HOOVER DIGEST

RESEARCH + OPINION ON PUBLIC POLICY

WINTER 2022 NO. 1

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The *Hoover Digest* (ISSN 1088-5161) is published quarterly by the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 434 Galvez Mall, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305-6003. Periodicals Postage Paid at Palo Alto CA and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to the *Hoover Digest*, Hoover Press, 434 Galvez Mall, Stanford University, Stanford CA 94305-6003.

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ON THE COVER

A tranquil travel poster beckons: "Come to Ulster." The Ulster Tourist Development Association (UTDA), which printed the poster, was established in 1923 to work with railroads, seaside resorts, towns, and businesses in Northern Ireland. The UTDA strove for eighty years to confirm "the belief that Northern Ireland was an attractive place to visit," as the *Irish Times* put it in 2003. The article pointed out how Northern Ireland's tourist traffic rose to one million visitors in 1967. Two years later, the Troubles began. **See story, page 228.**

Winter 2022

HOOVER DIGEST

AFTER AFGHANISTAN

What Did Afghanistan Mean?

Hoover fellows H. R. McMaster and Victor Davis Hanson scrutinize the long and ultimately futile American campaign to remake Afghanistan.

By Peter Robinson

***Peter Robinson,* Uncommon Knowledge:** On Monday, August 30, a US military C-17 carried the last American troops out of Afghanistan, marking the formal end of what reporters called the longest war in US history. Analysis in a moment, but first: what did you think the moment you heard that this withdrawal was happening so quickly and in such disorder?

H. R. McMaster: I was not surprised at all. I mean, this is what happens when you surrender to a terrorist organization. And I think there are those in our government who believe there are no consequences for a lost war. What's astounding to me is this rationale that we had to leave on the timeline

H. R. McMaster *(US Army, Ret.), a former national security adviser, is the Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of Hoover's working groups on military history and Islamism and the international order. He is also a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project, the former Bernard and Susan Liautaud Visiting Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute, and a lecturer at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business.* ***Victor Davis Hanson*** *is the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, the chair of Hoover's Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict, and a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project.* ***Peter Robinson*** *is the editor of the* ***Hoover Digest,*** *the host of* ***Uncommon Knowledge,*** *and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

that we gave to the Taliban, and in so doing, we could reduce risk to our servicemen and women. Of course, thirteen were killed in a mass attack that killed hundreds of Afghans just a few days before this. So, we reduce risk to servicemen and women, but we are leaving civilians, American citizens behind.

Robinson: Victor, Secretary of State Antony Blinken testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "we"—that is, the Biden administration—"inherited a deadline" from the Trump administration, but not "a plan." Had President Biden not followed through on his predecessor's commitment, Blinken said, attacks on our forces "would have resumed."

Victor Davis Hanson: Well, that was a very self-incriminating statement. We inherited a plan, but we didn't inherit the conditions under which the prior plan said that there would be punitive actions if the conditions weren't met. More important, they inherited a lot of plans. They inherited a plan to secure the border; it was secure. They inherited a plan to have three million more barrels of oil and gas. They inherited the plan, by the way, of about 2 percent annual inflation.

"Once you give a number and a timeline, and that became the mission, then you're going to have a catastrophe."

So they were very promiscuous in getting, and then jettisoning, every plan they got. There hadn't been anybody killed in Afghanistan for one year when Biden was inaugurated, and he had plenty of time to make a graduated plan. If you wanted to withdraw over two or three years, he could have done it. But he didn't want to do that. He wanted to get out and have a big parade and say, "I, Joe Biden, the understudy and unfairly deprecated 'Joe from Scranton,' did what George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump didn't do. I got out of Afghanistan, and I did it on September 11." That's what it was about.

Robinson: Here's a quotation from President Biden the day before the final American troops departed. "The idea that somehow there's a way to have gotten out without chaos ensuing . . . I don't know how that happens." As a purely military matter, was he correct?

McMaster: No, that's not true. Once he said that you can have only *x* number of troops on the ground and they have to leave on this particular schedule, then your options are quite limited. You can't keep Bagram [Airfield] open; Bagram has seventy-eight outposts. It has a pretty significant perimeter to

LONG ROAD HOME: Army Stryker armored vehicles patrol Helmand province in 2010. "We paid a lot of attention to how to unseat the Taliban government, how to defeat their fielded forces," says Hoover fellow H. R. McMaster, "and not enough attention to how to consolidate gains and get to a sustainable outcome in Afghanistan." [Tech Sgt. Efren Lopez—US Air Force]

man. Once you give a number and a timeline, and that became the mission, then you're going to have a catastrophe like we saw.

And what was the mission given to the government departments and agencies? Was it to get every American out and do so in good order; to get every one of the citizens of our allies, our European allies, get the Afghans out who have worked with us and who will be brutalized and murdered if we don't get them out? That was not the mission. The mission, Peter, was "get the hell out on the timeline I gave you." And once you do that, this is what you get.

Robinson: All right, this is how it ended. Let's go back to how it began. As a military operation projecting that kind of power to the far side of the world, entering one of the most difficult theaters in the world, how do you judge that as a military operation, the way it began?

Hanson: Well, it was brilliant. We had three missions. Number one was to get Osama bin Laden; number two, the government that had aided and abetted him. And then number three: to create conditions on the ground so the Taliban

***FADEOUT:** A night-vision image shows Army Major General Chris Donahue as he boards a C-17 cargo plane on August 30 at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. Donahue was the last American service member to leave Afghanistan.* [ZUMA Press]

and/or bin Laden would not come back. This was in reaction to whack-a-mole during the Clinton administration, where we would just bomb and go home.

Robinson: H. R., Victor mentioned that one of the stated missions was to get bin Laden. What's now called the Battle of Tora Bora takes place from December 6 to December 17, 2001. We think we've located bin Laden's headquarters, we think bin Laden is there, and before the battle is over some

number of terrorists, including bin Laden, if he was there, escape into Pakistan. Did we miss a chance?

McMaster: Yes, and it was a result in large measure of the type of campaign we waged. We decided to wage a light-footprint campaign, to rely mainly on courageous intelligence professionals and special operations forces who enabled our tremendous air power to support mujahideen-era militias that were anti-Taliban. It was those militias that liberated Afghanistan and liberated Kabul and put the Taliban forces on the run. But what we found is that by this overreliance on militias and not deploying enough US conventional force capability, we had a hammer, but we had no anvil. This was really a fixation of the Pentagon at this time, because of the orthodoxy of what was known as the "revolution in military affairs." We paid a lot of attention to how to unseat the Taliban government, how to defeat their fielded forces, and not enough attention to how to consolidate gains and get to a sustainable outcome in Afghanistan consistent with that third objective, which Victor mentioned, which is to ensure that whatever political settlement emerged in Afghanistan could withstand the regenerative capacity of the Taliban and would remain fundamentally hostile to jihadist terrorists, including the Taliban.

Robinson: You've said elsewhere that it wasn't a twenty-year war, it was a one-year war that we fought over and over again twenty times.

McMaster: What was required in Afghanistan because of the regenerative capacity of the Taliban and the resilience of jihadist terrorists who were waging, by the way, an endless jihad against us, was a sustained commitment that would allow the Afghans to bear the brunt of the fight and, of course, to have the resilience, the strength necessary to cope with the regenerative capacity of the Taliban. That's what we abandoned. I think we talked ourselves into defeat, we didn't sustain our will, and a false narrative about the war took hold in the United States that this was a futile endeavor because Afghanistan was not yet Denmark. Heck, it didn't need to be Denmark, it just needed to be Afghanistan.

THE MEANING OF "SUSTAINABLE"

Robinson: Here's Lee Smith writing in *Tablet,* "The evidence is that our elites sought to graft the effects of a civilization built by and for its own people—democracy, a military and police force, girls' schools, etc.—onto a primitive society that had to be bribed to accept what we were offering." That gets to something I think you were about to start in on, Victor, this notion that somehow the original mission was directly tied to obvious American

interests—above all, the defense of this republic—and yet somehow or other, it took root in American thinking that it wasn't the defense of this nation. How did we get involved in nation building?

Hanson: Well, we *are* building. We have one hundred fifty-plus outposts, bases, all over the world. Afghanistan was not the aberration. But when we go into these places and we stabilize them temporarily, and we have a mission to advance US and our allies' interests, then it starts to be mission creep. And from twenty years ago, that mission creep reached levels of absurdity. So, finally, we're an imperial power who gave up Afghanistan and are leaving in humiliation, but we're still flying the pride flag. We're advancing George Floyd murals in a traditional, pre-modern society; we're bragging on our gender studies. These are the imperial pretensions of a victorious, strong power. So we combine the worst of both worlds. We were trying to leave a cultural implant, but without manifest military strength.

Also, from the very beginning, because of the rapid victory and the brilliance in 2001, I think a lot of people thought Iraq was a bad war and Afghanistan was a good war. But if you look at it historically, Afghanistan is always much harder than a country like Iraq. It had no middle class, no industry, no ports. We had allies in the Middle East, but none in that area. More important, we had a nuclear Pakistan right on the border that we didn't know how to deal with. We never understood whether it was an enemy or friend or what, but it was undermining our efforts.

So, there were so many things against us, and yet from 2015 you can argue that the US military was not in an active combat role day to day. It had stabilized things, at least in that the plains, the cities, had been compliant to our strategic aims. But if you're going to go into Afghanistan and say it will be easy, and we'll have all these cultural ruffles and flourishes like we did in the end, you're not going to pay attention first to military efficacy.

"It was a political decision to prioritize withdrawal over supporting the Afghan government security forces."

Robinson: In something like fourteen years, we actually did what we needed to do. Is that correct?

Hanson: Yes. But you're asking me, a civilian military historian, to do something that the military and these administrations did not. You could have asked that question of George W. Bush and Barack Obama and Donald

THE LONG VIEW: A Navy corpsman treats an Afghan boy with a head injury in 2009. The US mission in Afghanistan soon grew to include projects to help Afghanistan's people: schools, hospitals, infrastructure, military aid, and much more. US policy makers hoped to bring about humanitarian changes, restore governance to Afghanistan's people, and bolster the country's resistance to jihadism. Hoover fellow Victor Davis Hanson says, "We were trying to leave a cultural implant, but without manifest military strength." [Staff Sgt. William Greeson—US Marine Corps]

Trump, and especially Joe Biden. But we did not have people articulate what exactly we wanted in Afghanistan, the cost-benefit analysis in Afghanistan, why we must stay there, and do it explicitly.

THE ART OF WINNING

Robinson: H. R., once it becomes the narrative that we're there to improve life for Afghans, we're not there to defend ourselves, then the whole venture becomes subject to withering critiques. A line of attack in the *Spectator:* "On Ivy League campuses, students are taught to decry colonialism, but Ivy League diplomats who sought to remake Afghanistan in Harvard's image were among

the most ambitious practitioners of colonialism in world history." You've been hearing criticism of this nature for two decades. How do you handle it?

McMaster: Well, I think you're setting up a straw man. There's a lot of ground between the ideology of the Taliban, which wants to thrust Afghanistan back into the seventh century, and this neoliberal ideology that some elements within the US government or nongovernmental organizations were trying to introduce into Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not naturally a jihadist-terrorist-friendly place. It really became a theocratic dictatorship only under the Taliban, after a destructive civil war from 1992 to 1996. And of course, the Afghan people suffered tremendously from '96 to 2001 under Taliban rule.

The Asia Society has been doing pretty good polls in Afghanistan in the twenty years since 9/11. And the most support that the Taliban has ever registered in Afghanistan was 13 percent. Now, problems were identified that proved fatal to the Afghan state, such as corruption and organized crime. But I believe that those problems were enabled mainly by our short-term approach to a long-term problem in Afghanistan. We kept telling the Afghans, "Hey, we're leaving. Okay, now we're really leaving. Now we're really, *really* leaving, and here's the timeline for our withdrawal." And that encouraged a hedging behavior on the part of Afghans, who then determined to try to build up power bases in advance of post-American Afghanistan, an Afghanistan that would revert back to civil war.

Robinson: And various warlords are trying to steal as much money as they can while the going is good.

McMaster: Absolutely. And they became stakeholders in state weakness because it was the weakness of state institutions that gave them impunity. Hamid Karzai looked over his shoulder and said, "Who's got my back?" Nobody did. So he cut deals with the mujahideen-era elites and in exchange for their fealty he gave them license to steal. It was our lack of diplomatic and political engagement that led to or exacerbated the self-destructive behavior on the part of the government.

"The worst of both worlds: we were trying to leave a cultural implant, but without manifest military strength."

There are no short-term solutions to long-term problems. What happened in Afghanistan was that our short-term approach actually lengthened the war and made it more costly.

WHAT WENT WRONG? Senator Ben Cardin (D-Maryland) questions Secretary of State Antony Blinken about the Afghan withdrawal during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing September 14. In the background are images from the tumultuous last days before the US military departure. Blinken said the United States was unable to renegotiate the pullout. "We inherited a deadline. We did not inherit a plan," he told House lawmakers the day before.
[Drew Angerer—Consolidated News Photos]

I would also like to point out that the warrior ethos that "in war, there is no substitute for victory, there is no substitute for winning," is at risk. What has crept into our lexicon and been infused into the military in certain quarters, well before any elements of critical race theory, were ideas that these wars are unwinnable.

Well, what was winning in Afghanistan? Winning in Afghanistan was a sustainable political order in that country that was hostile to jihadist terrorists with Afghan security forces that with a very small amount of our support could sustain that effort and bear the brunt of the fight against enemies of all humanity. And one of the straw men, I think, we're setting up in this conversation is that trillions of dollars were wasted on these gender programs and everything. Well, look at the progress that was made in helping Afghanistan just become Afghanistan again. The Afghanistan prior to the civil war, and prior to the

brutal rule of the Taliban. But also consider the amount of resources that were being committed toward the end, even before the mistake to engage in capitulation negotiations, from 2019 to 2020—and that was a force of about 10,000, about 2.5 percent of our defense budget, and expenditures of about $22 billion a year. Was that sustainable? I would say it was sustainable.

Actually, it was sound policy if you think of it as an insurance policy against the catastrophe we're witnessing now. And I want to point out that the person who got us on track for that strategy was Donald Trump. We briefed him on all options in 2017. It was not my job to advocate for any of these; I felt, as national security adviser, that I provided the elected president with options and explored the long-term costs and consequences of each. If you go back to his August 2017 speech, I believe that was the only time we had in place in Afghanistan a sound, sustainable approach to the war that prioritized our interests and would in fact honor the sacrifices and service of our men and women who fought there for over twenty years.

"Deterrence is very hard to create, but it can be lost in a day."

Robinson: H. R., are you saying that these reports of $187 billion spent on gender studies and tens of billions wasted in corruption are mistaken, or that they don't matter in the larger picture?

McMaster: No, what I'm saying is you're not placing them in context. As Victor knows better than anybody, wars do not ever appear linear. They're based on a continuous interaction of opposites, to use a Clausewitzian phrase, between our forces and the enemy, and then policies and strategies shift over time. We neglected what was necessary to consolidate gains in Afghanistan. And then when we woke up to the idea, we actually provided a whole bunch of assistance, with a great deal of enthusiasm and no finesse, and we dumped money into Afghanistan well beyond the absorptive capacity of that country.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

Hanson: If Biden had made it very clear that he was unpredictable and he would retaliate, I think the Trump policy was sustainable for two, three, four years. That is a graduated withdrawal with NATO. Remember we had eight thousand NATO troops, which was ironic since we're always accusing them of being less than stalwart, but Biden didn't have deterrence. Finally

THE FALLEN: Marines of the 2nd Combat Engineer Battalion stand ready with combat boots, rifles, and helmets to build the battlefield crosses in honor of three fallen Marines during a memorial ceremony aboard Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, on July 8, 2014. [Sgt. Jessica Ostroska—US Marine Corps]

the jihadists took a long look at him and thought, "You know what? If we do something, unlike a year ago, there's a good chance we're not going to get bombed." And they tried it, and tried it again. Deterrence is very hard to create, but it can be lost in a day, and that's what we did. We lost it. And now we've lost it all over; I think we've lost it in a lot of very critical places.

Robinson: H. R., if you look back across the long sweep of our involvement in Afghanistan, particularly the final month, Victor and you seem to agree on the political difficulty of sustaining this effort that emerged in this democracy. It's hard to tell people in Fresno who see their fields withering in the sun that there's corruption taking place on US taxpayer money in Kabul. It seems to me almost crazy that we thought we'd learned the lessons of Vietnam. How can that be?

McMaster: I know Victor and I both admire Michael Howard. He wrote, "The roots of victory or defeat often have to be sought far from the

END OF MISSION: Soldiers stand guard at Kabul's international airport on August 15. The American withdrawal, says Hoover fellow McMaster, was carried out in a way that failed to get all Americans and allies out of the country in good order—and the president's statement that the pullout could not have been done "without chaos" is wrong. [Sgt. Isaiah Campbell—US Marine Corps]

battlefield." And I think that is the case in Afghanistan. We know that a sustained military commitment in Afghanistan would have prevented this from happening, but it was a political decision to prioritize withdrawal over supporting the Afghan government security forces. I can understand that the American people, after three administrations in a row, say, "hey, it's not worth it," that the American people demand an end of America's involvement in the war. But what I don't understand is why two administrations empowered the Taliban on the way out and weakened the Afghan government and security forces, and essentially threw them under the bus on our way out.

Hanson: Afghanistan was never going to be a centrally governed country like a nation state, but there was a methodology. And I don't know where that went. One thing I liked about H. R.'s work on Vietnam was he was saying this, as I understood it: there is a crisis of confidence in the post-Vietnam military,

and whether it was the values or whether it was the bureaucracy, we didn't fight that war in a way that we won on the battlefield, but there were strategic and tactical decisions that nullified that victory.

Robinson: Can we recover, or does what just happened in Afghanistan prove that the United States, the West itself, represents a spent civilizational force?

Hanson: I think we can recover, and I happen to be confident, but we have to remember we're disunited. Military power is a reflection of economic, cultural, and social unity, and robustness. We need a regeneration of the elite establishment class. And we've got to go back to what was working.

McMaster: I often quote Wang An, a Chinese immigrant to the United States who founded Wang Computers. He said of his adopted nation, "We don't always live up to our values, but what we have is a mechanism for self-correction below the level of revolution." What disappoints me in much of the popular discourse today is this sense among Americans that we can't do anything about the problems and the obstacles we're facing. Hell yes, we can do something. We can demand better. We all get a say in how we're governed.

"What I don't understand is why two administrations empowered the Taliban on the way out."

And so, as we're lamenting the catastrophe in Afghanistan, we still ought to take a moment to recognize the regenerative capacity we have in this country and to acknowledge the great promise of America. If we owe our servicemen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan anything, I think it's to live well and cherish the freedoms they fought to preserve. And maybe we can help build a better future for generations to come. ■

"Power and Principle": A Coda

Condoleezza Rice, Jim Mattis, John B. Taylor, and Karen Hughes reflect on 9/11 and twenty tumultuous years.

In this round-table discussion hosted by Hoover fellow Peter Robinson, Director Condoleezza Rice joins senior fellows John B. Taylor and Jim Mattis and former Bush White House official Karen Hughes to discuss the memory and legacy of the September 11 attacks. All were important players in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks and the political, economic, and military actions that followed. Remarks have been edited for clarity and length. Watch or listen to their full discussion at hoover.org.

Peter Robinson: September 11, twenty years later: here are four people on whom the gravest responsibilities suddenly fell on that terrible day two decades ago. Today, a lot of Americans feel a certain sense of loss. What happened to the unity? The competence? What has happened in these past two decades?

Jim Mattis: War is a fundamentally unpredictable phenomenon. You cannot predict where it's going to go. And like any crisis—and war is always a crisis even if you start managing it as if it's an everyday operation—it remains unpredictable. You have a race between time and knowledge.

I think we failed to create a strategy that kept that unity together, the unity we all saw from our allies and even from some of the most unlikely people.

The larger issue of an integrated national strategy is if you're going to have a limited war, then you make very clear the limited political end state. We had the strategy right going in. No doubt whatsoever. And we are going to sustain the effort. A strategy is an appetite suppressant: it keeps you from

going too far on certain things. But you want to put in all the troops you need, plus a reserve to end it as quickly as you can.

But we didn't define the limits politically. We only defined them militarily.

Condoleezza Rice: I would put it a little bit differently. I think we allowed the wrong narrative to emerge about Afghanistan. When I think about Afghanistan, I actually think of Korea. We fought to a stalemate in Korea; we've still never won that war. It's still an armistice. It's seventy years later and we have 28,000 American forces in South Korea because we do not believe that the 500,000-man, sophisticated South Korean force can hold off that crazy man to the north.

President Bush said in his address to the Congress on September 20: "This is a war that will not be won on my watch. I will pass it to my successor, and to my successor, and to my successor."

There would be a military side to this, and then there would have to be a long period where it might actually be a stalemate of trying to build a country that would be stable—hopefully more democratic—so we would not experience again an attack on our soil.

Over time that narrative of what we were trying to do in Afghanistan deteriorated to "we need to get out."

We tried to connect the dots on Iraq. It's very hard to follow the weapons of mass destruction programs of an opaque government that's hiding. But it wasn't as if Saddam Hussein suddenly emerged on the Bush administration's watch. We'd fought a war against him in 1990; we were trying to hold him in check by what the president called Swiss cheese–like sanctions that were falling apart under the United Nations' inability to continue to carry them out.

We thought he was rebuilding his weapons of mass destruction. And the question was, "Do you wait until he's rebuilt them or do you do something about it now?" In retrospect, if we had known that he had not built his weapons of mass destruction to the levels that we thought, might we have done something differently? Perhaps. But what you know today can affect what you do tomorrow, but not what you did yesterday.

John B. Taylor: When the planes struck, I was halfway around the world. After returning to the White House, I encountered President Bush in the Rose Garden and said: "This war on terrorism will be fought on a variety of fronts. The front lines will look different from wars in the past. It is a war that will require the United States to use our influence in a variety of areas in order to win it, and one area is financial."

Stopping the terrorist financing was a big deal. It was a rallying cry for a lot of people in our government. We set up a war room in Treasury, and

the cooperation with State and Defense was key. I've never experienced such cooperation. Everybody was our friend. It didn't last as long as I would like, but everybody was our friend and that made it possible to do things we couldn't have done otherwise.

Robinson: To quote Dan Henninger in the *Wall Street Journal,* "Notwithstanding his broad initial support, President Bush was loathed the next seven years by Democrats, the media, and a mocking entertainment complex." Is that just a reassertion of normal American politics after the shock and horror of September 11 wears off, or is there something more dangerous, more toxic to our ability to live together as fellow Americans and to remain unified enough to pursue policy in the world?

Karen Hughes [former White House director of communications and counselor to President Bush]: Part of it is you make tough decisions that people don't like. And maybe those decisions look different over time. I think as people look back, history will give President Bush a lot of credit for making very courageous decisions that his own party was against. Somehow since President Bush left office, I think we have lost the political will to see the long game. Somebody asked me the other day, "What would you tell young people who weren't alive during 9/11?" And I would tell them, "It could happen again."

Rice: I just wanted to mention, by the way, Harry Truman's popularity rating when he left office was 30 percent. In his farewell address, he said, "We will one day win the Cold War." Everybody probably laughed at him at that point.

It's hard to watch what happened in Afghanistan. But we bought twenty years that I didn't think possible: no further attack on our soil. And if you had seen the threat reporting after that fateful day, you would never have taken that bet.

And so, as bleak as it might seem after this twentieth anniversary—what did we achieve? We achieved peace for a long time. And I think we have a whole generation of people who fought bravely and are making us better.

Robinson: Think of the freshmen at American campuses across the country this year. They were all born after 9/11 took place. Condi said in the *Wall Street Journal* that "we must tell the story to those who are not old enough to feel the horror and sadness of that day." What do you tell an 18- or 19-year-old that they really need to grasp about 9/11?

Taylor: You tell them what happened, with no holds barred. I was in college in 1966; that was twenty years after World War II. There wasn't enough

IN THE END: Secretary of State Antony Blinken appears virtually at a House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on September 13. "There's no evidence that staying longer would have made the Afghan security forces or the Afghan government any more resilient or self-sustaining," he testified. At least two Republican lawmakers called on Blinken to resign. [Consolidated News Photos]

talking about it then. All I learned about World War II I learned from my dad, who fought in the Pacific.

And I think now you have to do more of that. I'm teaching freshmen, and I taught freshmen when I first came back from government. There were important victories and stories. And we have to remember that what went wrong in Afghanistan did not have to happen. What happened recently did not have to happen. We were on the right track long ago.

I always say economics is part of diplomacy and part of defense. We probably should have spent more time on economics than Afghanistan.

Mattis: I would draw on what John and Condi have said. Put it in human terms. Don't talk statistics or years and that sort of thing. Talk about human beings who are in America. Talk about nearly three thousand innocent citizens murdered on our shores, of forty-two thousand New York City police who could not stop those airplanes coming in. Be honest about that. And you think we couldn't have maintained four thousand or five thousand troops in Afghanistan, with double the number of allied troops, to keep that from happening again?

Hughes: I agree. You have to tell in human terms the horror, and the shock, and the sorrow of that day.

I would also tell the story of a little girl I met in Afghanistan. I visited a reading program where our government was funding a program to teach little girls how to read. They'd never had an opportunity to have an education in their life. I asked them what they hoped to do once they were educated. A little girl told me she wanted to be a writer. She said, "Women should be free to go to school, to go to work, and to choose their own husbands."

As I was leaving, the translator came after me, and grabbed me by the arm, and said, "The little girl wants to tell you something else: Please don't forget them. Please help them live in freedom." The eyes on that little girl followed me home and they've haunted me ever since. I think it's a reminder of our responsibilities and the many wonderful young men and women who are serving and answering that call to our responsibilities to defend freedom around the world.

Robinson: Condi, summing up falls to you.

Rice: America has always been best when it acts from both power and principle. And in Afghanistan, we tried to act from both power and principle after the horrible attacks that landed us there.

Nobody wanted to go to war in Afghanistan. We knew it was a place where great powers went to die. But we learned a lesson again: that our security is inextricably linked to the security and the well-being of others.

And yes, we did want to leave Afghanistan a better place, a place where women could go to school and choose their own husbands. And it did become a place where infant mortality and maternal mortality began to decline.

And there's nothing wrong with wanting for other people the same liberties and the same opportunity for a good life that we have. America's always been best when it really believes in the universality of its values.

If we erred in Afghanistan in believing that Afghans also wanted to be free? That's an error that I'm proud of. ◘

***Special to the* Hoover Digest.**

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Losing Our Way

US goals in Afghanistan changed gradually—and fatally. As nation-building efforts increased, victory slipped away.

By John Yoo and Robert J. Delahunty

We were officials in the Department of Justice two decades ago when Al-Qaeda attacked us, destroying the World Trade Center in New York and one-fifth of the Pentagon and killing nearly 3,000 civilians, including all those on board four hijacked airliners. We advised President George W. Bush's administration as it launched its lightning attack to rout the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, where it had provided safe haven to Osama bin Laden and his terrorist gang. We are aghast at the Biden administration's disastrous flight from Afghanistan almost two decades to the day after the 9/11 attacks.

Key points

» After the 2001 invasion, US forces successfully kept Al-Qaeda from committing a major attack on the US homeland.

» The US mission changed, fatally, from self-defense to constructing democracy in a hostile land.

» No one can impose democracy on people who do not demand it and are not ready for it.

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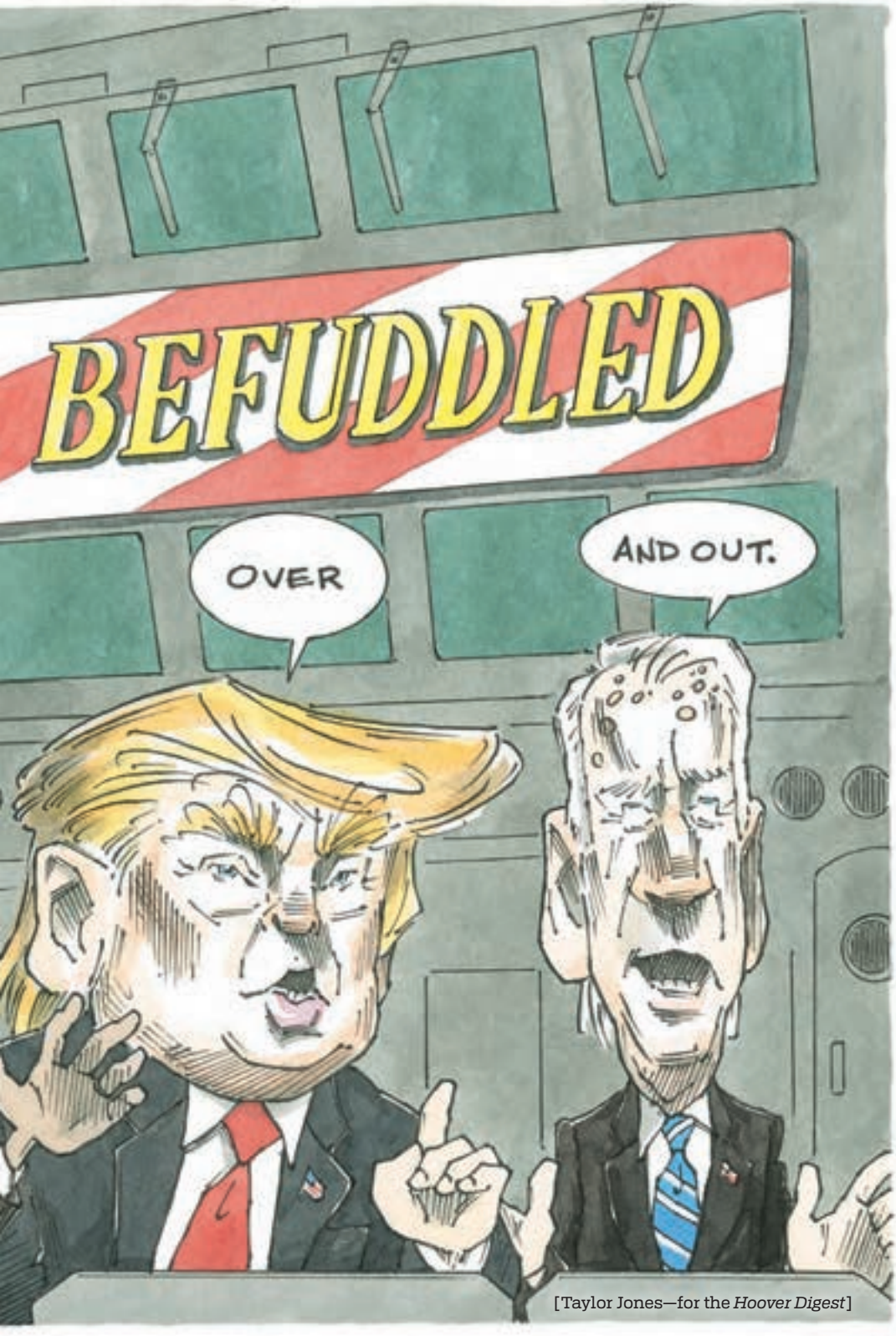
T. Jones
MISSION
ON YOUR MARKS
GET SET



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

As part of the administration that played a part in the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and its subsequent occupation by US forces, we accept part of the blame for what went wrong. On September 25, 2001, we advised the White House that the United States had the right to attack Al-Qaeda to prevent future attacks and to overthrow the Taliban for sheltering terrorist operations on its territory. We believed the president had the constitutional authority as commander in chief to defend the United States from attacks by nations or by brigands such as Al-Qaeda, that he had the right to disrupt any opponents who might launch future attacks, and that Congress had given its support in the Authorization for Use of Military Force, which we helped negotiate with congressional leaders. We stand by that legal advice, which recognized the president's traditional constitutional powers; those powers have justified the campaign against Al-Qaeda not just in Afghanistan but throughout the world.

The Afghan debacle made clear to us that the limits on American power are not military but political.

THE NATION-BUILDING TRAP

The United States achieved much of its original goal in attacking Afghanistan twenty years ago. In the icy mountains of Afghanistan and Pakistan, our forces killed or captured much of the Al-Qaeda leadership but failed to stop Osama bin Laden from slipping out of Tora Bora to hideouts in Pakistan. With a light footprint and supported by local allies on the ground, our military drove the Taliban from power within a few weeks, and Afghan factions agreed to install Hamid Karzai as a provisional leader. While the Taliban pursued an insurgency, and US deployments ebbed and flowed, Al-Qaeda could not resuscitate its operations in Afghanistan. Although in the course of the long war the United States lost about 2,300 service members, with 20,000 more wounded, its military actions prevented Al-Qaeda from carrying out another major terrorist attack on the US homeland. (Sporadic attacks, often by self-radicalized Islamists, did occur in Boston, San Bernardino, Miami, and Fort Hood.)

But in the end, the United States failed. President Biden's humiliating retreat not only was a disaster at a tactical level but also reflected a failure at the strategic level by his three presidential predecessors. The United States erred in allowing our mission in Afghanistan to transform from one of self-defense, in which our forces sought to eliminate Afghanistan's role as a safe haven for terrorist attacks on the homeland, to one of constructing a democracy on Afghan soil.

Our goals slid almost imperceptibly into such grandiose dreams after the shocking ease of our wins in Afghanistan and Iraq, which led us to think that American arms could achieve almost anything. After all, the United States had achieved similar feats in Germany and Japan immediately after World War II; during the Cold War, America had shepherded other allies such as South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, and the Philippines toward some form of democratic government; and then after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Washington had midwifed the birth of stable democracies in Eastern Europe. The Bush and Obama administrations were betrayed by the hubris that we could achieve similar success in Afghanistan (and Iraq), while the Trump and Biden administrations searched only for a way out.

While the two of us had left the Bush administration by the time nation-building had replaced self-defense as America's mission in Afghanistan, we must reflect on why our nation failed and even to ask whether the last twenty years' effort was worth it. The Afghanistan debacle has made clear to us that the limits on American power are not military but political. We cannot impose a democratic constitution and political system on a people who themselves do not demand it and are not ready for it.

Constitutions grow organically out of a people's history, culture, and tradition. In referring here to "constitutions," we mean not legal texts, which can be altered as desired, but the basic institutions, practices, rules, and norms that structure a society's legal system and govern its operations. In that sense, constitutions are highly resistant to change. Even when outward constitutional forms undergo drastic transformation—as in the Russian Revolution—the deep structures of the old regime tend to persist, and entrenched patterns of governance re-emerge. Russia was an autocracy under both czarism and communism, although the communists were more efficient and brutal.

The United States achieved much of its original goal in attacking Afghanistan twenty years ago.

Our own constitutional history shows this clearly. The Constitution of 1787 was not a bolt from the blue. It grew organically from deep roots in the traditions of the English common law and a century and a half of experience in self-government in the colonies. It was a product not of abstract thinking but of generations of political experience and experimentation. It was, so to say, native to the soil.

OUTSIDE IDEAS ARE REJECTED

The US failure in Afghanistan stemmed in large part from our refusal to recognize the constraints that history places on constitution-making imposed by force from without. The American project in Afghanistan was based on the assumption that any political and cultural environment would be receptive to the attractions of liberal democracy, capitalism, and international human rights law, especially its doctrines about religious toleration and women's rights. But nothing in the political culture or traditions of Afghanistan—an undeveloped, impoverished, tribal, Muslim state ravaged by prior wars—was favorable to such a radical constitutional transformation. Two decades later, after the waste of many lives and trillions of dollars, we have begun to acknowledge our tragic error.

The United States is not the first imperial state to have made this basic error. In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* the nineteenth-century German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel analyzes the causes of the military and political failures of Napoleonic France in its war in Spain. Napoleon had attempted to impose a new constitution on Spain, based on the principles of the Enlightenment and the French view of the rights of man. Spain was considered backward, ignorant, in the grip of a reactionary Catholic Church. Hegel fastened on the causes of the failure of Napoleon's constitution:

> To think of giving to a people a constitution a priori is a whim, overlooking precisely that element which renders a constitution something more than a product of thought. Every nation, therefore, has the constitution which suits it and belongs to it. . . . Napoleon insisted upon giving to the Spanish a constitution a priori but the project failed. A constitution is not a mere manufacture, but the work of centuries. . . . No constitution is merely created. That which Napoleon gave to the Spanish was more rational than what they had before, yet they viewed it as something foreign to them, and rejected it because they were not sufficiently developed.

The Spanish preferred the constitutional arrangements that were organic to them—whatever their deficiencies—to the enlightened and progressive model the French sought to impose. In the end, the "Spanish ulcer," as Napoleon called it, brought him down.

We are not saying that because Afghanistan is a Muslim society, it cannot be a democracy. Indonesia, which is Muslim, is a functioning democracy. So, until recently, was Tunisia. But Afghanistan was always going to be different.

GETTING OUT: Soviet soldiers withdraw from Afghanistan in May 1988. Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan and installed a new leader in 1979; the last forces went home in early 1989. Islamist forces known as mujahideen carried out a guerrilla war against the Soviets, and in later years many of the same groups fought the Americans. [V. Kiselev—RIA Novosti]

The American foreign policy elite has indeed studied history, but it has drawn the wrong lessons from it. It believes that after 1945 the United States successfully transformed Germany and Japan in constitutionally fundamental ways that ran contrary to their traditions. That belief is open to question: Germany at least was familiar with both the ideals and the practice of parliamentary democracy; and Japan too had been exposed to them. Furthermore, both nations had enjoyed high levels of economic development before the war, and both had robust state institutions. Finally, both nations were (at least relatively) ethnically homogeneous—a condition that political scientists have found to be favorable to the forcible implantation of democracy by an intervening power.

But in any event, Japan and Germany were exceptional. The two nations had suffered cataclysmic defeat in war. Their ruling elites had been not merely beaten but disgraced, bringing their own advanced states to the

brink of utter ruin. Their conqueror had an unparalleled opportunity to work its will on them. By contrast, of the twenty-eight cases of forcibly imposed regime change identified by political scientists Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten, only three (Panama, along with Germany and Japan) have proven to be instances in which a lasting democracy was built.

The US record since the reconstructions of Germany and Japan is littered with failures to accomplish lasting democratic transformations at gunpoint. Iraq and now Afghanistan are the most obvious cases. But our elites persist in the desire to remold other societies in our (perhaps mistaken) image of ourselves.

CONSIDERING CHINA

Here the most prominent example is China. To date, the United States has never formally disavowed the ambition of inducing (or even compelling) China to democratize. Opening the door to China's admission to the World Trade Organization was intended to further that objective. Indeed, this aim has underpinned much of our China policy for decades.

Given China's millennial predisposition to autocratic and bureaucratic rule, is the objective attainable? This predisposition results from a combination of factors, including the nature and quality of the soil in northern China and the difficulty that early Chinese farmers encountered in resettling in areas outside the central state's control; the comparative unimportance to China's rulers, during much of Chinese history, of mobilizing masses of peasants for military purposes; and the talent, depth, extent, and resilience of China's imperial bureaucracy even when the Chinese state fell into the hands of foreign conquerors.

Even after the fall of the Qing dynasty—China's last—in 1911, China failed to make a democratic turn. The Beiyang government, a constitutional republic that succeeded the Qing and remained in power until 1928, borrowed Western models in adopting many of the forms of a modern democracy. Many Chinese welcomed these developments, believing that democratization and Westernization were necessary for China's recovery. But the short-lived experiment failed. A key element in this failure was the virtual absence in Chinese political history of popular assemblies that sought

Hegel pointed out, "A constitution is not a mere manufacture, but the work of centuries."

to limit the power of absolute monarchs. Despite the effort at constitutional transformation, China's long tradition of bureaucratic and autocratic rule reasserted itself.

Again, we are not saying that the democratization of China is impossible: China could in time take the path that Taiwan, South Korea, and other Asian nations have. Or it could develop a form of popular democracy that did not include regular elections. But it will not take such paths under American compulsion, or simply because of our trade and investment.

The US record since the end of World War II is littered with failures to accomplish lasting democratic transformations at gunpoint.

In Afghanistan, the lesson that our elites should have learned from history is that external force rarely succeeds in bringing about the constitutional transformation of a society so long as it remains culturally resistant. History teaches humility about transformative constitutional change, especially when attempted coercively and from without. Yet, throughout the US effort in Afghanistan, the American foreign policy elite remained hubristic. It is time for that elite to reassess its ambitions lest it lead us again into disaster. ■

Jihadi vs. Jihadi

And now, **the power struggle.**

By Cole Bunzel

The Taliban's rapid takeover of Afghanistan last summer raised fears that the country would once again become a safe haven for Islamist militants intent on international terrorism. In light of the Taliban's history of harboring such radical groups, these fears are justified. But the two movements vying for influence in the country, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State (also known as ISIS), both face serious obstacles in their quest to use Afghanistan as a platform to bolster their strength and launch a new wave of terrorist attacks.

These groups are themselves bitterly divided over what role a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan will play in the global jihadi landscape. For Al-Qaeda, the Taliban's victory is an epic triumph—the fulfillment of God's promise to give victory to the believers over the unbelievers. For ISIS, it is not a triumph at all but rather further evidence of the Taliban's willingness to collaborate with the Americans.

Key points

» Al-Qaeda and Islamic State are bitterly divided over the meaning of the Taliban's victory.

» Al-Qaeda seeks to position itself as the more moderate and pragmatic of the two groups. The Taliban will try to both protect and restrain Al-Qaeda, their close ally.

» The United States must stay alert to the threats from all jihadi groups active in Afghanistan.

