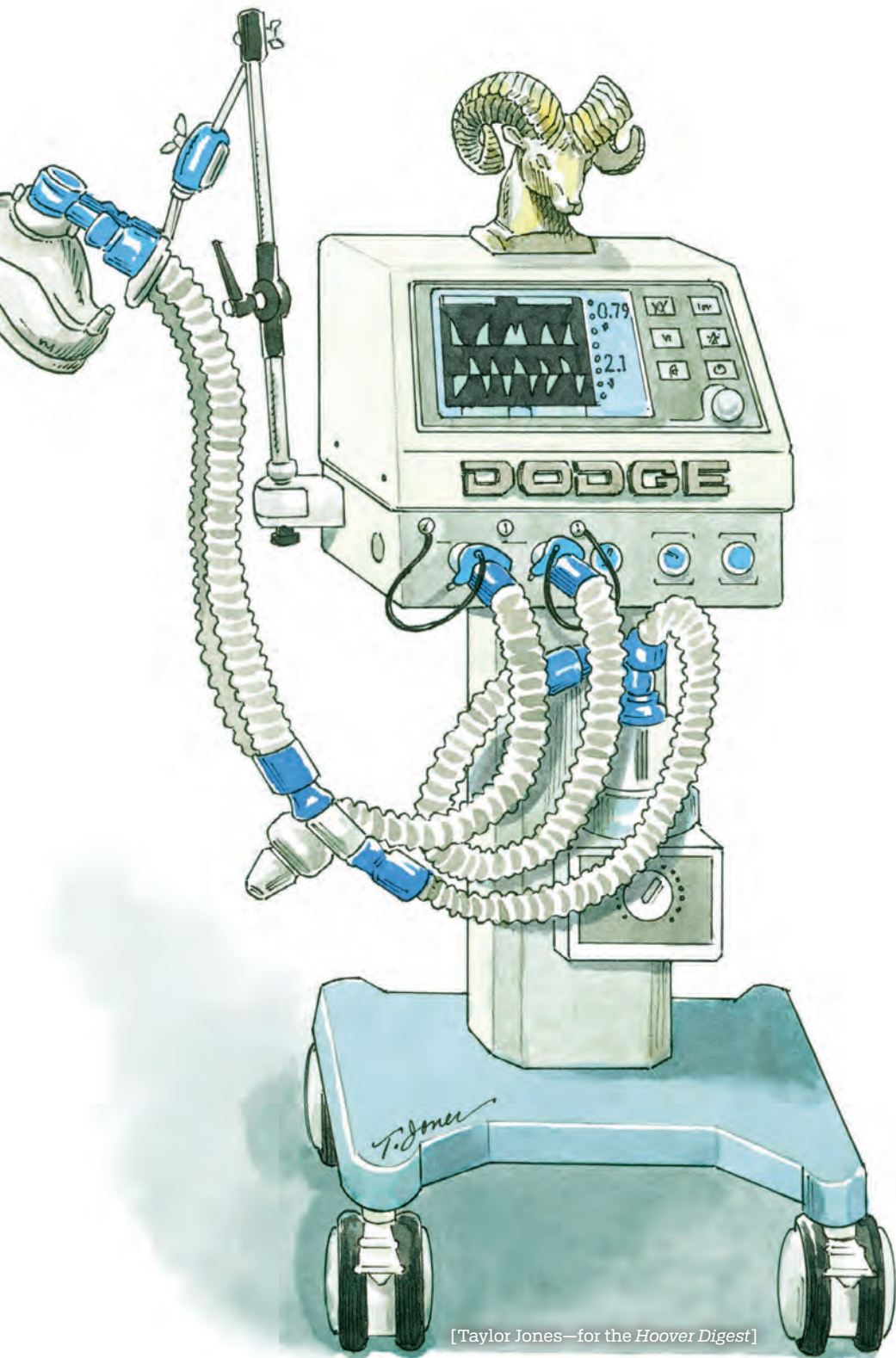
Chinese officials knew about the new virus back in December and did nothing to warn their citizens or impose measures to curb it early on. Instead of acting with speed and transparency, the party-state looked to its own reputation and legitimacy. It threatened whistleblowers like the late doctor Li Wenliang and clamped down on social media to prevent both information about the virus and criticism of the Communist Party and government from spreading.

### **ENABLERS ABOUND**

China also has enablers abroad who help to whitewash Beijing's culpability. World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus refused for months to declare a pandemic, and instead thanked China for "making us safer," a comment straight out of an Orwell novel. This is the same WHO that has refused to allow Taiwan membership, undoubtedly because of Beijing's influence over the WHO's purse strings.

Most egregiously, some Chinese government officials have gone so far as to claim that the Wuhan virus was not indigenous to China at all, while others, like Tedros, suggest that China's response somehow bought the world "time" to deal with the crisis. That such lines are being repeated by global officials and talking heads shows how effectively China's propaganda machine is shaping the global narrative. The world is quickly coming to praise the Communist Party's governance model instead of condemning it.





[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

The reality is that China did not tell its own people about the risk for weeks and refused to let in major foreign epidemiological teams, including from the US Centers for Disease Control. Thus, the world could not get accurate information and laboratory samples early on. By then, it was too late to stop the virus from spreading, and other world capitals were as lax in imposing meaningful travel bans and quarantines as was Beijing.

Because of China's initial failures, governments around the world, including democratic ones, were forced to take extraordinary actions that mimic to one degree or another Beijing's authoritarian tendencies, thus remaking

the world more in China's image. Not the least of the changes will be in more intrusive digital surveillance of citizens, so as to be able to better track

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***To question globalization today is in large part to question the world's relationship with China.***

and stop the spread of future epidemics, a step that might not have been necessary had Beijing been more open about the virus back in December and if the WHO had fulfilled its responsibilities earlier.

Xi and the Chinese Communist Party care about dominating the propaganda war because the Wuhan virus has stood their nation on a razor's edge. Not only is Xi's legitimacy at stake. His government is fighting to divert blame and attention out of fear that the world may utterly reassess modern China, from its technocratic prowess to its safety. Decades of a carefully curated global image may crumble if nations around the globe start paying attention to China's lax public health care, incompetent and intrusive government, and generally less developed domestic conditions.

## **RETHINK BOTH TRADE AND DEPENDENCE**

A global reconsideration of China is long overdue. Legitimate criticisms and doubts about China's governance and growth model were long suppressed by Chinese pressure and the willingness of many to buy into the Communist Party's public line. Public shaming of foreign corporations, global influence operations, and "elite capture"—all are strategies Beijing has deployed to maintain China's public image.

That carefully tended image is now cracked. Those concerned with global health issues may wonder why China is wracked regularly by viral epidemics in addition to coronavirus, such as SARS, African swine fever, and avian flu (another outbreak is happening right now). Others may begin to look more carefully at China's environmental devastation and its





hundreds of thousands of premature deaths each year from air and water pollution.

On the trade side, many foreign corporations already have been reconsidering their operations in China because of rampant intellectual-property theft and rising production costs. Now they may seriously question how safe

it is to continue to do business there. Not only is the health of their employees at risk, but they no longer can be assured that China will be a stable supplier.

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***In truth, Beijing is culpable for the spread of the pathogen around China and the world.***

If the coronavirus becomes a seasonal phenomenon, as some experts predict, then even after a vaccine is developed, new strains of the pathogen will always raise the specter of another out-of-control epidemic overwhelming the party-state's capabilities and infecting the rest of the world.

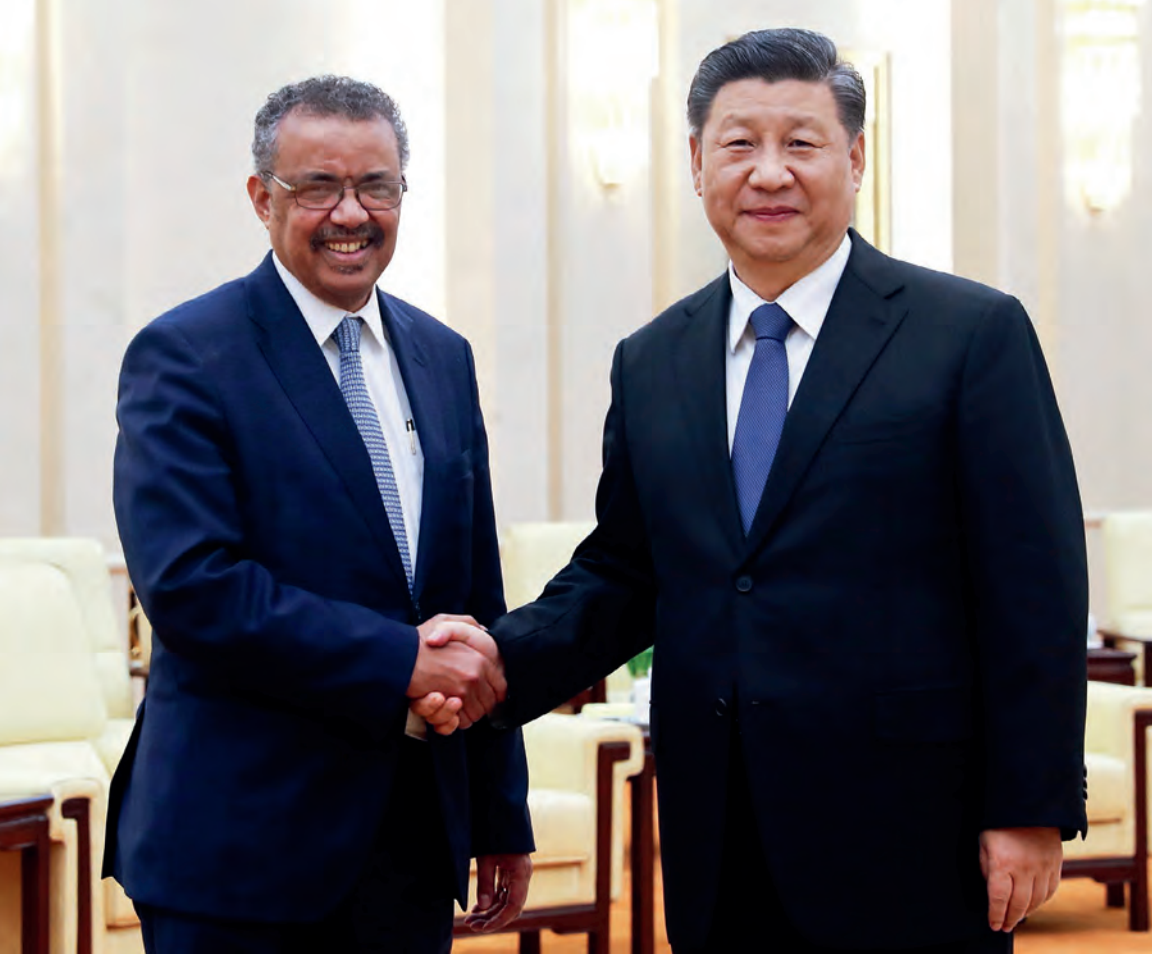
More broadly, the pandemic of 2020 has brought doubts about globalization into the mainstream. Decades of open borders, intercontinental travel, study abroad, just-in-time inventory systems, and the like have created unexpected vulnerabilities in populations and economies. To worry about such weaknesses is not to adopt a Luddite reactionary stance, but to try to salvage the bases of the post-World War II global economic architecture.

Those who assumed that global markets were the optimal economic model and would always work now have to consider whether globalization is the best system for dealing with pandemics like the coronavirus, let alone old-fashioned state power plays such as China imposed on Japan back in 2010, when it blocked the export of rare-earth minerals over territorial disputes in the East China Sea. Perhaps the biggest long-term economic effect of the pandemic will be on long-standing assumptions about global supply chains.

Because of the way the global economy has developed since 1980, to question globalization today is in large part to question the world's relationship to China. As Senators Marco Rubio and Tom Cotton have pointed out, America and the world have a prudential responsibility to reconsider their dependence on China.

Only since the outbreak of the pandemic have Americans come to learn that China is the major supplier for US medicines. The first drug shortages due to dependence on China have already occurred. Eighty percent of America's "active pharmaceutical ingredients" come from abroad, primarily from China (and India); 45 percent of the penicillin used in the country is Chinese-made, as is nearly 100 percent of the ibuprofen. Rosemary Gibson,





***SHAKE ON IT: Chinese leader Xi Jinping, right, shakes hands with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in January. Tedros refused for months to declare a pandemic, and instead thanked China for “making us safer.” [Ju Peng—Xinhua]***

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co-author of *China Rx*, testified last year to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission about this critical dependence, but nothing has changed in this most vital of supply chains.

The medicine story is repeated throughout the US economy and the world. The unparalleled economic growth of China over the past generation has hollowed out domestic industries around the globe and also prevented other nations, such as Vietnam, from moving up the value-added chain. Many industries are, quite frankly, stuck with Chinese companies as their only or primary suppliers. Thus, the costs of finding producers other than China, what is known as “decoupling,” are exorbitant, and few countries currently can replicate China’s infrastructure and workforce.

## THIS SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED

The world never should have been put at risk by the coronavirus. Equally, it never should have let itself become so economically dependent on China. The uniqueness of the coronavirus epidemic is to bring the two seemingly separate issues together. That is why Beijing is desperate to evade blame, not merely for its initial incompetence, but because the costs of the system it has built since 1980 are now coming into long-delayed focus. Coronavirus is a *diabolus ex machina* that threatens the bases of China's modern interaction with foreign nations, from tourism to trade, and from cultural exchange to scientific collaboration.

Xi can best avoid this fate by adopting the very transparency that he and the party have assiduously avoided. Yet openness is a mortal threat to the continued rule of the Chinese Communist Party. The virus thus exposes the CCP's mortal paradox, one showing the paralysis at the heart of modern China. For this reason alone, the world's dependence on China should be responsibly reduced.

To begin, Washington must mandate that some significant percentage of major drugs, everyday medicines, first-aid material such as masks and gowns, and higher-end medical equipment like ventilators be produced domestically, so that we are better prepared for the next pandemic. In addition, controlling our own supply of vital medicines and equipment will allow Washington to continue to be able to assist other countries during similar emergencies, something we are unable to do with the coronavirus and which Beijing is stepping in to take advantage of.

Second, America's broader economic dependence on China needs to be reduced. Materials such as rare earths, 80 percent of which come from Chi-

na, should be produced at home when possible, while the US military needs to limit its exposure to Chinese goods for everything from electronics to tire rubber.

Third, Washington

must ensure that China does not capture the global semiconductor chip-making industry, which is a priority for Beijing. To surrender the crown jewel of the digital economy would put America in a position of permanent dependence vis-à-vis China.

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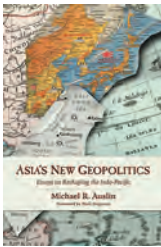
***Washington must make sure that some significant percentage of major drugs, first-aid materials, and high-end medical equipment be made domestically.***

The coronavirus pandemic is a turning point for China and the world. Today, Washington and other global capitals are solely responsible for the success or failure of their own efforts to control the Wuhan virus. They should not let Xi and China get away with rewriting the history of the epidemic. In the longer run, they must look to reform globalization by prudently reshaping their economies and societies in the shadow of future crises. ■

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***The pandemic of 2020 has brought doubts about China and globalization into the mainstream.***

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# Newsom the Rainmaker

**California needs federal aid; Washington needs California to bounce back fast. That's why President Trump and Governor Newsom are playing nice—at least for now.**

**By Bill Whalen**

To understand the complicated relationship between President Trump and California Governor Gavin Newsom, try watching *The Defiant Ones*, a 1958 film starring Tony Curtis and Sydney Poitier. The plot line: two inmates, one black and one white, are on the loose. But there's a catch. They're shackled together and, in order to elude the authorities, must learn to set aside their mutual animosity and work in tandem.

The Trump-Newsom telenovela has moments of spite and revenge, and plenty

## Key points

» Among other considerations, President Trump needs California's governor to help maintain the calm in America's nation-state.

» Trump also needs a foil. California offers him a case study of progressivism gone to ridiculous extremes, be it on immigration, homelessness, or taxes.

» Gavin Newsom, if he has presidential ambitions, would benefit from another four years of Trump.

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*Bill Whalen is the Virginia Hobbs Carpenter Fellow in Journalism at the Hoover Institution and the host of **Area 45**, a Hoover podcast devoted to the policy avenues available to America's forty-fifth president.*

of outbursts and overreactions. Or so the story line went until Covid-19 came along. Suddenly, Trump and Newsom have started saying complimentary things about each other's competency. Since the pandemic brought California to a halt and the nation's economy to its knees, there has been no Twitter spit-balling between the two heads of state, which characterized the first year-plus of their interaction. Even the legal war between California's Democratic governing class and the Trump administration seemingly has been placed on the back burner.

So what has happened? For starters, the pandemic made the two politicians reliant upon each other in ways neither anticipated. Newsom asked the federal government for \$1 billion in pandemic-related relief (setting up state-run and mobile hospitals,

testing and treatment

for individuals without

health insurance, plus

housing options to help

Californians practice bet-

ter social distancing). Newsom also requested to have a naval hospital ship

deploy to Los Angeles to help local hospitals deal with overcapacity; Newsom

thanked the president for sending the ship.

So Newsom, by taking the high road with his onetime nemesis, stands to benefit from federal largesse, as do other governors ordinarily at odds with the administration, such as Andrew Cuomo of New York. But what's in it for Trump?

One is a pocketbook consideration. America's economy simply cannot recover as swiftly as the president would like—that is, on an upward escalator come Election Day—if California, by itself the world's fifth-largest economy, is slow to bounce back. Before the outbreak, California's economy was projected to outpace the nation's in 2020. But the pandemic, with its effect on California's economic cornerstones of trade, tourism, and technology, places that very much in doubt. The more Trump helps California and the quicker its recovery, the better his re-election chances.

Second, Trump can't afford the same visual that haunted George H. W. Bush during his hoped-for re-election year: the spectacle of an unhinged California. In April 1992, after a jury had found four police officers not guilty of using excessive force in the beating of Rodney King, South Central Los Angeles broke out in rioting. Residents set fires, looted stores, and targeted light-skinned motorists for beatings. What America saw, in addition to urban mayhem: an incumbent president who seemingly possessed bad instincts

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***The more Trump helps California and the quicker its recovery, the better his re-election chances.***



(Bush was roundly criticized for sending in federal troops to restore order and then waiting five days to visit in person). Six months later, the Republican incumbent was out of a job.

Trump is not in the same  
political straits as was  
Bush back in the  
day. For



[Taylor Jones for the Hoover Digest]

openers, he has a healthier relationship with his party's base. Still, Trump needs California's governor to help maintain the calm in America's nation-state, lest voters lose faith in his ability to manage the country through the present crisis.

So, yes,  
Trump and





Newsom are shackled, because of both a global pandemic and their respective destinies. But any president seeking re-election also needs a foil. Ronald Reagan had the Soviets. George W. Bush had Osama bin Laden. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama invoked heartless Republicans hell-bent on cutting the public safety net.

And Trump? Once politics return to normal, he once again will stage rallies to alarm Middle America with images of “democratic socialism” run amok. And with Bernie Sanders a spent force, Trump can turn to California as a study case of progressivism gone to ridiculous extremes, be it immigration, homelessness, or an insatiable appetite to tax its residents.

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***The pandemic made the two politicians reliant upon each other in ways neither anticipated.***

As for Newsom, he could use another four years of a Trump presidency to position himself for a White House run in 2024 (a Biden failure,

coupled with eight years of Trump fatigue, bodes well for a Western governor). Otherwise, Newsom is looking at one of two unpleasant scenarios: waiting until the 2028 election (assuming an octogenarian President Biden wins a second term); or, taking on a sitting vice president if, it turns out, Biden is but a one-term act. From Richard Nixon to Joe Biden, history shows that vice presidents don’t always move up the ladder, but they’re hard to take down in primaries.

A plot spoiler in case you don’t want to stream the movie: the chained fugitives in *The Defiant Ones* manage to break their shackles, with the movie ending in a pair of unselfish acts. Not a happy ending, but a positive one. Can Donald Trump and Gavin Newsom ever reach that point in their relationship? ■

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# *Walled Cities on a Hill*

**Long after this crisis fades, free nations must continue healing the world economy, restraining power, and pursuing justice and security. The democratic future is at stake.**

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***By Henry Kissinger***

**T**he surreal atmosphere of the Covid-19 pandemic calls to mind how I felt as a young man in the 84th Infantry Division during the Battle of the Bulge. Now, as in late 1944, there is a sense of inchoate danger, aimed not at any particular person, but striking randomly and with devastation. But there is an important difference between that faraway time and ours. American endurance then was fortified by an ultimate national purpose. Now, in a divided country, efficient and farsighted government is necessary to overcome obstacles unprecedented in magnitude and global scope. Sustaining the public trust is crucial to social solidarity, to the relation of societies with each other, and to international peace and stability.

Nations cohere and flourish on the belief that their institutions can foresee calamity, arrest its impact, and restore stability. When the Covid-19 pandemic is over, many countries' institutions will be perceived as having failed. Whether this judgment is objectively fair is irrelevant. The reality is the world will never be the same after the coronavirus. To argue now about the past only makes it harder to do what has to be done.

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*Henry Kissinger is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution.*



***THE MESSAGE: An electronic billboard thanks doctors and nurses in Manhattan in April. Sustaining the public trust is crucial to social solidarity, to the relation of societies with each other, and to international peace and stability.***

[William Volcov—ZUMA]

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The coronavirus has struck with unprecedented scale and ferocity. The US administration has done a solid job in avoiding immediate catastrophe. The ultimate test will be whether the virus's spread can be arrested and then reversed in a manner and at a scale that maintains public confidence in Americans' ability to govern themselves. The crisis effort, however vast and necessary, must not crowd out the urgent task of launching a parallel enterprise for the transition to the post-coronavirus order.

Leaders are dealing with the crisis on a largely national basis, but the virus's society-dissolving effects do not recognize borders. While the assault on human health will—hopefully—be temporary, the political and economic upheaval it has unleashed could last for generations. No country, not even the United States, can in a purely national effort overcome the virus. Addressing the necessities of the moment must ultimately be coupled with a global collaborative vision and program. If we cannot do both in tandem, we will face the worst of each.

Drawing lessons from the development of the Marshall Plan and the Manhattan Project, the United States is obliged to undertake a major effort in three domains:

» **Shore up global resilience to infectious disease.** Triumphs of medi-

cal science like the polio vaccine and the eradication of smallpox, or the emerging statistical-technical marvel of medical diagnosis through artificial intelligence,

have lulled us into a dangerous complacency. We need to develop new techniques and technologies for infection control and commensurate vaccines across large populations. Cities, states, and regions must consistently prepare to protect their people from pandemics through stockpiling, cooperative planning, and exploration at the frontiers of science.

» **Strive to heal the wounds to the world economy.** Global leaders have learned important lessons from the 2008 financial crisis. The current economic crisis is more complex: the contraction unleashed by the coronavirus is, in its speed and global scale, unlike anything ever known in history. And necessary public-health measures such as social distancing and closing schools and businesses have contributed to the economic pain. Programs should also seek to ameliorate the effects of impending chaos on the world's most vulnerable populations.

» **Safeguard the principles of the liberal world order.** The founding legend of modern government is a walled city protected by powerful rulers, sometimes despotic, other times benevolent, yet always strong enough to protect the people from an

external enemy. Enlightenment thinkers reframed this concept, arguing that the purpose of the legitimate state is to provide for the fundamental needs of the people: security, order, economic well-being, and justice. Individuals

cannot secure these things on their own. The pandemic has prompted an anachronism, a revival of the walled city in an age when prosperity depends on global trade and movement of people.

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***Nations cohere and flourish on the belief that their institutions can foresee calamity, arrest its impact, and restore stability.***

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***No country, not even the United States, can in a purely national effort overcome the virus. There must be a global collaborative vision and program.***

The world's democracies need to defend and sustain their Enlightenment values. A global retreat from balancing power with legitimacy will cause the social contract to disintegrate both domestically and internationally. Yet this millennial issue of legitimacy and power cannot be settled simultaneously with the effort to overcome the Covid-19 plague. Restraint is necessary on all sides—in both domestic politics and international diplomacy. Priorities must be established.

We went on from the Battle of the Bulge into a world of growing prosperity and enhanced human dignity. Now, the historic challenge for leaders is to manage the crisis while building the future. Failure could set the world on fire. ■

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# *This Sudden Chill*

**Beijing's global ambitions are only increasing, pandemic or not. So is the danger China poses to the United States and other free nations.**

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**By Michael R. Auslin**

**A**mong the biggest victims of the coronavirus pandemic is the fiction of amicable US-China relations. Those ties have been worsening for years, even before President Trump decided to call out Beijing's predatory behavior starting in 2017, but now it seems impossible to salvage the old working ties. Washington now faces an unambiguously adversarial relationship with the Chinese Communist Party, one in which global ideological blocs may be drawn. Losing this new cold war would be a grievous blow to global transparency and liberal order. It would also threaten a significant reduction of American power and influence abroad.

Just a few months ago, it appeared that traditional engagement between the United States and China might survive. The January trade agreement was the most visible sign that elites in both countries wanted to return to some level of normalcy. Outstanding issues such as Huawei and 5G technology were slouching toward a state of permanent irresolution, the imprisonment of a million Uighurs was largely forgotten, and cultural and student exchanges were escaping any serious interruption. A stalemate in the South China Sea was also emerging, with the Trump administration dramatically increasing the number of freedom-of-navigation operations but with the

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Chinese dug into their new military bases. All this has been swept away by the coronavirus crisis.

It is important both politically and morally to retain clarity about what has happened. Arguments that Washington and Beijing must work together to defeat the pandemic are foundering on the rocks of the Chinese government's freely chosen actions. Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping decided early on that concealing the truth about the outbreak, both at

home and abroad, was a national priority. This put his country on a collision course with Washington and the world.

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### ***The Chinese Communist Party openly contrasts its claimed victory with conditions in the United States.***

Xi's government has consistently denied the hard evidence that Chinese officials knew about human-to-human transmission at least as far back as December, failing to warn the globe and misleading the credulous World Health Organization. Nor has it admitted that the government destroyed virologic samples from Wuhan. Meanwhile, even though the party has "solemnly apologized" to the family of Dr. Li Wenliang and exonerated him for his attempts to warn about the epidemic, it continues to threaten and suppress brave Chinese whistleblowers who attempt to reveal the truth about what is happening in China.

Beijing wants to convince global public opinion that it has beaten the coronavirus and is in a position to help save the world. The Communist Party openly contrasts its claimed victory with conditions in the United States, claiming that the virus rages uncontrolled in America because of President Trump's ineffective action. Yet the truth is more complex. Leaked video shows the supposedly closed Wuhan emergency hospitals being relocated outside the city, while the officials have decreed that asymptomatic patients, primarily in Wuhan, not be counted as new cases, thereby giving the false impression that there is no more indigenous spread of the pathogen. Thanks to the efforts of Chinese citizens and opposition media outlets, evidence is mounting by the day that the epidemic is far from controlled in China. And, far from acting as an altruistic partner attempting to help other stricken countries, Beijing is actually charging nations for the emergency aid it is giving, even when those supplies are defective, as in the case of test kits sent to the Czech Republic.

## **PENT-UP FRUSTRATIONS**

In response to his government's manifest failures during the coronavirus crisis, Xi launched a global propaganda campaign, largely targeting America.



As proof of Washington's bad faith, Beijing objected to use of terms such as "Wuhan flu." In turn, government spokesmen and scientists have blamed the United States for creating the coronavirus and releasing it into China, and Beijing has mobilized bots on social media to spread the lies.

Blaming Washington for the outbreak prepares the ground for claiming that it was America that is the cause of the economic straits into which China's economy appears to be sliding. There are also signs that Xi is continuing, if not increasing, his military actions in the disputed South China Sea, potentially as a way to deflect domestic criticism and to warn other nations not to think China has been weakened by the pandemic.

In some ways, the coronavirus pandemic was simply an excuse for years of pent-up frustration and distrust between Washington and Beijing to be fully released. Yet the Communist Party has by its own choices sown permanent doubt about its trustworthiness as a global partner. Its behavior during the crisis can no longer be swept aside by diplomatic niceties that ignore the facts on the ground.

Given Xi's cover-up, it is not only reasonable but necessary to ask how any US government, let alone the rest of the world, can trust what Chinese officials say. Those who believe that increased engagement is the only way to solve common prob-

lems must question how any meaningful dialogue between US and Chinese leaders can take place while

China continues to lie about the origins of the virus and its own actions.

