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Green Upheaval

The New Geopolitics of Energy

JASON BORDOFF AND MEGHAN L. O'SULLIVAN

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It is not hard to understand why people dream of a future defined by clean energy. As greenhouse gas emissions continue to grow and as extreme weather events become more frequent and harmful, the current efforts to move beyond fossil fuels appear woefully inadequate. Adding to the frustration, the geopolitics of oil and gas are alive and well—and as fraught as ever. Europe is in the throes of a full-fledged energy crisis, with staggering electricity prices forcing businesses across

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the continent to shutter and energy firms to declare bankruptcy, positioning Russian President Vladimir Putin to take advantage of his neighbors' struggles by leveraging his country's natural gas reserves. In September, blackouts reportedly led Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng to instruct his country's state-owned energy companies to secure supplies for winter at any cost. And as oil prices surge above $80 per barrel, the United States and other energy-hungry countries are pleading with major producers, including Saudi Arabia, to ramp up their output, giving Riyadh more clout in a newly tense relationship and suggesting the limits of Washington's energy "independence."

Proponents of clean energy hope (and sometimes promise) that in addition to mitigating climate change, the energy transition will help make tensions over energy resources a thing of the past. It is true that clean energy will transform geopolitics—just not necessarily in the ways many of its champions expect. The transition will reconfigure many elements of international politics that have shaped the global system since at least World War II, significantly affecting the sources of national power, the process of globalization, relations among the great powers, and the ongoing economic convergence of developed countries and developing ones. The process will be messy at best. And far from fostering comity and cooperation, it will likely produce new forms of competition and confrontation long before a new, more copacetic geopolitics takes shape.

Talk of a smooth transition to clean energy is fanciful: there is no way that the world can avoid major upheavals as it remakes the entire energy system, which is the lifeblood of the global economy and underpins the geopolitical order. Moreover, the conventional wisdom about who will gain and who will lose is frequently off base. The so-called petrostates, for example, may enjoy feasts before they suffer famines, because dependence on the dominant suppliers of fossil fuels, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia, will most likely rise before it falls. And the poorest parts of the world will need to use vast quantities of energy—far more than in the past—to prosper even as they also face the worst consequences of climate change. Meanwhile, clean energy will come to represent a new source of national power but will itself introduce new risks and uncertainties.

These are not arguments to slow or abandon the energy transition. On the contrary, countries around the world must accelerate efforts to combat climate change. But these are arguments to encourage policymakers

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to look beyond the challenges of climate change itself and to appreciate the risks and dangers that will result from the jagged transition to clean energy. More consequential right now than the long-term geopolitical implications of a distant net-zero world are the sometimes counter-intuitive short-term perils that will arrive in the next few decades, as the new geopolitics of clean energy combines with the old geopolitics of oil and gas. A failure to appreciate the unintended consequences of various efforts to reach net zero will not only have security and economic implications; it will also undermine the energy transition itself. If people come to believe that ambitious plans to tackle climate change endanger energy reliability or affordability or the security of energy supplies, the transition will slow. Fossil fuels might eventually fade. The politics—and geopolitics—of energy will not.

PERSISTENT PETROSTATES

World War I transformed oil into a strategic commodity. In 1918, the British statesman Lord Curzon famously said that the Allied cause had "floated to victory upon a wave of oil." From that point forward, British security depended far more on oil from Persia than it did on coal from Newcastle, as energy became a source of national power and its absence a strategic vulnerability. In the century that followed, countries blessed with oil and gas resources developed their societies and wielded outsize power in the international system, and countries where the demand for oil outpaced its production contorted their foreign policies to ensure continued access to it.

A move away from oil and gas will reconfigure the world just as dramatically. But discussions about the shape of a clean energy future too often skip over some important details. For one thing, even when the world achieves net-zero emissions, it will hardly mean the end of fossil fuels. A landmark report published in 2021 by the International Energy Agency (IEA) projected that if the world reached net zero by 2050—as the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned is necessary to avoid raising average global temperatures by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels and thus prevent the worst impacts of climate change—it would still be using nearly half as much natural gas as today and about one-quarter as much oil. A recent analysis carried out by a team of researchers at Princeton University similarly found that if the United States reached net zero by 2050, it would still

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be using a total of one-quarter to one-half as much gas and oil as it does today. That would be a vast reduction. But oil and gas producers would continue to enjoy decades of leverage from their geologic troves.

Traditional suppliers will benefit from the volatility in fossil fuel prices that will inevitably result from a rocky energy transition. The combination of pressure on investors to divest from fossil fuels and uncertainty about the future of oil is already raising concerns that investment levels may plummet in the coming years, leading oil supplies to decline faster than demand falls—or to decline even as demand continues to rise, as it is doing today. That outcome would produce periodic shortages and hence higher and more volatile oil prices. This situation would boost the power of the petrostates by increasing their revenue and giving extra clout to OPEC, whose members, including Saudi Arabia, control most of the world's spare capacity and can ramp global oil production up or down in short order.

In addition, the transition to clean energy will wind up augmenting the influence of some oil and gas exporters by concentrating global production in fewer hands. Eventually, the demand for oil will decline significantly, but it will remain substantial for decades to come. Many high-cost producers, such as those in Canada and Russia's Arctic territory, could be priced out of the market as demand (and, presumably, the price of oil) falls. Other oil-producing countries that seek to be leaders when it comes to climate change—such as Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States—could in the future constrain their domestic output in response to rising public pressure and to hasten the transition away from fossil fuels. As a result, oil producers such as the Gulf states—which have very cheap, low-carbon oil, are less dependent on the financial institutions now shying away from oil, and will face little pressure to limit production—could see their market shares increase. Providing more or nearly all of the oil the world consumes would imbue them with outsize geopolitical clout, at least until oil use declines more markedly. Other countries whose oil industries might endure are those whose resources can be brought online quickly—such as Argentina and the United States, which boast large deposits of shale oil—and that can thereby attract investors who seek faster payback periods and may shy away from longer-cycle oil investments given the uncertainties about oil's long-term outlook.

An even more intense version of this dynamic will play out in natural gas markets. As the world starts to use less natural gas, the market

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shares of the small number of players that can produce it most cheaply and most cleanly will rise, particularly if countries taking strong climate action decide to curb their own output. For Europe, this will mean increased dependence on Russian gas, especially with the advent of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline connecting Russia to Germany. Today's calls from European lawmakers for Russia to increase its gas output to avoid an energy crisis this winter are a reminder that Moscow's importance to Europe's energy security will rise before it declines.

POWER FROM POWER

In order to understand the geopolitics of a world moving away from fossil fuels, it is critical to grasp which elements of being a clean energy superpower will actually yield geopolitical influence. Here, too, reality differs from the conventional wisdom, and the transition process will look very different from the end state. In the long run, innovation and cheap capital will determine who wins the clean energy revolution. Countries with both those attributes will dominate in at least four ways.

One source of dominance—the power to set standards for clean energy—will be more subtle than the geopolitical power that came with oil resources but just as enduring. Internationally, a country or company that sets global standards for equipment specifications or norms of engagement maintains a competitive advantage over others. For example, Australia, Chile, Japan, and Saudi Arabia have emerged as early adopters in trading low-carbon hydrogen and ammonia across borders and thus may be able to set infrastructure standards and certification norms for those fuel sources, giving their favored technologies and equipment an edge. And for technologies that involve vast quantities of data, such as digital tools that optimize electric grids or manage consumer demand, whoever defines the standards not only will be able to export compatible domestic systems but also may be able to mine data from them.

Standard setting will be particularly important when it comes to nuclear energy. According to the IEA, global nuclear energy generation will need to double between now and 2050 for the world to achieve net-zero emissions. As of 2018, of the 72 nuclear reactors planned or under construction outside Russia's borders, more than 50 percent were being built by Russian companies and around 20 percent by Chinese ones; fewer than two percent were being built by U.S. companies. This will increasingly enable Moscow and Beijing to influence norms regarding

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nuclear nonproliferation and impose new operational and safety standards designed to give their own companies a lasting leg up in a sector that will need to grow as the energy transition unfolds.

A second source of dominance in a clean energy world will be control of the supply chain for minerals such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel, and rare earths, which are critical to various clean energy technologies, including wind turbines and electric vehicles. Here, the analogy to oil power holds, to an extent. According to the IEA, should the world begin to move with haste toward a more sustainable energy mix, demand for such substances will far outstrip what is readily available today; in the agency's estimation, a world on track for net-zero emissions in 2050 will by 2040 need six times as much of them as it does today. Meanwhile, global trade in critical minerals will skyrocket, from around ten percent of energy-related trade to roughly 50 percent by 2050. So over the course of the transition, the small number of countries that supply the vast majority of critical minerals will enjoy newfound influence. Today, a single country accounts for more than half the global supply of cobalt (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC), half the supply of lithium (Australia), and half the supply of rare earths (China). By contrast, the world's three largest oil producers—Russia, Saudi Arabia, and the United States—each account for just ten percent of the world's global oil production. Whereas smaller, poorer countries, such as the DRC, may be hesitant to use their mineral strength to exert pressure on more powerful countries, China has already demonstrated its willingness to do so. China's embargo on the export of critical minerals to Japan in 2010, in the context of rising tensions in the East China Sea, could be a sign of things to come.

China's control over the inputs for many clean energy technologies is not limited to its mining prowess; it has an even more dominant role in the processing and refining of critical minerals. At least for the next decade, these realities will give China real and perceived economic and geopolitical power. Yet in the long term, this influence will wane. The oil price spikes of the 1970s led new players to search for new sources of oil; the mere prospect of political manipulation of scarce minerals is producing the same phenomenon. Moreover, such minerals can be recycled, and substitutes for them will also materialize.

The third element of clean energy dominance will be the ability to cheaply manufacture components for new technologies. This will not confer the same advantages as possessing oil or gas resources has, however.

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China, for example, accounts for the manufacturing of two-thirds of the world's polysilicon and 90 percent of the semiconductor "wafers" used to make solar power cells. By suddenly removing these items from global supply chains, China could create major bottlenecks. But inputs for clean energy products that produce or store energy are not the same as the energy itself. If China did restrict exports of solar panels or batteries, the lights would not go out. China would not be able to bring economies to a standstill overnight or put the well-being and safety of citizens at risk—as Russia did when it curtailed natural gas exports to Europe during the frigid winters of 2006 and 2009.

To be sure, China's actions would create disruption, dislocation, and inflation akin to the effects of the delays in computer chip exports throughout 2021. Such turmoil could stall the energy transition if it encouraged consumers to turn back to gasoline vehicles or cancel plans to install rooftop solar panels. Yet even if China adopted that tactic, over time, markets would respond, and other countries and companies would generate their own substitute products or supplies—in a way that is much harder to do with a natural resource available only in certain locations, such as oil.

A final way in which a country could become a clean energy superpower is through the production and export of low-carbon fuels. These fuels—especially hydrogen and ammonia—will be critical to the transition to a net-zero world given their potential role in decarbonizing hard-to-electrify sectors, such as steel production; fueling trucks, ships, and other heavy vehicles; and balancing grids supplied primarily by renewable sources of energy that can experience intermittent disruptions. The IAE's "net zero by 2050" scenario anticipates that trade in hydrogen and ammonia will rise from almost nothing today to more than one-third of all energy-related transactions. Over time, hydrogen supplies are projected to consist mostly of green hydrogen produced in places with abundant, low-cost renewable energy, such as Chile and the Gulf states, which have vast quantities of cheap solar energy. In this way, some of the petrostates threatened by the move away from fossil fuels may be able to transform themselves into "electrostates."

If a well-supplied and diversified market for hydrogen and ammonia eventually develops, a gap in one location can be offset with supplies from another, much as with oil today. This will limit the geopolitical influence of dominant suppliers. In the near to the medium term, however, the evolving production and trade of low-carbon fuels

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will create tensions and geopolitical risks. Much as was true of the nascent global market for liquefied natural gas decades ago, the supply of low-carbon fuels will at first be dominated by a small number of producers. As a result, if a country such as Japan bets on hydrogen and ammonia and depends heavily on just one or two countries for its supply of fuel, it may face outsize energy security risks.

The dominant suppliers of low-carbon fuels will also evolve over time. Before green hydrogen (or ammonia, which is easier to transport and can be converted back to hydrogen) becomes dominant, "blue" hydrogen will likely prevail, according to the IEA. Blue hydrogen is made from natural gas using carbon capture technology to reduce emissions. Countries with cheap gas and good carbon dioxide storage capacity, such as Qatar and the United States, may emerge as some of the top exporters of blue hydrogen or ammonia. For countries that lack natural gas but have the capacity to store carbon dioxide underground, the cheapest way to get hydrogen—which is hard to transport over long distances—may well be to import natural gas and then convert it into hydrogen close to where it will be used, thus presenting some of the same risks and dependencies that natural gas presents today. And worst off will be countries that lack both gas and storage capacity, such as South Korea, and so will have to import blue hydrogen, green hydrogen, and ammonia; these countries will remain vulnerable until a much larger and more diversified market for hydrogen and ammonia develops.

GREENER BUT LESS GLOBAL

A net-zero global economy will require large supply chains for clean energy components and manufactured products, trade in low-carbon fuels and critical minerals, and continued trade (albeit much smaller than today) in oil and gas. At first blush, then, a decarbonized world might seem likely to be more globalized than today's fossil-fuel-dependent planet. But getting to that net-zero world will generate three forces that will push against globalization.

First, a decarbonized world will rely more on electricity—and a more electricity-reliant world will see less global trade in energy. The IEA has projected that in a net-zero world of 2050, total energy-related trade will be only 38 percent of what it would be if the world were to stay on its current trajectory. The cheapest and easiest way to decarbonize several sectors of the economy, such as cars that run on oil products or heat generated by burning natural gas, is often to electrify them and

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ensure that the electricity is generated from zero-carbon sources. For this reason, total electricity usage in the United States will likely be two to four times as great in a fully decarbonized economy as compared with today, according to the Princeton researchers. And compared with oil and gas, decarbonized electricity is much more likely to be produced locally or regionally; less than three percent of global electricity was traded across borders in 2018, compared with two-thirds of global oil supplies in 2014. That is because electricity is harder and more expensive to transport over long distances, notwithstanding the evolution of high-voltage, direct-current transmission technology. Dependence on imported electricity also creates more energy security concerns for a country than, say, dependence on imported oil, since electricity is much harder to stockpile and store in the case of supply disruptions or to import from other sources.

Additional pressure against globalization will come from the fact that clean energy is already contributing to the trend toward protectionism. Countries around the world are erecting barriers to cheap clean energy inputs from abroad, fearing dependence on other countries and seeking to build job-generating industries within their own borders. A prominent example of this is the customs duties and tariffs that India is placing on Chinese solar panels in order to nurture its own domestic solar industry. In a similar vein, the U.S. Congress is considering a tax credit that would favor companies that manufacture electric vehicles in the United States with union labor. And international efforts to eliminate obstacles to trade in environmental goods, such as wind turbines and solar panels, have stalled.

Finally, countries taking strong steps toward decarbonization may try to compel others to follow suit through economic statecraft—which in turn might lead to global fragmentation. For instance, policymakers in the EU are intent on instituting border adjustment mechanisms related to greenhouse gas emissions by 2023. Under this policy, goods imported from countries that do not match the EU's climate standards will be subject to tariff-like fees intended to equalize the price of goods based on their carbon content. That way, "green" steel made in Europe, for example, will not be disadvantaged in the European market relative to "dirty" imported steel. Over time, however, tariffs aimed at leveling the playing field might morph into tariffs aimed at pressuring countries considered too slow in decarbonizing to pursue stronger climate policies. And although the idea of using sanctions to compel speedier

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decarbonization may seem over the top now, in a world in which carbon emitters are increasingly seen as threats to international peace and security, sanctions could become a common tool to force laggards to act.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

Moving to a net-zero global economy will require an unprecedented level of global cooperation but will also lead to conflict along the way and ultimately produce winners and losers. Some great powers, such as China and the United States, are well positioned to benefit from the transition. Others, such as Russia, seem more likely to wind up worse off. These diverging paths will, of course, alter relations among the great powers.

The relationship between Beijing and Washington is more fraught now than it has been in decades. Thus far, cooperation between the two powers on climate change has been minimal, notwithstanding a last-minute agreement to work together on the issue that they reached at the COP26 (26th Conference of the Parties) meeting in Glasgow this past fall. If recent developments—such as Chinese President Xi Jinping's failure to attend the Glasgow meeting in person, China's lackluster revision of its climate targets, and Beijing's softening on coal policy in the face of recent gas shortages—are indicative of a trend, China and the United States could increasingly clash over climate change, which may then sap the political will of other countries to take strong climate action.

The transition to clean energy seems likely to become yet another sphere in which the two countries compete aggressively over technology, talent, supplies, markets, and standards. That competition may accelerate the pace of clean energy deployment, but it will also fuel tensions between the two great powers. China will increasingly assert its power, leveraging its dominant position in clean energy manufacturing and its control of critical minerals. As the transition progresses, however, China's influence may wane as new technologies emerge elsewhere, supply chains shift, and more plentiful materials are used to produce clean energy.

Another great-power relationship that the energy transition might transform is that between the United States and its European allies. At a time when transatlantic relations require repair and rejuvenation, climate policy could potentially act as a powerful bonding agent. Washington and its partners in Europe could ultimately use their collective economic and diplomatic power to spur

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decarbonization around the world; they might form a "climate club" of countries committed to net-zero emissions that would impose tariffs on imports from outside the club—as advocated in these pages by the Nobel Prize–winning economist William Nordhaus in 2020. They could also put in place joint mechanisms to decarbonize the most energy-intensive industries, such as steel, cement, and aluminum, and even repurpose NATO to focus on responding to climate-related environmental and security disasters.

Yet in the short term, the road to a net-zero world may not be smooth for U.S.-European relations. Washington's convoluted climate politics require tortured policy approaches, such as trying to use congressional budget reconciliation to overcome Republican opposition to stringent emission standards and carbon taxes and relying solely on carrots (such as subsidies) rather than sticks to change corporate and consumer conduct. This will make it difficult to harmonize policies across the Atlantic and risks exacerbating trade tensions as Europe commits to measures such as carbon border tariffs.

Finally, the energy transition will inevitably transform Russia's relations with the other major powers. Russia is highly dependent on oil and gas exports, and in the long term, the clean energy transition will pose significant risks to its finances and influence. In the messy transition, however, Russia's position vis-à-vis the United States and Europe may grow stronger before it weakens. As European countries come to increasingly depend on Russian gas in the coming years and as volatility in the oil market rises, both the United States and Europe will count on Russia to keep prices in check through its partnership with Saudi Arabia as leaders of the OPEC+ alliance, which is made up of the members of OPEC and ten other major oil-exporting countries.

Meanwhile, Russia's largely dismissive approach to climate change will become a growing source of tension in Moscow's relations with Washington and Brussels—even though Putin's recent rhetoric has become more climate-friendly. And in a decarbonized world that is increasingly electrified and interconnected digitally via the Internet of Things, Russia may find it hard to resist targeting energy infrastructure with cyberattacks, as it did when it took down Ukraine's electric grid in 2015 and 2016. Moreover, as traditional energy consumers in the West curb their fossil fuel use, Russia will increasingly turn to the Chinese market to offload its supplies, fostering the geopolitical alignment of Moscow and Beijing.

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FROM CONVERGENCE TO DIVERGENCE

For the past 30 years, rates of growth in the developing world have on the whole exceeded those in the developed world, fueling a gradual economic convergence of rich countries and poor ones. In the long run, the transition to clean energy promises to reinforce that trend. Although a net-zero world will still entail hardships, it will also mean far less pain for developing countries than a world of unchecked climate change. Moreover, many developing countries enjoy abundant, low-cost clean energy resources, such as solar power, which they will be able to use at home or export as either electricity or fuels. A fair number also boast geologic formations excellent for storing carbon dioxide that will need to be removed from the atmosphere. (According to some estimates, one-fifth of the reduction in carbon dioxide necessary to achieve net-zero emissions will come from carbon removal.)

The rocky pathway to decarbonization, however, also poses serious risks for developing countries. The rift between rich and poor nations was on full display at the climate meeting in Glasgow. Lower-income countries were emphatic in their calls for industrialized nations to pay for the damage their historical greenhouse gas emissions have caused. Climate change is the result of cumulative carbon emissions over time. One-quarter of total emissions from the beginning of the industrial age until now have come from the United States, and nearly as much, from Europe. A mere two percent has come from the entire continent of Africa. As rich countries feel an increased urgency to slash carbon emissions and developing countries remain focused on the need to deliver growth to their citizens, the two groups are set to clash.

There was also evidence of tension over the fate of the $100 billion in aid to poor countries that rich countries pledged at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit to deliver by 2020. That commitment remains unfulfilled—and even that large sum is a rounding error compared with the roughly $1 trillion to $2 trillion needed annually in clean energy investment in developing and emerging-market economies to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. As the urgency of decarbonization increases along with the costs of climate change, the failure of rich countries to assist poor ones will be a growing source of geopolitical tension—particularly as developing countries disproportionately bear the brunt of damage they did not cause.

Given how long the world has waited to act on climate change, poor countries will need to follow development trajectories different

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from the one taken by rich countries; developing countries will have to rely far less on fossil fuels. Yet nearly 800 million people lack access to any energy services, much less the amount of energy needed to drive meaningful levels of economic growth and industrialization. Although solar power, wind, and other renewable sources of energy can be an excellent way to meet some of the needs of the developing world, they are currently insufficient to power industrialization and other paths to growth, and there are limits to how quickly they can be scaled up. Some developing countries will also face obstacles that rarely crop up in rich countries. For example, charging an electric car may not be viable in countries that experience blackouts every day or where electric grids are backed up by diesel generators.

If rich countries increasingly seek to prevent the use of fossil fuels and developing ones see few viable, affordable alternatives to them, the gap between the rich and the poor will only widen. For instance, last April, the U.S. Treasury Department announced that the United States would no longer finance natural gas projects overseas because of climate change concerns—except in the poorest of countries, such as Sierra Leone—even though 60 percent of U.S. electricity still comes from fossil fuels. Shortly thereafter, Nigerian Vice President Yemi Osinbajo argued in *Foreign Affairs* that it was unfair to ask his country to develop without using natural gas.

Tensions between developed countries and developing ones will escalate not only over the use of fossil fuels but also over their production. Several of the world's poor countries, such as Guyana, Mozambique, and Tanzania, have significant hydrocarbon resources they would like to tap. But rich countries that see themselves as climate leaders will increasingly pressure those and other developing countries, or the companies that want to partner with them, not to drill, even as at least some of those rich countries continue to extract their own oil, gas, and coal. And financial institutions will face growing pressure from activists not to support extractive projects in the developing world. In a world with less and less scope for fossil fuel usage, poor countries may understandably ask why they should not be allowed to have a larger slice of a shrinking pie.

HOW TO LOWER THE RISKS

The clean energy transition demands a complete transformation of the global economy and will require roughly $100 trillion in additional

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capital spending over the next three decades. There is little reason to expect that such a radical overhaul can be completed in a coordinated, well-managed, and smooth way. An orderly transition would be hard enough if there were a master planner designing the highly interconnected global energy system—and, needless to say, there is not.

When the world does achieve a fully, or even mostly, decarbonized energy system, many of today's energy security risks will be significantly ameliorated (even as some new ones arise). The influence of the petrostates and Russia's leverage in Europe will be diminished, prices for renewable electricity will be less volatile, and conflicts over natural resources will wane. But if on the way to that end state, the affordability, reliability, or security of the supply of energy, or other national security imperatives, comes into conflict with ambitious responses to climate change, there is a significant risk that environmental concerns will take a back seat. International climate leadership thus requires far more than just negotiating climate agreements, making promises to decarbonize, and mitigating the national security implications of the severe impacts of climate change. It also means lowering, in a variety of ways, the economic and geopolitical risks posed by even a successful transition to clean energy.

First, policymakers need to expand their toolkits to increase energy security and reliability and prepare for inevitable volatility. For starters, it would be shortsighted to scrap an existing zero-carbon energy source that can operate consistently—namely nuclear power. And it would be foolish to get rid of existing energy security tools, such as the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve; Congress has prematurely decided to put fuel from the reserve up for sale in response to near-term U.S. oil abundance and in anticipation of a post-oil world. Indeed, as the energy transition accelerates, policymakers should undertake cost-benefit analyses to assess whether additional strategic stockpiles may be justified in order to secure supplies of natural gas, critical minerals, hydrogen, and ammonia.

Policymakers should also maintain maximum flexibility on energy sources even as they phase out "brown" energy. Arguments that the United States saw "peak gasoline" use in 2007 and that the world experienced "peak coal" use in 2014 proved to be incorrect. Given the uncertainty about future needs and demands, policymakers should be prepared to keep some legacy fossil fuel assets in reserve, in case they are needed for brief periods during the transition when there is a disconnect between supply and demand. Regulators of utilities should adopt pricing structures

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that would compensate companies for providing reliability. For example, in order to prepare for peaks in demand, regulators should design markets that pay energy utilities for maintaining capacity and supplies even if they are rarely used and that incentivize utilities to offer plans that reward customers for reducing their electricity use during peak periods. More broadly, policymakers should enact measures to increase efficiency in order to reduce demand, thereby narrowing potential supply and demand imbalances.

Another way governments can boost energy security is by reducing supply chain risks—but not in a way that would encourage protectionism. Officials shouldn't chase the chimera of independence but instead try to build flexibility in a diversified and interconnected system. In Europe, improved energy security has come not from reducing Russian gas imports—indeed, those imports have consistently risen—but rather from regulatory and infrastructure reforms that have made the European market more integrated and competitive. In contrast, during the 2021 power crisis in Texas, the parts of the state with grids connected to those of neighboring states fared better than the rest of Texas, which was served by an isolated electric grid and transmission system.

Policymakers must also address some of the ways in which the jagged energy transition will exacerbate already deep inequalities in society and potentially produce a political backlash against clean energy. Communities dependent on fossil fuel revenue and jobs will suffer in the absence of government-backed economic development and workforce training. Meanwhile, to help low-income consumers deal with price volatility, policymakers should turn to subsidies or temporary tax-rate adjustments, as many European countries have in recent months.

As much as governments need to foster new innovation and accelerate the clean energy transition to curb climate change, they also must take conscious steps to mitigate the geopolitical risks this change will create. New technologies can solve technical and logistical problems but cannot eliminate competition, power differentials, or the incentive that all countries have to protect their interests and maximize their influence. If governments do not recognize this, the world will confront some jarring discontinuities in the years ahead, including new economic and security threats that will reconfigure global politics. But perhaps the greatest risk of failing to identify and plan for these pitfalls is that if national security concerns come into conflict with climate change ambitions, a successful transition might not take place at all. And the world can ill afford more bumps on the already rough road to net zero.

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Keeping the Wrong Secrets

How Washington Misses the Real Security Threat

OONA A. HATHAWAY

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The United States keeps a lot of secrets. In 2017, the last year for which there are complete data, roughly four million Americans with security clearances classified around 50 million documents at a cost to U.S. taxpayers of around $18 billion.

For a short time, I was one of those four million. From 2014 to 2015, I worked for the general counsel of the Department of Defense, a position for which I received a security clearance at the "top secret" level. I came into the job thinking that all the classified documents I would see would include important national security secrets accessible only to those who had gone through an extensive background check and been placed in a position of trust. I was shocked to discover that much of what I read was in fact not all that different from what was available on the Internet. There were exceptions: events I learned about a few hours

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or even days before the rest of the world, for instance, and information that could be traced to intelligence sources. But the vast bulk of the classified material I saw was remarkable only for how unremarkable it was.

The U.S. system for classifying secrets is based on the idea that the government has access to significant information that is not available, or at least not widely available, to private citizens or organizations. Over time, however, government intelligence sources have lost their advantage over private sources of intelligence. Thanks to new surveillance and monitoring technologies, including geolocation trackers, the Internet of Things, and commercial satellites, private information is now often better—sometimes much better—than the information held by governments.