***Cole Bunzel** is a fellow at the Hoover Institution and contributes to Hoover's Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on the Middle East and the Islamic World. He is the editor of the blog **Jihadica** (jihadica.com).*

Since the rise of ISIS in 2013 and its declaration of a caliphate the following year in territory the group seized in Iraq and Syria, Al-Qaeda has sought to position itself as the more moderate and pragmatic of the two groups. It is more restrained in the practice of *takfir*—the practice of declaring other Muslims to be unbelievers—and more concerned with appealing to public opinion in the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda has also deepened its already close ties with the Taliban. The relationship between the two groups dates to the very beginning of Taliban rule in 1996, when Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was invited by the Taliban to stay in Afghanistan under its protection. In 2001, before the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden publicly swore an oath of allegiance, or *bay'a,* to then–Taliban leader Mullah Omar and urged all Al-Qaeda members in the country to do the same.

Under the leadership of bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda has increasingly emphasized its loyalty to the Taliban. In Al-Qaeda's propaganda, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the Taliban's official name, is presented as the seat of the anticipated caliphate and the Taliban's leader—who is the "commander of the believers," a title traditionally assumed by caliphs—is depicted as a quasi-caliphal figure. This development came about in response to the declaration of a caliphate by ISIS in June 2014, which included a decree that all other jihadi groups, including Al-Qaeda, were no longer legitimate. Al-Qaeda's answer was to vest new meaning in its relationship with the Taliban, suggesting that the Al-Qaeda network was held together in a semi-caliphal bond under the aegis of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

While Al-Qaeda was reinforcing its relationship with the Taliban, ISIS was accusing the Taliban of having strayed.

One key way Al-Qaeda has done this is by placing newfound emphasis on its *bay'a* to the Taliban ruler. In a 2014 newsletter, for instance, it announced "the renewal of the *bay'a* to the Commander of the Believers, Mullah Muhammad Omar, the jihad warrior (may God protect him)," affirming "that Al-Qaeda and its branches in all locales are soldiers in his army." Zawahiri, meanwhile, publicly reiterated the *bay'a* on behalf of the entire Al-Qaeda network to the next two leaders of the Taliban, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour in 2015 and Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada in 2016, in each message describing the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan as "the first legitimate emirate" since the fall of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924.

Al-Qaeda's affiliate groups likewise have depicted the Taliban leader as their supreme authority. In March 2017, for instance, when the Malian rebel Iyad ag Ghali announced the formation of a new Al-Qaeda affiliate in West Africa, he proclaimed his loyalty not only to Zawahiri but also to Akhundzada.

VAGUE AGREEMENTS

All of this would seem to contradict the text of the February 2020 agreement between the United States and the Taliban, in which the Taliban promised to cease supporting Al-Qaeda and enter into peace talks with the Afghan government. Although the Taliban did not agree to "cut ties" with Al-Qaeda, as has sometimes been portrayed, they did pledge not to "host" or otherwise support Al-Qaeda and similar groups. They also promised not to allow Afghanistan to be used "to threaten the security of the United States and its allies."

Al-Qaeda's senior leadership, however, seems not to have been offended by the agreement. In March 2020, the group put out a statement congratulating the Taliban on the promised American withdrawal. The statement hailed the Doha agreement, signed following Qatari mediation, as "a great historical victory" and called on Muslims around the world to follow the example set by the Taliban in its commitment to jihad. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was portrayed as "the nucleus of the Islamic state"—that is, the caliphate—"that will rule by God's pure law."

While Al-Qaeda was reinforcing its relationship with the Taliban, ISIS was accusing the Taliban of having strayed. In ISIS's narrative, the Taliban's deviation from religious purity became particularly acute after the death of Mullah Omar in 2013, after which the Taliban neglected to apply Islamic law, grew increasingly nationalistic and tolerant of Afghanistan's Shiite minority, and sought to forge relations with infidel states—including the "apostate" Qatar. ISIS also faults the Taliban for rejecting ISIS's claim of having re-established the caliphate and resisting its efforts in 2015 to create a "province" in the so-called land of Khurasan, a historical region that includes nearly all of modern-day Afghanistan. The Taliban and ISIS's so-called Khurasan province have been at war ever since, in some cases with the United States effectively providing air support to the Taliban.

The Taliban have a strong interest in holding Al-Qaeda in check, particularly as they pursue international recognition and acceptance.

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

After the announcement of the 2020 deal between Washington and the Taliban, ISIS cast the agreement as further evidence of the Taliban's deviation. ISIS's official newsletter condemned the Taliban for taking the Americans as their "new allies," and its spokesman remarked that the agreement made official what was already apparent: that the United States and the Taliban were conspiring together against ISIS. In his words, the deal was "a cover for the standing alliance between the apostate Taliban militia and the Crusaders."

VICTORY OR TREACHERY?

After celebrating the Taliban's deal with the United States, Al-Qaeda ceased to comment on the situation in Afghanistan for the next year and a half. According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Taliban asked Al-Qaeda "to restrict its activities and obfuscate the long-standing relationship between the groups until US and coalition troops complete their withdrawal." Al-Qaeda evidently felt free to comment publicly once the final US soldiers departed Kabul on August 31, as just hours later it released a written statement congratulating the Taliban and the entire Muslim community on the "historic victory."

The outcome in Afghanistan, according to the statement, proved that "the path of jihad," not compromise or conciliation, was the right way to deal with infidel states. The US pullout marked the end of "the era of American and European arrogance and their desires for militarily occupying Muslim lands."

Although Al-Qaeda did not say that the "far enemy" of the United States and its allies had been entirely defeated, it did define the coming stage as one more focused on spreading the jihad to other states in the Muslim world. The Taliban's victory "will clear the path, with God's help and might, for our Muslim peoples to liberate themselves from the rule of the oppressive *tawaghit,"* the jihadis' word for Muslim rulers seen as governing by other than God's law. It would also pave the way toward "the liberation of Muslim Palestine from Zionist occupation."

To ISIS, the Afghan pullout was nothing more than "a peaceful transfer of power from one idolatrous ruler to another."

Similar sentiments were expressed by Al-Qaeda's regional branches. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, the group's Yemen-based franchise, praised the Taliban for adhering to the path of jihad and refusing "to compromise on its principles and its constants." The victory in Afghanistan, it

boasted, would lead to "the overthrow of oppressive tyrants and the expulsion of invaders from Muslim lands." In the words of Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Hurras al-Din, the Taliban's victory showed that jihad is "the only path" that leads to victory and empowerment. Al-Qaeda's affiliates in North Africa and the Sahel released a joint statement extolling the Taliban's steadfastness, saying that they had proved that jihad was the only way for the Muslim world to move "from the low of humiliation to the height of glory."

Al-Qaeda boasted that the outcome in Afghanistan proved that "the path of jihad," not compromise or conciliation, was the way to deal with infidel states.

But for ISIS, the idea that the Taliban have achieved any kind of "victory" in Afghanistan is laughable. What really happened, in its view, was that the United States willingly handed power to the Taliban, who have effectively become a US client. After the Taliban's seizure of Kabul on August 15, ISIS's weekly newsletter played down the apparent shock of the Taliban's military success, calling it the "natural outcome" of what the Americans and the Taliban had agreed to in Doha the prior year. This was nothing more than "a peaceful transfer of power from one idolatrous ruler to another . . . the substitution of a shaven idolatrous ruler for a bearded one," it argued. The Taliban had promised not to allow something like 9/11 to happen again, and so "America returned the Taliban to power and handed it Kabul without a shot being fired."

ISIS's online supporters made similar critiques even before the group's newsletter was published. One prominent follower argued that the Americans had succeeded in corrupting the Taliban's religious principles. "God says: 'They will not cease to fight you till they turn you from your religion, if they are able' (Q. 2:217). And they have been able to turn the Taliban from their religion."

WHOM TO SUPPORT, AND HOW

Clearly, the views of Al-Qaeda and ISIS are irreconcilable. Either the Taliban are more inclined to cater to US interests than Al-Qaeda would hope, or they are more disposed to radicalism than ISIS would like to believe.

The truth is probably somewhere in the middle. The Taliban want to have it both ways: to maintain their relationship with Al-Qaeda and to secure

international recognition as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan. Generally speaking, they do not share Al-Qaeda's transnational agenda; their interests begin and end in Afghanistan, or at least so they claim. At the same time, the Taliban have formed close ties with Al-Qaeda over the past twenty years. A United Nations report published last year put the Al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan at somewhere between several dozen and five hundred personnel spread across fifteen provinces. According to the report, "the Taliban and Al-Qaida remain closely aligned and show no indication of breaking ties."

Although some Taliban representatives have denied the existence of any relationship with Al-Qaeda—one even denied the existence of the *bay'a*—the Taliban as a whole have stubbornly refused to repudiate the group, even at tremendous cost. This stubbornness can be ascribed to several factors, beginning with the fact that Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have fought together against the United States for twenty years and developed ties of blood. As the same UN report noted, the groups' relationship is built on "personal bonds of marriage and shared partnership in struggle, now cemented through second-generational ties." There is also a pragmatic rationale for not ending the relationship, as denouncing Al-Qaeda would risk alienating the Taliban's more hard-line members and factions, especially Sirajuddin Haqqani, the newly appointed interior minister, and his Al-Qaeda–aligned Haqqani network.

Despite the persistence of the relationship, however, the Taliban have a strong interest in holding Al-Qaeda in check. Particularly as the Taliban pursue international recognition and acceptance, it would be folly for the group to permit Al-Qaeda to launch attacks on the West or even on fellow Muslim states. It is not hard to imagine a scenario in which the Taliban provide space and financial support for Al-Qaeda to operate while also restricting the activities of the group to plot and stage attacks. In this scenario, Afghanistan would once again become a refuge for Al-Qaeda—a safe haven where Al-Qaeda members and leaders could regroup, raise funds, produce propaganda, and issue guidance to the larger network of affiliates but where they would be prohibited from launching offensive operations.

The United States will continue trying to degrade both ISIS and Al-Qaeda—in the case of ISIS, potentially with Taliban support.

The Taliban's second attempt at governing Afghanistan involves a balancing act between adhering to their hard-line principles and making pragmatic

concessions to secure their rule—and their relationship with Al-Qaeda may follow the same dynamics.

Ironically, the Taliban's enemy, ISIS's Khurasan province, could stand to benefit from Taliban rule. ISIS in Afghanistan may be down and out—it has suffered serious losses and no longer controls territory—but it has a well-defined strategy to capitalize on the new reality. It can portray itself as the hard-line jihadi alternative to the Taliban, emphasizing the latter's alleged moderation and penchant for compromise. By attacking the United States at the Kabul airport in late August, ISIS was not only trying to kill Americans but to demonstrate to the Taliban's more hard-line supporters that their group had gone soft. In its newsletter, ISIS emphasized that the Taliban were protecting "the Crusaders and their spies" at the Kabul airport.

The Taliban's second attempt at governing Afghanistan involves a balancing act between hard-line principles and pragmatic concessions.

ISIS will also benefit from the US exit from Afghanistan, as American airpower was key to reversing the group's gains there. Its online supporters certainly see it this way. "The soldiers of the Caliphate in Khurasan are in a good state," one prominent advocate boasted online. "Now there is no longer an Afghan army, as the idolatrous military establishment has been defeated and most of the soldiers and leaders have fled Afghanistan, and there are no longer American bases from which planes are taking off to aid them or special forces to carry out raids and landings against the *mujahidin*. Only the apostate Taliban remain in the theater to face their inevitable fate, which is either a piercing bullet in the head or a fine-drawn knife in the neck."

Yet even though ISIS will probably benefit from the reduced military pressure in Afghanistan, the group has only limited appeal in the country. In part this is due to its affiliation with Salafism, a purist form of Sunni Islam that is in a minority in Afghanistan, where the Hanafi school and its associated Maturidi theology predominate. Most of the areas in which ISIS previously held territory, such as the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar, are places where Salafism is unusually popular. ISIS might be able to capture some of the Taliban's more hard-line supporters, but it will have a hard time expanding its base of support any further.

Both Al-Qaeda and ISIS face serious challenges in trying to re-establish themselves in Afghanistan. The return of the Taliban could create the biggest opportunity for Al-Qaeda to reconstitute and reorganize in more than a

decade, but it is not well positioned to seize it. ISIS will seek to play a spoiler role, but it will have a hard time winning domestic support or matching the Taliban in terms of manpower and resources. The United States, meanwhile, will continue to attempt to degrade both groups through continued drone strikes—in the case of ISIS, potentially with Taliban support.

None of this is to minimize the threat that these jihadi groups pose to Afghanistan, its neighbors, and the world. The United States and its allies must remain vigilant and proactive, lest one or both of these groups re-emerge in force. But how successful the jihadis might be in utilizing Afghanistan remains to be seen. ◘

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No Country for Young Women

For the legions of hopeful women who pursued careers and degrees, who now live longer lives and dream of a wider world, Afghanistan has become terra incognita. Many will not submit.

By Ayaan Hirsi Ali

I was a defiant little girl. One afternoon, I came home with my nails painted—a grave sin. My mother took one look and told me to get the filth off of my nails before she chopped off each finger.

My mother could be fierce and she punished me frequently, but even then I knew that her threat was bluster. She might smack me, but she wasn't going to take off any digits.

Empty threats are used as leverage to entice certain behavior. But what if the threats are real? For the girls living under Taliban control in Afghanistan, threats are not theater: they are promises. Even for transgressions as small as painting their fingernails, they face real consequences.

Last fall the world remembered the attacks on September 11, 2001, a day that brought unimaginable devastation, heartbreak, and loss to America. But if there was one glimmer of hope that came from that tragic moment, it was for the women and girls of Afghanistan. After 9/11, and the conflict that

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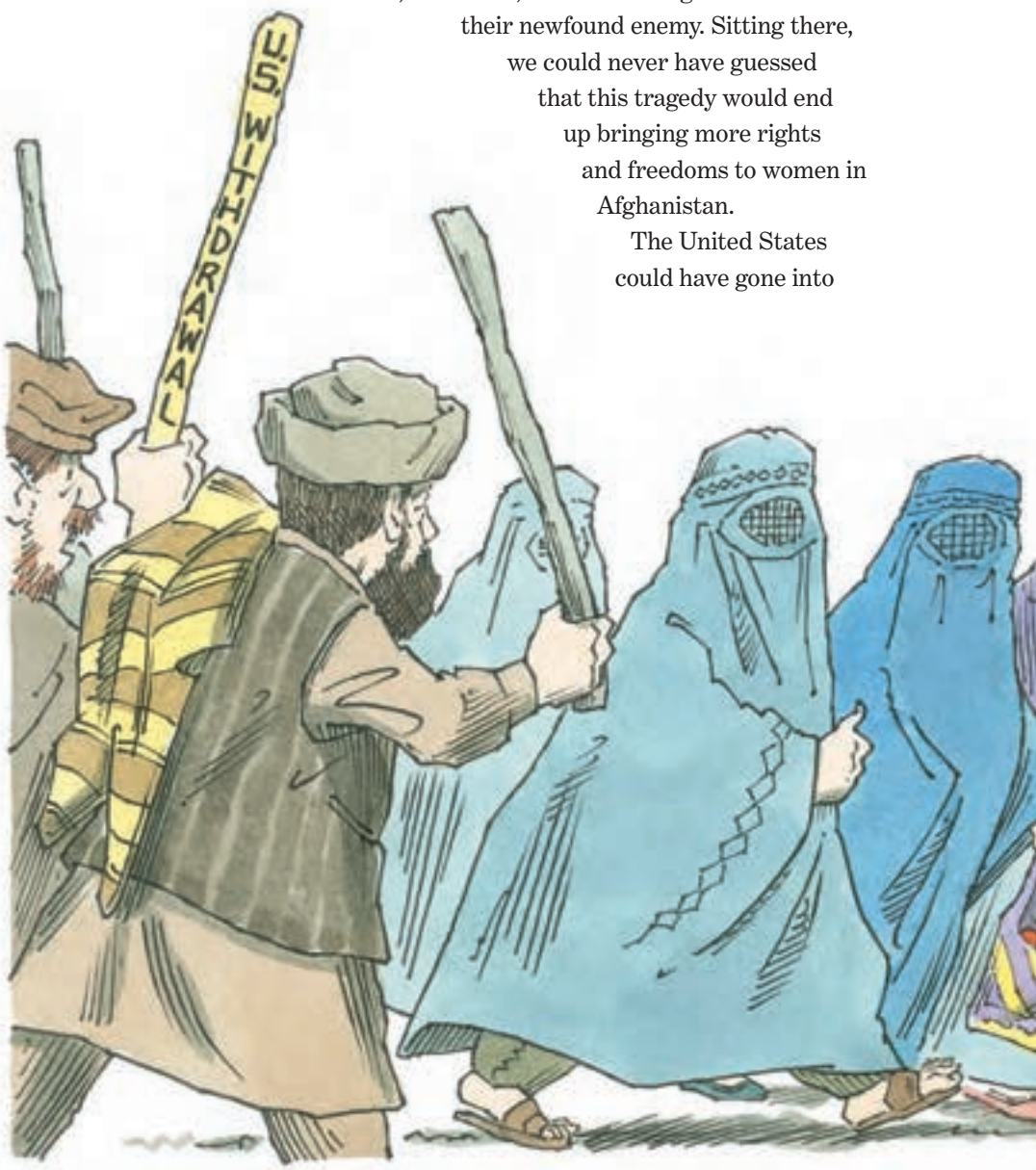
followed, a level of freedom unknown to previous generations came to their country.

I remember watching the planes crash on television. I was at work in the Netherlands at the time, and sat, horrified, with my colleagues. As we watched, we wondered how the world's superpower would respond to such an evil attack on the American homeland. Americans certainly had the power, resources, and reason to go and obliterate their newfound enemy. Sitting there, we could never have guessed that this tragedy would end up bringing more rights and freedoms to women in Afghanistan.

The United States could have gone into



Afghanistan, taken its revenge, and left. President Biden's continual defense last summer of the Afghanistan pullout was that he was following the original plan. "We went to Afghanistan almost twenty years ago with clear goals: get those who attacked us on September 11, 2001, and make sure Al-Qaeda could not use Afghanistan as a base from which to attack us again," he said.

But this is not where the legacy of 9/11 ends. It was not all necessary revenge and retaliation. Instead, we offered to help rebuild and provide hope to those who had not had it before. Together with our Afghan allies, we built a more inclusive society for women and girls, in the belief that precisely this kind of modernization would reduce the danger of a Taliban restoration.

AMERICA'S GIRLS

As Adam Tooze explained in his brilliant Substack essay, from 2003 to 2018, the number of women enrolled in university rose from 7,200 to 49,000. Female life expectancy increased by almost ten years from 2001 to 2019.

"Whereas in 2000," Tooze explained, "Afghan men lived longer than women, now Afghanistan has the normal pattern of women outliving their menfolk." Rates of literacy among females more than doubled from 2000 to 2018.

A generation of girls was raised without knowing life under Taliban control. And they soared. In 2017, an all-girls robotics team known as the Afghan Dreamers was formed. They went on to win the Entrepreneurial Challenge at the Robotex festival in Estonia. In 2008, Afghanistan saw its first female mayor, Azra Jafari, in the town of Nili. And she was just the first of many women to hold political positions, including Salima Mazari, Zarifa Ghanfari, and Fawzia Koofi. Women made up 40 percent of the most recent class of graduates from the American University of Afghanistan. They have their own all-female orchestra. Female entrepreneurs invested $77 million over eighteen years, resulting in 77,000 jobs. Their rights were promoted by the 2004 Afghanistan Constitution in Article 44, which states that "the state shall devise and implement effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women."

We built a more inclusive society for women and girls, believing that precisely this kind of modernization would reduce the danger of a Taliban restoration.

Their successes were awe-inspiring. They were also a source of pride for Americans. They were, in part, America's girls—girls raised to know a certain level of freedom, with their rights secure and protected, thanks to the US-led intervention prompted by 9/11.

In 2002, the United Nations Development Program produced the Arab Human Development Report, aimed at providing a path for growth and opportunity in the Arab world. The report concluded that three factors contribute to the constraints of human development in the Arab world: "freedom, empowerment of women, and knowledge." Individuals needed to be educated beyond religious ideology, their human rights respected, and women's rights expanded. And for the past twenty years, the United States supported women and these goals through the US Agency for International Development and State Department–funded programs, as well as encouraging women's participation in government and the private sector.

But now women's rights are being ripped away. Biden's betrayal reverberates sharply across the country. He offered a false dichotomy to the

American people: either pull all troops out or go back to fighting an "endless war." Pulling out the remaining US troops initiated the swift collapse of the Afghan government, will result in Afghanistan returning to a terrorist safe haven, and removed the shield protecting women's rights in the country. Surely this is not the legacy that Americans want to leave behind twenty years after 9/11?

The effects of Taliban control are being felt. They have announced that women must cover their faces to attend university and the sexes must segregate, both in class and while entering and exiting buildings. Women and girls are banned from sports, considered by the Taliban's cultural commission as "neither appropriate nor necessary" for women. Women can no longer hold ministerial positions. There are no women in the new administration. Some have been told not to go to work, allegedly a temporary change while the Taliban draw up new "women-related procedures." They face real violence if they disobey. Those speaking out against the Taliban are deemed "agents of America" and accused of "not being true Muslims." They are being erased from the public square.

What will happen to America's Afghan girls, the ones born and raised since 2001? The girls inspired by the allure of freedom, liberalism, and chasing their own dreams? Those who have, until now, not known the crushing burdens and barriers of life under the Taliban? What will become of the defiant girls; who will speak up for their rights?

Many will suffer severe punishments. Violence will be unleashed against them to a degree that those in the West do not comprehend. Body parts will be chopped off. Sexual harassment, rapes, honor violence, and murders will become the norm.

NO SUBMISSION

But this time is different. The women of Afghanistan will fight back. They've already begun. Protests are erupting across the country, with women of all ages standing firm against the Taliban. In Kabul, women attempted to march to the presidential palace, "demanding the right to work and to be included in government." They were attacked for it, with videos and photos revealing the bloody violence they faced at the hands of the Taliban. At a subsequent protest in Kabul, one woman stated: "We don't care if they

A generation of girls was raised without knowing life under Taliban control. And they soared.

beat us or even shoot us. We want to defend our rights. We will continue our protests even if we get killed."

At another protest in Herat, calling for girls' education, one of the organizers, Basira Taheri, explained: "The women of this land are informed and educated. We are not afraid, we are united." Pashtana Durrani, the executive director of Learn Afghanistan, a bulwark for Afghan women's rights, said; "We are going to make sure [girls] get to go to school, they get to go to work."

The Taliban cannot undo the past twenty years.

As the saying, often attributed to Thomas Carlyle, goes: "Once the mind has been expanded by a big idea, it will never go back to its original state." The Taliban cannot undo the past twenty years. These women and girls are refusing to submit to a new dark age. That glimmer of hope, sparked after 9/11, has not been extinguished. Even with the Taliban in control, America's girls aren't going to give up.

And now the world is watching. Before 9/11, the atrocities committed by the Taliban against the women of Afghanistan received very little coverage in the West. Now, everyone knows names like Malala and Bibi Aisha. And we will come to know more names, like Basira Taheri's, as we cheer them on. Two decades on, these women may be the most enduring achievement of the American intervention that followed 9/11.

They are defiant. And, as a former defiant girl, I can say with conviction that they can't beat or cut that defiance out of you. ◘

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Crossing to Safety

The Hoover Institution organized a broad, international effort to help Afghan allies escape Taliban rule and **find new homes.**

By Jonathan Movroydis

After the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August, Hoover fellow H. R. McMaster and his chief of staff, Chelsea Berkey, organized a group of fourteen students who made up the beginnings of the Hoover Afghanistan Relief Team (HART). HART was created out of a sense of duty to Afghans who fought heroically alongside US and coalition forces during the twenty-year war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda forces. Because many of these Afghans collaborated with the West and supported building a democratic society, according to the Hoover team, they were likely to be persecuted if they did not leave the country.

The team members, including Stanford University students, set out to support and fill gaps in the US government's operations to evacuate refugees. McMaster also notes how the HART initiative fits into the mission, history, and tradition of the Hoover Institution. Herbert Hoover himself was a leader of humanitarian efforts beginning in World War I and during several other conflicts.

H. R. McMaster *(US Army, Ret.), a former national security adviser, is the Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of Hoover's working groups on military history and Islamism and the international order. He is also a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project, the former Bernard and Susan Liautaud Visiting Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute, and a lecturer at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. His latest book is* ***Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World*** *(Harper, 2020).* ***Jonathan Movroydis*** *is the senior content writer for the Hoover Institution.*

These refugees will strengthen the fabric of American society, the team believes, because of their devotion to democratic values and strong commitment in Afghanistan to expand political and religious freedom, advance women's rights, and build a judicial system grounded in the due process of law.

The team is also partnering with the Hoover Institution Library & Archives to document the experience of Afghan refugees through an oral history program.

Movroydis: Tell us about the origins of the Hoover Afghanistan Relief Team (HART).

H. R. McMaster: In August, when the Taliban started to take over large swaths of territory in Afghanistan, and ultimately toppled Kabul by the middle of the month, we recognized that many Afghans who worked with US forces and coalition partners, and who wanted to build a better future for their country after the hell of Taliban rule from 1996 to 2001, were going to be persecuted, brutalized, or murdered. We wanted to find a way to help expedite their evacuation from this chaotic environment, but we did not want to be a distraction to US military and State Department efforts.

We looked for needs that were going unfulfilled and found that there was a gap in coordinating the evacuation of people. We availed ourselves of the tremendous talent that is here at Stanford University and the Hoover Institution, in particular my chief of staff, Chelsea Berkey, and our student research assistants, whom she organized into our relief team. This team created a database and solicited information from Afghans who were under duress, unburdened them from their immigration paperwork, and advocated for them to US government officials so that they could board outgoing flights from Kabul Airport.

We also coordinated with other organizations that were involved in securing charter flights for evacuees as well as with officials in other countries so that undocumented Afghans could transition there as they awaited processing for onward movement to the United States or other countries. It has been a massive coordination effort, and we couldn't have done it without Chelsea and the extremely dedicated students here at Stanford.

Movroydis: Chelsea, will you talk about organizing this team of Stanford students?

Chelsea Berkey: H. R. McMaster asked me and Laurie Garcia on our team to manage requests coming in from Afghans who were trying to evacuate the

STARTING OVER: Afghan refugees arrive at Dulles International Airport on August 27 after leaving Afghanistan as it fell to the Taliban. "Our country will be invigorated with Afghans who were advocates for freedom in their own country," says Hoover fellow H. R. McMaster. [Tom Williams—CQ Roll Call]

country. Some of these people hadn't filed visa applications with the State Department, while others had their visas or were in the process of obtaining them. Many Afghans with proper paperwork were stranded outside the Kabul airport without a clear path to enter the airport or be manifested for an evacuation flight. Around this time, I received an email from Lisa Einstein, a graduate student on our team, offering to support us in any way she could. I enlisted her as my deputy and we spent the next few days managing and coordinating requests 24/7. As we started to receive an overwhelming number of requests, General McMaster said, "Let's enlist a group of our smart and capable Stanford student researchers to assist while they are still on summer break."

When we started these efforts, we needed someone to make sure that all the data we gathered were well organized, standardized, and ready to pass along to important leaders in the military and civilian sides of the US government. It was in this area that one of our students, Sylvie Ashford, answered the call and performed brilliantly.

Sylvie Ashford: The whole team felt really grateful to have an opportunity to contribute in any small way to the Afghan relief effort. I was tasked with helping organize evacuees' biographical data into a central spreadsheet, a small role in the scheme of things. I have to give credit to Lisa Einstein for helping me standardize this process and for being Chelsea's partner in making this initiative possible.

Movroydis: General McMaster, in your book *Battlegrounds* and in the programming here at Hoover, you have discussed the idea of *retrenchment,* that is, the belief that our leaders should pull back from costly foreign interventions and primarily address concerns on the home front. There are some who believe that US leaders should not assume unnecessary risks to the nation's security, including the resettlement of refugees from foreign countries within US borders. How would you respond?

McMaster: Refugees and other immigrants have been the strength of our country since its founding. For example, Vietnamese refugees who arrived on our shores in the wake of the communist assault on South Vietnam in 1975 are deeply patriotic to America and faithful to its principles.

Our country will be invigorated with Afghans who were advocates for freedom in their own country. These are people who had dedicated their lives to building a better future for their children and their grandchildren, and for equality of opportunity for women. Before the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan had achieved an extraordinary degree of political and religious freedom thanks to the efforts of those who are now fleeing after what I would describe as our self-defeat in Afghanistan. The way we withdrew from the war empowered the Taliban and delivered devastating psychological blows to the Afghan military and government. Sadly, our policies and actions helped precipitate the humanitarian crisis. It's time to acknowledge that sad reality and do all we can to mitigate it.

"We did not want to be a distraction to US military and State Department efforts."

Movroydis: What is the scale of the crisis in Afghanistan and how do you plan to contribute to continuing relief efforts?

Berkey: Our government said that it helped evacuate approximately 130,000 people, which is amazing. However, their data don't specify the number of US citizens and refugees who petitioned for asylum and who are still in country.

I've heard estimates that there are over a hundred thousand people who need to be evacuated. There are tens of thousands of refugees awaiting processing in third countries. There are also nearly fifty thousand refugees on US military bases stateside who are going to be resettled in different parts of America. Further complicating this effort are virus outbreaks on US bases and in our partner countries' bases.

As you could see from the chaotic scenes on television, there were many Afghans trying to elbow their way onto military aircraft. Families were separated during the evacuation and in their transition for processing in third countries and at military bases. These people need assistance completing their paperwork so that the US government can swiftly identify and process them and help them resettle and reunite with their families. Some will need medical assistance. We have also heard stories of babies being born on our military bases.

Lisa Einstein: The process of procuring special immigrant visas and relief for refugees has been historically very slow. Some might say the process is broken. The system is under unimaginable pressure. It's clear that it is not designed for a human catastrophe of this scale. What I really hope is that this experience pushes long-needed reforms in refugee resettlement policy. However, it's important to note that within these broken systems, there are people—Foreign Service officers, civil servants, military service members, and other individuals—throughout the US government who have been working all-day and literally all-night shifts at airports, the Pentagon, and the State Department, as well as in US embassies and on military bases. Amid all of this chaos, these public servants have really stepped up.

"Refugees and other immigrants have been the strength of our country since its founding."

Movroydis: How is HART connecting with individual Afghan refugees seeking relief?

Berkey: Refugees first connected with us by e-mail and then through WhatsApp. We have been connected with approximately one thousand people and we continue to share resources with and advocate for them. Due to the volume of cases and our limited number of staff, we realized early on that we would primarily act in support of existing government efforts.

McMaster: We couldn't manage each and every case and we didn't have the knowledge or capacity to run on-the-ground operations such as navigating refugees around Taliban checkpoints and to their assigned gates at the Kabul airport. At the very beginning, we did some coordination for individuals trying to evacuate the country. For example, we helped a former high-ranking government official and a head of an Afghan think tank move from the civilian side to the military side of the airport. In such cases, we were actually sending descriptions of the evacuees' vehicles and their geolocation to US officials to secure a safe arrival. In other cases, we helped refugees with visas who were manifested on flights to identify the airport gates through which they were meant to pass.

"The way we withdrew from the war empowered the Taliban and delivered devastating psychological blows to the Afghan military and government."

We didn't want to distract the US military and deluge them with individual messages. The work our team did in organizing data about refugees was meant to fill gaps for the military and the State Department.

Movroydis: As Americans, how can we help integrate Afghan refugees into our society?

Berkey: Different nongovernmental organizations partner with resettlement centers across the country. These organizations connect refugees with Afghan-American communities as well as religious institutions and charities. One of the large Afghan-American communities is actually here in Northern California, and we expect a significant number of refugees to arrive here in the near future. Across the country, we will need volunteers to work in their communities to provide food and shelter and assist in the day-to-day process of integrating Afghans into American society.

Movroydis: How do HART's efforts square with the Hoover Institution's overall mission?

McMaster: The Hoover Institution was founded in the wake of World War I, which at that time had been the most destructive war in modern history. Herbert Hoover dedicated the institution's mission to the study of war and how we can prevent future conflict and solidify a long and enduring peace. Hoover himself had been the leader of humanitarian relief efforts in the wake of World War I and later in the aftermath of World War II and the Korean

War. Thus, HART's mission is very much in keeping with the history of the institution and the legacy of the person whose name it bears.

I think also that we are contributing to America's security and prosperity by helping these extremely talented Afghans, who share our values and our principles. What you're seeing now is the best of America: the outpouring of support for those in need. I think these efforts will ultimately bolster our reputation around the world and help compensate for the damage done to our reputation because of the manner in which we withdrew from Afghanistan.

Movroydis: What about the oral history program you have planned with the Hoover Institution Library & Archives?

McMaster: Part of the Hoover Institution's mission is to capture the historical record and make available primary materials so they can be studied by students and scholars. The Hoover Institution Library & Archives has one of the most extensive records in the world that covers major political, social, and economic events in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I believe it is important for Afghans to recount not just the horrors of fleeing the Taliban this year but also their experience across recent decades, and I think the oral history program will help Afghans regain their voice about the future of the country. Every time I hear our government officials saying "we need to engage the Taliban on the future of Afghanistan," I just wonder when we're going to stop trying to empower a jihadist terrorist organization instead of engaging the 90 percent-plus of Afghans who didn't support Taliban rule.

"The system is under unimaginable pressure. It's clear that it is not designed for a human catastrophe of this scale."

For America, understanding the failure in Afghanistan is important to developing policies and strategies to build a better future for our nation and the world.

Ashford: There are quite a number of students at Stanford who don't understand what's happening in Afghanistan and don't have much historical understanding of the region. The Hoover Institution has an opportunity to play an integral role on campus by contributing to public knowledge and increasing Americans' awareness of current events in Afghanistan and the larger Middle East.

Einstein: One of the concepts that General McMaster discusses at length in *Battlegrounds* is "strategic empathy." It's an idea coined by Zachary Shore, a historian and a national security visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. Shore describes the importance of stepping out of our own heads and understanding the ideologies, emotions, and aspirations that drive others. By recording the experience of Afghans and really listening to their stories, we can better learn from our mistakes and miscalculations.

"HART's mission is very much in keeping with the history of the institution and the legacy of the person whose name it bears."

We had to pull ourselves out of our spreadsheets and process what was actually happening to the people whom those numbers represented. We hope that the oral history project will help policy makers put themselves in the shoes of these people and inform future approaches to reduce human suffering.

Ashford: Many young people believe that those who are older and more experienced are the only ones capable of solving big problems. But sometimes when no one else steps up to do the job, duty calls and young people have to give it their all and hope that what they can contribute will be meaningful. Working with this team was certainly an eye-opening realization that not everything is being handled by decision makers at the top.

Berkey: I am very proud to work at the Hoover Institution. It has been fulfilling to know that in some small way we helped advance President Hoover's legacy by providing relief to people in need. ◼

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What About Africa?

The Afghanistan pullout doesn't mean the United States can now ignore other regions, especially Africa. If anything, US attention to the Sahel should intensify.

By Russell A. Berman

The Sahel and the states bordering it are sites of significant jihadist activity that will derive considerable encouragement from the Taliban victory in Afghanistan. Islamism will be on the upswing everywhere. In the Sahel region of Africa in particular, such violent extremism plays out against the backdrop of weak political structures, poor governance, intercommunal conflicts, and profound economic challenges.

These are poor states with growing populations. This is also a region in which America's great-power rivals, China and Russia, have

Key points

» The Sahel region of Africa is a locus not only for jihadism but for great-power conflict.

» Pulling away from Afghanistan should not lead the United States to ignore the dangers, including terrorism, in Africa.

» An American strategy in the Sahel is essential. A key reason is the rising competition with China.

Russell A. Berman *is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, co-chair of Hoover's Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on the Middle East and the Islamic World, and a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project and its working groups on military history and national security. He is also the Walter A. Haas Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University.*

shown increasing interest. Moreover, the potential for significant flows of refugees or economic migrants could lead to disruptive political repercussions in the domestic politics of US allies in Europe, which would put further strains on the European Union and NATO. There are plenty of reasons for US policy makers to pay close attention to developments in the Sahel with an eye to addressing the endemic problems.

Yet in the wake of the defeat in Afghanistan, it will be difficult to muster much interest, whether in the foreign policy community or the public at large, for any engagement in a region seemingly far from American interests. The argument that there are nonetheless American national interests at stake in the Sahel immediately faces the resistance of a broader policy discussion moving in a different direction. The insistence on a pivot to Asia, now a well-established feature of American strategic thinking, likely precludes any pivot to Africa, despite the instability in the Sahel and the dangers that accompany it. Yet despite the difficulty in mounting an argument for the relevance of the Sahel for US interests, it would be shortsighted for Washington to ignore the real threats taking shape across this important region.

A CAUTIOUS PIVOT

The purported rationale for the departure from Afghanistan involved the need to free up resources that could be better used elsewhere, in particular in the western Pacific to counter Chinese ambitions. The costs of the war in the land-locked Central Asian country were judged to be undermining the American capacity to effectively confront the new strategic challenge of great-power competition with Beijing. Yet if Afghanistan, which in fact borders China and might therefore have provided a certain geostrategic advantage, especially with Bagram Air Base, was deemed merely a distraction from the primary rivalry of our time, regions still further removed from the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific are even less likely to attract genuine strategic attention. This holds for the various crises ringing the Mediterranean, from Lebanon to Tunisia and Libya.

The pivot to Asia has always meant the deprioritization of the Middle East. But the privileging of East Asia also means minimizing the importance of the growing instability in the Sahel region.

The prevailing argument after the departure from Kabul would seem to be that involvement in any of these conflicts can only divert the United States from responding to the first order of business, the Chinese challenge. Examined more closely, this argument is deeply flawed. The competition with China is not at all limited to the western Pacific. On the contrary,

precisely because Beijing has been actively projecting its power globally, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative, it is foolish for Washington to limit its China policy geographically to the Asia pivot. This great-power competition takes place globally, not only in one narrowly territorial theater. Indeed, the very withdrawal from Afghanistan, allegedly undertaken to better push back against China elsewhere, has in fact opened up the Central Asian space, including Afghanistan's coveted mineral resources, to Chinese access.

An evaluation of the strategic options that might have been available during the Afghanistan War is a complex topic that will engage historians, but in any case, the decision to withdraw cannot be justified primarily with the China argument.

By the same token, questions as to whether to commit US resources—not necessarily extensive military presence but also financial aid, development expertise, and diplomatic attention—in any other regions cannot be reduced to the single question of their importance for the rivalry between Washington and Beijing. US national interests are multidimensional and the international system complex in ways that resist such a one-dimensional simplification. The post-Afghanistan challenge, as exemplified by the case of the Sahel, involves retaining a commitment to American global presence in the name of the national interest without, however, being drawn into long and costly conflicts. The reasons that an active foreign policy in the Sahel would be in American national interests are multifold.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Twenty years after 9/11, the first and foremost concern for US policy must remain protecting the homeland from Islamist attacks. A key element of that defensive strategy involves protections at the borders, but that aspect is perpetually hamstrung by the ongoing political difficulties that prevent Washington from reaching an adequate immigration policy. That domestic partisan conflict is unlikely to be resolved soon. Furthermore, protection from terrorist attacks also involves domestic security and surveillance practices which, however, similarly face political constraints. Therefore, protection against domestic terrorist violence must rely on a third dimension, the consistent disruption of international terrorist networks, which means degrading Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their various offshoots overseas.

None of that is simple, and the unflagging ideological-religious commitment of the adversaries requires constant vigilance and counterterrorism on the part of the United States. Because the Sahel has emerged as the

TAKE AIM: Malian soldiers train under US supervision near the desert city of Timbuktu in 2004. Africa continues to be a leading front in a US military campaign to deny Al-Qaeda a safe haven in the continent's vast ungoverned regions. [Luc Gnago—Reuters]

prominent but by no means exclusive crucible of jihadist activity, there are sound counterterrorist grounds for American involvement there.

In addition, the logic of great-power competition requires an American strategy in the Sahel. The priority of countering China is not simply a question of the South China Sea, just as the Russian challenge is not merely a threat on the eastern front of NATO. Both of these adversaries pursue global agendas, and each is active across Africa, especially in the Sahel. China has contributed a noteworthy contingent to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in size just behind Germany, and its broader military presence in Africa stretches across the continent to its first extraterritorial base in Djibouti. It also ambitiously engages in infrastructure projects throughout Africa, and unlike the United States, it does not tie them to human rights norms or good-governance metrics, which gives Beijing an advantage when negotiating with authoritarian regimes.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi began the past new year with visits to five African nations—a long-established ritual of Chinese foreign policy. In

contrast, African observers were critical that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken could not leave Washington but held only a virtual meeting with the presidents of Nigeria and Kenya. The contrast was not useful for improving America's reputation in the continent.

Meanwhile, the third party in the narrative of great-power competition, Russia, is increasingly prominent. Unlike China, Russia cannot afford to be a major source of infrastructure projects, but it has vigorously inserted itself as an effective actor in violent conflicts via the Kremlin-linked paramilitary Wagner Group, now with a footprint in Libya, Chad, and the Central African Republic, as well as Sudan, Angola, Mozambique, and elsewhere.

Despite the differences between them, which Washington has been unable to leverage, Beijing and Moscow pose a de facto combined challenge to Western leadership in Africa. The continent should not be viewed as a distraction from great-power competition but rather as one of its most important theaters. In light of the argument that the United States had to leave Afghanistan to push back against China, the Sahel can be understood as at least one plausible theater in which that pushback could play out.