This poisoning of relations between America and China won't easily be overcome. Indeed, it may well have established the new normal between the two nations. For those committed to maintaining as much as possible of the post-1945 world order, Beijing's actions have shown that its long-professed claims about contributing to global governance are questionable if not worthless—and just when they are needed the most.

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***The Communist Party has by its own choices sown permanent doubt about its trustworthiness as a global partner.***

## **LARGER STAKES**

But is all this really a new cold war, with its connotations of existential struggle? The stakes for the liberal order are high. If Beijing succeeds in rewriting history and escaping either censure or pressure to change its behavior, then the world will remain vulnerable to future Chinese public health and environmental failures. In addition, countries like Italy, Spain, and Serbia, which have accepted

emergency Chinese government “aid,” will be added to those countries increasingly dependent on Chinese trade through the Belt and Road Initiative. This will further gestate an incipient pro-Chinese political bloc that will increase Beijing’s influence and reach, thereby enabling its further bad behavior.

If this is a new cold war, it is being fought to maintain certain standards and norms that have benefited the world for seven decades. Beijing has long touted its techno-authoritarian model as superior to liberal forms of government. Ceding victory in the coronavirus battle would help cement the belief that the party’s repressive and opaque systems are the wave of the future.

Given Beijing’s propaganda success so far, it may seem inevitable that the Communist Party will emerge stronger than ever from this crisis. Yet America should never forget that it has potentially hundreds of millions of allies in the ordinary Chinese who feel betrayed and oppressed by their government. Their bravery in shouting down party-state officials and recording heartbreaking video testifies to their desire for more responsible, not to mention humane, leaders. Other countries that early tried to warn the world, like Taiwan, should be given a larger international role. The global community, teetering during the pandemic, may also have a role to play, as legal opinion is emerging that Beijing can be held responsible for its failures at the beginning of the crisis, based on international law.

It is too early to understand the full scope of this new cold war. Suffice it to say, the old model is shattered and Xi is right to fear that China must now re-earn the world’s trust. A long propaganda and proxy struggle between Washington and Beijing is more likely than ever. With emotions running high, the risk of an armed encounter, accidental or otherwise, between the two is also heightened. In the end, victory may come down to which economy proves more resilient in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, thereby proving which system truly is stronger. ■

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# “Doomed to Cooperate”

**Just as during the Cold War, Beijing and Washington must work together against this common threat or fail separately.**

**By Michael A. McFaul**

**T**he coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated already-tense relations between the United States and China. Even before Covid-19 came along, many experts were already describing the relationship between the two countries as a new cold war or “Cold War 2.0.” But now, the virus has added a new accelerant to the confrontation—with both sides blaming each other for creating and spreading the disease.

The world’s two superpowers, the United States and China, will compete in many realms for decades to come. Alongside

## **Key points**

- » China and the United States will compete for decades to come. But they will also share interests that demand cooperation.
- » A high level US-China working group could come up with a joint plan of attack against the virus.
- » Washington and Beijing must demonstrate leadership in world forums.
- » Cooperating with China doesn’t mean checking our values at the door.

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*Michael A. McFaul is the Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of Hoover’s Working Group on Foreign Policy and Grand Strategy, and a contributor to the George P. Shultz Project on Governance in an Emerging New World. He is also director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University and a professor of political science at Stanford.*

confrontation, however, Chinese and American leaders also must realize that they share some interests that require cooperation. Addressing a global pandemic is one of them.

Unfortunately, leaders in both countries have lately succumbed to some of their worst impulses. The Chinese government has been conducting a propaganda campaign—including even the expulsion of American journalists from China—to rewrite the origins of the virus and to blame the United States for its spread. The Trump administration has taken to referring to the coronavirus as a “Chinese virus.” Some US officials have promised retribution for China’s role in spreading the virus internationally.

This blame game serves the long-term interests of neither the United States nor China. It needs to stop.

## MANAGEABLE TENSIONS

During the Cold War, the United States and Soviet Union learned to confront each other on several issues around the world and at the same time worked out ways to cooperate when their interests overlapped, as in the cases of nuclear arms control, smallpox eradication, and joint space research. American and Chinese leaders must learn similar habits for managing competition and cooperation in the twenty-first century.

Working together on managing the coming global economic downturn is our next common challenge. Attempting to solve either of these two problems unilaterally will make both countries worse off.

Both President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping should begin by initiating confidence-building measures to set the stage for more regular diplomacy. Xi should remove his flame-throwing spokesperson at the Min-

istry of Foreign Affairs, Zhao Lijian, and find a face-saving way to allow the ousted American journalists to return. Trump

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***The race for a vaccine is one that all should win, not just one country.***

and his team should stick to scientific terminology when describing this global virus. (In 2003, President George W. Bush referred to the then-new coronavirus, which originated in China and threatened the world, as simply “SARS.”)

Next, Trump and Xi should establish a high-level working group to engage in direct talks, air their differences, agree to new norms for public discourse, and—most important—develop a joint plan for combating the virus, our common enemy.



***CAN'T STAND THE HEAT?: In a famous Cold War moment that came to be known as the “Kitchen Debate,” US Vice President Richard Nixon challenges Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in front of a model American kitchen displayed in Moscow in July 1959. Future Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev stands behind Nixon. US and Soviet leaders learned to cooperate in many areas for mutual benefit.*** [Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum]

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A zero-sum view of Chinese and US international efforts in response to the coronavirus is counterproductive. Chinese aid to Europe does not undermine American interests. US officials should applaud Chinese humanitarian assistance to nations such as Italy, and then provide the same for our ailing ally. Italy needs everyone's help. Likewise, Chinese officials should welcome, not block, American doctors seeking to learn more about the Wuhan outbreak. And the race for a vaccine for the virus is one that all should win, not just one country.

## **THE POWER OF TWO**

US and Chinese leaders should also lead in multilateral arenas, especially the Group of 20—a vital organization for managing the 2008 global financial crisis—and the UN Security Council. In the short term, as the two great powers in these multilateral institutions, the United States and China should be leading global efforts to share data about the coronavirus, coordinate



international research, provide and encourage greater funding of the World Health Organization, and triage humanitarian assistance.

In the longer term, the United States and China must demonstrate leadership in multilateral forums to adopt new rules and norms for preventing and

ameliorating future pandemics. These will include protocols for testing readiness, international standards for personal protective equipment, and the abolition everywhere of the dangerous “wet

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***During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union learned to confront each other on certain issues and cooperate when their interests overlapped.***

markets” implicated in the outbreak. Once this current pandemic recedes, we will need a *global* accounting of best practices and lessons learned for fighting this virus—not just national studies.

Working with Beijing to defeat a common enemy does not mean we have to concede to China on other issues, stop deterring China in other arenas, or check our values at the door. But going it alone—against a disease with no nationality—does not advance US national interests or the interests of our allies and partners around the world.

After the Cuban missile crisis, US and Soviet leaders, and especially scientists in both countries, learned that on nuclear issues, we were, as Siegfried Hecker characterized it, “doomed to cooperate.” The coronavirus pandemic should teach Chinese and American leaders—not to mention scientists, doctors, and health care officials in both countries—that even rivals are sometimes doomed to cooperate. ■

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# How to Make China Pay

**Beijing hid the coronavirus outbreak, at the cost of broken economies and lost lives. International law offers one way to seek damages.**

**By John Yoo and Ivana Stradner**

One of the big questions facing the international community is how to hold China legally and politically accountable for all its dishonesty and harm to people around the world. According to reports, US intelligence agencies confirmed to the White House that China deliberately understated the number of its people who contracted and died from the coronavirus epidemic. Such deceit follows Beijing's recklessness in suppressing news of the origins, rapid spread, and lethality of Covid-19 in December and January.

## Key points

- » America alone may suffer billions in health care costs, trillions in lost economic activity, and trillions more in government debt.
- » International institutions offer no meaningful way to force China to remedy the harm it's caused.
- » To protect against the next outbreak, the United States should create a monitoring mechanism similar to the nuclear verification regimes of the Cold War.
- » The United States could impose sanctions on China or even seize assets of state-owned companies.

*John Yoo is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, the Emanuel S. Heller Professor of Law at the University of California, Berkeley, and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Ivana Stradner is a Jeane Kirkpatrick Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.*

Chinese officials punished doctors who tried to warn of the outbreak in Wuhan, slowed identification and research on the virus, and allowed thousands to leave the region for the rest of the world.

If China were an individual, a company, or a law-abiding nation, it would be required to provide compensation for the harm it has inflicted globally. The United States alone may well suffer billions in health care costs, trillions in lost economic activity, and trillions more in new government spending. China's failures render it legally liable under international law, but the Covid-19 crisis has exposed the crisis of ineffectiveness and corruption of international institutions. Instead of focusing on international law, the United States should thus protect its national interests by opting for self-help.

International institutions provide no meaningful way to force China to remedy the harm it has caused. The United Nations Security Council, allegedly the supreme lawmaking and executive body in international law, cannot

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***If China were an individual, a company, or a law-abiding nation, it would be required to provide compensation for the harm it has inflicted globally.***

hold China to account because China and Russia exercise their permanent right to veto any Security Council resolution. China has rendered the United Nations impotent, even

though UN Secretary-General António Guterres has declared the pandemic the world's most challenging crisis since World War II, as it has become a threat to international peace and security by shutting down swaths of the global economy and killing many thousands.

The United States and its allies also could try to sue China before an international tribunal, such as the International Court of Justice, although countries have never been sued for their violation of infectious-disease treaties. But even if a court were to judge China responsible for the injury caused by its handling of Covid-19, China would ignore any decision. When the Permanent Court of Arbitration found that China's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea violated international law, Beijing simply ignored that ruling. A Chinese official declared that the judgment was "nothing more than a piece of paper." We should expect nothing different from China in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **CORRUPT AND CONFLICTED**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has only a weak, nonbinding dispute-resolution mechanism, but China's failure to promptly report the coronavirus

outbreak to the organization violated the International Health Regulations, which require states to notify the WHO of potential public health emergencies “of international concern.”

In fact, China has used its financial war chest to manipulate the WHO.

China’s annual funding of the organization, which relies on voluntary donations, has increased to \$86 million since 2014 (a rise of 52 percent). The

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***China has used its financial war chest to manipulate the World Health Organization.***

WHO’s director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has praised China’s leadership for its “openness to share information” with the international community and stated that China “has bought the world time” regarding the coronavirus. In January, the WHO parroted China’s line that there was no “clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus.” The WHO has also followed the Chinese line on Taiwan, excluding it from membership and barring it from Covid-19 response meetings.

While some scholars have suggested that a larger budget would make the WHO more effective, the Trump administration in April announced it would halt America’s contribution, pending an investigation into its handling of the coronavirus outbreak. Not only has the WHO become a Chinese client, but it also spends \$200 million a year on luxury travel. The United States should investigate the WHO and its director-general and expose their ties with China.

Rather than rely on corrupt, conflicted international institutions such as the WHO, the United States and its allies should shift to self-help. To protect against the next virus outbreak, the United States should create a monitoring mechanism that

can detect global health threats early, spread information about them reliably, and coordinate national efforts to

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***“Trust but verify” could become the watchword for a truly effective global health system.***

develop a response. The International Atomic Energy Agency’s inspection regime for illicit nuclear weapons could provide a model. The United States and other wealthy nations could establish a similar inspection regime and provide financial assistance to developing nations that agree to participate. “Trust but verify” became the watchword for President Reagan’s nuclear reduction treaties with the Soviets, and it could guide a truly effective global health system as well.

The United States should also punish China for its coronavirus failings as an incentive for Beijing to mend its ways. Washington could persuade leading nations to join it in excluding Chinese scholars and students from scientific research centers and universities. China has used its “Thousand Talents” program to recruit scientists to help steal sensitive technology from American laboratories. Confucius Institutes have spread propaganda while masquerading as Chinese cultural centers. Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Representative Francis Rooney (R-Florida) have introduced the Stop Higher Education Espionage and Theft Act to help colleges protect against threats by foreign actors.

## **SERIOUS SANCTIONS**

According to China experts, President Xi Jinping depends on a humming economy and appeals to nationalism for his political legitimacy. The United States and its allies could strike at the heart of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) claim to a mandate from heaven by further ratcheting up the

pressure on Beijing to adopt a more cooperative, transparent stance on public health by imposing economic sanctions and inflicting serious economic harm on China. The Trump administration

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***Let the Communist Party go to court and try to blame the very victims of its wrongdoing for the worst public health catastrophe in a century.***

could enhance its efforts to exclude China from buying and selling advanced technologies, such as microchips, artificial intelligence, or biotechnology. It took an important step in that direction by implementing new measures on chip exports to Huawei.

In addition, the United States should use targeted sanctions on specific CCP leaders and their supporters by freezing their assets and prohibiting their travel. The administration needs to impose pain on CCP supporters so that they will want to change policy to alleviate their own economic losses.

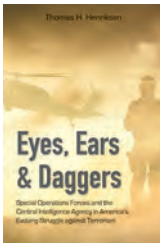
In addition to halting any further trade cooperation with Beijing, the administration could also seize the assets of Chinese state-owned companies. Under its Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing reportedly has lent billions to developing nations in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, and then taken over their strategic ports and facilities once the debts fall due. The United States could turn this strategy on its head by supporting the



expropriation of these assets by legal process and the cancellation of these debts as compensation for coronavirus losses.

Seizing Chinese property would allow the United States to finally use international law to its advantage. Let China try to go to court and claim that the United States, its allies, and the developing world have violated international rules. Let Beijing try to show that these nations have no right to compensation for its cover-up of the coronavirus outbreak. Let the Chinese Communist Party try to claim, outside its own borders, just as it does within them, that it can deny common sense and blame the very victims of its wrongdoing for the worst public health catastrophe in a century. ■

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# *All Serve the State*

**Censorship and propaganda are business as usual for Chinese “news agencies,” which in fact are spy agencies.**

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***By Markos Kounalakis***

A decade ago, I first saw signs that Chinese news organizations were operating as global spy dens and diplomatic outposts. In February, America decided not only to call them out for what they do but to punish them further for this activity within the United States.

It's about time.

My 2018 book, *Spin Wars and Spy Games: Global Media and Intelligence Gathering*, detailed how China's global news organizations are used to advance its national interests. China—and also Russia—uses its foreign news bureaus as fronts for editors and journalists to work as both witting and unwitting spies. My research over the years shows that these news bureaus' primary responsibility is to report to their countries' political leadership in Beijing.

Chinese state-run news organizations task their correspondents with actively taking advantage of America's open society. That means exploiting First Amendment journalism rights and the relative naiveté of unsuspecting subjects and institutions.

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***Markos Kounalakis is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution.***

China's reporter-agents collect and analyze critical information about the United States and other countries. Bureaus then package and deliver it to their masters back home. In the process, they also repurpose it as a quasi-journalistic propagandistic product for a mass foreign audience in their newspapers and broadcasts. To audiences, it looks and feels like real news, but it's really just a byproduct of intelligence gathering.

For this reason, the State Department recently led the charge against five Chinese news organizations: Xinhua, CGTN, China Radio, *China Daily*, and the *People's Daily*. As a result, the United States has further downgraded their status. Last year, CGTN and Xinhua fell under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), requiring them to report to the US Justice Department. The DOJ did not explain why, but the reason is that these seemingly benign institutions really are just extensions of the state, delivering a slanted, Beijing-approved, often heavy-handed propaganda message. They were also operating surreptitiously as intelligence-gathering shops.

China's state-run bodies must serve the state.

They live or die by the authority and funding they receive from the country's leadership

and, in this case, the Chinese Communist Party. Whether Xinhua or CGTN, these Chinese information-gathering institutions do the party's bidding and coordinate the priorities of its United Front Work Department propaganda. China is willing to spend billions of dollars to promote its United Front Work and support the growing network of Xinhua and CGTN bureaus around the world.

Meantime, the advertising-based business model for American and other Western news organizations has collapsed, diminishing not only the frequency of publication—goodbye, Saturday editions—but also dramatically reducing the number of journalists, researchers, and editors at nearly every single news source. This is bad news for everyone. It is bad news for democracy.

Not only is the Chinese government outspending the West's traditional news organizations, it is hiring some of its former reporters and editors. These freshly unemployed or underemployed Western professionals bring with them their Rolodexes, networks, and access. In the process, they become unwitting foreign agents. Further, readers and audiences feel comfortable with the deceptive news product delivered by these familiar and credible journalists. We accept familiar faces appearing on China's television networks.

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***Unemployed or underemployed  
Western professionals become  
unwitting foreign agents.***

The goal of China's relatively new entry into the global news and information marketplace is a troubling development around the world. Western open societies welcome and protect traditional news organizations as important components of society. They have traditionally been bulwarks of democracy and an integral part of a system of checks and balances.

China has taken advantage of America's openness, not merely with unfair foreign trade in its commodity and consumer markets but now in the marketplace of ideas. It is right that the government has called out China for this behavior and activity.



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

But it's also time for American society and government to invest in traditional American news institutions to help them not only to survive but also to thrive in this newly competitive global information environment. Both the government and the public need to recognize and support American news organizations for the sake of maintaining democracy's infrastructure.

Washington's targeting Chinese news outlets has led to retaliation against American journalists in China. Foreign correspondents for the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* were ordered out of the country. That's rough, of course, but for years China has been using other means to limit the presence of undesired foreign correspondents in the country. The easiest, preferred method was to deny Western journalists visas.

Expect more Chinese retaliation against Western journalists in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Some will be accused of spying. The real retaliation, however, will be the further demise of the credibility, strength, and economic viability of traditional American journalism. ■

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# *Illusions of Change*

**China was supposed to have transformed itself into a modern, democratic state by now, but this was not to be. What went wrong—and what should the United States do now? A conversation with Hoover fellow **Stephen Kotkin**.**

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**By Peter Robinson**

**Peter Robinson, *Uncommon Knowledge*:** A professor of history at Princeton and a fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stephen Kotkin is one of the nation's most compelling observers of global affairs past and present. He is now working on the third and final volume of his definitive biography of Josef Stalin. Stephen, welcome to this special work-from-home edition of *Uncommon Knowledge*.

**Stephen Kotkin:** Great to be back.

**Robinson:** We'll come to the coronavirus in a moment. First, China and what's gone wrong. Here's a quotation, the late Hoover fellow Henry Rowen writing in 1996: "When will China become a democracy? The answer is around the year 2015. This prediction is based on China's impressive

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*Stephen Kotkin is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the John P. Birkenlund '52 Professor in History and International Affairs in the Woodrow Wilson School and History Department of Princeton University. Peter Robinson is the editor of the **Hoover Digest**, the host of **Uncommon Knowledge**, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

economic growth, which in turn fits the way freedom has grown elsewhere in Asia.” China was supposed to follow the pattern of South Korea and Taiwan. You start with economic freedoms, you achieve economic growth, the population begins to demand political freedoms and you end up with democracy. That has not happened, how come?

**Kotkin:** First of all, God bless Henry Rowen. And unfortunately, he did not predict the future properly. It would have been better had Henry been right. I’ll give you two quick answers to your opening question, Peter. First, an important point is that

it’s nonsense that authoritarian regimes have some type of unwritten social contract with their population, so that the population agrees to give up their freedom, and

the regime promises to raise standards of living. The reason that’s nonsense is because if the regime fails to uphold its side of the bargain—for example, if it fails to continue to generate economic growth—the regime doesn’t say, “oh, we failed to uphold the contract and so we’re leaving power voluntarily.”

The regime instead says, we’re going to use more repression. And we’re going to ramp up the nationalist xenophobia or whatever tools it has in the toolkit. So, it’s very important to understand that there is no unwritten social contract or bargain with authoritarian regimes. They do not leave voluntarily; there are rare exceptions.

The second important point and answer to your question is that China is ruled by the Communist Party. We forgot about this. We tended to downplay the idea that it was still ruled by a Communist Party. But we’ve seen how important that dimension of the question is. Communism in rule is an all-or-nothing proposition. You can’t be half-communist. In other words, you’re either a monopoly regime, or you begin to disintegrate; either you’re a sole party, and you don’t brook any possible competition in the political sphere, or there are people who want different political parties and who don’t need your monopoly anymore. This is the prime lesson of the history of communism, that the party rule is an all-or-nothing, monopoly-or-dissolution proposition.

In fact, the Chinese Communist Party spent a great deal of time studying this question and has taught all its cadres why the Soviet Union fell. They study the Soviet collapse endlessly, and Xi Jinping, the head of the party in

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***“People have their own wealth, their own sources of power, their own sense of independence, and they begin to talk about politics as if they have the right to do so.”***



**ПУСТЬ ЖИВЁТ И КРЕПНЕТ  
НЕРУШИМАЯ ДРУЖБА И СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО  
СОВЕТСКОГО И КИТАЙСКОГО НАРОДОВ!**

China, speaks about this publicly. What you see, however, is China indulge market economics but retain centralized political power, because they need the economic growth. They need to benefit from the rising standard of living and everything else. However, when the market grows, it becomes a threat to the Chinese Communist Party. Because people have their own wealth, their own sources of power, their own sense of independence, and they begin to talk about politics as if they have the right to do so, as if it's not the Communist Party's monopoly. So, the party indulges, it allows markets to expand and then it clamps down on the market.

**Robinson:** Stephen, I want to go back and highlight this point. I can remember asking you, what's the big finding when you study the Soviet archives? And you immediately replied, they were communists. There's the notion that the Soviet Union by the time of Brezhnev had stopped believing, it was just a great-power struggle, they were imperialist. And Stephen Kotkin said, "No, they were communists." Honestly, I don't know of anyone who believes that the Communist Party in China is serious about its communism. Is that correct? Or do you want to add some nuance?

**Kotkin:** You're right, Peter; the secret of the Soviet archives was that they were communists. So what does this mean? It has two dimensions. One dimension you could call the dogma or the ideology. The other dimension is the organizational structure, the Leninist party. You can watch the dogma unravel. You watch the ideology get chipped away until everybody is a cynic, rather than a partial cynic or a minority cynic. However, the Leninist party organization means there's no political system of legitimate voting where multiple parties and secret-ballot elections get to compete, with different programs. There's no peacefully leaving power, when the people vote you out of office. Instead, there is a permanently endowed party rule which monopolizes not just the political sphere but the public sphere and imposes censorship on everybody else. So, you can watch the ideology erode, and we've watched that in China. But the party somehow doesn't give up its monopoly position of power.

**POWER PARTNERS: A famous 1951 propaganda poster (opposite page) shows Soviet leader Josef Stalin congratulating Mao Zedong, ruler of communist China. "Let our indestructible friendship live and get stronger," it reads. Mao's book has Lenin's name on the cover. Today's Chinese rulers "study the Soviet collapse endlessly," according to Hoover fellow Stephen Kotkin, constantly calibrating how to feed economic growth without losing power.**

[Russian State Library]

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**Robinson:** All right.

**Kotkin:** You begin to see the nationalist story fill some of the vacuum, so that as the party's ideology recedes there's a new ideology: Chinese greatness, Chinese history, Chinese civilization, Chinese values under party rule. Once they give up the party monopoly, which is what happened in the Soviet Union, the whole thing unravels. However, if the resolve is there with the elite, and if the nationalist card and repression, if all of that works, they can hold on to power even with the erosion of the ideology.

There's always been a limit. And I never expected the party to liberalize. We have no historical case where the party opened up and Communist Party monopoly survived. This is what they've gone to school with in Xi Jinping's China, so I anticipated not an opening but a crackdown.

## WHAT KIND OF EMPIRE?

**Robinson:** Stephen here's Walter Russell Mead in the *Wall Street Journal*: "In an ironic twist, an epidemic that started in China may end by increasing Beijing's international reach. The greatest impact of the pandemic will come in less-developed countries. Aid donations plus propaganda about the supposed superiority of China's governance model will find sympathetic ears in many countries. China will have opportunities to deepen security, economic, and political relationships with governments around the world." To what extent does the Communist Party in China remain loyal to the communist dream of worldwide revolution, and to what extent are they willing to supplant the strictly communist aim or goal with a more limited Chinese hegemony?

**Kotkin:** China is the largest economy with such an opaque political regime ever. They hide their policy process, they hide their motivations from their

own people and from the rest of the world.

But we can deduce their aims from their actions.

China's aims in order of importance to their rulers

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***"There is no unwritten social contract or bargain with authoritarian regimes. They do not leave voluntarily."***

are threefold. The first and most important by far is regime preservation at any cost: they will stop at nothing to keep that regime in power. The second goal that we can deduce from their actions is the pursuit of primacy in East Asia, their own region. This includes the eviction of the United States from its military bases and the weakening or dissolution of US bilateral alliances.



The third aim is the build out of a grand Eurasia, folding in Russia folding in Iran and reorienting Europe, away from Atlanticism, away from the Atlantic and toward China. This is a breathtaking grand strategy. It's not something abstract, like world revolution, world domination, or spreading Chinese civilization. It's concrete domination of their region, East Asia, and domination of the Eurasian

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***“You can watch the ideology get chipped away [but] there is a permanently endowed party rule which monopolizes not just the political sphere but the public sphere and imposes censorship on everybody else.”***

landmass. This is something we have to come to grips with as a nation. We've begun to do so, but there's a long way to go.

**Robinson:** Stephen, back for a moment to the Soviet Union. This coronavirus is in its own way a national calamity. Is there anything from the Soviet experience that you know so well that comes to mind, lessons to learn?

**Kotkin:** In a crisis, what you discover, Peter, is that you need two things. The first is competent and compassionate leadership. What was interesting about the Soviet Union was that it had competence but not compassionate leadership. The Soviets did not value life. They could lose a million men here and a million men there, and there were millions more whose lives could be wasted by the regime in pursuit of defense of the country. The second thing you need besides competent and compassionate leadership is social solidarity and trust. Look at the Soviet Union in World War II: they had social solidarity but they didn't have the trust. The secret police were ubiquitous. There was massive terror, all during the war. Nonetheless, the society held together and the regime did not collapse. They had a version, but not the version of what you need in a crisis.

Now, if you look overall at World War II or the Cold War, you see that democracies are better than totalitarian regimes at mass mobilization of resources because their leadership is compassionate, not just competent, and because their social solidarity is based upon trust, not coercion, plus a sense of nationalism, or tragedy. And so both Britain and especially the United States were superior at mass mobilization during the war and during the Cold War. So this is a long game, Peter. And the advantages are on the side of democracies that have the compassion as well as the competence and that have the trust as well as the social solidarity. You win because people step up.

The leadership actually performs or outperforms expectations. The social solidarity strengthens over time. You win because you earn it.

This is the challenge for us. We're not going to win this battle unless we rise to the occasion.

## CHINA IS NOT THE SOVIET UNION

**Robinson:** In the winter of 1946, right at the get-go of the Cold War, diplomat George Kennan sent what we now call the long telegram from Moscow to Washington. In it, Kennan outlined the policy of containment, which would remain substantially the framework for American foreign policy for the next four and a half decades, until the end of the Cold War. Why haven't we had a long telegram on China yet? For that matter, why have we wasted a quarter of a century supposing they were going to become more democratic?

**Kotkin:** In part, it's because China is not just a foe or an opponent, but it's also a collaborator, a partner. China's success has redounded to America's success. We have been better off because of China's success. It has thrown off tremendous

benefits for the Chinese. The hundreds of millions lifted out of poverty, all around the world. And so we don't want Chinese success to stop. We want to figure out a better way

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***"We may have a race to the moon, like we had with the Soviets, over the vaccine. I welcome that rivalry, but I would prefer cooperation."***

to manage the relationship. We want to continue to benefit from the relationship but not have it be the one-sided relationship it has become.

Having said that, what's similar is a potentially successful, or perceived to be successful, authoritarian great power. That changes the game internationally. An authoritarian power that's a basket case is not going to galvanize a whole lot of others on to its side, or to imitate it, or to do its will. But an authoritarian power that projects its ability to lock down a country and stop the spread of the virus . . .

**Robinson:** Right.

**Kotkin:** . . . to manufacture all the medical equipment that the world needs and to supply it on a voluntary, philanthropic basis to countries in need? That kind of power, authoritarian power, that's the challenge that we face. Chinese scientists may be the ones to come up with the vaccine. We may have a race to the moon, like we had with the Soviets, over the vaccine. I welcome

that rivalry, but I would prefer cooperation. It could be that our race with China for the vaccine accelerates the process of discovering the vaccine. But cooperating with Chinese scientists on the vaccine would be even better potentially.

And that's the proposition. It could be that many of those analyses of how to both compete and cooperate with China should get a second look, and we figure out what we need to do. The bottom line on all of this is: how do we protect liberty and the rule of law at home and globally?

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***“Communism in rule is an all-or-nothing proposition. You can't be half communist.”***

**Robinson:** Here's the last question, Stephen. The Chinese vastly outnumber us; their economy may very soon be bigger than ours. How optimistic are you?