At the same time, these technologies have given rise to an altogether new threat: troves of personal data, many of them readily available, that can be exploited by foreign powers. Each new piece of information, by itself, is relatively unimportant. But combined, the pieces can give foreign adversaries unprecedented insight into the personal lives of most Americans.

Yet the United States has not begun to adapt its system for protecting information. It remains focused on keeping too many secrets that don't really matter, treating government information like the crown jewels while leaving private data almost entirely unguarded. This overemphasis on secrecy at the expense of privacy isn't just inefficient. It undermines American democracy and, increasingly, U.S. national security, as well.

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EPIDEMIC OF ESPIONAGE

The U.S. government did not always keep so many secrets. At the turn of the twentieth century, in fact, it had no formal nationwide system of secrecy. That began to change after Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, stunning Western countries and signaling the rise of a new regional power in Asia capable of challenging the major powers in Europe. Japan had long prohibited emigration, but it had lifted this restriction in 1886, just as its military prowess was beginning to grow. By 1908, around 150,000 Japanese immigrants had entered the United States.

As the number of new arrivals ticked up, American newspapers began reporting stories about "Japanese spies roaming about the Philippines, Hawaii, and the continental United States, busily making drawings of the location of guns, mines, and other weapons of defense,"

as *The Atlanta Constitution* put it in 1911. Journalists at *The Courier-Journal* detailed a sophisticated Japanese spying operation in Los Angeles, Portland, and the harbors around Puget Sound, including rumors that "agents of the Japanese War Office, in the guise of railroad section laborers or servants in families residing in the locality, are stationed at every large railroad bridge on the Pacific coast." These stories were fantastic—and likely false, for the most part, as were widespread tales of Japanese candy store operators who were really mapmakers, Japanese fishermen who were really taking harbor soundings, and Japanese barbers who picked up military secrets from their unsuspecting clients.

Members of Congress, alarmed by the stories, decided to act. The Defense Secrets Act, passed in 1911, was the first U.S. law to criminalize spying. It provided that "whoever, . . . without proper authority, obtains, takes, or makes, or attempts to obtain, take, or make, any document, sketch, photograph, photographic negative, plan, model, or knowledge of anything connected with the national defense to which he is not entitled" could be fined or imprisoned.

After war broke out in Europe, President Woodrow Wilson appeared before Congress and asked it to strengthen the laws against sedition and the disclosure of information. His racist nativism on full display, he declared, "There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags but welcomed under our generous naturalization laws to the full freedom and opportunity of America" who "have sought to pry into every confidential transaction of the Government in order to serve interests alien to our own." The result was the Espionage Act of 1917—a law that, with a few revisions, still forms the main legal basis for proscribing the unauthorized disclosure of national security information in the United States. The law was extraordinarily broad, criminalizing the disclosure of "information respecting the national defence" that could be "used to the injury of the United States."

Now there were rules criminalizing the disclosure of national security secrets. But what was a secret? Historians consider the American Expeditionary Forces' General Order No. 64, also issued in 1917, to be the first attempt by the U.S. government to adopt a formal classification system for government information that had national security value. In the years that followed, the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy adopted their own regulations on classified information, producing a mishmash of classification rules across the military branches. Then, in 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt displaced this series of decentralized

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classification rules with an executive order making it unlawful to record "certain vital information about military or naval installations" without permission. The rules applied to aircraft, weapons, and other military equipment, as well as to books, pamphlets, and other documents if they were classified as "secret," "confidential," or "restricted."

Since then, many presidents have issued executive orders that define what information is classified, how it is classified, and who can access it. The latest comprehensive executive order, issued by President Barack Obama in 2009, lays out three levels of classification—top secret, secret, and confidential—along with a vast array of rules about what each level of classification means. Under the order, classified documents originate in two ways: one of the 1,867 officials designated as having "original classification authority" decides that a document should be classified or one of the four million or so individuals with access to classified material creates a new document using information that was already classified—so-called derivative classification. In 2017, more than 49 million government-generated documents were derivatively classified.

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SECRECY BEGETS SECRECY

Almost everyone who has examined the U.S. system of keeping secrets has concluded that it results in mass overclassification. J. William Leonard, who led the Information Security Oversight Office during the Bush administration, once observed that more than half of the information that meets the criteria for classification "really should not be classified." Others would put that number much higher. Michael Hayden, a former director of the National Security Agency and later of the CIA, once complained of receiving a "Merry Christmas" email that carried a top-secret classification.

One factor driving overclassification is the fact that those who do the classifying are almost always incentivized to err on the side of caution—classifying up rather than down. When I worked at the Pentagon, if I made a mistake and classified a document or an email at too high a level, there would likely be no penalty. As far as I know, no one in the offices I worked with was ever disciplined for classifying a document too high. Classifying a document too low, however, can bring serious professional consequences—not to mention potentially threaten U.S. national security. Secrecy, in other words, is the easiest and safest course of action.

Secrecy also begets more secrecy, because documents must be classified at the highest level of classification of any information they contain.

If a ten-page memo contains even a single sentence that is classified as top secret, for instance, the memo as a whole must be classified as top secret (unless it is "portion marked," meaning that each segment—the title, each paragraph, each bullet point, and each table, for instance—is given a separate mark of classification). This requirement fuels an endless progression of derivative classification that compounds the United States' already enormous overclassification problem.

HIDDEN HARM

The democratic costs of overclassification are hard to overstate. To note the obvious: a state cannot keep secrets from its enemies without also keeping them from its own population. Massive government secret keeping undermines democratic checks and balances, since it makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the public—and, often, for members of Congress—to know what the executive branch is up to.

The U.S. government has done horrific things when acting in secret. CIA black sites, where detainees suspected of involvement in terrorist groups were tortured during the Bush administration, could not have survived public scrutiny—which is why they operated in secret for years. Secrecy also undermines American democracy in more subtle ways. When the government keeps secrets, those secrets enable—and sometimes require—lies. When those lies are exposed, public trust in the government takes a hit—as it did in 2013, when Edward Snowden, then a contractor for the National Security Agency, revealed the existence of a massive surveillance program under which the agency had accessed the email, instant-messaging, and cell phone data of millions of Americans. That revelation eroded trust in U.S. intelligence agencies, making it harder for them to operate—precisely the opposite of what the government's secrecy was meant to achieve.

Secrets also have a chilling effect on free speech. In May 2019, the Department of Justice indicted Julian Assange, the founder of the whistle-blowing organization WikiLeaks, on 17 counts of violating the Espionage Act for obtaining and publishing classified documents. It was the first time the government had brought such charges for publication alone, raising fears in the media that the government might start using the Espionage Act to prosecute journalists. As *The New York Times* reported at the time, Assange had been charged for actions that the paper itself had taken: it had obtained the same documents as WikiLeaks, also without government

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authorization, and published subsets of them, albeit with the names of informants withheld.

And it is not just whistleblowers and journalists who need to worry; former government officials can also be caught in the classification vise. Even after leaving office, government employees are not only subject to potential criminal prosecution if they disclose classified information that they learned while in government but also required to submit their writings (and drafts of public talks) for "prepublication review." John Bolton, who served as national security adviser to President Donald Trump, became an unexpected poster child for abuse of the prepublication review process after his book was subjected to delays that appeared politically motivated. He is far from alone. Millions of former government employees, including me, are bound by similar rules. The real harm of this system is not to former government employees, however. It is to the quality of public discourse, as former government employees with knowledge about the U.S. national security system too often decide that it is easier to simply stay silent.

Overclassification also makes it difficult to keep the secrets that really matter. As the Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart put it in his concurring opinion in the 1971 case ordering the release of the Pentagon Papers, the Defense Department's classified history of the U.S. role in Vietnam, "When everything is classified, then nothing is classified, and the system becomes one to be disregarded by the cynical or the careless, and to be manipulated by those intent on self-protection or self-promotion." Too much secrecy can also make it harder to protect the American public from national security threats—for instance, by limiting information sharing that could inform decision-making or identify new dangers. One reason the plot to carry out the 9/11 terrorist attacks was not detected in advance, the 9/11 Commission found, was too much secrecy: the failure to share information between agencies and with the public allowed the attackers to succeed. "We're better off with openness," said Thomas Kean, the chair of the commission. "The best ally we have in protecting ourselves against terrorism is an informed public."

EYES AND EARS EVERYWHERE

But perhaps the biggest cost of keeping too many secrets is that it has blinded the United States to an emerging and potentially even more dangerous threat: new tracking and monitoring technologies that

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are making it increasingly difficult to conceal even the most sensitive information. Take the exercise app Strava, which allows athletes to record their runs and bike rides, among other activities, and share them with friends. In 2017, this seemingly innocuous app became a national security nightmare after a student in Australia began posting images that showed the activities of American Strava users on what appeared to be forward operating bases in Afghanistan and military patrols in Syria. Others quickly generated maps of a French military base in Niger and of an Italian base and an undisclosed CIA site in Djibouti. Soon, it became clear that Strava data could be used not only to reveal the inner workings of such military installations but also, with a few tweaks, to identify and track particular individuals.

Hundreds of similar apps track the locations of unwitting Americans every day, collecting information that is bought and sold by data aggregators. One such company, X-Mode, collects, aggregates, and resells location data so granular that it can track the movements of individual devices and even determine their hardware settings. X-Mode collects this information through its own applications, but it also pays app developers who use X-Mode's software developer and its location-tracking code for their data. According to a 2019 news report, X-Mode had access to location information for an average of 60 million global monthly users. In late 2020, Apple and Google banned X-Mode from collecting location information from mobile devices running their operating systems, but the tracking technology remains widespread.

X-Mode is the best-known location-tracking data aggregator, but it is far from the only company taking advantage of publicly available information to track people's private lives. The New York–based company Clearview AI has devised a groundbreaking facial recognition app that allows users to upload photos and run them against a database of more than three billion images scraped from Facebook, Venmo, YouTube, and millions of other websites to identify the people in the photos. Federal and state law enforcement agencies have found the app to be much better than the FBI's own database for tracking down criminal suspects. In 2019, the Indiana State Police solved a case in 20 minutes after uploading to Clearview an image from a cell phone video shot by a bystander to a crime. The man identified as the criminal suspect did not have a driver's license and was not in any government database, but someone (not the man himself) had posted a video of him on social media along with a caption containing his name. He was quickly arrested and charged.

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The rise of the Internet of Things—networked devices—means that more information is being collected about people's daily lives than ever before, including vast troves of voice data generated by voice-operated assistants such as Amazon's Alexa. In a 2017 report, Dan Coats, the director of national intelligence, identified the cybersecurity vulnerabilities produced by the Internet of Things as a key threat to national security. But the report focused narrowly on the physical dangers that sophisticated cybertools might pose to consumer products such as cars and medical devices and did not address the threats that these tools might pose to information security. Late last year, Congress enacted the Internet of Things Cybersecurity Improvement Act, which established minimum security requirements for connected devices. But the law applies only to devices sold to the federal government. Private citizens are on their own. And devices are hardly the only way that companies collect personal information. Facebook makes third-party plug-ins, such as "like" and "follow" buttons and tracking pixels, that its advertising partners can add to their own, non-Facebook websites and applications. These plug-ins, in addition to collecting data for Facebook partners, enable Facebook to monitor the online activities of its users even when they are not on its site.

The spies that necessitated the Espionage Act a century ago have largely been replaced by this ubiquitous tracking and monitoring technology. If an app can expose the location and identity of U.S. soldiers on forward operating bases in Afghanistan, it can do the same to intelligence officers working at the CIA's headquarters, in Langley, Virginia, or even to the secretary of defense and his or her family members. Forget trying to place operatives under cover again. No matter how careful they have been to keep their identities off the Internet, their friends' photos of them on Facebook and Instagram and inescapable surveillance videos that data aggregators and their customers can easily access will make it nearly impossible to hide their true identities and contacts, much less the identities and whereabouts of their families and friends.

The U.S. government may have refrained from sounding the alarm in part because its own intelligence agencies are exploiting such vulnerabilities themselves. Documents disclosed by WikiLeaks in 2017, for instance, revealed that the CIA had exploited a vulnerability in Samsung-connected televisions to use them as covert listening devices. But while the U.S. government has kept mum, private industry has met and sometimes surpassed authorities' ability to collect information.

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Nongovernmental organizations working in conflict zones now crowdsource conflict-related information that is often as good as or better than the information gathered by U.S. intelligence agencies. At the same time, private satellite companies provide on-demand access to sophisticated satellite imagery of practically any location on earth. In short, the government no longer has a monopoly on the information that matters.

THE MOSAIC THEORY

In the national security world, there is a concept known as "the mosaic theory." It holds that disparate, seemingly innocuous pieces of information can become significant when combined with other pieces of information. This theory is one reason why the vast majority of individuals with access to classified information are told that they cannot judge what information should be classified. A document that appears meaningless might, when put together with other information, give away an important piece of the mosaic to an adversary.

Historically, intelligence analysts have pieced together bits of information to complete the mosaic. As specialists in their fields, good analysts come to know when a seemingly inconsequential piece of information may be significant in context. The advent of big data, combined with artificial intelligence, promises to upend this traditional approach. To understand why, consider the breakthrough made by the retail giant Target almost a decade ago. Like most companies, Target assigns its customers ID numbers tied to their in-store cards and to their credit cards, names, and email addresses. When a customer makes a purchase, that information is collected and aggregated. In 2012, a statistician working at Target figured out that he could use this information, together with purchase information from women who had set up baby registries, to determine who was likely pregnant. Women who were pregnant started buying unscented lotion, for instance, and they were more likely to purchase calcium, magnesium, and zinc supplements. Using this information, Target was able to create a "pregnancy prediction score," calculate where women probably were in the course of their pregnancies, and send women coupons for products they may need. This technology only came to public attention after an angry customer complained to a manager at Target that the company was sending mailers to his daughter that clearly targeted pregnant women. Later, he called to apologize: "It turns out there's been some

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activities in my house I haven't been completely aware of. She's due in August. I owe you an apology."

That was one company monitoring one set of purchases nearly a decade ago with the help of a simple statistical analysis. Now consider what an adversary could do if it combined that kind of information with similar information from a variety of databases and then used modern artificial intelligence to detect patterns.

This is likely already happening. China is suspected of collecting the personal data of millions of Americans. William Evanina, former director of the U.S. National Counterintelligence and Security Center, warned in early 2021 that China had stolen personal information belonging to 80 percent of Americans, including by hacking health-care companies and smart home devices that connect to the Internet. In April, federal investigators concluded that Chinese hackers may have scraped information from social media sites such as LinkedIn to help them determine which email accounts belonged to system administrators, information that they then used to target Microsoft's email software with a cyberattack. In other words, China appears to have built a massive data set of Americans' private information using data illegally obtained and scraped from publicly available websites.

In March 2014, Chinese hackers broke into computer networks of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, which houses personal information of all federal employees, and obtained the files of tens of thousands of employees who had applied for top-secret security clearances—including me.Although these files were not classified, they contained valuable national security information: the identities of government employees with top-secret clearances, as well as their family contacts, overseas travel and international contacts, Social Security numbers, and contact information for neighbors and friends. Combined with the database of Americans' personal information, this information has likely put China in a position to determine which federal government employees with top-secret access are carrying large credit card debts, have used dating apps while married, have children studying abroad, or are staying unusually late at the office (possibly signaling that an important operation is underway). In short, while the U.S. government has been wasting its energy protecting classified information, the vast bulk of which is unimportant, information with much greater national security value has been left out for the taking.

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ENDING OVERCLASSIFICATION

The current U.S. national security system was designed to protect twentieth-century secrets. At the time the system was created, most important national security information was in the government's hands. It made sense to design a system devoted almost entirely to keeping spies from obtaining that information and preventing insiders from disclosing it. Today, however, government information has been eclipsed by private information. The United States needs an approach to national security information that reflects that new reality. It must fundamentally reform the massive national security system that has created a giant edifice of mostly useless classified information and reduce the amount of private information that is easily attainable.

In pursuit of the first aim, the United States should start by imposing an automatic ten-year declassification rule for all classified information. Currently, all classified records older than 25 years are supposed to be automatically declassified, but there are so many exceptions to that rule that many documents remain secret for a half century or more. It took until 2017 to declassify 2,800 classified records relating to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, for instance, and even then the Trump administration held some records back.

A ten-year declassification timeline should have only two exceptions: information classified as "restricted data" under the Atomic Energy Act and information identifying intelligence agency informants who are still alive. Decisions about whether declassifying any other information might harm national security should be left to an independent review board made up of former government officials, historians, journalists, and civil rights advocates. A government agency facing the automatic declassification of information it deemed potentially harmful could appeal to the board to extend the classification period—in essence, forcing the agency to justify any deviation from the rule. By making declassification the default, such a rule would incentivize the government to adequately resource the review process and to allow it to take place in a timely manner.

The government should also harness the power of artificial intelligence and machine learning to identify cases of overclassification. Individual government employees who routinely overclassify information relative to their peers could be identified, notified that they classify documents more often than others, and encouraged to be more careful to assess the true need to classify. Artificial intelligence may also eventually be able to

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suggest classification levels at the time employees are writing documents or emails, to challenge incorrect classification decisions at the time they are made, and to review the classification of stored documents.

Ending mass overclassification would free officials to think more creatively about addressing the emerging threat posed by enormous troves of readily available personal data. Washington can begin by following the lead of Beijing, which despite being an intrusive surveillance state recently enacted one of the strongest data privacy laws in the world—likely not primarily to protect its citizens' privacy but to prevent their data from being collected and exploited by foreign adversaries. The law applies to all entities and individuals, both inside and outside China, that process the personal data of Chinese citizens or organizations, imposing controls on the data and allowing Chinese citizens to sue if the information is stolen, misused, or corrupted. In so doing, the law discourages companies doing business in China from collecting and retaining personal data that could be of interest to foreign intelligence services. In other words, China is working to close the door to foreign powers seeking to exploit the personal data of its citizens, while the United States has left that door wide open.

Privacy in the United States, meanwhile, relies on a patchwork of federal and state laws, each of which addresses elements of the problem, but none of which is comprehensive. For years, civil liberties groups have been calling on the federal government to protect the private information of individuals, but those calls have gone mostly unheeded. Today, however, it is increasingly clear that protecting the privacy of Americans is necessary not just to ensure their civil liberties but also to defend the country.

Congress should start by expanding to all Internet-connected devices the same security requirements that currently apply only to those such devices that the government owns or operates. One subset of Internet-connected devices poses an especially acute danger: those that monitor the human body. These include fitness trackers that are worn on the body but also devices that are implanted or inserted into it: pacemakers, cardioverter defibrillators, and "digital pills" with embedded sensors that record that the medication has been taken. To reduce the vulnerability of these devices to hacking, federal regulators must require manufacturers to improve their security protocols.

The government should also give consumers new and better tools to control the data that companies collect about them. The Information

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Transparency and Personal Data Control Act, introduced in March by Representative Suzan DelBene, Democrat of Washington, would require "opt in" and "opt out" consent and "plain English privacy notices." These measures would certainly be improvements over the status quo. But research shows that consumers tend not to read disclosures, so even clear individual opt-in and opt-out requirements may not limit data collection from unwitting consumers. The proposed legislation would also preempt state laws that may be more protective than the federal law, meaning that it may actually reduce protections in some places. A better option would be for Congress to enact a federal law that follows the example recently set by California, requiring businesses to respect individuals' choices to universally opt out of data collection. That would be an important step toward giving control back to consumers.

Last, Congress should create an independent federal agency to monitor and enforce data protection rules. The United States is one of only a few democracies that does not have an agency dedicated to data protection. Instead, it relies on the Federal Trade Commission, which has many competing obligations. The proposed Data Protection Act of 2021, introduced in June by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Democratic of New York, would create an agency to "regulate high-risk data practices and the collection, processing, and sharing of personal data"—in particular, by data aggregators. Establishing such an agency would also allow the federal government to develop expertise in data privacy issues and to respond more quickly and effectively to new challenges and threats.

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LOCKED OUT

The inventor Charles Kettering once observed that "when you lock the laboratory door, you lock out more than you lock in." In the early twentieth century, when the current classification system took shape, the information worth protecting was mostly located inside federal agencies, so locking the door made some sense. Today, however, Kettering's observation applies more than ever. Private entities have access to more, and in many cases better, information than the government, so locking the door only isolates federal agencies without protecting much information worth keeping secure.

What a twenty-first-century approach to national security information requires is greater attention to privacy. Yet the United States has done little to protect the information about ordinary citizens that in a world of artificial intelligence and machine learning poses a growing

threat to national security. The United States spends billions of dollars to protect classified information, much of which is already readily available from public sources. But it does little to enable its citizens, including those in important government positions, to keep their private lives from being documented, tracked, and exposed. In so doing, it is leaving pieces of the mosaic of U.S. national security lying around for its adversaries to gather up and put together.

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The End of the Middle East

How an Old Map Distorts a New Reality

MARC LYNCH

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In early December 2021, the Ethiopian government pulled off a dramatic reversal in its yearlong civil war with rebels from the Tigray region. Armed with a new arsenal of drones and other forms of military support from Iran, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Ethiopian forces were able to push back an offensive by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, which itself was supported by Somali fighters, who were in turn backed by Qatar.

Many American observers were surprised by the direct involvement of no fewer than four Middle Eastern countries in what appeared to be an African conflict. But such interest is hardly unusual. In recent years, Turkey has established more than 40 consulates in Africa and a major military base in Somalia. Israel has announced a "return to Africa," in part to find new alliances as it faces growing international pressure

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over its occupation of the West Bank. Saudi Arabia has bought wide swaths of agricultural land in Ethiopia and Sudan in pursuit of food security, and the UAE has built naval bases across the Horn of Africa. Egypt has been embroiled in a conflict with Ethiopia over its plans for a dam at the head of the Nile River.

Nor are these entanglements limited to Africa. Oman has traditionally seen itself as an Indian Ocean nation and maintains strong economic ties with India, Iran, and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have long meddled deeply in the affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Turkey has become increasingly involved in Central Asia, including with a military intervention in Azerbaijan. Almost every Gulf state has recently upgraded its partnerships with China and other Asian countries.

Amid these continual and growing transregional connections, however, U.S. foreign policy remains wedded to a far narrower mental map of the Middle East. Since the early years of the Cold War, the Washington establishment has viewed the Middle East as the Arab world—broadly conceived as the member states of the Arab League (with the exception of the geographic outliers Comoros, Mauritania, and Somalia)—plus Iran, Israel, and Turkey. These parameters feel natural to many. Based on geographic continuity, common-sense understandings of the region, and twentieth-century history, this is the Middle East of American university departments and think tanks, as well as of the U.S. State Department.

But such a map is increasingly outdated. Leading regional powers operate outside the traditional Middle East in much the same way as they operate inside it, and many of the rivalries most important to the region now play out beyond those assumed borders. The Pentagon knows this: the region covered by U.S. Central Command, the combatant command that handles the Middle East, includes not only Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf states but also Afghanistan, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan—a grouping that is directly at odds with the State Department's Middle East.

Such a dramatic misalignment of the U.S. policymaking and military establishments points to the dangers of clinging to the old model of the region. Not only is the concept out of step with current politics and military practice; it also hampers attempts to confront many of the biggest challenges of the day, from serial refugee crises to Islamist insurgencies to entrenched authoritarianism. Continuing to build scholarship and policy on a legacy definition of the Middle East threatens to blind U.S.

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strategy to the actual dynamics shaping the region—and, worse, makes Washington all too likely to continue making disastrous blunders there.

COLD WAR CARTOGRAPHY

As set in stone as it now seems, the American concept of the Middle East has little grounding in premodern history. For centuries, the Arab provinces of North Africa and the Levant were part of the vast, multinational Ottoman Empire. The coastal communities of the Gulf were organically linked to the Horn of Africa across the Red Sea. Islamic networks connected Egypt and the rest of North Africa to areas deep in sub-Saharan Africa. But instead of looking back that far, the United States adopted its version of the region from a more recent source: the colonialism and great-power politics of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe.

In the nineteenth century, British and French imperial projects gave rise to the idea of a distinct region defined by North Africa and the Levant. In 1830, France occupied Algeria; in 1881, it captured Tunisia; and by 1912, it also controlled Morocco. French colonial legacies of racial classification, and not the natural barrier of the Sahara, informed the distinction between Black French Africa and a French Maghreb of lighter-skinned Arabs and Berbers. That same racism drew a hard barrier between culturally similar populations of the Mediterranean basin, with white southern Europe forcibly distinguished from the Near Eastern peoples across the sea in North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

The British, for their part, called the region "the Near East" because of its role as a transit point along the way to their primary colonial interests in India and "the Far East," or Asia. Following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the region took on new importance. British imperial interests now connected the Arabian Peninsula to Egypt and the Levant, while distinguishing those areas from points north, east, and south. And a string of protectorates along the Arabian Peninsula remained under British control all the way until 1971, reinforcing the old colonial boundaries long after other forces had begun to reshape the region. A set of ideological assumptions about the supposed exoticism of Arabs, Persians, and Turks, an outlook that was famously termed "Orientalism" by the late Palestinian American scholar Edward Said, helped give shape to the idea that this vast region shared a common, backward culture.

After World War II, as the United States plunged headlong into Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, the U.S. State

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Department adapted the Anglo-French concept of the region for its own purposes. The definition of what the United States was now calling "the Middle East" (not quite as near to Washington as to London) was informed by policymakers' goals: maintain access to oil in the Arabian Peninsula, protect Israel, and keep former British and French possessions in North Africa out of the Soviet sphere of influence.

During the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. economic and political priorities helped institutionalize this map in academic and policymaking circles. The 1958 National Defense Education Act channeled federal resources toward area studies in support of Cold War priorities, and big nonprofits, such as the Ford Foundation, joined the effort. The new approach divided the world into distinct regions, one of which was the Middle East. As a result, scholars of the Middle East developed deep expertise about the cultures, languages, history, and politics of the countries in that tightly defined area. But they were not expected to know much of anything about sub-Saharan Africa or Afghanistan and Pakistan, no matter how important those places might be to the issues they were studying.

In those early years of the Cold War, the pan-Arabism of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser reinforced the notion of the Middle East as a cultural-political unity rather than an artificial construct. The Palestinian issue and struggles for decolonization energized and unified the Arab world, with heads of state defining themselves through their positions on Israel and Arab unification. And in Egypt and other North African countries, racist attitudes about the populations of sub-Saharan Africa contributed to the idea of the Middle East as ethnically and culturally distinct from surrounding areas. The incorporation of much of Central Asia into the Soviet Union, meanwhile, justified the exclusion of states such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan from a region defined by Cold War competition.

This concept of the Middle East provided the foundation for a series of U.S. foreign policy doctrines and security alliances, relationships that, despite upheavals such as the Iranian Revolution, for many decades served to keep the oil flowing and maintain stability. There were costs, however. Trained to think according to this map, and often informed by Orientalist views inherited from the colonial era, academics and policymakers tended to draw conclusions about the region without taking into account the many social and political forces that transcended its boundaries. For instance, the 9/11 attacks quickly produced a consensus that they had been driven by the specific pathologies of

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the Arab Middle East. The mountains of analysis explaining jihadism through Arab culture often simply ignored the parallel rise of Islamist and other forms of religious extremism in Africa, South Asia, and many other parts of the world.

Similarly, the long-held idea that Muslim countries are somehow uniquely resistant to democracy ignores the real drivers of autocratic resilience in the Middle East: Western-backed oil monarchies and Arab strongmen with little accountability to their poorly governed citizens. It also overlooks the regular participation of Muslims in many democracies outside the Middle East—from India and Indonesia to the United States itself. The assumption that Muslims would inevitably choose radical Islamist governments if they had the chance has been used to justify decades of American failure to support real political reform there.