Developments in the Sahel also have the potential for strategically significant impacts on the trans-Atlantic alliance structure. At stake are two distinct dynamics. The greater the instability in the region, the greater the likelihood of increased immigration into Europe. The 2015 wave of Syrian refugees elicited the rise of far-right parties, divided the EU over immigration policies, and arguably contributed to the pro-Brexit vote, fracturing the European project. The prospect of a wave of immigrants from Afghanistan is already producing intra-European political friction. Increased immigration from the Sahel or elsewhere in Africa—and passing through the Sahel—will further disturb the European political landscape. The United States has a security interest in minimizing this effect.

In addition, the United States has a vital interest in the character of the international military effort in the Sahel. The legacy of colonialism and postcolonial relations explains the primary role that France can play in combating terrorism in the Sahel; the American military presence need not be extensive. However, it is in the counterterrorism and, to some extent, counterinsurgency campaigns in the Sahel that intra-European military cooperation patterns are being established which will feed back into the discussion of the future of NATO. The Sahel campaigns, in other words, will serve as a laboratory for future European security architecture, which is directly relevant to the character of the Atlantic Alliance. The United States must be part of this discussion.

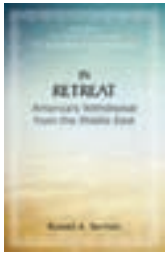
VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

There are other grounds for the United States to engage purposefully in the Sahel: humanitarian concerns.

It is of course the people of the region who suffer directly from the violence of jihadist movements. Stopping the sorts of atrocities that have taken place in the Sahel would be consistent with American values and be welcome to the American public. However, in the wake of the American experience in Afghanistan, there is likely to be little enthusiasm for institutional reform, "nation building," or democracy promotion. Hence the conundrum programmed into the policy discussion.

China, unlike America, does not tie its infrastructure projects to human rights norms or good-governance metrics.

For some, the only way to end terrorism involves eliminating so-called root causes by establishing good governance. In that case, however, the limited goal of degrading terrorist forces transforms into a much larger project of political and social reform, requiring different resources and capabilities as well as a much longer time commitment—perhaps even an "endless" one. There should therefore be a clear understanding of the political will required to take on and sustain a mission of that scope and duration. That is the Afghan lesson for Sahel policy. ◘



Pillars of Wisdom

Five points Americans should absorb from decades of unusually bitter politics.

By Peter Berkowitz

Even as the Afghanistan crisis unfolded last August, the White House heightened confusion about the purpose of American foreign policy. The Biden administration's Afghanistan debacle shows that the United States has yet to come to grips with the lessons for freedom from America's twenty years of war against jihadism.

Neither military necessity nor sober diplomatic calculation determined President Biden's decision to remove all American troops from Afghanistan in the middle of the Taliban's warm-weather fighting season, much less his team's conduct of the tragically ill-conceived pullout.

Contrary to his repeated insistence, Biden was not hamstrung by the Trump administration's February 2020 agreement with the Taliban. Since taking office in January, Biden has aggressively exercised his executive prerogative to rescind Trump administration executive orders, repudiate Trump administration priorities, and reverse Trump administration policies. Had the Biden administration genuinely considered itself bound by the Doha agreement, it would have taken seriously the provision that conditioned the

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withdrawal of American troops on "guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the United States and its allies." The Taliban's

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

manifest failure to live up to their end of the bargain nullified the US obligation to complete the withdrawal.

Nothing in the Doha agreement, moreover, compelled the Biden administration to vacate Bagram Air Base in early July in the middle of the night, well in advance of the final troop pullout and without informing the base's Afghan commander. Nor did the agreement require the Biden administration to complete the withdrawal before evacuating all American nationals and Afghans who had worked with the United States.

The chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal compounded confusion and controversy about America's purposes abroad.

Biden also repeatedly misled the nation by suggesting that he faced a stark choice: continue America's failed efforts at nation building or remove all US troops. Biden falsely implied that the only conceivable purpose of retaining a modest military presence in Afghanistan was to promote democracy and freedom. There was also, for example, our counterterrorism mission to consider. By continuing to provide air cover and intelligence, several thousand US troops could very well have sustained the Afghan National Army. This would have prevented the country from falling into the Taliban's hands and likely reverting to a launching pad for jihadism against American targets around the world.

MISSION CREEP

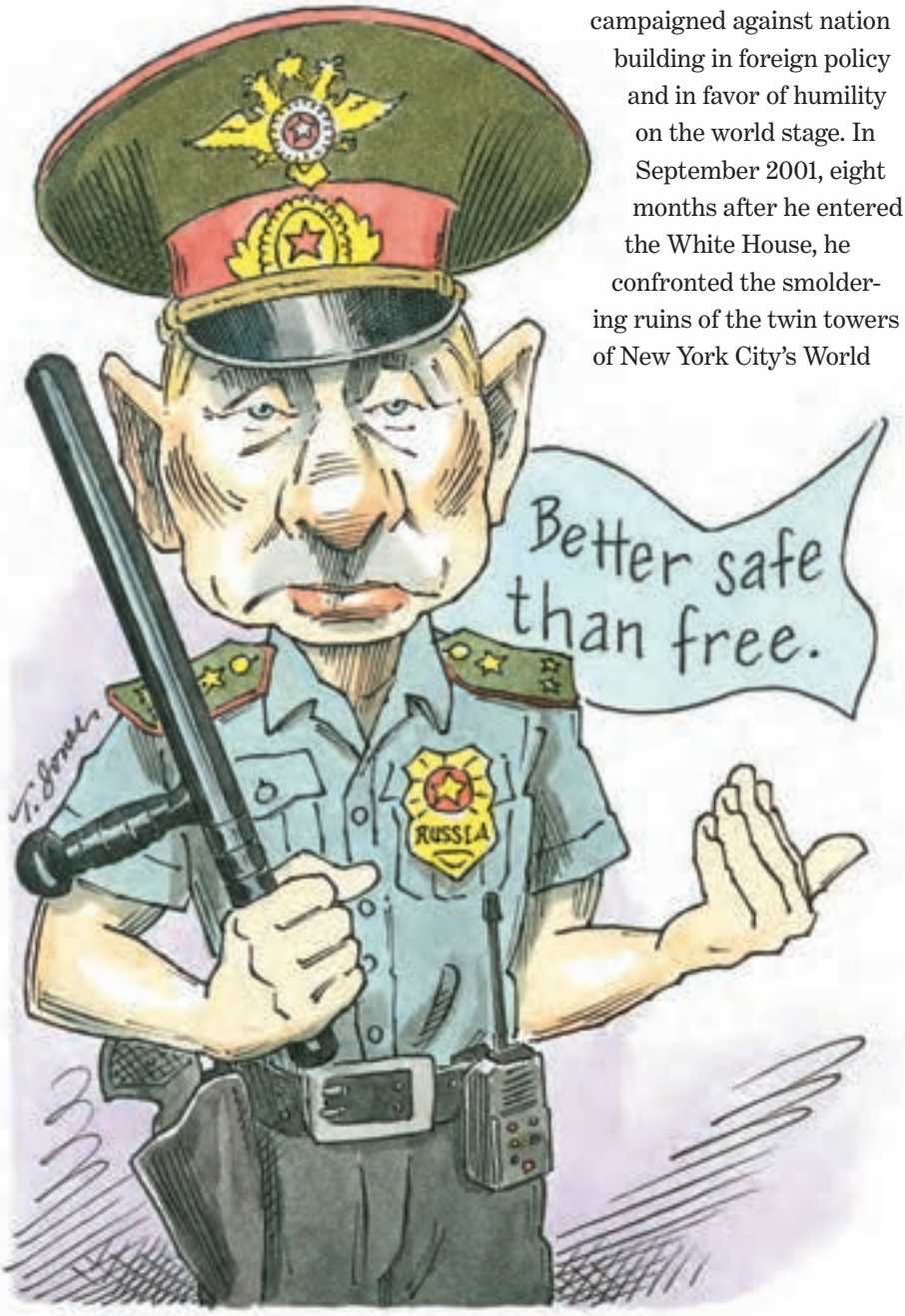
Meanwhile, Zhou Bo, a senior colonel in the People's Liberation Army from 2003 to 2020, boasted in the *New York Times* that China "is ready to step into the void left by the hasty US retreat to seize a golden opportunity," including Chinese construction projects in Afghanistan and mining of the abundant rare-earth mineral deposits there. Chinese state-run media warned Taiwan that American fecklessness in Afghanistan shows that the United States cannot be trusted.

Aesthetics and domestic political considerations seem to have impelled Biden to set a firm date of August 31 to make a clean break with his predecessors' policies. The president and his advisers apparently anticipated a public relations bonanza from celebrating the conclusion of America's involvement in Afghanistan by the twentieth anniversary of Al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks.

The costs of this subordination of national security to partisan politics are staggering. The US actions that plunged Afghanistan into chaos continue to reverberate around the world, disheartening America's friends and

emboldening America's enemies. And they compound confusion and controversy at home—two decades in the making and growing—about America's purposes abroad.

In 2000, George W. Bush campaigned against nation building in foreign policy and in favor of humility on the world stage. In September 2001, eight months after he entered the White House, he confronted the smoldering ruins of the twin towers of New York City's World



Trade Center, the charred and gaping gash in the Pentagon, and the burned-out remnants of United Flight 93 in a western Pennsylvania field, along with the almost three thousand Americans killed and tens of billions of dollars of near-term damage to the country. Al-Qaeda's attacks that day, undertaken in service of the religious war that Osama bin Laden declared in 1996 against the United States and the freedom and democracy to which it is dedicated, changed President Bush's calculations. In the face of the threat posed by rogue states as well as stateless terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction—biological, chemical, and nuclear—Bush resolved that the United States must go on the offensive.

Bush was convinced that dictatorship was a principal source of poverty, religious extremism, and political instability in the Middle East.

In October 2001, he dispatched troops to Afghanistan to eliminate the haven that the ruling Taliban provided to bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network. Within two months, Operation Enduring Freedom had destroyed Al-Qaeda's camps and routed the Taliban. Determined to prevent Afghanistan from serving again as a base for jihadism, the administration eventually adopted the promotion of democracy and freedom in Afghanistan as one of its objectives.

In mid-March 2003, Bush launched Operation Iraqi Freedom to oust Saddam Hussein who, in defiance of numerous UN Security Council resolutions, had long pursued weapons of mass destruction. By the end of April, coalition forces had driven Saddam from Baghdad and gained control over the country. After the conclusion of major military operations, US and international investigators, despite uncovering numerous plans and programs, found little evidence that the dictator had made significant progress in acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Convinced, nevertheless, that dictatorship was a principal source of poverty, religious extremism, and political instability in the Middle East, the Bush administration expanded the US mission in Iraq to include the promotion of democracy and freedom.

The Afghanistan episode points to the need for a new approach to US foreign policy.

Gross miscalculations, grave setbacks, and recurring deceptions and self-deceptions in Afghanistan and Iraq over the past two decades have brought nation building—another way of saying the promotion of democracy and

freedom, since rights-respecting democracy is the only sort of regime that the United States seeks to build—into disrepute. More than seven thousand US soldiers lost their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq and tens of thousands were wounded. Direct Afghanistan and Iraq war costs to the US taxpayer exceed $2 trillion. Notwithstanding genuine accomplishments in the two countries, Iraq's Shiite-led government leans toward Iran, the world's leading state-sponsor of terror and the United States' primary adversary in the region, while the Taliban—now better trained and equipped than before—control more of Afghanistan than on 9/11.

LESSONS DEARLY BOUGHT

For many on the left and the right, the Biden administration's calamitous pullout cements the conclusion they reached by the end of the Bush administration: promoting democracy and freedom are beyond America's capabilities, impose destabilizing practices and institutions on local populations, and have no place in a responsible US foreign policy.

The better conclusion, however, is that to serve the nation's surpassing interest in securing the conditions conducive to freedom at home, US foreign policy must responsibly identify opportunities to advance it abroad. In support of that conclusion, the two decades since the September 11 attacks furnish several lessons of freedom, paid for with blood and treasure.

» ***Rethink foreign policy.*** The conventional categories of foreign policy analysis—realists vs. idealists, isolationists vs. interventionists, and nationalists vs. globalists—should be set aside. They reflect hidebound dichotomies that derail clear thinking about America's role in the world. The challenge is not to choose one of the poles but to secure American freedom by striking a reasonable balance among competing imperatives. US foreign policy should begin with a clear-eyed assessment of the motives, aims, and geopolitical logic that drive nation-states while never losing sight, on the one hand, of how customs and ideas shape regime conduct and, on the other hand, of the rights inherent in all human beings. US foreign policy should be grounded in America's needs and priorities, which include the preservation of a free and open international order, while fashioning plans to act abroad—from speeches, educational initiatives, and foreign aid to (always as a last resort) military operations—to defend US interests. And US foreign policy should insist that sovereign nation-states are the fundamental political unit of international affairs even as securing freedom at home compels America to cultivate a diversity of friends, partners, and allies and to maintain—and reform—international institutions to promote comity and commerce among nations.

» ***Distinguish between promoting democracy and promoting freedom.*** Both conservatives and progressives have a bad habit of treating these undertakings as synonymous. They are not. Although liberal democracies such as the United States weave together freedom and democracy to the benefit of both, they are separable and distinct achievements. Democracy refers to the people's rule through fair elections. Hence, promoting democracy usually implies regime

change. In contrast, freedom—which in the first place means the ability to choose how to live one's life instead of being commanded by another—can be a matter of degree and enjoyed to a greater or lesser extent under a variety of regimes. Accordingly, freedom can be advanced—more religious liberty, more economic freedom, more free speech, more independence in the judiciary—incrementally and without replacing an authoritarian regime with a democratic one.

Because freer nations not only are more respectful of human rights but also tend to be more productive, more reliable, and more aligned with the United States' interest in a free and open international order, hardheaded political calculation requires the prudent allocation of scarce resources to advance freedom abroad.

» ***Recognize that America's ability to advance freedom abroad is, in most circumstances, severely limited.*** In 2012, after devoting the better part of a decade to establishing the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, John Agresto reconsidered America's post-9/11 foreign policy aims. It is one thing, Agresto argued, to say that all people *deserve* freedom. That proposition reflects the principles of the American Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Agresto added, it "is flat-out wrong" to say that all people *desire* freedom. That proposition is contradicted by history and the diversity of nations and peoples today. "Indeed, some people would rather be holy than free, or safe than free, or be instructed in how they should lead their lives rather than be free," Agresto observed. "Many prefer the comfort of strong answers already given rather than the openness and hazards of freedom. There are those who would never dream of substituting their will for the imam's or pushing their desires over the customs and traditions of their families. Some men kiss their chains."

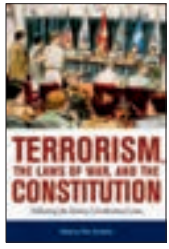
» ***Improve the foreign policy establishment's understanding of other cultures.*** The desire for freedom and—equally important to the establishment and preservation of free institutions—the appreciation for the right of others to a like freedom depend on a people's traditions. Cultural understanding is a prerequisite not only to understanding strategic competitors and adversaries but also to determining where advancing freedom is most feasible and to ascertaining the best available means. A crucial step in the acquisition of such cultural understanding is a concerted national effort to encourage the serious study of critical foreign languages.

» ***Rededicate the United States to educating Americans for liberty.*** Citizens indoctrinated from grade school on up with the notions that oppression is pervasive in the United States, that government and society must

allocate rewards and burdens based on race, and that America is a uniquely iniquitous nation will be in no position to safeguard freedom at home, let alone understand the limited means by which America can advance it abroad. Instead, from K–12 through college the core curriculum must explore the principles of freedom on which the United States is based and the constitutional traditions through which those principles have been institutionalized. That exploration includes the nation's tragic betrayals of those principles and the heroic struggles to set things right. Individual freedom, human equality, the consent of the governed, limited government, and a foreign policy dedicated to securing American freedom should be seen for what they are: not a set of partisan commitments but the nation's precious heritage and the basis on which right and left in America can constructively debate, and cooperate in determining, what's best for the nation.

"Some men kiss their chains."

The debacle in Afghanistan, coupled with the magnitude of the China challenge, makes the learning of these lessons of freedom from America's twenty years of war against jihadism a vital national interest. ◘



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A Convenient Untruth

Why does China's COVID-19 slander against the United States sound familiar? Because bogus tales of American "biowarfare" surfaced before, during the Korean War, and lingered for decades.

By Miles Maochun Yu

Last May, the White House ordered American intelligence agencies to deliver a report on COVID-19's origins within ninety days. When the inconclusive findings came out, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) responded by accelerating its big lie of the pandemic: that the virus originated not in Wuhan, the focus of the global outbreak, but at the US Army base at Fort Detrick, Maryland. This was not the first time that the CCP had weaponized disinformation in its Leninist struggle against the West. In 1952, in an infamous case just three years after coming to power, the party accused the US military of being behind a biological attack during the Korean War.

On January 29 of that year, a routine field intelligence report from the 42nd Corps of the Chinese communist forces in Korea reached headquarters. The report informed commanders of the discovery of house fleas, flies, and spider-like crickets in a small, snow-covered plot of land near the 38th parallel, which the US Air Force had overflown the day before.

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Rather than accept that the incident was a fairly typical insect infestation, the CCP high command, both in Korea and in Beijing, seized on it as evidence of US imperialists having launched biological weapons in what was supposed to be a conventional war. Mao Zedong; his premier, Zhou Enlai; and Peng Dehuai, the commander in chief of all Chinese forces in Korea, leapt into action, orchestrating an elaborate campaign of lies with the help of Joseph Stalin and North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.

PHONY INVESTIGATIONS

Today, Beijing ships hundreds of millions of doses of vaccines of questionable quality all over the world to try to restore its reputation. In 1952, after the alleged American atrocity, the CCP shipped millions of doses of plague vaccine to Korea. Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang dialed up their propaganda, denouncing the American imperialists' alleged callousness and criminality. Mao escalated the lies, and Stalin bought Mao's claim without any hesitation when on February 21, 1952, Mao cabled the Kremlin that the Americans had also dropped biological weapons far beyond the Yalu River, deep into the People's Republic of China.

The party's disinformation campaign continued in elaborate detail for months. On March 8, Zhou announced, "Since they first launched a large-scale biological war in Korea on January 28, 1952, the American aggressors have, between February 29 and March 5, deployed 68 air maneuvers, totaling 448 sorties, to invade the Chinese airspace and dropped an enormous quantity of bacteria-carrying insects."

But Zhou's mendacity went on. He said, "In order to achieve its goal of expanding the Korean War and undermining the peace of the Far East and the world, the US government not only used bacterial weapons that are absolutely forbidden by international conventions and human morality against the peaceful people, but also expanded this crime. For the peaceful people of Northeast China, they also use this illegal germ weapon to carry out barbaric provocations. The Chinese people will absolutely not tolerate such brutal acts by the US government that blatantly violate international conventions and violate humanity."

The "evidence" of bioweapons? An outbreak of fleas, flies, and crickets in a small plot of land in Korea.

The communist bloc embraced the lies unquestioningly. Tens of millions demonstrated against the alleged American biological attack. The Soviet

ambassador to the United Nations echoed his comrades in Beijing, and he "gravely" condemned the alleged US uses of biological weapons in Korea.

The US government, of course, was outraged by this lunacy. Washington categorically denied the allegation. Secretary of State Dean Acheson attempted to call Beijing's bluff, demanding the International Red Cross (IRC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) launch an immediate investigation in Korea and China into the communist allegations. In a move familiar to observers of the party's actions over the past two years, Beijing rejected the repeated requests of the IRC and WHO to allow investigators to go to Korea and China to find out the truth.

Instead of cooperating, Beijing's disinformation campaign went global. The party mobilized its army of Western fellow travelers in the academic, legal, and scientific fields and conducted its own "investigations." The Paris-based communist-controlled International Association of Democratic Lawyers as well as the International Scientific Commission for the Facts Concerning Bacterial Warfare, sponsored by a communist front organization called the World Peace Council, all quickly and conveniently confirmed the Chinese allegations and ritualistically condemned the American imperialists, without science and without conscience.

Tens of millions demonstrated against the nonexistent American biological attack.

Perhaps most disturbing, the Chinese paraded twenty-five American POWs and published their "confessions" that they had conducted biological warfare in Korea. When the prisoners were eventually released, all of them recanted their statements, which had been made under torture and mental duress.

A MOST USEFUL "FALSE ALARM"

The most powerful admission of this calumny against the US military emerged four decades later. The medical and health chief of the Chinese forces in Korea, Wu Zhili, the very person in charge of investigating the alleged American use of biological weapons in Korea, wrote a detailed account of the entire fabrication in 1997. Wu recorded his recollections at age eighty-three and they were published posthumously in the Beijing-based journal *Yanhuang Chunqiu* in November 2013. The entire editorial staff of the journal has since been purged.

Wu's memory was unequivocal: "It's been forty-four years since the armistice of the Korean War, yet we should ask about the worldwide sensation of

DISEASED: A grisly propaganda leaflet from 1952 shows a human figure covered with rats and flies, representing biological warfare. The caption condemns the United States, accusing it of biological warfare in Northeast China and Korea. The allegation grew into a concerted campaign by North Korea, China, and the Soviet Union that was not publicly refuted until years later.
[National Library of Medicine]

1952: how indisputable is the claim of the American imperialists' use of bacterial war? My answer: this was a case of false alarm." Wu provided minute details of how this big lie was made and who was involved.

When Wu and his team had been summoned to report in person their inability to find any credible evidence of the allegation to Peng Dehuai, the

commander in chief of Chinese forces in Korea, Peng became enraged. He exclaimed to Wu and his staff, "Our health chief is an American imperialist spy and speaks on behalf of the enemy! With him in charge, how can our troops' health be guaranteed?"

One senior North Korean officer at Wu's briefing intimated to Wu that he thought Peng would quickly execute the health chief. But Wu's life was spared, possibly because of a phone call that same day from the Soviet chief of staff at Peng's headquarters, who said Stalin wanted to know if there was really a bacterial war going on in Korea. Wu replied, "Go ask Commander in Chief Peng," and hung up. Wu was scared into submission and carried on the fabrication in the months to come.

Eventually, these lies proved too embarrassing even for the Kremlin. After Stalin's death in March 1953, the new Soviet leadership reviewed the record and decided that there was no truth to the Chinese claims that the United States had ever used biological weapons during the Korean War. On May 22, 1953, the Presidium of the USSR Council of Ministers passed a resolution, forwarded to Mao Zedong in Beijing, that said:

> The Soviet government and the Central Committee of the CPSU were misled. The spread in the press of information about the use by the Americans of bacteriological weapons in Korea was based on false information. The accusations against the Americans were fictitious. . . . Soviet workers responsible for participation in the fabrication of the so-called "proof" of the use of bacteriological weapons will receive severe punishment.

After being rebuked by the Kremlin for the embarrassing fake claim, Mao and Zhou began to act as if their subordinates had misled them. Zhou asked Peng's chief of staff, General Huang Kecheng, and Peng's deputy, General Hong Xuezhi, "Did you guys fake the whole thing?" Hong replied: "Yes, we did. But we would not be able to answer the order from above if we didn't fake it."

NEW OUTBREAK OF FALSEHOODS

The Chinese Communist Party's lies today about Fort Detrick are the latest displays of its long history of Leninist disinformation. They are part of General Secretary Xi Jinping's "people's war" against the US-led international campaign calling for an independent investigation into the origins and cover-up of the COVID-19 outbreak in Wuhan. The Party's main propaganda outlets such as Xinhua, the *People's Daily,* and its top government media

WEAPONIZED: Flies and germ-laden bombs fall from the sky in this 1952 leaflet. Wu Zhili, in charge of investigating the alleged US use of bioweapons in Korea, detailed the fabrication in 1997. As long ago as 1953, the new Soviet leaders had confronted Beijing, saying that "the spread in the press of information about the use by the Americans of bacteriological weapons in Korea was based on false information." Chinese leaders claimed their subordinates had misled them. [National Library of Medicine]

representatives blame a little-known US Army base without evidence, without fear, and once again, without conscience.

Sadly, the party also once again has Western fellow travelers eager to play along. In the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, an alarming

number of intellectuals and scientists in the West parroted the CCP's lies and tried to pre-empt an independent, transparent international query into the origin of the virus. They offered premature, categorical denials of any possible lab origin. Meanwhile, in a move reminiscent of the mass mobilization campaign during the Korean War, the communist government in Beijing has engineered a bogus national petition drive aimed at pressuring the World Health Organization to launch an investigation not into the Wuhan Institute of Virology but into Fort Detrick. By mid-August, the regime had collected more than twenty-five million signatures in China.

Twenty-five American POWs were tortured into confessing a role in the "attacks." When freed, they recanted.

In its modern COVID-19 disinformation campaign, the party has summoned the ghost of the Korean War bacterial weapons hoax. In their coverage of the pandemic, state media outlets are resurrecting the now demonstrably false accusations that the US military used biological weapons during the Korean War. Some lies never die.

Lenin said the presence of the enemy is constant, so the struggle must be eternal. Mao's successors have proven to be faithful followers of Russia's great false prophet.

Read* Military History in the News,** ***the weekly column from the Hoover Institution that connects historical insights to contemporary conflicts (www.hoover.org/publications/military-history-news).

Tomorrow's Arms Race

The fundamental contest between Beijing and its nuclear rivals is not just about ships, missiles, and warheads but about technology itself.

By Rose Gottemoeller

President Biden is reviewing America's nuclear posture, and soon we should know what he thinks about US nuclear weapons, what policies should govern them, and how many we need. Congress is watching closely, and the Senate and House of Representatives are sure to debate the results; they always do.

But this time will be different. A new player has entered the field: China.

China is modernizing its nuclear forces. The recent discovery of three intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silo fields in remote regions west and north of Beijing point to a big buildup of weapons and a different strategy for their use.

Key points

» China is changing its nuclear weapons stance, and both the United States and Russia should be concerned.

» Developments in China don't meant the US dominance in warheads has been undermined.

» America's goal, in light of China's goals, should be to push the frontiers of science and innovation.

***Rose Gottemoeller** is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a participant in Hoover's Task Force on National Security. She is also the Steven C. Házy Lecturer at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and its Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC).*

Since acquiring nuclear weapons from the Soviets, the Chinese have taken the stance that they would not build up a large and highly alert force but instead would be ready to retaliate. This "second strike deterrence posture" has served them well, but now the Chinese seem to have decided it is not enough.

That is why it is urgent that the Biden administration (and the Kremlin) get them to the table to ask them. Chinese nuclear force posture and strategy should be an equal concern in Washington and Moscow.

We can ask the Chinese separately, or together, but ask them we should. All three countries might even agree to take some early steps, such as exchanging deployment plans and information about nuclear doctrine. Such confidence-building measures would build mutual predictability and may stave off a nuclear arms race.

Most important, we must not panic. Even if the Chinese deploy intercontinental ballistic missiles in each of their new silos, the United States will still have a large and capable nuclear force structure and many more nuclear warheads. Some authorities have predicted that the Chinese may be able to quadruple their warhead numbers in coming years. If one goes by the Stockholm Peace Research estimate of 350 Chinese warheads, then China would end up with 1,400 total warheads. More than 4,000 warheads are available for deployment in both the United States and Russia. We need to keep a sharp eye on what China is doing but not rush into making rash changes in our own nuclear forces.

From 2000 to 2017, the share of basic research funded in the US by the federal government declined from 58 percent to 42 percent.

TECHNOLOGICAL PROWESS

China may be a rising nuclear power, but its bigger agenda is building up its science and technology prowess. And this is where we need to focus as a competitor. We should ask ourselves: What is in the long-term US national security interest? Where can we best spend our national treasure to ensure our future defense? Our defense budget funds are finite; we have to balance how best to spend them.

The focus should be not on nuclear weapons but on the new and emerging technologies that are rapidly maturing into military assets. Innovations in artificial intelligence, big data analysis, quantum computing and sensing, and biotechnology are where future defense capacity is being born.

LAUNCH: An HD-1 supersonic cruise missile is displayed at Airshow China 2018 in Zhuhai, Guangdong province. The missile is designed for both land and naval warfare. Beyond weapons systems, China is focusing on new and emerging technologies that are rapidly maturing into military assets. [Imagine China/Newscom]

The Chinese have sworn to beat everyone at acquiring and exploiting every one of these technologies. Their China 2025 and 2050 plans are designed to ensure that China will dominate the science and technology space at midcentury.

The United States needs to do everything it can to disrupt this Chinese rush to technological superiority. But it cannot do so while distracted by a hundred ICBM silos. These seventy-year-old weapon systems have nothing to do with the future capabilities the United States must deploy to maintain national defense.

To achieve that goal, we must push the frontiers of science and innovation and prevent Chinese dominance. The United States has the talent and the institutions to do so—as long as we spend our resources wisely.

But we are moving in the wrong direction. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF), between 2000 and 2017 the share of basic research funded by the federal government declined from 58 percent to 42 percent. Other NSF indicators, such as the number of patents granted, also show a decline in US performance.

BEYOND HARDWARE

Putting more resources into science and innovation does not mean we should fail to modernize our nuclear forces. The program of record for nuclear modernization first put in place by President Obama continued to develop momentum during the Trump administration as we began to exchange new weapons systems for old.

Some of them, such as the Ohio-class submarines, are nearly fifty years old. They need to be replaced with newer, quieter, and more capable nuclear-armed submarines. It is still true that for as long as nuclear weapons exist, the United States must maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear arsenal.

Artificial intelligence, data analysis, quantum computing and sensing, biotechnology—this is where future defense capacity is being born.

But let us not let the Chinese push us into pouring our national treasure into nuclear weapons that we do not need. Beijing will continue to go for broke to dominate science and technology achievement in this century, and this is where our attention needs to be.

We must keep a sharp eye on China's nuclear deployments, but we have a long head start on China and can ensure that it does not surprise us in the nuclear space. If we fail to stay focused, we may find one day that Beijing has achieved strategic superiority with entirely new military systems that we can neither defend against nor match. ⊞

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Where Is the Inequality?

"Surging inequality" is the phantom that just won't go away—despite rising household wealth in the Trump years, even during the pandemic.

By Cale Clingenpeel and Tyler Goodspeed

For years, Democrats have told us that inequality is the most pressing problem facing our nation. National media outlets have regularly echoed this point, often blaming Republican policies as major contributing factors. But you might have noticed that it has been a while since anyone mentioned any actual, recent facts about inequality. That is because we have learned when inequality statistics are not worth mentioning: when those statistics show Republican policies reducing inequality.

To be sure, inequality itself is still mentioned all the time. In recent testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen suggested that the administration's unprecedented spending spree—along with the deficits and higher tax burden proposed to fund these plans—is necessary to address the "destructive forces" of our time, inequality chief among them.

Cale Clingenpeel *is chief economist at the America First Policy Institute and served in the Trump administration as senior adviser to the chairman of the White House Council of Economic Advisers.* ***Tyler Goodspeed*** *is the Kleinheinz Fellow at the Hoover Institution and a former member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, where he served as acting chairman and vice chairman.*

But if this is the paramount concern, Democratic policy makers should be considerably more curious about a glaring fact: in the four years through 2020, real wealth inequality among American households declined, according to the Federal Reserve's Distributional Financial Accounts.

Despite this period ending with the worst macroeconomic shock since the Great Depression, real wealth held by the bottom half of households grew faster—over three times faster—than wealth held by the top half of households in the 2017–20 period, and almost three times faster than for the top 1 percent. This reduction in wealth inequality—made possible by broad-based and noninflationary growth—was realized amid the implementation of tax and regulatory reforms that critics erroneously claimed would result in surging inequality.

For wealth to grow at all—let alone grow 21.9 percent—during a recession is unprecedented.

The pattern of wealth growth over the 2017–20 period is best described in two phases: that before the pandemic and that during the pandemic. From the end of 2016 through the end of 2019, real wealth for the bottom half of households grew at an annual rate of 17.2 percent, while real wealth for the top 1 percent of households grew at a 5.2 percent pace. After landmark tax reform in 2017, real wealth for the bottom half of households grew at almost four times the pace of that of the top 1 percent.

In the previous expansion period—after the Great Recession but before 2017—real wealth grew at annual rates of 8.2 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively, for the bottom half and top 1 percent of households. But pre-2017 growth for the bottom 50 percent merely constituted slow, painful, and partial recovery from a steep contraction during 2007–9, and followed a pre–Great Recession period in which real wealth for the top 1 percent of households rose substantially while that of the bottom half declined. Only after the 2017 tax reforms did real wealth for the bottom 50 percent of households finally regain and then surpass its 2007 level.

The pandemic and the attendant recession introduced a number of historical anomalies. One was the preservation—and even growth—of the aggregate wealth accumulated by American households. In fact, the rate of growth of aggregate real wealth for the bottom half of households exceeded that of the top 1 percent of households. By the end of 2020, aggregate real wealth held by the bottom half of households was 21.9 percent above its

pre-pandemic level, while aggregate real wealth among the top 1 percent of households was up 10.3 percent.

For wealth to grow at all—let alone grow 21.9 percent—during a recession is unprecedented. During the 2008–9 recession, real wealth held by the bottom half of households fell by a staggering annualized rate of 36.9 percent. While the top 1 percent of households also faced substantial wealth losses, in percentage terms they faced a much smaller contraction of 13.7 percent. Whereas real wealth of the top 1 percent had regained its pre-2008 peak by 2013, it took more than a decade, and the 2017 tax cuts, for real wealth of the bottom half of households to recoup the steep losses of 2008–9. Aggregate data can of course mask considerable variation and hardship among households, but the fact that overall real net worth held by the bottom half of households rose in 2020, and rose by more than double the rate of the top 1 percent, is a testament to the unprecedented response of the Trump administration to the worst macroeconomic shock to hit the US economy since the Great Depression.

The policies implemented in the 2017–20 period have frequently been mislabeled as amplifying inequality. Even today, perhaps out of political expediency, some critics maintain that these policies resulted in greater inequality. The data contradict such claims. With a better understanding of the patterns of wealth inequality in recent years, it might be hoped that these critics would not be so quick to dismiss the growth-enhancing policies of the 2017–20 period and that they might even stop short of calling for their reversal.

Finally, the Biden administration should perhaps consider the effects that its fiscal proposals could have on inflation. In view of the decline in real wages in 2021 amid higher inflation, real wealth growth—especially for households at the lower end of the distribution—may be at risk of slowing substantially. Having successfully mitigated what would have constituted the largest adverse hit to household wealth since the Great Depression, we need to start returning to the set of policies that were delivering sustainable gains to household wealth at the lower end of the distribution on the eve of the pandemic.

Only after the 2017 tax reforms did real wealth for the bottom 50 percent of households finally regain and then surpass its 2007 level.

If Democrats were serious about addressing inequality, they would have at least a modicum of curiosity about why the bottom half of the wealth

distribution experienced the biggest gains in wealth share on record during President Trump's term. That they do not have such curiosity reveals that inequality in fact matters little to them. Instead, their willingness to disregard data evinces political rather than economic goals—to peddle a narrative of helping those at the bottom while reversing the policies that delivered the biggest real economic gains to those households in decades. ■

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Of Course, Incentives Matter

Playing politics, certain economists have engaged in a bizarre rejection of incentives, one of the most basic tools of economics.

By Kevin A. Hassett

In the 1980s, the inventive rock band Devo put forward the theory that mankind was experiencing de-evolution—that by destroying the planet, we were on a path to take the earth back to its roots. The subsequent decades were certainly less cataclysmic than the group had expected, but the idea that things could be unlearned and progress could be reversed will always be with us. That idea is especially relevant now as one considers the de-evolution of economic thinking among many on the left. One might even say that a significant fraction of the Democratic Party no longer practices economics when formulating policy, but instead commits itself to *de-economics*. Frankly, it's the only explanation for the ridiculous arguments that abound today.

Economics is, after all, founded on the principle that models of firms and workers can be very useful for understanding how the world works. These models begin with the idea that resources are constrained and incentives matter. If something you like costs less than you'd value it at, you buy more of it. How much incentives matter is, of course, an empirical question, and economists have spent the past half century using more and more

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sophisticated computer techniques to measure how firms and consumers respond to them.

A FRESHMAN SHALL LEAD THEM

In almost every first-year economics class across the country, it's common to begin the semester with the principles of supply and demand. If you have lots of supply, then, because incentives matter, you can still clear the market because people will buy more of the product when the price drops. If you have lots of demand, then suppliers can clear the market by lifting the price until demand declines to equal the amount supplied. That covers just about everything essential—except, perhaps, for one last foundational idea.

Consider the following: if you want to have a better standard of living five years from now, you can do that by putting money in the bank and building wealth or by investing in honing your own talents, which will increase your wage five years from now. If you are lucky, maybe the firm you work for will give you better machines to work with, which will also increase your wage. But in any case, progress requires that somebody has the foresight to invest in financial, physical, or human capital.

Against this backdrop has emerged an enormously destructive de-economic view that incentives do not matter. Under this theory, one can lift the unemployment-insurance benefit to the heavens, and people will still go to work just as they did when the benefit was low. The individual income tax can be lifted, and people won't respond by working less. The capital-gains tax can be lifted, but people will not invest less and the economy can still grow.

Economics models begin with this idea: resources are constrained and incentives matter.

The corporate tax in the United States can be, as President Biden proposes, lifted above the effective rate that President Trump inherited, and yet the economy will still grow. The minimum wage can increase, and nobody will lose their job. The Keynesian multiplier is two, so government spending can make society richer, but when government spending collapses by 10 percent relative to GDP—as it is currently scheduled to do—GDP will not suffer.

This of course makes little sense at all. Yet that is the position we now find ourselves in—something so cataclysmic that even Devo might be impressed. You want demand? How about we lift government spending to levels not seen since the height of World War II. You want supply? Away, conservative conspiracy hounds. Supply is like the sun and the moon, it will be there no

matter what. What emerges is our current supply policy, where the Biden administration promises unprecedented supply contractions through higher regulation, higher corporate taxes, and a straitjacket for the energy sector.

There was a time when a college freshman would have been able to explain that increasing demand and reducing supply would lead to an explosion in prices. Today, instead, we hear from our policy-making experts that the recent reading of an 11.4 percent annual rate of inflation is temporary and unrelated to anything the Biden administration might be doing.

Supposedly one can lift the unemployment-insurance benefit to the heavens, and people will still go to work just as before.

But, our earnest freshman might argue, "Why not try to help supply out a little bit and end the expansion of unemployment-insurance benefits?" No, the de-economists will respond: "Incentives don't matter!" And when an annoying young economist such as our own Cale Clingenpeel points out the Republican states that ended the expanded benefit saw a collapse in claims, while those that did not saw claims increase, why, it's time to rev up the cancel machine, and assault him and his offspring on Twitter. If Mark Zuckerberg is not too busy, we might even be able to suspend him from Facebook.

The de-economists also tell us that the American system is biased against African-Americans, who are getting less and less of the pie because of racist Republican policies. And when Scott Turner points out that free market policies lead to record low African-American poverty and unemployment rates, and record-high income growth, well, the threats again begin to swell. But don't worry too much about Scott; after nine years in the NFL, he is quite capable of taking care of himself.

The de-economists tell us that wealth and economic inequality are the Achilles' heels of the capitalist state, and the most important metric of a successful society. Unless, of course, these metrics *improve* at an inconvenient time, as they did dramatically under President Trump. This reality requires one to look the other way and stifle any burgeoning curiosity about the policies—such as opportunity zones—that use incentives to make the neediest in society better off.

As for energy, the de-economists tell us that we should shut down the Keystone pipeline, but open up the Nord Stream pipeline. That we should shut down US energy production, but then beg the Russians to increase production when the price of oil surges.

WILLING DISBELIEF

All this might give the impression that economics is dying, and that policy chaos lies before us. But if you look at the top journals—or head to the National Bureau of Economics website—you will see that the profession is as vibrant as ever. Yet the John Cochrane and Casey Mulligan types willing to stand up for economic logic and speak out in public are few and far between. Undoubtedly this is because support for the idea that incentives matter has become associated with the GOP. (After all, only their economists dare to defend the profession.)

Cancel culture is standing by to silence the impudent economist who points out the obvious.

Espousing nonsense is professional suicide because the silent majority in the economics profession are too smart to fall for all of this. Note to a de-economist: your efforts may appear in the *New York Times,* but sooner or later a tenure or promotions committee will notice what a fool you are. ■

The Losses of Lockdown

New Hoover fellow Tyler Goodspeed, a former White House economic adviser, on the Trump economy before COVID—and why it proved a boon for the American taxpayer, worker, and investor.

By Peter Robinson

***Peter Robinson,* Uncommon Knowledge:** What did the Trump administration truly accomplish? And what does the Biden administration think it's doing? Tyler Goodspeed served on the Trump administration's Council of Economic Advisers, and during the final year of the administration, he served as acting chairman.

Here's the first question. As I understand it, you joined the Trump administration by giving our friend Kevin Hassett, then the director of the Council of Economic Advisers, a cold call and saying, "Hire me." Let's spend a moment or two talking about the Trump economy. Before the pandemic, there were three fat years in there. Sustained growth of more than 2 percent; as I recall, in one quarter the growth rate exceeded 3 percent. That was very healthy. This is from an interview you gave to *National Review:* "During the first three years of the Trump administration, real wage growth for the bottom 10 percent was

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more than double real wage growth for the top 10 percent. Since the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, real wealth for the bottom 50 percent rose 28.4 percent, while that of the top 1 percent rose 8.9 percent. In one year, 2019 real median household income rose by more than in the entire sixteen years through 2016 combined." Those who are experiencing the most rapid increase in wealth and wages are those at the bottom. How did that happen?