**Kotkin:** That's an excellent question, and I'd have to say that I'm a pessimist by nature. However, I don't think full pessimism is called for. China has fundamental vulnerabilities, which involve mostly politics, though we also understand their banking system presents fundamental challenges. We understand they face enormous challenges demographically. I'm a very big admirer of the accomplishments of modern China. I'm awed by the dynamism and entrepreneurialism of that society. It's amazing what they've been able to achieve. And without them, we would have a lot fewer medical supplies right now in the crisis that we're in. At the same time, they're politically vulnerable. And we are potentially politically strong, if we can rediscover what it is that made us the country that we are.

**Robinson:** Stephen Kotkin, will you now please get away from your microphone and get back to work on the third and final volume of your Stalin trilogy? I get e-mail every week from people asking, “When is Dr. Kotkin going to finish that trilogy?”

**Kotkin:** Nobody wants to finish quicker than I do, Peter. I've been living with this monster for a long time now. ■





# Another Political Placebo

**Medicare for All** was never going to be a miracle cure—far less in times of pandemic.

**By Scott W. Atlas**

**I**t may seem counterintuitive, but single-payer health care proposals like “Medicare for All” could very well destroy Medicare as we know it and jeopardize medical care for seniors.

It’s not just because single-payer systems like those in Britain and Canada hold down costs by limiting the availability of doctors and treatments, even for the most serious life-threatening diseases like cancer, brain tumors, and heart disease. And it’s not just because single-payer systems restrict access to the newest drugs for cancer and other serious diseases, sometimes for years, compared with the US system.

## Key points

- » What Americans value are access, choice, and quality.
- » It’s pure fantasy to believe that the access and quality Americans enjoy today would survive if private insurance were abolished.
- » The current trajectory of the Medicare system—depleted funding, growth in patient base, costly specialist treatment—is unsustainable.
- » The solution is to empower older people to seek value for their money.

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*Scott W. Atlas, MD, is the Robert Wesson Senior Fellow in Scientific Philosophy and Public Policy at the Hoover Institution and a member of Hoover’s Working Group on Health Care Policy. He is the author of **Restoring Quality Health Care: A Six-Point Plan for Comprehensive Reform at Lower Cost** (Hoover Institution Press, 2016).*

Or that single-payer systems have shown to have worse outcomes than the United States' system for many common diseases like cancer, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, and diabetes. Or that tens of thousands of citizens in single-payer countries have died because of wait times for non-emergency treatment.

And it's not just because proposals like Bernie Sanders's Medicare for All bill could cost an estimated \$32 trillion in its first decade, more than double all currently projected federal individual and corporate income tax collections.

Beyond that, Medicare for All would radically change health care for retirees because the services they now get from hospitals and doctors are in effect subsidized

by higher payments from privately insured patients. According to a report by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, while private insurance often pays more than 140 percent of

the cost of care, Medicare and Medicaid pay an estimated 60 percent of what private insurance pays for inpatient services, and an estimated 60 percent to 80 percent for physician services. Most hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and in-home health care providers already lose money on every Medicare patient. By 2040, under today's system, about half of hospitals, roughly two-thirds of skilled nursing facilities, and over 80 percent of home health agencies would lose money overall.

The estimated \$32 trillion cost of Medicare for All includes the immediate cuts of about 40 percent to hospitals and about 30 percent to doctors now treating patients under private insurance, with these cuts likely growing more severe over time. Will these cuts occur without hurting timeliness or quality of care for patients?

Here's another truth—abolishing private insurance would harm today's retirees on Medicare, because more than 70 percent of them use private insurance in addition to or instead of traditional Medicare. About 29 percent of those enrolled in traditional Medicare (A and B) buy “Medigap” plans, state-based private insurance that supplements non-drug Medicare benefits. Twenty-two million other beneficiaries, 34 percent, enroll in alternative private Medicare Advantage health plans to replace traditional Medicare, a

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***America's aging population means more heart disease, cancer, stroke, and dementia—diseases that depend most on specialists, complex technology, and innovative drugs.***

number doubling in the past decade. And millions of Medicare beneficiaries buy private prescription drug coverage in Part D.

We also must not ignore the fact that Medicare is already facing serious financial challenges. A projection in the 2019 Medicare trustees' report states that the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund, one of two Medicare funds, will be depleted in 2026. On top of that is the issue of funding the program. Just as the population of older people is greatly expanding, the taxpayer base financing the program is greatly shrinking.

Medicare now spends more than \$740 billion for more than sixty million enrollees, but taxpaying workers per beneficiary will decline by half in 2030 from when Medicare began. Nearly four million Americans now reach age sixty-five every year. In 2050, the sixty-five-and-over population is projected to have almost doubled from 2012. America's aging population means more heart disease, cancer, stroke, and dementia—diseases that depend most on specialists, complex technology, and innovative drugs for diagnosis and treatment. The current trajectory of the system is unsustainable.

But there is another paradigm. The Trump administration has begun breaking down barriers to competition in the health care market by improving transparency essential to value-seeking patients. It has also reduced the government's harmful overregulation of health care and insurance: barring

“gag clauses” that prohibit pharmacists from revealing that a prescription drug may cost less than the insurance co-payment if bought with

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***Abolishing private insurance would eliminate the health care access and quality that today's retirees enjoy.***

cash; and executive orders that require hospitals and doctors to post prices for procedures under Medicare and that facilitate tools to show patients their out-of-pocket costs have been introduced.

These moves, intended to remove the cloak of mystery around health care prices, are long overdue. The Trump administration has also increased private plan choices under Medicare, through Medicare Advantage, over the past few years. Nationwide, 3,148 private insurance plans now participate in Medicare Advantage, an increase of 15 percent over 2019 and the largest number of plans in the history of the program.

The average Medicare beneficiary can choose from twenty-eight plans offered by seven firms in 2020. The continual increase in choices of coverage under Medicare Advantage to twenty-eight in 2020 from nineteen in 2016



reversed the trend of reduced choices under the Obama administration, when thirty-three plans offered in 2010 declined to eighteen in 2015.

And while these private plans provide extra benefits not covered by traditional Medicare, according to the Centers for

Medicare and Medicaid Services, average premiums for Advantage plans dropped this year by 23 percent compared with

2018—down to the lowest monthly premiums since 2007—likely a result of competition among insurers, reversing the average premium costs seen from 2012 through 2015 under the Obama administration.

Voters must realize this. It is pure fantasy to believe that the access and quality Americans enjoy today would be maintained if private insurance—used by more than 217 million Americans—were abolished and everyone used Medicare for All.

Abolishing private insurance, whether by law or via the slower pathway of introducing a public option, would eliminate the health care access and quality that today's retirees enjoy. Instead, empowering older people to seek value with their money with more flexible coverage and larger, liberalized health savings accounts, stimulating competition among doctors and hospitals, and increasing the supply of medical care will generate what Americans most value and expect from health care: access, choice, and quality. ■

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***Most hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and in-home health care providers already lose money on every Medicare patient.***



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# “Public Option” Dead End

**Joe Biden’s health plan would bring higher taxes for most Americans and turbulence to the insurance market.**

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**By Lanhee J. Chen**

**J**oe Biden is among the Democrats who claim they’ve proposed a moderate, less disruptive approach to health care reform when they advocate a public option—a government policy offered as an alternative to private health insurance—in lieu of “Medicare for All.” Don’t believe it. My research finds that such proposals would increase the federal deficit dramatically and destabilize the market for private health insurance, threatening health care quality and choice.

While estimates by the Congressional Budget Office and other analysts have concluded that a public option-style proposal would reduce federal deficits, those effects are predicated on two flawed assumptions: first, that the government will negotiate hospital and provider reimbursement rates similar to Medicare’s fee schedules and far below what private insurers pay; second, that the government would charge “actuarially fair premiums,” which cover 100 percent of provided benefits and administrative costs.

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History demonstrates that we should be skeptical of cost estimates that rely on such assumptions. Political pressure upended similar financing assumptions in Medicare Part B only two years after the entitlement's creation. The Johnson administration in 1968 and then Congress in 1972 had to intervene to shield seniors from premium increases. Objections from health care providers to low reimbursement rates have regularly led to federal spending increases in Medicare and Medicaid. The result isn't hard to fathom. If premiums can't rise to cover program costs, or reimbursement rates are raised to ensure access to a reasonable number of providers, who will pay? Taxpayers, who were promised a self-sufficient government program.

With Hoover Institution research fellows Tom Church and Daniel L. Heil and support from the Partnership for America's Health Care Future, I estimated

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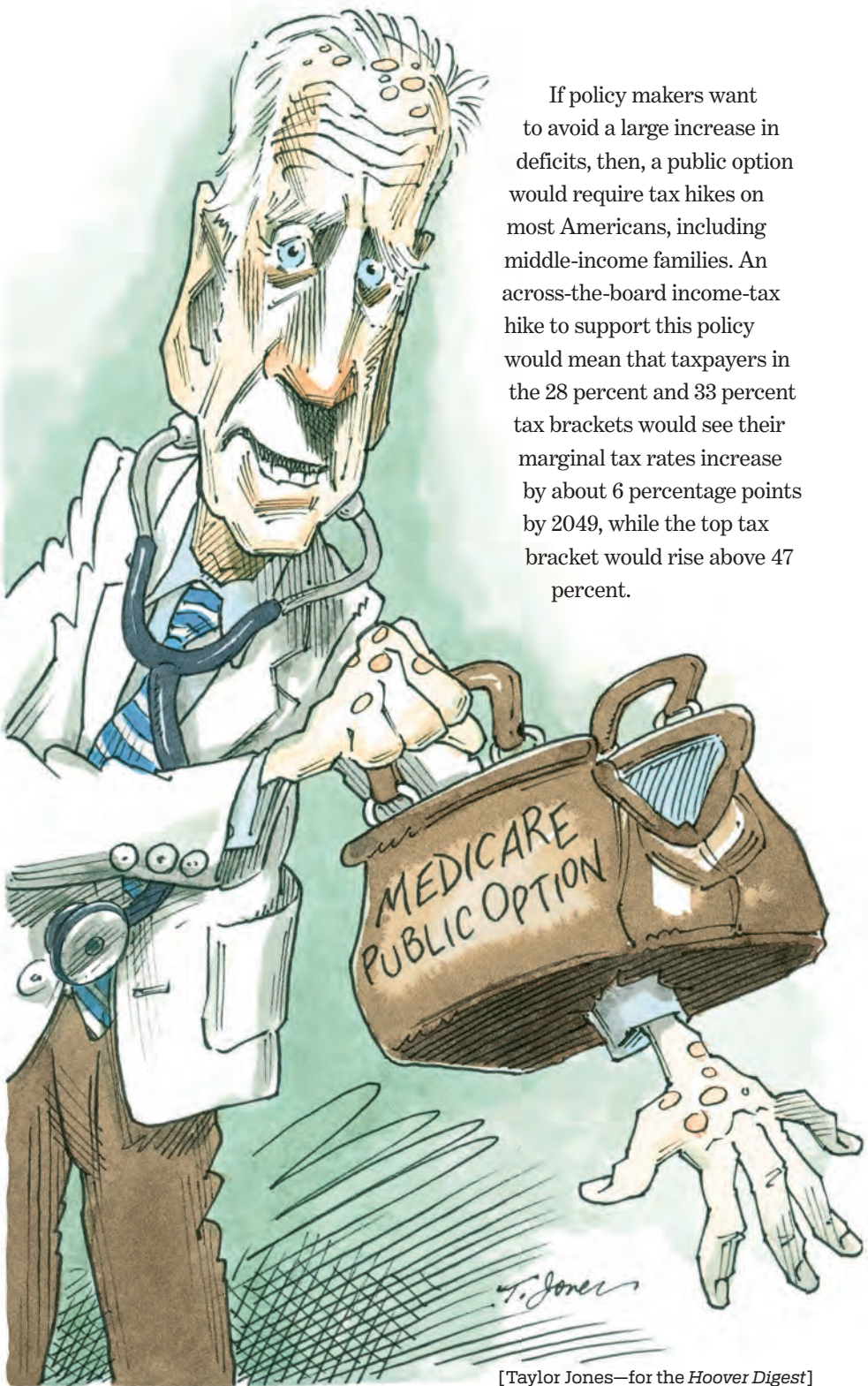
***The public option would quickly displace employer-based and other private insurance, forcing some insurers out of the market.***

the fiscal and tax implications of creating a federally administered public option. If Congress's past behavior is a guide, a public option available to all individuals and employers would add more than \$700 billion to the ten-year federal deficit. The annual deficit increase would hit \$100 billion within a few years. Some 123 million people—roughly one in three Americans—would be enrolled in the public option by 2025, broadly displacing existing insurance. These estimates don't include the costs of proposed additional Affordable Care Act (ACA) subsidies and eligibility expansions.

The fiscal effects are even more pronounced over the long run. We estimate that federal spending on the public option would exceed total military spending by 2042 and match combined spending on Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and ACA subsidies by 2049. In the latter year the public option would become the third-most-expensive government program, behind only Medicare and Social Security. The public option alone would raise the federal debt by 30 percent of gross domestic product over the next thirty years.

While some, like Biden, claim their health reforms can be paid for by simply taxing the wealthy more, that seems unrealistic. We conclude that if tax increases to pay for a politically realistic public option were limited to high-income filers, the top marginal rate would have to rise from the current 37 percent to 73 percent in 2049—a level not seen since the 1960s. Such large rate increases would undoubtedly have economic effects, causing revenue to fall short of our static estimates.

If policy makers want to avoid a large increase in deficits, then, a public option would require tax hikes on most Americans, including middle-income families. An across-the-board income-tax hike to support this policy would mean that taxpayers in the 28 percent and 33 percent tax brackets would see their marginal tax rates increase by about 6 percentage points by 2049, while the top tax bracket would rise above 47 percent.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

Alternatively, Congress could enact a new broad-based tax similar to Medicare's 2.9 percent hospital insurance payroll tax. The new tax would be levied on all wage and salary income and would reach 4.8 percent in 2049.

These fiscal estimates may underestimate the cost of the public option, as they assume no changes in use of medical services. The generous cost-sharing rules in the public option would likely increase demand for health care services, while the federal government would be unlikely to implement the stringent and sometimes painful cost-management procedures needed to limit use.

Beyond fiscal considerations, the public option would quickly displace employer-based and other private insurance. This would force some private insurers to exit the market and encourage greater consolidation among remaining insurers. Consumers seeking coverage would be left with fewer insurance options and higher premiums.

Meanwhile, many health care providers would suffer a dramatic drop in income, while at the same time experiencing greater demand for their services. Longer wait times and narrower provider networks would likely follow for those enrolled in the public option, harming patients' health and reducing consumer choice. Declines in provider payments would also affect investment decisions by hospitals and may lead to fewer new doctors and other medical providers.

Politicians like to market the public option as a less dramatic and cheaper alternative to "Medicare for All." That's far from the whole story. A politically realistic public option would produce dramatic fiscal costs and harm the US health care system. Policy makers may yet find the middle ground in health reform, but a government-run public option isn't it. ■

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# *Cheated by Collectivism*

**Businesses do good by benefiting their shareholders, not pursuing a phantom of “social responsibility.”**

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***By George P. Shultz, Michael J. Boskin, John F. Cogan, and John B. Taylor***

**F**rom time to time in the past one hundred and fifty years, a socialist impulse has taken hold among a significant segment of the US population. This impulse was a primary driver behind the 1880s populists' movement and among Progressives in the 1910s. It was the dominant ideology among socialists in the 1930s and among young radicals and intellectuals in the 1960s. Today, a similar collectivist sentiment runs through America. Although most Americans do not favor government control over the means of production, a significant portion of the population appears to prefer that government, rather than the private sector, be given primary control over the US economy or important parts of it. In a recent poll, 44 percent favored government control over health care, 35 percent favored government control over wages of workers, and 33 percent favored economywide government controls.

Today, as in the past, the collectivist sentiment is fueled by resentment against a system that some see as having treated them unfairly, distrust of

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*George P. Shultz, Michael J. Boskin, John F. Cogan, and John B. Taylor are senior fellows at the Hoover Institution.*



public and private institutions, and a utopian belief that human nature can be changed to make the world a better place. The American left has developed a strong antibusiness sentiment and progressive politicians are calling for extensive regulation of business activities, confiscatory taxes on the wealthy, and a general redistribution of income.

Into this environment, the Business Roundtable (BRT), the collected CEOs of many of America's largest companies, recently issued a statement fundamentally changing its

view of the basic purpose of US corporations.

The BRT has scrapped its long-standing view (since 1997) that "the paramount duty of management and of boards

of directors is to the corporation's stockholders. The interests of other stakeholders are relevant as a derivative of the duty to stockholders." In its place, the BRT stipulates that US companies should consider the interests of numerous stakeholders—including employees, customers, and communities in which the company operates—along with shareholders when making corporate decisions. Underlying the roundtable's new view is its belief that companies have a social responsibility that transcends their role as producers of goods and services in a freely competitive economy.

The Business Roundtable consists of highly respected leaders both within and outside the business community whose views carry weight in public policy deliberations in Washington. Its examination of the conduct of US corporations is welcome, but wrongheaded. We believe its new statement of corporate purposes, which makes shareholders an "also ran" alongside other stakeholders, including an ill-defined group of "communities," is misguided. It lends credence to an incorrect view of the way American businesses operate; it fundamentally misunderstands the role that business plays in a free market economy; and it fails to consider the real world, adverse consequences of demoting shareholders' interests.

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***Investing in employees increases a firm's human capital. Honest dealings with suppliers also add value. Good community relations create "intangible" capital.***

## **SAFEGUARDS ARE ALREADY BUILT IN**

The critique of the goal of maximizing shareholder value is based on the erroneous belief that in order to maximize this value, businesses must mistreat employees, shortchange suppliers, take advantage of customers, and take actions that damage the community and its surrounding environment.

In fact, the exact opposite is true. Maximizing long-term shareholder value requires companies to make sure that employees and suppliers are in a strong position to make the business successful. Investing in employees increases a firm's human capital, honest dealings with suppliers add value to the physical capital they provide, and maintaining good community relations creates "intangible" capital. Customers are, of course, the ultimate evaluators of a company product or service. Mistreat any of these stakeholders and shareholder value will decline. Competition from companies who take account of all of their stakeholders ensures this outcome.

US corporations have played a central role in improving standards of living in the United States and around the globe. In the basic US corporate structure, investors are shielded from direct legal liability for corporate actions and investors hire corporate executives to run the company. Investors supply capital by purchasing company stock and, in return, become part owners in the company and in its success or failure. This structure has been crucial in allowing companies to raise funds efficiently through capital markets.

But this arrangement creates a potential "agency problem," wherein company executives have different objectives from those of the owners. The maximization of shareholder value as the paramount duty of corporate executives addresses this problem by aligning management's objectives, strategies, and decisions with owners' interests. It also provides owners with

a relatively clear, straightforward way to assess executives' performance and, thereby, to ensure accountability. The value of this arrangement, along with corporate governance rules that require

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***Taking other people's money without their consent and using it to achieve social purposes is properly viewed as a governmental function, controlled by checks and balances.***

executives and board members to own their company's stock, has proven itself over and over again as public corporations have been a dynamic engine behind improving living standards.

Fifty years ago, the late Hoover fellow Milton Friedman made the quintessential case against the idea that corporations have a more general social responsibility. As Friedman argued, in our system, corporate executives are hired to carry out the corporation's responsibilities. They are employees of the company's owners and are responsible to them. Executives conduct their business according to the wishes of the owners, not the desires of others. This conduct is, of course, subject to all parties adhering to applicable laws,

customs, and social mores. In economic terms, corporate executives act as agents of owners, who are the principals. When executives spend corporate funds, they are spending the owners' money.

If executives choose to pay some employees a higher wage to “reduce inequality,” hire less-qualified workers to “reduce poverty,” or buy higher-priced inputs from local

suppliers to “support the community,” they are spending someone else's money. That includes the hard-earned money of retirees, workers, and ordinary investors

throughout the economy. When such actions lower shareholder returns, the company owners lose money. When the impact is a higher price to consumers, consumers lose money.

Taking other people's money without their consent and using it to achieve social purposes is properly viewed as a governmental function. To ensure that this function is applied to publicly preferred social purposes with a minimum financial burden, our government has an elaborate set of checks and balances that operate through representatives chosen by the people through fair and open elections. A policy of corporate social responsibility, on the other hand, lets corporate executives choose which social goals to achieve and how much of other people's money to allocate to them. This circumvents the safeguards provided by the governmental checks and balances. It effectively gives unelected persons the power to tax. This, as Friedman wrote a half century ago, is “pure and unadulterated socialism.” He could also have called it undemocratic.

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***Making shareholder value the paramount duty of corporate executives aligns management's objectives, strategies, and decisions with owners' interests.***

## **DRAINING VALUE**

It is hardly possible that social-policy decisions under the BRT standards would be left to corporate executives whose employment is determined by a board of directors consisting solely of owners. More likely, boards would be required to add members representing each of the stakeholders—that is, employees, consumer groups, suppliers, and community officials. Indeed, Senator Elizabeth Warren campaigned for the Democratic presidential nomination on a proposal that would have required that 40 percent of board seats be occupied by representatives of the company's employees. She requested support from the BRT for this requirement.

The new BRT standard will result in corporate decisions that, on balance, sacrifice shareholder value in return for other, yet-to-be-specified social objectives. Lower values will cause investors to reduce their inflow of new capital. At first the price will be paid by current investors, including millions of retirees and those preparing for retirement when share values drop. Ultimately, as capital inflows continue to decline, the price will be paid by the entire society as economic growth slows and living standards stagnate.

The damage doesn't end there. Under the BRT standard, executives would no longer serve as the agent of a single principal, the company's owners. They would instead serve simultaneously as an agent of the various stake-

holders. All of these masters will have their own goals; conflicts and tradeoffs are inevitable. Employee representatives will seek higher pay and pension benefits at the

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***Like Milton Friedman, we see little benefit, and considerable harm, in the pursuit of “socially responsible” policies.***

expense of shareholder value, in much the same way that public employees currently do. Consumer groups will oppose price increases, even those that may well be justified in competitive markets. Representatives of local communities will oppose plant closings even if the company can gain efficiency from relocating production facilities.

The BRT's proposed standard of multiple masters and numerous objectives is a recipe for a lack of corporate accountability. With few ways to measure and assess how much shareholder value has been sacrificed to meet some vaguely defined social goals, and with conflicting valuations by the various stakeholder groups, boards will be unable to properly evaluate executives' performance.

The multiple masters and competing objectives will entangle companies as conflicts over goals, and disagreements over the appropriateness of actions to achieve those goals, produce legal wrangling and litigation. Today, even with a relatively clear paramount duty for corporate executives serving a single master, a drop in a company stock often produces shareholder lawsuits. Imagine the legal quagmire that a system with a multitude of masters with conflicting goals will create.

The lack of accountability, endless legal wrangling, and litigation will slow down companies' decision making and lengthen their response times. The crucial dynamism of US companies will diminish.

## PARAMOUNT DUTY

Like Milton Friedman, we see little benefit, and considerable harm, in attempting to make corporations pursue “socially responsible” policies. The pursuit of shareholder value as the paramount duty is more often than not accomplished by investing in employees, delivering value to customers, and treating suppliers fairly. As Adam Smith informed us two and a half centuries ago, the pursuit of private value is the best way to promote the broader interests of society: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their self-interest.”

Achieving socially responsible outcomes should be left to individuals pursuing their own ends and to elected public officials charged with properly carrying out governmental responsibilities. The business community would have been far better served had the Business Roundtable reaffirmed its 1997 statement and articulated the important role US corporations have played in improving the quality of life in the United States and abroad. Attempts to placate progressive politicians will only encourage further efforts to use corporations for their own social purposes. ■

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# *The World as It Is*

**The United States can neither fix the world's governance problems nor ignore them. The middle way: helping others rule well.**

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**By Stephen D. Krasner**

**T**hroughout its history, the United States has oscillated between two foreign policies. One aims to remake other countries in the American image. The other regards the rest of the world as essentially beyond repair. According to the second vision, Washington should demonstrate the benefits of consolidated democracy—free and fair elections, a free press, the rule of law, the separation of powers, and an active civil society—but not seek to impose those things on other countries. The George W. Bush administration took the first approach. The Obama administration took the second, as has the Trump administration, choosing to avoid actively trying to promote freedom and democracy in other countries.

Both strategies are, however, deeply flawed. The conceit that the United States can turn all countries into consolidated democracies has been disproved over and over again, from Vietnam to Afghanistan to Iraq. The view that Washington should offer a shining example but nothing more fails to appreciate the dangers of the contemporary world, in which groups and individuals with few resources can kill thousands or even hundreds of thousands

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of Americans. The United States cannot fix the world's problems, but nor does it have the luxury of ignoring them.

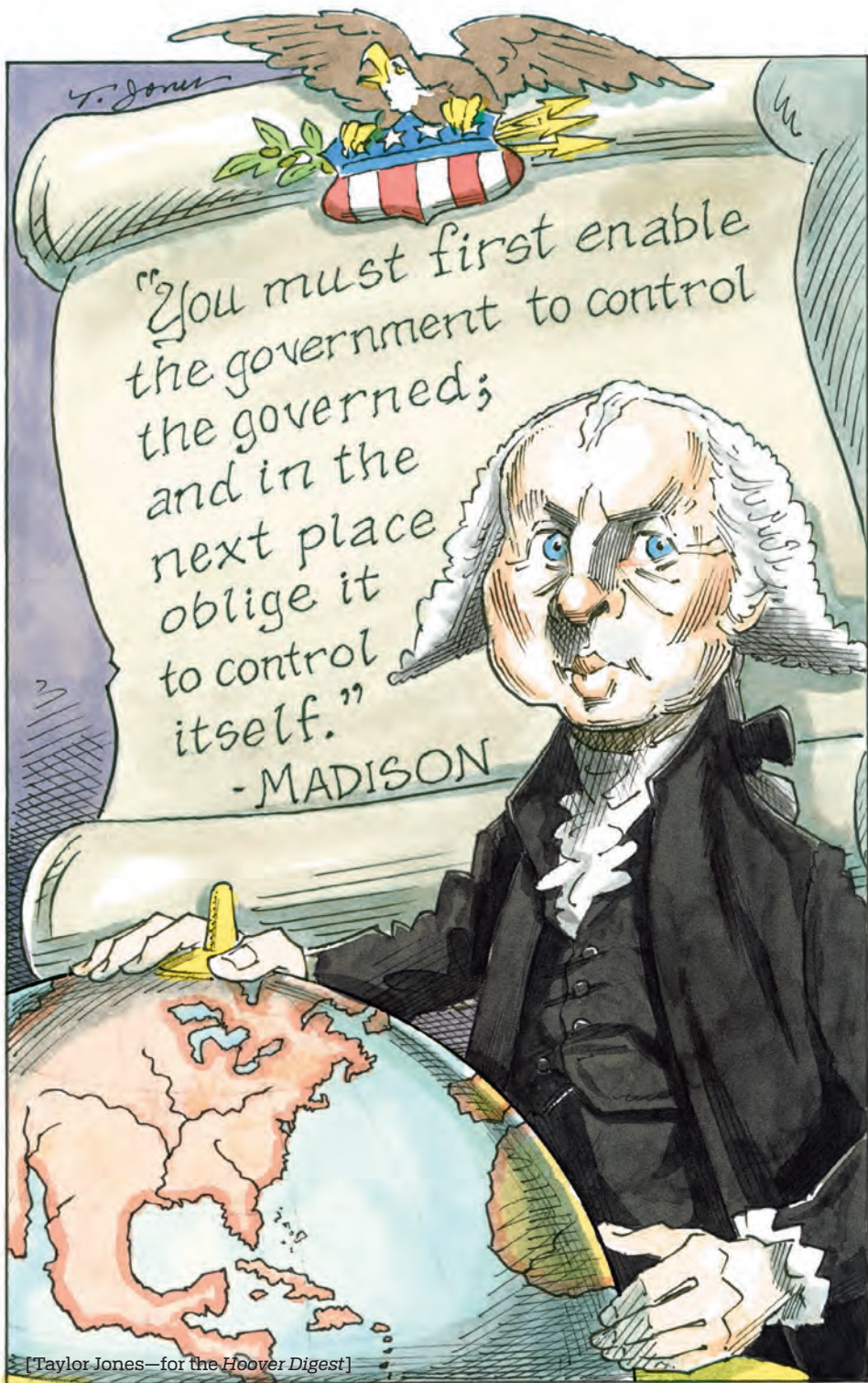
Washington should take a third course, adopting a foreign policy that keeps the country safe by working with the rulers the world has, not the ones the United States wishes it had. That means adopting policies abroad that can improve other states' security, boost their economic growth, and strengthen their ability to deliver some services while nevertheless accommodating a despotic ruler. For the purposes of US security, it matters more that leaders in the rest of the world govern well than it does that they govern democratically. And in any case, helping ensure that others govern well—or at least well enough—may be the best that US foreign policy can hope to achieve in most countries.