In all these ways, the American concept of the Middle East has more often been a limitation than an asset, yet for decades, it has proved remarkably sticky. Even after 9/11 forcefully exposed the global connections of a group such as al Qaeda, which had roots in Afghanistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, U.S. policy continued to be driven by the old paradigm. The invasion of Iraq was justified in part by a determination to remake the Middle East, with the George W. Bush administration's "freedom agenda" pushing a war of ideas aimed at an Arab world that was supposedly uniquely prone to authoritarianism and sectarian violence. More recently, similar assumptions led the United States to fail to anticipate—or react effectively to—the wave of popular revolts that engulfed the Arab world in 2010–11.

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POLITICS OUT OF BOUNDS

For U.S. policymakers, the Arab uprisings provided a deceptive lesson. At first, the rapid spread of protests from Tunisia and Egypt to much of the rest of the region seemed to show the renewed coherence of the Middle East. Further underscoring the idea of a single geopolitical arena was the jockeying that followed: Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE intervened in wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen and meddled in the transitions occurring in Egypt and Tunisia. Yet the countries in the region whose influence grew the most—Iran, Israel, and Turkey—were not part of the Arab world at all. Moreover, Arab autocrats quickly came to view the interconnectedness of their populations as a threat to their own survival, and many sought to crack down on pan-Arab political movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood

and liberal activist networks alike. The hopes of regionwide political change were instead quashed by a new fracturing, with Libya and Syria descending into chaos and many of the Arab monarchs looking for new sources of legitimacy that had little to do with the broader Arab public.

Today, if anything, political developments in many Middle Eastern countries have made the region's traditional boundaries increasingly meaningless. Sudan's 2018 revolution—and its more recent military coup, which was backed by Egypt, a leading Middle East power, but opposed by the African Union, an international body representing 55 African states—showed the extent to which the country straddles two regions. Elsewhere in Africa, migration and the growth of Islamist insurgencies across the Sahel have shifted the political, security, and economic interests of the Maghreb states southward. Libya's civil war has fueled flows of migrants, weapons, drugs, and radicalism across central Africa, further blurring the line between North Africa and the rest of the continent. Many of the migrants arriving in Europe from the Middle East originate in countries south of the Sahara. In response to the growing strategic importance of the Sahel, Morocco has focused on spreading its religious authority in West Africa, and Algeria has been involved in security operations in Mali.

Other political dynamics have also revealed the limited value of defining the Middle East as a single geographic area. The Iranian-Saudi rivalry, for example, has little relevance in North Africa. The political battle among Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE after the 2017 blockade of Qatar by several states in the region played out in a competition for support not only in neighboring Arab countries but also across the African continent and even in Washington. The appeal of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), even more than that of al Qaeda, was more global than regional, as manifested by the flow of foreign fighters to Syria and the spread of the movement across Africa and Asia. It is difficult to sustain counterterrorism models based on problems said to be uniquely Arab when some of the most active jihadi insurgencies unfold in Mali, Nigeria, and Somalia.

Meanwhile, some of the largest recent conflicts have defied the region's assumed geography. Libya's civil war destabilized Mali and other African neighbors. When Saudi Arabia built a coalition to back its intervention against Yemen's Houthi rebels in 2015, it not only sought help from like-minded Arab states; it also solicited support from Eritrea, Pakistan, and Sudan, which contributed bases and troops. At the same time, the UAE's enforcement of a naval blockade against

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the Houthis has led it to build up a military presence across the Horn of Africa and to fortify the strategically located island of Socotra, which is closer to Africa than the Arabian Peninsula. Although it is often seen as a paradigmatic Middle Eastern war, the conflict in Yemen has played out in ways that call into question the supposed borders of the region.

MARKETS MOVING EAST

Just as recent political dynamics have rendered the old map of the Middle East obsolete, so have large-scale social changes. From the 1950s through the 1980s, the mass migration of laborers from poorer Arab countries to the rapidly developing Gulf states created powerful connections within the region. Remittances played a key role in the informal economies of Egypt and most of the states in the Levant, and workers' extended stays in Gulf countries enabled the spread of conservative Islamist ideas that had not previously found much purchase outside Saudi Arabia. But after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, during which Palestinian and Yemeni workers were often seen as disloyal, Arab migrant laborers were increasingly replaced in the country by politically safer South Asian workers. That trend has greatly weakened the economic and social ties between the Gulf and the rest of the Middle East, while correspondingly strengthening those ties between the Gulf and countries across the Indian Ocean.

Similarly, Arab media have lost much of their thematic coherence. Until 2011, Arab satellite television did much to shape a common culture at a popular level, including during the Arab uprisings. But in the decade since, the media landscape has become Balkanized, mirroring the region's political polarization. Thus, where Al Jazeera served as a common platform for Arab public politics in the 1990s and early years of this century, after 2011, it became just one among many partisan media platforms, including the Saudi-based Rotana Media Group, the Emirati-based Al Arabiya, and Iran's Arabic-language Al-Alam. Such stations reinforce political polarization, with each one's narrative embraced by those within its political ambit and scorned by those outside it. Social media, once a force for the Arab public's integration, has been weaponized by regimes such as those in Egypt and Saudi Arabia through the widespread use of bot armies and censorship and has fragmented into hostile silos.

Over the past two decades, global financial markets have themselves reshaped the orientation of some of the wealthiest Middle

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Eastern countries, including Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Given their deep investments in Western real estate and sports clubs, their growing economic ties to Asia, and their large populations of non-Arab service workers and Western expatriates, it increasingly makes more sense to view these places as centers of global capitalism than as Middle Eastern states; Dubai has more in common with Singapore or Hong Kong than with Beirut or Baghdad. Similarly, Saudi Arabia's and the UAE's use of Israeli-made digital surveillance tools mirrors China's model as much as it does those of other Arab regimes. Such global ties in economics and technology may soon come to play as much of a role in these states' foreign policies as any traditional regional priorities do—pushing them closer to Asia, say, or providing new incentives for them to manipulate elections in Western democracies.

In turn, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which once served as a unifying force in the Arab world, has dramatically faded in importance. The Boycott, Divest, and Sanctions movement, which is aimed at Israel's escalating settlements in the West Bank, has attracted more interest on American college campuses and in the halls of Congress than in the Middle East. Europe, the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court are more central battlefields for Israeli-Palestinian disputes than any Arab capital. The Palestinian cause today, while gaining unprecedented support in the West, has rarely enjoyed less sympathy from the states of the Arab region, as demonstrated by the decision of Bahrain and the UAE to normalize relations with Israel in the 2020 Abraham Accords. Despite the limited tangible implications of that agreement, Israelis have seemed to embrace it with a sense of catharsis, in part because it signaled the passing of the Middle East as a primary arena of security or political concerns—for Arabs as well as for Israelis.

THEIR MAP, NOT OURS

For 75 years, the Middle East as we know it has in large part been a construct of American primacy. For much of that time, the U.S. map made sense because Washington's priorities in the region could go a significant way toward influencing the region's politics. Washington's Cold War strategic doctrines shaped alliances and interventions from the time of the 1956 Suez crisis, when the United States displaced France and the United Kingdom as the primary Western power in the region, until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The 1990–91 Gulf War entrenched an American regional order, in which all roads seemed to

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lead to Washington. The United States monopolized stewardship of the Arab-Israeli peace process, from the Madrid conference through the Oslo accords, and its dual containment of Iran and Iraq defined the geopolitics of the Gulf.

But the global position of the United States has rapidly declined, and so, too, has the coherence of a region largely organized around U.S. interests. Amid the fallout from the disastrous decision to invade Iraq in 2003, three successive U.S. presidents have sought to downgrade U.S. commitments in the Middle East and pivot toward Asia. And with the United States perceived to be in retreat, regional powers have asserted their own definitions of the region: an order centered on the Indian Ocean for the Gulf states, a trans-Sahel orientation for North African states. This does not mean that the traditional zones of conflict have vanished. Iran, for example, has spread its proxy networks and influence throughout the shattered states of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen and is locked in a growing competition with Israel and Saudi Arabia. But like its regional rivals, Iran has also upped its activities in Africa and begun building partnerships with states in Asia, especially China.

For the United States, the rise of jihadi insurgencies in sub-Saharan Africa has rendered obsolete the Middle East–focused counterterrorism doctrine that emerged after 9/11. Although U.S. forces have withdrawn from Iraq and Syria, U.S. drone strikes and counterterrorism operations continue from Somalia through the Sahel. Confusingly, even as the United States signals that it is getting out of the Middle East, it is maintaining or expanding the same military architecture, to deal with many of the same security concerns, in the Sahel and East Africa.

And now, the United States must also contend with Beijing, which thinks differently about the Middle East than Washington does. China's map of the region follows its own strategic interests, not Washington's. Through its Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has expanded its energy interests in the Gulf and its presence in Africa. It has signed a series of agreements with Gulf states, bridging the divide between Iran and the Arab Gulf states by downplaying politics and focusing on infrastructure and energy resources. China's growing involvement has opened up new prospects for stabilizing oil production and other forms of regional cooperation, but it has also multiplied the opportunities for dangerous misunderstandings, as Washington seeks to balance its own regional interests with its growing rivalry with China.

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If U.S. scholars, analysts, and policymakers were to begin to understand the Middle East less as a discrete geographic area and more as a fluid collection of states and populations through which broader social forces and shifting contests for power flow, many of these recent developments would seem far less surprising. Thinking beyond the traditional Middle East would also have direct analytic and strategic benefits for Washington, not only because it would entail the recovery of forgotten history but also because it would lead to a better understanding of the fast-changing realities on the ground.

But there are risks to a transregional approach. Simply adopting the Pentagon's broader definition of the region may end up reproducing the security-driven focus that has characterized many of the failed U.S. policies in Afghanistan and the Middle East over the past two decades. This would be a tragedy. A transregional lens should allow academics and policymakers not only to move beyond the old paradigms but also to rethink how the United States promotes development and good governance abroad. It could help Washington generate a more effective response to Africa's and Europe's migration crisis, better align world powers to respond to Libya's and Yemen's catastrophic wars, and avoid unnecessary conflict with China in areas and on issues on which cooperation would make far more sense. Abandoning old cultural and political assumptions about the Middle East and viewing the region within a broader global context could also enable the United States and its allies to finally get serious about defending human rights and promoting real democratic change there.

By remaining locked in an outdated concept of the region, Washington risks truncating its understanding of the behavior and interests of the Middle East's main players; misunderstanding the actions there of other global powers, such as China; and overestimating the effects of an American retreat. It will be difficult to think beyond the Middle East: accumulated expertise, deeply internalized thought patterns, and entrenched bureaucratic structures all stand in the way. But the changing dynamics of global power and regional practice are rapidly reorienting many leading Middle Eastern states, and the map they are following is no longer Washington's; the map is their own. It is now up to Washington to learn to read it.

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Revenge of the Patriarchs

Why Autocrats Fear Women

ERICA CHENOWETH AND ZOE MARKS

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The pantheon of autocratic leaders includes a great many sexists, from Napoléon Bonaparte, who decriminalized the murder of unfaithful wives, to Benito Mussolini, who claimed that women "never created anything." And while the twentieth century saw improvements in women's equality in most parts of the world, the twenty-first is demonstrating that misogyny and authoritarianism are not just common comorbidities but mutually reinforcing ills. Throughout the last century, women's movements won the right to vote for women; expanded women's access to reproductive health care, education, and economic opportunity; and began to enshrine gender equality in domestic and international law—victories that corresponded

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with unprecedented waves of democratization in the postwar period. Yet in recent years, authoritarian leaders have launched a simultaneous assault on women's rights and democracy that threatens to roll back decades of progress on both fronts.

The patriarchal backlash has played out across the full spectrum of authoritarian regimes, from totalitarian dictatorships to party-led autocracies to illiberal democracies headed by aspiring strongmen. In China, Xi Jinping has crushed feminist movements, silenced women who have accused powerful men of sexual assault, and excluded women from the Politburo's powerful Standing Committee. In Russia, Vladimir Putin is rolling back reproductive rights and promoting traditional gender roles that limit women's participation in public life. In North Korea, Kim Jong Un has spurred women to seek refuge abroad at roughly three times the rate of men, and in Egypt, President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi recently introduced a bill reasserting men's paternity rights, their right to practice polygamy, and their right to influence whom their female relatives marry. In Saudi Arabia, women still cannot marry or obtain health care without a man's approval. And in Afghanistan, the Taliban's victory has erased 20 years of progress on women's access to education and representation in public office and the workforce.

The wave of patriarchal authoritarianism is also pushing some established democracies in an illiberal direction. Countries with authoritarian-leaning leaders, such as Brazil, Hungary, and Poland, have seen the rise of far-right movements that promote traditional gender roles as patriotic while railing against "gender ideology"—a boogeyman term that Human Rights Watch describes as meaning "nothing and everything." Even the United States has experienced a slowdown in progress toward gender equity and a rollback of reproductive rights, which had been improving since the 1970s. During his presidency, Donald Trump worked with antifeminist stalwarts, including Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, to halt the expansion of women's rights around the world. And despite the Biden administration's commitment to gender equity at the national level, Republican-controlled states are attempting to reverse the constitutional right to abortion, which is now more vulnerable than it has been in decades.

Not surprisingly, women's political and economic empowerment is now stalling or declining around the world. According to Georgetown University's Women, Peace, and Security Index, the implementation of gender equality laws has

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slowed in recent years, as have gains in women's educational attainment and representation in national parliaments. At the same time, intimate partner violence has increased, and Honduras, Mexico, and Turkey have seen significant increases in femicide. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these trends worldwide, forcing millions of women to leave the workforce and take on additional unpaid care, restricting their access to health care and education, and limiting their options for escaping abuse.

The assault on women's rights has coincided with a broader assault on democracy. According to Freedom House and the Varieties of Democracy Project at the University of Gothenburg, the last 15 years have seen a sustained authoritarian resurgence. Relatively new democracies, such as Brazil, Hungary, India, Poland, and Turkey, have slid back into autocracy or are trending in that direction. Countries that were considered partially authoritarian a decade ago, such as Russia, have become full-fledged autocracies. And in some of the world's oldest democracies—France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States—antidemocratic sentiment is rising in established political parties.

It is not a coincidence that women's equality is being rolled back at the same time that authoritarianism is on the rise. Political scientists have long noted that women's civil rights and democracy go hand in hand, but they have been slower to recognize that the former is a precondition for the latter. Aspiring autocrats and patriarchal authoritarians have good reason to fear women's political participation: when women participate in mass movements, those movements are both more likely to succeed and more likely to lead to more egalitarian democracy. In other words, fully free, politically active women are a threat to authoritarian and authoritarian-leaning leaders—and so those leaders have a strategic reason to be sexist.

Understanding the relationship between sexism and democratic backsliding is vital for those who wish to fight back against both. Established autocrats and right-wing nationalist leaders in contested democracies are united in their use of hierarchical gender relations to shore up nationalist, top-down, male-dominated rule. Having long fought against social hierarchies that consolidate power in the hands of the few, feminist movements are a powerful weapon against authoritarianism. Those who wish to reverse the global democratic decline cannot afford to ignore them.

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WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES

Scholars of democracy have often framed women's empowerment as an outcome of democratization or even a function of modernization and economic development. Yet women demanded inclusion and fought for their own representation and interests through contentious suffrage movements and rights campaigns that ultimately strengthened democracy in general. The feminist project remains unfinished, and the expansion of women's rights that occurred over the last hundred-plus years has not been shared equally among women. As intersectional and anticolonial feminists have long argued, the greatest feminist gains have accrued to elite women, often white and Western ones. Yet women's political activism has clearly expanded and fortified democracy—a fact that autocrats and illiberal democrats intuitively understand and that explains their fear of women's empowerment.

In the past seven decades, women's demands for political and economic inclusion have helped catalyze democratic transitions, especially when those women were on the frontlines of mass movements. Democratic transitions in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia during the 1980s and 1990s were driven in part by mass popular movements in which women played key roles. Our research shows that all the major resistance movements during the postwar period—those seeking to topple national governments or to win national independence—featured women in support roles, such as providing food, shelter, intelligence, funds, or other supplies. But these movements differed in the degree to which they had women as frontline participants—those who took part directly in demonstrations, confrontations with authorities, strikes, boycotts, and other forms of noncooperation. Some, such as Brazil's pro-democracy movement in the mid-1980s, featured extensive women's participation: at least half of the frontline participants were women. Others, such as the 2006 uprising against the Nepalese monarchy, featured more modest frontline participation of women. Only one nonviolent campaign during this period seems to have excluded women altogether: the civilian uprising that ousted Mahendra Chaudhry from power in Fiji in 2000.

In the first half of the twentieth century, women played active roles in anticolonial liberation struggles across Africa and in leftist revolutions in Europe and Latin America. Later, pro-democracy movements in Myanmar and the Philippines saw nuns positioning their bodies between members of the security forces and civilian activists.

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During the first intifada, Palestinian women played a key role in the nonviolent resistance against Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, organizing strikes, protests, and dialogues alongside Israeli women. In the United States, Black women have launched and continue to lead the Black Lives Matter movement, which is now a global phenomenon. Their organizing echoes the activism of forebears such as Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and other Black American women who planned, mobilized, and coordinated key aspects of the U.S. civil rights movement. Two women revolutionaries, Wided Bouchamaoui and Tawakkol Karman, helped lead the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Yemen, respectively, later winning the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to bring about peaceful democratic transitions through nonviolent resistance, coalition building, and negotiation. Millions more like them have worked to sustain movements against some of the world's most repressive dictatorships, from tea sellers and singers in Sudan to grandmothers in Algeria to sisters and wives in Chile demanding the return of their disappeared loved ones outside Augusto Pinochet's presidential palace.

It turns out that frontline participation by women is a significant advantage, both in terms of a movement's immediate success and in terms of securing longer-term democratic change. Mass movements in which women participated extensively on the frontlines have been much more likely to succeed than campaigns that marginalized or excluded women. Women have been much more likely to participate in nonviolent mass movements than in violent ones, and they have participated in much greater numbers in nonviolent than in violent campaigns. To explain why women's frontline participation increases the chances that a movement will succeed, therefore, one must first understand what makes nonviolent movements fail or succeed.

Generally, movements seeking to topple autocratic regimes or win national independence are more likely to prevail when they mobilize large numbers of people; shift the loyalties of at least some the regime's pillars of support; use creative tactics, such as rolling strikes, in addition to street protests; and maintain discipline and resilience in the face of state repression and countermobilization by the regime's supporters. Large-scale participation by women helps movements achieve all these things.

On the first point, power in numbers, the advantage of women's participation is obvious. Movements that exclude or sideline women reduce their potential pool of participants by at least half. Resistance movements

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must achieve broad-based support to be perceived as legitimate. And the larger the mobilization, the more likely the movement is to disrupt the status quo. General strikes and other mass actions can bring a city, state, or country to a standstill, imposing immediate economic and political costs on a regime. Mass mobilization can also generate a sense of inevitability that persuades holdouts and fence sitters to join the resistance. People want to join the winning team, and when there are large numbers of diverse participants, that can help encourage tacit or overt support from political and business elites and members of security forces.

Second, popular movements improve their chances of success when they persuade or coerce their opponents to defect. In research on public attitudes toward armed groups, scholars have found that female fighters increase the legitimacy of their movements in the eyes of observers. The same is likely true for nonviolent mass uprisings. Significant participation by women and other diverse actors also increases the social, moral, and financial capital that a movement can use to erode its opponent's support system. When security forces, business elites, civil servants, state media, organized labor, foreign donors, or other supporters or enablers of a regime begin to question the status quo, they signal to others that it may be possible to defy that regime. For example, during the People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos ordered the security forces to attack large crowds of demonstrators who were demanding his ouster. But nuns who were participating in the protests put themselves between the tanks and other demonstrators. The security forces could not bring themselves to follow through with the assault, averting a massacre that could have altered the course of the revolution. High-level defections followed, and Marcos eventually fled the country, leading to a democratic transition.

A third way women's participation makes mass movements more effective is by expanding the range of tactics and modes of protest available to them. Everywhere it has been studied, diversity has been found to improve teamwork, innovation, and performance, and mass movements are no exception. In particular, diversity enhances creativity and collaboration, both of which help movements tap into broader information networks and maintain momentum in the face of state crackdowns. Women's participation also makes possible culturally gendered tactics, such as marching in full beauty queen regalia, as women did in Myanmar's pro-democracy protests in 2021; cooking food at the frontlines of demonstrations, as women did during an

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uprising of farmers in 2020 and 2021 in India; or protesting naked, as women in Kenya, Nigeria, and many other countries have done in order to stigmatize or disarm their opponents. Some protest movements have relied on social shaming. For example, during antigovernment protests in Algeria in 2019, grandmothers told riot police to go home, threatening to report the officers' bad behavior to their mothers. In Sudan that same year, a women's Facebook group named and shamed plainclothes policemen: its members outed their own brothers, cousins, and sons as members of the shadowy militias that were trying to terrorize the opposition into submission.

Women have also developed other forms of gendered noncooperation that can benefit mass movements. Consider the origins of the term "boycott." In the late nineteenth century, women cooks, maids, and laundresses in County Mayo, Ireland, refused to provide services and labor to an absentee British landlord named Captain Charles Boycott. They encouraged others to join them, making it impossible for Boycott to remain in Ireland and inspiring a new name for their tactic. Women have pioneered other forms of social noncooperation, as well. Although the antiwar sex strike in Lysistrata was fictional, it is likely that Aristophanes had some historical precedent in mind when he wrote the comedic play. Women activists have organized sex strikes over the millennia: Iroquois women used this method, among others, to secure a veto over war-making decisions in the seventeenth century; Liberian women used it to demand an end to civil war in the early years of this century; Colombian women used it to urge an end to gang violence; and on and on.

Power in numbers, the persuasion of opponents, and tactical innovation all help facilitate a fourth key factor in the success of nonviolent people power movements: discipline. When movements maintain nonviolent resistance in the face of violence or other provocations by security forces, they are more likely to mobilize additional support and, ultimately, to succeed. And movements with women on the frontlines, it turns out, are less likely to fully embrace violence or develop violent flanks in response to regime crackdowns. At least in part, that is likely because having large numbers of women on the frontlines moderates the behavior of other protesters, as well as the police. Gendered taboos against public violence against women and against violent confrontations in the presence of women and girls may explain part of this phenomenon. So might the higher political costs of violently repressing women who are participating in sit-ins and strikes.

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Women from different backgrounds face different risks of violent repression, however. The women on the frontlines of movements demanding and expanding democracy often come from oppressed castes, classes, and minority groups. They are students and young people, widows and grandmothers. Women from marginalized backgrounds have often been ignored or subjected to greater violence during mass mobilizations than have wealthy or otherwise privileged women who benefit from patriarchal authoritarianism. This is why, for example, "Aryan" German women succeeded in securing the release of their Jewish husbands during the Rosenstrasse protest in Berlin in 1943, whereas Jewish women would have been arrested or executed for such a protest. Black Americans who powered the U.S. civil rights movement similarly faced much greater risks than did the white people who participated as allies. Only sustained cross-class, multiracial, or multiethnic coalitions can overcome these dynamics of privilege and power, which is why such coalitions are crucial for facing down violent authoritarian repression and pushing societies toward egalitarianism and democracy for all.

A RISING TIDE

Women who participate on the frontlines of mass movements don't just make those movements more likely to achieve their short-term objectives—for instance, removing an oppressive dictator. They also make those movements more likely to secure lasting democratic change. Controlling for a variety of other factors that might make a democratic transition more likely—such as a country's previous experience with democracy—our analysis shows that extensive frontline participation by women is positively associated with increases in egalitarian democracy, as defined by the Varieties of Democracy Project.

In other words, women's participation in mass movements is like a rising tide, lifting all boats. Researchers have found that inclusive transition processes lead to more sustainable negotiated settlements and more durable democracy after civil wars. Although there is little research on settlements that come out of nonviolent mobilizations, the presence of women likely translates into increased demands for electoral participation, economic opportunity, and access to education and health care—all of which make democratic transitions more likely to endure.

What happens when inclusive popular mobilizations are defeated and no transitions take place? Incumbent regimes that stamp out inclusive

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mass movements tend to indulge in a state-sponsored patriarchal backlash. The greater the proportion of women in the defeated movement, the higher the degree of a patriarchal backlash—a dynamic that has ominous implications for Afghanistan, Belarus, Colombia, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Myanmar, Russia, Sudan, and Venezuela, all of which currently have inclusive people power movements whose outcomes are uncertain. Our research shows that countries with failed popular movements tend to experience major backsliding in both egalitarian democracy and gender equality, making them worse off than before the movements began. In other words, the impressive impact of women's frontline participation on the probability of democratization is contingent on the movement's victory; women's participation leads to democratic change and women's empowerment only when the broader movement succeeds.

THE AUTOCRAT'S PLAYBOOK

Authoritarian leaders and illiberal democrats have responded to the threat of women's political mobilization by reversing progress on gender equality and women's rights. Their motivation is not all strategic—many probably believe in sexist ideas—but their worldview is self-serving.

In fully authoritarian states, the mechanisms of sexist repression can be uncompromising and brutal. Often, they take the form of policies that exert direct state control over women's reproduction, including through forced pregnancies or forced abortions, misogynistic rhetoric that normalizes or even encourages violence against women, and laws and practices that reduce or eliminate women's representation in government and discourage women from entering or advancing in the workforce.

In China, for instance, Xi has launched a population suppression campaign against the Uyghurs and other ethnic and rural minorities, forcing birth control, abortions, and even sterilization on many women. Women from ethnic minorities now face the threat of fines or imprisonment for having what Beijing considers too many children. In Egypt, state control over women's reproduction is harnessed to the opposite effect: abortion is illegal in any and all circumstances, and women must seek a judge's permission to divorce, whereas men have no such requirement. In Russia, where abortion has been legal under any circumstance since 1920, Putin's government has attempted to reverse the country's declining population by discouraging abortions and reinforcing "traditional" values. In all three countries, despite nominal constitutional commitments to protect women against gender

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discrimination, women are dismally underrepresented in the workforce and in powerful official roles.

In less autocratic settings, where overtly sexist policies cannot simply be decreed, authoritarian-leaning leaders and their political parties use sexist rhetoric to whip up popular support for their regressive agendas, often cloaking them in the garb of populism. In doing so, they promote misogynistic narratives of traditionalist "patriotic femininity." The scholar Nitasha Kaul has described these leaders as pushing "anxious and insecure nationalisms" that punish and dehumanize feminists. Where they can, they pursue policies that assert greater state control over women's bodies, while reducing support for political and economic gender equality. They encourage—and often legislate—the subjugation of women, demanding that men and women conform to traditional gender roles out of patriotic duty. They also co-opt and distort concepts such as equity and empowerment to their own ends. Although such efforts to reassert a gender hierarchy look different in different right-wing settings and cultures, they share a common tactic: to make the subjugation of women look desirable, even aspirational, not only for men but also for conservative women.

One way that autocratic and illiberal leaders make a gender hierarchy palatable to women is by politicizing the "traditional family," which becomes a euphemism for tying women's value and worth to childbearing, parenting, and homemaking in a nuclear household—and rolling back their claims to public power. Female bodies become targets of social control for male lawmakers, who invoke the ideal of feminine purity and call on mothers, daughters, and wives to reproduce an idealized version of the nation. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has argued that women are not equal to men and that their prescribed role in society is motherhood and housekeeping. He has called women who pursue careers over motherhood "half persons." Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government has similarly encouraged women to stop trying to close the pay gap and focus instead on producing Hungarian children.

Across the full range of authoritarian and semiauthoritarian regimes, sexual and gender minorities are often targeted for abuse, as well. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people are seen as undermining the binary gender hierarchy celebrated by many authoritarians. As a result, they are frequently marginalized and stigmatized through homophobic policies: Poland's "LGBT-free zones," for instance,

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or Russia's bans on "LGBTQ propaganda" and same-sex marriage. Beijing recently went as far as banning men from appearing "too effeminate" on television and social media in a campaign to enforce China's "revolutionary culture."