Tyler Goodspeed: Well, I'm glad that you had those figures before you so that I didn't have to reach into my memory bank to take them out. And yes, it does put the complete lie to what I think is the standard narrative about the 2017 tax reform and the Trump economy generally. The reality is that not only were the gains largest at the lower end of the wage income and wealth distributions, but we actually saw that reflected in the inequality data, with inequality declining by pretty much any measure.

But then it's also important to note that there's a growing body of empirical literature that finds that the burden of corporate income taxation is disproportionately borne by labor, and particularly less-skilled labor, because they are the less-mobile factor of production and they pay it through lower investment in new plant. And so by lowering the effective tax rate on corporate income, both through the reduction in the statutory corporate tax rate and by introducing a full expensing for new equipment investments, we helped to raise the level of investment in the US economy and thereby increase that contribution of capital deepening to labor productivity growth.

Robinson: So we continue to live—those of us who live right here in Silicon Valley are acutely aware of this, but everybody's aware of it—in a country in which technology advances, computing power becomes cheaper all the time. And what you're saying is that the federal government had layered so many burdens on firms that even the natural growth of productivity that you'd expect to be aided by technological process, by the technological dynamism, was so suppressed that we were losing ground in productivity. The corporate tax rate was too high. Am I correct about this? That the federal government did an astonishing thing, screwing things up so badly that it forced America to lose ground in productivity in this technologically glorious moment?

Goodspeed: I think that is fair. One word that we've heard a lot of from 2009 through 2016 was *secular*. That all these trends—declining labor force participation, historically slow productivity growth—that was all secular. It had nothing to do with policy. There was nothing we could do about it.

COUNTING THE COSTS: Hoover fellow Tyler Goodspeed, looking back on the COVID-19 economic shock, notes that "perhaps the cost-benefit analysis would conclude yes, there are substantial costs; yes, it's painful; but the benefits of the treatment outweigh the cost. But that analysis never took place. And I think that ought to be cause for soul searching within the public health and epidemiology profession." [Patrick Beaudouin—Hoover Institution]

Robinson: This is the notion of "the new normal," that phrase.

Goodspeed: The new normal. And when we were looking at the empirical data, what we were seeing was that no, they were very certainly exacerbated by uncompetitive effective corporate income tax rates. They were adversely impacted by an elevated regulatory burden. They were adversely impacted by the fact that we had a tax code that certainly, at the very least, didn't help incentivize increased labor force participation.

One of the bigger things that we haven't talked about is what happened since on the personal income side of the US Tax Code. We've raised the standard deduction. That helps smooth some of those cliffs that are present in the Tax

Code for individuals who are going from out of employment into employment and face very high, effective personal income tax rates. That limits some of that federal income tax liability. The other thing we did was reduce certain tax expenditures, particularly regressive income tax expenditures like the deduction for state and local taxes and the mortgage interest deduction. And we plowed some of those budgetary savings into lowering marginal personal income tax rates.

GOING SIDEWAYS

Robinson: The pandemic strikes, everything goes sideways. What did it feel like to be working in the White House when you've got a president who's under assault? You've got an economy where, to me, perhaps the most striking figure of the whole period is that for African-Americans and Hispanics, unemployment fell to the lowest levels ever recorded. Americans in the hundreds of thousands and in the millions are leading better lives, are better able to provide for their families, are better able to pay for education. And then we lock it all down and it ends. What was that like?

Goodspeed: In a word, terrifying. Especially when the early projections, both internal and external, gave a clear indication of what was coming. In January, we had some folks from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development visit, and their modeling was saying that the US economy was heading toward a 12 percent contraction during the four quarters of 2020.

Robinson: Any precedent for that since the Great Depression?

Goodspeed: No. And the Congressional Budget Office projected the unemployment rate would spike to 16 percent and end the year still above 11 percent. Some private sector forecasters were projecting that the unemployment rate would hit 25 percent. I mean, this was just an adverse macroeconomic shock of unprecedented magnitude staring us in the face.

Robinson: That's the moment of the lockdown. Let me quote you again in *National Review,* "One aspect of the pandemic recession that I don't think gets sufficient attention is the extreme regressivity of lockdowns. Job losses have been concentrated among lower-wage, predominantly service industries." And then you wrote a piece in the *New York Post* with Peter Navarro, also of the Trump administration, "High unemployment boosts rates of depression, suicide, drug overdoses, comorbidities associated with illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. And Americans have been forgoing a wide range of

elective procedures as a result of lockdowns, from mammograms, Pap smears, and breast cancer surgeries to arthroplasties, colonoscopies, and bone marrow and lung biopsies." And the two of you never even touched on what we now know is a massive cost: shutting down schools. Why did that happen?

Goodspeed: There were, as you suggested, just enormous side effects. Also the destruction of human capital: there was an enormous amount of on-the-job training and human-capital acquisition on the job that didn't take place in 2020 because of the shutdowns. An enormous amount of human-capital formation didn't take place because schools were either closed or in remote-learning mode. There was a flow of investment that didn't take place. Firms weren't investing in plant and equipment in 2020 because of the economy of shutdown. Therefore, there is not the flow of future services from that installed capital stock, even if investment now bounces back to where it was pre-pandemic. And perhaps the cost-benefit analysis would conclude yes, there are substantial costs; yes, it's painful; but the benefits of the treatment outweigh the cost. But that analysis never took place. And I think that ought to be cause for soul searching within the public health and epidemiology profession, certainly.

"This was just an adverse macroeconomic shock of unprecedented magnitude staring us in the face."

STIMULUS MISDIRECTED

Robinson: The centerpiece of the American Rescue Plan was direct payments of up to $1,400 for hundreds of millions of Americans. Something like two-thirds of the population. Tyler, would you have voted for it?

Goodspeed: I would not have voted for it. And actually, it might be instructive to take a step back and think about the contours of the CARES Act and the context within which some of the provisions in the CARES Act that were applicable in March 2020 are no longer applicable in spring 2021.

When we were looking at what was coming, we realized that unlike in 2008, we thought capital and labor were for the most part efficiently allocated. And so we wanted to try to preserve those matches between employers and employees, to preserve the organizational capital that's embedded in small businesses. And also, given the massive shutdown of the US economy, we wanted to make sure that consumer spending, which is two-thirds of the US

economy, didn't fall off the cliff—where it would infect credit markets as students default on their student loans, renters default on their rent, and homeowners default on their mortgages. Our priority was on near-term income replacement. That's usually best done through the unemployment insurance system because it's targeted at those using employment.

But the unemployment insurance system is creaky, a lot of old state-level IT systems. So a lot of folks said, "Well, in addition to that, we should probably do one-off stimulus checks." I don't use the word "stimulus" because I don't think it's appropriate to be trying to stimulate an entity that's in a medically induced coma. But "economic impact payments."

All of these were term-limited. The enhanced unemployment insurance benefits were to expire in the summer. The pandemic was still raging then, so there was another term-limited extension with economic impact payments, but those were much smaller. And then the current administration has just reversed direction: go in bigger. But what made sense in the context of March and April 2020, I don't think makes sense in the context of spring and summer 2021. And I think the current administration is taking a great deal of comfort that in recent years the rate of growth in the economy has exceeded the real rate of return on their debt. So they think it's sustainable, but history has some contrarian things to say on that front, shall we say.

IS WISDOM LOSING GROUND?

Robinson: Back during the Reagan administration I was just a lowly speechwriter, but it felt as though we were getting someplace. With Milton Friedman and George Stigler and Gary Becker, the discipline of economics was learning permanent lessons. And as late as the Clinton administration, the profession was such that politicians believed that they had to comport with these lessons. Bill Clinton himself said the era of big government is over. Now suddenly it seems as though Milton Friedman had never been born and John Maynard Keynes had never died. So here is my question to someone who, as young as you are, you've dedicated your life to the field, to the discipline. You've published three books, you've established yourself. But as an intellectual matter, what do you see for yourself? Are you simply now engaged in a professional fight to recapture lost ground? How can we have come to this pass and what is the discipline to do about it?

Goodspeed: It's a question that I have found myself thinking more and more about, and I'm reminded of the quote that the reason academic politics are so nasty is because the stakes are so small. But I increasingly think that

this is wrong: perhaps the stakes are very high. The stakes seem quite large because we are educating those who go off to be leaders in business, leaders in law, leaders in politics and public policy. And so when I think about how to regain momentum, there are the more traditional tools for which it's important to still be making the case. There's still room to go on tax reform. You think about perhaps making the full expensing of equipment investment permanent, and extending that to structures and intellectual-property investment. And there's always room to go on the deregulatory front, the benefits of which disproportionately accrue to lower-income households. But increasingly I feel that those traditional policy issues just don't resonate.

"We wanted to make sure that consumer spending, which is two-thirds of the US economy, didn't fall off the cliff."

I'm thinking more about how one makes a positive policy—formulate a positive agenda in the education sphere and the housing sphere, because in both areas I think the budgetary requirements aren't massive but the potential impact on so-called total-factor productivity growth is massive. There's research that shows that if the states of California and New York had only median levels of zoning restrictions, US productivity growth would be in double digits, because there's something about people being able to move from where unemployment is relatively high and productivity growth relatively low to where unemployment is relatively low and productivity is relatively high.

There ain't no such thing as a free lunch, but that is a pretty cheap lunch. And so I keep thinking about how we can continue to improve our human capital while also enhancing the factors of production. Ideally in less wonky terms.

Robinson: Tyler Goodspeed, our new colleague here at the Hoover Institution, thank you.

Counting Climate Costs

Climate change is always and everywhere **an economic question.**

By John H. Cochrane

Climate policy is ultimately an *economic* question. How much does climate change hurt? How much do various policy ideas actually help, and what do they cost? You don't have to argue with a single line of the IPCC scientific reports to disagree with climate policy that doesn't make economic sense.

Climate policy is usually framed in terms of economic costs and benefits. We should spend some money now, or accept reduced incomes by holding back on carbon emissions, in order to mitigate climate change and provide a better future economy. But the best guesses of the economic impact of climate change are surprisingly small. The United Nations' IPCC finds that a (large) temperature rise of 3.66 degrees Celsius by 2100 means a loss of 2.6 percent of global GDP. Even extreme assumptions about climate and lack of mitigation or adaptation strain to find a cost greater than 5 percent of GDP by the year 2100.

Now, 5 percent of GDP is a lot of money—$1 trillion of our $20 trillion GDP today. But 5 percent of GDP in eighty years is couch change in the annals

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of economics. Even our sclerotic post-2000 real GDP grows at a 2 percent annual rate. At that rate, in 2100, the United States will have real GDP 400 percent greater than now, as even the IPCC readily admits. At 3 percent compound growth, the United States will produce, and people will earn, 1,000 percent more GDP than now. Yes, that can happen. From 1940 to 2000, US GDP grew from $1,331 billion to $13,138 billion in 2012 dollars, a factor of ten in just sixty years, and a 3.8 percent compound annual growth rate.

Five percent of GDP is only two to three years of lost growth. Climate change means that in 2100, absent climate policy or much adaptation, we will live at what 2097 levels would be if climate change were to magically disappear. We will be only 380 percent better off. Or maybe only 950 percent better off.

Northern Europe has per capita GDP about 40 percent lower than that of the United States, eight times or more the potential damage of climate change. Europe is a nice place to live. Many Europeans argue that their more extensive welfare states and greater economic regulation are worth the cost. But it is a cost, which makes climate change look rather less apocalyptic.

Imagine yourself in 1921, asked to estimate the impact of carbon emissions on GDP in the year 2000. You'd have been drastically wrong.

India's $2,000 per-capita GDP is one-thirtieth of the United States' $60,000. The cost of climate change to India is trivial compared with the benefits India could obtain by adopting economic institutions more like those of the United States—which themselves are far from perfect.

Growth is not an inexorable force. Each step of growth is hard won and fragile. Growth could be 3 percent or more. Growth could be zero percent or less. We have seen countries move backwards for decades. Growth risk is an order of magnitude larger than climate risk.

A TOWER OF UNCERTAINTIES

If the question is "what steps can we take, perhaps costly today, to improve GDP in the year 2100?" hurried decarbonization is not the answer. If the question is "what steps can we take to improve the well-being of the world's poor?" climate policy is not the answer, with many zeros before you get to the decimal point. Sturdy pro-growth policies, however unpopular to so many in today's political class and incumbent businesses and labor organizations, are the answer.

UNFRIENDLY SKIES: Waves erode the shore in Dania Beach, Florida, in 2017. Estimates of the economic cost of climate change rely largely on the statistical association between weather and productivity in today's economy. But all statistical associations offer questions, and even the worst heat waves, floods, and storms do not move national GDP. [Daniel Di Palma—Creative Commons]

Even 2–5 percent of GDP in economic cost estimates is wildly uncertain—more uncertain even than the meteorological parts of climate models. Imagine yourself in 1921, asked to estimate the impact of carbon emissions on GDP in the year 2000. Well, you would have taken out your slide rule, and looked at how much gas a Ford Model T consumes, how many people will want to travel on coal-fired steam railways, and so on. You would have looked at the statistical association between heat and output. The estimates might have looked pretty bad in an economy dependent on low-tech agriculture and without air conditioning.

And you would have been drastically wrong. Our economy looks nothing like anyone could have guessed in 1921. Your guess of how much our economy would be hurt by (or benefited from?) twentieth-century carbon emissions would have been less likely to be even vaguely correct.

Most of all, you would have missed the main story: the twentieth century produced the greatest gain in human well-being of all time, by orders of magnitude, despite warming, and despite its upheavals. You would have had no clue of the move to a service economy, far less dependent on weather, or adaptations including air conditioning, transport, high-tech agriculture, and how much cleaner and healthier the 2000 economy would be. If you had ordered a return to horses and buggies, you would have doomed billions to short lives of squalid poverty.

That is the unenviable task of today's economists who measure the effects of climate change on the economy eighty or more years from now.

Looking under the hood of big models, it is not even obvious that climate change hurts the economy at all. People and companies are moving in droves from the cold Rust Belt and cool, coastal California to Texas, even though Texas is a lot hotter than anything climate change will bring to the former.

In technical terms, estimates of the economic cost of climate change rely in large part on the statistical association between weather and productivity in today's economy. But all statistical associations offer questions. Yes, on average hotter countries are not as productive as colder ones. But sometimes they are productive—Singapore, for example. So you have to somehow take out the immense effects of government, culture, past investments, and so on. Then you have somehow to deal with the fact that the economy one hundred years from now will be nothing like today's. People will invent new technologies that will help them to adapt. Yes, recent heat waves in Oregon have been damaging. But similar heat in Texas is taken in stride. How many people will buy air conditioners in Oregon in the next eighty years?

The central uncomfortable fact is that the output of an advanced industrial economy like the United States, moving headlong into services, is just not that sensitive to climate or weather. The worst heat waves, floods, and storms just do not move national GDP.

GDP AND BEYOND

GDP is not everything, of course. GDP measures income, how much people earn and how much they produce. It leaves out a lot: the tremendous value of free or nearly free goods, the value of clean air and water, good health, long life, a free and egalitarian society, and so forth. But all these things are better when GDP is better, and far worse where GDP is worse. Only a productive people can afford them. The United States today is immeasurably

better off than in 1940, or 1840, on all these measures too. Our air and water are cleaner than just about everywhere else in the world. Our welfare state is much more generous than those of poor countries or what it was in 1940. GDP is imperfect, but if anything it understates the benefits of economic progress.

What about floods and droughts, wildfires, heat waves, all the events you see on the news along with another scolding about climate change? Whether carbon emissions are leading to more weather extremes is actually scientifically contentious. Fortunately, once again, we do not need to get into this debate. Even if these claims are correct, they do not justify draconian climate policy.

I live among wildfires in California, which are very unpleasant. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the increase in wildfires is entirely due to carbon-caused climate change. But even if the United States adopts all the recommendations of the IPCC, or the Green New Deal itself, we will contain only the *further* rise of temperature. The pre-industrial climate will still not return in our great-great-great-grandchildren's lifetime.

Even if rising greenhouse-gas emissions are the ultimate cause of more frequent and severe wildfires, the only path to actually doing something about wildfires is to spend money on fire prevention and forest management—clearing out the accumulated brush. (Reforming zoning and planning laws so it's easier to build in cities will help, too.) It will cost money, perhaps a lot of money compared with historical budgets, but a tiny amount of money compared with GDP or government stimulus programs, or, say, high-speed trains. Cal Fire's budget is $2.9 billion, 1 percent of the state of California's budget, and 0.1 percent of California's GDP. The supposedly carbon-saving high-speed train is budgeted at $80 billion.

The twentieth century produced the greatest gain in human well-being of all time—by orders of magnitude, despite warming, and despite upheavals.

This example illustrates a larger point. If the question is how to blunt the economic impact of climate change, adaptation has to be a major part of the answer. There seems to be a great disdain for adaptation, clearing the brush, building dikes and dams, moving to higher land, installing air conditioners, moving or engineering crops, and so forth. Spread over a hundred years, the costs of adaptation are not large. Perhaps climate-policy advocates dismiss talk of adaptation because, by reducing the damage that might

be caused by greenhouse-gas emissions, it makes emissions less scary. Climate models are also short on adaptation and innovation, perhaps for the same reason.

Miami might be six feet underwater in 2100, but Amsterdam has been six feet underwater for centuries. They built dikes. By hand. Amsterdam is a very nice place, not a poster for dystopian end of civilization. Buildings decay and need to be rebuilt every fifty years or so. Just start building in drier places. At a minimum, the US government could stop subsidizing construction and reconstruction in flood and fire zones!

COST-BENEFIT SOBRIETY

What of "tipping points," stories of unforeseen disasters that the IPCC charitably labels "low-probability low-confidence"? Isn't it worth taking out insurance? The trouble is that if anvils might fall from the sky, pianos might fall from the sky, too. If this is not just an excuse to spend money on carbon, but instead an open-minded effort to identify all out-of-the-box dangers, we end up spending all of GDP on insurance. Insurance arguments must include some attention to the probability of events and the cost of those events.

Given how small and uncertain the economic costs are, climate-policy advocates really ought to give up the economic argument. Admit that economic losses are just not the issue. Make the standard environmental case, as they successfully did for clean water and clean air: This will cost money. It will reduce GDP, now and in the future. But argue that it is a cost we must bear to save the environment.

Yet that argument too needs to be much clearer and better quantified. The media and too much of the scientific literature, such as IPCC reports, offer only hypotheticals and scare stories. For a small donation, pictures of cuddly animals might do. For trillion-dollar costs and regulations, they do not. To justify such costs, we need some dollar value on specific environmental damage of climate change. Yes, the numbers are uncertain. But those numbers are the only sensible framework to discuss spending trillions of dollars on climate now.

Without numbers, we will follow fashion. Today it's windmills, solar panels, and electric cars. Yesterday it was corn ethanol and switchgrass.

Naming costs and benefits is particularly useful to analyze whether some of those trillions are not better spent on other *environmental* issues. For example, species extinction is a real problem. We are in the middle of a mass

extinction. But the elephants will die from lack of land and poaching long before they get too hot or dry. For a trillion dollars, how much land could we buy and turn over to complete wilderness? How many more species would we save that way, rather than spending similar amounts of money on high-speed trains and hurrying the adoption of electric cars? The oceans are in trouble. For a trillion dollars, how much overfishing, chemical pollution, plastic garbage, or noise could we fix? Economics is about choice, and about budget constraints.

As much as media bleat that climate change is a current emergency with "disparate impact," the world's poor face much worse environmental problems: smoky air, chemicals, fetid water, easily preventable diseases. For a trillion dollars a year, we could radically improve their human environment.

WISER STEPS

Still, climate change is real and undesirable. What should we do about it?

Economics offers a few guidelines. The first is explicit cost–benefit analysis. For every step one wishes to take, figure out how much it costs, and how much it will reduce carbon.

Even though we don't really know the economic or environmental cost of carbon, cost-benefit analysis is vital so that we do whatever we do efficiently. Avoid doing incredibly expensive things that save little carbon, and don't ignore unfashionable things that might save a lot of carbon at lesser cost.

Without numbers, we will follow fashion. Today it's windmills, solar panels, and electric cars. Yesterday it was high-speed trains. The day before it was corn ethanol and switchgrass. Actually addressing climate change in a sensible and effective way is likely to involve unfashionable technologies, and new technologies without political backers. A focus on cost-benefit, carbon per dollar, is vital to allow different technologies to compete, and new technologies to emerge. The alternative—and current predilection—is for different technologies to compete for political favor, a mechanism we all know well, along with its disastrous results, especially regarding innovation and cost reduction.

We can't spend all our money on insurance. Insurance arguments must include some attention to events' probability and cost.

Nuclear energy is very safe and emits no carbon. Many climate-policy institutions cut their teeth on the anti-nuclear movement of the 1980s, so the

carbon advantages of nuclear are a bitter pill for them to swallow. Carbon capture and storage removes carbon from the atmosphere. Since it would allow us to burn fossil fuels for a few decades while ramping up alternative technologies, it is disparaged by climate activists. If warming and the climate change it induces really have apocalyptic effects, then geoengineering to reduce temperatures ought to be at least considered. Are these technologies part of the solution? I don't know. Only dollars per ton of carbon, or dollars per degree of future temperature, can tell us.

Innovation really is the only solution to this problem. Just as innovation is what made us so much better off than our great-grandparents.

From an economic perspective, the ideal policy combines a carbon tax, whose revenues reduce other marginal tax rates, with strong support for basic R&D.

A carbon tax is a win-win. Many climate advocates disparage the carbon tax, on the view that people will not reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions when the price goes up. If so, great! A bankrupt government can raise a lot of money, and reduce other heavily damaging taxes. If people drastically reduce carbon emissions to avoid a small tax, the government doesn't earn much money. Great! We save the planet at low cost.

A visible price incentivizes behavior that regulation cannot touch. Maybe rather than buying a Tesla, you should move closer to work—or carpool. Maybe cutting out one international trip does more than buying the Tesla. Maybe zoning and permitting reform will allow building houses so people don't commute in the first place. Is it easier to decarbonize transport, home heating, cement, steel, or agriculture? Only by setting a price can we know the answers, and incent the millions of little daily decisions that go into reducing carbon emissions efficiently.

A carbon tax bakes in cost–benefit analysis, and otherwise incalculable carbon-reduction pledges. Just buy the cheapest option and you're doing your bit.

But the main point of a carbon tax will be to make new technologies cost-effective and get them going, and going more cheaply in the brutally competitive private market, not the cost-plus market of political subsidies.

Thus, if the question is how to reduce carbon as much as possible while damaging the economy as little as possible, an evenly applied carbon

tax—even to the coal emissions used to create solar panels and car batteries—is the answer, in place of regulation and subsidies.

THE REAL CRISIS: DECEPTIVE POLITICS

Like many economists, I used to start and stop at a carbon tax, for just these reasons and in return for getting rid of all the extensive and ineffective energy regulations and subsidies. But two recent developments have tempered my enthusiasm.

First, across all the various scenarios considered by the IPCC, total warming is robustly related to total carbon. Alternative scenarios, including carbon taxes, simply delay warming and its consequences. Even with alternatives, the coal and oil get burned eventually and the climate warms.

Second, carbon taxes are right now a political nonstarter. You can see this most clearly in the hilarious plea from the White House for OPEC to increase production in order to keep gas prices down. This from the same administration that canceled the Keystone pipeline, "suspended" the issue of new oil and gas leases on federal lands, and is spearheading a "whole of government" move to rapid elimination of fossil fuels before alternatives are in place, all of which must raise the price of gas. What's going on? Well, clearly, governments find they must take underhanded, obscure regulatory steps to drive up the price of gas, with plausible deniability, rather than enact simple, transparent, much more effective and much less costly carbon taxes, which voters will notice.

Doing something about the climate will demand decades of consistent policy—not cramming regulations down the throats of a disdained, distracted electorate.

But our current climate policies are not an answer either. Notice how our policy makers never tell us how much they think each new policy will reduce year 2100 global temperature or raise year 2100 GDP. The reason is that the numbers are tiny. If the question is how to funnel billions of pork to constituencies by painting it green, however, these policies are a natural answer.

The bottom line: a policy focused entirely on making what we do now more expensive, either by regulation or by taxation, will not work. Massive subsidies for alternatives will not work. Innovation, aimed at lowering the cost of noncarbon-energy production, really is the only solution that is going to work. Just as innovation is what made us so much better off than our great-grandparents.

Carbon policy is full of economic fallacies. Mother Earth does not care if solar panels are made in the United States or China. She just wants them to be cheap. "Millions of green jobs" are a cost, not a benefit. Our businesses cannot find enough workers already, and taking millions of people away from other activities hurts the economy. Financial regulators are now taking on climate change, justifying this dramatic expansion beyond their legal authority by endlessly repeating a fantasy that "climate risk" imperils the financial system in the near future.

Climate advocates have done themselves and the planet a great disservice by wrapping climate policy in increasingly shrill, apocalyptic, partisan, and unscientific rhetoric. "Global warming" became "climate change," reflecting in part effects on rainfall or different geographies, but also inviting media commentary on every weather event to become a sermon. In the Green New Deal and comparable movements, it became "climate justice," wrapping climate inexorably in a far-left-wing politics of anti-capitalism. The required vocabulary moved on to "climate crisis." Still not enough: in April the (formerly) *Scientific American* proclaimed that in coordination "with major news outlets worldwide," it would start using the term "climate emergency." Will "climate catastrophe" be next?

A carbon tax bakes in cost-benefit analysis. Just buy the cheapest option and you're doing your bit.

There is nothing in climate science to justify apocalyptic rhetoric. If the question is "what threatens the collapse of civilization?" then war, nuclear war, civil war, pandemic, crop pandemic, and social and political disintegration are far higher on the list. No healthy society fell apart over a slow and predictable change that came over a hundred years. There is nothing in climate science to say life on Earth is threatened. Climate has varied far more in the past. The retreat of ice ten thousand years ago came from a much larger and more natural warming, and was a boon to humans, producing agriculture and civilization.

There is nothing in the science that justifies uniting "climate" with a left-wing political agenda. Yet even the IPCC mixes climate change with "sustainable development, poverty eradication, and reducing inequalities." Mixing anti-capitalist politics with climate change makes those skeptical of the rest of the agenda wonder about the objectivity of climate science, and whether the planet really is in such danger.

People are smart, and when they suspect facts are bent to a political cause, they stop listening. Actually doing something about the climate will require

decades of consistent policy. That will not happen by today's elites crying wolf and cramming regulations down the throats of a disdained and temporarily distracted electorate.

Too many people, rightly critical of climate policies, attack the science. Though that science is full of uncertainties, the policies that follow from the science are much less certain. Two degrees of warming does not call for the Green New Deal. Economics is the key element in designing a workable climate policy.

A Simple Fix

High-priced employer-provided health plans inflate costs and divert a vast amount of potential tax revenue. We should tax them.

By Daniel P. Kessler

Prices for health services in the United States are high relative to the rest of the world. For example, a simple MRI scan that costs $1,430 in the United States costs around $450 in the United Kingdom, $750 in New Zealand, and $310 in Switzerland. High US prices have been the primary cause of high health insurance premiums in the United States for several years. Ultimately, the burden of high prices and premiums is borne by American workers in the form of high employee contributions, lower wages, and less generous benefits.

A simple change to federal tax policy can bring down high health care prices, while increasing government revenues and reducing inequality: make insurance coverage of high-priced health care providers a taxable employee benefit.

To see this requires a bit of history. In 1954, the IRS made employer-sponsored health insurance deductible

Key points

» Making employer-sponsored health care taxable would restore competition among providers. Consumers would pay less for coverage.

» The health care tax exemption costs the treasury $215 billion a year.

» The current tax exemption is also highly regressive, favoring high-priced providers and high-income workers.

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to the employer, but non-taxable to the employee. Research by myself and others shows that one effect of the tax exemption has been to dampen employers' and employees' sensitivity to increases in health insurance premiums. This makes sense: employers' and employees' response to an increase in premiums that is tax-exempt will be less than the response to an increase that must be paid with (more valuable) taxable dollars.

Insensitivity to health insurance premiums, however, creates a big problem: it weakens the ability of competition among providers to keep prices low. This too makes sense. Why should doctors or hospitals compete vigorously when they know that their high prices can be passed on by insurers without much pushback?

Problems with the tax exemption don't stop there. The tax exemption is the largest single "tax expenditure"—revenue loss attributable to a special exclusion, exemption, or deduction from gross income. According to the US Treasury's Office of Tax Analysis, in 2020 the health benefits exemption cost the federal treasury $215 billion. By comparison, all retirement savings exemptions (including those for individual retirement accounts) cost $210 billion, lower rates on capital gains cost $99 billion, and the deductibility of home mortgage interest cost $30 billion.

Workers bear the burden of high prices and premiums through high employee contributions, lower wages, and less generous benefits.

Finally, the tax exemption is regressive: high-income taxpayers benefit more from it than low-income taxpayers. High-income taxpayers face higher marginal tax rates than low-income taxpayers, so the value of a $1 exemption increases with income. In addition, high-income taxpayers tend to spend more on health insurance than low-income taxpayers, so the exemption benefits high-income taxpayers more independent of their tax rate.

Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama both tried to cap the unlimited tax exemption. Bush proposed replacing it with a fixed amount available to anyone with employer-sponsored health benefits; Obama, as part of the Affordable Care Act, sought to impose an excise tax on high-premium health insurance plans that would effectively undo the exemption for those plans. Neither succeeded. Bush's proposal never passed; Obama's proposal was adopted into law, but later repealed with bipartisan agreement.

The best solution, of course, would be to abolish the tax exemption entirely, putting health insurance spending on a par with all other goods. However,

as the experiences of Presidents Bush and Obama showed, abolishing the tax exemption is highly politically unpopular—given that it would raise taxes on a vast swath of the middle class, especially those with generous benefit packages.

A compromise position would abolish the tax exemption only for spending on high-priced providers, perhaps those priced at more than a specified multiple of Medicare rates. Employers who wished to preserve access to high-priced providers could still do so, but they would have to pay for it with premium dollars that would be taxable to their employees. Spending on high-priced providers would become a taxable benefit.

This solution has several merits. It directly targets high prices due to tax-policy-induced failures of competition. It is flexible: Congress could set the cutoff at a very high level (affecting relatively few providers) and gradually phase it down. It avoids the dangers of direct government price regulation. Some proposals would make it illegal to charge health plans more than a specified multiple of Medicare; although this might seem satisfying at first, it runs the risk of inadvertently banning a product or service that people value.

Other proposals (like those of Presidents Bush and Obama) increased taxes on plans with high insurance premiums, which pulled in plans not only with high prices per unit of service but also plans with high volumes of services. Although plans that deliver high volumes of services can also be cost-ineffective, the evidence that consumers are getting poor value from services with high unit prices is stronger than the evidence that consumers are getting poor value from services with high volumes.

Why should doctors or hospitals compete when they know their high prices can be passed on by insurers without much pushback?

Finally, abolishing the exemption for high-priced providers is implementable. Health plans could keep track of the share of payments to high-priced providers on a plan-level basis, and then report it to individuals, employers, and the IRS on the existing Form 1095.

As with most changes in tax policy, there will be losers and winners. Losers will be the high-priced providers, such as academic medical centers, which will need to deliver a clearer value proposition to justify their rates. High-income people, union members, and others with plans that do not differentiate between providers on the basis of price will also see effective premium increases. The winners will be the rest of us, who will enjoy the fruits of

enhanced competition in markets for health services, some extra tax revenue, and a modest increase in the progressiveness of the tax system.

If this sounds too good to be true, it isn't. The tax exemption is a historical accident that no one ever intended to become so large and destructive. Who knows? It might even have grown into a big enough problem to attract a bipartisan coalition for its reform.

Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise: Five Steps to a Better Health Care System,*** *second edition, by John F. Cogan, R. Glenn Hubbard, and Daniel P. Kessler. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

A Golden Age of Federalism

Amid turbulent times and partisan rancor, state governments—our "laboratories of democracy"—are busier than ever.

By Clint Bolick

Lately it seems our nation is neither one nor indivisible. The divide between red and blue America is palpable, extreme, and so rancorous it sometimes spills into violence. Bipartisanship is largely defunct and our nation's legislative branch essentially frozen. Yet one ray of sunshine brightens the horizon: we are living in the golden age of federalism.

Our system of dual sovereignty was at once a genius inspiration of our Constitution's framers and a necessary expedient for its enactment. The idea, enshrined in the Tenth Amendment, is that certain limited powers were delegated to the national government, with the remaining valid powers retained by the states. Alexander Hamilton argued in *Federalist* No. 51 that reserving certain powers in the states would provide a "double security," in addition to separation of powers, to constrain abuses of national power.

Despite the relentless flow of power to our nation's capital, states continue to dominate wide swaths of governance, from education to criminal law,

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personal injury, domestic relations, and most important, the police power (the power to regulate for public health and safety). In domains that have not been taken over by the national government, states are free to call their own shots—to be, in the words of Justice Louis Brandeis, "laboratories of democracy"—so long as they do not violate the Constitution.

HONORING OTHER VOICES

For most of America's history, federalism was a partisan issue: whichever party dominated Washington squelched federalism. One decision from the New Deal Supreme Court dismissed the Tenth Amendment as a "truism," aspirationally majestic but devoid of content.

But today, both parties embrace federalism. Even when one party or the other seeks to increase the national government's power, it simultaneously moves the policy ball forward in states it controls.

In this regard, federalism serves a vitally important function: as a release valve for pent-up dissent. Did liberals disdain former president Trump's immigration policies? How about creating welcoming "sanctuary cities"? Conservatives who fear President Biden's gun-control policies have appropriated the idea, creating sanctuary cities for gun rights.

Are these divergent policies meaningful, or even constitutional? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. But they reflect our doctrinal preference for decentralized authority. "Federalism secures the freedom of the individual," the Supreme Court declared in a unanimous 2011 opinion. "It allows states to respond, through the enactment of positive law, to the initiative of those who seek a voice in shaping the destiny of their own times without having to rely solely upon the political processes that control a remote central power."

We have never experienced so much federalism. We are emerging from COVID-19 federalism, in which some states exercised tight control, while others reopened more quickly. We have abortion federalism, in which some states permit abortion until nearly birth while others proscribe it after a fetal heartbeat. We have capital punishment federalism, educational federalism, right-to-work federalism. The list is endless.

We also have what I call civil disobedience federalism, where states pursue their own path contrary to federal law. For instance, marijuana is legalized in some states, illegal in others. So far, the federal government under both parties has tolerated the divergence and may even legalize it.

That example illustrates another attribute of federalism: where the national government is deadlocked, we can test-drive different approaches in the states. My favorite example is a policy my former colleagues at the

Goldwater Institute and I devised called "right to try." For decades, advocates in Washington toiled without success to speed up the approval process at the Food and Drug Administration for potentially lifesaving drugs. Our audacious idea was to establish in state law the right for terminally ill patients to try experimental drugs.

We expected the FDA to challenge the law to protect its regulatory hegemony. Instead, as the idea swept dozens of states, both red and blue, the FDA began streamlining its processes. Eventually the law was passed with bipartisan majorities in Congress—just in time to aid the rapid approval of COVID-19 vaccines.

WORKING IT OUT

Free-rein federalism is properly checked by constitutional constraints. But both sides of the ideological divide should applaud the willingness—and the ability—of states to pass laws that reflect their citizens' values and aspirations. That means resisting efforts to nationalize decision making on matters traditionally entrusted to the states. Indeed, where such efforts go too far, they also may transgress constitutional boundaries.

We need the release valve. Certainly, the red-blue divide exists not just among but within states. But it is much easier to affect, and change, politics at the state level than the national level. If you don't like what your state does, you can always find more hospitable climes.

We all have a direct stake in protecting federalism, even if we don't always like what it produces. The one-size-fits-all alternative will often look far less appealing. ◘

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Daring to Undeceive

The end of the British empire represents only too telling a parallel for post-Afghanistan America.

By Niall Ferguson

"The multitudes remained plunged in ignorance . . . and their leaders, seeking their votes, did not dare to undeceive them." So wrote Winston Churchill of the victors of the First World War in *The Gathering Storm*. He bitterly recalled a "refusal to face unpleasant facts, desire for popularity and electoral success irrespective of the vital interests of the state." American readers who watched their government's ignominious departure from Afghanistan, and listened to President Joe Biden's strained effort to justify the unholy mess he had made, may find at least some of Churchill's critique of interwar Britain uncomfortably familiar.

Britain's state of mind was the product of a combination of national exhaustion and "imperial overstretch," to borrow a phrase from Paul Kennedy, a historian at Yale. Since 1914, the nation had endured war, financial crisis, and in 1918–19 a terrible pandemic, the Spanish influenza. The economic landscape was overshadowed by a mountain of debt. Though the country

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remained the issuer of the dominant global currency, it was no longer unrivaled in that role. A highly unequal society inspired politicians on the left to demand redistribution if not outright socialism. A significant proportion of the intelligentsia went further, embracing communism or fascism.

Meanwhile, the established political class preferred to ignore a deteriorating international situation. Britain's global dominance was menaced in Europe, in Asia, and in the Middle East. The system of collective security—based on the League of Nations, which had been established in 1920 as part of the postwar peace settlement—was crumbling, leaving only the possibility of alliances to supplement thinly spread imperial resources. The result was a disastrous failure to acknowledge the scale of the totalitarian threat and to amass the means to deter the dictators.

Britain's experience between the 1930s and the 1950s is a reminder that there are worse fates than gentle, gradual decline.

Does Britain's experience help us understand the future of American power? Americans prefer to draw lessons from the United States' history, but it may be more illuminating to compare the country to its predecessor as an Anglophone global hegemon, for America today in many ways resembles Britain in the interwar period.

DIFFERENT DEBTS

Like all such historical analogies, this one is not perfect. The vast amalgam of colonies and other dependencies that Britain ruled over in the 1930s has no real American counterpart today. This allows Americans to reassure themselves that they do not have an empire, even when withdrawing their soldiers and civilians from Afghanistan after a twenty-year presence.

Despite its high COVID-19 mortality, America is not recovering from the kind of trauma that Britain experienced in the First World War, when huge numbers of young men were slaughtered (nearly 900,000 died, some 6 percent of males aged fifteen to forty-nine died, to say nothing of 1.7 million wounded). Nor is America facing as clear and present a threat as Nazi Germany posed to Britain. Still, the resemblances are striking, and go beyond the failure of both countries to impose order on Afghanistan. ("It is clear," noted the *Economist* in February 1930, after "premature" modernizing reforms had triggered a revolt, "that Afghanistan will have none of the West.") And the implications for the future of American power are unnerving.

So many books and articles predicting American decline have been written in recent decades that "declinism" has become a cliché. But Britain's experience between the 1930s and the 1950s is a reminder that there are worse fates than gentle, gradual decline.

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

Start with the mountains of debt. Britain's public debt after the First World War rose from 109 percent of GDP in 1918 to just under 200 percent in 1934. America's federal debt is different in important ways, but it is comparable in magnitude. It is due to reach nearly 110 percent of GDP, even higher than its previous peak in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that it could exceed 200 percent by 2051.

An important difference between the United States today and the United Kingdom roughly a century ago is that the average maturity of American federal debt is quite short (sixty-five months), whereas more than 40 percent of the British public debt took the form of perpetual bonds or annuities. This means that the American debt today is a great deal more sensitive to moves in interest rates than Britain's was.

Another key difference is the great shift there has been in fiscal and monetary theories, thanks in large measure to John Maynard Keynes's critique of Britain's interwar policies.

Britain's decision in 1925 to return sterling to the gold standard at the overvalued prewar price condemned Britain to eight years of deflation. The increased power of trade unions meant that wage cuts lagged behind price cuts during the Depression. This contributed to job losses. At the nadir in 1932, the unemployment rate was 15 percent. Yet Britain's depression was mild, not least because abandoning the gold standard in 1931 allowed the easing of monetary policy. Falling real interest rates meant a decline in the burden of debt service, creating new fiscal room for maneuver.

Such a reduction in debt-servicing costs seems unlikely for America in the coming years. Economists led by the former treasury secretary, Lawrence Summers, have predicted inflationary dangers from the current fiscal and monetary policies. Where British real interest rates generally declined in the 1930s, in America they are projected to turn positive from 2027 and rise steadily to hit 2.5 percent by midcentury. True, forecasts of rising rates have been wrong before, and the Federal Reserve is in no hurry to tighten monetary policy. But if rates do rise, America's debt will cost more to service, squeezing other parts of the federal budget, especially discretionary expenditures such as defense.

COSTS OF EMPIRE

That brings us to the crux of the matter. Churchill's great preoccupation in the 1930s was that the government was procrastinating—the underlying rationale

of its policy of appeasement—rather than energetically re-arming in response to the increasingly aggressive behavior of Hitler, Mussolini, and the militarist government of imperial Japan. A key argument of the appeasers was that fiscal and economic constraints—not least the high cost of running an empire that extended from Fiji to Gambia to Guiana to Vancouver—made more rapid rearmament impossible.

It may seem fanciful to suggest that America faces comparable threats today—not only from China, but also from Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Yet the mere fact that it seems fanciful illustrates the point. The majority of Americans, like the majority of Britons between the wars, simply do not want to contemplate the possibility of a major war against one or more authoritarian regimes, coming on top of the country's already extensive military commitments. That is why the projected decline of American defense spending as a share of GDP, from 3.4 percent in 2020 to 2.5 percent in 2031, will cause consternation only to Churchillian types. And they can expect the same hostile reception—the same accusations of warmongering—that Churchill had to endure.