## **STUBBORN DESPOTISM**

*Homo sapiens* has been around for about eight thousand generations, and for most of that time, life has been rather unpleasant. Life expectancy began to increase around 1850, just seven generations ago, and accelerated only after 1900. Prior to that point, the average person lived for around thirty years (although high infant mortality explained much of this figure); today, life expectancy is in the high seventies or above for wealthy countries and approaching seventy or more for many poor ones. In the past, women—rich and poor alike—frequently died in childbirth. Pandemic diseases, such as the Black Death, which wiped out more than one-third of Europe's population in the fourteenth century, were common.

Until the nineteenth century, no country had the rule of law; at best, countries had rule by law, in which formal laws applied only to some. For most people, regardless of their social rank, violence was endemic. Only in the past century or two has per capita income grown significantly. Most humans who have ever lived have done so under despotic regimes.

Most still do. Consolidated democracy, in which the arbitrary power of the state is constrained and almost all residents have access to the rule of law, is a recent and unique development. The experience of people living in wealthy industrialized democracies since the end of World War II, with lives relatively free of violence, is the exception. Wealthy democratic states have existed for only a short period of history, perhaps one hundred and fifty years, and in only a few places in the world—Western Europe, North America, Australasia, and parts of Asia. Even today, only about thirty countries are wealthy, consolidated democracies. Perhaps another twenty might someday make the leap, but most will remain in some form of despotism.



"You must first enable  
the government to control  
the governed;  
and in the  
next place  
oblige it  
to control  
itself."

-MADISON

The United States cannot change that, despite the hopes of policy makers and scholars such as the political scientist and Hoover senior fellow Larry Diamond. Last year, Diamond, reflecting on his decades of studying democratization all over the world, wrote that “even people who resented America for its wealth, its global power, its arrogance, and its use of military force nevertheless expressed a grudging admiration for the vitality of its democracy.”

Those people hoped, he wrote, that “the United States would support their cause.” The trouble is that regardless of such hopes, despotic leaders

do not want to provide benefits to those they govern; they want to support with arms or money those who can keep them in power. They will not accept policies that aim to end their rule. What’s more, organizing against a despot is dangerous and unusual. Revolutions are rare. Despots usually stay in power.

Yet although the United States cannot build wealthy democracies abroad, it cannot ignore the problems of the rest of the world, either, contrary to what Americans have been told by people such as President Trump, who, in his first speech after he was elected, said, “There is no global anthem, no global currency, no certificate of global citizenship. We pledge allegiance to one flag, and that flag is the American flag. From now on, it’s going to be America first, OK? America first. We’re going to put ourselves first.”

The trouble with wanting to withdraw and focus on home is that, like it or not, globalization has indeed shrunk the world, and technology has severed the relationship between material resources and the ability to do harm. A few individuals in badly governed and impoverished states control enough nuclear and biological weapons to kill millions of Americans. And nuclear weapons are spreading. Pakistan has sold nuclear technology to North Korea; the North Koreans might one day sell it to somebody else. Nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of jihadi groups. Pandemic diseases can arise naturally in badly governed states and could spread to the developed world, killing millions. The technology needed to create artificial pathogens is becoming more widely available. For these reasons, the United States has to play a role in the outside world, whether it wants to or not, in order to lower the chances of the worst possible outcomes.

And because despots are here for the foreseeable future, Washington will always have to deal with them. That will mean promoting not good

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***Because despots are here for the foreseeable future, Washington will always have to deal with them.***

government but good enough governance. Good government is based on a Western ideal in which the government delivers a wide variety of services to the population based on the rule of law, with laws determined by representatives selected through free and fair elections. Good government is relatively free of corruption and provides reliable security for all citizens. But pushing for elections often results only in bloodshed, with no clear improvement in governance. Trying to eliminate corruption entirely may preclude eliminating the worst forms of corruption. And greater security may mean more violations of individual rights. Good government is not in the interests of the elites in most countries the United States wants to change, where rulers will reject or undermine reforms that could weaken their hold on power.

A foreign policy with more limited aims, by contrast, might actually achieve more. Greater security, some economic growth, and the better provision of some services is the best the United States can hope for in most countries. Achieving good enough governance is feasible, would protect US interests, and would not preclude progress toward greater democracy down the road.

## **GLASSES HALF FULL**

Policies aiming for good enough governance have already succeeded. The best example comes from Colombia, where for the past two decades, the United States has sought to curb violence and drug trafficking by providing financial aid, security training, military technology, and intelligence under what was known until 2016 as Plan Colombia (now Peace Colombia). The results have been remarkable. Between 2002 and 2008, homicides in Colombia dropped 45 percent. Between 2002 and 2012, kidnappings dropped 90 percent. Since the turn of the century, Colombia has improved its scores on a number of governance measures, including control of corruption, the rule of law, government effectiveness, and government accountability. That progress culminated in 2016 with a peace deal between the government and the guerrilla movement known as FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).

Yet despite Plan Colombia's success, it has not transformed the country. Violence has declined, but Colombia is not yet on the path to becoming a consolidated democracy. A narrow elite still dominates the country. Colombia's high economic inequality has not budged. Elections matter, but they serve mostly to transfer power from one segment of the ruling class to another.

Colombia's elites accepted intrusive US assistance not because they were committed to making the country a consolidated democracy but because, by the 1990s, violence in Colombia had reached such an extreme level that the country was near collapse. Without US help, the elites would not have been



able to maintain their position. Plan Colombia provides both a model for US intervention elsewhere and a sobering reminder of the limits of change that can be brought from the outside.

American naiveté about the likelihood of creating wealthy democratic states has been based on a widely held view of development and democracy known as *modernization theory*. This theory holds that wealth and democracy can be attained relatively easily. All that is necessary are population growth and technological progress. Greater wealth begets greater democracy, which in turn begets greater

wealth. If countries can find the first step of the escalator, they can ride it all the way to the top. Yet

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***Despotic leaders don't want to provide benefits to those they govern.***

modernization theory has a conspicuous failure: it cannot explain why consolidated democracy has emerged only very recently, only in a small number of countries, and only in certain geographic areas.

US leaders have also been influenced by a second perspective on development, one that emphasizes *institutional capacity*. They have usually assumed that rulers in poorly governed states want to do the right thing but fail because their governments do not have the capacity to govern well, not because the rulers want to stay in power. But theories that stress institutional capacity fall at the first hurdle: they cannot explain why leaders in most countries would want to act in the best interests of their populations rather than in their own best interests.

US leaders would be more successful if they adopted a third theory of development: *rational choice institutionalism*. This theory emphasizes the importance of elites and stresses that only under certain conditions will they be willing to tie their own hands and adopt policies that benefit the population as a whole.

The sweet spot, in which the government is strong enough to provide key services but does not repress its people, has been achieved by only a few polities. As James Madison wrote in *Federalist* No. 51, "In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself." No wiser words on government have ever been written.

Rational choice institutionalism makes it clear that wealth and democracy are not the natural order of things. More wealth and a large middle class may make democracy more likely, but they do not guarantee it. Luck matters, too. If the wind had blown in a different direction in June 1588, the Spanish Armada might have been able to support the Duke of Parma's invasion of



***BORDERLANDS: President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meet inside the Demilitarized Zone in June 2019. Good government is not in the interests of the elites in most countries the United States wants to change, including North Korea. American power and aid can still make a difference even in despotic countries, provided the goal is to help individuals.*** [Shealah Craighead—White House]

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England. Queen Elizabeth I would probably have been deposed. Great Britain might never have become the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution or the cradle of liberty. Likewise, in 1940, if the waters of the English Channel had prevented the small boats from rescuing the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk, the British government might have sought peace, and Nazi Germany might have been able to devote all its resources to the defeat of the Soviet Union. The outcome of World War II might have been very different.

Pointing out that outside actors cannot usually create democracy, effective government, and a free market economy hardly amounts to a revelation. The successes in West Germany, Italy, and Japan after World War II were aberrations made possible by the power of the United States, the delegitimization of fascist governments, and the existence of local members of the elite who saw aligning with Washington as the best of difficult choices. General Douglas MacArthur allied with the emperor of Japan rather than trying him as a war criminal. Hirohito was no democrat. But the alternative, a communist system, was even worse.

There is no teleological trajectory, no natural and inevitable path from extractive, closed states to inclusive, open states. Sustained economic growth



and consolidated democracy have eluded most societies. Progress requires aligning the incentives of repressive elites with those of the repressed masses. This has happened rarely and has depended on many factors that cannot be controlled by outside powers.

## **SPEAK SOFTLY**

The United States can still exert influence on the rest of the world, but it must carefully tailor its strategy to fit the circumstances. There are three main kinds of countries: wealthy, consolidated democracies; countries that are transitional (with a mix of democratic and nondemocratic features); and despotic regimes.

Of the world's wealthy countries, defined as having a per capita annual income greater than \$17,000, around thirty are consolidated democracies according to the measures used by the Center for Systemic Peace's Polity Project, which rates the democratic quality of countries on a scale of negative ten to ten. All the consolidated democracies (with the exception of Australia and New Zealand) are in East Asia, Europe, or North America. The United States can best help these countries by working to perfect its own democracy, as well as strengthening the US alliance system, containing or deterring threats to the US-led order, keeping trade barriers low, and sharing intelligence.

Demonstrating the effectiveness of democracy is not easy. The US Constitution is difficult to change. What worked at the end of the eighteenth century does not necessarily work today. The US Senate is growing less democratic as the population ratio between the most populous and the least populous state increases. That ratio was about thirteen to one (Virginia to Delaware) when the Constitution was written; it is now more than sixty to one (California to Wyo-

ming). This means that a small part of the population (less than 20 per-

cent) can frustrate legislation. The Internet has changed political communication. Anyone can publish anything, including groups acting at the direction of foreign entities, which can now influence US politics far more cheaply and easily than in the past. And as digital technology advances, distinguishing between true and false information will only become harder.

Imperfect though American democracy may be, Washington can nevertheless help countries that are in transition. The best chances exist in the nineteen countries with per capita annual incomes between \$7,000 and \$17,000

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***A foreign policy with more limited aims might actually achieve more.***

and Polity scores of six or higher, a group that includes Botswana, Brazil, Croatia, Malaysia, and Panama. The most promising candidates in this group are former satellite states of the Soviet Union, such as Bulgaria and Romania, which have relatively high incomes and levels of education, robust EU development programs, and, in many cases, leaders who want their countries to be a part of Europe.

The key to helping these places reach consolidated democracy is to identify and support the right local leaders. Even democratic elections, after all, can produce leaders with little commitment to democracy, such as Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. And some leaders who have only a limited commitment to democracy can prove

to be valuable partners, as Hirohito did in Japan after World War II.

Knowing which leaders are likely to deliver good enough governance—

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***Wealth and a large middle class may make democracy more likely, but they do not guarantee it. Luck matters, too.***

regardless of their commitment to democracy—requires an intimate knowledge of local elites, their beliefs, and their followers. To that end, the US State Department should alter its practice of moving Foreign Service officers from post to post every two or three years and instead institute longer stays so that they can develop a close, deep understanding of the countries to which they are assigned. The department will also need to find ways to allow Foreign Service officers to have greater access to and more influence with top decision makers.

With luck, the United States, working with other advanced democracies, might succeed in moving some countries toward consolidated democracy and the greater wealth that comes from unleashing individual initiative and constraining the state from seizing its fruits. Most of the world's polities, however, are not going to make the jump to sustained growth or full democracy. In those places, most of which are poor, despots are too anxious to cling to power. Here, too, the most important task is to pick the right leaders to support.

First, Washington should ask not whether local elites are committed to democratic values but whether they can maintain effective security within their borders. The United States should support these leaders with security assistance. Local elites might also accept help from Washington that would result in improvements in public services, especially health care, because better public health might mean more popular support. Finally, rulers in

despotic regimes might accept assistance in boosting economic growth, provided that such growth does not threaten their own hold on power.

The question is how to provide such assistance. Outside actors have difficulty suggesting reforms because they have their own interests and only limited knowledge of local conditions. A more realistic approach that can achieve good enough governance would start with a series of practical questions. For example, US policy makers should be asking if the government of Egyptian President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi is inclusive and competent enough to establish stability, not whether the general came to power through a coup. If the answer is yes, then the United States should support Egypt's security forces, help strengthen the regime's provision of public health services, and open US markets to at least some Egyptian exports.

Similar considerations should guide US policy elsewhere. For example, Washington should be asking if there are local leaders in Afghanistan and Iraq who could provide stability, regardless of their past sins or how they might have come to power. The United States should acknowledge that there is little it can do to alter the political systems in China and Russia, despotic states with strong central governments. Humanitarian aid is a good thing, but the United States should give it because it helps individuals and not because it will lead to good government.

Washington can succeed only if its policies align with the interests of local rulers; in most cases, those rulers will be despots. Tolerating them and even cooperating with them may be anathema to many Americans. But the alternatives—hubristically trying to remake the world in the image of the United States or pretending that Washington can simply ignore leaders it dislikes—would be even worse. ■

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# *An Incorrigible State*

**Washington should stop looking for that elusive moderation in Iran. The state itself is the problem.**

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**By Tony Badran**

**T**he “transnational”—this is how Qasem Soleimani, the former head of Iran’s Quds Force killed in a US missile strike in Baghdad, is described in Hezbollah-run schools in Lebanon. Soleimani, who commanded the militias prosecuting Iran’s wars in the region and who managed the Islamic Republic’s realm from Iraq to Lebanon, met his end as the Iranian order in those two countries was under severe stress, adding to the Iranian regime’s domestic troubles as it reels under the weight of US sanctions.

Iraq and Lebanon have long suffered from endemic corruption and mismanagement, which have now resulted in failing economies. Beyond economic grievances, however, the political orders both in Iraq and Lebanon are in a crisis of legitimacy. For months, popular demonstrations have been raging against the Baghdad and Beirut governments and the sectarian political

## **Key points**

» American policy ideas about Iran and fractured states like Iraq and Lebanon have long been incoherent.

» Institutions in Iraq and Lebanon have lost their legitimacy, at least among much of the population.

» Washington ought not concern itself with salvaging pro-Iranian systems under whatever pretext.

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actors who run them. This turmoil in Iran's Arab holdings adds another layer of pressure on top of the two-year-old widespread popular protests inside Iran.

These popular protests have revealed the vulnerabilities of the Iranian regional project, of which Soleimani was the anchor. Likewise, they have exposed the incoherence of US policy ideas about Iran and fractured states like Iraq and Lebanon over the course of almost two decades.

## **POWER BEHIND THE PROXIES**

Iran is at the heart of the protests in Iraq and Lebanon. In Iraq, far more explicitly than in Lebanon, the protests have taken aim directly at Iran and its local agents who control the government. Iraqi protesters have defaced posters of Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei and have attacked the Iranian consulate along with the offices of militias like the Badr Organization, ripping up pictures of its leader as well. It bears underscoring that these protests have been raging not only in Baghdad but also in majority-Shiite cities like Karbala, Najaf, Nasiriyah, and Basra.

The Lebanese protests have been more widespread in terms of sectarian geography, encompassing both major Sunni cities like Tripoli as well as Shi'ite cities like Tyre. The anti-Iran element of the Lebanese protests has been indirect. The protests have targeted the entire political system, over which Hezbollah presides. Their slogan, demanding the ouster of the entire sectarian political class, spares none: "All of them means all of them." And they have not shied away from including Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, by name: "all of them means all of them, and Nasrallah is one of them."

The political orders of Iraq and Lebanon share a core feature. While both claim the trappings

and formal structures of states, these structures are, in fact, dominated from within by parties-cum-militias commanded by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the model of Hezbollah. The reaction of the wardens of these political orders in Baghdad and Beirut has been to suppress the protest movements. In Iraq, the death toll had exceeded six hundred by the end of January. While events in Lebanon have not yet reached that level of lethality, violence against the protests has been a centerpiece of the sectarian elite's response from the start.

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***Washington is still wedded to the conceit that there are state institutions in Iraq and Lebanon and that America needs to strengthen them.***

This violent response, however, has not yet succeeded in snuffing out the protests. In Iraq especially, this failure is compounded by competition among the militia leaders, a result of the vacuum left by the elimination of the governor of the realm, Soleimani, and of his top Iraqi lieutenant, Abu Mahdi

al-Muhandis. These leaders are now scrambling to claim the head position. The fractiousness of the Iraqi Shiite scene, formerly managed by

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### ***Competition among militia leaders has intensified since Soleimani's death.***

Soleimani, and the absence of a credible figure to succeed him in that role, has led Iran to rely on Hezbollah as a steadying hand in Iraq, even as it deals with the turmoil in Beirut.

These frailties inside the Iranian order only underscore the fantastical nature of former president Barack Obama's vision for Iran as the bedrock of stability in the region. But if these protests against the political systems and governments of Iraq and Lebanon have exposed Iran's vulnerabilities, they have also highlighted the incoherence of US policy in these countries.

On one hand, the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" policy, a fundamental departure from his predecessor's strategy of realignment with Iran, has been key in exacerbating the structural problems of the Iraqi and Lebanese systems. Since the Lebanese banking sector depended on a constant inflow of fresh dollars, the tightening of sanctions on Hezbollah over the past three years further constrained the group's ability to circulate the proceeds of its global criminal enterprise through the banks. Drying up the flow of dollars denied the corrupt Lebanese political class the ability to limp along and accelerated the collapse.

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### ***The point of "maximum pressure" is simple: to raise the costs of Tehran's foreign adventures to levels it can't sustain.***

On the other hand, the president continues to be trapped in the failed policy framework of the Bush and Obama administrations. The frameworks of the Bush administra-

tion's Freedom Agenda, the counterterrorism campaigns, and the explicitly pro-Iranian realignment strategy of the Obama administration all invested the United States in the pro-Iranian political orders through the policy of building up state institutions.



Washington is still wedded to the conceit that there are state institutions in Iraq and Lebanon, distinct from and in opposition to Iran's militias, and that the United States needs to strengthen these institutions as the best way to roll back Iranian influences in Baghdad and Beirut. The protests have put the lie to this conceit.

That the people on the streets of Iraq and Lebanon are protesting these "state institutions," indeed the very political systems, already testifies to the fact that these institutions have lost their legitimacy, at least among much of the population. With that, the full absurdity of the argument behind current US policy—that these institutions are the instruments with which to defeat Hezbollah's "narrative"—comes into focus. If the United States doubles down on the mantra of propping up "state institutions," it would mean bailing out the Iranian order.

## THE GOAL: RESTRAINING IRAN

To be sure, it's unlikely that these protests will lead to a successful overhaul of the entrenched political systems of Iraq and Lebanon. But equally unclear is how the regeneration and

continued underwriting of these systems is in any way in the interests of the United States. Washington ought not concern itself with salvaging the existing pro-Iranian systems under whatever pretext, whether it's "strengthening state institutions," or

"contesting Iranian influence," or counterterrorism. Investment in "state institution-building" only relieves pressure on Iran, as is the case with the sanctions waivers Washington continues to extend to the Iraqi government.

Rather, the model for the United States should be its policy during the Cold War. The United States did not pour money into strengthening "state institutions" in Budapest or Warsaw. Rather, it worked on bankrupting and breaking the Soviet Union, all while lending support, moral and political, to the dissident movements in the Soviet realm.

Likewise, the priority for the United States is the intensification and success of its maximum pressure campaign against Iran. The focus should be on raising the heat on Iran and bankrupting it, so as to severely limit its means to project power abroad. While it is possible to envision a wide range of

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***In the Cold War, the United States did not pour money into strengthening "state institutions" in Budapest or Warsaw. Rather, it worked on bankrupting and breaking the Soviet Union.***

outcomes inside Iran, from the weakening or collapse of the current regime to its possible liberalization, the point of the ongoing pressure campaign is much simpler: to raise the relative costs of the regime's foreign adventures to levels it can't sustain. Insofar as the popular protests in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon are challenging the Islamic Republic and its political order in Baghdad and Beirut, and thereby contributing to the pressure campaign, America ought to support the protesters, and not the state institutions trying to suppress them. ■

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# Shaken, not Deterred

**Despite sanctions, protests, and the toll of disease, Iran is likely to continue along its destructive regional path.**

**By Sanam Vakil**

**T**umultuous domestic events in Iran and around the Middle East might lend favor to the view that President Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against the Islamic Republic is destabilizing and weakening Iran alongside its grip on its regional networks. No doubt the many interconnected domestic and regional challenges—economic sanctions, the November protests, the January downing of a Ukrainian airliner, low popular turnout in the February parliamentary elections, the killings of Qassem Soleimani and

## Key points

- » "Maximum pressure" has weakened Tehran's legitimacy and economy, but not its regional goals or commitments.
- » Iran's regional standing is not tied to one or two powerful figures. It flows from decades of collusion, negotiation, mutual benefit, and strategic intervention.
- » The conservative bloc took a majority of parliament seats this year. This will empower hardliners.
- » Iran will keep looking for ways to outmaneuver the Trump administration.

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Iraqi Popular Mobilization Unit (PMU) commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and anti-Iranian protests in Iraq and Lebanon—have placed significant pressure on Tehran. This pressure has most definitely weakened the Islamic Republic's domestic legitimacy above all. At the same time though, this pressure has neither altered Tehran's regional calculus and commitments nor has it returned Iran to the negotiating table.

In fact, these events are facilitating the empowerment of Iran's hard-liners who strongly support its regional resistance strategy. With the hard-liners' grip on power fortified, Iran's regional playbook will continue to be put to use as both maximum pressure is maintained and the Islamic Republic soldiers on.

The impact of Washington's maximum pressure campaign has clearly affected Iran's economy. Statistics indicate that the reimposition of US sanctions in November 2018 has plunged Iran's economy further into recession. After sanctions were restored, Iran's currency lost 60 percent of its value against the US dollar and its oil exports have plummeted. According to Iran's Statistical Center, year-on-year inflation was close to 40 percent in January 2020, with higher rates reported on basic foods. The International Monetary Fund has also forecast that unemployment would rise from its official rate of 12 percent in 2018.

These dynamics were further displayed in the November protests over a government plan to increase gas prices. In reaction, protesters took to the streets to demonstrate against the state of Iran's economy as well as against widespread corruption and mismanagement. The demonstrations reflected a growing public displeasure with the government's inability to meet the population's economic needs and were met by an equally striking government crackdown. Government mismanagement was on full display yet again in the tragic downing of the Ukrainian airliner and Iran's initial attempt to cover up its complicity and incompetence.

Protests last fall in Iraq and Lebanon that directly attacked the Iranian government and its support for nonstate actors across the region also raised questions about Iran's ability to manage its regional relations. At the same time, protests in both countries extend beyond the issue of Iran and point to a common theme of lack of governance, staid elite politics, and corruption.

## **HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE NATIONS**

The killing of Qassem Soleimani also affected Iran's regional relationships. Soleimani was deeply popular inside Iran and seen as a nationalist who protected the country from threats such as ISIS while executing Iran's regional



***COMMANDERS: Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi Popular Mobilization Unit commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis meet in November 2017 at the funeral for Soleimani's father. The two men were killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad last January. Their deaths left a power vacuum that successors are working to fill.*** [Hossein Velayati—Fars News Agency/Creative Commons]

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strategy. His four-day funeral drew extraordinary crowds, providing the government with a groundswell of popular support.

Soleimani had a personal relationship with the leaders of Lebanon's Hezbollah and the many PMUs in Iraq. Indeed, Iraq's parliament, in the aftermath of his killing, voted for withdrawal of American troops from the country—a move, should it come to fruition, that would be seen as an Iranian victory. His death and that of Muhandis left a power vacuum that Soleimani's successor, Esmail Qaani, will be working to fill over time.

At the same time, one should not assume that Iran's regional ties rely solely on the Soleimani conduit. Iran's regional standing and the power balance that has taken shape between itself and the range of regional groups it supports has come about through decades of collusion, negotiation, mutual benefit,

and strategic intervention. This amounts to a “parallel state building” process tailored to different countries, rather than mere influence through proxies. Formed by its postrevolutionary worldview and defensive position in the region, Iran has opportunistically capitalized on power vacuums around the Middle East to infiltrate weak states such as Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian territories, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

This process emulates Iran’s own hybrid political system, which is divided between formal elected institutions and the informal deep-state secu-

urity actors. Through this strategy, Tehran has been able to insert its influence into formal state institutions and informal layers

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### ***Events are only encouraging Iran’s hard-liners in their regional strategy.***

of civil society, the economy, and nonstate military groups. This rounded approach displays the range of direct and soft-power influence that extends into the diplomatic realm and through channels of economic investment and trade, sociocultural and religious ties, and military and intelligence training. Rolling such endemic influence back cannot be expected to be achieved so quickly.

Iranian conservatives took a majority of seats in the country’s February 21 parliamentary elections. As a marker of public apathy over the economic recession and heightened tensions with the United States, voter turnout was the lowest in the Islamic Republic’s forty-year electoral history. A predominantly conservative parliament will change the tenor of political debate and empower hard-liners to support economic and political resistance strategies against the United States.

After having failed to win the 2016 parliament or the presidency in 2013 and 2017, the conservative bloc will find this victory especially strategic. The impact will most visibly be felt in the change of tone toward President Hassan Rouhani. Conservatives will waste no time attacking Rouhani for the state of the international nuclear agreement (JCPOA), sanctions, and the country’s economic ills.

With its hard-line orientation, the parliament will also increase support for the resistance economy and look to promote local industry and small businesses to offset the impact of sanctions. While parliament does not determine foreign policy, it will remain supportive of Iran’s strategy in the region and toward the United States, and of nonstate actors around the Middle East. It will also look to nurture the “looking East” strategy that would continue to strengthen ties with Russia and China.



## NO CLEAR WINNER

Compared to the nuclear agreement that was shepherded by Iran's moderate factions with the blessing of Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, conservative groups in the country have supported Iran's regional strategy. The JCPOA is seen as having

furthered Iran's economic isolation and renewed sanctions. Conversely, Tehran's regional strategy, through its support

of nonstate actors and its asymmetrical ability to pressure the Arab Gulf, is seen internally to have been successful in staving off threats to the country and gaining intermittent leverage in its stalemate with Washington.

In this winding tale of wins and losses, Washington has interpreted that it is, for now, ahead in its campaign to change Iran's regional behavior. Iran's objective, however, will be to continue seeking opportunities to outmaneuver the Trump administration. This strategy will rear its head regionally in the coming months and grow in intensity as Tehran assesses and games the outcomes of the US presidential election. With these ebbs and flows ahead, one should avoid interpreting these events through a zero-sum lens. ■

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# What About Next Year?

**There's a strong case for having many students, especially those from poor families, repeat the school year the pandemic has cost them. If done well, this could be a gift of extra time.**

**By Michael J. Petrilli**

Education leaders around the country are working to set up distance-learning opportunities for their students whose school year was cut short by the coronavirus pandemic. That includes navigating multiple logistical and regulatory hurdles, training millions of educators overnight in how to use online tools, and figuring out how to get digital devices and packets of printed material into children's hands, among dozens of other pressing tasks.

So it's understandable if educators are a bit preoccupied. But it's high time to plan for next year because major decisions loom

## Key points

- » Decisions loom that could affect students' trajectories for the rest of their academic careers.
- » Schools will have to attend to the social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and re-establish supportive, comforting routines.
- » Children who are furthest behind could get regular one-on-one tutoring from specialists.
- » Letting students catch up will reap rewards in the years ahead.

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*Michael J. Petrilli is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, executive editor of **Education Next**, and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.*

that could affect students' trajectories for the rest of their academic careers. Most critical—and sensitive—is whether kids should be “socially promoted” to the next grade come fall. The answer for millions of elementary pupils who were already a year or two behind when the crisis struck should be no.

That is especially true since the 2020–21 school year is likely to be rocky as well. Even if some states and communities are prepared to return to a semblance of normalcy in September, localized outbreaks are likely to shutter schools again for weeks or months at a time. All of this time

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***Schools should have embraced “personalized learning” long before this crisis hit.***

away from school is going to be particularly devastating for poor and working-class youngsters, many of whom are already performing below grade level. Their parents are often working the sorts of jobs that don't have the option of being done virtually, and their homes are more likely to lack high-speed Internet and ample devices.