Despite their flagrant misogyny—and, in some cases, because of it—some authoritarians and would-be authoritarians succeed in enlisting women as key players in their political movements. They display their wives and daughters prominently in the domestic sphere and sometimes in official positions to obscure gender unequal policies. Valorizing traditional motherhood, conservative women often play supporting roles to the masculine stars of the show. There is perhaps no better illustration of this dynamic than the dueling women's movements that supported and opposed Jair Bolsonaro's 2018 presidential campaign in Brazil. Bolsonaro's opponents organized one of the largest women-led protests in the country's history under the banner of *Ele Não*, or "Not Him." His female supporters swathed themselves in the Brazilian flag and derided feminism as "sexist."

In the patriarchal authoritarian's view, men are not real men unless they have control over the women in their lives. Trump's masculine authority was therefore heightened when his wife, Melania Trump, walked behind him onto Air Force One, and it was challenged when she refused to appear with him in public. Sara Duterte-Carpio, the mayor of Davao City, in the Philippines, and a daughter of President Rodrigo Duterte, was a front-runner to succeed her father until he announced that women are "not fit" to be president. Despite the country's history of female heads of state and Duterte-Carpio's leading poll numbers, she dutifully filed her candidacy for vice president instead.

While women are pigeonholed into traditionally feminized roles, patriarchal authoritarian leaders trumpet their power with gratuitous displays of masculinity. Putin posing topless is the viral version of this public peacocking, but casual misogyny, carefully staged photo ops, and boastful, hypermasculine rhetoric also fit the bill. Think of Trump's oversize red tie, aggressive handshake, and claims that his nuclear button was bigger than Kim's—or Bolsonaro's call for Brazilians to face COVID-19 "like a man." This kind of talk may seem ridiculous, but it is part of a more insidious rhetorical repertoire that feminizes opponents, then projects hypermasculinity by criticizing women's appearance, joking about rape, threatening sexual violence, and seeking to control women's bodies, all in order to silence critics of patriarchal authoritarianism.

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The counterpart to this violent rhetoric is paternalistic misogyny. As Kaul writes, "While Trump, Bolsonaro, and Duterte have most explicitly sexualized and objectified women, projecting themselves as profusely virile and predatory, [Indian Prime Minister Narendra] Modi and Erdogan have promoted themselves as protective, and occasionally, even renunciatory, father figures . . . to keep women and minorities in their place. . . . [They] are at times deeply and overtly misogynist, and yet at other times use progressive gender talk to promote regressive gender agendas."

As tolerance for misogyny in general increases, other shifts in the political and legal landscape occur: protections for survivors of rape and domestic violence are rolled back, sentences for such crimes are loosened, evidentiary requirements for charging perpetrators are made more stringent, and women are left with fewer tools with which to defend their bodily and political autonomy. For instance, in 2017, Putin signed a law that decriminalized some forms of domestic abuse, despite concerns that Russia has long faced an epidemic of domestic violence. On the campaign trail in 2016, Trump famously minimized a video that surfaced of him bragging about sexual assault, dismissing it as "locker room talk," despite the fact that numerous women had accused him of sexual assault and misconduct. Once Trump became president, his administration directed the Department of Education to reform Title IX regulations to give more rights to those accused of sexual assault on college campuses.

Finally, many autocrats and would-be autocrats promote a narrative of masculine victimhood designed to gin up popular concern about how men and boys are faring. Invariably, men are portrayed as "losing out" to women and other groups championed by progressives, despite their continued advantages in a male-dominated gender hierarchy. In 2019, for instance, Russia's Ministry of Justice claimed that reports of domestic violence were overstated in the country and that Russian men faced greater "discrimination" than women in abuse claims. In a similar vein, aspiring autocrats often maintain that masculinity is under threat. Among Trump supporters in the United States, such claims have become commonplace. For instance, Senator Josh Hawley, a Republican from Missouri, recently blamed leftist movements for redefining traditional masculinity as toxic and called for reviving "a strong and healthy manhood in America." Representative Madison Cawthorn, a Republican from North Carolina, echoed Hawley's sentiments in a

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viral speech in which he complained that American society aims to "de-masculate" men and encourages parents to raise "monsters."

FIGHT ON

As an engine of genuine democratic progress, activism by women and gender minorities threatens authoritarian leaders. Although many autocrats and aspiring autocrats no doubt believe the sexist and misogynistic things they say, their campaigns to restrict women's empowerment and human rights also seek to undermine potential popular democratic movements that would oust them.

Those who wish to combat the rising tide of authoritarianism will need to make promoting women's political participation central to their work. Domestically, democratic governments and their supporters should model and protect the equal inclusion of women, especially from diverse backgrounds, in all places where decisions are being made—from community groups to corporate boards to local, state, and national governments. Democratic governments should also prioritize issues that directly affect women's ability to play an equal role in public life, such as reproductive autonomy, domestic violence, economic opportunity, and access to health care and childcare. All these issues are central to the broader battle over the future of democracy in the United States and around the world, and they should be treated as such.

Democratic governments and international institutions must also put defending women's empowerment and human rights at the center of their fight against authoritarianism worldwide. Violent, misogynistic threats and attacks against women—whether in the home or in public—should be denounced as assaults on both women and democracy, and the perpetrators of such attacks should be held accountable. The "Year of Action" promoted by the Biden administration to renew and bolster democracy should include an uncompromising commitment to stand up for gender equity at home and abroad. Efforts by the U.S. Agency for International Development to support human rights activists and civil society groups could likewise make explicit that women's empowerment and political participation need to be integrated throughout all democracy renewal efforts.

Internationally, a multinational coalition is needed to explicitly reject patriarchal authoritarianism and share knowledge and technical skills in the fight against it. Those who are best equipped to build and sustain such a coalition are feminist grassroots and civil society leaders,

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as they are often the most aware of acute needs in their communities. An ambitious summit or conference convened by a multilateral group of countries or a regional or global organization could help jump-start such an effort by bringing women and their champions from around the world in contact with one another to share their experiences and strategies. One step in the right direction would be to dramatically increase the support and visibility given to the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Finally, organizers and supporters of mass movements for democratic change need a gender-inclusive agenda in order to attract women to the frontlines and to leadership roles. Supporters of democracy at home and abroad should focus on assisting, amplifying, and protecting civil society groups and movements that are pushing for gender equity and work to make sure they are included in any negotiations or transitions that follow mass uprisings or democratic movements. Pro-democracy groups and organizations must understand that truly inclusive movements—those that transcend class, race, gender, and sexual identity—are the most likely to achieve lasting change.

If history is any guide, authoritarian strategies will fail in the long run. Feminists have always found ways to demand and expand women's rights and freedoms, powering democratic advancement in the process. But unchecked, patriarchal authoritarians can do great damage in the short run, erasing hard-won gains that have taken generations to achieve.

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The Cold War Never Ended

Ukraine, the China Challenge, and the Revival of the West

STEPHEN KOTKIN

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Does anyone have a right to be surprised? A gangster regime in the Kremlin has declared that its security is threatened by a much smaller neighbor—which, the regime claims, is not a truly sovereign country but just a plaything of far more powerful Western states. To make itself more secure, the Kremlin insists, it needs to bite off some of its neighbor's territory. Negotiations between the two sides break down; Moscow invades.

The year was 1939. The regime in the Kremlin was led by Joseph Stalin, and the neighboring country was Finland. Stalin had offered to swap territory with the Finns: he wanted Finnish islands to use as forward military bases in the Baltic Sea, as well as control of most of the Karelian Isthmus, the stretch of land at the southern end of which

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sat Leningrad. In exchange, he offered an expansive but boggy forest in Soviet Karelia, bordering Finland far to the north of the isthmus. To Stalin's surprise, despite serial modifications of his original demands, the Finns rejected the deal. Finland, a country of around four million people with a small army, spurned the Soviet colossus, an imperial power with 170 million people and the world's largest military force.

The Soviets invaded, but Finnish fighters stalled the poorly planned and executed Soviet attack for months, administering a black eye to the Red Army. Their resistance captured imaginations in the West; British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and other European leaders hailed gallant Finland. But the admiration remained rhetorical: Western powers did not send weapons, let alone intervene militarily. In the end, the Finns kept their honor but lost a grinding war of attrition, ceding more territory than Stalin had initially demanded. Soviet casualties exceeded those of the Finns, and Stalin embarked on a belated top-to-bottom reorganization of the Red Army. Adolf Hitler and the German high command concluded that the Soviet military was not ten feet tall, after all.

Now flash forward. A despot in the Kremlin has once again authorized an invasion of yet another small country, expecting it to be quickly overrun. He has been expounding about how the West is in decline and imagines that although the decadent Americans and their stooges might whine, none of them will come to the aid of a small, weak country. But the despot has miscalculated. Encased in an echo chamber, surrounded by sycophants, he has based his strategic calculations on his own propaganda. The West, far from shrinking from the fight, rallies, with the United States decisively in the lead.

The year was 1950. Stalin was still in power, but this time, the small country in question was South Korea, invaded by North Korean forces after he gave the despot in Pyongyang, Kim Il Sung, a green light. To Stalin's surprise, the United States formed an international military coalition, supported by a UN resolution; the Soviets, boycotting the UN Security Council, had failed to exercise their veto. UN forces landed on the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula and drove the North Koreans all the way to the Chinese border. Stalin, aided by Washington's failure to heed its own intelligent reports, effectively managed to shunt his blunder onto the Chinese leader Mao Zedong. China's People's Liberation Army intervened in huge numbers, surprising the U.S. commander, and drove the U.S.-led coalition

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back to the line that had divided the North and the South before the North's aggression, resulting in a costly stalemate.

And now to the present. Stalin and the Soviet Union are long gone, of course. In their place are Vladimir Putin, a far lesser despot, and Russia, a second-rank, albeit still dangerous, power, which inherited the Soviet Union's doomsday arsenal, UN veto, and animus toward the West. In February, when Putin chose to invade Ukraine, dismissing its sovereignty and disparaging the country as a pawn in the hands of Russia's enemies, he was expecting an international response like the one Stalin witnessed when invading Finland in 1939: noise from the sidelines, disunity, inaction. So far, however, the war in Ukraine has engendered something closer to what happened in South Korea in 1950—although this time, the Europeans were ahead of the Americans. Putin's aggression—and, crucially, the heroism and ingenuity of the Ukrainian people, soldiers and civilians alike, and the resolve and savvy demonstrated by Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky—spurred a dormant West to action. The Ukrainians, like the Finns, have kept their honor. But this time, so has the West.

What these parallels show is not that history repeats itself or rhymes; the point, rather, is that the history made in those earlier eras is still being made today. Eternal Russian imperialism leaps out as the easiest explanation, as if there were some sort of innate cultural proclivity toward aggression. There is not. Conversely, however, it would also be simplistic to see Russia's invasion as a mere reaction to Western imperialism, whether in the form of NATO or its expansion, when the pattern long predates NATO.

These recurring episodes of Russian aggression, for all their differences, reflect the same geopolitical trap, one that Russian rulers have set for themselves again and again. Many Russians view their country as a providential power, with a distinct civilization and a special mission in the world, but Russia's capabilities do not match its aspirations, and so its rulers resort, time and again, to a hyperconcentration of power in the state in a coercive effort to close the yawning gap with the West. But the drive for a strong state does not work, invariably devolving into personalist rule. The combination of weakness and grandeur, in turn, drives the autocrat to exacerbate the very problem that facilitated his appearance. After 1991, when the gap with the West widened radically, Russia's perpetual geopolitics endured, as I argued in these pages in 2016. It will persist until Russian rulers make the strategic choice to abandon the

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impossible quest to become a great-power equal of the West and choose instead to live alongside it and focus on Russia's internal development.

All of this explains why the original Cold War's end was a mirage. The events of 1989–91 were consequential, just not as consequential as most observers—myself included—took them to be. During those years, Germany reunified within the transatlantic alliance, and Russian power suffered a sharp temporary reduction—outcomes that, with Moscow's subsequent withdrawal of troops, freed up small eastern European countries to adopt democratic constitutional orders and market economies and join the West in the EU and NATO. Those events transformed the lives of the people in the countries between Germany and Russia and in those two historical frenemies themselves, but they changed the world far less. A reunified Germany largely remained a nonfactor geopolitically, at least until the weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, when Berlin adopted a far more assertive posture, at least for the moment. Parts of eastern Europe, such as Hungary and Poland, which happened to be among the biggest losers in the world wars and their peace settlements, started to show illiberal streaks and in this way confirmed limitations in the EU's framework. Although the radical diminution in the size of the Russian state has mostly held (so far), the collapse of Russian power was hardly permanent, just as it was not after the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. The West's relatively brief respite from great-power competition with Russia constituted a historical blink of an eye.

All the while, the Korean Peninsula remained divided, and China remained communist and continues to insist on its claim to the self-governing democratic island of Taiwan, including the right to forcibly unify it with the mainland. Well beyond Asia, ideologically tinged rivalries and resistance to American power and the West's professed ideals persist. Above all, the potential for nuclear Armageddon, among the Cold War's defining aspects, also persists. To argue that the Cold War ended, in other words, is to reduce that conflict to the existence of the Soviet state.

To be sure, far-reaching structural changes have occurred since 1991, and not just in technology. China had been the junior partner in the anti-Western alternative order; now, Russia is in that position. More broadly, the locus of great-power competition has shifted to the Indo-Pacific, a change that began gradually during the 1970s and quickened in the early years of this century. But the foundations for that shift were laid during World War II and built up during the Cold War.

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From a geopolitical standpoint, the historical hinge of the late twentieth century was located less in 1989–91 than in 1979. That was the year that the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping normalized relations with the United States and began the Chinese Communist Party's acquiescence in economic liberalization, which exponentially expanded China's economy and global power. In the same year, political Islam came to power in Iran in a revolution whose influence reverberated beyond that country, thanks partly to the U.S. organization of Islamist resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Around the same time, amid the depths of stagflation and social anomie, the Reagan-Thatcher revolution launched a renewal of the Anglo-American sphere with an emphasis on free markets, which ignited decades of growth and would eventually force the political left back to the center, with the advent of Tony Blair's New Labour in the United Kingdom and Bill Clinton's New Democrats in the United States. This remarkable combination—a market-Leninist China, political Islam in power, and a revived West—reshaped the globe more profoundly than anything since the postwar transformations of Germany and Japan and the consolidation of the U.S.-led West.

The mistaken belief that the Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union spurred some fateful foreign policy choices in Washington. Believing that the ideological contest had been settled definitively in their favor, most American policymakers and thinkers shifted away from seeing their country as the bedrock of the West, which is not a geographic location but a concatenation of institutions and values—individual liberty, private property, the rule of law, open markets, political dissent—and which encompasses not only western Europe and North America but also Australia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and many other places, as well. In place of the concept of the West, many American elites embraced a vision of a U.S.-led "liberal international order," which could theoretically integrate the entire world—including societies that did not share Western institutions and values—into a single, globalized whole.

Fever dreams of a limitless liberal order obscured the stubborn persistence of geopolitics. The three ancient civilizations of Eurasia—China, Iran, and Russia—did not suddenly vanish, and by the 1990s, their elites had clearly demonstrated that they had no intention of participating in one-worldism on Western terms. To the contrary, China took advantage of its integration into the global economy

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without fulfilling its economic obligations, let alone liberalizing its political system. Iran embarked on an ongoing quest to blow up its neighborhood in the name of its own security—unwittingly assisted by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Russian elites chafed at the absorption into the West of former Soviet satellites and republics, even as many Russian government officials availed themselves of the money-laundering services provided by top Western firms. Eventually, the Kremlin rebuilt the wherewithal to push back. And nearly two decades ago, China and Russia began developing an anti-Western partnership of mutual grievance—in broad daylight.

THE WORLD THE WAR MADE

These events precipitated a debate about whether there should or should not be (or whether there already is) a new cold war, one that primarily pits Washington against Beijing. Such handwringing is beside the point; this conflict is hardly new.

The next iteration of the great global contest is likely to revolve around Asia partly because, to a degree that is underappreciated by many Western observers, the last two did, as well. Correcting that misperception, at least when it comes to World War II, is part of the historian Richard Overy's mission in his latest book, *Blood and Ruins*, which seeks to shift perspectives on the war and the postwar era by calling more attention to Asia. "The Asian war and its consequences," he observes, "were as important to the creation of the post-war world as the defeat of Germany in Europe, arguably more so."

Some of Overy's arguments read like self-admonishments: the Eurocentric chronology dating the onset of World War II to 1939 "is no longer useful"; "the war should be understood as a global event, rather than one confined to the defeat of the European Axis states with the Pacific War as an appendix"; "the conflict needs to be redefined as a number of different kinds of war," including "civil wars fought alongside the major military conflict . . . and 'civilian wars', fought either as wars of liberation against an occupying power (including the Allies) or as wars of civilian self-defence." Less conventional for a scholar of Asian or global history is his principal argument that "the long Second World War was the last imperial war." This contention turns out to clash, however, with his welcome call for greater emphasis on Asia.

Overy sets out his imperialism framework by noting the various major wars before 1914, such as the Sino-Japanese clash of 1894–95,

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and approvingly quotes Stalin to the effect that a crisis of capitalism "intensified [the] struggle for markets" and that extreme economic nationalism "put war on the order of the day as a means for a new redivision of the world and of spheres of influence." Overy does not dwell on the fact that Stalin himself sought to forcibly divide the world into hierarchical spheres of influence, albeit ones unrelated to market access. And despite his emphasis on imperialism and his call for a spotlight on Asia, his opening chapters furnish a familiarly Hitler-centric picture of interwar diplomacy and the onset of World War II, his chief subject. He does take a run at a kind of revisionism, recasting British appeasement as "containment" combined with deterrence, even though the arms buildup carried out by London was too slow and the supposed containment lacked credibility. He disregards the 1939 nonaggression pact between Hitler and Stalin, as if the Soviet Union was not involved in the outbreak of the war.

In any case, for the millions of Asians caught up in the conflagration, the war had little to do with Hitler or Stalin or British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, and everything to do with Japan and its clash with the United States, which Overy relegates to a secondary position in his narrative. He also has difficulty demonstrating the imperial nature of the belligerent armies. The only country that fielded a large-scale imperial army was the United Kingdom; the British dominions mobilized 2.6 million soldiers, and India 2.7 million more. But they were deployed primarily outside the main theaters.

Overy's book takes flight, however, when it turns to logistics, production, and mechanics. Overy demonstrates, for example, that what today is called "modern warfare" bears little resemblance to the mid-twentieth-century version of industrialized conflict. During World War II, the combatants mostly produced weapons of relative simplicity in prodigious volume, because they had to be operated by the more than 100 million uniformed men and women thrown into combat with comparatively little training. In contrast with many histories of the war, Overy eschews the drama of great tank battles and instead conveys the stupefying loss of nearly all the tanks produced by the combatants. This is a history not of generalship but of unfathomable deprivation, atrocities, and genocide.

It is also a compelling story of organization. Overy illuminates how the sensational initial breakthroughs that the Axis powers achieved had inherent limits—but also how their defeat was not foreordained. "The Axis states all had space rather than time, and it was space that

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slowed down their advance and brought them to a halt in 1942," he writes, adding that "the Allies were no nearer invading the Japanese, German, or Italian homelands in 1942, but they now had the time and the global reach to work out how to reorganize and improve their military capability so that they were in a position to do so over the last two years of war." The slog to victory meant learning the hard way how to fight better and develop the full means to do so. Overy shows how the Soviets painfully absorbed the lessons of German tank warfare and eventually emulated the Nazis' prowess, revolutionizing standardized tank production despite a massive loss of territory, physical infrastructure, and laborers. The British, meanwhile, underwent their own grind to mimic German air warfare and overhaul their air fleet. Admittedly, Overy is less incisive on how the Americans confronted the most confounding task of all, learning how to fight on oceans, while building out the world's largest and most advanced navy and air force. Still, he rightly concludes that Allied "military establishments became what the organizational theorist Trent Hone has described as 'complex adaptive systems', in which the learning curve"—a term coined in 1936—"could be worked through."

Ultimately, the war was won not predominantly on the eastern front, where the Red Army suffered unfathomable casualties to annihilate the Wehrmacht, but on the seas and in the air. The United Kingdom and the United States deliberately destroyed the ability of Germany and Japan to produce the weapons of war and to transport them to the front. By 1944, only a minority of the war-making potential of Germany and Japan could even be put into battle. The value to Japan of its vast overseas conquests, with their prodigious natural resources, disappeared once U.S. forces wiped out Japanese merchant shipping. In Germany, even when factories managed to relocate their production (usually belowground), the hasty dispersals introduced higher rates of defects and took workers away from critical manufacturing tasks.

Rather than highlight these Allied achievements, however, Overy emphasizes the costs of the Anglo-American denial strategy. He does note that the Soviet Union did not have the means to engage in systematic economic warfare and that Germany's attempted ocean blockade of the United Kingdom sputtered, a reflection of Germany's failure to invest sufficiently in submarines until it was too late. But "in the end," he concludes, "volume-production and the sharing of military goods proved to be the surer economic contribution to victory."

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Needless to say, production and destruction were two sides of the same coin. Overy himself highlights the massive investments in air and naval power to control sea-lanes and mount assaults at a distance and demonstrates the degree to which the Axis powers launched the war to preempt the Allies' attempt to deny them access to indispensable raw materials, such as oil and rare metals, which the Axis powers did not control. The leaders of Germany and Japan were mesmerized by the unparalleled resources and interdiction capabilities of the British Empire and the continental United States, as well as the sprawling Soviet Union. They felt compelled to fight a war in order to be able to fight a war.

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

Overy's understanding of empire evinces a pronounced political hue. He suggests, for example, that the postwar Soviet occupation of and coercive imposition of clone regimes in eastern Europe did not constitute imperialism and that British imperialism could be equated with Axis conquests and plundering. "As one Japanese official complained," he writes, "why was it regarded as morally acceptable for Britain to dominate India, but not for Japan to dominate China?" But not all domination is alike. The British, for all their perfidy, including misgovernance contributing to the 1943 Bengal famine, did not obliterate India's infrastructure, strafe and shell Indian civilians, coerce millions of Indians into sex slavery, or carry out gruesome scientific experiments on humans—all of which the Japanese did to Asians in China. Overy further implies that the United Kingdom's single-minded aim in 1945 to recover Malaya and Hong Kong differed little from Japan's objective to seize and occupy them; in fact, many Asians who rejected British rule could tell the difference between it and Japan's carnage.

For all his focus on British imperialism, moreover, Overy fails to recount the enormously consequential British recapture of Hong Kong, which the United Kingdom had controlled for a century prior to Japan's seizure of the territory in 1941. In a book purporting to shift the focus to Asia, he might have credibly made the case that in geopolitical terms, Hong Kong's fate was more important than that of, say, Poland. Arguably, with the exception of the Soviet capture of Berlin in May 1945 and the stern telegram that U.S. President Harry Truman sent to Stalin in August of that year warning him not to invade Hokkaido (one of Japan's four main islands), the physical reoccupation of Hong

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Kong by the British in 1945 exceeded any other wartime episode in its strategic implications.

When Japan's surrender suddenly appeared imminent in the summer of 1945, surprising Washington, the Truman administration hastily accelerated work on a plan for the handover of Japanese-occupied territories and assigned the acceptance of Japan's surrender of Hong Kong not to the British but to Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist government. The British, however, undertook furious military and political preparations to reclaim Hong Kong for themselves. U.S. officials wanted to satisfy their British allies but also allow Chiang to save face, and so they cleverly suggested that the British could accept the surrender on behalf of the Chinese government. But the British refused that offer, and eventually, Washington acquiesced. Chiang acquiesced as well, dependent as he was on U.S. military and logistical support to reclaim other areas of China. The upshot was that Hong Kong passed from the Japanese back to the British and remained that way even after 1949, when the Communists triumphed over Chiang's Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War but shrank from attempting to expel the British from the strategic southern port.

Had the British acquiesced rather than the Americans and Chiang, history would have played out very differently. As it was, the communist regime in Beijing was able to take extraordinary advantage of something it would not otherwise have possessed: a world-class international financial center governed by the rule of law. During the period of Deng's reforms, British Hong Kong ended up funneling indispensable foreign direct investment into mainland communist China—from Japan and Taiwan, especially.

People often ask why Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, when attempting to reenergize the Soviet economy in the second half of the 1980s, did not follow the successful Chinese approach to reforms. Beyond the immense gulf between a highly urbanized, heavily industrialized country and a predominantly rural, agricultural one, the Soviet Union had no Hong Kong to attract and direct incoming investment according to market, rather than political, considerations. No British Hong Kong, no Chinese miracle.

Hong Kong reverted to Beijing's control only in 1997, under an agreement announced by China and the United Kingdom in 1984. Under the "one country, two systems" arrangement, the Chinese Communist Party agreed to allow Hong Kong to maintain a level

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of autonomy, democratic rule, and civil liberties, at least until 2047. But Chinese President Xi Jinping has made a mockery of his country's treaty promises. The logic of communist rule has spurred a vicious and self-defeating crackdown on Hong Kong's independent sources of wealth, power, and liberty, all of which has threatened the Communist Party's monopoly on power.

Such instances of Chinese imperialism do not fit easily into Overy's end-of-imperialism story line. And Hong Kong is hardly the only place to have been on the receiving end. After all, communist China inherited the Qing dynasty's multiethnic empire. In 1950 and 1951, the Communists occupied Tibet, which had been self-governing since 1912. Stalin had supported Muslim separatists in the predominantly Uyghur region of Xinjiang during and after the war, but in 1949, he advised the Chinese Communists to encourage Han settlement there. The goal was to bring Xinjiang's ethnic Chinese population up to 30 percent from five percent so as to foster development and strengthen China's grip. In 2020, according to that year's census, Han Chinese made up 42 percent of Xinjiang's population. A 2018 UN report, whose findings have been corroborated by copious open-source satellite imagery, indicated that Beijing has incarcerated at least one million Uyghurs in "reeducation" and forced-labor camps.

Ethnic tensions were not the only difficulty that faced communist China after its successful military occupation of and legalization of its rule over a swath of what is known as "Inner Asia," a region that spans from Tibet to Turkmenistan. The terrain itself was forbidding: deserts, mountains, and high plateaus. Nor did it offer China anything equivalent to the American West Coast. China has no California. Today, Beijing is trying to acquire something of an ersatz California to gain access to the Indian Ocean via the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea by extending Chinese infrastructure into volatile Pakistan and Myanmar. But this is no substitute for the real thing, a second coast that provides both an immense security moat and an invaluable commercial highway; California represents the fifth-largest economy in the world by GDP. Lacking anything like it is by far China's biggest strategic deficit.

HOW THE WEST WAS ONE

Asia has cast a harsh light on a number of Americans celebrated for their grand statesmanship in Europe and the Soviet Union: the envoy

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George Marshall and his failed mission to China to reconcile Chiang's Nationalists and Mao's Communists; the diplomat George Kennan and his ignored recommendations to abandon the Nationalists and to launch a U.S. military invasion of Taiwan that would deny it to both the Nationalists and the Communists; Secretary of State Dean Acheson and his exclusion of the Korean Peninsula from the U.S. defense perimeter. Stalin, more than U.S. policymakers, feared the competitive weight of China, which after his death, in 1953, vied for supremacy within the communist bloc (and across what was then called the Third World). Many analysts blame Clinton for naively encouraging communist China's accession to the World Trade Organization without proper conditionality or reciprocity. Fair enough. But one could just as well point the finger at President Jimmy Carter for restoring "most favored nation" status to China, a nonmarket economy with a totalitarian regime.

In truth, the original source of the endemic U.S. fumbling over modern China was President Franklin Roosevelt. The wartime leader had a vague intuition about China's significance in the postwar world he envisioned, but he effectively gave up on China, even as he elevated its status by making it one of the four countries (eventually five) that wielded veto power at the Security Council in the newly formed United Nations. Churchill was apoplectic over Roosevelt's notion that China should be afforded the role of a great power (a mere "affectation" on Beijing's part, in the British prime minister's view). As Overy recalls, the United States distributed some $800 million in aid to China between 1945 and 1948 (the equivalent of more than $10 billion in today's dollars), trained 16 divisions of the Nationalist government's army and assisted another 20, and provided some 80 percent of Chiang's military equipment, before disengaging from China's civil war. By pursuing his communist and anti-Western convictions, Mao imposed bellicose clarity on the confused bilateral relationship, and although Americans debated the question, "Who lost China?" for decades after, under Mao, China lost the United States. Today, more than 40 years after the two countries normalized relations, Xi risks doing much the same.