A relative decline compared with other countries is another point of resemblance. According to estimates by the economic historian Angus Maddison, the British economy by the 1930s had been overtaken in terms of output by not only America's (as early as 1872), but also Germany's (in 1898 and again, after the disastrous years of war, hyperinflation, and slump, in 1935) and the Soviet Union's (in 1930). True, the British empire as a whole had a bigger economy than the United Kingdom, especially if the Dominions are included—perhaps twice as large. But the American economy was even larger and remained more than double the size of Britain's, despite the more severe impact of the Great Depression in the United States.

America today has a similar problem of relative decline in economic output. On the basis of purchasing-power parity, which allows for the lower prices of many Chinese domestic goods, the GDP of China caught up with that of America in 2014. On a current-dollar basis, the American economy is still bigger, but the gap is projected to narrow. China's current-dollar GDP is around 75 percent of America's. By 2026 it will be 89 percent.

It is no secret that China poses a bigger economic challenge than the Soviet Union once did, since the latter's economy was never more than 44 percent the size of America's during the Cold War. Nor is it classified information that China is seeking to catch up with America in many


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technological domains with national security applications, from artificial intelligence to quantum computing. And the ambitions of China's leader, Xi Jinping, are also well known—along with his renewal of the Chinese Communist Party's ideological hostility to individual freedom, the rule of law and democracy.

American sentiment towards the Chinese government has markedly soured in the past five years. But that does not seem to be translating into public interest in actively countering the Chinese military threat. If Beijing invades Taiwan, most Americans will probably echo the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, who notoriously described the German bid to carve up Czechoslovakia in 1938 as "a quarrel in a faraway country, between people of whom we know nothing."

PERCEPTIONS OF WEAKNESS

A crucial source of British weakness between the wars was the revolt of the intelligentsia against the empire and more generally against traditional British values. Churchill recalled with disgust the Oxford Union debate in 1933 that had carried the motion, "This House refuses to fight for King and country." As he noted: "It was easy to laugh off such an episode in England, but in Germany, in Russia, in Italy, in Japan, the idea of a decadent, degenerate Britain took deep root and swayed many calculations." This of course is precisely how China's new breed of "wolf warrior" diplomats and nationalist intellectuals regard America today.

Nazis, fascists, and communists alike had good reason to think the British were succumbing to self-hatred. "I did not even know that the British empire is dying," George Orwell wrote of his time as a colonial policeman in his essay "Shooting an Elephant." Not many intellectuals attained Orwell's insight that Britain's was nevertheless "a great deal better than the younger empires that [were] going to supplant it." Many—unlike Orwell—embraced Soviet communism, with disastrous results for Western intelligence. Meanwhile, a shocking number of members of the aristocratic social elite were attracted to Hitler. Even readers of the *Daily Express* were more inclined to make fun of the empire than to celebrate it.

"It is clear," the* Economist *noted in 1930, "that Afghanistan will have none of the West."

America's empire may not manifest itself as dominions, colonies, and protectorates, but the perception of international dominance, and the costs

associated with overstretch, are similar. Both left and right in America now routinely ridicule or revile the idea of an imperial project. "The American empire is falling apart," gloats Tom Engelhardt, a journalist in *The Nation*. On the right, the economist Tyler Cowen sardonically imagines "what the fall of the American empire could look like." At the same time as Cornel West, the progressive African-American philosopher, sees "Black Lives Matter and the fight against US empire [as] one and the same," two pro-Trump Republicans, Ryan James Girdusky and Harlan Hill, call the pandemic "the latest example of how the American empire has no clothes."

Most Americans, like the majority of Britons between the wars, simply do not want to contemplate the possibility of a major war.

The right still defends the traditional account of the republic's founding—as a rejection of British colonial rule—against the "woke" left's attempts to recast American history as primarily a tale of slavery and then segregation. But few on either side of the political spectrum pine for the era of global hegemony that began in the 1940s.

In short, like Britons in the 1930s, Americans in the 2020s have fallen out of love with empire—a fact Chinese observers have noticed and relish. Yet the empire remains. Granted, America has few true colonies: Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands in the north Pacific, and American Samoa in the south Pacific. By British standards, it is a paltry list of possessions. Nevertheless, the American military presence is almost as ubiquitous as Britain's once was. American armed-forces personnel are to be found in more than one hundred and fifty countries. The total number deployed beyond the borders of the fifty states is around two hundred thousand.

The acquisition of such extensive global responsibilities was not easy. But it is a delusion to believe that shedding them will be easier. This is the lesson of British history to which Americans need to pay more heed. President Joe Biden's ill-advised decision for a "final withdrawal" from Afghanistan was just the latest signal by an American president that the country wants to reduce its overseas commitments. Barack Obama began the process by exiting Iraq too hastily and announcing in 2013 that "America is not the world's policeman." Donald Trump's "America First" doctrine was just a populist version of the same impulse: he too itched to get out of Afghanistan and to substitute tariffs for counterinsurgency.

The problem, as last summer's debacle in Afghanistan perfectly illustrates, is that the retreat from global dominance is rarely a peaceful process. However you phrase it, announcing you are giving up on your longest war is an admission of defeat, and not only in the eyes of the Taliban. China, which shares a short stretch of its vast land border with Afghanistan, is also closely watching. So is Russia, with *zloradstvo*—Russian for *Schadenfreude*. It was no mere coincidence that Russia intervened militarily in both Ukraine and Syria just months after Obama's renunciation of global policing.

Biden's belief (expressed to Richard Holbrooke in 2010) that one could exit Afghanistan as Richard Nixon exited Vietnam and "get away with it" is bad history: America's humiliation in Indochina did have consequences. It emboldened the Soviet Union and its allies to make trouble elsewhere—in southern and eastern Africa, in Central America, and in Afghanistan, which it invaded in 1979. Re-enacting the fall of Saigon in Kabul will have comparable adverse effects.

If Beijing invades Taiwan, most Americans will probably echo Chamberlain: "a quarrel in a faraway country, between people of whom we know nothing."

The end of American empire was not difficult to foresee, even at the height of neoconservative hubris after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. There were at least four fundamental weaknesses of America's global position at that time, as I first argued in *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*. They are a manpower deficit (few Americans have any desire to spend long periods of time in places like Afghanistan and Iraq); a fiscal deficit (see above); an attention deficit (the electorate's tendency to lose interest in any large-scale intervention after roughly four years); and a history deficit (the reluctance of policy makers to learn lessons from their predecessors, much less from other countries).

These were never deficits of British imperialism. One other difference—in many ways more profound than the fiscal deficit—is the negative net international investment position (NIIP) of the United States, which is just under negative 70 percent of GDP. A negative NIIP essentially means that foreign ownership of American assets exceeds American ownership of foreign assets. By contrast, Britain still had a hugely positive NIIP between the wars, despite the amounts of overseas assets that had been liquidated to finance the First World War. From 1922 until 1936 it was consistently above 100 percent of GDP. By 1947 it was down to 3 percent.

Selling off the remaining imperial silver (to be precise, obliging British investors to sell overseas assets and hand over the dollars) was one of the ways Britain paid for the Second World War. America, the great debtor empire, does not have an equivalent nest egg. It can afford to pay the cost of maintaining its dominant position in the world only by selling yet more of its public debt to foreigners. That is a precarious basis for superpower status.

NOT TOO LATE

Churchill's argument in *The Gathering Storm* was not that the rise of Germany, Italy, and Japan was unstoppable, condemning Britain to decline. On the contrary, he insisted that war could have been avoided if the Western democracies had taken more decisive action earlier in the 1930s. When President Franklin Roosevelt asked him what the war should be called, Churchill "at once" replied: "The Unnecessary War."

In the same way, there is nothing inexorable about China's rise, much less Russia's, while all the lesser countries aligned with them are economic basket cases, from North Korea to Venezuela. China's population is ageing even faster than anticipated; its workforce is shrinking. Sky-high private sector debt is weighing on growth. Its mishandling of the initial outbreak of COVID-19 has greatly harmed its international standing. It also risks becoming the villain of the climate crisis, as it cannot easily kick the habit of burning coal to power its industry.

And yet it is all too easy to see a sequence of events unfolding that could lead to another unnecessary war, most probably over Taiwan, which Xi covets and which America is (ambiguously) committed to defend against invasion—a commitment that increasingly lacks credibility as the balance of military power shifts in East Asia. (The growing vulnerability of American aircraft carriers to Chinese anti-ship ballistic missiles such as the DF-21D is just one problem to which the Pentagon lacks a good solution.)

America's acquisition of such extensive global responsibilities was not easy. But it's a delusion to believe that shedding them will be easier.

If American deterrence fails and China gambles on a *coup de main,* the United States will face the grim choice between fighting a long, hard war—as Britain did in 1914 and 1939—or folding, as happened over Suez in 1956.

Churchill said that he wrote *The Gathering Storm* to show

> how the malice of the wicked was reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous; how the structure and habits of democratic States, unless they are welded into larger organisms, lack those elements of persistence and conviction which can alone give security to humble masses; how, even in matters of self-preservation . . . the counsels of prudence and restraint may become the prime agents of mortal danger . . . [how] the middle course adopted from desires for safety and a quiet life may be found to lead direct to the bull's-eye of disaster.

He concluded the volume with one of his many pithy maxims: "Facts are better than dreams." American leaders in recent years have become over-fond of dreams, from the "full spectrum dominance" fantasy of the neoconservatives under George W. Bush to the dark nightmare of American "carnage" conjured up by Donald Trump. As another global storm gathers, it may be time to face the fact that Churchill understood only too well: the end of empire is seldom, if ever, a painless process.

There's nothing inexorable about China's rise, much less Russia's.

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Red Lines for Russia

Even after years of cyberwar, the United States still responds to Russian attacks with bluster. How to replace empty threats with rules we intend to enforce.

By Jack Goldsmith

Last summer, President Biden warned Russian President Vladimir Putin that the United States would take "any necessary action," including imposing unspecified "consequences," if Russia did not disrupt ransomware attacks from its soil. The problem with this warning is that the United States has been publicly pledging to impose "consequences" on Russia for its cyber actions for at least five years—usually, as here, following a hand-wringing government deliberation in the face of a devastating cyber incident. This talk has persisted even as adverse cyber operations have grown more frequent and damaging. It is ineffective and, in the aggregate, self-defeating.

Biden's warning was part of a string of verbal threats against Russia by his team since the 2020 election. Consider:

In late June 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: "We expect Russia to take action to prevent these cyberattacks from happening again. . . . If

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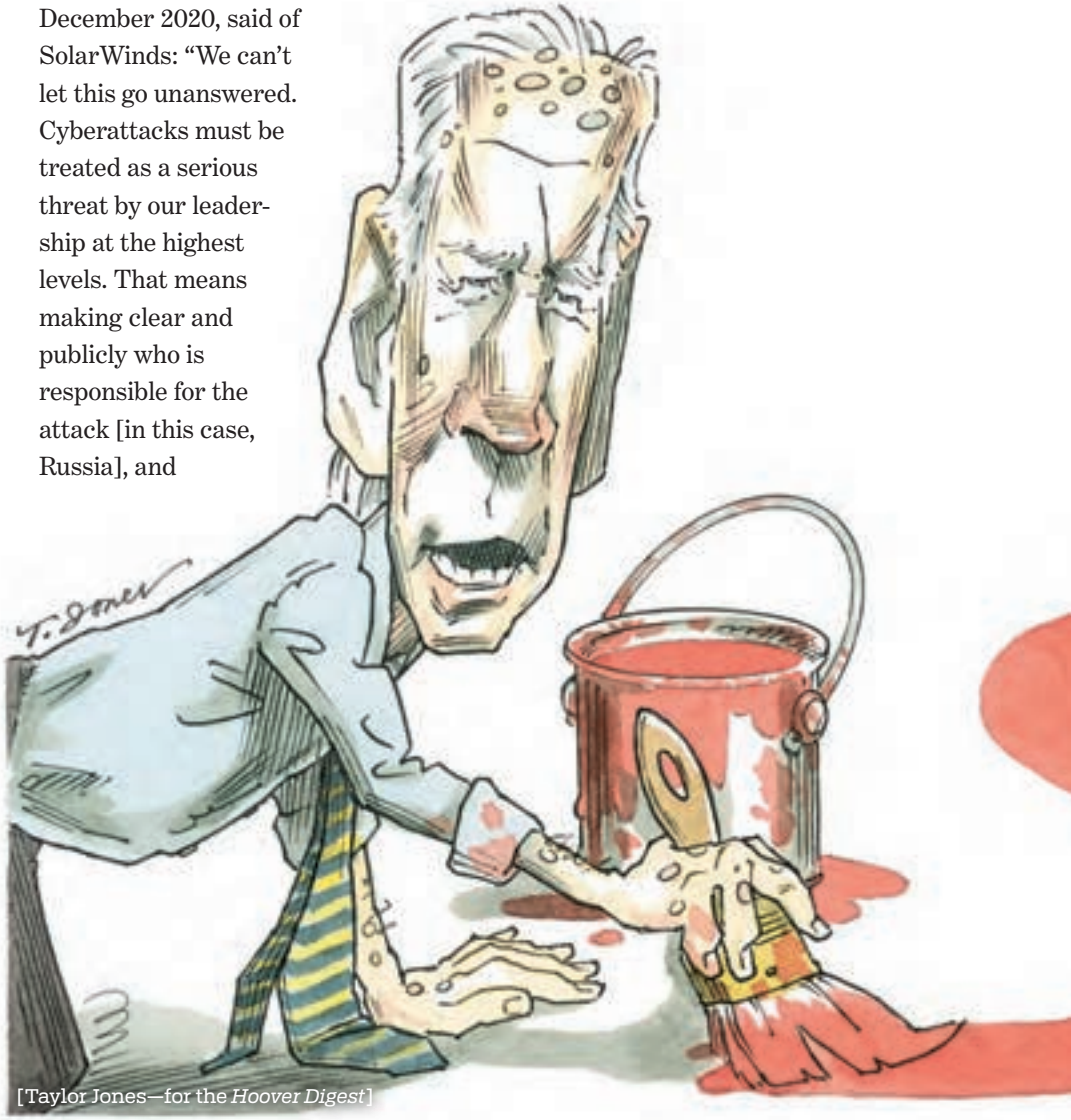
Russia continues to attack us, or to act as it did with the SolarWinds attacks, the intrusions into our elections, and the aggression against Navalny, then we will respond."

On June 16, Biden said: "[Putin] knows there are consequences. . . . He knows I will take action." Biden boasted that the United States has "significant cyber capabilities." He added: "[Putin] knows it. He doesn't know exactly what it is, but he knows it's significant. If in fact they violate these basic norms, we will respond."

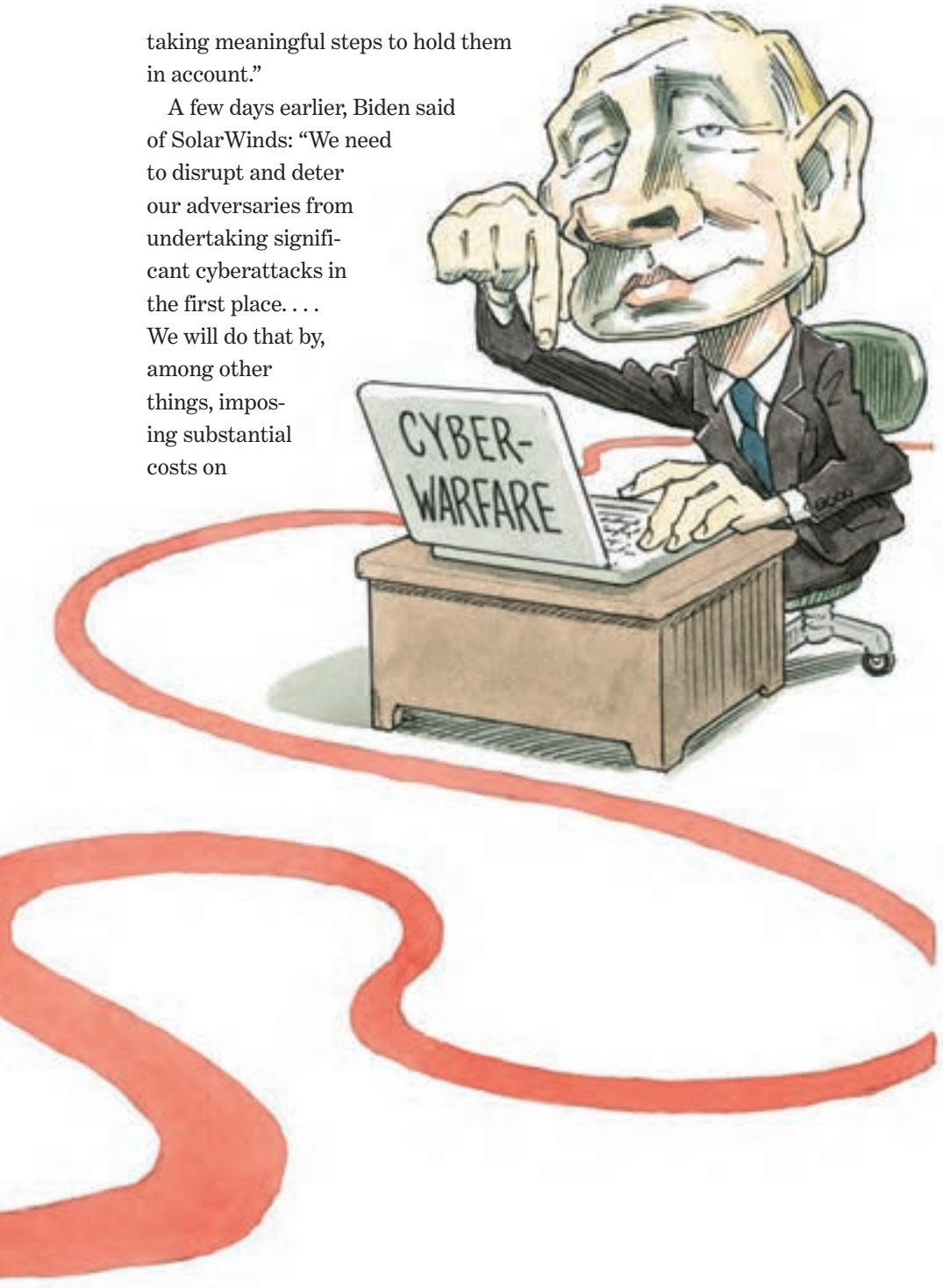
President-elect Biden, in December 2020, said of SolarWinds: "We can't let this go unanswered. Cyberattacks must be treated as a serious threat by our leadership at the highest levels. That means making clear and publicly who is responsible for the attack [in this case, Russia], and



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

taking meaningful steps to hold them in account."

A few days earlier, Biden said of SolarWinds: "We need to disrupt and deter our adversaries from undertaking significant cyberattacks in the first place. . . . We will do that by, among other things, imposing substantial costs on



those responsible for such malicious attacks, including in coordination with our allies and partners."

We heard similar things in public from the Trump and Obama administrations. A selective list:

President Trump's national security adviser, John R. Bolton, stated in 2019: "You [Russia] will pay a price if we find that you are doing this. And we will impose costs on you until you get the point that it's not worth your while to use cyber against us."

December 2016: after suspicions of Russian interference in the 2016 election surfaced, President Obama stated: "Our goal continues to be to send a clear message to Russia or others not to do this to us, because we can do stuff to you. . . . Some of it we do publicly, some of it we will do in a way that they know but not everybody will."

In October 2016, US intelligence officials told NBC News that the US government "is contemplating an unprecedented cyber covert action against Russia in retaliation for alleged Russian interference in the American presidential election." They said the CIA had been asked to develop a wide-ranging "clandestine" cyber operation designed to harass and "embarrass" the Kremlin leadership.

The repeating cycle sends a clear message of extraordinary weakness.

STILL NO RED LINES

What is the point of this talk? How many times does the United States need to send the message? What is the message sent by sending so many messages?

Any such message should have been sent only once. The reason to send it would be to establish red lines that, if crossed, would be met by a response more painful than the gains of the action. But this is clearly not what has been happening. The persistent braggadocio about how powerful our capabilities are and how we will use these weapons if Russia does something bad is met, time and time again, with another Russian operation, and then more warnings and threats.

Yes, the United States is also imposing retaliatory pain on Russia in "secret," as we sometimes learn after the fact. But the combination of puffed-up threats, news reporting on government uncertainty about how to respond to cyber operations from Russia, a covert retaliatory operation, and then the next revelation about an unexpected and very damaging cyber operation

sends a clear message of extraordinary weakness. This is exactly the opposite of the message one should want to send, not just to the Kremlin but to other adversaries who are watching and learning from our fecklessness. (It is also hard to understand why the United States, alone among nations, boasts about living in adversary networks and publicly reveals, through studied leaks, many of its cyber operations in adversary networks. This is a related problem, but for another day.)

Amazingly, the United States is in exactly the place it was five years ago when the Russians interfered in the 2016 election. It still has not figured out how to impose costs on the Russians that outweigh the Russians' perceived benefits from these cyber operations. Whatever combination of public and secret sanctions it has been imposing clearly is not doing the trick. The repeated warnings over a period that has been marked by damaging cyber operations only emphasize that reality.

How many times does the United States need to send this message?

WORRIED ABOUT ESCALATION

The United States could, of course, do much more, but at least two major hurdles stand in the way. One, the less serious hurdle, is international law, which limits US options, at least those involving forcible measures, in the face of the Russian operations below the threshold of uses of force or armed attacks.

Second, the more serious hurdle, is the escalation threat. As David Sanger and Nicole Perlroth explained last year in the *New York Times:*

> Whenever counterstrikes are debated in the White House, veterans of those debates note, an air of caution eventually settles in. The United States may possess what Mr. Biden calls "significant cyber capability"—made clear more than a decade ago when, as vice president, he participated in the meetings on the Stuxnet cyberattacks on Iran's nuclear centrifuges. But it is also more vulnerable to cyberattacks than most nations because it is so digitized and most of its critical infrastructure is owned by businesses that have not adequately invested in their digital defense. Thus, any escalation risks blowback.

Sanger and Perlroth reported that "in recent days, however, a growing number of experts have argued that the United States is now facing such a

barrage of attacks that it needs to strike back more forcefully, even if it cannot control the response."

But the experts have not been arguing this just "in recent days." They have been arguing this since the 2016 Russian interference in the US election, and even before. (One aim of the much-ballyhooed 2018 "Defend Forward" strategy—which basically involves Cyber Command conducting more proactive and persistent operations to counter and disrupt adversary cyber threats—was to skirt the escalation problem.) Even if Biden responds to ransomware operations, and he surely will, it is hard to see how he can impose pain enough to slow the operations while avoiding a serious risk of on-balance harmful escalation.

It's hard to see how the United States can impose pain enough to slow the attacks while avoiding the risk of escalation.

And so the United States remains stuck in response to these ever more menacing cyber operations. It cannot defend its networks from increased attacks. And it cannot credibly threaten greater consequences for the attacker, thereby deterring the attacker. The government has worked very hard on both of these approaches. And it has clearly failed. But it sure is talking a good game.

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The Best Defense . . .

State-sponsored cybercrime costs billions and endangers national security. When will President Biden finally do something about it?

By John Yoo and Ivana Stradner

After the United States' humiliating Afghanistan retreat, America's rivals will amplify their assaults on our credibility and defenses. China could attack Taiwan; Russia might further encroach on Ukraine; Iran or North Korea may seek more extortion over their nuclear programs. It's also possible that adversaries will launch their first jabs where America is most vulnerable: cyberspace.

While President Biden has warned the Kremlin that Washington will "respond with cyber" if Moscow's cyberattacks affect critical infrastructure, he also wants to cooperate with the Russians. This contradictory approach fails to notice that Beijing and Moscow have exploited the international order by co-opting key institutions in their low-intensity cyberwar against the United States.

To make good on his promise to curb cyberattacks, Biden should adopt a strategy of deterrence rather than of international cooperation. Today, the most effective path forward for the United States is retaliation. If Biden takes

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such a step, it would be a striking, and welcome, departure from the soft policies he has adopted.

Cybercrime costs the United States billions of dollars, makes money for criminals, and derails critical infrastructure. To protect the nation, the administration must strengthen, and even use, its offensive cyber capabilities. Biden shouldn't shy away from deploying offensive and pre-emptive cyberattacks. Those actions don't violate international law, and America's adversaries have co-opted the international institutions that could hypothetically resolve such conflicts anyway.

Some in the defense community want to improve network security, but defensive capabilities are expensive and imperfect. Offense, by contrast, comes cheaply and easily.

These basic facts mean that the most effective means of security lie in deterrence based on the threat of reciprocal attack. During the Cold War, when nuclear weapons were inexpensive, US and Soviet strategies of mutually assured destruction produced international stability. Similarly, America can deter future cyberattacks by demonstrating its capability and resolve to respond now.

The Biden administration can't rely on multilateral gabfests to control cyber conflict. International law remains vague on cyberwarfare. Yes, diplomats and scholars have tried to adapt conventional laws of war to cyber conflict in a document known as the *Tallinn Manual*. But while these rules may dominate the discussion in academe, they don't bind states—certainly not Russia and China.

And while Washington has signed the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, an international agreement governing hacking and other cybercrimes, Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran have refused to do so. NATO, for its part, seems content to simply declare that international law should apply in cyberspace without taking public measures to respond to foreign hacking.

American cyber capabilities are still the most powerful in the world.

Meanwhile, Russia and China are developing their own international legal schemes to regulate cyberspace. In recent years, Moscow and Beijing signed bilateral agreements on information-security cooperation, attempted to take over the United Nations International Telecommunication Union, and extended a cooperation treaty with the goal of destroying the global free flow of online information.

With Chinese support, the Kremlin has also manipulated the United Nations so that Russia, a sponsor of cybercrimes, is leading efforts to draft a new international cyber treaty. Any cyber treaty developed by Moscow and Beijing would allow their hacker proxies to continue operating while granting political cover to authoritarians who repress online free speech. It's as if Congress invited the Mafia to draft laws against racketeering and extortion. Inexplicably, the Biden administration and the US Office of the Coordinator for Cyber Issues still support some UN control over cyber rules.

Beijing and Moscow exploit the international order by co-opting key institutions in a low-intensity cyberwar.

As rogues and rivals challenge the US-led order, Washington should not be fooled into thinking that Russian and Chinese support for international institutions signals genuine cooperation. Both countries will continue to pursue their national interests through international law and institutions in the short term, even as they seek to destroy the broader system that supports those rules in the long term.

America can prevail in this struggle but only from a position of strength —not naiveté. American cyber capabilities are still the most powerful in the world. To maintain its advantage, the United States must develop and use its offensive cyberweapons. Most nations will understand that Washington is defending itself by launching pre-emptive cyberattacks.

If Moscow and Beijing dislike a dose of their own medicine, they can always complain to the UN mandarins or, better yet, cease their cyber hostilities. While they plead their case, they can also answer for their cybercrimes. ◘

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Threats Never Sleep

We still haven't done enough to prevent another 9/11.

By Amy B. Zegart

Twenty years ago, Al-Qaeda hijackers carried out the worst-ever terrorist attack on American soil, killing nearly three thousand innocents, terrifying the nation, and forever changing the course of history—ushering in America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Yet September 11 was also something else: our worst intelligence failure in more than half a century.

It was a surprise attack that should not have been a surprise. The agonizing truth is that American intelligence agencies saw the danger coming but failed to stop it because

Key points

» The September 11 attacks were a surprise that should not have been a surprise.

» The US intelligence community has been drastically reformed since 2001, but it still struggles to keep up.

» Technology is the new arena for spies. It also provides potential weapons against spies, if agencies can force themselves to adapt.

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they were hard-wired to fight a different enemy from a bygone era. My research found that when the Cold War ended and the threats shifted in the 1990s, America's intelligence community failed to adapt.

Today, we face a similar challenge. Since 9/11, spies have become adept at countering Al-Qaeda, but Al-Qaeda is no longer the overarching problem it once was. The global threat landscape has become much more crowded and complex, encompassing escalating cyberattacks, a rising China, Russian aggression, nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea, the fallout from climate change, and more. And once again, spy agencies are struggling to keep up.

SLUMBERING

Like generals, intelligence officials are often left fighting the last war even when new dangers are evident. Why? Because no matter what politicians and agency leaders say, no matter how clearly they see new adversaries looming over the horizon, government agencies are tailored to fight the enemy they already know. Bureaucracies are designed to last, not to adapt. Businesses go under if they fail, but government agencies almost never die. Instead, over time, organizations harden, budgets balloon, capabilities and cultures become ingrained. Early innovations grow obsolete. Even when reports are issued, warnings are raised, and courageous champions press for action, change comes slowly. The old ways endure. Meanwhile adversaries grow stronger, and the nation is left vulnerable once again.

Throughout the 1990s, even as America's spy agencies warned of Al-Qaeda's growing danger, these institutions were stuck in the Cold War. Money poured into technological platforms that could count Soviet warheads from space instead of human intelligence efforts better suited for penetrating terrorist groups on the ground. George Tenet, the CIA director on September 11, had tried but failed to upgrade his agency's counterterrorist capabilities and better coordinate counterterrorism intelligence across the federal government.

Although the FBI formally declared terrorism its number one priority years before 9/11, in 2001 only 6 percent of FBI personnel were working on counterterrorism issues and FBI special agents received more time for vacation than for counterterrorism training. A massive effort to reform the bureau's counterterrorism capabilities across the FBI's US field offices ended in disaster: just weeks before 9/11, an internal report gave all fifty-six offices failing grades. The assessment was considered so embarrassing that it was highly classified and only a handful of copies were ever produced.

KEEP UP: Navy personnel operate a drone at sea. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet, biotechnology, and satellite miniaturization are unleashing new threats and challenging countries to respond to them. Technology is also disrupting the ability of US intelligence agencies to make sense of the world. [Cover Images via ZUMA Press]

I found that organizational weaknesses led the CIA and the FBI to miss twenty-three opportunities to penetrate and possibly stop the 9/11 plot. Among them are the facts that CIA officers had identified two suspected terrorists attending an Al-Qaeda planning meeting in Malaysia, learned their full names, and discovered that one held a US visa and the other had traveled to the United States. More than fifty CIA officials had access to this information, yet nobody told the State Department or the FBI for more than a year. Until 9/11, there was no formal training, no clear process, and no priority placed on warning other government agencies about dangerous terrorists who might travel to the United States. When the CIA finally did tell the FBI, nineteen days before 9/11, the bureau designated its manhunt for the two suspected terrorists as "routine," the lowest level of priority, and assigned it to

a special agent who had just finished his rookie year. This wasn't a mistake, either: for the FBI, catching perpetrators of past crimes had always been far more important than gathering intelligence to stop a potential terrorist attack.

The pair should not have been that hard to find. They were hiding in plain sight inside the United States, using their true names on identifiers such as rental agreements and credit cards. One was even listed in the San Diego telephone directory. And while living in San Diego, they made contact with several targets of FBI counterterrorism investigations, at one point living with an FBI informant.

The two operatives went on to crash American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon. They didn't need secret identities or clever schemes to succeed. They just needed the CIA and the FBI to operate as they usually did.

A WORLD WIDE WEB

In the twenty years since 9/11, American intelligence agencies have been retooled and revamped to combat terrorism. Reforms include the creation of a director of national intelligence, the National Counterterrorism Center, and the Department of Homeland Security—in sum, the largest restructuring of American intelligence since 1947. Budgets have skyrocketed, and integration between intelligence and military operations has reached new levels, yielding stunning counterterrorism successes, including the operation against the 9/11 mastermind Osama bin Laden.

But the threat landscape never sleeps. Today, American intelligence agencies face another moment that requires rapid adaptation. This time, the dangers arise from technology. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet, biotechnology, and satellite miniaturization are profoundly changing global economics and politics, empowering old adversaries, unleashing new threats, and challenging every facet of the intelligence business. Never have so many technological advances converged so quickly and changed so much.

When the Cold War ended and the threats shifted in the 1990s, America's intelligence community failed to adapt.

In the old days, power and geography protected America. Not anymore. Cyberspace is enabling adversaries to attack us across long distances without firing a shot, hacking machines as well as minds. China has prosecuted a sustained and successful campaign to steal huge amounts of American

intellectual property for economic and military advantage. Russia is using cyber-enabled information operations to interfere in elections and undermine democracies from within. Criminal groups are waging ransomware attacks against American cities, energy suppliers, and other crucial infrastructure.

The array of threats facing the country has never been greater because cyberspace is strengthening the weak and weakening the strong. Advanced industrial democracies are exceptionally vulnerable to cyber-breaches of all kinds because they are the most digitally connected and because their freedom of speech enables nefarious actors to deceive at scale.

Technology is also disrupting the ability of American intelligence agencies to make sense of the world. Intelligence has always been a business of finding needles in haystacks to generate insight. Now the haystacks are everywhere and growing exponentially because the amount of data on earth doubles about every two years. Connective technologies are driving this data overload, with no end in sight.

The US intelligence community needs a radical reimagining to succeed in this new era. In the past, advantage came from stealing secrets. Secrets still matter, but advantage more and more derives from harnessing open information available to anyone and from human thinking, augmented by machines, that can sift through enormous troves of data to find hidden patterns.

SOLUTIONS

Success requires three key ingredients. The first is the creation of a new, independent intelligence agency dedicated to open-source intelligence. The CIA, the National Security Agency, and other elements of the intelligence community have open-source efforts under way, but secret agencies will always favor secrets. The United States will never be able to win the race for insight so long as open-source intelligence remains trapped inside agencies that believe more in their secret missions.

Never have so many technological advances converged so quickly and changed so much.

The second necessary ingredient is talent. Our intelligence community was designed for an era when intelligence officers were expected to be lifers. Today's best and brightest typically move jobs multiple times in a career. What's more, our greatest talent needs are in science and technology, precisely the areas with the toughest private sector competition. Attracting the

right workforce for the digital era starts by enabling technologists to move much more easily into and out of government at all stages of their career.

The third ingredient is strategy. We need to rethink what intelligence is and whom it serves. Today, the policy makers who need intelligence to protect the nation don't just live in Washington and hold security clearances. They include chief executives whose companies own and operate 85 percent of crucial American infrastructure—much of it vulnerable to a cyberattack—and tech leaders whose platforms have become disinformation superhighways.

Bureaucracies are designed to last, not to adapt.

Navigating the era of digital threats will not be easy. The private sector answers to global shareholders, not American voters. Our national security does not rest in the hands of the government as it once did. Protecting the nation from the next surprise attack requires faster action and a far-reaching transformation of intelligence. ◘

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Ally in Waiting . . . Still Waiting

Ukraine keeps Russia at bay while the White House keeps Ukraine at arm's length. Kyiv deserves better.

By Paul R. Gregory

In the United States' perennial quest for allies who share goals and contribute their fair share toward security, Ukraine is an exceptional bargain. This was perhaps the most important message that President Volodymir Zelenskiy carried with him to Washington last fall in his face-to-face meeting with President Biden. Time will tell whether his message sinks in.

The United States has not had the best of experiences with choosing allies over the years. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Washington often has thrown in its lot with unsavory partners. In August, as Afghan forces collapsed despite the billions of dollars spent to train and equip them, it again became clear that lavish military aid buys neither friendly, stable governments nor territorial integrity. And within NATO, partner nations seem to want the American security blanket without always paying their dues or developing serious military forces of their own.

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Zelenskiy, therefore, should have earned a warm reception from the Biden administration at the long-awaited Washington summit. Instead, he was received as a supplicant from a country characterized as paralyzed by corruption. The forty-four-year-old former TV actor, in his third year of office and first Washington visit, had come to America to counter Ukraine's more-than-half-empty image in Washington.

Biden poured cold water on Zelenskiy's most important request: US support for granting Ukraine MAP (Membership Action Plan) status in NATO. MAP would provide a path to Ukraine's eventual NATO membership. The White House statement shrugged off Ukraine's request as follows: Ukraine must first undertake "the deep and comprehensive reforms necessary to fulfill its European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations." During last June's NATO summit in Brussels, when asked directly by the media whether Ukraine should be admitted to NATO, Biden responded that Ukraine must "meet the criteria . . . they still have to clean up corruption." He concluded, "In the meantime we will do all we can to put Ukraine in a position to be able to continue to resist Russian physical aggression."

In other words, the United States would support Ukraine's armed resistance to Russian aggression, but no NATO membership for the foreseeable future. The White House underscored that stance last fall, saying little beyond a vague endorsement of Ukraine's "right to decide its own future foreign policy course free from outside interference."

Zelenskiy has countered the corruption charge by describing Ukraine's comprehensive reform program under way. But measuring reform progress is difficult. How to do so is not clear.

Zelenskiy had to make do with the White House's reiterated assurances of the United States' "commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of continued Russian aggression." Such assurances may have reminded Ukrainian officials of Biden's fly-ins to Kyiv as vice president during the dark days of 2014 with lofty promises but empty hands.

UKRAINE HOLDS ITS GROUND

Zelenskiy wanted to drive home the fact that Ukraine has been fighting Russian illegal aggression, occupation, and annexation for nigh on eight years, and with remarkably little outside assistance. In fact, he intimated that Ukraine is actually fighting Washington's and NATO's own battles against Russian aggression and expansion. Nor is there doubt about where Ukraine stands in the world. Even the UN General Assembly has condemned Russia's "temporary occupation" of Crimea, and the European Parliament has

HALF FULL: President Volodymir Zelenskiy came to the United States last year but was denied support for Ukraine's eventual membership in NATO. At the same time, US officials offered help in resisting "Russian physical aggression." [Presidential Office of Ukraine]

condemned human rights violations in Crimea and the occupied Donbas region. And Russia is burdened by sanctions for its many misdeeds and outrages on the international stage.

There also can be little doubt about Ukraine's allegiance to the West. The 2014 Maidan Revolution was a reaction to the pro-Russian president at the time, Viktor Yanukovich, rejecting association status with the European Union. Over the years, Ukraine has contributed armed forces to NATO's Kosovo and Afghan missions and participated in NATO maneuvers.

Ukraine's military assistance from its American partner is remarkably small, considering that some 7 percent of Zelenskiy's nation is occupied by Russian-controlled forces backed by a massive deployment of Russian troops on an open border (a troop number that recently swelled to one hundred thousand).

Ukraine received just 3.5 percent of the $80 billion total of US military assistance in 2020. In absolute value, Ukraine's $280 million equals what tiny Jordan receives from the United States. Unlike NATO partners, Ukraine meets NATO defense contribution requirements, devoting 3.4 percent of its GDP to defense (versus Germany's 1.2 percent). Ukraine maintains a standing army of three hundred thousand, the largest in Europe along with that of France, versus 1.5 million for Russia.

Ukraine's armed resistance has come at considerable cost: almost fifteen thousand Ukrainian military and civilian lives, and the displacement of more than a million Ukrainian citizens.

To sum up Zelenskiy's message: Ukraine has for eight years served as a buffer against Putin's revanchism that threatens Eastern Europe and former Soviet states. As expressed by a top adviser to Zelenskiy, Ukraine is "very different from Afghanistan. . . . We are an independent country, not a failed state, and our military has managed to resist the Russians, not the Taliban."

Given its losses and sacrifices, Ukraine will never capitulate to Russia. Imagine the effects of a "peace" agreement forced upon Ukraine by Russia and the two other members of the so-called "Normandy Four" (France and Germany) according to Russia's interpretation of the 2014 Minsk Accords. Under its terms, the two breakaway eastern provinces—ruled by Moscow potentates—return to Ukraine in good standing with veto power over important measures. Under such circumstances, Ukraine would eventually return to the Russian sphere of influence à la Belarus and bring Vladimir Putin's reconstituted Russian empire to the borders of Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland—all NATO members.

The Ukrainian leader was received as a supplicant from a country characterized as paralyzed by corruption.

Putin would still require foreign enemies to justify his repressive rule at home. He would go about peeling off NATO's eastern flank with cyberwarfare, border maneuvers, bribes, and other threats.

Not that Putin is in any particular rush for peace anyway. In the current clash, Ukraine has no eastern border, Ukraine's access to its eastern ports is insecure, and Russia can threaten Ukraine at will with massive troop buildups. That Ukraine has a growing economy despite all this is a singular achievement.

For the above reasons, Zelenskiy had yet another message for Biden: Ukraine will not allow third countries to decide its fate. Nothing like Neville

Chamberlain's 1938 debacle in Munich will take place. Ukraine will reject any negotiation without a seat at the table for itself.

Ukraine insists on this position based on bitter experience. Last June, Biden and German leader Angela Merkel agreed that the United States would not enforce its sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 undersea gas pipeline from Russia to Germany. Biden and Merkel presented this as a way to repair German-US relations. Although the pipeline is an existential issue for Ukraine, which will lose security leverage now that vast Russian gas deliveries will now circumvent Ukraine, Zelenskiy learned of this German-American agreement through the press. Similarly, Biden's one-on-one meeting in Geneva with Putin in June was received as a potential sellout of Ukraine.

Biden's withdrawal of the last US forces from Afghanistan without first consulting its NATO allies could also be seen as reinforcing Ukraine's view that its needs will easily be disregarded.

WHAT ARE UKRAINE'S OPTIONS?

How legitimate are Biden's objections to setting Ukraine on the road to eventual NATO membership?