Perhaps middle and high school students can overcome these challenges, given their ability to work and read independently. But most low-income, low-performing elementary students will struggle mightily, almost surely falling even further behind. Thousands of Title I schools nationwide, serving upward of ten million students, are full of kids fitting this description.

So when schools reopen in the fall, these students should remain in their current grade and, ideally, return to the familiarity of their current teacher. (Other types of schools—including affluent schools, middle schools, and high schools—may also want to consider a similar approach.) The first order of business will be to attend to the social, emotional, and mental health needs of their children and to re-establish supportive and comforting routines.

Then teachers should develop individualized plans to fill in the gaps in kids' knowledge and skills and accelerate their progress to grade level. The use of high-quality diagnostic tests will be critical in assessing how much ground has been lost in reading and math. Students who are assessed as ready for the next grade level can move onward.

The next step would be for teachers to develop plans for each pupil to make progress, aimed at getting them to grade level by June. The plans should involve as much small-group instruction as possible, with kids clustered according to their current reading or math levels, plus some online learning opportunities in case schools are closed again. Those who are furthest behind could get regular one-on-one tutoring from specialists. This

would be different from just “repeating the grade,” which, research shows, rarely helps students catch up.

To be sure, holding back most students would present challenges. For one, schools would have two kindergarten cohorts, so principals would have to quickly staff up to find qualified teachers for the extra classrooms and extra funding to pay for them. (In future years, some of the “first year” kindergarteners would move ahead, but others might benefit from additional

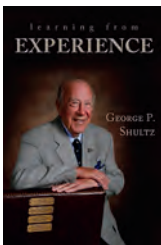
time, especially if the school is again hit by long closures.)

Principals would also need to find extra space for additional classrooms, though thanks to

declining enrollment (caused by the ongoing baby bust), that shouldn’t be insurmountable.

None of this is ideal. It would have been far better if US schools had embraced “personalized learning” long before the crisis hit—whereby kids move at their own pace, rather than in lockstep with their peers. But if there’s any silver lining, it’s that school closures create an unprecedented opportunity to give struggling students the gift of extra time. That will reap rewards in the years ahead. ■

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# *Cuba's Dubious Miracle*

**Havana has always boasted of its schools, which some educators even tout as a model for the United States. But in communist Cuba, education is never what it seems. The supposed excellence of those schools is highly suspect.**

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***By Paul E. Peterson***

**I**t's widely accepted that Cuban schools have made great strides forward. "Cuba's education system might as well be considered the ultimate wrap-around institution for children," claims the executive director of the American School Superintendents Association. A Stanford scholar writes in the *HuffPost* that he has "a hunch" that Cuban schools are better than those in the United States. Former president Barack Obama and Senator Bernie Sanders are equally celebratory.

Where is the evidence to warrant this enthusiasm? Cuba does not participate in major international tests of educational achievement. The country did participate in the 1997 and 2006 waves of Laboratorio, a UNESCO-sponsored survey of Latin American elementary school students, but it dropped out of the third wave administered in 2013. Further, the Cuban results from the 1997 and 2006 waves of this survey lack credibility, as we shall see.

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One thing is certain. Education—at least of a certain kind—is central to Cuban communism. “Revolution and education are the same thing,” said Fidel Castro, the island’s revolutionary hero. Castro’s philosopher-in-residence, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, wrote, “To build communism, a new man must be created. . . . Society as a whole must become a huge school.” Immediately following its 1960 revolution, Cuba embarked on a campaign to eradicate illiteracy. “Over a quarter of a million” *alphabetizadors*, or literacy teachers, were sent from schools into rural areas to live with the “*campesinos* and others whom they taught,” Samuel Bowles, a Marxist economist, writes approvingly in a 1971 article in the *Harvard Educational Review*. In an effort similar to China’s “Great Leap Forward,” the staff of “entire schools [were moved] to the countryside for extended periods to harvest crops and do other agriculture work,” Bowles writes. Teachers and students were “housed in simple camps and doing hard agricultural work side by side with the *campesinos*.”

A less sanguine account, by H. S. Bola, conveys the militaristic energy of the operation:

Student workers were organized into “brigades,” wore uniforms and took oaths, and “liberated” villages from illiteracy. The title of the primer, *Venceremos*, which means “We will overcome” or “We will conquer,” reflects a military tone, although it is well understood that the enemy in this case is illiteracy. A section of the hymn sung by *brigadistas* in the countryside, however, includes reference to yet another enemy: “Down with imperialism, up with liberty! We carry with the words the light of truth.”

One million, four hundred thousand Cubans fled their homeland for the United States in the wake of draconian measures taken to restructure Cuban society. The cost to the Cuban economy is well known. But what has been the long-term educational impact of Cuba’s broad jump forward?

## **SANDERS’S ADMIRATION**

That topic edged into the 2020 presidential race when then-candidate Bernie Sanders, in a *60 Minutes* interview, gave Cuba’s educational innovations high marks. Castro “educated their kids,” by means of “a massive literacy program,” he said admiringly. Asked to defend the assertion, Sanders cited President Obama’s own assessment of Cuban education reforms: “You’ve made great progress in educating young people. Every child in Cuba gets a basic education,” Obama says he told Castro in a conversation in which the president asked him to embrace a market economy.



Sanders and Obama are correct that Cuba launched a campaign to reduce illiteracy in rural communities, and it would be inaccurate to deny that progress has been made. But the gains may well be overstated—the literacy rate in Cuba had already reached 78 percent before Castro’s revolution. Beyond that, celebratory claims by left-wing academics and liberal media outlets have left the impression that Cuba, alone among Latin American countries, has created a high-quality educational system—and that its “great progress in educating young people” stands in contrast to the dismal performance of American schools.

Cuba has resisted invitations to subject its claims to external verification. Notably, it has declined to participate in the Program for International Student Assessment, sponsored by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development, which every three years since 2000 has administered achievement tests in math, science, and reading to fifteen-year-old students in more than

seventy countries. PISA tests are administered to students in Russia, China, Vietnam, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, the United States, and Uruguay. Cuba could easily establish its purported superiority over the United States and other countries in Latin America simply by participating. But Cuba has never administered PISA to a representative sample of its students.

Cuba did participate in the 1997 and 2006 waves (but not the 2013 wave) of a survey of elementary-student achievement known as the UNESCO Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study, which has been administered by Laboratorio, the moniker used here, to multiple countries in Latin America. Results from these tests seem to show that Cuba outranks the rest of Latin America by wide margins. UNESCO has given Laboratorio responsibility for design of the survey. The testing organization also asks each country to include in the sample a representative number of schools by urbanicity (urban vs. rural), grade composition (primary, middle school, combined), and sector (public vs. private). However, the actual selection of schools and administration of the tests is left to the coordinating agency within each country. As a consequence, the Cuban administration of Laboratorio in the 1997 and 2006 waves of the survey was the responsibility of the country’s central government.

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***Havana had a strong incentive to demonstrate that Cuban students outperformed the rest of Latin America—and it very probably took steps to make sure that happened.***



A number of assumptions about how Cuba administered the tests are problematic, but they are not the main reason for skepticism over the size of “Cuba’s academic advantage.” The main concern is the credibility of the test results themselves. There is no direct evidence of cheating, it must be said. But the following peculiarities raise concerns that would likely prompt official investigation had they been observed in the United States:

- » Performance levels are incredibly high.
- » Gains from one grade to the next are minuscule.
- » Socioeconomic gaps in student achievement are unbelievably tiny.
- » Teachers report extraordinarily high homework assignment rates and low incidences of disciplinary problems.
- » Cuba withdrew from participation in 2013, despite its number-one ranking in earlier surveys. Countries that win gold medals don’t typically withdraw from subsequent competitions without good reason.

Any one of these outside-the-box outcomes may have an alternative explanation, but together they point toward one conclusion: the Cuban central government had a strong incentive to demonstrate their students outperformed the rest of Latin America—and it very probably took steps to make sure that happened.

## REASONABLE SUSPICIONS

When outcomes seem unlikely, the first suspect is the design of the sampling frame. A survey must give all students in the country an equal probability of being chosen to participate. If US performance on the PISA were ascertained by gathering information only from schools in rich suburbs, estimates would exaggerate nationwide achievement levels. Conversely, if tests were administered only in schools located in central cities, estimates of average national performance would be skewed downward.

Laboratorio left sampling decisions, apart from the guidelines mentioned above, to the discretion of the countries administering the test. So it is entirely possible that the results for Cuba are simply due to biases in the sampling frame. Other oddities, though, suggest that more than sample design impacted the Cuban results.

***UNTESTED: Schoolchildren walk along a Havana street (opposite). “To build communism . . . society as a whole must become a huge school,” proclaimed Che Guevara. Indoctrination aside, the success of Cuban schools may be overstated: Cuba does not participate in major international tests of educational achievement.*** [Kate Perez—Creative Commons]

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Consider, for example, Cuba's achievement results in language arts in Laboratorio's 1997 wave. The median score in language arts for Cuban third-graders was 343 points, as compared to 264 points in Argentina, 256 points in Brazil, 259 points in Chile, and 229 in Mexico, differences that range from 1.6 to 2.4 standard deviations. (A standard deviation on these tests appears to be roughly two or more years' worth of learning.) If these scores are to be believed, the median child in Cuba learns by third grade what the median student in other countries learns only by sixth grade or later. This difference is so large that the distributions of achievement in these three countries barely overlap that of Cuba. The score of a student at the 25th percentile in Cuba is 305 points, while the scores of students at the 75th percentile in Argentina, Chile, and Brazil are only 305 points, 304 points, and 283 points, respectively.

Cuba's eye-popping performance was not limited to language arts. In 2006 the median third-grade student in Cuba performed on the math achievement test at about 1.5 standard deviations higher than the median students in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. The same is true for the sixth-grade test. These results have been interpreted as showing an astonishing Cuban educational advantage, but they might also be interpreted as "too good to be true." After all, Chile performed only 0.9 standard deviations lower than high-flying Finland on the 2018 math test administered by PISA.

And despite the fantastic results at each grade level, the Cuban students do not seem to learn much from one grade to the next. In 1997, Laboratorio tested students in both third and fourth grade, which allows one to track how much students, on average, gain over the course of a single year. In Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, fourth-graders score 22 to 25 points higher than third-graders, indicating learning gains of about a half a standard deviation in the course of one year. But the students attending Cuba's marvelous schools gained only 5 points, not enough to achieve statistical significance. The oddity is of such magnitude that Martin Carnoy and Jeffery Marshall, who wrote about Cuban education in 2005 in *Comparative Education Review*, feel required to comment, if only in a footnote, as follows:

One of the mysteries of the Cuban results is the small difference between third- and fourth-grade test scores (on the same test but different students taking the test). One possible explanation is that the test was sufficiently easy for Cuban students that a high fraction of both third and fourth graders achieved perfect scores, so that it was difficult to achieve much higher average scores in the fourth grade.



An alternative explanation for this unusual phenomenon is that teachers were correcting the answers so that many students, in both third and fourth grades, were obtaining perfect or near-perfect scores.

Cuba has virtually eradicated the socioeconomic-status achievement gap, if Laboratorio results are to be believed. In Latin America as a whole, that gap is very large. According to a report of the Inter-American Development Bank, Latin American students participating in the 2006 wave of Laboratorio who were from households in

the bottom 20 percent of the socioeconomic distribution had only a 10 percent probability of scoring at a satisfactory level on the third-grade math test, while stu-

dents from households in the highest quintile had a 48 percent probability. In Brazil, these probabilities were 12 percent and 59 percent, respectively. But in Cuba, the probabilities were essentially the same—72 percent and 74 percent—for students from households in the lowest and highest quintiles of the distribution. For sixth-grade students taking the 2006 math test, these probabilities were 76 percent and 81 percent, respectively.

The socialist paradise has also virtually eliminated the urban-rural gap, which is otherwise quite massive throughout Latin America. In Mexico and Brazil that gap in language arts is 0.62 and 0.66 standard deviations, respectively, and in Argentina and Chile, it is 0.35 standard deviations. But in Cuba that number falls to just 0.16 standard deviations. In math it is just 0.05 standard deviations, a difference that is not statistically significant. Cuba has indeed lived up to its egalitarian commitments—if it has not falsified its scores to give that impression.

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***The alleged Cuban educational advantage flogged by left-wing professors has never been subjected to the same scrutiny applied to impressive US test scores.***

## **POLITICAL GOALS**

In 1935, Stalin honored Aleksei Grigorievich Stakhanov for mining 102 tons of coal in less than six hours, fourteen times his quota. His followers, the Stakhanovites, tried to do likewise, and it is this kind of heroism that Cuban teachers apparently feel they need to report. When responding to a survey, the vast majority say they always assign their students homework. Elsewhere in Latin America, only a minority of teachers say they always assign homework. Fewer than 30 percent of the third-grade and sixth-grade math teachers in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, and no more than 10 percent of the Chilean

ones, said they always assign math homework. By comparison, 90 percent of third-grade and sixth-grade math teachers in Cuba insisted they always assign homework. In the language arts, these percentages were 87 percent and 84 percent for the two grades, respectively. Homework is not popular in progressive circles in the United States, but it appears to be nearly pervasive in Cuba—or at least teachers feel compelled to claim that that is the case.

Then, too, elementary students “hardly ever” fight in Cuban classrooms, teachers say. The average “classroom fight” score on the Cuban teacher survey runs a full standard deviation below that for other Latin American countries. Just as test scores are incredibly high, reports of classroom fights are dubiously low. Perhaps elementary students in Cuba are model socialist citizens, but if they are not, teacher reports understate the factual situation on the ground, perhaps because accurate statistics are not desired by the authorities. One can only wonder about the potential consequences for teachers had they reported that their students misbehaved or did not do well on the Laboratorio tests.

Given Fidel Castro’s commitment to state socialism, one can hardly fault his cheating. To deceive credulous sympathizers is in the national interest, as understood from his point of view. After all, education was central to the original mission of the Cuban revolution, thousands of Cubans were uprooted ostensibly to eliminate illiteracy and equalize opportunity in rural Cuba, and a sizable share of the country’s scarce resources are committed to primary education.

Nor should Laboratorio be faulted for launching an imperfect survey of Latin American countries which hitherto had not participated in international testing. Results from international tests can have serious political consequences. Germany was forced to re-examine its school system in 2000

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***Perhaps the Cuban authorities aren’t interested in accurate statistics. To deceive credulous sympathizers is in the revolution’s interest.***

when its students ranked well below those in Finland and the Netherlands. India withdrew from PISA after 2009 when results placed the country near the bottom

of international rankings. The United States is embarrassed by its low math rankings each time the PISA tests are announced. When asking a country to participate in an international test for the first time, an international agency needs to be sensitive to local political circumstances, and Laboratorio was in no position to drive a hard bargain with individual countries when first



attempting to construct the survey. Even PISA officials may be more lenient with countries participating in its survey for the first time. Allowing nations to draw samples and administer the tests themselves was the only option for Laboratorio.

One need not be as generous with scholars, who have the responsibility to expose sham and pretense whenever and wherever it is observed. The Laboratorio data are open

and available for any scholar to analyze. Yet the alleged Cuban edu-

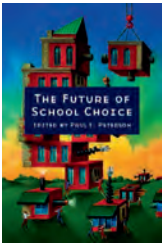
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***“Revolution and education are the same thing,” Fidel Castro once said.***

cational advantage flogged by left-wing professors has never been subjected to the kind of rigorous scrutiny applied to impressive test scores reported by schools in the United States. When the academic community fails to exercise its responsibilities, political leaders are not constrained from making unwarranted claims based on flimsy evidence.

Under the circumstances, Bernie Sanders must be complimented for exercising restraint when he said Cuba had made progress toward ending illiteracy. That statement does not say much, but at least it is true. ■

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# Contempt in Court

**How anti-American ideologues hijacked the International Criminal Court.**

***By David Davenport***

Since the International Criminal Court (ICC) was created in 1998, many have understood it to be a way for those in the world who oppose but cannot match America's military power to attack it legally instead. This aim is becoming clear after the court's recent decision to investigate the US military for potential war crimes in Afghanistan. If successful, the ICC prosecutor may then charge individual Americans for war crimes.

How did we come to this place, where Americans could be ordered to stand trial in The Hague for war crimes? It is a story of good intentions captured by a small but vocal group and turned to this group's own political ends. After special international criminal tribunals were formed to deal with overwhelming human rights atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia earlier in the 1990s, there was a sense that a permanent court should be established to deal with these. The United States not only supported the idea but was one of its leading proponents and organizers.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the creation of the ICC. A group of human rights nonprofit groups and smaller nations formed a coalition to change the entire nature and scope of the proposed court. Instead of seeing cases referred by the UN Security Council as was done previously, the

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***JURISDICTION?: Former Ivory Coast president Laurent Gbagbo appears before the International Criminal Court in The Hague last February. Gbagbo, the first former head of state taken into custody by the court, was arrested and extradited in 2011 after refusing to yield power and sparking a short civil conflict. He was acquitted in early 2019 of crimes against humanity but faces a possible retrial. [Jerry Lampen—Reuters]***

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coalition wanted an independent prosecutor who could range over the world and bring forward his own cases. Instead of limiting parties to citizens of nations that agreed to the treaty creating the court, as was done historically, the council wanted jurisdiction over anyone who committed a crime on the territory of a signatory state. It also sought to add a new crime to the traditional mix: the crime of aggression.

The point of these politicized human rights activists was to create what they called “a court worth having,” not the sort of institution that would

attract wide support. Instead of taking the time to engage in compromise and negotiation to attract most of the nations to join, the court was formed when only sixty of the world's one hundred ninety-plus nations signed on.

Rightly, the United States refused to agree to this kind of aggressive political institution. Washington did not sign the treaty and took some comfort in the fact that the court would act only in cases where local judicial systems either could not or would not act. Indeed, that was its original purpose: to be available when local systems were overwhelmed by abuse, as in the Rwandan genocide, or when powerful dictators or national leaders refused to investigate their own people.

In questions of war and military force, there really is no true international "law." Most treaties establish something like international norms to which nations aspire, which are easily violated when national interest dictates. There is no international constitution, no global police force, to enforce these norms, so in that sense, it is a misnomer to think of them as law in the way Americans regard law.

Thus, an institution with the bold aspirations of the ICC becomes, in effect, politics by other means. Even though the United States has not signed on to the ICC and has arguably the strongest judicial system in the world, the ICC nonetheless creates an opportunity to try to put on a political trial of American soldiers and officials, which is precisely what many of the proponents of the court sought in the first place.

Just as the United States said no when the court was formed, it must just say no again if the prosecutor comes calling on Americans to be investigated or stand up in court. ■

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# *Bureaucrats and Indians*

**American Indian tribes are quite competent to manage the federal lands they know so well, and Washington should let them do so.**

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**By Terry L. Anderson**

A proposal by Senator Steve Daines (R-Montana) to transfer the National Bison Range—18,800 acres—to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) has run into opposition on the grounds that it is simply another part of the Republican Party’s federal land “giveaway” program. Such claims are nonsense.

Start with the fact that the 18,800 acres were a tiny part of 22 million acres that were once the territory of the Flathead Indians, as they were called by the European immigrants. Under the Hellgate Treaty of 1855, the Flathead tribes ceded over 20 million acres to the federal government and were left with a 1.3 million-acre reservation. Then in 1908, President Teddy Roosevelt created the National Bison Refuge out of grazing land purchased from the CSKT for \$807,000 (in today’s dollars).

In the early years of contact, Europeans viewed gifts from generous Native Americans as gifts, while the Indians saw them as exchanges for which they expected something in return. Seen in terms of the original

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*Terry L. Anderson is the John and Jean De Nault Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and past president of the Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, Montana.*





***PLAIN TALK: American bison graze in the National Bison Range in Montana. President Teddy Roosevelt in 1908 created the refuge, which a senator now seeks to transfer to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, who originally held the lands. Long-standing federal law still locks Indian lands in trusteeship until the government decides Indians are “competent and capable.”***

[Nino Calvo—Newscom]

territory of the Flathead tribes, Daines’s proposal to transfer the land to the Indians seems more like a giveback than a giveaway. Moreover, if the transfer happens, the land will still be under the trusteeship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Most of the opposition to the transfer comes from Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). It filed a lawsuit in 2016 to stop then-interior secretary Ryan Zinke from transferring the land to the CSKT. PEER mainly contended that Zinke’s proposal did not follow administrative procedures, but senior counsel Paula Dinerstein also complained that bison management “would be difficult to do if it weren’t part of the refuge system.” In



other words, Indians would not know how to manage bison as well as bureaucrats do. Then, in her next breath, Dinerstein admitted that “the Bison Range has been pretty sorely neglected.”

It is useful to compare the CSKT’s management of their timber lands with the performance of the federal government. Since taking control of forest management on the Flathead Reservation in 1988, CSKT have earned more than \$2 for every

\$1 spent; the US Forest Service is simply breaking even. Moreover, CSKT lands had better species and age distri-

bution of trees, making them less prone to wildfires, better wildlife habitat, and better water quality. As law professor and tribal member Robert Miller points out in his book *Reservation “Capitalism”*, “tribes are making profits and creating economic development and jobs from their forests and they are striving to preserve their ecosystems and sustainable growth for years to come.” CSKT could do the same with the National Bison Range.

The case for transferring other federal lands to Indian tribes also applies to national monuments. In early February, the Trump administration finalized its plan to downsize Bears Ears National Monument by more than one million acres and open them to grazing and mineral development. Instead, it should have transferred Bears Ears to the tribes who claim it as part of their heritage.

Just as CSKT have demonstrated with timber management, the Navajo Nation has shown that it is fully capable of managing cultural sites. Canyon de Chelly National Monument is owned by

the tribe, held in trust by the federal government, and managed cooperatively by the tribe and the National

Park Service. Hence, “administration of the park requires the National Park Service and the Navajo Nation to work together to protect and preserve the park resources,” as it says on the monument’s website.

Following the Daines proposal, Trump should have given Bears Ears to the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition (the Hopi, Navajo, Ute Mountain Ute, Zuni, and Ute Indian Tribes). Surely those tribes can do as well as or better than

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***Apparently, Indians don’t know how to manage bison as well as bureaucrats do.***

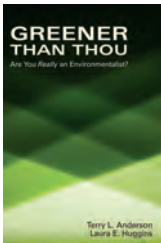
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***Surely the tribes can do as well as federal agencies—or better—at determining what’s best for Native American cultural assets.***

federal agencies at determining what is best for Native American cultural assets.

Opposing tribal land management harks back to the Burke Act of 1906, which locked Indian lands into the trusteeship of the federal government until and unless the government ordained Indians to be “competent and capable.” To this day those words underpin federal Indian law. Transferring federal lands back to Native Americans would be a good first step toward expunging that racist notion from our national policies. ■

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# *Gig Workers to the Rescue*

**Maybe it took an emergency to prove the worth of flexible, on-demand workers. Now will Sacramento finally ease its stranglehold over the gig economy?**

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***By Lee E. Ohanian***

**E**vidence is mounting that Assembly Bill 5, the California law that guts the gig-worker economy in the state, is creating long-term economic harm. At the same time, California's stay-at-home order for nearly all residents, which shuttered most of the world's fifth-largest economy, has greatly increased the need for on-demand drivers for delivery of groceries, medications, and prepared food to California households, particularly the oldest and most vulnerable.

A broad group of economists, including Nobel Prize winners, advisers to US presidents and California governors, former Treasury officials, and advisers to the Federal Reserve and other central banks, has called on Governor Gavin Newsom and the state legislature to suspend AB 5 immediately. A letter circulated by the Independent Institute argues that AB 5, which also prevents many health care workers from working as independent contractors, damages the state's ability to respond quickly and flexibly to rapidly changing economic needs:

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*Lee E. Ohanian is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and a professor of economics and director of the Ettinger Family Program in Macroeconomic Research at UCLA.*

By prohibiting the use of independent contractor drivers, health care professionals, and workers in other critical areas, AB 5 is doing substantial and avoidable harm to the very people who now have the fewest resources and the worst alternatives available to them. . . . Self-isolation has created an immediate need for flexible and low-cost ways of delivering goods to customers.

California is home to Uber, Lyft, DoorDash, ChowNow, and other innovative businesses that have developed and implemented breakthrough algorithms that have transformed on-demand driving and food-delivery services. These innovations have benefited consumers enormously and created millions of opportunities for workers.

These newcomers should be ready to spring into action to help deal with the Covid-19 crisis, with state and local governments providing support. And in a period when tens of thousands of California workers filed for unemployment compensation, just think how many furloughed Californians would want to drive to replace lost income and support their communities. As the letter says:

A mountain of work needs to be done, deliveries made, and people stranded at home helped to receive groceries and medications. Meanwhile, furloughed Californians stand on the verge of being wiped out financially because the law prevents them from working part time in a variety of positions. Blocking work that is needed and impoverishing workers laid off from other jobs are not the intentions of AB 5, but the law is having these unintended consequences and needs to be suspended.

Newsom has responded to the health care crisis, not by suspending AB 5 but by creating a new state government health care bureaucracy to hire health care workers. Interestingly, and importantly, the governor suspended some significant regulations in dealing with this crisis, including waiving medical certification for health care workers. Here he made the right call. But AB 5 remains on the books.

AB 5, which passed on a party-line vote and took effect January 1, outlawed the incredibly creative business model of on-demand driving and delivery services. Gig businesses have hired drivers as independent contractors. This is a win-win, as about 80 percent of independent contractors prefer this work relationship because it affords them flexibility in how much they work, when they work, and where they work. But rather than being able to ramp up their

businesses at a critical time, gig companies are now spending their capital to protect against an overreaching state and spending their technical talents redesigning software to deal with the new law. Gig companies have pledged \$90 million to fight AB

5, including a lawsuit on equal-protection grounds and a potential November ballot initiative that would repeal the law.

To defend the severe intrusion on workers' ability to choose how they earn their livelihood, the state claims that independent contractors need government protection from exploitation and access to disability insurance and unemployment insurance. These defenses are implausible. Exploitation? Nearly all gig workers provide services for multiple gig companies. A driver who doesn't like the working conditions at Uber simply drives for Lyft. By driving for competing companies, gig workers are pushing their compensation up to its maximum level. As for social insurance, it would be simple to allow independent contractors to buy into the state disability fund. And unemployment—not being able to drive for reasons other than cause—does not exist for gig workers.

California's new law is in fact an enormous political payoff to labor unions, who are among the most important political supporters of the Democratic Party's incumbent politicians. It was strongly supported by the state's biggest unions, including the California Labor Federation, the Service Employees International Union, and the California Teachers Association. It offers up hundreds of thousands of potential new members

for union organizing efforts once these workers become formal employees rather than independent contractors.

To dispel any doubt about its intentions, the bill's author, assembly member Lorena Gonzalez, tweeted that she “would love if all employees were unionized.”

More broadly, this destructive law illustrates the dangers of a one-party supermajority state. Every major elected statewide California official is a Democrat, and both state legislative houses have comfortable Democratic supermajorities. Since there is no competitive check, Democrats can run roughshod over the personal freedom of nearly forty million Californians, and almost nothing can be done about it.

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***“A mountain of work needs to be done, deliveries made, and people stranded at home helped to receive groceries and medications.”***

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***The gig workforce is tailor-made for the Covid-19 crisis.***

In late March, Republican Assemblyman Kevin Kiley wrote to Newsom, urging him to suspend AB 5 because “at a time when most Californians can’t work outside the home, AB 5 is stopping many of them from working inside the home.”

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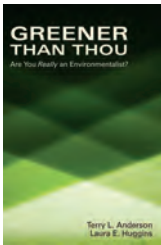
***“Blocking work that is needed and impoverishing workers laid off from other jobs are not the intentions of AB 5, but the law is having these unintended consequences.”***

Senate Republican  
Caucus Leader Shannon  
Grove (R-Bakersfield)  
also urged the governor to  
suspend AB 5: “In my dis-  
trict, I am aware of about  
seventy certified nurse  
anesthetists who want to

go to work to provide the crucial health and safety needs of our community, but they are forced to sit at home because of AB 5.”

AB 5 is a destructive law, and there is no worse time for it to be affecting California. Suspending it would largely return the determination of independent-contractor status to the common-sense definition applied in the past. And Newsom could do it with a stroke of his pen. ■

***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](http://www.hoover.org/publications/californiaonyourmind)). © 2020 The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University. All rights reserved.***



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# *Ruins of the Great Society*

Lyndon Johnson's grand program was born under a fatal paradox, says historian **Amity Shlaes**: the beliefs that "we can do anything" but "only the government can do it." That tangled ambition led not to greatness but to a great disappointment.