Where the world is now, however, is not a place it has ever been. For the first time in history, China and the United States are great powers simultaneously. China had long been the world's preeminent country when the 13 American colonies broke free from the United Kingdom. Over the next nearly two centuries, as the United States

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ascended to become the world's largest economy and greatest power known to history, China not coincidentally entered a long, dark tunnel of external and especially internal depredations. That ended as the two countries became intertwined in profound ways. That process had less to do with U.S. President Richard Nixon's kowtowing to Mao, aiming at widening the wedge that Beijing had opened with Moscow, than with Deng's historic decision to ditch the Soviets, don a cowboy hat during a 1979 visit to Texas, and hitch China's wagon to the insatiable American consumer market, following the trail that had been so spectacularly blazed by Japan, then South Korea and Taiwan. In the 1990s, Chinese President Jiang Zemin recuperated a vital relationship with a jilted Russia and its military-industrial complex, while retaining China's strategic orientation toward the United States, allowing Beijing to have its cake and eat it, too.

But regimes in Eurasia have a way of reminding the United States and its allies, no matter how deep they have sunk into delusions, about what matters and why. U.S. President Donald Trump exhibited strongman envy and only wanted to cut trade deals, but his presidency spurred a remarkable shift to a hawkish national consensus on China, which has endured the advent of the Biden administration even though many members of President Joe Biden's team served in the all-too-submissive Obama administration. Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Xi's evident complicity, in turn, shook Europe out of its dependence on Russian energy and its trade-above-all complacency about China and its leader. The view is now widespread that Putin cannot be allowed to triumph in Ukraine not only for the sake of Ukraine and Europe but also for the sake of the Asian strategy that the United States is pursuing with its allies. Moscow is now a pariah, and business as usual with Beijing is no longer tenable. Going forward, nothing is more important than Western unity on both China and Russia. This is where the Biden administration has taken an important step forward, despite its fumbles in the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rollout of the AUKUS security pact.

In China, the lean toward Russia is not solely Xi's. Chinese nationalists—in the broader public, among experts, and in ruling circles—ardently blame NATO and the United States for the war in Ukraine. They urge China to draw even closer to Russia. These hard-line Chinese want Russia to win, because they want their country to take over Taiwan and believe that the United States will violate any international

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norm in the pursuit of dominance. Still, some Chinese elites have noted the degree to which Western intelligence agencies have managed to penetrate Putin's regime, the ease with which Russia was severed from the global financial system, and the ways that a despot in a sycophantic echo chamber can miscalculate in shattering fashion. Maybe allowing one man to turn an authoritarian system that was benefiting myriad interest groups into a personalist fiefdom that risks everything isn't such a good idea, after all.

Still, whereas Stalin maneuvered to fob off his Korean War blunder onto Mao and the Chinese rank-and-file cannon fodder, in the war in Ukraine, Xi has so far allowed Putin and Russian soldiers to pay the costs of attempting to accelerate the West's supposed decline and what the Chinese leader repeatedly refers to as "great changes unseen in a century."

In fact, the West has rediscovered its manifold power. Transatlanticism has been pronounced dead again and again, only to be revived again and again, and perhaps never more forcefully than this time. Even the most committed liberal internationalists, including some in the Biden administration, are coming to see that enduring rivalries constitute an ongoing cold war—that the world as it is came into being not in 1989–91 but in the 1940s, when the greatest sphere of influence in history was deliberately formed to counter the Soviet Union and Stalin. It is fundamentally a voluntary sphere of influence that offers mutual prosperity and peace, in contrast to the closed, coercive sphere pursued by Russia in Ukraine and by China in its region and beyond.

Just as decisive are the less tangible qualities that allow the United States to lead not an imaginary liberal international order but rather a non-geographic West. American leaders frequently err, but they can learn from their mistakes. The country has corrective mechanisms in the form of free and fair elections and a dynamic market economy. The United States and its allies have strong institutions, robust civil societies, and independent and free media. These are the advantages afforded by being unashamedly and unabashedly Western—advantages that Americans should never take for granted.

BLOC PARTY

All three of the eruptions that began in 1979 have sputtered. Political Islam long ago revealed its bankruptcy, nowhere more starkly than in Iran. Unable to provide for the development of its economy or the well-being of its people, the Islamic Republic survives through domestic repression,

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lies, and the emigration of its opponents. China faces demographic problems and a severe challenge to escape the so-called middle-income trap, on top of the manifest failures and impossible contradictions of its governance system. The Leninist regime in Beijing has ceased to be able to tolerate the now vast private sector, whose dynamism is so vital for economic growth and job creation yet so threatening to the regime's existence. And in the United States and the United Kingdom, the Reagan-Thatcher synthesis ran its course, in part because some of its downsides grew over time, but mostly because its successes altered and partly eliminated the conditions in which it arose and operated. But whereas Islamism and "market-Leninism" cannot foster systems that can reinvent themselves and still remain stable, history indicates that with leadership and vision, a far-reaching renewal of Western rule-of-law systems is possible. What Western countries—regardless of where they are—need now is a new synthesis of substantially expanded opportunity and a national political consensus.

Globally, the West is both envied and resented. In recent decades, Europe and especially the United States have managed to diminish the envy and magnify the resentment, from Latin America to Southeast Asia and lands in between. That dynamic needs to be reversed, but so far, it has only been reinforced by the Western response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which in the short run has put wind in the sails of detractors who seize on the West's interventionist hypocrisy, self-serving approach to international law, and excessive power.

It is seductive to single out Putin and Xi and imagine that individuals rise almost accidentally to the top of major countries and that their removal would solve the geopolitical challenges their regimes pose. Personalities matter, of course, but systems have a way of selecting for certain types of leaders. Eurasian landmass empires are weaker when compared to the modern Anglo-American archetype of surpassing sea power, free trade with other rich nations, and comparatively limited government. The Allies' victory in World War II enabled that model to encompass not just western Europe but part of central Europe, as well—and, over time, the first island chain in East Asia. China, too, became a trading power, free-riding on the security supplied by the U.S. Navy, building its own navy to protect its position only belatedly. Yet it still suffers from some of the debilitations of a Eurasian power: only one coast, for one, which is largely hemmed in, notwithstanding its seizure and conversion into military installations of coral reefs in

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the South China Sea. Overbearing states and their attempts at coercive modernization are a backhanded compliment that Eurasia pays to the West. Access to the U.S. and European consumer markets, high-end technology transfers, control of the seas, reserve currencies, and secure supplies of energy and rare metals remain decisive. As Overy's book shows, a quest for just that and the formation of self-sufficient blocs underlay the run-up to the world wars, their character, and their aftermaths. He conflates this with empire and avers that World War II brought the hammer down on the entire epoch of imperialism.

But empires come and go; blocs endure. Today's China is arguably pursuing a strategy similar to the one that Nazi Germany and imperial Japan adopted, albeit by all means short of war: to become blockade-proof and sanctions-proof. And now, with Putin having provoked a siege of Russia, Xi will redouble his efforts.

Others will continue to debate whether great-power conflict and security dilemmas are unending. Yet the important point here is not theoretical but historical: the contours of the modern world established by World War II persisted right through the great turn of 1979 and the lesser turn of 1989–91. Whether the world has now reached another greater or lesser turning point depends in large measure on how the war in Ukraine plays out, and on whether the West squanders its rediscovery of itself or consolidates it through renewal.

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The New Nuclear Age

How China's Growing Nuclear Arsenal Threatens Deterrence

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In late June 2021, satellite images revealed that China was building 120 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silos on the edge of the Gobi Desert. This was followed by the revelation a few weeks later that another 110 missile silos were under construction in Hami, in Xinjiang Province. Together with other planned expansions, these sites amount to a dramatic shift in the country's approach to nuclear weapons. For decades, China maintained a relatively small nuclear force, but according to current U.S. intelligence estimates, that arsenal is now on track to nearly quadruple, to 1,000 weapons, by 2030, a number that will put China far above any other nuclear power save Russia and the United States. Nor does it seem likely that Beijing will stop there, given President Xi Jinping's commitment to build a "world class" military by 2049 and his refusal to enter into arms control talks.

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It is hard to overstate the significance of this effort. In developing a nuclear arsenal that will soon rival those of Russia and the United States, China is not merely departing from its decades-old status as a minor nuclear state; it is also upending the bipolar nuclear power system. For the 73 years since the Soviet Union's first nuclear test, that bipolar system, for all its flaws and moments of terror, has averted nuclear war. Now, by closing in on parity with the two existing great nuclear powers, China is heralding a paradigm shift to something much less stable: a tripolar nuclear system. In that world, there will be both a greater risk of a nuclear arms race and heightened incentives for states to resort to nuclear weapons in a crisis. With three competing great nuclear powers, many of the features that enhanced stability in the bipolar system will be rendered either moot or far less reliable.

There is nothing the United States can do to prevent China from joining it and Russia as the world's top nuclear powers, but there are things that U.S. strategists and defense planners can do to mitigate the consequences. For starters, Washington will need to modernize its nuclear deterrent. But it will also need to engage in new ways of thinking about the nuclear balance of power and how, in a far more complex strategic environment, it can maintain deterrence and keep the nuclear peace.

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GUNFIGHTERS ON A DUSTY STREET

During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the United States were able to focus their nuclear strategies almost entirely on the other. The two superpowers built nuclear arsenals exceeding 20,000 weapons apiece, allowing them to largely discount the arsenals of the minor nuclear states—China, France, Israel, and the United Kingdom—whose stockpiles did not exceed the low hundreds. After the Cold War, Russia and the United States felt comfortable agreeing to reduce their deployed strategic forces to 1,550 nuclear weapons, as they continued to maintain a large advantage over any other nuclear-armed state.

Although the bipolar system did not eliminate the risk of nuclear war, it worked well enough to avoid Armageddon. Two features of the two-power system are parity and mutually assured destruction, or MAD. Ever since they initiated the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, in 1969, both Moscow and Washington have emphasized maintaining parity, or similar-sized arsenals, as a way to enhance deterrence and crisis stability—a situation in which there are strong disincentives

to resort to nuclear weapons, even under conditions of great stress. For both powers, establishing nuclear forces that were similar in size and far larger than that of any other nuclear state placed them on an equal footing. This was especially important for the United States, which sought to discourage Soviet attacks not only on itself but also against key allies and security partners, whom Washington had offered to shelter under its "nuclear umbrella" through extended deterrence. Consequently, Washington was keen to avoid creating the perception among these states that its nuclear forces were in any way inferior to Moscow's.

As the Soviet arsenal continued expanding in the Cold War's early period, and especially after the development of thermonuclear weapons, American strategists sought new ways to strengthen deterrence. A key factor in this effort was the concept of assured destruction, according to which the U.S. arsenal needed to be able to absorb a surprise Soviet first strike and still be capable of inflicting a devastating retaliatory, or second-strike, attack that could destroy the Soviet Union as a functioning society. (In 1964, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara estimated that an arsenal needed to be able to conserve 400 weapons to maintain an assured destruction force for a second strike, which he defined as the ability to destroy a quarter of the Soviet Union's population and half its industrial capacity.) Later, strategists devised the term "mutually assured destruction" to describe the situation in which both rivals possessed this ability. This apocalyptic standoff was famously characterized by the physicist Robert Oppenheimer, who led the development of the atomic bomb, as the state of two scorpions trapped in a bottle, each able to kill the other, but only at great risk to its own survival.

Simply maintaining the ability to obliterate the adversary's population centers and industrial infrastructure in retaliation for any nuclear attack did not, however, guarantee that deterrence would hold in every situation. Under what conditions would a rational leader opt to use nuclear weapons in a conflict? The game theorist and Nobel laureate Thomas Schelling pointed out that under certain circumstances, initiating a nuclear war could be seen as a rational act. As Schelling saw it, the two great nuclear powers, instead of resembling scorpions in a bottle, might confront each other as two gunfighters on the dusty street of a lawless Old West town, where whoever is quicker to draw enjoys an advantage. This situation would obtain when one of the two powers sensed what Schelling called "the fear of being a poor second

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for not going first." This fear became particularly acute when advances in ballistic missile guidance enabled both the Soviet Union and the United States to execute a "counterforce" nuclear attack on the other's own nuclear arsenal, thereby potentially compromising the efficacy of any second-strike attack.

These fears were accentuated by the advent of missiles with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, or MIRVs. Since each "vehicle," or nuclear warhead, on such a missile was capable of hitting a different target, there was now the prospect of an attacker using a single missile to destroy several comparably armed enemy missiles in their silos, or of a naval base hosting several ballistic missile submarines, each armed with a dozen or more missiles carrying hundreds of weapons, or of dozens of nuclear-armed bombers at an air base. In military terminology, the attacker could now enjoy a highly favorable "cost-exchange ratio," in which it could destroy dozens of its rival's weapons using only a few of its own, thus significantly altering the state of parity that had existed before the attack.

In such a contingency, the victim would be left with two unpalatable forms of retaliation. It could use much or most of its small surviving force to launch an attack in kind against the aggressor's arsenal. But the prospects for success would now be slight, as the bulk of the aggressor's nuclear forces would be intact and, along with its air and missile defenses, be standing on full alert. Moreover, such a second strike would also risk leaving the victim with insufficient forces to maintain an assured destruction capability. Alternatively, if the victim chose to conduct a devastating attack on the aggressor's economy and society, it would be an act of suicide, since it would trigger MAD, provoking a corresponding attack on itself from its adversary, which had preserved its own assured destruction force. The victim would therefore be confined to a third option, retaining its surviving nuclear forces to deter an attack on its economy and society. But if it did so, the attacker would enjoy a substantial surplus of nuclear forces to support acts of coercion or further aggression.

The "fear of being a poor second" led both the Soviet Union and the United States to maintain some of their nuclear forces on high alert, known as a "launch on warning" posture. The objective was to increase the risk to the attacker by having vulnerable forces able to launch before they could be destroyed. This approach had its own hazards: at several points during the Cold War, American or Soviet forces came

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uncomfortably close to launching a nuclear strike when their early warning systems erroneously detected that an attack was underway. Nonetheless, the general stability of the bipolar system did much to help avert a nuclear conflict for nearly 70 years.

THREE SCORPIONS, NOT TWO

China's attainment of great-nuclear-power status will dramatically upset this delicate equilibrium. Until recently, the Chinese government seemed content with a "minimum deterrent" force of only a few hundred weapons. Now, however, it is moving in an entirely different direction. Along with its silo-building spree, it has developed a new ICBM capable of being armed with up to ten MIRVed nuclear warheads. This combination of proliferating launch silos and hydra-headed missiles will enable the Chinese military to expand its land-based arsenal even further, to as many as 3,000 weapons, simply by filling its silos with these missiles. China has also been modernizing its submarine-launched ballistic missile force and its long-range bomber fleet with an eye to fielding a robust triad of nuclear delivery systems—land, sea, and air—a capability that until now only Russia and the United States have possessed.

Addressing nuclear strategy in a tripolar nuclear system brings to mind the challenges associated with the so-called three-body problem in astrophysics. This is the problem of trying to predict the motion of three celestial bodies based on their initial positions and velocities. In a system of two celestial bodies, such a prediction can readily be made. But when there are three, no general solution has yet been identified (except when at least one of the bodies has a gravitational attraction that is miniscule relative to those of the other two). Because the future positions of the three bodies defy an easy solution, a three-body system is described as "chaotic." Similarly, with the emergence of three rival nuclear powers, several key features of the bipolar system will break down, and the "fear of being a poor second" for failing to attack first will likely increase.

To begin with, once China, Russia, and the United States all have large nuclear arsenals, each power will have to work to constrain the behavior of not one but two different adversaries. The concept used by the Chinese for deterrence—*weishe*—serves to make the point. It is more expansive than the traditional Western definition of "deterrence," and it includes two different objectives. The first, similar to

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the Western concept, involves discouraging, or deterring, an opponent from pursuing a particular course of action. But the second objective of *weishe* is to coerce an opponent into pursuing a course of action it would not otherwise undertake. Thus, *weishe* also includes the Western concept of compellence. This suggests that the Chinese have more ambitious goals for their nuclear forces than U.S. policymakers do for their own. It raises the question of how the Chinese Communist Party would use its nuclear capability for coercive purposes. Washington's allies are obvious targets.

During the Cold War, U.S. administrations sought to promote collective defense and discourage proliferation by convincing allies to shelter under the United States' nuclear umbrella. Washington pledged that if Moscow attacked any of them with nuclear weapons, the United States would respond by retaliating with its own. In a tripolar system, however, the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella risks being compromised by Washington's need to hedge against the threat of two major rival nuclear powers. To the extent that the U.S. nuclear guarantee is seen as diminished, key allies such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea might become vulnerable to coercion by China or Russia—or seek nuclear weapons themselves.

This brings us to the problem of parity. In a tripolar system, it is simply not possible for each state to maintain nuclear parity with the combined arsenals of its two rivals. Assume, for example, that China deployed the same size nuclear force as Russia and the United States: 1,550 weapons. At that point, U.S. strategists might rationally conclude that they need to add an additional 1,550 weapons to achieve parity with the combined forces of China and Russia. Meanwhile, Russian strategists would likely want the same. China, having established an arsenal on par with the two great nuclear powers, would not be inclined to forfeit its newly won status—and so a tripolar system risks collapsing into a Red Queen's arms race, in which parity is continuously sought but never achieved.

The same holds for MAD. Imagine that both Russia and the United States had 1,550 deployed nuclear weapons, as per the New START treaty, and that 400 nuclear weapons still constituted an assured destruction force: a U.S. force of 1,550 weapons would be sufficient to ensure that 400 weapons would survive a surprise Russian attack. In a tripolar system, however, such a residual force would no longer be enough. If, for example, China made a surprise attack on the U.S. arsenal, the United States could use its residual assured destruction force of

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400 weapons to retaliate against China, but that would leave it with insufficient forces to counterbalance Russia's arsenal. In order to maintain an assured destruction capability against both China and Russia, the United States would need twice as large a residual force—800 weapons—which would arguably require twice as large an original arsenal. And that assumes that both Beijing and Moscow froze their forces at 1,550 weapons, while Washington doubled its own, to 3,100. To expect either rival power to accept such a situation approaches fantasy.

Of course, this simple thought experiment is merely illustrative. It may be possible, for example, to establish an assured destruction force aboard ballistic missile submarines, which, at present, are very difficult to detect and thus to target. But these submarines will ultimately need to return to base, and so unless they launch their weapons before doing so, those weapons, too, will be vulnerable. Moreover, since the three powers have vastly different populations and geographies, each will have different requirements for establishing the needed assured destruction force against the other two. Russia's population and economic infrastructure are considerably smaller than the United States', and the United States' population is but a small fraction of China's. And so, all other factors being equal, Russia's assured destruction force—which would have to be sufficient to inflict devastating attacks on not one but both of its much bigger rivals—would need to be significantly larger than China's and the United States'. But it seems unlikely that Beijing or Washington would accept a rationale that would justify Moscow's maintaining an arsenal that was significantly larger than its own.

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TRIGGER-HAPPY TYRANTS

With three great nuclear powers, deterring a first strike in a crisis situation will also become more challenging. For one thing, strategies for managing the "poor second" problem seem likely to prove elusive. Assume that China, Russia, and the United States had roughly equal arsenals. At first blush, the situation might appear akin to having three scorpions in a bottle, where even a successful attack by one scorpion against another would increase the danger of the attacker's becoming a victim to the third scorpion. If China attacked the United States, for example, it would deplete some of its arsenal in doing so, thus reducing its ability to deter an attack from Russia. The incentives for any of the three powers to strike first would seem to decrease.

But the "poor second" problem does not concern the choice between, on the one hand, attacking and facing an assured counterattack and, on the other, not attacking and not being attacked at all. Instead, it is driven by the gunfighter's assumption that you must shoot first or get shot. Moreover, now there would be a second adversary with a gun, who could easily take advantage of you if you had dispatched your first rival but were now wounded. Hence, in a crisis situation, if the United States suspected that a Chinese attack on its nuclear arsenal was imminent, not only would it see itself disadvantaged for failing to strike China's arsenal first; it could also reasonably conclude that it was potentially more vulnerable to Russia's arsenal for not doing so. Even if, after withstanding a Chinese attack, the United States were able to retain an assured destruction capability against both China and Russia, the loss of a significant part of its arsenal would leave it far more exposed to coercion or aggression from either. Moreover, the threat posed to the United States by two hostile great nuclear powers might well convince many U.S. allies that the U.S. nuclear umbrella that has long shielded them had sprung fatal leaks.

The introduction of a third nuclear power that is, like the Russian Federation, a nondemocratic state could add another element of instability. The war in Ukraine has already demonstrated the risks posed by a leader with unchecked power. Absent a radical shift in the Chinese or the Russian political system, control over the world's largest nuclear arsenals will, in two out of three cases, rest in the hands of a tyrant with little or no need to consult with others. In democratic systems, the deliberations built into government tend to moderate the impulsiveness of a risk-tolerant leader. Yet tyrants may view their personal survival or the survival of their regime as superseding that of the state. As Winston Churchill warned, nuclear deterrence "does not cover the case of lunatics or dictators in the mood of Hitler when he found himself in his final dug-out."

The point is not that nuclear war in a tripolar rivalry among China, Russia, and the United States is inevitable but that maintaining stability in crisis situations will likely be significantly more difficult than it is now. Although it may seem far-fetched to imagine a great nuclear power choosing to attack a comparably armed adversary, the costs of failing to understand the incentives for such an attack are potentially catastrophic. As McNamara once observed, the United States' "security depends on assuming a worst possible case, and having the

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ability to cope with it." His views were echoed by the arms control expert Bruce Blair, who declared that deterrence "must remain robust under all conditions, including worst-case scenarios in which massive surprise strikes succeed in comprehensively destroying the opposing strategic forces in their underground silos, submarine pens, and air bases."

AN *N*-BODY PROBLEM?

As China pursues its nuclear ambitions, it may inspire other aspirants to seek larger arsenals of their own. For example, in the face of a much larger Chinese nuclear program, India, its rival, may have an incentive to increase its own nuclear forces significantly, perhaps causing Pakistan to do the same. And with less certainty about extended deterrence, U.S. allies, such as Japan and South Korea, may do likewise. Such developments would make stability even more difficult to achieve. In astrophysics, this situation is called "the *n*-body problem"—trying to predict the movements of an arbitrary number of celestial bodies—and reaching a solution is even more taxing than it is for the three-body problem. With the emergence of a tripolar nuclear system, then, a crucial challenge is how to prevent more states from boosting their arsenals.

Oddly enough, arms control agreements that impose relatively low limits on deployed nuclear weapons, such as the New START treaty, could decrease stability by minimizing the entry barriers for other powers seeking great-nuclear-power status. If, for example, China signed on to the New START treaty, with its limit of 1,550 deployed weapons, the threshold for achieving great-nuclear-power status might seem attainable to India or Pakistan. Nor would second-tier nuclear powers need to match China, Russia, and the United States weapon for weapon. Even if these lesser powers were to increase their arsenals to some 500 weapons or so, they would risk introducing substantially more instability into the system. For example, the United States could be confronted with the challenge of fashioning an effective nuclear deterrent against not only the Chinese and Russian arsenals but also the arsenals of Pakistan, North Korea, or both. To the extent that these countries are aligned with China, Beijing might even find that its interests are served by aiding them in expanding their arsenals as a way of circumventing its New START limits.

Counterintuitively, one possible way of keeping China's nuclear ambitions from creating an *n*-body problem would be for China, Russia, and the United States to build much larger arsenals. If each maintained a

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nuclear force level that was closer to that of the Soviet Union or the United States in the Cold War era, perhaps at the original START agreement level of 6,000 deployed weapons, the three states would establish a much higher barrier for other countries seeking to join them.

It's also possible that a new bipolar system could emerge. At present, Russia seems highly unlikely to allow itself to be eclipsed as a nuclear power, as its flaunting of its nuclear capabilities in the Ukraine crisis has demonstrated. But if Russia stays on the path of economic decline relative to China and the United States, that could allow the latter two to move to force levels substantially higher than those currently possessed by Russia, leaving it unable or unwilling to keep pace. In such an outcome, China and the United States would have to navigate their way to a new bipolar equilibrium by first transitioning through a relatively unstable era of three great nuclear powers.

MORE BASKETS FOR MORE EGGS

The issues raised here represent, at best, a modest initial step at identifying the challenges posed by a tripolar nuclear system. Given the uncertainties involved, the United States would be well served by keeping as many options open as possible. To begin with, the Biden administration should follow through on plans to replace the United States' aging triad of nuclear forces, some now over a half century old, with modern missiles, submarines, and bombers. The United States is even now playing catch-up, as both China and Russia have already embarked on broad-based modernization efforts of their own.

Pursuing modernization will ensure that the United States can at least maintain parity with each of its rivals, if not with their combined forces. Although the current U.S. modernization plan is predicated on a bipolar system, it can readily be adapted to address challenges posed by a tripolar one. According to Washington's current program, for example, U.S. production lines for land-based missiles, nuclear ballistic missile submarines, and long-range bombers will still be operating in the mid-2030s. Beijing and Moscow will have a greater incentive to negotiate limits on their own nuclear forces if they confront a modernized U.S. nuclear deterrent force rather than one facing so-called block obsolescence, when the reliability of entire weapons systems becomes questionable. Warm production lines would enable the United States to expand its forces to a substantially higher level, if need be, in response to Chinese or Russian

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actions or perhaps to boost the entry barrier so as to preclude lesser nuclear powers from expanding their own arsenals.

There are also steps that all three parties could take to reduce the incentives to attack first in a crisis. The goal should be to ensure that a prospective attacker will have to expend more weapons in attacking than the victim will lose. One way of accomplishing this is to rely more on land-based missile systems armed with single warheads. In the case of silo-based missiles, for example, it is generally accepted that an attacker must expend at least two weapons, and perhaps as many as four, in attacking each silo to ensure success. When an attacker must use two to four times as many weapons to destroy a single one of the victim's weapons, attacking becomes far less appealing. Put simply, the attacker confronts the prospect of depleting its own arsenal in a first strike against its rival, rather than the other way around. The broader the attack, the greater the residual disparity that exists in the targeted state's favor.

Although effective in the case of land-based missiles armed with single warheads, this approach works less well for the other two legs of the nuclear triad. When it comes to submarines, there are, according to current arrangements, many nuclear "eggs" in a handful of submerged "baskets." Submarines' principal contribution to deterrence and stability lies in their ability to avoid detection while on patrol. When in port, however, they are sitting ducks. Their vulnerability could be reduced, if only at the margins, by spreading the number of missiles and weapons among a larger number of submarines and finding ways to keep a higher percentage of them on patrol. Like nuclear-armed submarines, strategic bombers are armed with a clutch of nuclear weapons and are hard to target when airborne but relatively easy to attack while at their bases.

Thanks to its triad modernization program, the United States appears well positioned to mitigate some of these drawbacks. The newest generation of land-based missiles are intended to carry one warhead. The new class of submarines will carry fewer missiles than the submarines they are replacing. Plans for the new bombers call for fielding them in significantly greater numbers than those constituting the current airborne leg's stealthy component. Thus, the opportunity exists to reduce the number of nuclear weapons deployed on any single delivery system and, by doing so, make attacking any of them less rewarding.