Ukraine does suffer from corruption and oligarch influence, as does virtually every country that emerged from the Soviet Union (except the Baltic states). The Zelenskiy administration understands the importance of reform and seems to be working hard to deal with it. NATO has not always been so particular with respect to some of its current members. Ukraine's corruption index is roughly equal to those of NATO members Albania and North Macedonia. Its global freedom score, as measured by Freedom House, is superior to those of NATO members Turkey and North Macedonia. Most important, Ukraine remains one of the few countries from the former Soviet Union that have relatively free elections for parliament and the presidency.

Ukraine has been fighting Russian illegal aggression, occupation, and annexation for nigh on eight years, and with remarkably little outside assistance.

It is legitimate to ask whether the denial of NATO MAP status to Ukraine is based on Russia's objections. The Kremlin has labeled NATO membership for Ukraine a red line that would trigger a ferocious Russian response. A *Washington Post* editorial warned that Ukraine's admission to NATO would be a "bridge too far." Russia's saber rattling will not let up as long as Putin is in charge. What will NATO

do if Ukraine clearly solves its corruption issues and continues to seek membership?

If Ukraine understands that Russia's "red line" will block it from NATO membership, it can pursue other options, which may become more attractive if NATO is permanently weakened by the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. Ukraine has entered into a regional alliance of sorts with Poland and Lithuania, both strong anti-Putin nations. Called the Lublin Triangle, its combined military force equals a half million. In this way, Ukraine could conceivably maintain its national autonomy, reduce its military dependence on the United States, and be in a position to impose immense costs on any invading Russian force. This option is worth Zelenskiy's attention.

That Ukraine has a growing economy despite all the Russian pressure and occupation is a singular achievement.

***Special to the* Hoover Digest.**

Escape the Culture Wars

Let the school boards and the politicians rage. Parents and teachers can reach common ground on what really matters: helping kids.

By Michael J. Petrilli

I'm sure I'm not the only one who is depressed and dispirited by the latest skirmishes in education's never-ending culture wars—the tussles about critical race theory, "anti-racist" education, and diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom. I have friends and colleagues on both sides of these battles, who hold positions that are both heartfelt and hardening. I am not naive enough to believe that they are likely to declare a truce anytime soon. Nor do I have any particular wisdom about the perfect way to address these sensitive issues.

Still, I believe that common ground can be found—if not between the hardliners on either side then at least among parents and educators in the real world of kids and classrooms. I also believe that a great many Americans yearn to occupy such ground. After a crippling pandemic and way too much partisan warfare, so many of us long to get back to working together to help all students make progress.

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

Here are five promising and praiseworthy practices that I believe most of us could support, regardless of our politics or our views on other issues, while doing a lot of good for millions of kids.

» ***Adopting and using "culturally affirming" instructional materials.*** The label is new, but the idea is not: kids should be able to see themselves and their cultures in the books that they read. Mostly that's about making sure the canon is inclusive and diverse, with authors and characters that represent America's diversity. The good news is that several of the best English–language arts programs already do this quite well, especially EL Education, which is purposefully inclusive of black, white, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American themes, authors, and characters. But we should keep getting better at this so that all children feel as if they're valued as part of the great American story.

» ***Diversifying the education profession.*** This is simply common sense, especially because of the large demographic gulf between our student population and our educator corps. Everyone benefits from teacher diversity. It's a shame that education schools have made such little progress on this score. It's particularly important for students of color, especially black students, given the growing research evidence demonstrating the value for such children of having the opportunity to take classes from teachers of the same race. As we at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found in a recent study by scholar Seth Gershenson, this may be one reason that urban charter schools outperform their district counterparts. They are simply better at recruiting a diverse staff.

Nobody should be demonized because of their race. Schools should never seek to indoctrinate their students.

» ***Helping teachers maintain high expectations for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.*** This is right in line with education reform dogma going back a generation, encapsulated by President George W. Bush's call to end the "soft bigotry of low expectations." It's racist to expect less from black children and other children of color. (That's a message that some "anti-racism" advocates need to hear.) It's also un-American. This is one of the primary motivations for statewide academic standards and uniform assessments. A high-quality curriculum can be extremely helpful here, too, as it articulates what high expectations look like in daily practice. We must also pay attention to

grading practices and to the subtle messages that educators send their students.

» ***Teaching students to empathize with and understand others, especially those whose lives are more difficult than their own.*** This, too, is scarcely new. It's part of "social and emotional learning," or what others call "character education," and has been part of great schooling since ancient times. But there's a case to be made that given America's growing diversity and inequalities, it's more important than ever for children to appreciate that some kids have it much harder than they do. And in particular, that many black Americans face particular challenges because of racism that their fellow Americans need to better acknowledge and understand. We also need to teach students to listen to each other and engage with views from across the ideological spectrum—essential objectives for high-quality civics programs.

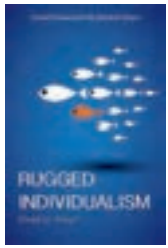
We should strive to teach history in a way that's both critical and patriotic.

» ***Presenting the history of slavery, Jim Crow, and other painful chapters in an honest, unflinching way.*** Everyone should want all American children to know the evils of those institutions, given how at odds they were with the principles of our founding as well as our current aspirations. This isn't reinventing the past on the basis of today's values. It's correcting efforts to sugarcoat the horrors of those chapters in American history. Of course, instructional materials and methods should be age-appropriate, but nowhere in the United States should these topics be avoided. Nor should we fail to teach the significant progress that we've made on these and other fronts. Instead, we should aim for an approach to teaching history that is both critical and patriotic.

This list covers a lot of territory. It is congruent with the education reform movement of the past several decades, and I don't see it as ideological, even as I recognize that some aspects will appeal more to progressives and some more to conservatives. It avoids both mandates and bans on how schools should address these topics. In a big, diverse country, we should allow schools to figure out the best path forward, especially schools that parents themselves have chosen.

At the same time, let's not let our solutions to old problems cause new ones. Nobody should be demonized because of their race. Schools should never seek to indoctrinate their students. About that, the conservative critics are right.

But for education leaders who want to advance a positive agenda without alienating parents, teachers, and students, these five actions—embracing culturally affirming instructional materials; diversifying the teaching profession; maintaining high expectations for all students; teaching students empathy; and presenting American history in a manner both critical and patriotic—present a path forward. They sure beat fighting each other into oblivion.



Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Rugged Individualism: Dead or Alive?*** *by David Davenport and Gordon Lloyd. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

A Nation Still at Risk

In American schools, the "rising tide of mediocrity" keeps rising.

By Chester E. Finn Jr.

Much as happened after *A Nation at Risk* was released in 1983, the United States finds itself facing a bleak education fate, even as many deny the problem. Back then, however, the denials came mostly from the education establishment, while governors, business leaders, and even US presidents seized the problem and launched the modern era of achievement-driven, results-based education reform. There was a big divide between what educators wanted to think about their schools—all's well, but send more money—and what community, state, and national leaders were prepared to do to rectify their failings. Importantly, those reform-minded leaders were joined by much of the civil rights community and other equity hawks, mindful that the gravest education problems of all were those faced by poor and black and brown youngsters.

Today, by contrast, we're surrounded by denial on all sides, including today's version of equity hawks, and we see little or nothing by way of reform zeal or political leadership, save for a handful of reddish states where school

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choice initiatives continue to flourish. We certainly see nothing akin to the bipartisan commitment to better school outcomes, higher standards, reduced achievement gaps, and results-based accountability that characterized much of the previous forty years.

Yet today's core education problem is much the same as what the National Commission on Excellence in Education called attention to way back then:

> The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. . . . Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them.

That was 1983. Today we find continued signs of weak achievement, arguably more menacing because during the intervening decades so many other countries, friend and foe alike, have advanced much farther in education, while the United States, with a few happy exceptions, has either run in place or slacked off. If you don't believe me, check any recent round of results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

As other countries' children surpass ours in core skills and knowledge, we face ominous long-term consequences for our national well-being, including both our economy and our security. But what's even more worrying than the achievement problem is the loss of will to do much about it and the creative ways we're finding to conceal from ourselves that it's even a problem—and doing that without necessarily even being aware of the concealment. These strategies take five main forms.

First, we change the subject. Instead of focusing on achievement failings, academic standards, and measurable outcomes, we've been redirecting our attention and energy to other aspects of education and schooling, such as social-emotional learning, and to beefing up inputs and services, such as universal pre-K and community college.

Second, we've been denouncing and canceling the metrics by which achievement (and its shortfalls and gaps) have long been monitored, declaring that tests are racist, barring their use for admission to selective schools and colleges, and curbing their use as outcome measures (e.g., states

scrapping end-of-course exams) without substituting any other indicators of achievement. I understand the ESSA testing "holiday" as COVID-19 raged and schools closed in spring 2020. But why did the College Board abruptly terminate the "SAT II" tests that for many college applicants served as a great way to demonstrate their mastery of particular subjects? Combine what was already a teacher-inspired (and parent-encouraged) "war on testing" with the allegation that tests worsen inequity and you have a grand example of shooting the messenger.

Third, we've been tinkering with the measures themselves, usually in the name of making them "fairer" and broadening access to them. Policy makers have built innumerable workarounds for kids who struggle with high school graduation tests. The College Board has twice "renormed" the SATs to bring the median back up to 500, and that practice has been joined by other score boosters, such as the invitation to mix and match one's top scores from the verbal and math sections on different test dates rather than simply adding the scores that one earns on a given day.

Less noticed, I think, is how the gold-standard Advanced Placement program has also been getting easier to do well on. It's true that AP minders at the College Board and Educational Testing Service have striven to maintain their scoring standards from year to year within each AP subject, even when transforming the exams to align with new subject "frameworks." But what's also happened over time is that the number of AP subjects (and exams) has grown—now it's a whopping thirty-eight—and many of the newer arrivals are known to be easier things to learn and easier exams to take. The Internet abounds with lists of which are the hard and which are the easy AP exams and advice as to which ones you should take to maximize your odds of scoring well. These, typically, are isolated single-year subjects, often new to the AP portfolio, such as psychology, "human geography," and environmental science, although the most popular exam on the "easy" lists is the longtime stalwart called "US Government and Politics," AP's version of civics.

"Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling."

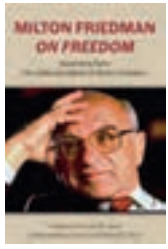
Moreover, participation in the easier APs has been rising much faster than in the harder ones. With my colleague Pedro Enamorado's help, we gauged the rate of increase (in one case a slight decline) over the decade 2009–19 in AP exam-taking in eight of the toughest and eight of the easiest AP courses. We found an average growth rate during that period of 60 percent in the

former versus 157 percent in the latter. While the overall rise in AP participation is a bright spot in American education, within it we see this hint that today's high school students are gradually reaching for the less demanding forms of it.

Fourth, we're inflating grades and scores to make things look better than they are. Grade inflation in high schools and colleges is widespread and well documented, now exacerbated by "no zero" grading policies and suchlike at the elementary- and middle-school levels. Standardized tests, too, can subtly be made to show higher scores—as many states did by setting their proficiency cut-points low—and even the National Assessment will gradually raise all boats as it supplies more "universal design" assists to test takers. (It may also artificially reduce learning gaps.)

Fifth and finally, we're scrapping consequences. In a no-fault, free-pass world that scoffs at both metrics and merit and practices the equivalent of social promotion and open admission for students, teachers, and schools alike, results-based accountability goes out the window. Out with it goes the central action-forcing element of standards-based education reform. Which is, in a sense, the ultimate erasure of achievement-related education problems and their replacement by an all's-well-and-don't-bother-telling-me-otherwise-much-less-doing-anything-about-it attitude. Which, let me say again, is pretty much what we faced from the education establishment after *A Nation at Risk*. The difference is that now it's coming from the political system, the culture, and many onetime reformers, too, and we don't appear to have any leaders pushing back against it. Instead, they're fussing about how many trillions more to pump into the schools.

Not a good prospect. Call me an old fuddy-duddy and you won't be wrong. But close your eyes to America's achievement problems and their denial and you will be very wrong. ◘



Texas or Bust

Even tech giants are among the many businesses fleeing California for **a better, more affordable life.**

By Lee E. Ohanian and Joseph Vranich

Align Technology is a $2.47 billion business revolutionizing orthodontics. Darvis is an artificial-intelligence firm creating safer and more efficient hospitals. Moov is the first interactive platform for buying and selling high-technology equipment. The common thread? These remarkable companies are among the seventy-four known California businesses that relocated their headquarters to another state in the first six months of 2021—double the rate for each of the three previous years. We have identified two hundred and sixty-five headquarters relocations out of California since 2018.

When company headquarters migrate out of California, significant economic costs affect not only the state but also communities as well-compensated employees depart and no longer patronize local businesses or pay taxes. Moreover, when advanced technology companies move their headquarters, centers of innovation move too.

Key points

» A new report confirms that company headquarters are increasingly moving out of California.

» When companies move, so do centers of innovation.

» California is too expensive, too regulated, and too heavily taxed for both companies and workers.

***Lee E. Ohanian** is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project. He is a professor of economics and director of the Ettinger Family Program in Macroeconomic Research at UCLA. **Joseph Vranich** is the president of Spectrum Location Solutions.*

Our new report, *Why Company Headquarters Are Leaving California in Unprecedented Numbers,* is the most comprehensive and up-to-date documentation and analysis of headquarters relocations among California businesses and their destinations. Prepared by combing through governmental reports, media stories, and other sources, our report shows that the rate of California headquarters relocations has more than doubled compared to recent years. And since most business relocations fly under the radar (most are not reported by the media, nor are there requirements to file relocation compliance reports), the number of businesses leaving the state is much greater than we have counted, perhaps as much as five times higher, according to professionals in the business relocation industry.

We've counted 265 headquarters relocations out of California since 2018. There are certainly more.

These exits are occurring across virtually all industries—manufacturing, aerospace, financial services, real estate, chemicals, and health care—but perhaps most disturbing is the large number of high-technology businesses that are leaving. After all, the tech hubs of Silicon Valley (Apple, Google, Facebook) and San Francisco (Salesforce, Uber, Airbnb) are among the most productive locations on the planet, filled with creative inventors and with venture capital ripe and ready to fund those inventors.

California policy makers have always thought tech would stay, no matter what. But even tech firms are leaving the Golden State at an accelerating rate. These headquarters exits range from big-tech legacy firms including Hewlett Packard Enterprise and Oracle to smaller, rapidly growing firms such as Darvis, the AI business that is helping hospitals manage room utilization and complex protection protocols.

Losing small but rapidly growing businesses is a death knell to an economy, because long-run economic growth requires new, transformative ideas that ultimately displace old ideas. And the transformative ideas almost invariably are born in young companies. At one time, Kodak and Litton Industries were Fortune 20 companies. Now they are afterthoughts. Out with the old, in with the new.

BRAIN DRAIN

Some of the small businesses of today will become the blockbusters of tomorrow, and California is losing far too many of these potential game changers. California is also losing the gifted creators of these businesses, creators who

may start additional transformative businesses in their lifetimes. And if they do, these new businesses will not be launched in California.

The primary reason why California businesses are leaving is economics, plain and simple. California is too expensive, too regulated, and too heavily taxed, both for companies and for the workers they hire. These businesses are predictably moving to states with lower costs, fewer regulations, lower taxes, and a higher quality of life for their workers, in which families pay far less for a home.

Texas is the number one state favored by these relocating companies, snagging one hundred and fourteen California headquarters since the beginning of 2018, with Tennessee and Arizona following in the ranking. Many move to the nation's interior, which is sometimes disparaged as "flyover country."

The Lone Star State is popular in many important categories. Economic freedom? The American Legislative Exchange Council ranks Texas first, while California nudges out New Jersey to barely avoid the cellar. Ease of opening and operating a small business? California ranks forty-ninth, again barely passing New Jersey, and is far behind the entrepreneurial states of Texas, Nevada, Indiana, and others. Taxes? California ranks forty-ninth (meaning second-highest) in overall tax burden as well as individual tax burden, while Texas is near the top. How do CEOs view California's business environment? Annual surveys show they always rank California last and Texas first.

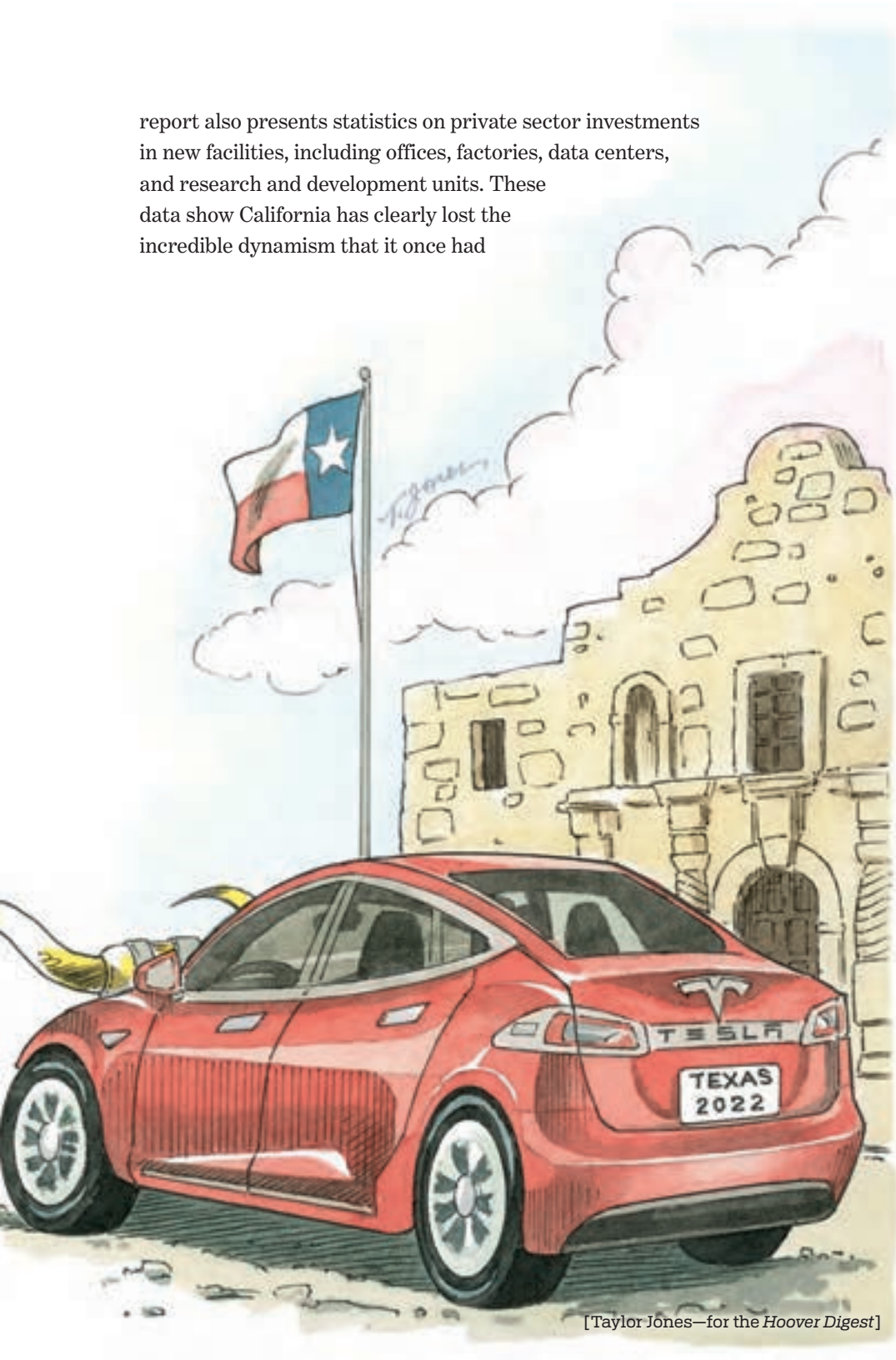
Long-run economic growth requires new, transformative ideas that ultimately displace old ideas.

So how much easier is it to live in Texas? The median-priced home in the tech hub of Austin is $562,000, compared to $1.6 million in California's tech hubs of San Francisco and Silicon Valley. Because of these exorbitant housing costs, incomes adjusted for the cost of living are much higher in Austin than in San Francisco. Check out Zillow's "for sale" listings for Austin—and also Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio—and you will see a plethora of new construction. For San Francisco? We checked and couldn't find any such listing.

A NATIONWIDE LAGGARD

Some in California dismiss these losses, arguing that some businesses will invariably leave and that California remains a dynamic economy. But our

report also presents statistics on private sector investments in new facilities, including offices, factories, data centers, and research and development units. These data show California has clearly lost the incredible dynamism that it once had



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

and is now among the worst states in the country for economic investment after adjusting for population size.

Despite California being the largest state, it ranks only sixteenth in total capital investment projects, trailing Texas, which has seven times more, and even trailing much smaller states, including Louisiana, South Carolina, and Kentucky. Measured in per capita terms, California ranks forty-sixth in capital investment projects, trailing Ohio, which has fourteen times more. We can think of no worse statistic for the future of California than the failure of businesses to invest more in the state today.

Annual business-climate surveys always rank California last and Texas first.

Texas has become the new California, and California is becoming the new Rust Belt, losing businesses and people to states that offer more opportunities and a better, more affordable life. The world has never been more competitive, which means no economy can rest on its accomplishments. Government policies must be competitive across states, provide value to constituents, protect property and liberties, and facilitate efficiency. California has failed at providing these commonsense policies for years and is now paying the price for this failure. And California will continue to decline until superior tax, spending, regulatory, schooling, water, and housing policies are implemented. ■

Download Economics Working Paper 21117,* Why Company Headquarters Are Leaving California in Unprecedented Numbers, *at https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/21117-ohanian-vranich-3.pdf.

Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Government Policies and the Delayed Economic Recovery,*** *edited by Lee E. Ohanian, John B. Taylor, and Ian J. Wright. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

Newsom's New Year

After his triumph in last fall's recall election, California's governor is again **confidently woke.**

By Bill Whalen

One way to understand the ebb and flow of politics in Sacramento is by dividing the year into quarters.

The first quarter: early in January, California's governor unveils a budget proposal (the budget in place at the time is set to expire at the end of June), followed by an expressed set of priorities via the annual State of the State address—resulting in something of a sitzkrieg as the state legislature ponders the two products.

The second quarter: the legislature and the governor find common ground—in surplus years, as seems likely in 2022, quite literally spreading the wealth—and put the new spending blueprint in place before July 1 at the beginning of the new state fiscal year (it's been more than a decade since California began a fiscal year without a budget in place).

The third quarter: the legislature turns its focus to the legislative slate—last year, a September 10 deadline to forward measures to the governor for his consideration.

And the fourth quarter: the governor has a month to weigh in on said bills (if a California governor chooses not to act on a bill that clears the legislature, it automatically becomes state law).

***Bill Whalen** is the Virginia Hobbs Carpenter Distinguished Policy Fellow in Journalism at the Hoover Institution and co-author of **California on Your Mind**, a Hoover online journal. He also moderates Hoover's **GoodFellows** broadcast, a video series that explores the social, economic, and geopolitical consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.*

Why the need to explain this? Because the fall's month-long bill-signing season is a window into the state's political soul. And what have we learned so far? In a nutshell: woke isn't broke.

And if you thought Governor Gavin Newsom was a changed man, having survived last fall's recall election . . . guess again.

GESTURES APLENTY

Case in point: policing.

At the end of September, Newsom ventured to the Southern California town of Gardena, roughly midway between Los Angeles and Long Beach, to sign a series of bills altering how law enforcement is practiced in the Golden State. Among the changes: new rules for officers to intervene when a fellow officer is perceived to be using excessive force (a so-called George Floyd Law) and to allow officers' badges to be permanently taken away for excessive force, dishonesty—and racial bias.

Never mind that the venue Newsom chose for the ceremony offers a complicated tale about law and order. It was held at a park where a young black man was shot to death by a police officer three years ago. However, the officer involved in the shooting was subsequently cleared of wrongdoing; a district attorney's report concluded he acted in self-defense.

That wasn't the same image Newsom presented as recently as a few weeks before, when his political future was on the line. During the recall election, Newsom offered a tough-on-crime persona, targeting retail theft and organized theft rings as a concern for his administration (maybe you've seen the footage of that brazen theft at a San Francisco Walgreens). Post-recall, however, the focus would seem to be more on pursuing law officers rather than lawbreakers.

Second case in point: Newsom again delved into racial justice, this time at a ceremony in Manhattan Beach during which he signed a bill returning two oceanfront lots to the descendants of the tract's black former owners. The event tapped into California history—a black couple purchasing the land over a century ago, at a time when black Californians had limited beach options because of segregation laws, only to see it taken away by eminent domain.

Pre-recall Newsom was tough on crime. Now he's tough on cops.

But for Newsom, it became an opportunity to connect California's past to a present debate over racial reparations, currently the subject of one of the seemingly infinite number of task forces the governor is fond of creating

RIDING HIGH: California Governor Gavin Newsom speaks after the polls closed September 14. Voters emphatically turned away the recall effort aimed at Newsom. The governor is expected to glow in the aftermath of crushing his recall opposition, with billions in revenue to spend. [Fred Greaves—Reuters]

(in June, California became the first state to weigh reparations—a two-year process to study both slavery and racism).

A third case in point, though this isn't a bill but an executive order: Newsom made California the first state to require COVID-19 vaccinations for in-person school attendance, pending FDA approval. Newsom didn't take this action during the height of the recall election; election day, September 14, was more than three weeks after California schools began the academic new year. Moreover, the governor had chosen not to make COVID-19 vaccinations mandatory for California prison guards, whose union donated generously to Newsom's anti-recall committee.

THE YEAR AHEAD

So where does California go from here?

These actions point to California coming full circle since Newsom first took office in 2019. That freshman year featured Newsom reveling in all sorts of matters that didn't see the light of day during the less-progressive days of his

predecessor, Jerry Brown—for instance, requiring college health clinics to provide abortion pills, along with UC and CSU requirements to offer students medical abortions.

Newsom's second legislative year was defined by the pandemic, with the governor signing such matters as sparing renters from eviction and expanding paid family leave.

And then, in year three of bill signing, Newsom re-emerged as an avatar for causes near and dear to the progressive cause, which would include race, victimization, and complicating life for law enforcement.

Newsom did veto a bill enabling farmworkers to vote by mail in union elections. That prompted the United Farm Workers, which supported Newsom in the recall, to organize a march to both the French Laundry restaurant in Yountville (scene of the infamous Newsom dinner party that jump-started the recall) and a winery owned by the company Newsom founded.

And though an outspoken gun-control advocate, Newsom vetoed a bill requiring California's Justice Department to verify hunting licenses before approving firearm sales to individuals under twenty-one. Newsom said the technology needed would have disrupted the department's other efforts to do background checks.

Otherwise, as the state begins a new year, look for a governor glowing in the aftermath of crushing his recall opposition, with billions in revenue to spend, who is more than willing to offer himself as an avatar for a national political party in search of a figure who can pair woke rhetoric with woke results thanks to his (and Democrats') domination of California's political landscape.

Consider this your woke-up call for 2022.

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).

Available from Stanford University Press is ***The High Cost of Good Intentions,*** *by John F. Cogan. To order, visit www.sup.org.*

"This Is a Sputnik Moment"

Hoover fellow Amy B. Zegart has built her career analyzing the big threats. Today's biggest, she says, is China.

By Peter Robinson

***Peter Robinson,* Uncommon Knowledge:** A fellow at the Hoover Institution and a professor of political science at Stanford University, Amy Zegart is an expert on intelligence, cybersecurity, and Big Tech. She served on President Clinton's National Security Council and she advised the 2000 presidential campaign of George W. Bush. At the Hoover Institution, Zegart co-chairs the Technology, Economics, and Governance Working Group. Amy, welcome.

Amy B. Zegart: Thanks Peter, it's a pleasure to be here.

Robinson: As we speak, we just had news that former defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld died at the age of eighty-eight. He knew a lot about the

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subjects we're going to discuss: intelligence, security, and so forth. What are your thoughts on Donald Rumsfeld?

Zegart: It's a terrible day with his passing. He was much maligned for the very famous speech he gave about "unknown unknowns" in reference to the Iraq War. In *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms,* I write about this speech and how it's widely misunderstood. Rumsfeld was popularizing a really important concept in the intelligence community that was first espoused by a man named Sherman Kent, who was a history professor at Yale and founded the CIA's analytic branch. What Rumsfeld meant by "known knowns" is that there are certain things that are knowable that US intelligence officials happen to know, like, for example, whether China has an aircraft carrier. That's a knowable question, and we happen to know the answer. Rumsfeld then discussed "known unknowns"—things that are knowable, but we might not know the answer to them. For example, how does a Chinese aircraft carrier operate at sea, under various conditions? Chinese sailors know the answer to that, but US intelligence officials may not unless they're on board for long or have access to information over long stretches of time. Then Rumsfeld talked about "unknown unknowns," and people teased him for it. He was exactly right—unknown unknowns are things that are not knowable to anyone at all. For example, how long will the Chinese Communist Party stay in power? Even Xi Jinping doesn't know the answer to that question.

"The economics and national security components of this competition are tightly intertwined."

The intelligence community has to deal with all three types of information: known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns, which are usually about intentions. What do leaders intend to do? They may not even know themselves. So, Rumsfeld got mocked for something that he actually shouldn't have. It's a really important lesson in how to think about the different types of intelligence that we have to gather.

THE INNOVATION CRISIS

Robinson: Let me quote from a white paper you wrote about China for the Hoover working group you chair: "The United States cannot afford to lose today's global technology competition." Why not? Britain lost the great-power competition and ceded great-power status to the United States, and it did so gracefully enough. Living standards in Britain continued to rise and peace

was kept in the world. Why must we believe that it's ordained for the United States to remain the number one power or everything falls apart?

Zegart: I think it matters for two main reasons. First, American values matter. It matters whether an authoritarian regime that persecutes its people, stymies democracy, and surveils its own citizens sets the standards, norms, and terms of the international order. Or whether the United States—with our foundational democracy, concern for human rights, and interest in free trade and free ideas and free peoples—will rule that international order. Values matter, and make no mistake.

The second reason why I think it matters is that the economics and national security components of this competition are tightly intertwined. This is not the Cold War, where we had a real separation between national security politics on the one hand and economics on the other. Dual-use technologies are fueling this competition, which have application in the commercial sphere and the military sphere. The estimates are that artificial intelligence (AI), to give you one example, could affect almost every industry in the world and affect 15–25 percent of the jobs worldwide. We're talking about being at the cusp of a new dawn, where technology is driving not only prosperity but security. So, the stakes are incredibly high for this technological competition.

Robinson: My first question was: why does it matter? You had a very good answer. My next question is: why should we worry? As long as the Chinese can't innovate themselves, they're always going to be a step or two behind. We invent it, they steal it, but there's a sequence there. Let me quote Peter Thiel in *Zero to One,* which was published in 2014: "The Chinese have been straightforwardly copying everything that has worked in the developed world: nineteenth-century railroads, twentieth-century air conditioning, even entire cities. They might skip a few steps along the way—going straight to wireless, without installing land lines for instance—but they're copying all the same." Still true, or are we now facing a China that's capable of real innovation?

"What do leaders intend to do? They may not even know themselves."

Zegart: It's much less true than it was even a few years ago, but I wish it were the case. I would like to not have to worry so much. The National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, a bipartisan commission, released its final report a few months ago. It looked at where we're ahead and

where we're behind vis-à-vis China, and it found that in three areas, China's already ahead of the United States. The first area is applications. We may invent more and better algorithms than the Chinese, but they're using them, because of the power of the government over the people—facial recognition technology, surveillance, and so on. Second is data. Nothing like an authoritarian power to control data, right? There's no privacy or freedom in China over your data. And the third area, which is perhaps surprising, is integration of commercial technology into the government for military and national security purposes. China is much better at integrating those technologies than the United States. We need to catch up in those areas. We're ahead in some other areas: talent, algorithms, semiconductors (for now). But those advantages are narrowing too.

So, it's not preordained that the United States will continue to win the technology race. And it's not true that China is just a copier, not an innovator. There's a real sense of urgency behind this report—urgency that we need to get our house in order to compete.

Robinson: The Chinese already spend about 60 percent as much as we do on their military budget. They have us beat in numbers and that's permanent. Our only hope for sustaining a military edge is innovation, but I just have the impression of a military that's behind. Is our military any good at incorporating our own innovation?

Zegart: Our military has a lot of room to improve. The innovation crisis is an urgent one. Why is it a crisis now, as opposed to during the Cold War? Until now, innovations largely happened first in the government and then they were commercialized. I often joke in my family that NASA actually had the wrong sales pitch. We were taught as kids that NASA was responsible for Tang. What NASA was really responsible for was computers. Microchips were originally bought by the Air Force and NASA when they were priced too high, because they could actually withstand space flight and then return back to Earth. The ARPANET, the precursor to the Internet, came out of the Pentagon.

We're used to a system where the government innovated and then those innovations went commercial. Now we're in a world where it's exactly the opposite. Most of the innovation is coming from the private sector and now the challenge is, how can the government adopt from the private sector? There are real challenges: classification challenges, interoperability challenges. I don't want to minimize the problem. A lot of smart people are working very hard to try to solve the problem, but we have a number of

different innovation hubs in the Pentagon. And when you need to have that many hubs for innovation, it tells you the mother ship is broken. And there's a widespread awareness that the system is broken and that acquisition has to be reformed.

We have to spend smarter in our defense budget and we have to make the rapidity of development much more of a focus. The F-35 took twenty-eight years from the first idea to the time that it's becoming operational. We don't have that kind of time. We need to be able to develop a blueprint for a plane and manufacture that next-generation plane in two to three years, not twenty-five to thirty. The pace of change is completely different, and the Pentagon has to adapt to it.

Robinson: Let me quote one more time from your working group paper: "The Chinese Communist Party has clearly and repeatedly stated its aims to become the dominant technological power in the world over the next decade." We're used to the idea that somehow or other we got trade with China wrong, and it may not even have impoverished the nation as a whole, but it was damaging to certain industries and to certain regions of the country. If the Chinese succeed, what are other ways in which life in America will be blighted rather than enhanced? If the Chinese get what they want, how will the world and this country look different?

"We may invent more and better algorithms than the Chinese, but they're using them, because of the power of the government over the people."

Zegart: If the Chinese get what they want, we're going to see a world of diminished freedom. We'll see a world where the Internet will be divided. There will be a free Internet where you actually have a free flow of ideas, and a closed Internet where propaganda is spewed and you don't know what the truth is. We'll have a world of hyper-protectionism, where China will not need to do much with the rest of the world because it has such a large domestic market. And we'll have a world of Chinese aggression—in every respect of the word. Look at what's happening in Hong Kong.

I was originally an East Asian studies person and studied Chinese and went to live in Beijing after Tiananmen. My research was on China's democracy movement in 1989 and what happened in Tiananmen. I remember very vividly that my phone was tapped, and I was followed wherever I went. I was searched on my way out of the country and interrogated. I remember never

feeling more thankful for the freedoms that I have when my airplane touched ground from Beijing to Hong Kong, which was then a British colony. I knew that no one would be following me, or watching me, or potentially imprisoning me or my friends.

It really matters whether China gets what it wants—not just for the Chinese, but for everybody around the world.

MAKING BIG TECH AN ALLY

Robinson: I'm quoting once again from your working group paper: "Without good intelligence, tech companies will make decisions that make the nation less safe." The premise beneath that quotation is that tech companies care about the nation—or should care about the nation. But why should Big Tech view it as anything other than mere happenstance that they were founded and remained headquartered in this country? Why should they feel any loyalty to the United States?

Zegart: You're getting at something that is near and dear to my heart, which is that I *want* them to care much more. It isn't just happenstance that they were enabled to grow so much and prosper in the United States. We take for granted things like rule of law, free markets, competition, rights, immigration, being able to attract the best talent, our higher education system. These things don't run themselves. They require nurturing in order to support this ecosystem that has made Silicon Valley the growth engine of the world.

"It's not preordained that the United States will continue to win the technology race. And it's not true that China is just a copier, not an innovator."

I think there's progress being made in Silicon Valley. I don't want to overstate the distrust problems. If you'd asked me that question several years ago, I'd say Edward Snowden is a big problem. A lot of the trust deficit—why tech companies don't feel trust with the government—was part of the shadow of Edward Snowden and his revelations.

Robinson: Snowden leaked a huge trove of ultra-secret government data. Why did that upset Big Tech?

Zegart: The tech perspective I heard was that they did not know that the US government was gathering data from their companies through a back door. They knew the government was coming in through the front door. It put

these tech companies—with their global shareholders, global employees, and global markets—in a very difficult and embarrassing position. So, they felt burned by the US government. I brought a group of congressional staffers to a major tech company soon after Snowden, and they heard a senior executive of the tech company say, "I think of you like I do the People's Liberation Army of China. I'm trying to keep you out of my systems too." That was an "aha" moment for these staffers.

Both sides have been working pretty hard to repair that trust. But there is a "how can they possibly think this way?" kind of feeling still in Washington when tech companies don't want to bid on Pentagon contracts or do anything with the Pentagon, but they support China's censored search engine. We need to work on bridging that divide much more. And I think it starts with education. We need more talent in government. Success is not just bringing STEM talent into government; it's bringing in students, bringing that perspective of patriotism and the importance of America with them as they become tech leaders. This is about your personal belief system—your character and patriotism—and the role it plays.

"Most of the innovation is coming from the private sector and now the challenge is, how can the government adopt from the private sector?"

There's a big movement in corporate America: environmental, social, and governance (ESG). More attention to climate is all well and good, but there's almost never any consideration of national security as part of ESG. Should companies be transparent about who's investing in them? Should there be more consideration for how your business model is affecting the freedoms of our nation? How can we incentivize companies to do the right thing, rather than regulate them? How can we get companies to think more about what's in the national interest?

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Robinson: You mentioned that you did your undergraduate work in Asian studies and that you went to Hong Kong and Beijing. You did your graduate work in political science, and here you are scaring us all to death, talking about tech and cybersecurity. How did you choose that field? How did you become involved in this?

Zegart: I'll give you the bizarre progression of my interests, which started with Deng Xiaoping wearing a cowboy hat when he visited Texas and I

watched him on TV and I thought, "Wow, this is a very interesting man and a very interesting country." I started taking Chinese lessons as a kid in Kentucky, fast forward to I really wanted to understand US foreign policy in graduate school. I was fascinated by information and how it got to the president, so I stumbled into looking at the intelligence community as part of my doctoral dissertation. Then I naturally gravitated to the cyber field, because of its intelligence overlap. It's endlessly fascinating, and now I catastrophize for a living!

Robinson: We seem to have approximately 300,000 Chinese students in this country now, overwhelmingly in the hard sciences. Google, Facebook, Apple, and other tech companies employ large numbers of Chinese nationals as a practical matter. We found it very difficult to prevent Soviet espionage and about the only thing that we had to do with the Soviet Union was selling them wheat. As a practical matter, how can we possibly hope to limit—or even to quantify and understand the extent of the problem—when it comes to Chinese espionage and the theft of intellectual property?

Zegart: Counterintelligence officials are very concerned about not only Chinese espionage, but espionage by other countries targeting our tech sector and our universities. That said, the long game really requires that we bring in the best and brightest from all over the world. We want them to stay here, contribute, and become American citizens and work for the United States. We want them to found our companies. Keeping them out entirely may hurt us in the long run. So, how do we mitigate the risk of Chinese espionage while we encourage the best talent from around the world to come and stay and be a part of our economy and be what Americans have always been: immigrants who assimilate and become Americans? That's a government role. That's the FBI's job. It's the State Department's job to much more seriously vet students who want to come to the United States and to educate universities about things that should be of concern, like the Thousand Talents Program, where professors are paid money to open up labs in China. A lot of this is educating faculty, staff, and students, so that we're not naive about the threat environment out there. But we can't close our doors, and we shouldn't close our doors. It's

"It really matters whether China gets what it wants—not just for the Chinese, but for everybody around the world."

really the engine of our economy. We want those best and brightest AI engineers from China to come to the United States and stay.

Robinson: Are you optimistic? Do you believe the United States will retain the technological edge by 2030 that it needs to retain?

Zegart: I think we absolutely can. But the window of opportunity is now. We don't have to guess about China's intentions; they told us their intentions. They have a document called Made in China 2025.

Robinson: They're not kidding. They mean it.

Zegart: Yes, they mean it. Xi Jinping has spoken publicly about China's intentions with AI and its intentions to become a technological superpower, so it's not guesswork here. The question is, what do we do about it? We have the capability, we have the innovation, we just have to get the wherewithal to act. Now is such an important moment. We have the six bills that recently passed the Judiciary Committee. What are we going to do in the tech sector in the next year or two? How is the Pentagon going to reform its acquisition programs? How are we going to invest as a country in fundamental research in science? How are we going to reform our K–12 education system, particularly after COVID? All of these threads come together in this moment. This is a Sputnik moment for the United States in our competition with China. I think if we seize it, if there's a sense of urgency, there's no question in my mind that we can win.

How Do We Know?

Jonathan Rauch, author of *The Constitution of Knowledge,* traces the convoluted road to facts that humans must follow through error, raw information, and opinion. The online world only adds new twists.

By Russ Roberts

Russ Roberts, **EconTalk:** My guest is journalist and author Jonathan Rauch. His latest book is *The Constitution of Knowledge,* a deep look at how we know what we know—or at least what we think we know—how that's been changed in the Internet age, and what might be done to make it better. It's a lovely title. What do you mean by the "constitution of knowledge"?