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**By Peter Robinson**

**Peter Robinson, Uncommon Knowledge:** A graduate of Yale, Amity Shlaes is the author of four *New York Times* bestsellers including, *Coolidge*, her splendid biography of the thirtieth president, and *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression*. Her most recent book is *Great Society: A New History*. Amity, welcome.

**Amity Shlaes:** Thank you, Peter.

**Robinson:** The Stanford class of 2020 will graduate more than fifty years after the enactment of the Great Society. What do current college students need to grasp about the Great Society?

**Shlaes:** The young people then were like those of today. They were idealistic. They saw tremendous wealth in the United States and said, "Why can't we

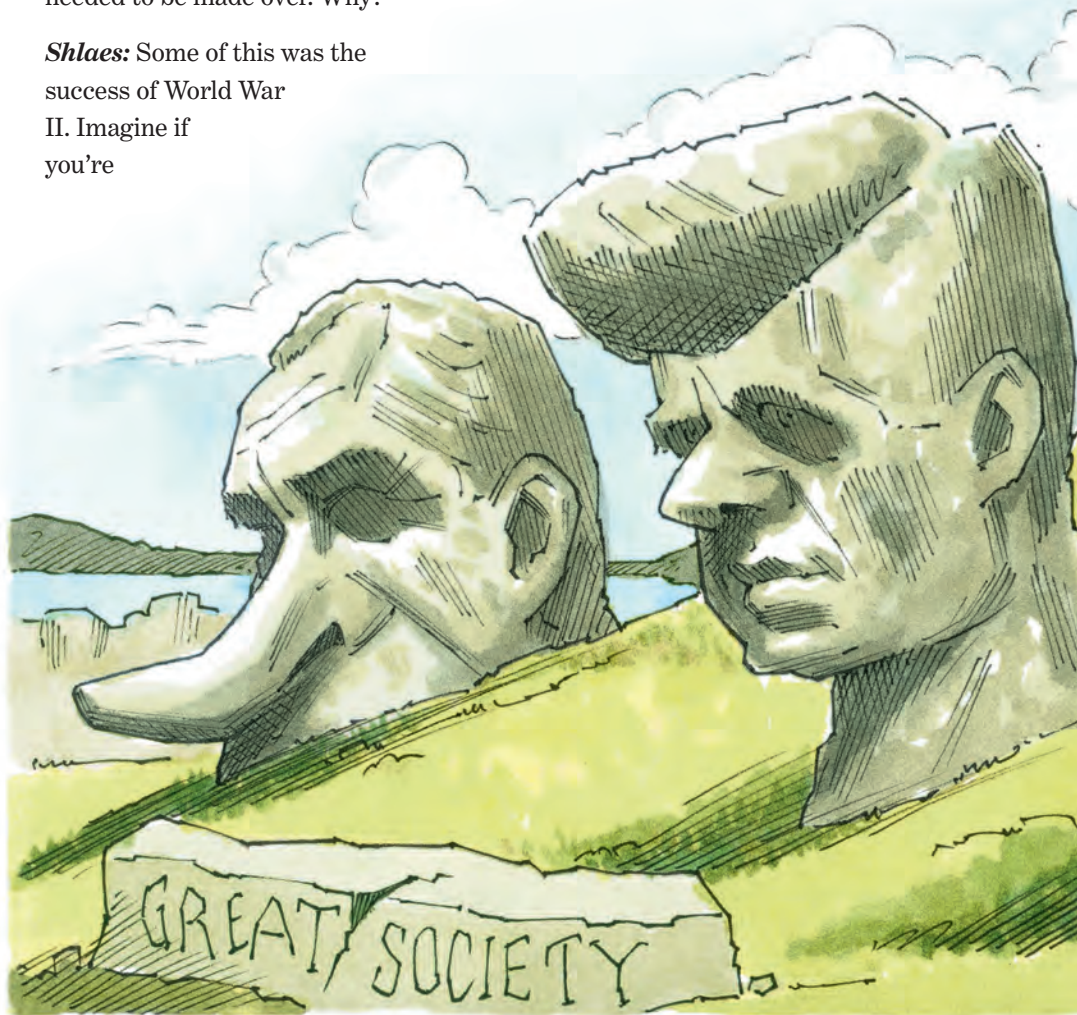
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*Amity Shlaes is the author of the new book **Great Society: A New History** (Harper, 2019). **Peter Robinson** is the editor of the **Hoover Digest**, the host of **Uncommon Knowledge**, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

just do the little bit that's left? Why can't we make the last tenth or last fifth of America happy? Why can't it all be fair?" It was an intensely idealistic period. Both eras also share a flirtation with socialism.

**Robinson:** A quote from *Great Society*: "There were not many self-described socialists in the country in the early 1960s. Still, many Americans ached to make American society over, whether by tinkering or rebuilding, in the name of improving life for all." By the 1960s, the United States had emerged from the Second World War as the most powerful nation on earth, and the history of the country was pretty clear. It had absorbed wave after wave of immigrants and created one of the richest societies in the history of humankind. And yet they thought it needed to be made over. Why?

**Shlaes:** Some of this was the success of World War II. Imagine if you're



a veteran and you saw what we did in Europe. Here at home, as Norman Podhoretz has said, solving and curing poverty seemed to be just a mopping-up action. There was a real sense of confidence in the United States that we could do anything—certainly deal with little domestic problems. That was a big part of it. Part of it was that the true early baby boomers hadn't



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



been through the Great Depression. So, they were more optimistic than their veteran parent or veteran big brother about what was possible in the United States. America was rich. We had a standard of living comparable to nowhere. Asia was not yet any kind of threat; it was a place we had to rescue. Europe was a place we had to rescue. There was no notion that we could ever be competed with.

**Robinson:** Another factor you stress is prosperity. From *Great Society*: “America was certainly prosperous enough to afford a vast experiment such as socialism. American unemployment was low and heading lower. American business boomed. As Stalin was said to have joked, America was the only country in the world that could afford communism.” Talk about that sense of economic buoyancy.

**Shlaes:** That, too, is like today. Americans today think an ever-rising stock market is their birthright. At that time, the stock market was rising and the landmark everyone imagined we would pass shortly was 1,000. If you wanted a job, you got one, more or less. If you were not particularly skilled, they would train you. There was that much demand for labor in the early '60s.

**Robinson:** So, we've got the feeling that the country can do anything, that it has the resources to afford anything, and you mention one other factor. Again, I'm quoting from your book: “In its *Great Society* endeavor, the country relegated the private sector to the role of consultant, workhorse, and milk cow.” On the face of it, this is puzzling. It's the private sector that produced all the matériel that enabled us to win the Second World War. It's the private sector where Detroit and Flint are booming and able to pay high wages that attract people from all over the country. Why do they look at all of this and say, “Ah, we'll just milk the private sector; we'll let the government get the job done”?

**Shlaes:** There are two ways to get a  
Great Society: private sector or  
public sector. We chose  
the public sector.

The question is why. I think the military was part of that. We built a military-industrial complex. Only the government can make an Internet. The thinking was that only the government can launch a national poverty plan if we need one. And you see that today as well. The young socialists, social democrats, and welfare idealists of that period thought only the federal government could do this.



## PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

**Robinson:** So, those are the predicates. Now the Great Society comes into being. We often associate the Great Society with one president, Lyndon Johnson, but you stress that this was also the project of John Kennedy and Richard Nixon. Let's take each of these in turn.

JFK was president for less than three years before he was assassinated. But his administration expands unemployment and Social Security benefits, enacts housing and transportation, but at the same time JFK is responsible for deep income tax cuts. They're not enacted during his lifetime, but he proposes them and Congress enacts them after his death. So, this is a strange picture. You've got a man willing to use government to expand, to begin the Great Society, but he also seems to understand the importance of the private sector and he wants to cut taxes to promote economic growth. What's the correct way to understand JFK's relationship to the Great Society?

**Shlaes:** All presidents are just a collection of impulses, none more so than John Kennedy. It was the Kennedy family presidency even more than it was the John Kennedy presidency. The impulses in JFK are his family's. His brother Robert was to his left and yet he felt he needed him in the cabinet as attorney general. His father was kind of to his right, because his father was an old Wall Streeter and had been chair of the SEC and kind of tough and probably not that trustworthy. So, which John are you speaking with? He respected capitalism, but he didn't particularly understand it. There was this essential distrust of business yet some idea that business is good, and certainly a kind of Keynesian understanding of growth. They thought we'll stimulate the economy if we cut taxes. But generally speaking, JFK was a man who respected the individual: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." He understood initiative and self-discipline very well. All these competing impulses were in him. The Bobby Kennedy and Eunice Kennedy side of him said: Let's do little projects to help young people; let's be friends with the Ford Foundation and try out ideas there; let's have giant programs for delinquents. That was the embryo of the Great Society, but Kennedy never had the magnitude of vision.

**Robinson:** That brings us to Lyndon Baines Johnson. Here are two quotations from *Great Society*.

The first is LBJ at the University of Michigan on May 22, 1964: "We are going to assemble the best thought from all over the world on the cities, on natural beauty, on the quality of education, and on other emerging



challenges. From these studies, we will begin to set our course toward the Great Society.” Hard to say quite what he’s talking about, but it’s big.

The second quotation is from you: “When Johnson’s aides expressed their trepidation, he intoxicated them with his bold reply. ‘Well,’ Johnson said, ‘what the hell’s the presidency for?’ ”

Johnson enacts a cascade of legislation: civil rights, the War on Poverty, Medicare, Medicaid, the Social Security Act of 1965, which greatly expands benefits and beneficiaries, and all this while ramping up a war in Vietnam. What did he think he was doing?

**Shlaes:** I start with the ambition. He wants to be bigger than John Kennedy. The good Johnson wanted to do his duty and fulfill the platform promises of the Democratic Party in 1960 and honor JFK. The less good and more human Johnson wanted to show them that he could do this better than Kennedy, and he had that advantage because Congress became more Democratic. So, he had the votes for projects such as the tax cut which Kennedy didn’t have.

**Robinson:** By 1964, of course, Kennedy has been assassinated. Barry Goldwater, a man of the right, is the Republican nominee, and Johnson sweeps to a landslide victory and brings in huge Democratic majorities in both the House and the Senate, making the most liberal Congress since 1936. The door is wide open, and he gets whatever he wants.

**Shlaes:** Johnson had a license Kennedy didn’t have. In addition to that, he had been Senate majority leader before becoming Kennedy’s vice president. You play to your strength, and Johnson’s strength was delivering laws. Joe Califano—a senior aide to LBJ and later a cabinet member under other presidents—said that Johnson made laws the way other men eat chocolate chip cookies: that’s a law, that’s a law, that’s a law, without much regard to the consequences of the law. I think Johnson thought he was honoring Truman and FDR in addition to JFK. FDR was his intellectual and political father, because Johnson’s youth as a politician was working in the New Deal. The Great Society was going to be even better than the New Deal and guess what? Johnson’s commitments cost more than FDR’s commitments today.

## NIXON DOUBLES DOWN

**Robinson:** Let’s turn to Richard Milhous Nixon. Once more from *Great Society*: “Though the electorate expected Richard Nixon to lead Congress in curtailing the Great Society”—he’s a Republican after all and the Great



***GREAT EXPECTATIONS: President Lyndon B. Johnson leans into a Cabinet meeting, with Secretary of State Dean Rusk at the left of the photo and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara at right. As historian Amity Shlaes writes about the president's ambitions in her new book, "When Johnson's aides expressed their trepidation, he intoxicated them with his bold reply. 'Well,' Johnson said, 'what the hell's the presidency for?'" [LBJ Presidential Library]***

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Society is a Democratic project—"the thirty-seventh president ended up expanding it."

**Shlaes:** You can almost feel Pat Buchanan, his speechwriter, trembling with rage. Nixon ran a beautiful campaign in 1968 in many ways. He spoke well, he was intelligent, he was less of a thug than Johnson, who often got his way through bluster and bullying. Nixon had clear arguments and compassion, but they thought he was going to cut government. For example, observers thought that Nixon would get rid of the poverty office that Johnson had established and had gone badly wrong. He didn't. Why not? One answer is the Vietnam War. Both Johnson and Nixon had to keep the country calm and avoid riots while they shipped off a lot of young men. We went from fifty thousand young men to five hundred thousand in just a few years. Also, Nixon was good at figuring out politics. He wanted the Democratic center

to vote for him, so he threw the Democrats a lot of bones, such as permitting the vast expansion of food stamps. Also, who Nixon was shifted when he got anxious, as we know from the history of Watergate. The paranoid Nixon emerged and he was a different man.

**Robinson:** You write about a famous meeting at Camp David on Friday, August 13, 1971. Nixon meets with a dozen of his advisers, including men we think of as giants of free market economics such as Arthur Burns, Paul Volcker, Herbert Stein, and George Shultz. On Sunday evening, Nixon goes back to Washington and delivers an address from the Oval Office in which he closes the gold window; that is, ends the convertibility of the dollar to gold, which makes it impossible for foreign governments to convert their dollar holdings. He imposes wage and price controls and a surcharge on imported goods. You quote Pete Peterson, who was then a junior staffer and went on to become commerce secretary and a major figure on Wall Street: “It was about as non-market oriented, non-Republican an idea as I could imagine.” It demonstrates how the Great Society carried everyone with it. None of these great figures says to Richard Nixon, you can’t do that.

**Shlaes:** Well, man is fallible. Politics trump intellect, and the men around Nixon wanted to be included.

**Robinson:** You know economics inside out, but you’re also so shrewd about human nature.

**Shlaes:** What happens when you have the power of the sun so close to you and you’re so warm? And Nixon was excellent at playing people off one another. So, these great economists convinced themselves that it was necessary to have an economic anathema. And, by the way, *redundant* economic anathema. If you’re going to have tariffs, maybe you don’t need to release the currency from gold because the effect will be the same. It was just every measure that Nixon and his Democratic treasury secretary, John Connally, could think of that was in what’s called the Camp David Agenda. It all contradicted itself and was anathema, and they all agreed to it. Why? Because they thought that then Nixon might win again. Nixon wanted to stimulate the economy to win the 1972 election. He wanted to rattle the chain of the Chinese. Does that sound familiar? He wanted to play judo with foreign leaders and shock and awe them. He wanted the public to have confidence if he came out like a strong man. He relished crisis as opportunity. All these guys signed off. I think it was an economy traded away for swag, because imagine you’re at Camp David and Navy officers wait on you, you have a tennis court, you

get a little blazer and some tumblers from Camp David that say: “I’m in the group. I’m in the room where it happens.”

**Robinson:** It was the lure of the inner circle.

**Shlaes:** Nixon flatters them and tells them how they’re all great diplomats and they sign off on this thing. And it does goose the heck out of the economy for just long enough for Nixon to win re-election.

## HOW IT ALL WENT WRONG

**Robinson:** One of the many things that are so impressive about this book is the generosity with which you write about the many admirable people who were involved in a project that failed. You write: “The government lost the War on Poverty. In fact, what the War on Poverty and the new flood of benefits did do was the opposite of prevent poverty—they established a new kind of poverty, a permanent sense of downtroddenness. The gap between black and white unemployment widened. Welfare programs funded by Johnson and Nixon expanded rolls to an appalling extent—appalling because welfare fostered a new sense of hopelessness and disenfranchisement among those who received it.” When did we realize it had all gone wrong?

**Shlaes:** Pretty soon in the ’70s. The economy was terrible. It wasn’t until well into the Reagan years that the stock market finally got past 1,000. That’s

a long time—more than fifteen years. So, there was that, but what made the ’70s so awful was the inflation and high interest

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**“You play to your strength, and Johnson’s strength was delivering laws.”**

rates. This was a time when right here at Stanford there was so much pessimism, because of unemployment and inflation, that a professor proposed a diaper tax and giant changes to the tax code to discourage reproduction because America couldn’t afford its people. A profound pessimism took over the land as a result of the Great Society.

**Robinson:** When Nixon holds that meeting at Camp David in August 1971, the crisis is that unemployment, as I recall, was just under 6 percent and inflation was running just over 6 percent. And by 1978–79, both of those numbers were in double digits, correct?

**Shlaes:** Unemployment did go into the tens, although I think it was in the ’80s under Reagan. But the interest rate was generally higher. We sum those

two and call it the misery index. Another way to put that is to call it *stagflation*. Economists were astounded. You're not supposed to have unemployment and inflation at the same time, in their book, and both were awful in the '70s.

**Robinson:** Again, from *Great Society*: "The damage of the 1960s showed up in a subtler area: political trust. The overpromising in social programs disillusioned voters, black

and white." So, all these charts we're constantly being presented with, as if Donald Trump is to blame, that show a decline in trust in the

federal government. This all starts with the Great Society. The government says it will eliminate poverty, and it fails. Right?

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***"The young people then were like those of today. They were idealistic. Both eras also share a flirtation with socialism."***

**Shlaes:** Governments should only promise what they can give. And most of the time deliver that thing. So, it's an example of the damage of ambition.

**Robinson:** You write in *Great Society* about the way the FBI put tails on certain leftists, which you say is perfectly stupid: "The trouble with the 1960s leftists was not that they were traitors. The trouble was that they were wrong." So where did they go wrong? We began this conversation with these predicates that it looks in the '60s as though the federal government can do anything. It beat Hitler, and it looks as though the United States can afford anything. It has the most buoyant economy after the war that humankind has ever experienced. What went wrong?

**Shlaes:** In offering equal opportunity, they were correct. If only one in ten black men in Mississippi can vote, that needs fixing. The Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act were not bad laws in terms of our country and our future. The big turn was when we began to talk about affirmative action and entitlements—what you are owed beyond opportunity. You are owed money of some kind, or some good, or a special place. That was problematic, and that's where the wrong turn came. LBJ says we will always help until it's all better. When is it ever going to be all better? That was the shift in the Great Society culture. There were good laws out of this period, but the ultimate damage was that we taught people that entitlements were their property—a new idea—and that they were always owed. This is not just poor people and minorities, but also through expansions of Social Security and Medicare.

**Robinson:** The Great Society now costs more than the commitments of the New Deal in the federal budget. And we just can't afford it. The federal deficit is rising and rising. But sorting out the wheat from the chaff here is tricky. Civil rights legislation and the Voting Rights Act, for sure we want to keep that, right? So, I hand you the scalpel. What do we need to cut?

**Shlaes:** I'm for education and opportunity. I'm for federal money for school choice. I think that most Americans, even today, like opportunity better than a commitment to receive things. They want that for their children, even if they need food stamps. They're not excited about the idea of their grandchildren receiving food stamps. They want their grandchildren to move ahead. So, that's how I would divide it. And I would not underrate the private sector. The milk cow did pretty well for a long time. It created the kindest thing you can ever give to someone: a job. We've paid insufficient attention to the capacities of the private sector.

## THE POWER OF RESTRAINT

**Robinson:** You write in *Great Society*: "For a time, under presidents Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, it seemed that America had finally managed to outgrow Great Society collectivism. This was due to a policy, commenced with Reagan, of staking national hope for greatness on the private sector once more." We seemed to have outgrown Great Society collectivism, yet today socialism is on the rise again. How did this happen?

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***"The good Johnson wanted to do his duty and fulfill the platform promises of the Democratic Party in 1960 and honor JFK. The less good and more human Johnson wanted to show them that he could do this better than Kennedy."***

**Shlaes:** It's idealism. It sounds better to ears that have not heard much history and this is partly our fault, let's face it. We've failed to teach history in our schools well enough. So young people don't really know what happened in the Cold War, or

they think that's old and fusty and they're not interested. They don't really know what's happening in Venezuela right now in real time—the same tragedy being replayed. The old saying is that socialism is a process, so you can never condemn it because you've never seen the finished product. And while it's still in process, it sounds good. It sounds warm and fuzzy.



**Robinson:** Can we learn from history? Can we truly learn from things that happened before we were born? Or are today's college kids only going to understand what socialism can do to them if someone like Bernie Sanders is elected and we get four or eight years of hugely expanded government, rising taxes, and a tanking economy? Can we only learn from experience?

**Shlaes:** I do believe we can learn from history. Think of medicine, where every doctor has within her all the failed experiments in surgical procedures of 1950 when they pulled the gall bladder out wrong, or whatever. But we've *chosen* not to learn, and this is partly the pre-dominance of the social sciences over history in our education culture. It's our job to make it come alive again, though, and that is hard work.

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***“Nixon wanted to stimulate the economy to win the 1972 election. He wanted to rattle the chain of the Chinese. Does that sound familiar?”***

**Robinson:** President Trump, a Republican he may be, so far has displayed zero interest in reforming the Great Society entitlement programs. How do you read this man? Is he saving the work of reform for a second term? Or is Donald Trump a true believer in the Great Society? Also, if you could give him two sentences of advice, what would you say to him?

**Shlaes:** I would say that what Trump has in common with Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon is great ambition and a desire to be loved—that populist edge. We see in this administration, some work to, for example, restrain the judiciary through the appointment of judges. Those judges would restrain the wildest of Great Society type activity.

And if one—not necessarily me—were to give advice to President Trump, one might respond as Calvin Coolidge and say, “perhaps restrain yourself.” ■





# The “Jewell” of Carmel

No longer Dirty Harry, **Clint Eastwood** still emits the occasional “Make my day!” But the Hollywood provocateur, director/producer of the recent **Richard Jewell**, also admits he wishes the president were less “ornery.”

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*By Tunku Varadarajan*

“**M**any years ago,” Clint Eastwood says—drawing close to me as if to share a secret—“I was in Las Vegas.” The Hollywood actor and director was staying at a hotel owned by Steve Wynn, the casino billionaire. “Steve called me up in the room and said, ‘Do you want to go play golf? We’re going out with Trump.’ I said, ‘Who?’ and Steve said, ‘Trump. You know Trump?’ ”

So, Eastwood and Wynn ventured out for a morning on the course with Donald Trump. “It was funny,” Eastwood says, “because every time I was together with Steve”—with the future president out of earshot—“he would say, ‘You know, Trump is doing those damn casinos. He’s going to lose his ass.’ ” And when Wynn couldn’t hear, “Trump would say, ‘You know, Steve is going to do this big hotel. He’s going to land right on his ass. There are too many hotels now.’ ”

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*Actor and director **Clint Eastwood**’s latest film is **Richard Jewell**. **Tunku Varadarajan** is editor of the Hoover Institution publication **Defining Ideas** and a member of Hoover’s **Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on Islamism and the International Order**.*

Back and forth the dissing went for hours, Eastwood recalls: “Together, they were great friends, but separately they were giving each other a hard time. I don’t know how much tongue-in-cheek was in all of that, but it was very amusing for me, the lone guy.”

Eastwood relates this story over a frugal lunch, in response to my asking for his thoughts on Trump. We’re seated outdoors at the Tehama Golf Club, which he owns, with views of Carmel Valley and the Monterey Peninsula, among the most expensive slivers of real estate in America.

Eastwood, ninety, has never fought shy of politics himself. Like Trump, he’s even held political office, albeit on a local scale: he

won election as mayor of Carmel-by-the-Sea in 1986. He’s known as a Hollywood conservative,

but his appeal was bipartisan. He chose to run, he says, because the incumbent mayor “had gotten to be too distant” from the townsfolk. “She used to knit during public meetings.”

His campaign staff “measured Carmel, and it was exactly 50/50, Republican-Democrat,” Eastwood says. “I was a Republican, but people never thought about their parties except at the national level.” The mayoral ballot didn’t list the candidates’ party affiliation. “I drank a lot of tea and chatted with people,” he says. “I told people I’ll fix this, and I’ll fix that.” He trounced his opponent, 2,166 votes to 799, served a single two-year term, and didn’t seek re-election: “You can’t have the same old people in office all the time.”

One of Mayor Eastwood’s first acts—widely reported at the time—was to reduce the onerous municipal prohibitions on the public sale of ice cream. More than three decades later, he laments that the Golden State is “like Regulation City right now.” An excess of rules is “making California a place other than a democracy.”

Eastwood describes himself as a libertarian—“somebody who has respect for other people’s ideas and is willing to learn constantly.” He is, he says, always in “a state of evolution,” and he comes across in conversation as much more nuanced than the hypermasculine roles he’s played in films from *Dirty Harry* (1971) to *Gran Torino* (2008).

Yet his voice is the same—that unmistakable tenor that lends itself as easily on screen to flirtation as to husky menace. He talks avidly about some of his films, including *Gran Torino*, which he produced and directed. His character, Walt Kowalski, is a cantankerous Korean War veteran who hates

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***Eastwood worries that the “presumption of innocence, not only in law, but in philosophy,” has been lost.***



***ACTION: Clint Eastwood on the set of Richard Jewell. After an Atlanta newspaper criticized his film for how it portrayed a character, Eastwood said the Journal-Constitution was trying to obscure its “guilt” for a “reckless story” that led to the persecution of Jewell, an innocent man.*** [Claire Folger—Warner Bros.]

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his Hmong neighbors in a rundown inner Detroit suburb. He agrees that the film has a certain relevance in Trump’s America, where everyone is “pairing off for adversity.”

The movie grossed \$270 million worldwide. “I’ll tell you why I liked it, and I think that’s maybe why Americans did, too,” he says. “It’s about a guy who’s a racist, a hard-ass. He didn’t like minorities much, of any kind. But he learns to appreciate people that he really hated.” His agent, he says, didn’t want him to make the movie—“ ‘The guy is kind of a bigot. Why would you want to do that?’ she said”—but when co-producer Rob Lorenz showed Eastwood the script, he loved it, “because it’s got a big transition of a person from one extreme to another.”

*Gran Torino*, he says, was made at a time when people were “putting down masculinity.” He has frequently played the archetypal American male,

particularly in eras when manliness was unabashed. He notes that times have changed for men. In *The Mule* (2018), his most recent lead role, he's an eighty-year-old Army veteran who gets duped into committing a crime. "He wasn't unmasculine," Eastwood says of the character, "but he wasn't some of the pseudo-masculine ones I've played before."

What does he mean by *pseudo-masculine*? "They were abrupt," he explains. "They didn't have the niceties of civilization. I've played some masculine guys who were a little bit dumb at times. They overlooked society—the nice, genteel part of society." He cites *Dirty Harry*, in which he plays a cop who takes the law into his own hands. It was the role that made him a star. "Harry Callahan was fun to play at that particular point in life," Eastwood says. "He's a man who's been through a lot, but he's also kind of relentless." People were afraid of crime in those days, "afraid to say anything."

He likens that fear to the mood in America now and cites the Me Too movement. "The Me Too generation has its points," he acknowledges. He appreciates that women "are standing up against people who are trying to shake you down for sexual favors." Sexual predation, he says, has been in the movie business since the days he started as a bit-part actor. "It was very prolific back in the 1940s and '50s." He pauses, then wryly adds, "And the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s . . ."

But Eastwood is concerned that the policing of sexual relations is getting out of hand. He believes people are "on the defensive because of Harvey"—Weinstein—"and all of these guys." He professes no sympathy for the movie mogul, who was recently convicted in a New York courtroom. But he worries that the "presumption of innocence, not only in law, but in philosophy," has been lost in accusations of sexual misbehavior.

He says his most recent film, *Richard Jewell*, suffered because it got sucked into a Me Too-like controversy over its portrayal of Kathy Scruggs, a reporter at the *Atlanta Journal-*

*Constitution*. Scruggs, who died in 2001, broke the false allegation that Jewell, a security guard,

had planted a bomb that killed two people in Atlanta during the 1996 Summer Olympics. Jewell was exonerated after "eighty-eight days of hell" (Eastwood's phrase) in which he could barely leave the apartment he shared with his mother. The newspaper, Eastwood says, was "ultimately responsible" for Jewell's death in 2007 at age forty-four. (The proximate cause was heart failure from complications of diabetes.)

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***Clint Eastwood says he's always in "a state of evolution."***



The film, which Eastwood directed and was released last December, depicts Scruggs (Olivia Wilde) getting her scoop by sleeping with a source from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A letter to Warner Bros. from the newspaper's lawyer called the portrayal "entirely false and malicious, and . . . extremely defamatory and damaging." The studio replied that the *Journal-Constitution's* accusation was "baseless."

Eastwood sidesteps the paper's accusation directly, preferring to invoke a director's right to cinematic license. "Well, she hung out at a little bar in town, where mostly police officers went," he says. "And she had a boyfriend that was a police officer. Well, we just changed it in the story. We made it a federal police officer instead of a local."

Eastwood says the *Journal-Constitution* is trying to obscure its "guilt" for a "reckless story" that led to the persecution of an innocent man. He says he wishes Warner Bros. had told the *Journal-Constitution* "to go screw themselves." (The studio did vow to fight any lawsuit in the matter.) Eastwood imagines himself daring the newspaper to sue: "Make my day!" He pronounces the iconic line from *Dirty Harry* with relish. "If you want to just go call more attention to the fact that you helped kill the guy, go ahead and do it—if you're dumb enough to do that."