The trends in China and Russia are far less encouraging. Both countries have been increasing the number of weapons carried by each of their land-based missiles. The ICBMs that China has already deployed

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can be armed with as many as ten warheads; one Russian ICBM in development can carry up to 15. Although either missile could be armed with only one warhead, the problem from a U.S. perspective is that Beijing or Moscow could add extra warheads to the same missiles on short notice to rapidly shift the balance of forces, a phenomenon known as "breakout." And since single missiles carrying multiple warheads are attractive targets—because several nuclear weapons can be destroyed with just one—these Chinese and Russian missiles would be most effective when employed in a first strike or in a risky "launch on warning" posture: all the more reason to make the U.S. deterrent as unattractive a target as possible.

DETERRENCE REDEFINED

For well over half a century, we have inhabited a world of two great nuclear powers. Although never quite as stable as it appeared, this bipolar nuclear system nevertheless succeeded in avoiding nuclear weapons' use. But that system is now passing into history, and the tripolar system that will emerge appears, at first blush, as though it will be far more fragile and unpredictable than its bipolar predecessor.

In this precarious new strategic environment, it will be crucial for the United States to anticipate new challenges and respond to them nimbly. This means proceeding with current plans to modernize the country's aging nuclear deterrent. But it will also require sustained intellectual effort from the country's finest strategic thinkers to find ways to mitigate the growing instability. Priority should be given to identifying methods for offsetting the erosion of stabilizing bipolar-era characteristics, such as parity and MAD, and preventing the tripolar system from devolving into an even more chaotic system of multiple major nuclear powers. Above all, it requires rethinking deterrence strategies and addressing the challenges posed by Beijing's *weishe* in ways that enhance, rather than compromise, the United States' security and that of its allies.

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The China Trap

U.S. Foreign Policy and the Perilous Logic of Zero-Sum Competition

JESSICA CHEN WEISS

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Competition with China has begun to consume U.S. foreign policy. Seized with the challenge of a near-peer rival whose interests and values diverge sharply from those of the United States, U.S. politicians and policymakers are becoming so focused on countering China that they risk losing sight of the affirmative interests and values that should underpin U.S. strategy. The current course will not just bring indefinite deterioration of the U.S.-Chinese relationship and a growing danger of catastrophic conflict; it also threatens to undermine the sustainability of American leadership in the world and the vitality of American society and democracy at home.

There is, of course, good reason why a more powerful China has become the central concern of policymakers and strategists in Washington

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(and plenty of other capitals). Under President Xi Jinping especially, Beijing has grown more authoritarian at home and more coercive abroad. It has brutally repressed Uyghurs in Xinjiang, crushed democratic freedoms in Hong Kong, rapidly expanded its conventional and nuclear arsenals, aggressively intercepted foreign military aircraft in the East and South China Seas, condoned Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine and amplified Russian disinformation, exported censorship and surveillance technology, denigrated democracies, worked to reshape international norms—the list could go on and will likely only get longer, especially if Xi secures a third five-year term and further solidifies his control later this year.

Yet well-warranted alarm risks morphing into a reflexive fear that could reshape American policy and society in counterproductive and ultimately harmful ways. In attempting to craft a national strategy suited to a more assertive and more powerful China, Washington has struggled to define success, or even a steady state, short of total victory or total defeat, that both governments could eventually accept and at a cost that citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders would be willing to bear. Without a clear sense of what it seeks or any semblance of a domestic consensus on how the United States should relate to the world, U.S. foreign policy has become reactive, spinning in circles rather than steering toward a desired destination.

To its credit, the Biden administration has acknowledged that the United States and its partners must provide an attractive alternative to what China is offering, and it has taken some steps in the right direction, such as multilateral initiatives on climate and hunger. Yet the instinct to counter every Chinese initiative, project, and provocation remains predominant, crowding out efforts to revitalize an inclusive international system that would protect U.S. interests and values even as global power shifts and evolves. Even with the war in Ukraine claiming considerable U.S. attention and resources, the conflict's broader effect has been to intensify focus on geopolitical competition, reinforced by Chinese-Russian convergence.

Leaders in both Washington and Beijing claim to want to avoid a new Cold War. The fact is that their countries are already engaged in a global struggle. The United States seeks to perpetuate its preeminence and an international system that privileges its interests and values; China sees U.S. leadership as weakened by hypocrisy and neglect, providing an opening to force others to accept its influence and legitimacy. On both sides, there is growing fatalism that a crisis is unavoidable and perhaps even necessary: that mutually accepted rules of fair

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play and coexistence will come only after the kind of eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation that characterized the early years of the Cold War—survival of which was not guaranteed then and would be even less assured now.

Even in the absence of a crisis, a reactive posture has begun to drive a range of U.S. policies. Washington frequently falls into the trap of trying to counter Chinese efforts around the world without appreciating what local governments and populations want. Lacking a forward-looking vision aligned with a realistic assessment of the resources at its disposal, it struggles to prioritize across domains and regions. It too often compromises its own broader interests as fractious geopolitics make necessary progress on global challenges all but impossible. The long-term risk is that the United States will be unable to manage a decades-long competition without falling into habits of intolerance at home and overextension abroad. In attempting to out-China China, the United States could undermine the strengths and obscure the vision that should be the basis for sustained American leadership.

The lodestar for a better approach must be the world that the United States seeks: what it wants, rather than what it fears. Whether sanctions or tariffs or military moves, policies should be judged on the basis of whether they further progress toward that world rather than whether they undermine some Chinese interest or provide some advantage over Beijing. They should represent U.S. power at its best rather than mirroring the behavior it aims to avert. And rather than looking back nostalgically at its past preeminence, Washington must commit, with actions as well as words, to a positive-sum vision of a reformed international system that includes China and meets the existential need to tackle shared challenges.

That does not mean giving up well-calibrated efforts to deter Chinese aggression, enhance resilience against Chinese coercion, and reinforce U.S. alliances. But these must be paired with meaningful discussions with Beijing, not only about crisis communications and risk reduction but also about plausible terms of coexistence and the future of the international system—a future that Beijing will necessarily have some role in shaping. An inclusive and affirmative global vision would both discipline competition and make clear what Beijing has to lose.

Otherwise, as the relationship deteriorates and the sense of threat grows, the logic of zero-sum competition will become even more overwhelming, and the resulting escalatory spiral will undermine both American interests and American values. That logic will warp global priorities and erode the international system. It will fuel pervasive insecurity and

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reinforce a tendency toward groupthink, damaging the pluralism and civic inclusion that are the bedrock of liberal democracy. And if not altered, it will perpetuate a vicious cycle that will eventually bring catastrophe.

THE INEVITABLE RIVALRY?

In Washington, the standard account for why the relationship has gotten so bad is that China changed: in the past decade or two, Beijing has stopped "biding its time," becoming more repressive at home and assertive abroad even while continuing to take advantage of the relationships and institutions that have enabled China's economic growth.

That change is certainly part of the story, and it is as much a product of China's growing clout as of Xi's way of using that clout. But a complete account must also acknowledge corresponding changes in U.S. politics and policy as the United States has reacted to developments in China. Washington has met Beijing's actions with an array of punitive actions and protective policies, from tariffs and sanctions to restrictions on commercial and scientific exchanges. In the process, the United States has drifted further from the principles of openness and nondiscrimination that have long been a comparative advantage while reinforcing Beijing's conviction that the United States will never tolerate a more powerful China. Meanwhile, the United States has wavered in its support for the international institutions and agreements that have long structured global interdependence, driven in part by consternation over China's growing influence within the international system.

The more combative approach, on both sides, has produced a mirroring dynamic. While Beijing believes that only through protracted struggle will Americans be persuaded to coexist with a strong China, Washington believes that it must check Chinese power and influence to defend U.S. primacy. The result is a downward spiral, with each side's efforts to enhance its security prompting the other to take further steps to enhance its own.

In explaining growing U.S.-Chinese tensions, some scholars point to structural shifts in the balance of power. Graham Allison has written of "the Thucydides trap": the notion that when a rising state challenges an established power, a war for hegemony frequently results. Yet a focus on capabilities alone has trouble accounting for the twists and turns in U.S.-Chinese relations, which are also driven by shifting perceptions of threat, opportunity, and purpose. Following President Richard Nixon's 1972 visit to Beijing, Washington came to view China as a strategic partner

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in containing the Soviet Union. And as the post–Cold War era dawned, U.S. policymakers began hedging against growing Chinese military power even while seeking to encourage the country's economic and political liberalization through greater integration.

Throughout this period, Chinese leaders saw a strategic opportunity to prioritize China's development in a stable international environment. They opened the country's doors to foreign investment and capitalist practices, seeking to learn from foreign expertise while periodically campaigning against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalization." Despite occasional attempts to signal resolve, including during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis and after the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia, Chinese leaders largely adhered to the former leader Deng Xiaoping's lying-low strategy to avoid triggering the sense of threat that could precipitate efforts to strangle China's rise.

If there is a year that marked an inflection point in China's approach to the world, it is not 2012, when Xi came to power, but 2008. The global financial crisis prompted Beijing to discard any notion that China was the student and the United States the teacher when it came to economic governance. And the Beijing Olympics that year were meant to mark China's arrival on the world stage, but much of the world was focused instead on riots in Tibet, which Chinese officials chalked up to outside meddling, and on China's subsequent crackdown. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) became increasingly fixated on the idea that foreign forces were intent on thwarting China's rise.

In the years that followed, the halting movement toward liberalization went into reverse: the party cracked down on the teaching of liberal ideas and the activities of foreign nongovernmental organizations, crushed pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, and built a sprawling surveillance state and system of internment camps in Xinjiang—all manifestations of a broader conception of "national security," animated by fears of unrest. Internationally, China gave up any semblance of strategic humility. It became more assertive in defending its territorial and maritime claims (along the Indian border, in the East and South China Seas, and with regard to Taiwan). Having surpassed Japan as the world's second-largest economy in 2010, it began wielding its economic power to compel deference to CCP interests. It ramped up development of military capabilities that could counter U.S. intervention in the region, including expanding its once limited nuclear arsenal. The decision to develop many of these capabilities predated Xi,

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but it was under his leadership that Beijing embraced a more coercive and intolerant approach.

As it registered China's growing capabilities and willingness to use them, Washington increased its hedging. The Obama administration announced that it would "pivot" to Asia, and even as Washington sought a constructive role for China in the international system, the pace of China's rise quickly outstripped U.S. willingness to grant it a correspondingly significant voice. With Donald Trump's election as president, Washington's assessment became especially extreme: a Marxist-Leninist regime was, in Trump's telling, out to "rape" the United States, dominate the world, and subvert democracy. In response, the Trump administration started a trade war, began to talk of "decoupling" the U.S. and Chinese economies, and launched a series of initiatives aimed at countering Chinese influence and undermining the CCP. In speeches, senior U.S. officials hinted at regime change, calling for steps to "empower the Chinese people" to seek a different form of government and stressing that "Chinese history contains another path for China's people."

The Biden administration has stopped any talk of regime change in China and coordinated its approach closely with allies and partners, a contrast with Trump's unilateralism. But it has at the same time continued many of its predecessor's policies and endorsed the assessment that China's growing influence must be checked. Some lines of effort, such as the Justice Department's China Initiative, which sought to prosecute intellectual property theft and economic espionage, have been modified. But others have been sustained, including tariffs, export controls, and visa restrictions, or expanded, such as sanctions against Chinese officials and companies. In Congress, meanwhile, ever more vehement opposition to China may be the sole thing that Democrats and Republicans can agree on, though even this shared concern has produced only limited agreement (such as recent legislation on domestic semiconductor investments) on how the United States should compete.

Over five decades, the United States tried a combination of engagement and deterrence to bring China into an international system that broadly sustains U.S. interests and values. American policymakers knew well that their Chinese counterparts were committed to defending CCP rule, but Washington calculated that the world would be less dangerous with China inside rather than outside the system. That bet largely succeeded—and is still better than the alternative. Yet many in Washington always hoped for, and to varying degrees sought to promote,

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China's liberal evolution as well. China's growing authoritarianism has thus fed the narrative of a comprehensive U.S. policy failure, and the focus on correcting that failure has entrenched Beijing's insecurity and belief that the United States and its allies will not accept China as a superpower.

Now, both countries are intent on doing whatever is necessary to demonstrate that any move by the other will not go unmet. Both U.S. and Chinese decision-makers believe that the other side respects only strength and interprets restraint as weakness. At this year's Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in June, China's defense minister, General Wei Fenghe, pledged to "fight to the very end" over Taiwan a day after meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

TELL ME HOW THIS ENDS

Where the current trajectory leads is clear: a more dangerous and less habitable world defined by an ever-present risk of confrontation and crisis, with preparation for conflict taking precedence over tackling common challenges.

Most policymakers, at least those in Washington, are not seeking a crisis between the United States and China. But there is growing acceptance that a crisis is more or less inevitable. Its consequences would be enormous. Even if both sides want to avoid war, crises by definition offer little time for response amid intense public scrutiny, making it difficult to find pathways to deescalation. Even the limited application of force or coercion could set in motion an unpredictable set of responses across multiple domains—military, economic, diplomatic, informational. As leaders maneuver to show resolve and protect their domestic reputations, a crisis could prove very difficult to contain.

Taiwan is the most likely flash point, as changes in both Taipei and Beijing have increasingly put the island at the center of U.S.-Chinese tensions. Demographic and generational shifts in Taiwan, combined with China's crackdown in Hong Kong, have heightened Taiwan's resistance to the idea of Beijing's control and made peaceful unification seem increasingly fanciful. After Taiwan's traditionally pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) won the presidency in 2016, Beijing took a hard line against the new president, Tsai Ing-wen, despite her careful efforts to avoid moves toward formal independence. Cross-strait channels of communication shut down, and Beijing relied on increasingly coercive measures to punish and deter what it perceived as incremental moves toward Taiwan's permanent separation.

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In response, the United States increased military patrols in and around the Taiwan Strait, loosened guidelines for interacting with Taiwanese officials, broadened U.S. declaratory policy to emphasize support for Taiwan, and continued to advocate for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations, including the United Nations. Yet many well-intentioned U.S. efforts to support the island and deter China have instead fueled Beijing's sense of urgency about the need to send a shot across the bow to deter steadily growing U.S.-Taiwanese ties.

Even with an official U.S. policy of "strategic ambiguity" on whether the United States would intervene in the event of an attack on Taiwan, Chinese military planners expect U.S. involvement. Indeed, the anticipated difficulty of seizing Taiwan while also holding the United States at bay has long underpinned deterrence across the Taiwan Strait. But many U.S. actions intended to bolster the island's ability to resist coercion have been symbolic rather than substantive, doing more to provoke than deter Beijing. For example, the Trump administration's efforts to upend norms around U.S. engagement with Taiwan—in August 2020, Secretary for Health and Human Services Alex Azar became the highest-ranking cabinet member to visit Taiwan since full normalization of U.S.-Chinese relations in 1979—prompted China to send combat aircraft across the center line of the Taiwan Strait, ignoring an unofficial guardrail that had long served to facilitate safe operations in the waterway. Intrusions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) have become a frequent means for Beijing to register displeasure with growing U.S. support. In October 2021, Chinese intrusions into Taiwan's ADIZ hit a new high—93 aircraft over three days—in response to nearby U.S.-led military exercises.

This action-reaction cycle, driven by mutually reinforcing developments in Beijing, Taipei, and Washington, is accelerating the deterioration of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. In recent months, Chinese official rhetoric has become increasingly threatening, using phrases that have historically signaled China's intent to escalate. "Whoever plays with fire will get burnt," Xi has repeatedly told U.S. President Joe Biden. In May, after Biden implied an unconditional commitment to defend Taiwan, rather than simply expressing the longstanding U.S. obligation to provide the island with the military means to defend itself and to maintain the U.S. capacity to resist any use of force, the Chinese Foreign

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Ministry stressed that Beijing "will take firm actions to safeguard its sovereignty and security interests."

Although Beijing continues to prefer peaceful unification, it is coming to believe that coercive measures may be necessary to halt moves toward Taiwan's permanent separation and compel steps toward unification, particularly given the Chinese perception that Washington's support for Taiwan is a means to contain China. Even if confidence in China's military and economic trajectory leads Beijing to believe that "time and momentum" remain on its side, political trends in Taiwan and in the United States make officials increasingly pessimistic about prospects for peaceful unification. Beijing has not set a timetable for seizing Taiwan and does not appear to be looking for an excuse to do so. Still, as the political scientist Taylor Fravel has shown, China has used force when it thinks its claims of sovereignty are being challenged. High-profile symbolic gestures of U.S. support for Taiwan are especially likely to be construed as an affront that must be answered. (As of this writing, Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, the first trip by a U.S. speaker of the house since 1997, has prompted Chinese warnings that "the Chinese military will never sit idly by," followed by unprecedently threatening military exercises and missile tests around Taiwan.)

As both the United States and Taiwan head into presidential elections in 2024, party politics could prompt more efforts to push the envelope on Taiwan's political status and de jure independence. It is far from clear whether Tsai's successor as president will be as steadfast as she has been in resisting pressure from strident advocates of independence. Even under Tsai, there have been troubling signs that DPP leaders are not content with the status quo despite its popularity with voters. DPP leaders have lobbied Washington to refrain from making statements that the United States does not support Taiwan independence. In March, Taipei's representative office in Washington gave former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo a hefty honorarium to visit Taiwan, where he called on the United States to offer the island "diplomatic recognition as a free and sovereign country."

The risk of a fatal collision in the air or at sea is also rising outside the Taiwan Strait. With the Chinese and U.S. militaries operating in proximity in the East and South China Seas, both intent on demonstrating their willingness to fight, pilots and operators are employing dangerous tactics that raise the risk of an inadvertent clash. In 2001, a Chinese fighter jet collided with a U.S. reconnaissance plane over the

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South China Sea, killing the Chinese pilot and leading to the 11-day detention of the U.S. crew. After initial grandstanding, the Chinese worked to head off a full-blown crisis, even cracking down on displays of anti-Americanism in the streets. It is much harder to imagine such a resolution today: the desire to display resolve and avoid showing weakness would make it exceedingly difficult to defuse a standoff.

THE CENTER CANNOT HOLD

Even if the two sides can avoid a crisis, continuation of the current course will reinforce geopolitical divisions while inhibiting cooperation on global problems. The United States is increasingly focused on rallying countries around the world to stand against China. But to the extent that a coalition to counter China forms, especially given the ideological framing that both the Trump and Biden administrations have adopted, that coalition is unlikely to include the range of partners that might stand to defend universal laws and institutions. "Asian countries do not want to be forced to choose between the two," Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong wrote of China and the United States in these pages in 2020. "And if either attempts to force such a choice—if Washington tries to contain China's rise or Beijing seeks to build an exclusive sphere of influence in Asia—they will begin a course of confrontation that will last decades and put the long-heralded Asian century in jeopardy."

The current approach to competition is also likely to strengthen the alignment between China and Russia. The Biden administration has managed to deter Chinese military assistance to Russia in Ukraine, and China has mostly complied with sanctions, demonstrating that there are in fact limits to Beijing and Moscow's "no limits" partnership. But so long as the two governments share a belief that they cannot be secure in a U.S.-led system, they will continue to deepen their cooperation. In the months since the invasion of Ukraine, they have carried out joint military patrols in the Pacific Ocean and worked to develop alternatives to the U.S.-controlled financial system.

Ultimately, Chinese-Russian relations will be shaped by how Beijing weighs its need to resist the United States against its need to preserve ties to international capital and technology that foster growth. China's alignment with Russia is not historically determined: there is an ongoing high-level debate within Beijing over how close to get to Moscow, with the costs of full-fledged alignment producing consternation

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among some Chinese analysts. Yet unless Washington can credibly suggest that Beijing will see strategic benefits, not only strategic risks, from distancing itself from Moscow, advocates of closer Chinese-Russian cooperation will continue to win the argument.

Growing geopolitical tension also crowds out progress on common challenges, regardless of the Biden administration's desire to compartmentalize certain issues. Although U.S. climate envoy John Kerry has made some headway on climate cooperation with China, including a joint declaration at last year's climate summit in Glasgow, progress has been outweighed by acrimony in areas where previous joint efforts had borne fruit, including counternarcotics, nonproliferation, and North Korea. On both sides, too many policymakers fear that willingness to cooperate will be interpreted as a lack of resolve.

Such tensions are further eroding the already weak foundations of global governance. It is not clear how much longer the center of the international rules-based order can hold without a broad-based effort at its renewal. But as Beijing has grown more concerned that the United States seeks to contain or roll back its influence—by, for example, denying it a greater say in international economic governance—the more it has invested in alternative institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Meanwhile, China's engagement with the multilateral system is increasingly aimed at discrediting U.S. leadership within it. Even though Beijing has not exactly demonstrated fealty to many of the principles it claims to support, the divide between the haves and have-nots has allowed it to cast the United States as protecting the privileges of a minority of powerful states. At the United Nations, Beijing and Washington too often strive to undercut each other's initiatives, launching symbolic battles that require third countries to choose between the two.

Last but far from least, a fixation on competition brings costs and dangers in the United States. Aggressive U.S. efforts to protect research security, combined with increased attacks against Asian Americans, are having a chilling effect on scientific research and international collaboration and are jeopardizing the appeal of the United States as a magnet for international talent. A 2021 survey by the American Physical Society found that 43 percent of international physics graduate students and early career scientists in the United States considered the country unwelcoming; around half of international early career scientists in the United States thought the government's approach to research security made them less likely to

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stay there over the long term. These effects are particularly pronounced among scientists of Chinese descent. A recent study by the Asian American Scholar Forum found that 67 percent of faculty of Chinese origin (including naturalized citizens and permanent residents) reported having considered leaving the United States.

As the United States has sought to shield itself from Chinese espionage, theft, and unfair trading practices, it has often insisted on reciprocity as a precondition for commercial, educational, and diplomatic exchanges with Beijing. But strict reciprocity with an increasingly closed system like China's comes at a cost to the United States' comparative advantage: the traditional openness, transparency, and equal opportunity of its society and economy, which drive innovation, productivity, and scientific progress.

The climate of insecurity and fear is also having pernicious effects on democracy and the quality of public debate about China and U.S. policy. The desire to avoid appearing "soft" on China permeates private and public policy discussions. The result is an echo chamber that encourages analysts, bureaucrats, and officials to be politically rather than analytically correct. When individuals feel the need to out-hawk one another to protect themselves and advance professionally, the result is groupthink. A policy environment that incentivizes self-censorship and reflexive positioning forecloses pluralistic debate and a vibrant marketplace for ideas, ingredients critical to the United States' national competitiveness.

From the World War II internment of Japanese Americans to the McCarthyism of the 1950s to hate crimes against Muslim and Sikh Americans after September 11, U.S. history is replete with examples of innocent Americans caught in the crossfire of exaggerated fears of the "enemy within." In each case, overreaction did as much as or more than the adversary to undermine U.S. democracy and unity. Although the Biden administration has condemned anti-Asian hate and stressed that policy must target behavior rather than ethnicity, some government agencies and U.S. politicians have continued to imply that an individual's ethnicity and ties to family abroad are grounds for heightened scrutiny.

BEFORE CATASTROPHE

If the United States and Soviet Union could arrive at détente, there is no reason that Washington and Beijing cannot do so as well.

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Early in the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy, hailing the need to "make the world safe for diversity," stressed that "our attitude is as essential as theirs." He warned Americans "not to see conflict as inevitable, accommodation as impossible, and communication as nothing more than an exchange of threats."

Even while making clear that Beijing will pay a high price if it resorts to force or other forms of coercion, Washington must present China with a real choice. Deterrence requires that threats be paired with assurances. To that end, U.S. policymakers should not be afraid of engaging directly with their Chinese counterparts to discuss terms on which the United States and China could coexist, including mutual bounds on competition. It was relatively easy for Americans to imagine coexistence with a China thought to be on a one-way path of liberalization. The United States and its partners now have the harder task of imagining coexistence with an authoritarian superpower, finding a new basis for bilateral interaction that focuses on shaping outward behavior rather than changing China's domestic system.

The most pressing need relates to Taiwan, where the United States must bolster deterrence while also clarifying that its "one China" policy has not changed. This means ensuring that Beijing knows how costly a crisis over Taiwan would be, putting at risk its broader development and modernization objectives—but also that if it refrains from coercive action, neither Washington nor Taipei will exploit the opportunity to push the envelope further. While Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other senior officials have affirmed that the United States does not support Taiwan's independence, other actions by the administration (especially Biden's repeated statements suggesting an end to "strategic ambiguity") have sown doubt.

While helping bolster Taiwan's resilience to Chinese coercion, Washington should avoid characterizing Taiwan as a vital asset for U.S. interests. Such statements feed Beijing's belief that the United States seeks to "use Taiwan to contain China," as China's ambassador to Washington put it in May. The United States should instead make clear its abiding interest in a peaceful process for resolving cross-strait differences rather than in a particular outcome. And as they highlight the costs Beijing can expect if it escalates its coercive campaign against Taiwan, U.S. policymakers should also stress to Taipei that unilateral efforts to change Taiwan's political status, including calls for de jure independence, U.S. diplomatic

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recognition, or other symbolic steps to signal Taiwan's permanent separation from China, are counterproductive.

These steps will be necessary but not sufficient to pierce the growing fatalism regarding a crisis, given Beijing's hardening belief that the United States seeks to contain China and will use Taiwan to that end. To put a floor beneath the collapsing U.S.-China relationship will require a stronger effort to establish bounds of fair competition and a willingness to discuss terms of coexistence. Despite recent meetings and calls, senior U.S. officials do not yet have regular engagements with their counterparts that would facilitate such discussions. These discussions should be coordinated with U.S. allies and partners to prevent Beijing from trying to drive a wedge between the United States and others in Europe and Asia. But Washington should also forge a common understanding with its allies and partners around potential forms of coexistence with China.

Skeptics may say that there is no reason for the leadership in Beijing to play along, given its triumphalism and distrust. These are significant obstacles, but it is worth testing the proposition that Washington can take steps to stabilize escalating tensions without first experiencing multiple crises with a nuclear-armed competitor. There is reason to believe that Beijing cares enough about stabilizing relations to reciprocate. Despite its claim that the "East is rising and the West is declining," China remains the weaker party, especially given its uncertain economic trajectory. Domestic challenges have typically tended to restrain China's behavior rather than, as some Western commentators have speculated, prompting risky gambles. The political scientist Andrew Chubb has shown that when Chinese leaders have faced challenges to their legitimacy, they have acted less assertively in areas such as the South China Sea.

Because Beijing and Washington are loath to make unilateral concessions, fearing that they will be interpreted as a sign of weakness at home and by the other side, détente will require reciprocity. Both sides will have to take coordinated but unilateral steps to head off a militarized crisis. For example, a tacit understanding could produce a reduction in Chinese and U.S. operations in and around the Taiwan Strait, lowering the temperature without signaling weakness. Military operations are necessary to demonstrate that the United States will continue to fly and sail wherever international law allows, including the Taiwan Strait. But ultimately, the United States' ability to deter

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and Taiwan's ability to defend against an attempt at armed unification by Beijing have little to do with whether the U.S. military transits the Taiwan Strait four, eight, 12, or 24 times a year.

In the current atmosphere of distrust, words must be matched by actions. In his November 2021 virtual meeting with Biden, Xi said, "We have patience and will strive for the prospect of peaceful reunification with utmost sincerity and efforts." But Beijing's actions since have undercut its credibility in Taipei and in Washington. Biden likewise told Xi that the United States does not seek a new Cold War or want to change Beijing's system. Yet subsequent U.S. actions (including efforts to diversify supply chains away from China and new visa restrictions on CCP officials) have undermined Washington's credibility among not just leaders in Beijing but also others in the region. It does not help that some administration officials continue to invoke Cold War parallels.

To bolster its own credibility, the Biden administration should also do more to preempt charges of hypocrisy and double standards. Consider U.S. policy to combat digital authoritarianism: Washington has targeted Chinese surveillance technology firms more harshly than similar companies based in the United States, Israel, and other Western democracies.