Jonathan Rauch: It's our system, collectively as a society, for figuring out what's true and what's not true, and doing that in a way that respects our freedom and keeps us sane and civil. Every society, large and small, needs a way to do that. Many societies have broken up over questions of truth and fact. Wars raged across Europe and many other places until we got a constitution of knowledge, which says that instead of having rulers make decisions

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about facts, we should have rules to do it. And we set up a system to do that, which looks a lot like the US Constitution in many ways.

Roberts: You point out the parallels between the constitution of knowledge and the marketplace. They're both decentralized. They both rely on competition, norms, and feedback loops to sustain them and make them do positive things and not just randomly produce outcomes.

Walter Williams said, "In the old days, if you wanted to get rich, you hit your neighbor over the head with a stick and took your neighbor's stuff." Capitalism was a way for a lot of people to get rich instead of a zero-sum game strategy. Similarly, if you kill someone or have a war to make them believe what you think is true, it's not as effective as what you outline in your book.

Rauch: The real US Constitution only starts with the words on paper. It really is all the norms and institutions—things like political parties, judicial review, and popular sovereignty—that have been built up. The same is true of the constitution of knowledge. It wasn't written down to begin with, but it was set up by human beings. It does have rules. It has lots of institutions. There are four big branches of the constitution of knowledge. First is research, which is academia and science. Second is the world of journalism—a fact-based world with professionals trying to figure out what's true in a disaggregated, decentralized way. Third is the world of law. The idea of a fact originally comes from law. It predates the world of science because you had to have some facts in common in order to figure out how to rule in a law case. Fourth is government, which has to be reality-based in order to function.

Those four all function using a set of rules, and lots of institutions and settings that you have to get right. That is the problem with the standard metaphor that knowledge comes from the marketplace of ideas. That assumes free speech is enough, and that leaves us vulnerable because you need to get in place a lot of settings, institutions, rules, and professionals. Those are easy to attack, and are under attack.

So, that's the idea in my book.

Roberts: Let's talk about informal norms, because they're so important in all these worlds we're talking about. In the past five to ten years, as the Internet has ramped up and the world has changed, a lot of norms that used to sustain decency in human behavior and result in civilized outcomes have been degraded. The behavioral expectations of people in academic life, journalism, and politics have all taken a hit. So many people use their platform as a place to perform rather than a place to be obligated to a duty to the institution. I

UNKNOWNS: "What really matters is accuracy above all, and we shouldn't be following political agendas. We should be seeking and following facts. Sometimes it's hard to know the difference." [Dean Alexander]

think some of what's going on is degradation of the institutions as the norms have deteriorated.

Rauch: Yuval Levin writes that no society can function without functioning institutions that shape us as people. In the journalism profession that I came into, newsrooms shaped me by really hammering into me: I've got to get it right; I've got to be accurate; I've got to check; I've got to double-source; I've

got to go back to people before I write about them; I've got to run corrections if I'm wrong.

Institutions shape us. And that's very true of the constitution of science. Unlike the commercial marketplace, the constitution of science, the reality-based community, is mostly a professional network because it takes years in any of these fields—law, journalism, public administration, and especially science—to get up to speed, to understand the ideas, to get the jargon and the education, to learn the literature, to build a track record so that others know that you're on the level. It's very much a professional network, and it relies heavily on a lot of unwritten rules, including obvious things like: you can't make stuff up. In regular life, people make stuff up all the time, and you can't believe stuff just because somebody told you, and you think it might be true. You can't do QAnon in science or journalism. You have to be fact-based. That's really hard. All of those norms can be undermined, and I argue in the book that there are two big attacks on them right now.

"Many societies have broken up over questions of truth and fact."

One of them is from the outside, and that's from people who are using disinformation and other forms of epistemic warfare. The force at the center of that right now in America is Donald Trump and his movement, which is very dangerous.

But the other is from the inside. And that's factions that come into academia and journalism, and seek to politicize it and to erode the norms. What really matters is accuracy above all, and we shouldn't be following political agendas. We should be seeking and following facts. Sometimes it's hard to know the difference, but we should be striving to keep political agendas out of it. There has been a pretty serious diminution of that at a lot of institutions.

THE FUNNEL OF KNOWLEDGE

Roberts: In your book, you talk about the epistemic funnel: the way that ideas get turned into what we have as knowledge and, in particular, the importance of its being shared knowledge, which I have not seen emphasized enough.

Rauch: Most of the ideas that most people have about what's true and not true, most of the time, are wrong. It's a human condition. We're in a state of bumbling error most of the time. We're pretty good at immediate problems

that affect our lives and give us immediate feedback, like: is that a tiger in the bush or just a breeze? But we're not good at bigger, abstract questions like: what's the cause of the disease that's decimating our tribe? Or which god do we worship? With those, we tend to be deeply in error because we're riddled with cognitive biases; we look for evidence and actually perceive, favorably, evidence that helps us with status or that favors our point of view.

Roberts: It makes us feel good.

Rauch: Yeah, that's pretty much how we choose ideas. The result is that most of what people want to believe on any given day is wildly wrong. So, how can a society find that small fraction of 1 percent of people's ideas that actually advance knowledge? That's finding needles in haystacks.

The way to do that is to set up a kind of giant funnel. The input end is free speech. Anyone can believe anything, and can say just about anything. That's the raw material for the reality-based community. Then it goes into this process that's like a system of pumps and filters, with many nodes in the network. Most ideas are so screwball, they don't even get acquired. Some people think Elvis is alive, but no research dollars are going to be spent on that. A small fraction of ideas will be acquired by the system, and science and journalism will say, "we need to look at this." Then it'll be divided up into units that are refutable and checkable, and it will be parceled out; peer reviewers and editors will look at it. If it passes muster—and only some of them will—it will be passed on or published. Then others can pick it up and do their own assessment.

"You need to get in place a lot of settings, institutions, rules, and professionals. Those are easy to attack, and are under attack."

Over time, and actually pretty darn quickly, the good stuff drips out at the narrow end of the funnel, which is new knowledge. It's a tiny fraction of what goes in. This does two things. First, it converts information—which is free and cheap, but mostly wrong—into knowledge, which is very expensive and precious and is humanity's greatest resource. Objective knowledge is a species-transforming invention. It put the shot in my arm that's protecting me from COVID. It changed us from small tribal societies in which knowledge essentially never grew from generation to generation into one in which we now add more to the canon of human knowledge in any one day than we did in two hundred thousand years.

But also very importantly, it gives us a way to settle disputes—to work very quickly through this massive quantity of ideas, and to do it in a way that's peaceful and decentralized, that no one can take control of. No prince or priest or politburo can say: "Here's what you're teaching at your university today because we think it's true." They can do that in China, the Soviet Union, Jonestown. Most human societies function that way, not this way. But this is the only way that gives you peace and knowledge—and freedom.

Roberts: That's beautiful. I worry that in real life it doesn't work quite as well as that romantic story you just told. One of the temptations is to extend the norms and institutions that work very well in science into places that don't work quite as well.

Rauch: I'm going to push back on that. What I described is not the ideal; it's how it actually works. That isn't to say that any human social system is perfect. But think of what this system did in late 2019 when this new virus was discovered. Within a period of weeks, hundreds of thousands of expert minds in all kinds of disciplines around the world spontaneously organized—without centralized control—to solve that problem. Thousands of institutions go to work on it. Within a couple weeks, it's sequenced. Within days, a vaccine is designed. And now it's in my arm less than a year later. That's an incredible feat of human organization. It's species-transforming.

"You can't believe stuff just because somebody told you and you think it might be true."

You may say that's an example of science, but it breaks down when you try to bring it to economics and to other fields. I say no. I'm against scientism. But scientism is basically lazy practice—trying to look for shortcuts by using methods that may not apply in your field.

The bigger point is that the constitution of knowledge can organize any kind of debate or argument, including even theology, which is the definition of something that's nonscientific. It can't resolve or adjudicate every kind of dispute because with a lot of things, like literary criticism, it's much harder to find evidence that people can agree is dispositive. That's the nature of the beast, and we've got to live with that.

But there is no kind of social argument about truth that cannot be organized by the principles of using decentralized methods of checking and debate, structuring this around looking at what you can check and giving that priority. I would argue that works for literary criticism. It even works

for moral disputes like abortion. It doesn't resolve them in a crisp way; that's asking too much. But it does give us a way of approaching them by asking what arguments we can bring to bear that would be persuasive to any reasonable person. What evidence do we have about the development of the fetus? What can we say about the history of ethics? It gives us a way to approach these ideas in an organized fashion. That's so crucial, compared to all the alternatives.

ESCAPING THE DOOM LOOP

Roberts: I think the biggest problem we have is that people don't care very much about the truth. I think they care about feeling good about themselves, or comforting themselves, or getting angry at people they think are worth getting angry at. The Internet has allowed that to be on steroids. People are forced into partisan, ideological boxes. It's horrible on both the left and the right. People listen to one side all day long, and they get angrier.

Rauch: There's some of that. It's the human condition, and you're correct that digital media has put that on steroids by making it possible to measure the clicks for every headline.

But on the hopeful side, we went through something like this in nineteenth-century American journalism. The invention of the penny press meant that newspapers now had subscribers, which meant they had bases of people who were expecting certain things—party lines. The invention of offset printing allowed you to print two hundred thousand copies of a newspaper in your basement overnight.

"You need to be in a position to call out the kinds of distortions we've been talking about when you see them."

These led to a race to the bottom, where everyone was trying to capture eyeballs. The result was basically a fetid swamp of fake news and hyper-partisanship, because that's where it seemed like the readers wanted to go, and that's where you were making money.

So, how did we get out of it? The answer is incentives and institutions, which is the way we get out of these doom loops. The information environment that was being created back then was toxic for the business model in the long term. You can only publish so much stuff that's fake and outrageous before people get on with their lives and want to do something less toxic. It was bad for the country, and a lot of people didn't like it. People in journalism

realized this was unsustainable. So, in the early part of the twentieth century, they formed institutions like the American Society of News Editors, which promulgated professional standards and ethics codes—don't make stuff up; be accurate; run corrections—things that we take for granted now. And there was the development of professional journalism schools, which inculcated those norms about the right and wrong ways to do things.

You also had incentives. The constitution of knowledge relies much more heavily on rewards than on punishments, which is what really works in this society. In journalism, they set up a bunch of prizes, like the Pulitzer. But there are also informal prizes in the sense that if you write a great story, others will pick it up and you'll get more famous. So, they began building in incentives to use journalism responsibly, and to make it truth-seeking and fact-based. That, in turn, retrained the audience and people thought: "This is valuable to me. I like this. This is sustainable." In forty years, that got us from yellow journalism to Edward R. Murrow and what's now considered a golden age for American journalism.

"It converts information—which is free and cheap, but mostly wrong—into knowledge, which is very expensive and precious and is humanity's greatest resource."

So, how can we establish institutions and incentives that will reverse the flow so that instead of rewarding people for fake news, cheap opinion, and outrage, we can start rewarding ourselves and retraining ourselves for other incentives? We've done it before. Can we do it again? I'm not optimistic, but I'm hopeful.

Roberts: I feel that in many areas, the internal mores of culture that used to enforce excellence have slipped. People have gotten kind of sloppy. Do you think that's fair?

Rauch: One of the reasons I wrote this book is to get people to push back—to be our best selves and to remember the constitution of knowledge is there and it requires a lot from us. The notion of a marketplace of ideas in which free speech is enough, and everything else is self-maintaining, is completely wrong. You need to have all of these structures and incentives. You need to understand them. They were made by humans for humans. And you need to protect them. You need to get them right. You need to be in a position to call out the kinds of distortions we've been talking about when you see them. I'm concerned that these distortions inside the constitution of knowledge

are becoming costly, and may be dangerous. And I'm certain that distortions outside from propagandists and other forms of epistemic warfare are a real threat.

A CURE FOR THE OUTRAGE EPIDEMIC

Roberts: Let's talk about what might reverse some of the degradation and destruction of the constitution of knowledge that the Internet has wrought. The book has a lot on trolling and what I call the outrage epidemic. You also talk a lot about cancel culture. Those are all being driven by social media and opportunities on the Internet to pan or criticize others. What might we do to make that better?

Rauch: These problems will not all just go away if we wait them out. If we don't defend the constitution of knowledge and redesign some of our personal expectations and behaviors, and also some of our institutions and organizations, then it's not clear we'll keep the constitution of knowledge. Ben Franklin famously said when asked what form of government the Constitutional Convention had produced: "A republic, if you can keep it."

"Am I going to retweet fake stuff just because it's fun? Am I going to take the burden of actually checking whether something is true?"

So, optimism is too complacent, but pessimism is too fatalistic. In between is hope. People who are serious, who put their minds to defending and understanding these institutions, will be able to do so. But we've got to do the work. It's going to involve fixing a lot of incentives, structures, and institutions—and no two will look quite alike.

So, with Facebook, I am very keen on the oversight board experiment, because that's exactly the kind of thing that worked for journalism one hundred years ago. You start trying to see if you can develop some guidelines, guardrails, norms, and principles. If they're pro-social, if they begin to work and improve the social media environment, then maybe others in social media will opt in, and say: "That's a better way to do it. It's more attractive to our customers. It's better for the business model." Do we know that it will succeed? No. Do we know that it's trying the right kind of thing? I think so.

Social media companies are going to need a lot of technical tweaks behind the scenes in terms of what their algorithms do. Right now, they promote a lot of stuff that's false because it gets eyeballs, but that's creating a toxic

environment. There are a lot of really good minds trying to figure out how to do that. Or how to create private algorithm systems you can buy and plug into Facebook or Twitter to get a feed that you think is going to be more truthful and reliable.

Twitter is implementing stuff that seems small, but in the world of incentives, a series of fairly small incentives can dramatically change behavior. And there will be policy changes. There will be top-down stuff where these institutions and organizations begin to try to build in better structures and incentives.

But there's also the bottom-up stuff—the things that we can all do. Am I going to retweet fake stuff just because it's fun? Am I going to take the burden of actually checking whether something is true? Am I going to join in on a trolling campaign or a cancel-culture campaign, or am I going to say it's wrong and stay away from it? Am I going to be strictly accurate in what I teach in my classroom? If you change incentives a little, and you just prime people to consider accuracy when they're doing a social media post, actual experiments find that they do it better. All you really have to do is prime them to care about accuracy with a statement like: "You agree or disagree? Accuracy is important in life."

So, it's going to be both top-down and bottom-up. It's got to be an all-of-society, multi-layered response. The bad news is that's really hard. The good news is we've done it before. Markets are based on all kinds of incentives like that. The constitution of knowledge is too. We can't be complacent, but we also shouldn't assume that it's an impossible job.

Roberts: You argue that what the Internet's really been good for is tribalism: a way to feel that you belong to something, whether it's through virtue signaling or ganging up on someone, especially anonymously. Religion is on the wane throughout the world, certainly in America, and that was one way we felt we belonged. Some people still have that, but the number's getting smaller. Maybe we could find other ways to feel connected to each other. Certainly, the Internet has the potential to do that in ways that are not outrage-driven, not just virtue signaling. That's my area of hope.

Rauch: That's a beautiful statement of the walk we've somehow got to walk. With the Internet, but also the constitution of knowledge and markets and democracy itself, we have to figure out ways to adapt so that people feel it's responsive to their lives and they don't look for illiberal, dangerous, and sociopathic alternatives. We also have to find ways to deter people and organizations from presenting sociopathic alternatives.

That's been a problem for every society since Plato's "Republic." Plato got the wrong answer, which is a totalitarian, top-down, very hierarchical system. We know that doesn't work. We know what does work—when we can do it—is trying to create a form of liberalism that provides a lot of good things to people but doesn't try to provide everything. A system that leaves strong the realms of civic society: family, faith, and all the other goods of life that science, journalism, and government can't provide. You've got to have that part going too. ■

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To Be Jewish in America

Anti-Semitism in the United States may appear to be on the rise, but the centuries during which Jews found increasing acceptance suggest that their place in American life remains secure.

By Josef Joffe

Is the Jewish American love affair over? This is the question American Jews are nervously asking—even sober souls not given to hysteria. The evidence is piling up: murder from Pittsburgh to Jersey City, Jews assaulted in West Hollywood and Times Square, vandalized synagogues, the BDS movement, ostracized Jewish college students, the ever-unfriendlier mainstream media. Add anti-Zionism, that veiled cousin of anti-Semitism, and the mob that stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021, and inevitably, the memories of twentieth-century fascism well up. Yet I still believe that "it can't happen here," unlike Sinclair Lewis, who used the phrase in bitter irony as the title of his 1935 novel about the attempted destruction of democracy in the United States.

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That destruction does not happen in Lewis's novel, nor does it in Philip Roth's counterhistorical tale of a Depression-era Charles Lindbergh presidency, *The Plot Against America*. In both dystopias, the good America triumphs over anti-Semitism and homegrown totalitarianism. Back in the present and in the real world, Donald Trump proved not even a pale copy of Mussolini despite the efforts of his enemies to liken him to the fascists of old, and his assault on norms as a return to the days of the Weimar Republic. The Weimar analogy betrays ignorance of the real thing. Weimar was fourteen years old when it fell to Nazis and Communists; the US Constitution has defied all attacks for two hundred and thirty-four years. The Great Depression spawned Hitler in Europe; over here, it brought forth FDR.

So, amid justified fear, let's first lay out the good news. America, I will still argue, is different; hence, three cheers for the country's genuine, not self-hyping exceptionalism. Why did Jews do so well in this "blessed plot," to crib from the Bard? How did the "tired, huddled masses" make it from the Lower East Side to Scarsdale? How did their offspring move from the *cheder* to Columbia and into the highest reaches of government? Think Cabinet members such as Henry Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger plus a slew of Supreme Court judges from Brandeis to Breyer. Hollywood is another towering symbol of Jewish achievement, though I will concede that the transgressive humor of Groucho Marx and Mel Brooks would not make it in today's hyper-woke times. Jews also flourished in the Kaiser's Germany and continued to thrive in the doomed Weimar Republic. One-third of Germany's Nobel Prizes went to Jews. But it ended in the Shoah. Meanwhile, America remained the "Land of Gold" it had been in the Jewish imagination on the far side of the Atlantic. This is no fluke of history; it is integral to the American experience. Before we get to today's darker parts, let's look at the three pillars of the Jewish American house—a palace, actually. It has no analogue in the two thousand years after the destruction of the Temple. There was no such sustained Golden Age anywhere.

THREE PILLARS OF FREEDOM

Chapter 1 began in 1654, more than a century before the American founding. Escaping from the Inquisition almost four hundred years ago, twenty-three Jews from Brazil's Recife arrived in New Amsterdam, now better known as New York. "Take us in, please," they pleaded. In response, Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant insisted on driving off this "deceitful race" of "usurers" and "blasphemers." Back home in Holland, where its Jewish brethren had offered support and succor for its efforts, the Dutch West India Company was not

IN TRANSIT: A young Jewish man arrives from Israel at Kennedy International Airport in New York. A familiar dictum has been appropriated by the cultural left: "You are either with us or against us." Not so long ago, American Jews were not faced with such a choice. [Rafael Ben-Ari—Chameleons Eye]

impressed by Stuyvesant's bigotry. It overruled him in the name of religious freedom. He buckled but fired off an angry letter: "Giving [the Jews] liberty, we cannot refuse the Lutherans and Papists." Take in one set of miscreants, and the floodgates will never close.

Thus, the first pillar of American exceptionalism was born; *dankjewel, Mijnheer* (thank you, sir). Call it "equal opportunity racism," and a wondrous blessing it was for the Israelites. For once, they were not singled out as Christ killers and corrupters of the righteous. Here, they were suddenly the equals of at least some Christians, if only as targets of revulsion. For the Dutch Reformed Church, Lutherans were the real enemies. So were Catholics as the fifth column of the pope. Quakers were also infra dig.

Indeed, all the way into the twentieth century, "Papists," especially Irish, were tainted with split loyalty, so the Jews had company. It wasn't until 1960 that a Catholic, John Kennedy, could make it into the White House. Ironically, there was comfort to be found in bigotry, because it was inflicted all around. Jews were not the only outsiders. Irish hated Italians, and both despised

Poles, while WASPs loathed everybody of different faith and origin. Mutual contempt was God-sent; suddenly, Jews had no particular "advantage" in the market of vilification. The Klan and the Know-Nothings were equal-opportunity racists, too, going after blacks, Jews, and Catholics.

The second pillar was Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation between church and state," which was duly enshrined in the First Amendment. For the Jews, it delivered a sturdy shelter. The state could not promote any religion. In the old country, though, church and state had been one—a tight alliance of altar and throne. So the wrong belief could bring in the executioner. Jews were ghettoized, slain, or expelled. *Judenrein* was not a twentieth-century invention. Yet in the United States, the no-establishment clause was the foundational law. Every house of worship was on its own, and none was granted a state privilege. America was a free market for religions. Unable to compel, everybody had to compete. Like no other place on earth, the United States became the land of "supply-side religion," which explains the limitless spread of denominations. Never before had Jews enjoyed so much safety and freedom.

America as the Jewish "Land of Gold" is no fluke of history. It is integral to the American experience.

The third pillar of exceptionalism is no less wondrous. No Christian-majority nation is as "Jewish" as the United States. Unlike Europe's Christians, the Puritans returned to the Hebrew Bible, unearthing their faith's roots in the Torah. "The God of Israel is among us," orated John Winthrop when he and fellow Pilgrims set out on their ocean voyage on the *Arbella* in 1630. They were re-enacting Israel's battle against Pharaoh. Their flight was like the Exodus, and in the New World, they found the Promised Land 2.0, bequeathed to them under a covenant with the Almighty.

For Cotton Mather, the most important early American thinker, the Jews were God's "beloved people." Martin Luther had wanted to "set fire to the synagogues of the devil's children." For the Puritans, America was the home of "Christian Israel." Jewish law entered into the early American corpus. Children were christened Abraham and Sarah. The Puritans would build a city upon a hill, the New Jerusalem. America is dotted with biblical place names like Zion and, how apropos, New Canaan. Europe has no such towns. So savor this bizarre twist. America- and Jew-haters around the world are perversely right when they denounce the United States as a "Jewish" country.

THE "DUAL LOYALTY" CANARD

Why worry, then, and mull *aliyah* to Israel? This rosy Jewish-American story has not ended, but the darker passages are multiplying. Let's run the gamut from politics to culture.

American Jews, who voted 77 percent for Joe Biden, are nonetheless in the process of losing their political home of a hundred years, the Democratic Party. For their forefathers, FDR stood right next to Moses, while Republicans occupied an impenetrable WASP redoubt. "Redlining" was then used against both blacks and Jews.

The cracks became visible in 2008, the year of Barack Obama's first victory. Even during the transition from his election to his presidency, Obama began to intimate that he was ready to turn away from Israel and tilt toward Iran, the country that has trumpeted the Jewish state's obliteration since the Khomeinist revolution of 1979. They don't mean it metaphorically.

Now, though Biden and his Jewish secretary of state, Tony Blinken, are sympathetic to Israel, they are back on Obama's road to Tehran. This isn't even good realpolitik. It is not in America's interest to legitimize a grasping theocracy that has been making a living off anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism while expanding via Iraq and Syria all the way to the Mediterranean. At the end of the road to propitiation lurks Iranian hegemony over the most critical strategic arena at the junction of Europe, Asia, and Africa. "It's the elephant path of history," Moshe Dayan once quipped.

And at home, Jews are rightly troubled. Among the most patriotic ethnicities in the Union, their emotional and political support for their Israeli kin now comes with a rising price. Haven't Jews always been charged with "dual loyalty"? In the past, love of America and Israel were the same. Should Jews concerned with Israel's condition and the embrace of anti-Semitic politicians in the "Squad" now bite their tongues or defect to a GOP still in thrall to Trumpism?

In the past, love of America and love of Israel were the same.

One of the most powerful men in Congress, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, is a sort of bellwether who shows how the winds are changing. Schumer was the member in Congress with the largest population of Jewish constituents in the country, but these days you hear no ringing pro-Israel oratory from him or his landsman colleague, Representative Jerry Nadler, in a party trickling into the anti-Israel camp. To the ancient charge of dual loyalty and misbegotten riches, add in our day Jewish "whiteness" in a party

dominated by the woke who depict Israel as a stronghold of colonialism and racism. What an irony! Historically tainted as an alien race, Jews are now fingered as members of the Supremacy. They are losing their home in FDR Land or looking at eviction if they don't behave.

NO MORE QUESTIONING

Black people make up a constituency far larger and even more committed to the Democratic Party than the Jews. The civil rights alliance between the two ethnicities broke down long ago—think not Martin Luther King Jr., but Louis Farrakhan. Now it's open enmity toward Jews on the part of the activist avant-garde. "Intersectionality" makes for a bizarre syllogism. Jews are white (oppressors), Arabs are POCs (victims), and Israel and American Jewry are the common enemy.

Another crumbling base is the university, a natural habitat of Jews in twentieth-century America. In a post-agrarian economy, knowledge capital was attracting ever higher demand and fetching ever higher returns. So it was far easier for Jews to break down barriers in the thought industry than in big banking and business. Eventually, achievement trumped ancestry, and excellence beat embedded WASP social standing. With discrimination waning, the post–World War II dispensation was good for the Jews and good for the country, especially because it came with an extra bonus: thousands of brilliant Jewish thinkers and scientists escaping from Hitler, then from Stalin. Jews drove the rise of the postwar US university. A nice setup if you can keep it.

America was a free market for religions. Unable to compel, everybody had to compete.

This Jewish Garden of Eden is now wilting, outside the hard sciences. The relentlessly spreading "critical race theory," identity studies, "safe spaces," and "microaggression" promote activism, not analytical acumen and dispassionate research. Nor does equity-as-equal-outcome favor equal opportunity, the very idea that made Jewish achievement in America possible, as it ought to be for Asian-Americans now. Neither does it favor excellence springing from ambition, talent, and the free competition of ideas.

With their culture of learning, questioning, and gainsaying, Jews are taking a hit. In the age of woke, achievement is not praiseworthy but proof of privilege and injustice. This ideology is harming the American university. Sixteen of them still make the world's top twenty, but gifted Jews are absconding

from academia. In the recent past, the proportion of Jewish students in the Ivy League has shrunk significantly. In my own field, political science (practically an American discipline), Jewish graduate-school applications are dwindling. Jews now find their careers elsewhere, from information technology to the investment industry.

Finally, there is the war within—with a growing number of Jewish voices in the anti-Zionist chorus. This is an old and not just American story. The more anti-Semitism, the more numerous the Jews moving outside the community. "Be nice to me," they are saying, "I am not one of them." This is "human, all too human," to borrow from Nietzsche. As a bitter joke had it, über-German Jews in the Weimar Republic distributed posters screaming "Out with Us!" Please don't hold us responsible for those bearded Jews piling in from the Pale.

Today, in the age of critical theory (a French import originally invented in Germany), it makes good sense to evade the charge of "whiteness," a.k.a. irremediable racism. It makes even better sense to be on the right side of the culture war when the class claiming cultural hegemony dominates the market: schools, universities, publishing houses, foundations, media, and the arts. Add big business and public bureaucracies. This is where income, writing contracts, and status are parceled out to certified *bien pensants*.

A familiar dictum has been appropriated by the cultural left: "You are either with us or against us." And so Jews must choose. Not so long ago, they did not have to, resting comfortably in a land where they could be both social-justice warriors and keepers of their ancient intellectual traditions. They could celebrate real diversity and defy pre-packaged thinking. They could root for both America and the Jewish state. Then-mayor of New York, Ed Koch, scored a good laugh against a reporter waving the dual-loyalty flag, wisecracking: "If Israel ever attacks us, Jews will fight for America." That comfort zone is shrinking, and laughter would be counterrevolutionary.

Jews and myriad liberal cohorts might take a deep breath. Frenzy does consume itself.

The German-Jewish thinker Gershom Scholem made this melancholy remark many decades ago: "The love affair between Jews and Germans has basically remained one-sided." Time to pawn the engagement ring in the United States as well? The correct answer remains no. For starters, we should not expect the three pillars of the American creed to crumble, as fearsome as the news from the culture war may be. We are talking four hundred

years, as against twenty. Culture and history do not change as quickly as cell-phone generations. Ever since the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, enforced goodthink has regularly rolled over the country, and yet the creed has proved stronger. Its seeds were planted back in the 1600s when Peter Stuyvesant lost. So too the Know-Nothings and the KKK, Charles Lindbergh, and Father Coughlin, the Jew-baiting Detroit radio priest.

AFTER THE GREAT AWOKENING

Since the early eighteenth century, four Great Awakenings have swept America. They share with today's Great Awokening foundational religious features. You are diehard sinners, and you must repent and make amends for your evil past—in the most recent case, colonialism, slavery, and "white supremacy." Take a knee and go with the new gospel. This wave is in full swing, but waves do recede. So Jews and myriad liberal cohorts might take a deep breath. Frenzy does consume itself. But as the song goes: "Don't know where, don't know when."

Historical analogies prove nothing, but data may. It is true that the refurbished left is scaling the "commanding heights" of the culture, to borrow from Lenin, scooping up victories from the classroom to the board room. But the hoi polloi won't take the brew of enforced enlightenment even after two decades of agitation. In that period, "total favorable opinion of Israel" actually rose from 62 to 72 percent. Is Israel an ally and/or friend? Up slightly from 60 to 62. US support for Israel? Adding "about right" and "too little" yields between 60 and 77 percent. According to Gallup, the ratio of pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian sympathizers remains roughly two to one. How attached are you to Israel? Even two-thirds of younger Jews (eighteen to forty) affirm such a bond. In short, the love affair is not exactly one-sided, say these reassuring numbers.

Equal opportunity, the very idea that made Jewish achievement in America possible, is out of favor.

The adversaries of the Jewish state have the stronger battalions among the so-called elite. True, but continuity since 1654 is not nothing, especially given the long-term stability of opinion as reflected in the polls in spite of recurrent waves of anti-Semitism. Certainly, this trend contrasts sharply with Europe whence, by 1654, Jews had been expelled from England, Spain, and Germany. The golden age of German Jewry was over after a few decades, lasting from Bismarck to the Third Reich. The three pillars of Jewish-friendly American

exceptionalism were not built on sand, and they hold up the larger American creed across all faiths. What started out with a few Brazilian Jews in New Amsterdam has now expanded to more than seven million Jews in America. Meanwhile, the Jewish population in Britain, France, and Germany is shrinking.

If it does "happen here," to recall Sinclair Lewis, America will have to betray what it has become. Anti-Semitic tweets, inflammatory oratory, and BDS campaigns are not enough for a victorious "Plot Against America." Do furrow your brow, but don't pack your bags, as Jews in France are doing. ◘

Looking Back without Anger

Everyone can benefit from a "life review"—not a doleful look at the past but a quest for closure and acceptance.

By William Damon

A "don't look back!" approach to life has lots of appeal. We aim for bright futures. Why not focus all our mental energies on plowing ahead with vigor? Preoccupations with the past can slow us down. Future-mindedness, for good reason, is deemed a character strength for people of all ages.

Yet totally turning away from the past is not the best way to build a well-directed future. We can't learn lessons from our mistakes unless we openly recognize them. We can't unburden ourselves of old regrets and resentments unless we confront them. Our accomplishments contain rich troves of ideas about what we're capable of doing, what's given us satisfaction, whom we've become, and whom we can aspire to be in the years to come. This is what Soren Kierkegaard meant when he wrote, "Life can only be understood backwards; and then it must be lived forwards." A contemporary version of this insight was offered by Steve Jobs at a Stanford commencement address

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in 2005: "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future."

When thinking about our past, we often recall the high points with nostalgia and the low points with regret. While these are natural emotional inclinations, they are not particularly useful because neither nostalgia nor regret help us with the challenges of coping with the present and preparing for the future. They may even stop us from confronting these challenges by disguising what actually happened and obscuring important lessons we otherwise would have taken to heart.

I began to understand how my father had influenced my own life in ways I never imagined.

A SEARCH FOR INSIGHT

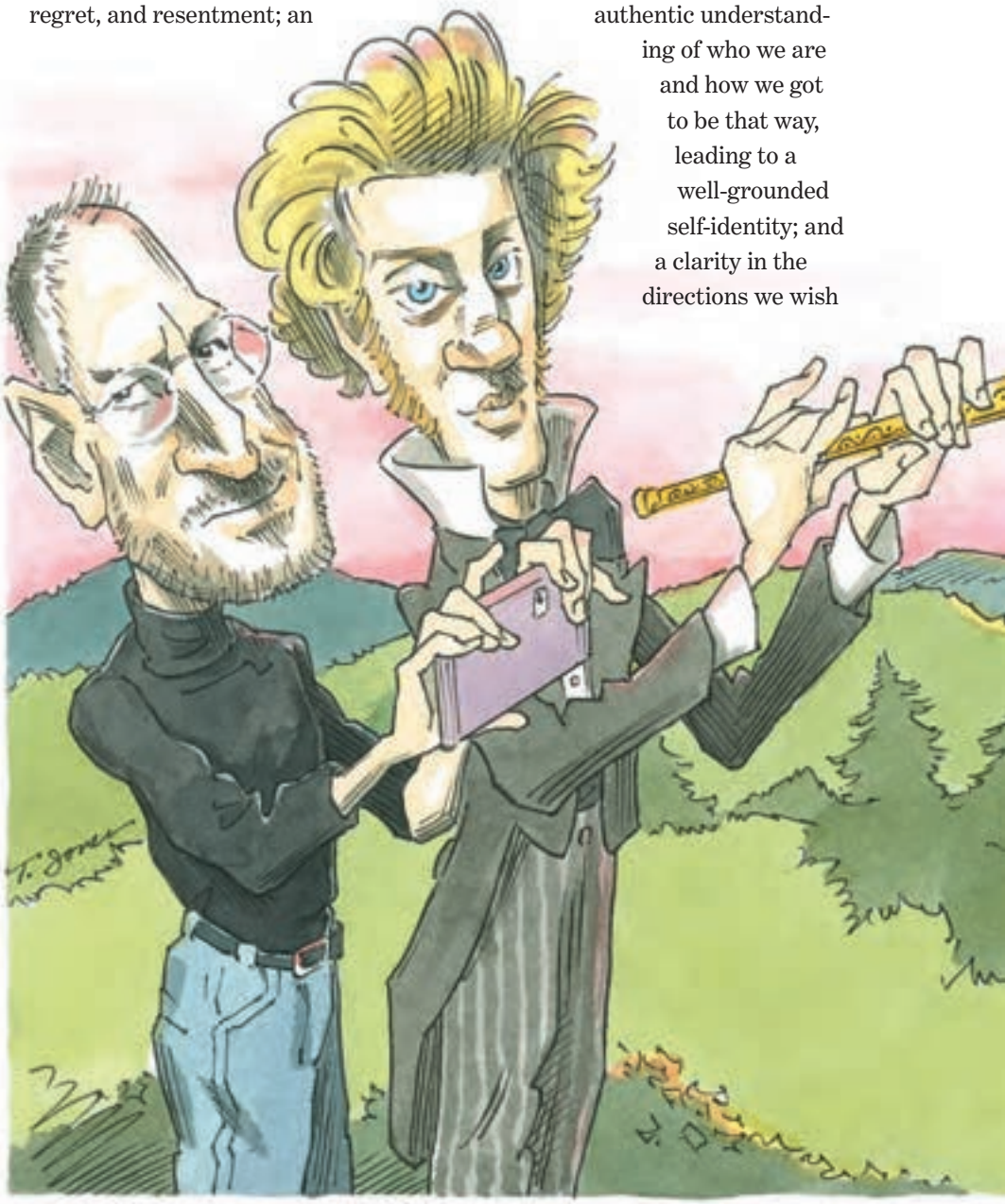
In my life, a dramatic phone call from my daughter triggered in me a burning desire to take a new look at my past and the people who shaped it. I had grown up without a father, and when I was young I was led to believe that he was killed during World War II. When I later found out that he had survived the war and abandoned my mother and me before I was born, I deduced that he was a scoundrel and I wanted to hear no more about him. But my daughter's phone call revealed a different story that, to my surprise, affected me deeply.

My daughter had taken an interest in her grandfather and discovered that after disappearing from my life, my father forged a distinguished Foreign Service career and established a second family with daughters who were my unknown half-sisters. He died before I heard this, but he left a trail of records, friends, and relatives that I could explore for further discoveries. I had never seen a picture of him or known anything about what he was like. Now, fired with curiosity, I found out everything I could. In the process, I gained an understanding of how he had influenced my own life in ways I never imagined.

I lived too long with unresolved feelings about growing up fatherless, and without contacting family members who would have been a great joy to know.

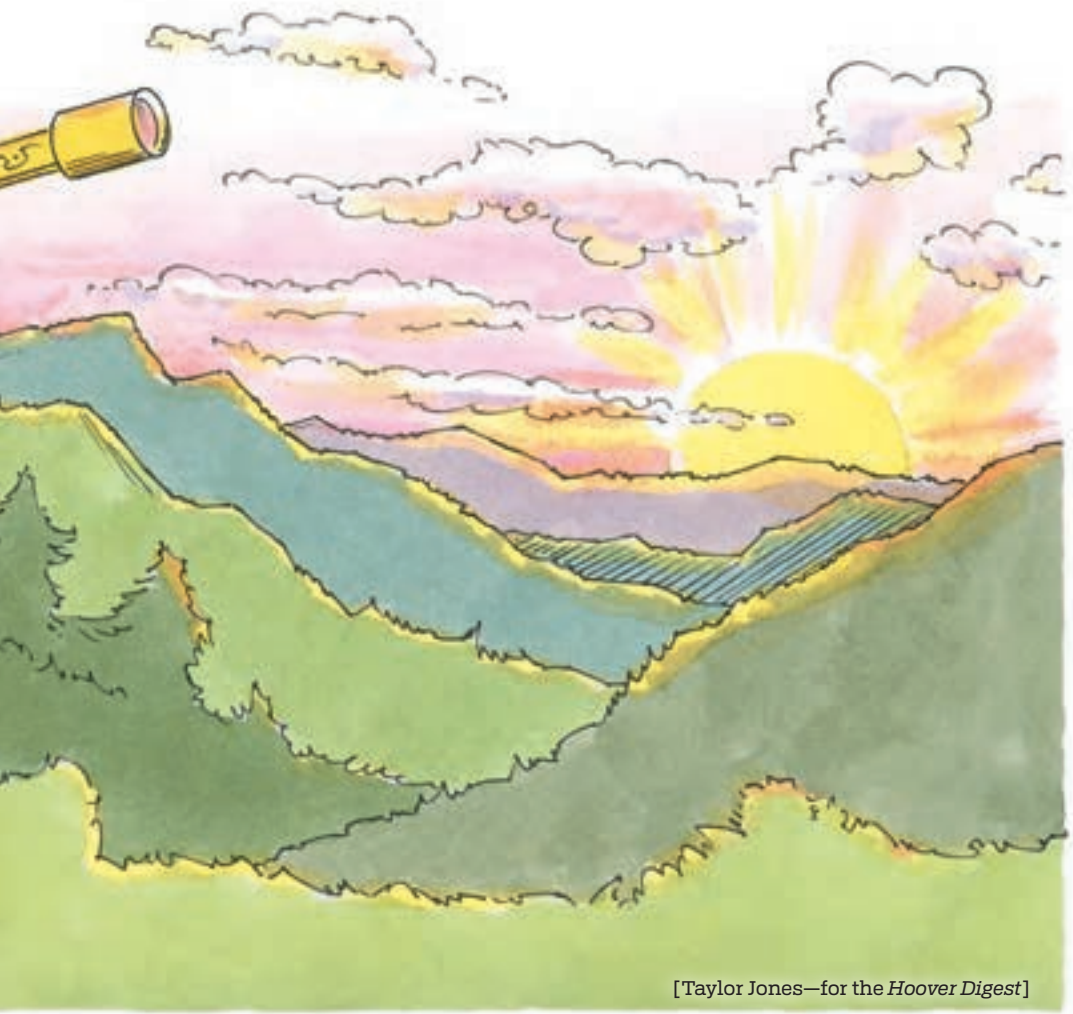
The revelations of my father's life moved me to conduct a *life review,* a method of self-analysis developed by the legendary psychiatrist and expert

on aging Robert Butler. A life review involves searching our memories, interviewing old friends and relatives, and retrieving school records and archival documents. With it, we can reconstruct our pasts in a manner that can provide three benefits: acceptance of the events and choices that shaped our lives, fostering gratitude for the life we've been given, in place of self-doubt, regret, and resentment; an authentic understanding of who we are and how we got to be that way, leading to a well-grounded self-identity; and a clarity in the directions we wish



to take our lives, reflecting what we have learned from what has given our lives meaning in the past.

By finding the positive in earlier experiences—including experiences that may have appeared unfortunate at the time—we can affirm the value of our lives and chart a hopeful path forward. As Butler wrote: "One's life does not have to have been a 'success' in the popular sense of the word. People take pride in a feeling of having done their best . . . and sometimes from simply having survived against terrible odds." Butler believed that life reviews would promote "intellectual and personal growth, and wisdom" throughout the lifespan. He noted many psychological benefits, including the capacity to enjoy pleasures such as humor, love, nature, and contemplation; and "an acceptance



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

of the life cycle, the universe, and the generations." This, of course, is a list of the pillars of psychological health.

My life review uncovered a wealth of insights about how I developed my interests, skills, beliefs, and personal characteristics. One influence I never realized was that my father attended the same school as I, a fine independent school mostly unknown to the less-advantaged circles in which I was raised. This revelation cleared up a question that always puzzled me: how did I make my way to this exceptional school? It now became clear that my mother had arranged the necessary scholarship and urged me to attend because she knew that my father had gone there decades earlier. With my new awareness, I was able to see how this choice was pivotal and turned my life in a direction it may otherwise not have taken. What's more, as I searched my old school records, and my father's, I found other fascinating insights regarding personal traits he and I shared, including some longstanding foibles (such as a degree of "stubbornness" that several of my teachers noted over the years) that I decided I still had time to correct in myself.