I ask Eastwood which of the movies he's directed makes him proudest. He cites the Japanese-language *Letters from Iwo Jima*, released in 2006. While working on *Flags of Our Fathers*—which tells the battle's story from the

American point of view and made its debut two months earlier—Eastwood got to wondering what it was like to be a

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***"I've played some masculine guys who were a little bit dumb at times."***

man who was "drafted into the Japanese military, sent to Iwo Jima, and told, 'By the way, you're not coming back.' " He thought to himself: "You couldn't tell a person that in America. An American soldier would go, 'What do you mean I'm not coming back?'"

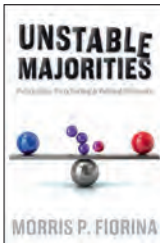
The film tells the stories of a Japanese private and General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, the commander on the island, who'd served as a military attaché in the United States before the war. Eastwood was particularly attracted to the character of the general, who "knew a lot about America," even as he fought its soldiers to the death. *Letters from Iwo Jima* was a critical success, especially in Japan, where it won that country's equivalent of the Academy Award for best foreign picture.



Would Eastwood make a film about other enemies of America—say, *Postcards from Guantánamo* or *Missives from Mosul*? “It may be too fresh to do that,” he says. He was drawn to the Japanese “by the fact that we’re on good terms now, and we appreciate some of their history and background.” He wanted to understand what they went through. “I don’t think we know enough about Al-Qaeda and ISIS.” But he also says it’s “too early in history” for him to make a movie about 9/11 from America’s point of view.

As for the domestic political scene, Eastwood seems disheartened. “The politics has gotten so ornery,” he says, hunching his shoulders in resignation. He approves of “certain things that Trump’s done” but wishes the president would act “in a more genteel way, without tweeting and calling people names. I would personally like for him to not bring himself to that level.” ■

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# Tomorrow's Child

**Students need purpose. And there's never been a better time to teach them that purpose derives from love of family, neighbors, and country.**

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**By William Damon**

**A**s any teacher will tell you, motivation is key to learning. Highly motivated students will find ways to acquire knowledge and skills even in suboptimal circumstances. Students who have little interest in learning will be hard to teach no matter how well furnished the school.

The gold standard of motivation is purpose, because purpose is enduring and resilient. A purpose is a long-term goal that a person sees as both personally valuable and important to the world beyond the self. A purpose motivates one to accomplish short-term goals that serve that purpose. If a student is dedicated to a long-term purpose such as becoming a doctor, the student is likely to pursue short-term goals such as studying biology, passing tests, going to college, and gaining admission to medical school. Along the way, that student will learn a lot.

The human species is built in a way that requires purpose for optimal functioning. This was the groundbreaking insight of Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl in his mid-twentieth-century masterpiece *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl rejected the reductionist views of fellow Austrian Sigmund Freud, contending that people are not primarily shaped by base emotional desires, early experiences, past traumas, or nagging conflicts, but rather are driven

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by what they believe in—actually, we drive ourselves to accomplish purposes that inspire us and give our lives meaning.

In the half century since Frankl's theory created a forward-looking line of thinking in psychology, research has confirmed the essence of his insights. Legions of studies have shown that beginning in early adolescence, people committed to purposes show high levels of achievement, energy, resilience, health, emotional stability, and subjective well-being.

Purpose is not a sole elixir for the good life; many other character

strengths and skills are needed. Purpose alone does not ensure either good sense or ethics. But purpose ranks high on the list of character strengths that young people should acquire for productive and fulfilling lives.

Yet American schools today (with notable exceptions) are failing to encourage the all-important development of purpose among their students. My message is that the reforms most needed in American education are the kind that would improve the capacity of schools to help students find purpose in their studies and beyond.

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***Students will be motivated to learn only if they find personal meaning in the subjects they are offered.***

## **THE WHOLE CHILD**

In advocating for the cultivation of student purpose, I am emphasizing the importance of motivation, interest, agency, and individual choice. I believe schools are responsible for offering a broadly conceived education that imparts the moral, civic, and character strengths that enable young people to become productive citizens who dedicate themselves to the achievements they aspire to and the causes in which they believe. In K-12 education, this approach lies squarely in the camp that's been known as "educating the whole child." The assumptions behind it include a conviction that the cognitive skills and knowledge that are central to the educational mission can be developed only when students are motivated to learn, and that students will be motivated to learn only if they find personal meaning in the subjects they are offered.

The whole-child approach also assumes that educators are responsible for more than cognitive learning in their students. Moral issues such as honesty and fairness arise in every classroom daily, and educating students to deal with such issues in an honorable manner is an essential part of a school's responsibility. So too are issues related to personal well-being and good citizenship.

I write as a developmental psychologist, not a political scientist or policy maker. But I cannot ignore one policy-linked irony of consequence: federal policy in the United States over the past quarter century has pushed K-12 schooling further and further away from whole-child education and toward a narrow curriculum and obsessive focus on test scores.

This counterproductive push took shape with legislation enacted in 1994—the Goals 2000 law and the Improving America’s Schools Act, which enshrined standards and tests in just two subjects (reading and math) as the

basis for judging school quality and effectiveness. The push strengthened with 2002’s No Child Left Behind Act, was reinforced in several ways in

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***American schools (with notable exceptions) fail to encourage the all-important development of purpose.***

2009’s Race to the Top program, and was only slightly eased in 2015’s Every Student Succeeds Act.

If one were to try to design a policy aimed at discouraging student purpose, it would be hard to find a more effective approach. The policy shaped choices that educators made, or felt compelled to make, in school districts throughout most of the country. It’s distressing to think of the vast number of students who, during their formative years for acquiring purpose, were subjected to the mis-educative instructional choices promoted by this centralized, top-down, coercive, narrowly conceived, federal policy approach.

From our studies and those of other researchers, we know a lot about the conditions that foster purpose. Here are the essential ones:

- » Opportunities to participate in activities that one finds worthwhile, gratifying, and interesting.
- » Opportunities to discover and further develop one’s talents.
- » Discovery of aspects of the world that need to be remedied or improved.
- » Opportunities to do so by making efforts to contribute something of value to the world.
- » Observations of mentors who are making such efforts in a purposeful way.
- » Instruction that fosters moral and character strengths such as honesty, diligence, and future-mindedness.

What did twenty-five years of federal policy signal as the top priority for US schools? None of the above. The policy’s most striking limitation was a narrowing of the curriculum that resulted from the emphasis that those

who designed the initiative placed on the particular academic skills they considered necessary for future employment. These skills centered on basic literacy and numeracy. These skills are obviously important, and schools should teach them in a rigorous way. I am in favor of teaching and testing for these skills in order to keep improving them. But the federal incentive system, however well-intentioned, relied so strongly on testing for these, and only these, limited skills that many school-based educators felt forced to focus on those skills exclusively.

“Peripheral” subjects such as art, music, theater, civics, geography, history, and creative writing were de-emphasized and even eliminated in many places. I have heard of schools that dropped their music teachers, or stopped funding their theater programs, to gain an advantage in the narrow types of student test scores that counted in the federal incentive regime. I was told of schools that no longer devoted resources to activities that foster students’ interests in entrepreneurship, such as projects designed to acquaint them with business skills and practices, and of schools that were not able to continue funding instructive extracurricular activities such as the school newspaper.

It is in such “peripheral” subjects that many students find personal meaning and interest. The narrowing of the curriculum drastically reduced the chances that such students would find purpose in their academic work.

Perhaps it might be argued that it doesn’t matter whether students find subjects such as art and music meaningful, since these subjects—unlike, say, algebra—won’t land

the student a job. But think about it: one of the largest industries in the United States is entertainment, which draws on skills such as those

fostered by various arts. Who is to say that students who throw themselves into learning the arts have fewer employment opportunities than those who feel constrained in school to study subjects that government policy makers speculate will make them employable? Equally misdirected, removing entrepreneurship education from the classroom eliminates an entire direction for employment possibilities.

Students who feel forced to learn become poor learners, and poor learners don’t make for successful workers. Nor do such students end up feeling purposeful or fulfilled. A high school student we interviewed in one of our

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***Students who feel forced to learn become poor learners, and poor learners don’t make for successful workers. Nor do they feel fulfilled.***

studies put it this way when speaking of her experience in a school that did not offer her anything matching her interests and personal aspirations: “I feel like a bird in a cage.”

## A RACE TO NOWHERE

So we come to whole-child issues of well-being, motivation, emotional stability, and mental health. We have evidence of how the cohort of students subject to such cramped schooling have fared in these essential personal qualities. A 2017 assessment by the American College Health Association reported that the current crop of college students expressed frighteningly adverse conditions related to their subjective well-being, mental health, and overall adaptation to college life. Over 80 percent felt “overwhelmed by all [they] had to do” in college and “exhausted” by their academic workloads. Three in five felt “overwhelming anxiety” in college, and two in five “felt so depressed that it was difficult to function.” Over half reported feeling “hopeless.”

Other causes may have contributed to the personal difficulties of college students in 2017, but one thing is certain: the cumulative effect of federal K–12 education policy since the end of the twentieth century has done nothing to arm students with character strengths that could allay such difficulties.

Even regarding the limited set of abilities that Uncle Sam emphasized, learning conditions promoted by the policy were counterproductive. The policy operated by creating incentives for schools to improve scores on “high

stakes” tests that held little interest or meaning for most students.

Teachers, naturally, were induced to teach to the test, especially in schools and districts most vulner-

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***The narrowing of the curriculum drastically reduced the chances that students would find purpose in their academic work.***

able to the incentive/disincentive structure of the program. This led to deadly instructional practices such as drill and rote learning, and objectives such as short-term learning rather than understanding and commitment.

In keeping with the overall cynicism that the incentive scheme fostered, it also led to corruption in the behavior of some teachers and administrators. There were widely covered cases of fudging student scores, misreporting data, and other instances of actual cheating on the part of school staffers trying to give their own schools an advantage. So much for moral education by example.

Despite the lofty titles of these various federal laws—“No Child Left Behind,” “Race to the Top,” “Every Student Succeeds,” and so on—the policy



moniker was fundamentally misleading. Toward what “top” was this program racing? The policy’s provisions paid no attention to excellence, giftedness, outstanding performance, or originality. Nothing in the policy was directed to learning that leads to innovation and creative achievement—capacities important for both individual success and the national interest.

Which brings up the essential though fraught matter of moral and character education. Although most parents would like to see schools impart virtues such as honesty and responsibility to their children, character education in public education has been hindered by progressive resistance to any instruction that makes

claims about right and wrong in the face of cultural variation—even when such claims focus on values such as truth

and obligation that virtually all cultures respect.

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***Federal policy enshrined standards and tests in just two subjects: reading and math.***

In recent years there has been a welcome upsurge in social and emotional-learning (SEL) instruction in K–12 education. But SEL does not substitute for character education.

In its most common uses, social and emotional instruction at the K–12 level has focused on communication strategies, self-control, “grit,” emotional awareness, goal-setting, and relaxation techniques such as meditation. Although this is potentially of personal value to student well-being, my guess is that such feeling states have little to do with acquisition of childhood morality. Children need to learn the difference between morally right and wrong ways to use the skills that they are being taught.

Fortunately, there are recent signs of a reawakening of attention to moral education in some of our schools, but we have a long way to go before American schools return to their once unquestioned mission of fostering character and virtue.

## **TOMORROW’S CITIZENS**

Perhaps the most glaring failure of public schools has been their inability to accomplish another classic mission of American schooling: citizenship education. This mission is as crucial as ever, yet most schools fail at it, if they even try. Civics is one of the “peripheral” subjects de-emphasized by the single-minded focus on basic skills during the recent heyday of the narrow curriculum.

After some high-profile public figures such as Sandra Day O’Connor called this deficit a “crisis,” the neglect of civics among public schools has abated

somewhat: in recent years, Florida, Texas, California, and other states have added beneficial civics materials to their public school curricula. Still, many key concepts have not been addressed, and doing so will require taking on a number of biases widespread in education circles today.

In civics, as in all subject areas, students learn well only when they find the ideas personally meaningful. Genuine citizenship education requires building a sense of civic purpose among students. The signs of civic purpose are knowledge of how one's government works, an understanding of the principles underlying the present social order, a historical perspective on the social order, and commitment to the preservation and improvement of one's civic society. In the United States, such a commitment means participation as a citizen in a democratic republic and a dedication to traditional American ideals such as liberty and equality.

Students must be motivated. The key is a positive attachment to one's society—that is, a sense that one cares about the society enough to contribute to it and, if necessary, to sacrifice for it. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, this aspect of civic purpose has been called patriotism. Unfortunately, patriotism is not a popular word in education circles. It is, in fact, one of the most politically incorrect words in education today. If you think it's hard to talk about morality and values in schools, try talking about patriotism. Educators often confuse the patriotic love of country with aberrant nationalism or with the militaristic chauvinism that twentieth-century dictators used to start

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***The serious tasks of citizenship that students need to learn are local or national, not global. We do not pay taxes to the world, nor vote for a world president, nor serve in a world army.***

wars and manipulate the masses. There is little awareness among educators and intellectuals that it was the patriotic *resistance* to dictatorships by citizens of democracies that saved the world from

tyranny in the past century and is the best hope of doing so in the future.

Many educators urge schools to teach children to become “citizens of the world” rather than of a single nation, and to adopt a “cosmopolitan” perspective rather than identifying themselves as Americans. As global citizens, it is argued, students should identify with humanity. These ideals do not in themselves provide a realistic route to civic education. For one thing, the serious tasks of citizenship that students need to learn are all played out on a local or national level rather than a global one. We do not pay taxes to the world, we do not vote for a world president or senator, we do not serve in a world army

or peace corps, and we are not called to jury duty in any world courtroom. When we write to our congressional representatives or vote and campaign for candidates running for elective office, these activities are part of our national civic life, not part of any global event. As the philosopher

Michael Walzer wrote, “I am not a citizen of the world. I am not even aware that there is a world such that one could be a citizen of.”

Yes, it is important that young people learn about mistakes their society has made and how the society can do better in the future. But it is always important to attend to context and development sequence—many students learn about what is wrong with our country without gaining knowledge of its successes. To acquire civic purpose, students need to care about their country. Schools should begin with the positive and emphasize reasons for caring enough about our society to participate in it and try to improve it. ■

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# Pale Horse

**The coronavirus proves once again the power of epidemics to upend, and sometimes erase, civilizations. Relearning a lesson the ancient world understood only too well.**

**By Victor Davis Hanson**

**T**he great plague at Athens (430–29 BC), which broke out in the second year of the Peloponnesian War, according to the historian Thucydides, wiped out as many as eighty thousand people (a fourth of the population of Athens), including rural refugees from the Attic countryside. Nothing, the historian claimed, did more damage to the city-state.

Some twenty-five hundred years later, it remains a parlor game among classicists to identify the precise infectious culprit. Some form of either typhus or typhoid seems most likely. Most historians agree that this epidemic that killed Pericles was probably a result of his policy of forced evacuation of the Attic rural population from the country to inside the walls of Athens

## Key points

- » One tradition in Western history sees plagues as reflections on the pathologies of society.
- » Thucydides thought calamities reduced people to their animal essences. The mob will do almost anything—and blame almost anyone and anything.
- » Globalization made possible the specter of a viral epidemic.
- » Procopius described a plague outbreak that included avoidance of the infected and outbreaks of nihilism, superstition, and self-pity.

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during the Spartan invasion in late May 430 BC. The busy port at Piraeus was an incubator and force multiplier of the disease.

Thucydides's contemporary description of the pestilence inaugurated a tradition in Western historiography of envisioning plagues as reflections on the pathologies of contemporary society. He focused not just on the deaths and the demographic swath of the disease but even more so on the psychological and sociological

damage the disease

wrought. In his view, such natural and man-made calamities, like

war and revolution, by the nature of their illogical violence and unpredictable mayhem, eventually rip off the thin veneer of civilization. They reduce people to their animal essences. In their instinctual and deadly competitive efforts to survive one more day, the mob in extremis will do almost anything—and blame almost anyone and anything.

Most preindustrial mass plagues were bacterial, caused by urban overcrowding and poor-to-nonexistent garbage and sewage disposal. In the disruptive aftermath of pandemics, fundamental social and political change sometimes followed—wars were lost, governments ended, wealth and power were reversed. Today, cheap antibiotics, modern medical care, and sophisticated sewage treatment and refuse collection have mostly ended the epidemic threat of typhus, typhoid, and bubonic plague. But our trust in modern drugs is such that we arrogantly overlook the chance of pandemic danger posed by a half million or so homeless Americans who live outside in harsh weather, amid vermin, excrement, and rodents on our major urban-center sidewalks.

In the modern age, viruses have mostly replaced bacteria in posing theoretical threats of mass infection, illness, and death. While modern Western medicine, given enough time, can sometimes prevent many pandemic viral infections through mass vaccinations, they are, unlike many bacterial illnesses, often impossible, or at least difficult, to treat.

Globalization has made possible the specter of a viral epidemic—Ebola, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and, most recently, Covid-19. The A and B influenzas, despite mass inoculations, infect about twenty million to thirty million Americans every year. Depending on the particular annual mutating strain, between ten thousand and eighty thousand die from those seasonal influenzas, mostly the elderly or chronically sick. There are also fears that it may be possible to weaponize a disease in labs to spark a historic pandemic.

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***The grandiose visions of imperial Athens ended with the plague.***





[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



## RUINS OF EMPIRE

In the ancient world, plagues usually arrived in early summer from the non-west (such as Egypt or Asia). They entered European ports, usually in the south and east, and accelerated through filthy and densely populated cities. Pandemics triggered debates between those who focused on science—symptoms, diagnoses, therapies, and prognoses—and the majority with its popular embrace of religion and superstition. The majority equated plagues with divine wrath or hubris, and therefore fixated on particular villains and customs that must have provoked such godly wrath.

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***In Thucydides's view, calamities like war, revolution, and plagues eventually rip off the thin veneer of civilization.***

After the Athenian plague, Athens could still ward off a Spartan victory, but it lacked the resources to vanquish the Spartan empire and its growing number of allies. In some sense, the grandiose visions of imperial Athens ended with the plague—even as a wider Greek interest in both medical science and popular religion increased.

Sophocles's greatest play, *Oedipus Rex*, was staged a year after the plague began to wane. Its chief protagonist, Oedipus, a good and wise man whose sin is to believe that his haughty reason can defeat cosmic fate, resembles in his arrogance the recently deceased Pericles, the renaissance man with a worldly consort of philosophers, libertines, and artists.

Again, it was the statesman's strategy of withdrawing tens of thousands of rural Athenians into the city to ride out the invasion of Spartan hoplites that ensured that the city became the petri dish for the plague. Of course, Pericles's strategy, in theory, might have worked, had his celebrated reliance on reason included knowledge of the relationship between sanitation and infection. In the end, even the rationalist Pericles was reduced to clutching amulets to ward off the plague.

The lifelong quest of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (c. 482–565) focused on re-establishing the lost Roman empire in the West under new Byzantine Greek auspices. Over some thirty years of constant campaigning, his brilliant marshals Belisarius and Narses reconquered much of Southern Europe, North Africa, the Balkans, and Asia Minor, while Justinian dedicated the monumental church of Hagia Sophia and codified Roman law. But the bubonic plague of 541–42 soon spread from the port capital at Constantinople throughout the empire. The pandemic would go on to kill a half million

Byzantines and render the military agendas of Justinian—who also got the disease but recovered—inert.

The chatty contemporary historian Procopius, in Thucydidean fashion, blamed the Egyptians for the pandemic's origins. He went on to describe the

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***The modern world, so technologically savvy and medically sophisticated, hasn't escaped the rumor, panic, and hysteria that break out when new diseases strike.***

disease as the catalyst for the same uncivilized behavior so chillingly described nearly a millennium earlier by Thucydides: the crass treatment of the unburied, the avoidance of the

infected, the desperation to live wildly in the expectation of impending death, and an equally pernicious outbreak of nihilism, superstition, and self-pity.

## **PALE HORSE**

The medieval outbreak in Europe of the Black Plague (1347–51) probably killed more than the Athenian and Justinian plagues combined, perhaps eventually half of the European population, or somewhere around fifty million to eighty million people. Like prior bacterial plagues, it too was believed to have spread from the east and entered Mediterranean ports. It went ballistic in the heavily populated, fetid, and numerous cities of Europe.

In *The Decameron*, his brilliant collection of novellas, Giovanni Boccaccio follows the same Western tradition of describing the symptoms, collating the various religious and superstitious exegeses for the sudden arrival of mass death, and illustrating the general breakdown in popular mores. He too notes that the stricken public believed they were shortly to perish and should

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***In the end, even the rationalist Pericles was reduced to clutching amulets to ward off disease.***

therefore satisfy their appetites in the time they had left.

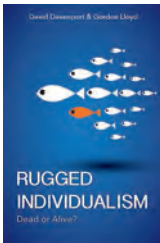
The modern world may be technologically savvy and medically sophisti-

cated, but it has not escaped the rumor, panic, and hysteria that break out when unknown diseases strike, as Thucydides and Procopius so chillingly detailed. For all our millennia of scientific advancements, when Covid-19 broke out we knew about as much about the novel coronavirus as Sophocles and Thucydides knew about the Athenian plague. How exactly does it spread differently from the flu? Are there unknown millions of infected who are not

sure when, or even if, they became sick? How did Covid-19 originate—from bats, snakes, or pangolins in the open-air food markets of Wuhan? The Internet remains fervid with theories and rumors and known unknowns. It would take a gossipy Procopius to hunt them all down.

Modern people—unlike ancients, who were without effective medicines or vaccinations—apparently believe that the good life means that pandemics of any sort belong to another era and have no business popping up in their own. But in our blending of fear and speculation and blame, the more the world changes, the more its people certainly remain the same. ■

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# *Western Civ and Its Discontents*

**Defending the history of liberal democracy is no mere intellectual exercise—it's crucial to preserving our rights and liberties.**

**By Peter Berkowitz**

**H**umanities courses in America's best universities are apt these days to denigrate, or even deny the reality of, Western civilization. Rare are classes devoted to transmitting Western civilization's leading ideas; examining its continuities and breaks; and cultivating the independence of mind that Western civilization prizes by exploring the several sides of fundamental moral questions and enduring political controversies.

Yet without such a liberal education, it is difficult to appreciate the sources of American freedom and prosperity. Among the most vital sources is the conviction, central to Western civilization, of the dignity of the individual, a conviction that in

## ***Key points***

» Higher education puts Western civilization on trial without so much as summoning witnesses for the defense.

» The strategic concerns of the United States revolve around the defense of liberal democracy.

» The Western tradition, in the modern era, made protection of individual rights the first task of politics.

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the modern era has received most forceful political expression in the idea of rights inherent in all persons. To put Western civilization on trial without so much as summoning witnesses for the defense, as our universities like to do, is to presume that villainy lies at the heart of the American constitutional order.

The doubts that American universities assiduously nurture about Western civilization are hardly confined to universities, or even to the United States. In February, the Munich Security Conference addressed the issue of “Westlessness.” In a speech that opened the conference, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated that anxieties about the West extend to matters of diplomacy and defense: “The ‘we’ of ‘the West’ that was once a given is clearly no longer something that can be taken entirely for granted. This is true both within our societies, but also in relation to the existential issues of foreign and security policy on which this conference focuses.”

It follows from President Steinmeier’s observations that the recovery of the principles that undergird, and the practices that typify, Western civilization is not only an intellectual requirement but also a strategic one. The strategic concerns of the United States revolve around the defense of liberal democracy—which encompasses individual freedom, human equality, consent of the governed, toleration, private property, and the rule of law—at home, and preservation of a free and open international order, which best serves the interests of nation states dedicated to the protection of individual rights.

The defense of liberal democracy and of a free and open international order depends on the cohesiveness of the West. That cohesiveness, in turn, depends on citizens of the West regaining an appreciation of their cultural inheritance, a distinctive component of which is its openness to other cultural inheritances and its readiness to embrace all who embrace political freedom and equality under law.

## **BANNING BOOKS**

In *The Lost History of Western Civilization*, Stanley Kurtz makes a vital contribution to restoring an appreciation of the West. His scholarly report for the National Association of Scholars (on whose board I serve) reconstructs pivotal episodes in the several-decades-long effort in the American academy to debunk Western civilization. For the debunkers, writes Kurtz, “Western civilization is both a recent invention and a thinly disguised form of neo-imperial propaganda.” At the same time, the debunkers denounce Western civilization as permeated with discrimination based on race, class, and sex,

and as dedicated to imperial conquest and exploitation. “The upshot appears to be,” Kurtz tartly observes, “that the West is evil; and besides, it doesn’t exist.”

Kurtz finds a turning point in an obscure 1982 scholarly article by University of New Brunswick, Canada, historian Gilbert Allardyce, “The Rise and Fall of the Western Civilization Course.” Allardyce maintained that, writes Kurtz, “The very idea of Western civilization is a modern invention devised during World War I as a way of hoodwinking young American soldiers into fighting and dying in the trenches of Europe.” Published in *The American Historical Review*, the Allardyce thesis gave intellectual heft to the movement at Stanford University in the 1980s to abolish the university’s popular, required course on the history and ideas of the West.

Stanford’s discontents with the teaching of Western civilization came to national attention in 1987 when, after a rally featuring presidential hopeful Jesse Jackson, students marched away chanting, “Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture’s got to go.” Surveys at the time indicated that the majority of stu-

dents felt gratitude for the mandatory course that introduced them to the Bible, Plato and Aristotle, Voltaire,

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***The defense of liberal democracy and of a free and open international order depends on the cohesiveness of the West.***

Darwin, Marx, Freud, and more. But their affection for the class—and the opportunity it provided for conversations over shared texts addressing perennial questions about morality, society, politics, and religion—was no match for the accusations of racism flung at the course.

Although commonplace now, it was still novel in 1987 to charge that the study of the great books of the West was discriminatory because the curriculum excluded minority authors and made minority students feel uncomfortable. The accusers won. In 1988, Stanford abolished its Western civilization course.

In the name of what came to be known as multiculturalism and in the spirit of what eventually was dubbed political correctness, colleges and universities around the country followed suit. The term for the new intellectual orientation, which suggests generosity and open-mindedness, obscured its crusading and intolerant spirit. Far from seeking to draw attention to, and encourage sympathetic understanding of, the distinctive cultural traditions of diverse peoples, multiculturalism taught that the divisions of nations and civilizations were invented or socially constructed and must be overcome to



create a worldwide community governed by progressive moral and political norms.

On the basis of a painstaking “excavation of the lost history of Western civilization,” Kurtz concludes that the multicultural critics of Western civilization are guilty of the sleight of hand they accuse defenders of the West of performing: inventing a history to advance a partisan political agenda.

As he amply demonstrates through probing examination of college curricula from the colonial

period to World War I, contrary to Allardyce, the study of Western civilization has been a featured part of the American curricu-

lum from the beginning. To be sure, such study proceeded under different descriptions and adopted varying focuses and texts. But from a concentration on Christendom in the eighteenth century to Europe in the nineteenth century to Western civilization in the twentieth century, colleges and universities taught that America springs from a tradition that arose from the merging of the biblical heritage and the heritage of classical Greece and Rome; a tradition that underwent momentous shifts in the Renaissance and Reformation; and a tradition that in the modern era made the protection of individual rights the first task of politics.

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***The term “multiculturalism,” which suggests generosity and open-mindedness, obscured its crusading and intolerant spirit.***

## **ASSAULTS ON CULTURE**

The indefensible Allardyce thesis encouraged proponents of multiculturalism to deny the history of the teaching of the history of West as a means to denying the history of the West. Postmodern ideas, disseminated most powerfully by French thinker Michel Foucault and no less problematic, emboldened multiculturalists to see the West whose existence they denied as evil.

According to Foucault, what we call “culture” and “society” are nothing more and nothing less than forms of domination that enable oppressors to entrench invented or socially constructed claims about truth and knowledge to manage and marginalize the oppressed. Foucault and the legions of academic multiculturalists who follow him ostentatiously reject the possibility of objective knowledge. At the same time, they affirm as incontrovertibly true that across cultures “regimes of truth”—that is, false and pernicious claims about the way the world really is—are the chief means by which the oppressors maintain power. Under Foucault’s spell, multiculturalists selectively

reject the very notion of truth while insisting that they possess indisputable knowledge about the logic of oppression and the obligation to resist it. It is this self-contradictory thinking that inspires the fashionable dogma that the primary purpose of the American constitutional tradition's commitment to individual freedom and human equality is to camouflage the institutionalized persecution of minorities and women.