THE WORLD THAT OUGHT TO BE

So far, the Biden administration's order-building efforts have centered on arrangements that exclude China, such as the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework. Although officials have been careful to insist that these initiatives are not targeted at any one country, there is little sign of any corresponding effort to negotiate Beijing's role in the international or regional order. At the margins, there have been some signs that inclusive groupings can still deliver. (The World Trade Organization has struck agreements on fishing subsidies and COVID-19 vaccines.) But if investments in narrower, fit-for-purpose coalitions continue to take priority over broader, inclusive agreements and institutions, including those in which China and the United States both have major roles to play, geopolitical tensions will break rather than reinvigorate the international system.

Renewing U.S. leadership will also require doing more to address criticism that a U.S.-led order means "rules for thee but not for me." Clear and humble acknowledgment of instances where the United States has violated the UN Charter, such as the invasion of Iraq,

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would be an important step to overcoming that resentment. And Washington must deliver value for citizens in developing countries, whether on COVID-19, climate, hunger, or technology, rather than simply urging them not to work with China. At home, Washington must work to rebuild bipartisan support for U.S. engagement with the international system.

As the United States reimagines its domestic and international purpose, it should do so on its own terms, not for the sake of besting China. Yet fleshing out an inclusive, affirmative vision of the world it seeks would also be a first step toward clarifying the conditions under which the United States would welcome or accept Chinese initiatives rather than reflexively opposing them. The countries' divergent interests and values would still result in the United States opposing many of Beijing's activities, but that opposition would be accompanied by a clear willingness to negotiate the terms of China's growing influence. The United States cannot cede so much influence to Beijing that international rules and institutions no longer reflect U.S. interests and values. But the greater risk today is that overzealous efforts to counter China's influence will undermine the system itself through a combination of paralysis and the promotion of alternate arrangements by major powers.

Finally, the United States must do much more to invest in the power of its example and to ensure that steps taken to counter China do not undermine that example by falling into the trap of trying to out-China China. Protective or punitive actions, whether military, economic, or diplomatic, should be assessed not just on the basis of whether they counter China but also on how they affect the broader system and whether they reflect fidelity to U.S. principles.

Competition cannot become an end in itself. So long as outcompeting China defines the United States' sense of purpose, Washington will continue to measure success on terms other than on its own. Rankings are a symbolic construct, not an objective condition. If the pursuit of human progress, peace, and prosperity is the ultimate objective, as Blinken has stated, then the United States does not need to beat China in order to win.

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The Du Bois Doctrine

Race and the American Century

ZACHARIAH MAMPILLY

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October 1961 was a momentous month for W. E. B. Du Bois. Since the early years of the twentieth century, Du Bois had been a towering figure among Black American intellectuals. A sociologist by training, he helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. During the Jim Crow era, he became known for an uncompromising stance, demanding equal rights for Black Americans through his journalism and advocacy work while also making seminal contributions to various academic debates. In the years between the two world wars, his attention turned increasingly to international affairs, and his politics veered sharply left; by 1961, Du Bois had applied for membership in the Communist Party. Now, at the age of 93, an ailing Du Bois was

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embarking on what would be his final journey. At the behest of Ghana's pan-Africanist president, Kwame Nkrumah, Du Bois moved to Ghana with the intention of beginning work on an "Encyclopedia Africana," which would combat the prevailing perception of Africans and people of African heritage as devoid of civilization. What had once been a dream project for Du Bois, however, had become more of a last resort. Hounded by the U.S. government and marginalized by the academic and policy establishments that once welcomed him, Du Bois was fleeing his homeland. It was a figurative exile that turned literal when the U.S. State Department refused to renew his passport, rendering him functionally stateless. He spent the next two years in Ghana, where local and international activists and thinkers embraced him warmly, but he made little progress. He died in 1963, one day before Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" address at the March on Washington.

Today, Du Bois's home in Accra is notionally a museum that, although scheduled for renovation next year, lies in a state of disrepair. Books, including many apparently owned by Du Bois, sit slowly decomposing in the heat. Photos of disparate Black and African leaders, including Du Bois's intellectual rival Booker T. Washington and the Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi, hang haphazardly alongside illustrations of ancient Egyptian queens. Tourists, mostly interested in a crafts market behind the house, wander in and out, posing for selfies.

It's hard to argue that Du Bois, perhaps the most celebrated Black intellectual of all time, is underrecognized. His work remains a standard on syllabi across disciplines; prizes from academic associations bear his name. Despite the acclaim, however, Du Bois remains underappreciated—especially when it comes to his thinking on international politics. For a time, Du Bois was a regular contributor to *Foreign Affairs*, publishing five essays during the interwar period on topics ranging from European colonialism in Africa to the United States' role in the League of Nations. But Du Bois was an exception in this regard: during his lifetime, this magazine published very few Black voices—and its founding involved acquiring an existing journal that had occasionally trafficked in the racist pseudoscience that shaped the early years of international relations theory. Then, during World War II and amid the hysterical anticommunism of the early Cold War, *Foreign Affairs* joined the rest of the white American establishment in casting out Du Bois; partly as a result, his contributions to the field have received little attention from scholars in recent decades.

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Du Bois is rightly still venerated for his work on civil rights. But the erasure of his contributions to debates on U.S. foreign policy and international order represents an enormous loss. By discarding him, the American foreign policy establishment robbed itself of one of the twentieth century's most perceptive and prescient critics of capitalism and imperialism. His now forgotten texts on world politics prefigured many of the ideas that later shaped international relations theory. They brim with insights on the importance of race, the effect of domestic politics on foreign policy, the limits of liberal institutions, and the relationship between political economy and world order. Revisiting them today reveals how racism marred the dawn of the so-called American century and the liberal internationalism that drove it—and the role of establishment institutions (including this magazine) in that history. And because many of the ills that Du Bois diagnosed in the imperial and Cold War orders persist in today's putatively liberal international order, rediscovering his work serves more than a purely historical purpose. A better order demands a more complete reckoning, and restoring Du Bois's rightful place in the international relations canon would be a step toward that goal.

STAMPED FROM THE BEGINNING?

Du Bois was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and his lifespan overlaps almost exactly with the Jim Crow era, a period during which Black Americans faced severe restrictions on their ability to participate in political, economic, and social life. Du Bois's youth also coincided with a period of domestic expansion after the Civil War, as the U.S. government, newly triumphant over the single greatest threat to its sovereignty, sent its armies west to put down various indigenous insurgencies.

The enlargement of the U.S. military that accompanied the pacification of rebellious southern whites and the defeat of Native American resistance did not recede once those projects were complete. Instead, the colonial projects that European countries were pursuing in Asia and Africa galvanized an envious United States to carve out its own colonies. In 1898, a year before Du Bois published his first major sociological study, *The Philadelphia Negro*, the United States' imperial ambitions produced the annexation of Hawaii and the acquisition of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines as spoils of the Spanish-American War.

At around that time, as the United States began to emerge as a leading global power, modern international relations theory started to take shape. As the political scientist Robert Vitalis has written, "The central challenge

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defining the new field of 'imperial relations' was the efficient political administration and race development of subject peoples." Most early theorists, such as John Hobson, Alleyne Ireland, and Paul Reinsch, saw as major concerns two interlinked subjects: first, the question of whether the United States should secure a global empire in the manner of its European rivals, and second, the role of race in U.S. foreign policy. Writing in *Political Science Quarterly*, Hobson, for example, argued that the clear biological advantages enjoyed by the Anglo-Saxon race not merely justified colonial occupation but demanded it: "It is desirable that the earth should be peopled, governed and developed as far as possible by the races which can do their work best, that is, by the races of highest 'social efficiency'; these races must assert their right by conquering, ousting, subjugating or extinguishing races of lower social efficiency."

Today, many scholars dismiss the imperialist, racist logics propounded by the founders of modern international relations theory as merely reflecting the prejudices of an unenlightened era: sins not egregious enough to diminish the value of the sinners' good works. Vitalis, however, maintains that the origins of modern international relations theory cannot be cleaved from the junk race science and dubious anthropology that were, at the very least, present at its creation.

The same could be said about this magazine. In 1922, the Council on Foreign Relations launched *Foreign Affairs* after acquiring the future publication rights for an existing quarterly called the *Journal of International Relations*—which, until just a few years earlier, had been known as the *Journal of Race Development*. Established to be what its editor, George Blakeslee, described as a "forum for the discussion of the problems which relate to the progress of races and states generally considered backward," the *Journal of Race Development* published plenty of quackery: for example, articles that considered whether white people could adapt to the tropics and that explored the evolutionary origins of blond hair. But it was hardly a bastion of white supremacism. Indeed, one of its most prominent contributors was Du Bois; in one contribution in 1917, he argued that World War I had its origins in colonial exploitation. And when the publication changed its title, dropping "race development" in favor of "international relations," Du Bois was skeptical: "I am much more interested in the old name than in the new name of your journal," he wrote to Blakeslee. And despite Blakeslee's interest in publishing him, Du Bois did not contribute to the short-lived *Journal of International Relations*.

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But a few years later, after *Foreign Affairs* had launched, Du Bois submitted an article titled "Worlds of Color," which revisited his concept of a global "color line" in light of the events of World War I. In a letter to Du Bois accepting the piece, the magazine's managing editor, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, praised "the admirable restraint with which you have expressed yourself." The essay was published in 1925, a quarter century after Du Bois had initially developed the concept, and it garnered a good deal of attention. In that piece and four others that he published in *Foreign Affairs* over the following two decades, Du Bois offered a real-time assessment of the emerging world order, decrying the yawning gap between its proponents' putatively liberal values and the order's actual consequences for the colonized world.

"BLACK AND POOR IN A RICH, WHITE WORLD"

One of the central questions that motivated Du Bois was why the white working class in the United States refused to align with formerly enslaved Black Americans to challenge their common oppression. His solution to this puzzle rested on his views about the nature of race and the tensions between democracy and capitalism. Unlike most of his white contemporaries, Du Bois did not see race as an immutable characteristic but as a social construct. "Humanity is mixed to its bones," he wrote in a 1935 article for *Foreign Affairs*. Race was not a product of primordial competition among different groups of humans but a useful fiction of sorts, employed by economic elites to justify hierarchies that served their interests. "The medieval world had no real race problems," he noted in the same article. "Its human problems were those of nationality and culture and religion, and it was mainly as the new economy of an expanding population demanded a laboring class that this class tended . . . to be composed of members of alien races." And later, writing on European colonialism, he argued, "The belief that racial and color differences made exploitation of colonies necessary and justifiable was too tempting to withstand. As a matter of fact, the opposite was the truth; namely, that the profit from exploitation was the main reason for the belief in race difference."

Du Bois saw this dynamic clearly at work in the United States, where white elites avoided economic redistribution and retained political power by offering white workers "a public and psychological wage" in the form of control over police forces, access to politicians, and flattering media portrayals. But white American elites did not rely solely on such tactics to secure the allegiance of the white working class: beginning after

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the collapse of Reconstruction in the late 1870s, global capitalism and imperialism improved the living conditions of poorer white Americans by providing resources for their segregated schools, parks, and neighborhoods, all without meaningfully transferring power to them. In this way, Du Bois argued in his seminal 1935 work, *Black Reconstruction*, white elites in the United States had created a double proletariat divided by a racial line. On one side were poor and working-class whites, afforded some material gains but no genuine social mobility or political power. On the other were Black Americans, bereft of any hope for either economic or political gain. Through imperial war and capitalism, the United States—in concert with the European powers—had created a global system for upholding white supremacy.

In the interwar period, Du Bois initially placed his faith in the emergence of international institutions to redress these inequities. In 1921, he presented a petition to the newly created League of Nations on behalf of the Pan-African Congress, concluding that the league might spark a "revolution for the Negro race." But over the next decade, his views soured as the league failed to live up to its liberal ideals and became a tool of the superpowers.

In a 1933 *Foreign Affairs* essay on Liberia, he detailed an unholy alliance between the Firestone corporation, the league, and the U.S. government. Despite a league-commissioned investigation that found that Firestone, in connivance with Liberian elites, had used forced labor, the United States sided with the company against the league's plan for reform. The result was Liberia's indebtedness and loss of sovereignty. As Washington debated whether to increase its military involvement to resolve the consequent crisis in Liberia, Du Bois asked, scathingly: "Are we starting the United States Army toward Liberia to guarantee the Firestone Company's profits in a falling rubber market?" Long before such charges became a staple of left-wing criticisms of American hegemony, Du Bois foresaw the troubling effects of commingling U.S. military power with private interests and the ease with which major powers could employ international organizations to hide their imperialist agendas under a veneer of legitimacy. The exploitation that Du Bois detailed in his report on Liberia was something of a blueprint for how, long after the end of direct colonialism, global superpowers would use debt to guarantee the subservience of countries in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.

By the time he published his *Foreign Affairs* piece on Liberia, Du Bois had come to see the promise of Western liberal internationalism as hollow.

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"Liberia is not faultless," he wrote. "She lacks training, experience and thrift. But her chief crime is to be black and poor in a rich, white world; and in precisely that portion of the world where color is ruthlessly exploited as a foundation for American and European wealth. The success of Liberia as a Negro republic would be a blow to the whole colonial slave labor system."

In his final essay for *Foreign Affairs,* in 1943, Du Bois rejected the idea that World War II was a fight between liberal and illiberal powers, arguing that it was competition for colonies that produced the fighting instead. "Is it a white man's war?" he asked, rhetorically, on behalf of Africans and Asians. And by the time of the San Francisco Conference that birthed the United Nations in 1945, which he attended on behalf of the NAACP, Du Bois's skepticism of the emerging liberal order had calcified. Afterward, he wrote a letter to Armstrong, who had become the editor of *Foreign Affairs* in 1928 (and would stay in the position until 1972), pitching a critique of the nascent organization. In his estimation, the conference "took steps to prevent further wars" but "did not go nearly far enough in facing realistically the greatest potential cause of war, the colonial system." The magazine rejected the pitch, and Du Bois would never again publish in *Foreign Affairs*.

AGAINST EMPIRE, FOR DEMOCRACY

In exploring the relationship between race relations inside the United States and the country's quest for power in the international system, Du Bois anticipated the ways in which, in the mid-twentieth century, scholars of international relations would increasingly focus on domestic politics to explain countries' foreign policies. And he applied this lens to cases besides the United States. In trying to understand the costs of European competition for control over Africa, for example, Du Bois argued that domestic factors would undermine the clear military advantage European countries had over their colonial subjects. As a keen observer of emergent anticolonial struggles in India and elsewhere, Du Bois deduced how the occupation of foreign lands would engender resistance among the colonized. But Du Bois also saw another dilemma that imperialism created for European countries: colonial domination abroad often required the sacrifice of democracy at home. Imperialism inevitably led to increased racial and economic inequality at home: military adventures and opportunities for extracting natural resources empowered the capitalist class (and its favored segments of the underclass) and stoked racial prejudice that justified further interventions in foreign lands. As Du Bois put it in "Worlds of Color" in 1925: "One looks on present France and her African

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shadow, then, as standing at the parting of tremendous ways; one way leads toward democracy for black as well as white—a thorny way made more difficult by the organized greed of the imperial profit-takers within and without the nation; the other road is the way of the white world, and of its contradictions and dangers English colonies may tell."

Du Bois's increasing engagement with international politics also shaped his evolving views of the United States and its racial and class hierarchies. Early in his career, Du Bois developed the concept of "the talented tenth," the idea that marginalized groups require their own internal elite to pull the rest of the group out of poverty. But his study of European colonialism in Africa forced him to reassess his faith in minority elites as a vehicle for racial uplift. In Liberia, Du Bois had initially supported Firestone's investment as a way to buttress the legitimacy of the ruling Americo-Liberian community. But by the 1940s, he had grown disenchanted with the idea of the talented tenth, warning that it would empower "a group of selfish, self-indulgent, well-to-do men." This change in his thinking dovetailed with the fact that, in his personal life, he was becoming increasingly estranged from Black elites in the United States, who he felt had not supported him during his investigation by the United States government.

Eventually, Du Bois embraced the strategy of "assigning transformative responsibilities to the international proletariat," as the political scientist Adolph Reed has put it. His change in thinking was reinforced by his interpretation of how international capitalism was developing: instead of a tool to uplift the darker races, it was the cause of their exploitation. As a result, long before he fully embraced communism, he had moved toward a form of democratic socialism.

Yet even as he developed a theory of working-class agency, Du Bois could never fully shake his faith in the idea of a chosen few leading the way toward emancipation or in the potential for global cooperation. But it would not be Western elites, with their attachment to racial and economic hierarchies, who would lead the way. Rather, he believed, it was the rising powers of Asia, as well as the Soviet Union, that would upend the global system of white supremacy and liberate Black Americans. This view is palpably present in one of his most personal works, the novel *Dark Princess*, which Du Bois wrote in 1928.

Inspired by his participation in the First Universal Races Congress in 1911 and in other forums, such as the League Against Imperialism in 1927, *Dark Princess* tells the story of Matthew Townes, an African American medical student in self-imposed exile in Germany,

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where Du Bois had conducted some of his graduate studies. An obvious surrogate for Du Bois, Townes encounters elites from multiple African and Asian countries who seek to overthrow colonial rule but whose own prejudices prevent them from recognizing the potential of the Black working class in the United States. One of these characters is the Indian princess of the novel's title, who overcomes her prejudices and commits a form of class suicide, giving birth to a child fathered by Townes. Du Bois positions the child as a messiah figure who will someday rescue the oppressed darker races of the world. Because of their historic prejudices, Europe and the United States—as well as rich elites elsewhere—were denying not only themselves but all of humanity of the potential benefits of lifting up marginalized groups.

WHAT DU BOIS SAW

That Du Bois died a member of the Communist Party is no secret. But his journey to the left took decades. Du Bois first encountered socialism as a student in Germany in the 1890s, but it was not until the 1930s that he began to seriously engage with leftist politics. Given Du Bois's stature as the predominant Black intellectual of his time, his leftward drift was a source of suspicion for the U.S. government. The FBI began investigating Du Bois in 1942, following his visit to imperial Japan, where he delivered a speech praising the country as a potential friend to Black Americans. Despite concluding that there was "no evidence of subversive activity," the FBI continued to investigate Du Bois for the rest of his life, derailing his career and strengthening his anti-Americanism. During the McCarthy era in the early 1950s, U.S. authorities arrested Du Bois and charged him with being a secret Soviet agent after he circulated a petition calling for a ban on nuclear weapons. At his trial, a federal judge summarily acquitted Du Bois as soon as the prosecution rested its case, citing a lack of evidence. But the controversy rendered Du Bois persona non grata—and penniless.

The State Department refused to issue him a passport in 1952, a harsh blow for a man who had spent his entire adult life visiting and studying foreign countries. In 1957, Du Bois sought to regain his passport to attend Nkrumah's inauguration. Du Bois sent a personal appeal to Vice President Richard Nixon, who was scheduled to attend on behalf of the United States. But the State Department denied the request. The following year, the Supreme Court declared the policy of denying passports to suspected communists unconstitutional. Du Bois secured a new passport—although, in Ghana just a few years later, he would be unable to renew it—and immediately

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embarked on a ten-week trip to China, where he met with both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai. Having last visited the country in 1936, Du Bois was amazed by China's progress, praising its rising industrial prowess and calling the changes nothing short of a "miracle."

Du Bois's admiration for authoritarians such as Nkrumah and Mao, and his fulsome praise for the Soviet tyrant Joseph Stalin were inconsistent with his lifelong support for democracy. But his unfortunate embrace of such figures arguably represents a misapplication of his well-founded belief that democracy was incompatible with racial and economic inequality. His decades-long persecution at the hands of the United States also fed his misgivings about Western liberalism's ability to foster racial and economic equality.

In his writings on international politics, Du Bois argued that the domestic could never be divorced from the global, and that Washington's quest for a liberal order could never be reconciled with a Jim Crow system at home. Although American society has changed since Du Bois's time, that fundamental tension has never been resolved: from the Cold War to the "war on terror" and beyond, the United States has cast itself as a champion of freedom and equality, despite never meeting its own standards in its treatment of American citizens and despite routinely enabling and empowering authoritarians and other enemies of liberal values when doing so has served U.S. economic or national security interests, as defined by establishment elites. Realists often excuse or even demand such inconsistency and hypocrisy, suggesting that liberals are naive to believe that domestic values should guide foreign policy. Meanwhile, hawks of all stripes—from neoconservatives to liberal interventionists—refuse to acknowledge the inconsistency and hypocrisy at all, claim they are transient aberrations, or insist that they don't really matter.

By linking his devastating insights into the realities of American apartheid with his analysis of Western imperialism, Du Bois charted a unique course through this perennial debate. His work upends the liberal fantasy of the United States' inevitable progress toward a "more perfect union" that would inspire a just global order and gives the lie to the realist fantasy that how the country behaves internationally can be separated from domestic politics. For Du Bois, the success of democracy in the United States required that political and economic equality be extended not only to U.S. citizens but to all people around the world. It is an uncompromising and inspiring vision; embracing it cost Du Bois dearly. But it may be just what the country needs as it faces the waning of American imperium.

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Spirals of Delusion

How AI Distorts Decision-Making and Makes Dictators More Dangerous

HENRY FARRELL, ABRAHAM NEWMAN, AND JEREMY WALLACE

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In policy circles, discussions about artificial intelligence invariably pit China against the United States in a race for technological supremacy. If the key resource is data, then China, with its billion-plus citizens and lax protections against state surveillance, seems destined to win. Kai-Fu Lee, a famous computer scientist, has claimed that data is the new oil, and China the new OPEC. If superior technology is what provides the edge, however, then the United States, with its world class university system and talented workforce, still has a chance to come out ahead. For either country, pundits assume that superiority in AI will lead naturally to broader economic and military superiority.

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But thinking about AI in terms of a race for dominance misses the more fundamental ways in which AI is transforming global politics. AI will not transform the rivalry between powers so much as it will transform the rivals themselves. The United States is a democracy, whereas China is an authoritarian regime, and machine learning challenges each political system in its own way. The challenges to democracies such as the United States are all too visible. Machine learning may increase polarization—reengineering the online world to promote political division. It will certainly increase disinformation in the future, generating convincing fake speech at scale. The challenges to autocracies are more subtle but possibly more corrosive. Just as machine learning reflects and reinforces the divisions of democracy, it may confound autocracies, creating a false appearance of consensus and concealing underlying societal fissures until it is too late.

Early pioneers of AI, including the political scientist Herbert Simon, realized that AI technology has more in common with markets, bureaucracies, and political institutions than with simple engineering applications. Another pioneer of artificial intelligence, Norbert Wiener, described AI as a "cybernetic" system—one that can respond and adapt to feedback. Neither Simon nor Wiener anticipated how machine learning would dominate AI, but its evolution fits with their way of thinking. Facebook and Google use machine learning as the analytic engine of a self-correcting system, which continually updates its understanding of the data depending on whether its predictions succeed or fail. It is this loop between statistical analysis and feedback from the environment that has made machine learning such a formidable force.

What is much less well understood is that democracy and authoritarianism are cybernetic systems, too. Under both forms of rule, governments enact policies and then try to figure out whether these policies have succeeded or failed. In democracies, votes and voices provide powerful feedback about whether a given approach is really working. Authoritarian systems have historically had a much harder time getting good feedback. Before the information age, they relied not just on domestic intelligence but also on petitions and clandestine opinion surveys to try to figure out what their citizens believed.

Now, machine learning is disrupting traditional forms of democratic feedback (voices and votes) as new technologies facilitate disinformation and worsen existing biases—taking prejudice hidden in data and confidently transforming it into incorrect assertions.

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To autocrats fumbling in the dark, meanwhile, machine learning looks like an answer to their prayers. Such technology can tell rulers whether their subjects like what they are doing without the hassle of surveys or the political risks of open debates and elections. For this reason, many observers have fretted that advances in AI will only strengthen the hand of dictators and further enable them to control their societies.

The truth is more complicated. Bias is visibly a problem for democracies. But because it is more visible, citizens can mitigate it through other forms of feedback. When, for example, a racial group sees that hiring algorithms are biased against them, they can protest and seek redress with some chance of success. Authoritarian countries are probably at least as prone to bias as democracies are, perhaps more so. Much of this bias is likely to be invisible, especially to the decision-makers at the top. That makes it far more difficult to correct, even if leaders can see that something needs correcting.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, AI can seriously undermine autocratic regimes by reinforcing their own ideologies and fantasies at the expense of a finer understanding of the real world. Democratic countries may discover that, when it comes to AI, the key challenge of the twenty-first century is not winning the battle for technological dominance. Instead, they will have to contend with authoritarian countries that find themselves in the throes of an AI-fueled spiral of delusion.

BAD FEEDBACK

Most discussions about AI have to do with machine learning—statistical algorithms that extract relationships between data. These algorithms make guesses: Is there a dog in this photo? Will this chess strategy win the game in ten moves? What is the next word in this half-finished sentence? A so-called objective function, a mathematical means of scoring outcomes, can reward the algorithm if it guesses correctly. This process is how commercial AI works. YouTube, for example, wants to keep its users engaged, watching more videos so that they keep seeing ads. The objective function is designed to maximize user engagement. The algorithm tries to serve up content that keeps a user's eyes on the page. Depending on whether its guess was right or wrong, the algorithm updates its model of what the user is likely to respond to.

Machine learning's ability to automate this feedback loop with little or no human intervention has reshaped e-commerce. It may, someday, allow fully self-driving cars, although this advance has turned out to be

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a much harder problem than engineers anticipated. Developing autonomous weapons is a harder problem still. When algorithms encounter truly unexpected information, they often fail to make sense of it. Information that a human can easily understand but that machine learning misclassifies—known as "adversarial examples"—can gum up the works badly. For example, black and white stickers placed on a stop sign can prevent a self-driving car's vision system from recognizing the sign. Such vulnerabilities suggest obvious limitations in AI's usefulness in wartime.

Diving into the complexities of machine learning helps make sense of the debates about technological dominance. It explains why some thinkers, such as the computer scientist Lee, believe that data is so important. The more data you have, the more quickly you can improve the performance of your algorithm, iterating tiny change upon tiny change until you have achieved a decisive advantage. But machine learning has its limits. For example, despite enormous investments by technology firms, algorithms are far less effective than is commonly understood at getting people to buy one nearly identical product over another. Reliably manipulating shallow preferences is hard, and it is probably far more difficult to change people's deeply held opinions and beliefs.

General AI, a system that might draw lessons from one context and apply them in a different one, as humans can, faces similar limitations. Netflix's statistical models of its users' inclinations and preferences are almost certainly dissimilar to Amazon's, even when both are trying to model the same people grappling with similar decisions. Dominance in one sector of AI, such as serving up short videos that keep teenagers hooked (a triumph of the app TikTok), does not easily translate into dominance in another, such as creating autonomous battlefield weapons systems. An algorithm's success often relies on the very human engineers who can translate lessons across different applications rather than on the technology itself. For now, these problems remain unsolved.

Bias can also creep into code. When Amazon tried to apply machine learning to recruitment, it trained the algorithm on data from résumés that human recruiters had evaluated. As a result, the system reproduced the biases implicit in the humans' decisions, discriminating against résumés from women. Such problems can be self-reinforcing. As the sociologist Ruha Benjamin has pointed out, if policymakers used machine learning to decide where to send police forces, the technology could guide them to allocate more police to neighborhoods with high arrest rates, in the

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process sending more police to areas with racial groups whom the police have demonstrated biases against. This could lead to more arrests that, in turn, reinforce the algorithm in a vicious circle.

The old programming adage "garbage in, garbage out" has a different meaning in a world where the inputs influence the outputs and vice versa. Without appropriate outside correction, machine-learning algorithms can acquire a taste for the garbage that they themselves produce, generating a loop of bad decision-making. All too often, policymakers treat machine learning tools as wise and dispassionate oracles rather than as fallible instruments that can intensify the problems they purport to solve.

CALL AND RESPONSE

Political systems are feedback systems, too. In democracies, the public literally evaluates and scores leaders in elections that are supposed to be free and fair. Political parties make promises with the goal of winning power and holding on to it. A legal opposition highlights government mistakes, while a free press reports on controversies and misdeeds. Incumbents regularly face voters and learn whether they have earned or lost the public trust, in a continually repeating cycle.