A successful life review leads to "an acceptance of the life cycle, the universe, and the generations."

COMING TO TERMS

During my life review, I also determined that because of my intentional obliviousness to elements of my past, I missed opportunities to meet my father and his family when I was young. The review exposed mistakes I made. For example, I avoided the difficult conversations with my mother that would have clarified the truths about my father's life in the years before my mother passed away. Those years, like all years, are irretrievable. I needed to come to terms with these regrets. My life review helped with that, too.

I came to wish that I had started my life review earlier. I lived too long with unresolved feelings about growing up fatherless, with mistaken notions about how I took the schooling path that led me to my vocation, and without contact with members of my family who would have been a great joy to know. The information that my life review uncovered resolved those feelings, revealing the truth about my father, correcting my false assumptions

Kierkegaard wrote, "Life can only be understood backwards; and then it must be lived forwards."

about my own developmental trajectory, and enhancing my present-day family relationships.

There is a paradox at the heart of a life review. The ability to look forward in a confident, well-directed manner requires looking back in an intentional and open way. We cannot separate the past, present, and future like walled-off compartments on a moving train. As Faulkner wrote, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." To be fully alive now and in the future, we must realize that our past, far from being dead, is in many ways a living concern and has many life-giving lessons to teach us.

Available from the Hoover Institution Press is ***Failing Liberty 101: How We Are Leaving Young Americans Unprepared for Citizenship in a Free Society,*** *by William Damon. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*

Fanfare for the "Uncommon" Man

Celebrating a quarter-century of Hoover's long-running video series, ***Uncommon Knowledge with Peter Robinson*.**

By Guy Denton

When the first episode of *Uncommon Knowledge* aired via PBS on May 18, 1996, those involved in its creation never once considered that the program would become conservatism's most consequential vehicle for in-depth conversation. Today, the Stanford-founded talk show is a magnet for political junkies and those intrigued by public policy. Peter Robinson, its host, is revered by fans across generational lines, and new episodes accrue thousands of views on YouTube within hours of publication.

But in the beginning, *Uncommon Knowledge* hardly enjoyed such esteem. *The McLaughlin Group* and *Firing Line with William F. Buckley Jr.* had been established on television for years, and provided cerebral discussions of public affairs that seemed difficult for Robinson to match. Viewing figures were meager, and many public intellectuals were unwilling to participate in the program at all. Yet Robinson's measured, incisive interview technique and warm demeanor engendered strong dialogue with guests and eventually

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won an audience. By 2000, more than a hundred PBS member stations were broadcasting *Uncommon Knowledge,* and Robinson was being recognized in the streets of New York by viewers. Since then, the show has continued to rise in popularity.

On the program's twenty-fifth anniversary, it seemed appropriate to review its progress. I spoke at length with Robinson and Scott Immergut, who has served as executive producer since 2011. Over a series of Zoom calls, we explored the show's past, present, and future, as well as many of the memorable anecdotes that have emerged from its production.

"The uncommon man" was a phrase Herbert Hoover used for individuals who would bring about humanity's great advancements.

Before *Uncommon Knowledge* began, Robinson followed a unique professional journey. After spending six years as a White House speechwriter in the Reagan administration (where he famously penned Reagan's Berlin Wall speech), he enrolled at Stanford Business School in 1988. "In all kinds of ways," he told me, "that was a decision that made no sense. My brilliant business career collapsed almost instantly."

Upon his graduation in 1990, Robinson began working with Rupert Murdoch, who was developing what would become Fox News. But recession struck that year, and forced him to leave the role for a position in public affairs with the Securities and Exchange Commission. When Bill Clinton defeated George H. W. Bush in the 1992 presidential election, it became clear that this job also wouldn't last. He received a call from John Raisian, an accomplished economist who was then the director of the Hoover Institution, and Raisian offered Robinson a position at Hoover, which he accepted in April 1993.

"We were like-minded in all kinds of ways," Robinson said of Raisian. "Why did he give me a call? Because at Stanford Business School, I'd gotten to know people at Hoover. I'd stopped by a few times, I'd gone to lunch with fellows. And John had several members of his board telling him that Hoover had to produce some video product—that video was the coming thing, and he had to do something."

In response, Raisian conceived of *Uncommon Knowledge,* a program in which Hoover fellows would engage in sophisticated policy discussions. He chose the name as an allusion to "the uncommon man," a phrase Herbert Hoover used to refer to individuals who would bring about humanity's great

MINDFUL: Dual monitors show Peter Robinson (left) interviewing Senator Tom Cotton. On preparing for interviews: "I like to shape the show so that one segment leads into another, and they cumulatively allow the audience to feel that the interview has gone someplace. It should feel like a journey." [Hoover Institution]

advancements. Raisian selected him to lead the project, which was more an obligation than a pleasure in its early stages. "It turned out to be tremendously time-consuming," Robinson told me. "The starting staff was zero, so I had to scramble around to find people who would be willing to do the darn thing."

MODEST BEGINNINGS

One of those staff members was William Free, who joined the show as its first producer. Free "had connections in the world of PBS," Robinson recalled, and secured a television deal with the network that allowed *Uncommon Knowledge* to initially air on two local stations. "One was the San Jose affiliate, and the other was the San Mateo affiliate. We thought that was a pretty big deal, because all of a sudden we were on television."

To distinguish the program from its contemporaries, Free thought to record episodes at Macarthur Park, a restaurant close to the Stanford

campus. "The idea was sort of *My Dinner with Andre,* people drinking and enjoying themselves," Robinson said. "It would make the show stand out a little bit visually. We were a think tank, and our constant danger was that we would bore people. So if you put it in a setting where people appear to be relaxed, it looks as though they're just having a conversation over a meal. And that lightens the feel of the show, it makes it seem more conversational."

"Hoover had to produce some video product—video was the coming thing, and we had to do something."

The inaugural episode of *Uncommon Knowledge* is available in full on YouTube. In it, Robinson moderates a debate between former US attorney general Edwin Meese III and former San Jose police chief Joseph McNamara on ending the war on drugs.

Producing the episode, as well as those that followed, was far from trouble-free. In the restaurant, "it took ages to get the lighting just right, and quite often by the time we did and the guests arrived I was drenched with sweat," Robinson continued. Indeed, technical issues extended beyond the oppressive heat of oversized lights. Filming in such an environment was often "a catastrophe, because you couldn't control the noise, the sound in the background. There were constant setbacks in the small sense. A waiter drops a plate and there's a crashing sound. Stop, cut, 'Peter, can you ask that question again?' "

Robinson, who had no prior experience as an interviewer, was intimidated at first but swiftly overcame his anxiety. "In high school, I appeared in a couple of plays. You're nervously waiting in the wings, then you walk out, speak a line or two, and the nervousness subsides. Same sort of thing. I found I became quite engrossed in the conversation," he said. "I don't look like Cary Grant and I don't sound like Gregory Peck. But it didn't bother me. In the moment, I forgot all about it."

Diners, though, would often mistake Robinson for a celebrity of such proportion. "People would see a camera setup and lights, and they'd think, 'Oh, someone famous.' Then they'd come over to me and say, 'Who the hell is that?' "

BILL BUCKLEY'S BLESSING

To craft questions to provoke compelling discussion, Robinson determined to prepare for each episode as thoroughly as possible. "I decided the only thing I could do was really know the material," he told me. "Not try to get by on

SOWELL: Peter Robinson and a frequent guest, Hoover senior fellow Thomas Sowell. "People seem to enjoy interviews with Tom Sowell. Tom always has an argument, but in the same show you can talk to him about what it was like to live in Washington, DC, when it was a segregated town."
[Hoover Institution]

personality or entertainment value, but to put the substance at the heart of the show. I'm not playing the Washington game of trying to get an embarrassing moment or an unexpected revelation that will trend on Twitter and help my ratings. I am genuinely trying to elicit the guest's thinking."

This approach to conversation distinguished *Uncommon Knowledge* in its formative years, and continues to separate the show from its contemporaries. Robinson has prepared for every interview with rigorous precision since that first show. "Typically," he said, "these people are all public figures. So I will have read columns they've written in the preceding months, or transcripts of interviews they've given. I want to know what's been on their mind in the month or two before I talk to them. I take notes, and I actually do type the questions out word for word. The prep time the way I do it is quite onerous, to tell you the truth. I need that quite thorough structure in order to

feel free to improvise. If I haven't departed from the script at all, something's not gone right with the show."

Robinson hopes that this fastidiousness ultimately affords viewers a more human understanding of his guests. "I like to shape the show so that one segment leads into another, and they cumulatively allow the audience to feel that the interview has gone someplace. It should feel like a journey. Typically, I've found it works if you start at the level of simple argument and exposition, and then by the time the program has ended you're at the level of personality.

"I believe that's one reason people seem to enjoy interviews with Tom Sowell. Tom always has an argument, but in the same show you can talk to him about what it was like to live in Washington, DC, when it was a segregated town. If you have someone saying that affirmative action is a mistake, it's one thing to hear that, it's another to be reminded that the person knows what it was like to live with Jim Crow laws in the Deep South."

By 1998, *Uncommon Knowledge* was growing rapidly in stature, and had begun airing on about thirty PBS stations. At that time, William F. Buckley Jr. was preparing to retire from hosting *Firing Line,* which itself aired on PBS, after more than thirty years in the role. Early in the year, Robinson attended an event in Southern California honoring Ronald Reagan where Buckley was the keynote speaker. At one point, Buckley invited Robinson to his room for a private conversation in which he revealed that *Firing Line* would soon come to an end. He then said he had selected *Uncommon Knowledge* to replace *Firing Line* in the PBS system. Robinson was to be his successor. "I said, 'Bill, I can't do that. I'm not you,' " Robinson told me. But Buckley was adamant that the program would flourish. "He thought I was saying something very foolish. 'I'm me and you're you,' he said. 'Just do it your way.' "

"One was the San Jose affiliate, and the other was the San Mateo affiliate. We thought that was a pretty big deal."

By this time, the restaurant setting had been replaced by an enormous, colorfully decorated space beneath the Stanford campus, which Immergut referred to in our conversation as the "intellectual man cave." Robinson believes that even today, few people at Stanford are aware of this area. "We discovered in one of the buildings on the main Quad that below the basement, they had excavated a sub-basement about the size of a barn," he recalled. "It

PLAY ON: Peter Robinson interviews Hoover director Condoleezza Rice as she plays the piano. The 2015 episode featured the former secretary of state introducing her teacher, George Barth, and explaining how her love of classical music helped her stay focused during her years in government. [Hoover Institution]

was for the communications department to use in the days when television was even cruder than it was when we were shooting."

Although Robinson enjoyed friendships with Buckley, Christopher Hitchens, and many other estimable guests, he seldom spoke to them casually when the cameras weren't rolling. "Professionals like Bill and Christopher arrive when they're asked to arrive and leave immediately afterward," he told me. Occasionally, though, a guest would linger. Robinson found Ron Reagan particularly agreeable when the pair had lunch together after a shoot. "He had so much of his father's personality and charm. He did something very few people do: he walked around the room and shook hands and chatted with everybody. By the time he sat down to begin the show, everybody just loved him." Other guests impressed Robinson with their magnanimity. "Newt Gingrich was a very nice person and charmed the crew as well. Bill Kristol was in a phase in the early days where he'd come out to the West Coast quite often to speak, and he did the show two or three times. I was very grateful for that."

CHANGES

On December 14, 1999, Buckley featured Robinson as a panelist on the final episode of *Firing Line,* readying viewers for the arrival of *Uncommon Knowledge* in the show's established spot. With Buckley's endorsement, around one hundred and fifty PBS stations began to host *Uncommon Knowledge*. The show's audience expanded consistently throughout the early 2000s, and the scale of the intellectual man cave added a cinematic flair to each episode. A rich assortment of potential interviewees became available to Robinson as publicity agents began to take the program seriously.

Robinson said he has, fortunately, never experienced a truly unpleasant or disastrous interview. But on one occasion, a guest who would never have appeared on the show in its early years managed to render him almost speechless: Gore Vidal.

On April 18, 2002, Vidal joined *Uncommon Knowledge* to promote *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace,* a collection of essays that reproved the policy agenda pursued by the United States in the wake of 9/11. "Vidal was the one guest who really did best me," Robinson mused when I showed him the episode. "He went off on an attack on the Bush administration. He was raving. It was a stream of invective that made so little sense I just couldn't find a handhold. I couldn't figure out what question to ask. That was one case where I simply sat there and let the guest spew." Robinson's desperately bewildered facial expressions throughout are glorious to view.

In 2005, *Uncommon Knowledge* left the PBS system to begin airing exclusively online. It had simply become too costly to keep the program on the network. "Every show was decided upon each season by three hundred different station managers, and it turned out that to keep in front of the station managers involved constant marketing," Robinson said of the show's transition away from television. "To sustain our presence within the PBS system, we needed to hire a marketing team that would work for us permanently. And that would roughly double the budget of the show. John Raisian decided that was not going to happen, and so we left the system altogether. By then, the show was part of Hoover's portfolio, and John certainly wanted it to continue. He just did not want it to continue at such expense."

"We were a think tank, and our constant danger was that we would bore people."

It soon became clear that a wide audience had been retained. And as the show could now be viewed on demand from anywhere in the world, it would

TO BE CONTINUED: In the beginning, Robinson says, "the starting staff was zero, so I had to scramble around to find people who would be willing to do the darn thing." By 2000, more than a hundred PBS member stations were broadcasting* Uncommon Knowledge. *Today the show continues to reach new viewers on YouTube. [Uncommon Knowledge]

continue to expand. Moreover, liberated from the constrictions of television, Robinson and the crew could shoot for as long as they pleased, and hourlong episodes became increasingly common. "Half an hour was always too short," he told me. "When Bill took *Firing Line* to an hour from half an hour, he said an hourlong show 'permitted the exploration of more subterranean chambers.' I keep going as long as I remain interested now that I have more self-confidence. If it runs long, it's because I feel the show's going someplace."

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, episodes in the online era would regularly be recorded at locations beyond Stanford. When global lockdowns began in March 2020, *Uncommon Knowledge* experienced an abrupt transformation. The first virtual episode of the program was recorded via Zoom on March 25. John Taylor, an economist and senior fellow at Hoover, appeared to discuss the impact of the pandemic on the world economy.

Robinson finds the episode surreal in retrospect. "John was very upbeat, he thought the economy was going to be OK. It was all very relaxed and informal. I thought the idea of talking into my computer was a little bit crazy. The video quality is not good—Scott sent me a video camera that clips onto my computer later on. It all felt very provisional and temporary still."

By the time Ross Douthat appeared on the show on May 28, 2020, to promote his latest book, *The Decadent Society,* Robinson had adjusted. "In some funny way, I was starting to enjoy the informality of it. It was starting to feel a little bit liberating. You could reach anybody. There's Ross in his home in New Haven, Connecticut. Not that I'd want to go on this way forever, but Zoom increased our reach."

Robinson and Immergut attest that the transition has proven remarkably painless from a technical standpoint. Naturally, guests will sometimes be visited by inquisitive children or interrupted by barking dogs, and Robinson has faced persistent trouble with his vision ("It's almost impossible to get the glare out of my lenses, and yet it's almost impossible for me to function without glasses"). But otherwise, major issues have been avoided.

Uncommon Knowledge enjoys greater viewership today than ever before, and the adoption of Zoom has provoked no complaints. "To me it was almost alarming," Robinson said. "We're producing with flat headshots. And nobody has said a word about missing the production values from the studio. . . . With Zoom, I walk into the dining room, shoot it, then get on with my life. Should we have been doing that all along?"

Immergut said, "The numbers have been better in a lot of respects than they were when we were doing it in the studio. And I think they're better because it's easier on Zoom to get to more interesting people. They're watching it for the conversation, and Zoom is pretty good at capturing that." He expects the show will alternate between in-person and virtual interviews going forward. "That's the lesson of the last year and a half: This is not a show about production values. This is a show about Peter and the guests."

"I'm not playing the Washington game of trying to get an embarrassing moment or an unexpected revelation."

A WIDER LANDSCAPE

The media landscape has changed markedly since *Uncommon Knowledge* began. Podcasts dedicated to long-form discussion have become ubiquitous,

and YouTube is home to an innumerable array of political talk shows. Yet increased competition has not impeded the program's growth, and its influence on younger generations has been profound. "One young man, studying to become a priest, said that my interview with Roger Scruton changed the way he thought," Robinson said. "I got a letter from a kid in Ghana, of all places, and he said that *Uncommon Knowledge* meant a great deal to him. So it has affected people. A lot of people devoted a lot of time and effort to make these things possible."

"People do relatively often write to me. Nobody ever says, 'Ah, Robinson, you're a genius!' What they say is, 'That guest meant something to me.' If I've had a hand in bringing people to an audience that appreciates them, yes, I'm proud of that." ■

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A Bumpy Road to the Free Market

Chiang Ching-kuo is often remembered, approvingly, for steering Taiwan toward a high-tech future. But his diaries also show how his stubborn faith in central planning held Taiwan back from prosperity.

By Hsiao-ting Lin

Half a century ago, in May 1972, Chiang Ching-kuo was inaugurated as Taiwan's premier, replacing his aging father, Chiang Kai-shek, as the de facto ruler of the island state. On his watch, Taiwan succeeded in creating an economic miracle under adverse conditions and with an extreme lack of natural resources. Its economic growth reached that of a newly industrialized country, and it ranked with South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore as a little Asian "dragon." Taiwan went from having labor-intensive, export-oriented industries to producing high-tech goods in the 1980s, setting an example for developing countries and laying down a solid foundation for a prosperous society in the 1990s. As Taiwan today faces economic doldrums, weak competitiveness, a decline in exports, and wage stagnation, people on the island, feeling this loss, are nostalgic for the good times of the Chiang Ching-kuo era.

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But Chiang was never an expert in finance and economics. His failure to manage the economy in Shanghai in late 1948, which led indirectly to the collapse of Chinese Nationalist rule on the mainland, was still fresh in people's minds when the government retreated to Taiwan. So how did a political figure noted for presiding over Taiwan's secret intelligence—and responsible for purging those who dissented to his father's rule—turn out to be remembered and revered for Taiwan's economic development?

FIGHTING TIGERS IN SHANGHAI

The diaries of Chiang Ching-kuo, who died in 1988, have recently been opened for public viewing at the Hoover Library & Archives, which acquired them in 2007. They cover the years 1937 to 1979 and provide context for significant episodes in the life of the Republic of China that are described in this article.

Chiang became administrative commissioner of the Fourth District of Jiangxi province (a.k.a. Gannan) in the spring of 1939. That was the first time he had engaged in work at a local level. He had absorbed socialist ideas in Russia when he was young, so he copied the collective-economy model of the Soviet Union when he came back to China. His experience in Gannan and his ideas about economic policy and local development were rather deficient. His signature Three-Year Construction Plan drawn up in 1943, for example, contained only two brief points as important issues to be promoted: increased production of daily necessities and integrated management of existing buildings—nothing else. When the plan was officially released six months later, it was heavily colored by Soviet thinking, with an economy based on cooperative production and development based on voluntary labor. Harking back to his work experience at Ural Heavy Machinery Plant in Sverdlovsk, he also planned to establish a national economic development plan, an agricultural and forestry company, four power plants, farm tool and machinery manufacturing plants, an iron and steel plant, and chemical industries.

Not surprising, none of these grand plans could be carried out because of the war and the extreme lack of funds and resources. Chiang Ching-kuo's governance of Gannan could respond only to emergencies, with no long-term

HONORED: A large statue of Chiang Ching-kuo (opposite) strikes a casual pose alongside a street in Taipei. Chiang presided over the beginnings of Taiwan's economic miracle, a leap into high-tech research and manufacturing that led it to rank among the "Asian Dragons." [Abon—Creative Commons]

planning to speak of. However, the sufferings of the common people he witnessed during the war with Japan, along with his personal experience as a local official, strengthened his intense socialist anti-capitalist ideas as well as his sympathy for vulnerable ordinary people. In the spring of 1942, he recalled how he couldn't bear seeing weak old women and children begging on the street. He knew that just giving them money wouldn't solve serious social problems. His psychology was profoundly affected by social injustice, and he vowed to make the rich and the poor more equal as the goal of his life's struggle.

The hyperinflation brought about during the eight years of the War of Resistance against Japan stabilized for a short while after Japan's defeat and surrender in 1945, but soon flared up again because of political turmoil. As the civil war intensified, the financial situation deteriorated everywhere, and Chiang felt it deeply. He observed that the common people's lives were getting harder while many high-ranking officials in Shanghai were still living a life of luxury. After being given the job of putting Shanghai's economy in order in the summer of 1948, he felt deep animosity toward merchants and people with vested interests and was determined to use drastic measures to reform finances.

Chiang Ching-kuo's initial foray into economic policies was strongly flavored by his experience in the Soviet Union.

In a desperate move, the Nationalist government decided to promote monetary reform. Gold, silver, and foreign exchange held by the people would be exchanged for new certificates. This would strengthen economic control, stabilize prices, and balance the national budget and international expenditures. Chiang Kai-shek delegated responsibility for economic control in the entire Shanghai area to his son. A confident Ching-kuo recruited twelve thousand young people in Shanghai to help overhaul finance, ban hoarding, and broaden the mass movement.

Chiang Ching-kuo's resolute "Fighting the Tigers" campaign in Shanghai had some success at first. However, vested interests such as the plutocrats and the bureaucracy were never willing to cooperate with him. As time went on, Fighting the Tigers took a turn for the worse; in early September 1948, Chiang asserted his authority by arresting Du Weiping, the son of Du Yuesheng, one of the most powerful crime bosses in Shanghai, for illegally hoarding goods. Du Yuesheng hit back at the Yangtze Company, led by David Kung,

ALL IN THE FAMILY: Chiang Ching-kuo was the elder son of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (left), shown here with his wife, Soong Mei-ling. Chiang Ching-kuo ran afoul of Madame Chiang when he attempted to assert his authority against her relatives in 1948. That experience colored his later views about investment and state control. [Pictures from History—Newscom]

eldest son of H. H. Kung and Soong Ailing Soong, Chiang Kai-shek's brother-in-law and sister-in-law, for illegally stockpiling materials. Chiang Ching-kuo went ahead and ordered the seizure of the Yangtze Company, arresting several employees, allegedly including David Kung.

When these events were reported to Madame Chiang Kai-shek (David Kung's aunt), she complained to her husband immediately and rushed to Shanghai to intervene in the case, asking her stepson to drop it. With this intervention, the Yangtze case was abandoned, damaging the reputation of the Fighting the Tigers campaign. The financial situation deteriorated rapidly in Shanghai: inflation rose tenfold while the cost of living for workers rose by 110 percent. Chiang Ching-kuo's failure in Shanghai meant his father's political fate on the mainland was sealed, and there wasn't much time left.

Twenty years later, Chiang Ching-kuo, who by then had become vice premier, was responsible for planning Taiwan's finances. When he thought back on this tragic experience in Shanghai, he realized that a country's economy,

revenues, and expenditures had their own laws that couldn't be ignored. But could the socialist economic thinking of his youth be forgotten?

BLUE-SKY THINKING

Chiang Ching-kuo's entry into the Executive Yuan in 1969 as vice premier, concurrently in charge of economic policy planning, must have been specially arranged by Chiang Kai-shek, who wanted his son to have a transitional period of experience before he took charge of top decision making. After more than twenty years of industrial development in Taiwan, bottlenecks were appearing in the 1970s, restricting further industrial progress. The island's ports, transportation, and communications infrastructure were in a dire state.

The terminals of the two major ports of Kaohsiung in the south and Keelung in the north were overcrowded, causing lengthy unloading times. The existing rail and road transportation systems were overwhelmed. Air traffic at Taipei Songshan Airport, the only international airport in Taiwan, had also exceeded capacity. Not enough petrochemicals, steel, and other industrial raw materials were being produced, and imports increased sharply. However, Taiwan's shipbuilding capacity was only 300,000 tons per year, so most imported raw materials had to be carried by foreign ships.

More than 80 percent of electric power was used by industry. The supply of hydropower was often unstable because of low-water periods. There was a shortage of nonrenewable energy on the island and large amounts of fuel had to be imported. Insufficient and unstable power generation became a major obstacle to industrial growth.

Chiang Ching-kuo accepted that his lack of basic knowledge on financial subjects was a kind of illiteracy, and he wasn't ashamed to ask subordinates for advice. He knew he didn't understand economics, but with that collective brainstorming, Chiang formed a blueprint for economic development. In August 1969, he set as priority goals the development of petroleum, nuclear power generation, and the construction of new ports, shipyards, steel plants, highways, and international airports. That summer he decided to add to these the electrification of railways and the construction of a new railway between Su'ao and Hualien on Taiwan's east coast, and the Ten Major Construction Projects had begun to take form.

Having witnessed wartime suffering and privation, Chiang tried to address economic inequality.

LISTENER: Chiang Ching-kuo talks with visitors during his years as administrative commissioner in Gannan, a role he accepted in 1939. Chiang took seriously the feelings of people at the lowest levels of society and was sensitive to the point of obsession about wealth inequality and stable prices. Much of his early thinking was colored by Soviet views—for instance, his attachment to big public works and resistance to privatization. [Wikimedia Commons]

The situation became more perilous at home and internationally when Taipei was expelled from the United Nations in 1971 and President Nixon visited the Chinese mainland the next year. Chiang recognized the urgency of developing Taiwan's economy and improving people's livelihood to stabilize society and the standard of living. When war broke out in the Middle East in the autumn of 1973, the Arab oil-producing countries substantially increased prices for crude. International oil prices rose fourfold in just three months, triggering a worldwide crisis. Taiwan, lacking natural resources, was hit hard. Chiang announced on November 12 that nine infrastructure and industry projects would be completed within five years. With the addition of nuclear power generation, these became the Ten Major Construction Projects that were promoted in 1974.

The impact of the oil crisis, the withdrawal from the United Nations, and the change of US China policy made large-scale public projects risky. Ordinary incomes were still low. An immediate problem was raising funds for the

estimated $5 billion expenditure over five years. We learn from his personal diary that Chiang had no clear answer, so he could only take one step at a time. A few days after announcing the Ten Major Construction Projects, Chiang wrote, "It's a big expenditure, but we should be able to solve it by classifying and sequencing the projects."

Chiang predicted that Taiwan's overall economic development would be hindered if the projects didn't progress smoothly. He didn't seem to have thought through the details of how things would be done, and the heads of the relevant ministries and committees, each of whom had their own positions and difficulties, came to him with their complaints. His finance minister complained that when Chiang announced the projects, nobody in the ministry knew anything about them.

The big public investments were meant to spark Taiwan's economic recovery at a perilous time.

Chiang sent his finance minister to Saudi Arabia and the United States, securing King Faisal's agreement for a $20 million loan and landing a preliminary $200 million loan from the US Export-Import Bank, which promised a total of more than $930 million. Foreign contractors financed some projects, such as railway electrification. Funding problems were gradually solved.

The fall of South Vietnam in 1975 made Chiang think that Taiwan, which was also in a precarious position internationally, must become unified internally. That would be impossible without speeding up economic development and reducing income inequality. Undoubtedly, Chiang's unhesitating large-scale public investment was meant to drive economic recovery at a time when a global oil crisis had occurred, prices of daily necessities were rising, and people were unwilling to invest.

HARD LESSONS IN THE FREE MARKET

People still recall how Chiang Ching-kuo pushed economic development in the 1970s, and these actions are a major reason many people remember him. But a closer look at his economic thinking shows that it had deep roots in the planned-economy views of his youth. He firmly believed that development should be guided by government power and fiscal means. He also had reservations about foreign investment, private enterprise, and the free market economy. He was unable to erase his personal belief that capitalism exploited peasants and workers, a belief forged when he lived in the Soviet Union and trained in the countryside and in factories. He had fixed ideas about where

ALLIES: US President John F. Kennedy meets with Chiang Ching-kuo (center) in September 1963. Economic friction between Taiwan and the United States, fueled by Chiang's long-time socialist economic ideas, continued for years. Still under US pressure to reduce tariffs, open markets, and adjust exchange rates, he died in 1988. [Abbie Rowe—John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum]

Taiwan's economy should go, and he was very conservative about his financial experts' proposals to encourage foreign investment.

Chiang believed it would be more cost-effective for the government to borrow from abroad than to allow foreigners to benefit from investment. In his view, using loans to establish businesses also meant that they were ultimately owned by the government. As the borrower, the government would also be responsible for overseeing construction and management. If properly handled, that process would help enterprises consolidate and develop. Taiwan would "be exploited forever" if foreigners were allowed to invest, he believed. That belief was rooted not only in his ideological education in the Soviet Union but also in his bruising experiences with the capitalist Kung and Soong families.

Chiang still emphasized the importance of politics in economic activity. He realized that there were two forces, "push" (internal motivation) and "pull" (external inducement), and that these two forces were generated by government and the public, respectively. He firmly believed that to accelerate economic growth it was necessary to streamline government spending, control population growth, increase public and private savings, and transfer resources for reinvestment. To make key investments, the government should use fiscal policy to encourage people to increase their savings. Too much consumption would create waste and the economy could not be expected to grow rapidly. Chiang believed that "the government should affect the distribution of national wealth by directly participating in decision-making on prices, wages, and interest rates." That would avoid excessive consumption, which caused wealth inequality and could lead to recession. He insisted that "this is the way to go to continue developing the economy."

He took seriously the feelings of people at the lowest levels of society and was sensitive to the point of obsession about wealth inequality and stable prices. At meetings, he stressed that governance should be based on the principle of equalizing wealth and not letting the gap between rich and poor get too wide. This thinking was reflected in his decisions to increase subsidies to rural areas and raise the living standards of farmers. However, it is difficult to achieve wealth equality under a planned economic system. Only a limited number of measures can be taken to try to narrow the wealth gap. Political power, used to enforce wealth equality, only undermines productivity.

Chiang's tendency to apply ethical principles to economic policy caused discord with some of his subordinates. One notable example happened in 1973, when the global energy crisis shook Taiwan's economy and standard of living. Economic growth dropped from 11.9 percent to 0.6 percent in just one year. The previous fall, when the economic situation was still healthy, Chiang declared that no adjustments to the prices of daily necessities would be made for one year. He reiterated this a few months later during Lunar New Year, and a few months before the energy crisis began. He instructed the Ministry of Economic Affairs to formulate measures to stabilize prices. The

MIXED LEGACY: A parade (opposite) features photos of the late Chiang Ching-kuo during a Double Ten celebration in Taipei in 2016. Chiang served as premier from 1972 to 1978 and as president from 1978 until his death. He has long been remembered and revered as a great contributor to Taiwan's success.
[C. Y. Yu—SCMP]

ministry prepared to limit prices of dozens of daily necessities, along with oil and electricity. This violated free market economic theory and attracted an immediate backlash from financial officials and nongovernment scholars. At a cabinet meeting on June 20, Chiang confronted his two ministers in charge of financial and economic affairs about their unwillingness to take responsibility for prices. He roundly cursed their "vile bureaucratic actions" and dismissed the economists' accusations, criticizing the experts for "respecting theory but not being practical, not having a full understanding, and failing to understand what politics meant."

In fact, the senior officials understood all too well how difficult it was for the government to control prices. As they had expected, the government's price stabilization plan couldn't stop the continuous surge in prices of commodities. Black-market prices rose alarmingly. Chiang seems to have recalled his lack of food in his early years in Russia and the nightmare of his failure to control Shanghai's economy. His mind was filled with negative thoughts, which gave him sleepless nights. At the end of the year, the Hualien County Government reported to him that the price of cement on the black market had risen to a point that industrial and commercial development was being seriously affected. When the Ministry of Finance also made it clear to him that bank interest rates were negative because of rising prices, Chiang reluctantly decided to adjust prices of oil, electricity, and commodities. He seems to have woken up from a long dream, admitting that his views on prices had been "too naive and simplistic."

Chiang was privately unsure if Taiwan's ambitious semiconductor campaign would succeed. "One can only try," he wrote.

In early 1974, however, Chiang issued measures restricting oil and household electricity supply throughout Taiwan and substantially increasing prices of oil, electricity, and transportation. He also increased tobacco, alcohol, and land prices, issued more government debt, and raised interest rates on bank deposits. With the twin goals of preventing inflation and assisting financial stability, he hoped those contingency measures would provide enough revenue for development. However, with prices rising as much as 47 percent that year, public dissatisfaction was widespread and the government's credibility was damaged. Chiang Ching-kuo had hoped to slow the rise in prices and alleviate shortages, but he didn't understand that market reactions could not be suppressed by human actions.

That episode finally changed Chiang's understanding of prices. When prices rose again with the second oil crisis in 1979, he accepted the advice of his close advisers and adopted a price-based policy for oil, making the commodity reflect its real cost.

CHIPS AND THE FUTURE

Chiang Ching-kuo was willing to let experts lead on specialist technology, and several important measures he approved in the 1970s would have far-reaching effects. Y. S. Sun, his minister of economic affairs, was invited to visit South Korea at the end of 1969. Sun was impressed that the South Korean government offered two or three times the salary of civil servants to attract back overseas talent. Back in Taiwan, Sun began to expedite the establishment of a similar institution, reorganizing several research units and hoping for a more flexible way to draw overseas talent back to Taiwan. After some twists and turns, Sun began to focus on integrated circuits.

Sun was intent on promoting technological innovation, but his bold idea drew public opposition. Most people believed that Taiwan's industry was still at the assembly stage, and that it was irresponsible to climb the technological ladder all at once. Chiang had limited knowledge of the high-tech electronics industry, but with his support the government decided to invest $10 million in semiconductor research and development. Chiang was privately unsure if the project would succeed, calling it "an unknown." He wrote, "One can only try." In early August 1976, Chiang inspected Shibajianshan on the outskirts of Hsinchu City, where he had decided to build Taiwan's first science park. He resolved: "I will personally supervise and complete this valuable project, to facilitate faster development of science." That brought about the development of capital and technology-intensive industries.

Taiwan's first integrated-circuit demonstration plant was completed in Hsinchu in the autumn of 1977. Assisted by US partner RCA's technology transfer over the years, Taiwan's integrated-circuit technology grew more sophisticated and the quality of the chips kept improving, making it one of the world's few emerging economies capable of producing them.

Chiang Ching-kuo, who still had his long-term economic plan in mind, believed that technology, talent, and organization had to have deep roots. In early 1978, before resigning from the post of premier, Chiang publicly declared that the three major goals of scientific and technological development were improving people's standard of living, promoting economic development, and achieving national defense independence. Among other steps, he had classified electronics, electrical machinery, and transportation

as strategic industries. The strategies he implemented in the middle and late 1970s made enduring contributions to Taiwan's high-tech industry for the next thirty years. They also were prototypes for the science parks and high-tech development zones in mainland China, when it began to reform its economy.

Some commentators attribute Taiwan's rapid economic transformation in the 1970s to changes in the world's industrial structure. Advanced industrialized countries such as the United States and Japan, needing to bring down costs and increase competitiveness, transferred their labor-intensive and capital-intensive processes to low-wage places including Taiwan. Oil crises further prompted Taiwan, lacking natural resources, to move towards self-reliance, and a shift favored technology-intensive industries that conserved energy and raw materials. However, it is doubtful that Taiwan would have become one of the Four Little Asian Dragons in the 1980s without a decision maker who could judge situations, seize opportunities, and propose appropriate strategies and directions.

Chiang's economic views delayed Taiwan's economic and trade liberalization for many years and led to continual friction with the United States.

But Chiang Ching-kuo's insistence on certain policies planted the seeds of the strong challenges that Taiwan faced later. Government control of financial activity caused major problems for the economy at the beginning of the 1980s. Under the government's foreign-exchange management system, huge foreign trade surpluses grew the money supply by hundreds of billions of dollars a year. Because capital was strictly controlled, the excess funds in circulation caused surges in the real estate market, the stock market, and gambling. This made capital holders lose interest in productive investments, shaking the foundations of Taiwan's economic miracle.

Chiang had always regarded public enterprises as the people's assets and advocated control of capital. Since the 1970s, Taiwan's domestic and foreign markets had become closed monopolies under the government's highly interventionist control. The government took advantage of thriving international markets to export large quantities of goods, while manipulating tariffs and exchange rates to eliminate foreign competition and protect local businesses.

He resisted calls for privatization and was unwilling to begin reforms even when public opinion questioned the low efficiency of public enterprises in the 1980s. Meanwhile, Taiwan's huge foreign exports, large foreign-exchange

reserves, and especially the gigantic trade surplus with the United States, had put Taipei under heavy pressure from Washington.

Yu Guohua, who had a background in finance and economics, became premier in June 1984. Under pressure from Washington, he announced policies including trade liberalization and internationalization. Chiang Ching-kuo, however, still had reservations. That autumn, he asked the cabinet to maintain the policy principle of equal attention to stability and growth. Yu immediately changed his position, retreating from his posture of promoting a free economy, to the conservative, government-led policies of the 1970s.

Chiang Ching-kuo's reservations delayed Taiwan's economic and trade liberalization and internationalization for many years, and put him under constant US pressure in the last years of his life to reduce tariffs, open markets, and adjust exchange rates. Taipei finally lifted foreign-exchange controls in the summer of 1987, but still resisted Washington's requests for exchange-rate negotiations. The friction between Taiwan and the United States, fueled by the embers of his old socialist thinking, was not resolved until an exhausted and ailing Chiang died in January of the following year.

Chiang's legacy as an economic reformer appears mixed. He has long been remembered and revered as a great contributor to Taiwan's economic miracle. He followed the advice of his staff and employed talent, but he was also stubborn and insisted on certain principles and values he firmly believed in. Some of those principles proved harmful to Taiwan's economic interests. Readers will make their own judgments of his role in Taiwan's modern history.

***Special to the* Hoover Digest.**

On the Cover

A tranquil travel poster beckons: "Come to Ulster." The Ulster Tourist Development Association (UTDA), which printed the poster, was established in 1923 to work with railroads, seaside resorts, towns, and businesses in Northern Ireland. The UTDA strove for eighty years to confirm "the belief that Northern Ireland was an attractive place to visit," said Alan Clarke, chief executive of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, to the *Irish Times* in 2003. The article pointed out that the UTDA helped build Northern Ireland's tourist traffic to one million visitors in 1967. Two years later, the Troubles began.

Modern viewers might find the invitation in this poster jarring. The civic unrest tied to Northern Ireland from 1969 to 1998 made Ulster (historically nine northern counties, only six of which were partitioned into the province of Northern Ireland) an international byword for violence. The bitter ethnonationalist conflict cost the lives of some 3,500 people, about half of them civilians. Even in the 1920s, a peaceful image such as the one on this poster might be seen as at odds with memories of the Easter Rising (1916); the establishment of the Irish Free State (1922), from which Northern Ireland fatefully "opted out"; and the Irish Civil War (1922–23). Historians recall much older violence.

But Elizabeth Johnston, UTDA secretary, told the *Irish Times* in 2003 that her organization succeeded because of its fundamental belief that tourism in Northern Ireland had a future. "The UTDA battled hard from its inception to promote Northern Ireland internationally as a tourism destination," she said.

The UTDA is gone, and the current tourism board does not use "Ulster." It is known as Tourism Northern Ireland. Last October, Tourism NI expressed delight in the recent "tourism frenzy" to the province sparked by HBO's *Game of Thrones,* which was filmed in Northern Ireland's "beautiful and inspiring landscape. . . . The giant spirit of this land gave life to the make-believe continent of Westeros." And it seems to have done wonders for the real-life land, too. Tourism in 2019 brought in £2.9 million every day.

The Ulster tourism campaign born in the 1920s had many layers, some not obvious. Jamie Nugent wrote last year in the *Journal of Tourism History* (vol. 13, issue 2) that posters and ads like these worked to emphasize Northern Ireland's separate constitutional status, not just its natural attractions. Tourism, he wrote, has "played a key role in state-building and image-shaping in

Northern Ireland, being used to showcase the region's modernity but also borrowing from contested images of rural Ireland . . . (and) expectations of its landscapes, people, and history." The UTDA, in this scholar's words, helped Northern Ireland as it "navigated modernity."

"Tourism, like modernity itself," Nugent concluded, "is by no means universally regarded as a benign force and continues to be contested."

—Charles Lindsey

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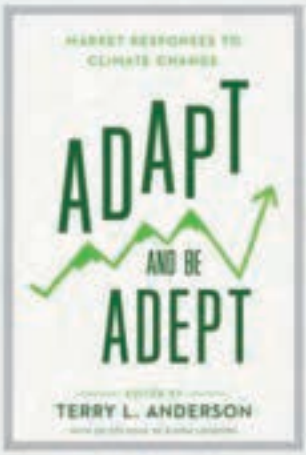

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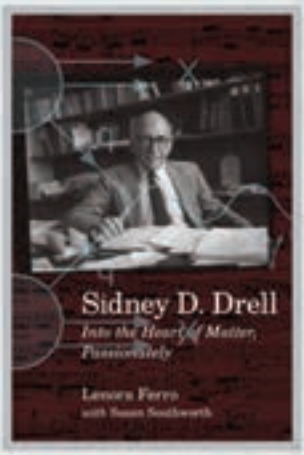

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The Hoover Institution gratefully acknowledges gifts of support for the *Hoover Digest* from:

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WINTER 2022 NO. 1