Multicultural critics of Western civilization profess a confused agglomeration of convictions and aspirations. In the fight against the West's supposed

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***Multiculturalists selectively reject the very notion of truth while insisting that they possess indisputable knowledge.***

cultural imperialism, they seek to impose a comprehensive moral view and global political culture. They have constant recourse to notions of genuine free-

dom and equality, the very principles found at the heart of the civilization they assail as both an imaginary construction and an implacable system of domination. And they suppose that they have achieved a radical break with the West through the embrace of identity politics which, through its demand for heightened sensitivity to the variety of sentiments and attachments that shape persons, radicalizes Western individualism.

From obligations of intellectual integrity to the defense of liberal democracy and of the rights inherent in all persons that inspire it, the rediscovery of the West is a civilizational imperative. ■

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# Rescuers in Another Time

**A hundred years ago, American doctors came to the aid of Belarus, a struggling Soviet republic where displaced people were falling prey to disease. In an eerily familiar story, overwhelmed hospitals and shortages of medical supplies prolonged the suffering. So did revolution and war.**

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***By Mary Schaeffer Conroy and Valentina Federovna Sosonkina***

**I**n the summer of 1921, having successfully completed child feeding in war-torn Europe, Herbert Hoover's American Relief Administration (ARA) answered the pleas of Maxim Gorky and Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow to succor famine sufferers in the Volga region, Ukraine, and North Caucasus of the nascent Soviet Union. As an added dividend it was hoped that American efficiency would prove that capitalism was superior to communism and, with Lenin's proclamation of the New Economic Policy, reopen the vast Russian market to American businesses. Hoover Institution fellow Bertrand Patenaude's monumental and magisterial *The Big Show in Bolo-land* chronicled the commitment, tribulations, escapades, confrontations with communist officials, and gratitude of Soviet citizens during the ARA's mission to combat famine in eastern and southern Russia during 1922 and 1923.

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There was no famine in Belarus, a small new Soviet socialist republic, the northern part of the Jewish Pale of Settlement on the western end of the emergent Soviet Union, that served as a conduit for supplies headed to the famine regions farther east. With soil and terrain like the state of Illinois, although the region was recovering from six years of war, there was plenty of food in the markets and cattle herds had nearly reached prewar levels. However, Belarus was grappling with fluctuating borders, as the provinces that would later comprise the republic—Mogilev, Minsk, Vitebsk, and Gomel’—had not been fully assigned by postwar agreements. More significant, the multiethnic, multilinguistic, multiconfessional indigenous population, fluctuating between 1.5 and 4.2 million, according to David Marples’s *Belarus*, was overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of transients and refugees whose presence would lead to a crisis in public health.

The ARA physicians and the Belarusian inspectors they hired, whose main task was to aid these refugees, would survey and supply hundreds of institutions and hospitals each month. Their reports, preserved in the Hoover Institution Archives, give insights into the practices of containing and combating epidemics in the early 1920s—two decades before sulfa drugs and antibiotics—by Belarusians and Americans working separately and in tandem.

The original refugee cohort arriving via railways and wagons or on foot consisted of people fleeing—or compelled by the czarist government to flee—German armies that took over Poland in the fall of 1915, occupied much of Belarus in 1916, and returned again in March 1918 after the Peace of Brest-Litovsk.

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***These unfortunates were “a menace to the local population . . . virtual disease carriers, especially of typhus,” said an ARA doctor.***

Some refugees had moved eastward, but 2.3 million were estimated to be still residing in Belarus. A second wave of migrants consisted of POWs being repatriated from Germany

plus former citizens of the Russian empire returning to the Motherland from the United States. For example, one Dr. Stackelberg, a Belarusian railway physician hired by the ARA, noted in July 1922 that 8,000–10,000 Russian prisoners of war were expected to return from Berlin along with 20,000 political evacuees from Latvia—plus “re-emigrants” from America. In addition, many Letts were returning from Ukraine, where they had worked during the war. A third group of transients comprised POWs from Western countries “still arriving from Siberia” as well as national minorities waiting to leave the USSR for the newly independent countries of Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and



***ROOTLESS: World War I and the revolution and wars that followed led to the displacement of vast numbers of people, including countless children. Here, people ride between rail cars, seeking refuge.*** [Source unknown]

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points west. In November 1920, 300,000 had moved through Minsk to Poland; by the end of 1922, 430,000 more had done so.

Refugees from the famine regions formed the fourth group of migrants. Belarusian “Evak” authorities reported that 101,000 migrants had been registered during the first half of 1922 but estimated that “an equal number pass through without registration.”

These unfortunates, camping in railway stations, their wagons, and “dugouts deep in the earth,” without adequate bathing and laundry facilities, wearing the clothes on their backs for months on end, were “a menace to the local population . . . virtual disease carriers, especially of typhus,” emphasized an ARA doctor named Donald Hardy. “Lice-borne diseases remain everywhere . . . especially relapsing,” Dr. Stackelberg seconded. Additionally, he warned, “water supply is everywhere bad, and the canalization worse.” The polluted rivers he described, mitigated only in some places by artesian wells, combined with filthy toilets and latrines, spawned typhoid





***NEW RULE: Soviet head of state Mikhail Kalinin, center left, salutes cadets marching in Mogilev, eastern Belarus, in June 1919. The Russian imperial army had been headquartered in Mogilev in 1915–17; German troops then occupied the city in 1918 and set up a buffer state, the short-lived Belarusian People's Republic. After 1919, Soviet forces were in control.*** [Museum of History of Mogilev]

fever, dysentery, and cholera. Insufficient food lowered immunity, making the migrants susceptible to tuberculosis and trachoma. Several thousand orphans, packed into children's homes, slept two and three to a bed or on the floor without sheets or blankets, underwear, sleepwear, and shoes, bathing infrequently and suffering from scabies—as another ARA doctor, Frank Wehle, observed in Minsk, Smolensk, Gomel', and Vitebsk in October 1922. There were flares of malaria, endemic and often epidemic in Russia and the Soviet Union.

## **DISEASES INCREASE**

Life for permanent residents was scarcely better than for the refugees. Factories barely operated or operated not at all. Shops and stores were shuttered. The government closed many Jewish institutions, throwing teachers and staff out of work. Dwellings varied from town to town but the majority



were ramshackle, dirty, and overcrowded. “Sanitary appliances” and electric lighting were inadequate; all heating was done with wood—which was scarce and expensive. Hygienic amenities were available in some towns but few in others. For example, Jlobin (Zhlobin), near Gomel’, with nine thousand mainly Jewish inhabitants

and rife with epidemics and tuberculosis, had no public baths and depended on the railroad for hospitalization. Railway employees in Jlobin had

their own bath but refused to share it with other residents. Baths in some other Belarusian towns were reserved for the military or used only infrequently because they charged high prices for adults—though not for children.

In sum, the abundance of food notwithstanding, Belarus was in the throes of a public health crisis.

No money was available to gather adequate disease and mortality statistics. But in Minsk alone during the last three months of 1921 and the first three of 1922, typhus cases totaled 11,707 with 500 deaths; recurring fever cases amounted to 21,756 with 827 deaths; typhoid and paratyphoid cases amounted to 2,639 with 119 deaths and 1,952 with 184 deaths, respectively; dysentery totaled 1,247 cases with 121 deaths; and scarlet fever cases amounted to 1,746 with 106 deaths. Fortunately, cholera, variola, and erysipelas were less lethal.

Tragically, hospitals and pharmacies were in precarious shape. “I have never seen hospitals, dispensaries and other institutions so bereft of all essentials so far as medical, surgical, and hospital supplies are concerned, as I have seen here,” Dr. Hardy lamented in September 1922, after inspections in Bobruisk, Slutsk, Gomel’, Mogilev, and Igumen. “One of the hospitals of the most dire need . . . is Bobruisk. There is a very good surgeon there. . . . His average is three major operations a day. . . . He has not sufficient gauze, iodine, has had no gloves for five years, no catgut for an equal period. He uses broken flax as a substitute for cotton and linen thread for catgut . . . and scrubs with three sterile brushes.”

Other ARA doctors noted that hospitals lacked rubber sheets, gowns, slippers, and blankets for patients—who had to pay for their food. Hardy also requested two thousand blankets for the hospital staff—some of whom ignored patients who appeared to be failing. There were a limited number of pharmacies—with limited supplies of soap, disinfectants, and food

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***The multiethnic, multilingual, multiconfessional population was overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of transients and refugees.***



***“WAR COMMUNISM”: Mikhail Kalinin addresses military cadets during his visit to Belarus in 1919. In the years after Soviet authorities took away Belarus’s independence, public health suffered from the ravages of the Polish-Belarusian-Russian War, the Russian Civil War, and mass movements of refugees. Bolshevik seizures of medical supplies and food, attempts to collectivize farms, and suppression of philanthropic organizations added to the toll.***

[Museum of History of Mogilev]

supplements to dispense. In August 1922, ARA doctors advised “cutting the number of hospitals . . . so those that remain are better equipped.”

The main task of the ARA personnel who worked in Belarus from January 1922 through June 1923 was to aid the refugees. District supervisor Charles Willoughby and Hardy set up headquarters in Minsk. They hired about a hundred locals, according to Alexander Lukashuk, whose 2005 publication on ARA feeding and political interaction with Belarusian Communists is available only in Belarusian and Russian. John Maitland organized an ARA branch in Gomel’ in southeastern Belarus. John Acker and Raymond Brand’s ARA office was in Vitebsk, erstwhile home of Marc Chagall, Yehuda Pen, and Nadezhda Chodasiewicz-Leger, who with fellow Belarusian artists Chaim Soutine, Sam Zarfin, and Osip Liubich dazzled Paris, then the world.

Belarusian archives detail two qualified pharmacists hired on: German Reiman, who was born in Riga, graduated from Iur’ev (now Tartu) University

in Estland, managed a pharmacy in eastern Ukraine before the war, served in the Red Army, managed a nationalized pharmacy in Odessa, and was a refugee in Minsk, waiting to emigrate to Latvia when he worked for the ARA through spring 1923. Yakov Polyak had managed a pharmacy for a benevolent association in Grodno, served in the imperial Russian army, and worked for the ARA only three months—fired ostensibly for redundancy but perhaps for czarist military connections.

## **GOOD CAMPS, SQUALID CAMPS**

The chief measures implemented by Belarusian health authorities in Nar-komzdrav (the Commissariat of Health) and Gub- and Gorzdravs (provincial and city health departments) were isolation and quarantine in vacated army bases. These camps varied in quality, according to Stackelberg in a July 1922 report. For example, that at Veliki-Luki was “one of the best.” It housed people waiting to emigrate and POWs who had just returned from Germany—five hundred at a time. The camp included barracks, kitchen, laundry, and bath. There were separate quarters for men and women, even a library. The families waiting to emigrate were healthy and most of the adults worked on the railway line. All were bathed and vaccinated before entering. The doctor in charge had a small hospital of twenty beds. The main feeding point could handle two thousand people a day, and there were “stocks of food until October,” clothing, and “extras.”

The “Evak” situation in Vitebsk was not as good. People seeking repatriation to Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania were waiting, but Lithuania was refusing to accept any. There were still five thousand famine refugees in Polotsk, Orsha, and other villages. Some lived in barracks; others in town. Although baths were available, the local doctor complained

that “the situation has never been so bad—typhus and relapsing fever remain epidemic.”

Typhoid was “little,” there were a few cases of

malaria, children’s infections were not excessive—but there was “a good deal of [gastro]enteritis” and dysentery was expected. Further, vaccinations had “not gone well.” In Gomel’ there were about six hundred inmates in the camp and also famine victims in barracks “with small rooms—thus easier to keep clean.” There were kitchens so the isolated could cook on their own.

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***Factories barely operated or operated not at all. Shops and stores were shuttered. The government closed many Jewish institutions, throwing teachers and staff out of work.***



***SUFFER THE CHILDREN: Bundled-up children gather outside an orphanage in Brest-Litovsk, Belarus. A health worker reported that in multiple cities several thousand orphans, packed into children's homes, slept two and three to a bed or on the floor without sheets or blankets, underwear, sleepwear, and shoes, bathing infrequently and suffering from scabies.*** [International Committee of the Red Cross]

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The barracks at Bolosk [sic], on the other hand, “were not very clean and no official steps seem to have been taken to stamp out the epidemics in the place.” There was “individual cooking” but the children had “gone away to beg.” The doctor in charge of the railway isolation hospital in the barracks did what he could but was “short of drugs and supplies.” The hospital had a hundred beds, about forty of which were “in use for cases of relapsing, typhus, dysentery, and enteritis.” Moreover, the hospital was “very old” and “short of drugs, linen, etc.”

In contrast, the refugee camp at Kozirova, outside Minsk, described by Dr. Whele as well as Dr. Stackelberg, was a showplace for three thousand inmates, mainly Polish, German, and Russian. It “was well situated on open ground with gravel soil. There were three large barracks. The bathing facilities”—Russian saunas—were not yet finished but the kitchens were “excellent.” There were separate tents for those wishing to stay in the open air.

The Belarusian government also established a Bacteriological Institute in Minsk in 1920 but it needed chemicals, dyes, and microscopes. The new

university in Minsk included a medical department. The Minsk government managed some clinics, refurbished the state hospital in Minsk, provided some meals for college students and workers, received medicines from Germany, and in February 1923 issued fifty thousand doses of smallpox vaccine free of charge.

The Belarusian government ran children's homes (some formerly Jewish) and some workers' unions founded children's homes. For example, the Belarus Commissariat of Education operated seven homes for 328 children in Borisov. One, the model Borisov Colony for Children, housed a reported thirty-four children, eight to sixteen years old and all orphans, on a confiscated private estate where the children took care of the animals and two hundred apple trees. But even this colony—and others less impressive—had shortages of crucial items and needed help from the ARA. In October 1922 Dr. Whele visited seventy children's homes and commented on the general lack of beds, linen, and clothing.

Some outside organizations assisted Belarusian authorities. The German Red Cross attended to German refugees waiting to leave

Belarus. The Joint Jewish Committee addressed the needs of compatriots, including children's homes. A Quaker organization provided some general assistance. The Red Cross had assisted but was pulling out of Belarus in 1922. Relatives of Belarusians also sent food packages through the ARA to their kin.

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***Bolsheviks seized large pharmaceutical factories in Petersburg and Moscow while locals seized those in the provinces. The factories were handed over to party stalwarts or remained moribund for years.***

## **THE GREAT WAR WASN'T SOLELY TO BLAME**

The disinfecting machine was the state-of-the-art apparatus to combat typhus in the early 1920s. The one at Kozirova was a Japanese model made of oakum that could disinfect four hundred items per day. The League of Nations had contributed six big disinfecting machines to the State Soviet Hospital in Minsk, which planned to send them to districts.

Otherwise, the key weapons in the fight against infectious diseases were shockingly scarce. These included vaccines; soap and disinfectants such as Lysol, lye, and iodine; more and cheaper public baths and laundry facilities; fever-reducing medicines; bed linens, towels, and clothing; more nutritious





**VACCINATIONS:** *A refugee child is immunized in a Brest-Litovsk clinic. Vaccines against a number of diseases were among the key supplies distributed by the American Relief Administration. Other items in desperately short supply included soap, bedding, shoes, and clothing.* [International Committee of the Red Cross]



food in the hospitals and children's homes; and shoes for children trudging barefoot in the snow. ARA doctors periodically ordered and distributed chemical and botanical remedies, vaccines, vast quantities of soap and disinfectants, thousands of pairs of shoes and garments, clothing, bedding, and medical instruments. For example, in October 1922 they contributed to the model Borisov Colony for Children sixty-eight pounds of soap, five cans of cod liver oil, thirty-five blankets, seventy-five dressing gowns, nineteen mattresses, seventy-two bandages, two thermometers, four cans of lye, and cocoa. ARA doctors also undertook water purification in Minsk.

ARA physicians attributed the shortages and unhygienic conditions to six years of war—the First World War, the civil war, and the Polish-Belarusian-Russian War of 1919–20. To some extent their assessment was valid. However, factors other than armed conflict had also caused the shortages.

On the eve of the First World War, according to Valentina Sosonkina's *Istoriia farmatsiia Belarusi*, there were forty-four private pharmacies in Mogilev city and province, thirty-two in Gomel' city and province, and one hundred and two in Minsk city and province. Ferrein in Moscow and approximately one hundred other Russian pharmaceutical factories, as cited in their brochures and in *Khimicheskoe delo v Rossii* (Odessa, 1913), produced soaps, disinfectants, cough

syrops, etc.—about half the pharmaceuticals dispensed in pharmacies according to data in Conroy's *In Health*

and in *Sickness*. Thirteen large pharmaceutical factories operated in Riga, Lifland province, next door to Belarus. There was only one major pharmaceutical company in Belarus: Lur'e in Pinsk. However, from 1885 this firm produced Lysol, the disinfectant creolin, and soap—items crucial to combatting infectious diseases. Russia did import the so-called magic bullets—*aspirin*, the anti-syphilitic *Salvarsan*, and some others—from German and Swiss firms because they held patents for these items and low tariffs made it more economical to import than to produce domestically. Similarly, Russia imported the disinfectant iodine from Germany and opium from Persia and the Ottoman empire because the active ingredients in Russian opium poppies and coastal seaweed (iodine's source) did not satisfy the pharmacopeia. However, during the war Russian pharmacologists reverse-engineered key patented items, heretofore imported, and used domestic opium and Black Sea seaweed.

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***The disinfecting machine was the state-of-the-art apparatus to combat typhus in the early 1920s.***

*Khimicheskoe delo* described other small-scale Belarusian factories that produced useful items such as hemp and glucose, flax oil, vinegar acid, charcoal, wood spirits, methyl alcohol, flour, and salt. There were five leather and shoe factories in Vitebsk, one in Mogilev, and forty-four in Grodno. Eight institutes produced vaccines for cholera, typhoid, and dysentery.

Some of Riga's pharmaceutical factories were evacuated during the Great War. In any case, links to them were severed when Latvia became independent in 1918. Belarus was likewise cut off from the Joint Stock Chemical Company in Vilna that produced Glauber's salts, fruit essences, nitric acid, and barium when Lithuania declared independence in 1918 and Poland acquired Vilnius in 1922. For compensation, Belarus was rich in medicinal botanicals—a major export of the Russian empire even during World War I—and Belarusians were skilled phytotherapists, as the publications of Drs. V. F. Korsun and E. V. Korsun attest. Medicinal plants were important because they had anti-inflammatory, bactericide, and antibiotic properties. (Russians and Belarusians still treat themselves with medicinal plants.)

*Istoriia farmatsiia Belarusi* documents that private warehouses in Mogilev were available to provision local pharmacies. In 1915, for example, the All-Russian Union of Zemstvos established a warehouse in Minsk stocked with pharmaceutical and medical supplies for the army and clinics, feeding stations, isolation hospitals, epidemic units, and children's refuges under Zemstvo Union jurisdiction in Mir, Igumen, Rechitsa, Brest-Litovsk, and other towns. Nine months before being sequestered by Bolshevik authorities in the fall of 1917, this warehouse contained more than two hundred medical-pharmaceutical items. Thus, medical/pharmaceutical deficits in Belarus in 1922 could not be attributed solely to the First World War.

## THOSE WHO COULD NOT ESCAPE

Indeed, the shortages of pharmaceuticals and disinfectants in Belarus in 1922 resulted more directly from the civil war between the Bolsheviks and their opponents and the simultaneous Polish-Belarusian-Russian War that followed World War I. The Treaty of Riga in April 1921, ending the Polish War, allotted Grodno—with its shoe factories and pharmacies—plus a large chunk of territory to newly independent Poland. This treaty also aggravated the refugee situation in Belarus as Poland and Lithuania delayed admission of emigrants from Belarus.

The civil war was equally if not more pernicious. It cost Belarus independence, declared by the liberal Rada in the spring of 1918, and harshly subordinated Belarusian liberals and anti-Bolshevik socialists to Bolsheviks in



(x)

20. by B. 1921  
Angar

**TAKING CARE:** Nurses work in a pharmacy in the Infectious Disease Hospital in 1921 in Vitebsk, where the American Relief Administration had a branch office. ARA doctors noted that in many places hospitals lacked rubber sheets, gowns, slippers, and blankets for patients—who had to pay for their food.

[Oblast' Regional Museum, Vitebsk]

Belarus and Moscow, as Elvira Yershova recounts in the article “Grazhdanskaia voina i bor’ba za vlast’ v Belorussii, 1918–1920.” The Bolsheviks’ policy of “war communism” ruined the pharmaceutical sector, as Conroy’s *The Soviet Pharmaceutical Business during Its First Two Decades* and Sosonkina’s *Farmatsevticheskoe delo v Belarusi* document. Bolsheviks requisitioned large pharmaceutical factories in Petersburg and Moscow in 1918 while locals seized those in the provinces. The factories were handed over to party stalwarts, most of whom had no pharmacological or business qualifications, or remained without management for years, with resultant deterioration of machinery and stock—and shortages of pharmaceutical and medical supplies. Bolsheviks sequestered the 4,800 or so pharmacies in the empire and the approximately 10,000 *aptekariskii magaziny* or “drugstores,” along with other shops and commercial entities. Many former factory and pharmacy owners left Russia;



***WAITING FOR MORE: Children in northern Russia wait for a meal in 1919. In the city of Minsk, a Communist Party newspaper acknowledged in January 1923 that the ARA had issued 2,997,519 rations per day over the previous year in Belarus. Lenin's New Economic Policy, implemented in Belarus in 1922, revived agriculture and production to some extent but continued to harm the pharmaceutical/medical sector.*** [American Red Cross]

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others were incarcerated in camps, some were killed, none could legally manage their properties, precipitating a brain drain. During the German occupation of Belarus in 1918, nationalization was reversed, then reimposed when Germany was defeated. By the end of 1922, the number of pharmacies in Belarus had shrunk to 105—about the number operating in Minsk city and province during the First World War.

Suppression of Jewish and Christian philanthropic institutions also harmed health care. Confiscation of agricultural produce for the Red Army and abortive attempts to collectivize caused peasant upheavals, shrank food on the market, and diminished medicinal botanicals. According to Drs. Stackelberg and Hardy, the hospital in the Jewish town of Mozyr, Belarus, was destroyed in 1920 when Bolsheviks crushed a “White Russian rising.” It is not clear whether the destruction of the hospital in Kalinkovitchi, Belarus,

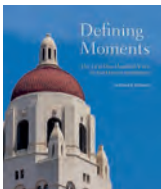
also resulted from marauding armies. However, shortages of pharmaceuticals and disinfectants can be directly traced to the Bolsheviks' policy of war communism.

Lenin's New Economic Policy, implemented in Belarus in 1922, revived agriculture and production to some extent but had baneful effects on the pharmaceutical/medical sector. Privatized bathhouses now charged high prices for usage in order to pay high taxes. Moscow devolved responsibility for maintaining hospitals and children's homes onto local governments that lacked wherewithal and was stingy in providing subsidies.

The Communist newspaper *Minsk Zvezda* noted that American and Canadian steamship lines' recruitment of refugees for immigration to North America offered one solution to the health crisis in Belarus. But, obviously, this escape route was open to only a few Belarusians who had funds and relatives to sponsor them. For the vast majority, ARA medical help was crucial. *Minsk Zvezda* acknowledged in January 1923 that along with issuing 2,997,519 rations per day since January 1922, the ARA had supplied one hundred and three institutions in Minsk district, twenty-two in Bobruisk, eighteen in Igu-men, twenty-three in Slutsk, and sixteen in Borisov "with drugs, medicines . . . vaccines, surgical instruments, hospital supplies," indeed "forty-nine carloads of supplies valued at three million gold rubles."

The work caused ARA doctors stress, even illness, reflected in their requests for Gold Flake cigarettes, tins of sardines, Palmolive soap, and coffee. Translated thank-you letters in the Hoover Archives from "workless" sick Belarusians testified to ARA doctors' commitment and efforts, although conditions still needed improvement in spring 1923. ■

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# On the Cover

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This poster from World War II Britain is a reminder of another era in which public health took on broad importance, with implications that crossed borders and even touched on world politics and conflict. Here are two science students examining samples under a microscope. What may be remarkable to modern viewers of this poster from the Hoover Archives is that the young scientists are not researching a vaccine or a cure. They are researching potatoes.

Readers of the Arabic-language text learn that Britain's scientific prowess includes work toward disease-resistant varieties of potato, a staple food. Messages like this were a staple of Britain's Ministry of Information (which famously employed George Orwell's wife as a censor). The MOI oversaw "information policy and the output of propaganda material in Allied and neutral countries, with overseas publicity organized geographically," according to a description in the British National Archives. These included newspapers, books, magazines, pamphlets, and radio broadcasts, and aimed to show Britain as a dependable, forward-looking democracy.

Germany was already hard at work wooing audiences in places like Egypt, Palestine, and North Africa. So, according to the British Library, the ministry "produced and disseminated a remarkable assortment of propaganda material in Arabic. The material that it produced was intended to counter pro-Axis sentiment in the Arab world and bolster support for Britain and its allies." Those materials went beyond favorable depictions of the science, industry, strength, and culture of the Allies; much of the content portrayed Nazis as haters of religion, a message thought to resonate with Islamic audiences.

A poster from the same series as the potato scientists shows young Britons convening a mock Parliament to discuss the future—an image crafted to inspire Arabic readers to think about their future, too.

The ministry commissioned children's books, such as a colorful illustrated series called *Ahmad and Johnny*, which centered on a British boy, his Sudanese pal, and their mutual interest in peace and the modern world.





Which is a roundabout return to potatoes. The humble tuber was vital to the free people on the home front. “Dig for Victory” gardens grew a variety of nutritious crops in playing fields, parks, and open spaces. Even the royal family grew onions at the palace. A different ministry, the Ministry of Food, stepped up. It created a cheerful cartoon mascot called “Potato Pete,” who volunteered to take the place of wheat and other scarce commodities. Pete would announce, “I make a good soup!” and “They use me on the kitchen front.” On the cover of one cookbook, he parachutes into enemy territory with his russet rangers, clutching a machine gun and crying “Attack with me!” Other vegetables got in on the act: there’s also “Doctor Carrot,” who proclaimed himself “the children’s best friend.” Carrots also had a certain mystique because of a belief, based on their plentiful Vitamin A, that they improved night vision for the likes of fighter pilots and blackout wardens.

Today’s audiences scouring grocery shelves might find another wartime message compelling. Home front propaganda demanded, for the greater good, not just healthy eating but healthy behavior. Such as this message: “Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases.”

—Charles Lindsey



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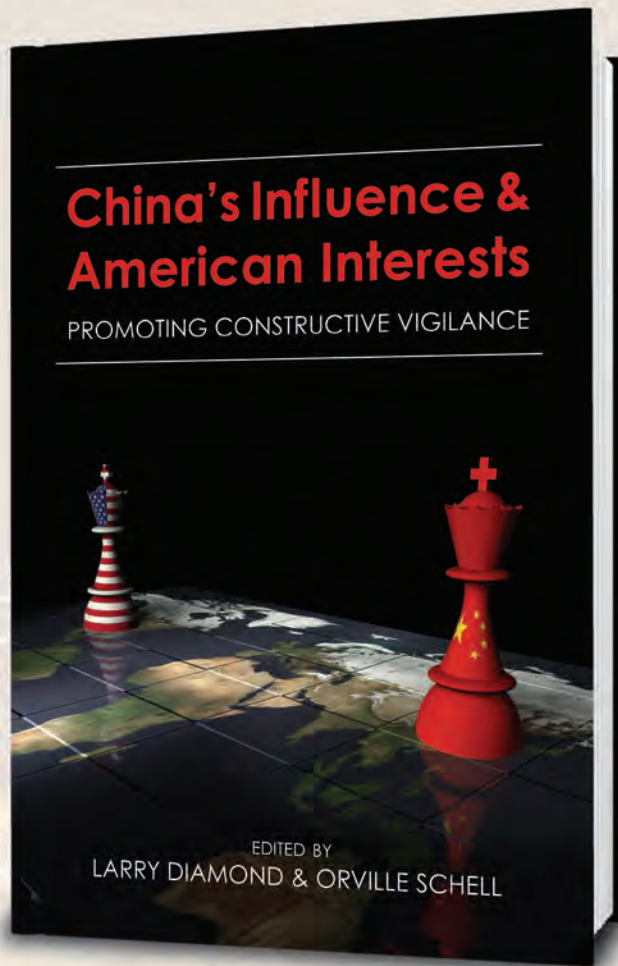
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