But feedback in democratic societies does not work perfectly. The public may not have a deep understanding of politics, and it can punish governments for things beyond their control. Politicians and their staff may misunderstand what the public wants. The opposition has incentives to lie and exaggerate. Contesting elections costs money, and the real decisions are sometimes made behind closed doors. Media outlets may be biased or care more about entertaining their consumers than edifying them.

All the same, feedback makes learning possible. Politicians learn what the public wants. The public learns what it can and cannot expect. People can openly criticize government mistakes without being locked up. As new problems emerge, new groups can organize to publicize them and try to persuade others to solve them. All this allows policymakers and governments to engage with a complex and ever-changing world.

Feedback works very differently in autocracies. Leaders are chosen not through free and fair elections but through ruthless succession battles and often opaque systems for internal promotion. Even where opposition to the government is formally legal, it is discouraged, sometimes brutally. If media criticize the government, they risk legal

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action and violence. Elections, when they do occur, are systematically tilted in favor of incumbents. Citizens who oppose their leaders don't just face difficulties in organizing; they risk harsh penalties for speaking out, including imprisonment and death. For all these reasons, authoritarian governments often don't have a good sense of how the world works or what they and their citizens want.

Such systems therefore face a tradeoff between short-term political stability and effective policymaking; a desire for the former inclines authoritarian leaders to block outsiders from expressing political opinions, while the need for the latter requires them to have some idea of what is happening in the world and in their societies. Because of tight controls on information, authoritarian rulers cannot rely on citizens, media, and opposition voices to provide corrective feedback as democratic leaders can. The result is that they risk policy failures that can undermine their long-term legitimacy and ability to rule. Russian President Vladimir Putin's disastrous decision to invade Ukraine, for example, seems to have been based on an inaccurate assessment of Ukrainian morale and his own military's strength.

Even before the invention of machine learning, authoritarian rulers used quantitative measures as a crude and imperfect proxy for public feedback. Take China, which for decades tried to combine a decentralized market economy with centralized political oversight of a few crucial statistics, notably GDP. Local officials could get promoted if their regions saw particularly rapid growth. But Beijing's limited quantified vision offered them little incentive to tackle festering issues such as corruption, debt, and pollution. Unsurprisingly, local officials often manipulated the statistics or pursued policies that boosted GDP in the short term while leaving the long-term problems for their successors.

The world caught a glimpse of this dynamic during the initial Chinese response to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in Hubei Province in late 2019. China had built an internet-based disease-reporting system following the 2003 SARS crisis, but instead of using that system, local authorities in Wuhan, Hubei's capital, punished the doctor who first reported the presence of a "SARS-like" contagion. The Wuhan government worked hard to prevent information about the outbreak from reaching Beijing, continually repeating that there were "no new cases" until after important local political meetings concluded. The doctor, Li Wenliang, himself succumbed to the disease and died on February 7, triggering fierce outrage across the country.

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Beijing then took over the response to the pandemic, adopting a "zero COVID" approach that used coercive measures to suppress case counts. The policy worked well in the short run, but with the Omicron variant's tremendous transmissibility, the zero-COVID policy increasingly seems to have led to only pyrrhic victories, requiring massive lockdowns that have left people hungry and the economy in shambles. But it remained successful at achieving one crucial if crude metric—keeping the number of infections low.

Data seem to provide objective measures that explain the world and its problems, with none of the political risks and inconveniences of elections or free media. But there is no such thing as decision-making devoid of politics. The messiness of democracy and the risk of deranged feedback processes are apparent to anyone who pays attention to U.S. politics. Autocracies suffer similar problems, although they are less immediately perceptible. Officials making up numbers or citizens declining to turn their anger into wide-scale protests can have serious consequences, making bad decisions more likely in the short run and regime failure more likely in the long run.

IT'S A TRAP?

The most urgent question is not whether the United States or China will win or lose in the race for AI dominance. It is how AI will change the different feedback loops that democracies and autocracies rely on to govern their societies. Many observers have suggested that as machine learning becomes more ubiquitous, it will inevitably hurt democracy and help autocracy. In their view, social media algorithms that optimize engagement, for instance, may undermine democracy by damaging the quality of citizen feedback. As people click through video after video, YouTube's algorithm offers up shocking and alarming content to keep them engaged. This content often involves conspiracy theories or extreme political views that lure citizens into a dark wonderland where everything is upside down.

By contrast, machine learning is supposed to help autocracies by facilitating greater control over their people. Historian Yuval Harari and a host of other scholars claim that AI "favors tyranny." According to this camp, AI centralizes data and power, allowing leaders to manipulate ordinary citizens by offering them information that is calculated to push their "emotional buttons." This endlessly iterating process of feedback and response is supposed to produce an invisible and effective

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form of social control. In this account, social media allows authoritarian governments to take the public's pulse as well as capture its heart.

But these arguments rest on uncertain foundations. Although leaks from inside Facebook suggest that algorithms can indeed guide people toward radical content, recent research indicates that the algorithms don't themselves change what people are looking for. People who search for extreme YouTube videos are likely to be guided toward more of what they want, but people who aren't already interested in dangerous content are unlikely to follow the algorithms' recommendations. If feedback in democratic societies were to become increasingly deranged, machine learning would not be entirely at fault; it would only have lent a helping hand.

There is no good evidence that machine learning enables the sorts of generalized mind control that will hollow out democracy and strengthen authoritarianism. If algorithms are not very effective at getting people to buy things, they are probably much worse at getting them to change their minds about things that touch on closely held values, such as politics. The claims that Cambridge Analytica, a British political consulting firm, employed some magical technique to fix the 2016 U.S. presidential election for Donald Trump have unraveled. The firm's supposed secret sauce provided to the Trump campaign seemed to consist of standard psychometric targeting techniques—using personality surveys to categorize people—of limited utility.

Indeed, fully automated data-driven authoritarianism may turn out to be a trap for states such as China that concentrate authority in a tiny insulated group of decision-makers. Democratic countries have correction mechanisms—alternative forms of citizen feedback that can check governments if they go off track. Authoritarian governments, as they double down on machine learning, have no such mechanism. Although ubiquitous state surveillance could prove effective in the short term, the danger is that authoritarian states will be undermined by the forms of self-reinforcing bias that machine learning facilitates. As a state employs machine learning widely, the leader's ideology will shape how machine learning is used, the objectives around which it is optimized, and how it interprets results. The data that emerge through this process will likely reflect the leader's prejudices right back at him.

As the technologist Maciej Ceglowski has explained, machine learning is "money laundering for bias," a "clean, mathematical apparatus that gives the status quo the aura of logical inevitability."

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What will happen, for example, as states begin to use machine learning to spot social media complaints and remove them? Leaders will have a harder time seeing and remedying policy mistakes—even when the mistakes damage the regime. A 2013 study speculated that China has been slower to remove online complaints than one might expect, precisely because such griping provided useful information to the leadership. But now that Beijing is increasingly emphasizing social harmony and seeking to protect high officials, that hands-off approach will be harder to maintain.

Chinese President Xi Jinping is aware of these problems in at least some policy domains. He long claimed that his antipoverty campaign—an effort to eliminate rural impoverishment—was a signature victory powered by smart technologies, big data, and AI. But he has since acknowledged flaws in the campaign, including cases where officials pushed people out of their rural homes and stashed them in urban apartments to game poverty statistics. As the resettled fell back into poverty, Xi worried that "uniform quantitative targets" for poverty levels might not be the right approach in the future. Data may indeed be the new oil, but it may pollute rather than enhance a government's ability to rule.

This problem has implications for China's so-called social credit system, a set of institutions for keeping track of pro-social behavior that Western commentators depict as a perfectly functioning "AI-powered surveillance regime that violates human rights." As experts on information politics such as Shazeda Ahmed and Karen Hao have pointed out, the system is, in fact, much messier. The Chinese social credit system actually looks more like the U.S. credit system, which is regulated by laws such as the Fair Credit Reporting Act, than a perfect Orwellian dystopia.

More machine learning may also lead authoritarian regimes to double down on bad decisions. If machine learning is trained to identify possible dissidents on the basis of arrest records, it will likely generate self-reinforcing biases similar to those seen in democracies—reflecting and affirming administrators' beliefs about disfavored social groups and inexorably perpetuating automated suspicion and backlash. In democracies, public pushback, however imperfect, is possible. In autocratic regimes, resistance is far harder; without it, these problems are invisible to those inside the system, where officials and algorithms share the same prejudices. Instead of good policy,

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this will lead to increasing pathologies, social dysfunction, resentment, and, eventually, unrest and instability.

WEAPONIZED AI

The international politics of AI will not create a simple race for dominance. The crude view that this technology is an economic and military weapon and that data is what powers it conceals a lot of the real action. In fact, AI's biggest political consequences are for the feedback mechanisms that both democratic and authoritarian countries rely on. Some evidence indicates that AI is disrupting feedback in democracies, although it doesn't play nearly as big a role as many suggest. By contrast, the more authoritarian governments rely on machine learning, the more they will propel themselves into an imaginary world founded on their own tech-magnified biases. The political scientist James Scott's classic 1998 book, *Seeing Like a State*, explained how twentieth-century states were blind to the consequences of their own actions in part because they could see the world through only bureaucratic categories and data. As sociologist Marion Fourcade and others have argued, machine learning may present the same problems but at an even greater scale.

This problem creates a very different set of international challenges for democracies such as the United States. Russia, for example, invested in disinformation campaigns designed to sow confusion and disarray among the Russian public while applying the same tools in democratic countries. Although free speech advocates long maintained that the answer to bad speech was more speech, Putin decided that the best response to more speech was more bad speech. Russia then took advantage of open feedback systems in democracies to pollute them with misinformation.

One rapidly emerging problem is how autocracies such as Russia might weaponize large language models, a new form of AI that can produce text or images in response to a verbal prompt, to generate disinformation at scale. As the computer scientist Timnit Gebru and her colleagues have warned, programs such as Open AI's GPT-3 system can produce apparently fluent text that is difficult to distinguish from ordinary human writing. BLOOM, a new open-access large language model, has just been released for anyone to use. Its license requires people to avoid abuse, but it will be very hard to police.

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These developments will produce serious problems for feedback in democracies. Current online policy-comment systems are almost certainly doomed, since they require little proof to establish whether the commenter is a real human being. Contractors for big telecommunications companies have already flooded the U.S. Federal Communications Commission with bogus comments linked to stolen email addresses as part of their campaign against net neutrality laws. Still, it was easy to identify subterfuge when tens of thousands of nearly identical comments were posted. Now, or in the very near future, it will be trivially simple to prompt a large language model to write, say, 20,000 different comments in the style of swing voters condemning net neutrality.

Artificial intelligence–fueled disinformation may poison the well for autocracies, too. As authoritarian governments seed their own public debate with disinformation, it will become easier to fracture opposition but harder to tell what the public actually believes, greatly complicating the policymaking process. It will be increasingly hard for authoritarian leaders to avoid getting high on their own supply, leading them to believe that citizens tolerate or even like deeply unpopular policies.

SHARED THREATS

What might it be like to share the world with authoritarian states such as China if they become increasingly trapped in their own unhealthy informational feedback loops? What happens when these processes cease to provide cybernetic guidance and instead reflect back the rulers' own fears and beliefs? One self-centered response by democratic competitors would be to leave autocrats to their own devices, seeing anything that weakens authoritarian governments as a net gain.

Such a reaction could result in humanitarian catastrophe, however. Many of the current biases of the Chinese state, such as its policies toward the Uyghurs, are actively malignant and might become far worse. Previous consequences of Beijing's blindness to reality include the great famine, which killed some 30 million people between 1959 and 1961 and was precipitated by ideologically driven policies and hidden by the unwillingness of provincial officials to report accurate statistics. Even die-hard cynics should recognize the dangers of AI-induced foreign policy catastrophes in China and elsewhere.

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By amplifying nationalist biases, for instance, AI could easily reinforce hawkish factions looking to engage in territorial conquest.

Perhaps, even more cynically, policymakers in the West may be tempted to exploit the closed loops of authoritarian information systems. So far, the United States has focused on promoting Internet freedom in autocratic societies. Instead, it might try to worsen the authoritarian information problem by reinforcing the bias loops that these regimes are prone to. It could do this by corrupting administrative data or seeding authoritarian social media with misinformation. Unfortunately, there is no virtual wall to separate democratic and autocratic systems. Not only might bad data and crazy beliefs leak into democratic societies from authoritarian ones, but terrible authoritarian decisions could have unpredictable consequences for democratic countries, too. As governments think about AI, they need to realize that we live in an interdependent world, where authoritarian governments' problems are likely to cascade into democracies.

A more intelligent approach, then, might look to mitigate the weaknesses of AI through shared arrangements for international governance. Currently, different parts of the Chinese state disagree on the appropriate response to regulating AI. China's Cyberspace Administration, its Academy of Information and Communications Technology, and its Ministry of Science and Technology, for instance, have all proposed principles for AI regulation. Some favor a top-down model that might limit the private sector and allow the government a free hand. Others, at least implicitly, recognize the dangers of AI for the government, too. Crafting broad international regulatory principles might help disseminate knowledge about the political risks of AI.

This cooperative approach may seem strange in the context of a growing U.S.-Chinese rivalry. But a carefully modulated policy might serve Washington and its allies well. One dangerous path would be for the United States to get sucked into a race for AI dominance, which would extend competitive relations still further. Another would be to try to make the feedback problems of authoritarianism worse. Both risk catastrophe and possible war. Far safer, then, for all governments to recognize AI's shared risks and work together to reduce them.

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2022

The Sources of Russian Misconduct

A Diplomat Defects From the Kremlin

BORIS BONDAREV

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For three years, my workdays began the same way. At 7:30 AM, I woke up, checked the news, and drove to work at the Russian mission to the United Nations Office in Geneva. The routine was easy and predictable, two of the hallmarks of life as a Russian diplomat.

February 24 was different. When I checked my phone, I saw startling and mortifying news: the Russian air force was bombing Ukraine. Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Odessa were under attack. Russian troops were surging out of Crimea and toward the southern city of Kherson. Russian missiles had reduced buildings to rubble and sent residents fleeing. I watched videos of the blasts, complete with air-raid sirens, and saw people run around in panic.

As someone born in the Soviet Union, I found the attack almost unimaginable, even though I had heard Western news reports that

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an invasion might be imminent. Ukrainians were supposed to be our close friends, and we had much in common, including a history of fighting Germany as part of the same country. I thought about the lyrics of a famous patriotic song from World War II, one that many residents of the former Soviet Union know well: "On June 22, exactly at 4:00 AM, Kyiv was bombed, and we were told that the war had started." Russian President Vladimir Putin described the invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation" intended to "de-Nazify" Russia's neighbor. But in Ukraine, it was Russia that had taken the Nazis' place.

"That is the beginning of the end," I told my wife. We decided I had to quit.

Resigning meant throwing away a twenty-year career as a Russian diplomat and, with it, many of my friendships. But the decision was a long time coming. When I joined the ministry in 2002, it was during a period of relative openness, when we diplomats could work cordially with our counterparts from other countries. Still, it was apparent from my earliest days that Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was deeply flawed. Even then, it discouraged critical thinking, and over the course of my tenure, it became increasingly belligerent. I stayed on anyway, managing the cognitive dissonance by hoping that I could use whatever power I had to moderate my country's international behavior. But certain events can make a person accept things they didn't dare to before.

The invasion of Ukraine made it impossible to deny just how brutal and repressive Russia had become. It was an unspeakable act of cruelty, designed to subjugate a neighbor and erase its ethnic identity. It gave Moscow an excuse to crush any domestic opposition. Now, the government is sending thousands upon thousands of drafted men to go kill Ukrainians. The war shows that Russia is no longer just dictatorial and aggressive; it has become a fascist state.

But for me, one of the invasion's central lessons had to do with something I had witnessed over the preceding two decades: what happens when a government is slowly warped by its own propaganda. For years, Russian diplomats were made to confront Washington and defend the country's meddling abroad with lies and non sequiturs. We were taught to embrace bombastic rhetoric and to uncritically parrot to other states what the Kremlin said to us. But eventually, the target audience for this propaganda was not just foreign countries; it was our own leadership. In cables and statements, we were made to tell the Kremlin that we had sold the world on Russian greatness and

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demolished the West's arguments. We had to withhold any criticism about the president's dangerous plans. This performance took place even at the ministry's highest levels. My colleagues in the Kremlin repeatedly told me that Putin likes his foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, because he is "comfortable" to work with, always saying yes to the president and telling him what he wants to hear. Small wonder, then, that Putin thought he would have no trouble defeating Kyiv.

The war is a stark demonstration of how decisions made in echo chambers can backfire. Putin has failed in his bid to conquer Ukraine, an initiative that he might have understood would be impossible if his government had been designed to give honest assessments. For those of us who worked on military issues, it was plain that the Russian armed forces were not as mighty as the West feared—in part thanks to economic restrictions the West implemented after Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea that were more effective than policymakers seemed to realize.

The Kremlin's invasion has strengthened NATO, an entity it was designed to humiliate, and resulted in sanctions strong enough to make Russia's economy contract. But fascist regimes legitimize themselves more by exercising power than by delivering economic gains, and Putin is so aggressive and detached from reality that a recession is unlikely to stop him. To justify his rule, Putin wants the great victory he promised and believes he can obtain. If he agrees to a cease-fire, it will only be to give Russian troops a rest before continuing to fight. And if he wins in Ukraine, Putin will likely move to attack another post-Soviet state, such as Moldova, where Moscow already props up a breakaway region.

There is, then, only one way to stop Russia's dictator, and that is to do what U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin suggested in April: weaken the country "to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine." This may seem like a tall order. But Russia's military has been substantially weakened, and the country has lost many of its best soldiers. With broad support from NATO, Ukraine is capable of eventually beating Russia in the east and south, just as it has done in the north.

If defeated, Putin will face a perilous situation at home. He will have to explain to the elite and the masses why he betrayed their expectations. He will have to tell the families of dead soldiers why they perished for nothing. And thanks to the mounting pressure from sanctions, he will have to do all of this at a time when Russians are even worse off than they are today. He could fail at this task, face widespread backlash,

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and be shunted aside. He could look for scapegoats and be overthrown by the advisers and deputies he threatens to purge. Either way, should Putin go, Russia will have a chance to truly rebuild—and finally abandon its delusions of grandeur.

PIPE DREAMS

I was born in 1980 to parents in the middle strata of the Soviet intelligentsia. My father was an economist at the foreign trade ministry, and my mother taught English at the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations. She was the daughter of a general who commanded a rifle division during World War II and was recognized as a "Hero of the Soviet Union."

We lived in a large Moscow apartment assigned by the state to my grandfather after the war, and we had opportunities that most Soviet residents did not. My father was appointed to a position at a joint Soviet-Swiss venture, which allowed us to live in Switzerland in 1984 and 1985. For my parents, this time was transformative. They experienced what it was like to reside in a wealthy country, with amenities—grocery carts, quality dental care—that the Soviet Union lacked.

As an economist, my father was already aware of the Soviet Union's structural problems. But living in Western Europe led him and my mother to question the system more deeply, and they were excited when Mikhail Gorbachev launched perestroika in 1985. So, it seemed, were most Soviet residents. One didn't have to live in western Europe to realize that the Soviet Union's shops offered a narrow range of low-quality products, such as shoes that were painful to wear. Soviet residents knew the government was lying when it claimed to be leading "progressive mankind."

Many Soviet citizens believed that the West would help their country as it transitioned to a market economy. But such hopes proved naive. The West did not provide Russia with the amount of aid that many of its residents—and some prominent U.S. economists—thought necessary to address the country's tremendous economic challenges. Instead, the West encouraged the Kremlin as it quickly lifted price controls and rapidly privatized state resources. A small group of people grew extremely rich from this process by snapping up public assets. But for most Russians, the so-called shock therapy led to impoverishment. Hyperinflation hit, and average life expectancy went down. The country did experience a period of democratization, but much of the public equated the new freedoms with destitution. As a result, the West's status in Russia seriously suffered.

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It took another major hit after NATO's 1999 campaign against Serbia. To Russia, the bombings looked less like an operation to protect the country's Albanian minority than like aggression by a large power against a tiny victim. I vividly remember walking by the U.S. embassy in Moscow the day after a mob attacked it and noticing marks left by paint that had been splattered against its walls.

As the child of middle-class parents—my father left the civil service in 1991 and started a successful small business—I experienced this decade of turbulence mostly secondhand. My teenage years were stable, and my future seemed fairly predictable. I became a student at the same university where my mother taught and set my sights on working in international affairs as my father had. I benefited from studying at a time when Russian discourse was open. Our professors encouraged us to read a variety of sources, including some that were previously banned. We held debates in class. In the summer of 2000, I excitedly walked into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for an internship, ready to embark on a career I hoped would teach me about the world.

My experience proved disheartening. Rather than working with skilled elites in stylish suits—the stereotype of diplomats in Soviet films—I was led by a collection of tired, middle-aged bosses who idly performed unglamorous tasks, such as drafting talking points for higher-level officials. Most of the time, they didn't appear to be working at all. They sat around smoking, reading newspapers, and talking about their weekend plans. My internship mostly consisted of getting their newspapers and buying them snacks.

I decided to join the ministry anyway. I was eager to earn my own money, and I still hoped to learn more about other places by traveling far from Moscow. When I was hired in 2002 to be an assistant attaché at the Russian embassy in Cambodia, I was happy. I would have a chance to use my Khmer language skills and studies of Southeast Asia.

Since Cambodia is on the periphery of Russia's interests, I had little work to do. But living abroad was an upgrade over living in Moscow. Diplomats stationed outside Russia made much more money than those placed domestically. The embassy's second-in-command, Viacheslav Loukianov, appreciated open discussion and encouraged me to defend my opinions. And our attitude to the West was fairly congenial. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs always had an anti-American bent—one inherited from its Soviet predecessor—but the bias was not overpowering. My colleagues and I did not think much about NATO,

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and when we did, we usually viewed the organization as a partner. One evening, I went out for beers with a fellow embassy employee at an underground bar. There, we ran into an American official who invited us to drink with him. Today, such an encounter would be fraught with tension, but at the time, it was an opportunity for friendship.

Yet even then, it was clear that the Russian government had a culture that discouraged independent thought—despite Loukianov's impulses to the contrary. One day, I was called to meet with the embassy's number three official, a quiet, middle-aged diplomat who had joined the foreign ministry during the Soviet era. He handed me text from a cable from Moscow, which I was told to incorporate into a document we would deliver to Cambodian authorities. Noticing several typos, I told him that I would correct them. "Don't do that!" he shot back. "We got the text straight from Moscow. They know better. Even if there are errors, it's not up to us to correct the center." It was emblematic of what would become a growing trend in the ministry: unquestioned deference to leaders.

YES MEN

In Russia, the first decade of the twenty-first century was initially hopeful. The country's average income level was increasing, as were its living standards. Putin, who assumed the presidency at the start of the millennium, promised an end to the chaos of the 1990s.

And yet plenty of Russians grew tired of Putin during the aughts. Most intellectuals regarded his strongman image as an unwelcome artifact of the past, and there were many cases of corruption among senior government officials. Putin responded to investigations into his administration by cracking down on free speech. By the end of his first term in office, he had effectively taken control of all three of Russia's main television networks.

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, Putin's early moves raised few alarms. He appointed Lavrov to be foreign minister in 2004, a decision that we applauded. Lavrov was known to be highly intelligent and have deep diplomatic experience, with a track record of forging lasting relationships with foreign officials. Both Putin and Lavrov were becoming increasingly confrontational toward NATO, but the behavioral changes were subtle. Many diplomats didn't notice, including me.

In retrospect, however, it's clear that Moscow was laying the groundwork for Putin's imperial project—especially in Ukraine. The Kremlin developed

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an obsession with the country after its Orange Revolution of 2004–5, when hundreds of thousands of protesters prevented Russia's preferred candidate from becoming president after what was widely considered to be a rigged election. This obsession was reflected in the major Russian political shows, which started dedicating their prime-time coverage to Ukraine, droning on about the country's supposedly Russophobic authorities. For the next 16 years, right up to the invasion, Russians heard newscasters describe Ukraine as an evil country, controlled by the United States, that oppressed its Russian-speaking population. (Putin is seemingly incapable of believing that countries can genuinely cooperate, and he believes that most of Washington's closest partners are really just its puppets—including other members of NATO.)

Putin, meanwhile, continued working to consolidate power at home. The country's constitution limited presidents to two consecutive terms, but in 2008, Putin crafted a scheme to preserve his control: he would support his ally Dmitry Medvedev's presidential candidacy if Medvedev promised to make Putin prime minister. Both men followed through, and for the first few weeks of Medvedev's presidency, those of us at the foreign ministry were uncertain which of the two men we should address our reports to. As president, Medvedev was constitutionally charged with directing foreign policy, but everybody understood that Putin was the power behind the throne.

We eventually reported to Medvedev. The decision was one of several developments that made me think that Russia's new president might be more than a mere caretaker. Medvedev established warm ties with U.S. President Barack Obama, met with American business leaders, and cooperated with the West even when it seemed to contradict Russian interests. When rebels tried to topple the regime of Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya, for example, the Russian military and foreign ministry opposed NATO efforts to establish a no-fly zone over the country. Qaddafi historically had good relations with Moscow, and our country had investments in Libya's oil sector, so our ministry didn't want to help the rebels win. Yet when France, Lebanon, and the United Kingdom—backed by the United States—brought a motion before the United Nations Security Council that would have authorized a no-fly zone, Medvedev had us abstain rather than veto it. (There is evidence that Putin may have disagreed with this decision.)

But in 2011, Putin announced plans to run for president again. Medvedev—reluctantly, it appeared—stepped aside and accepted the

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position of prime minister. Liberals were outraged, and many called for boycotts or argued that Russians should deliberately spoil their ballots. These protesters made up only a small part of Russia's population, so their dissent didn't seriously threaten Putin's plans. But even the limited display of opposition seemed to make Moscow nervous. Putin thus worked to bolster turnout in the 2011 parliamentary elections to make the results of the contest seem legitimate—one of his earlier efforts to narrow the political space separating the people from his rule. This effort extended to the foreign ministry. The Kremlin gave my embassy, and all the others, the task of getting overseas Russians to vote.

I worked at the time in Mongolia. When the election came, I voted for a non-Putin party, worrying that if I didn't vote at all, my ballot would be cast on my behalf for Putin's United Russia. But my wife, who worked at the embassy as chief office manager, boycotted. She was one of just three embassy employees who did not participate.

A few days later, embassy leaders looked through the list of staff who cast ballots in the elections. On being named, the other two nonvoters said they were not aware that they needed to participate and promised to do so in the upcoming presidential elections. My wife, however, said that she did not want to vote, noting that it was her constitutional right not to participate. In response, the embassy's second-in-command organized a campaign against her. He shouted at her, accused her of breaking discipline, and said that she would be labeled "politically unreliable." He described her as an "accomplice" of Alexei Navalny, a prominent opposition leader. After my wife didn't vote in the presidential contest either, the ambassador didn't talk to her for a week. His deputy didn't speak to her for over a month.

BREAKING BAD

My next position was in the ministry's Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control. In addition to issues related to weapons of mass destruction, I was assigned to focus on export controls—regulations governing the international transfer of goods and technology that can be used for defense and civilian purposes. It was a job that would give me a clear view of Russia's military, just as it became newly relevant.

In March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and began fueling an insurgency in the Donbas. When news of the annexation was announced, I was at the International Export Control Conference in Dubai. During a lunch break, I was approached by colleagues from post-Soviet

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republics, all of whom wanted to know what was happening. I told them the truth: "Guys, I know as much as you do." It was not the last time that Moscow made major foreign policy decisions while leaving its diplomats in the dark.

Among my colleagues, reactions to the annexation of Crimea ranged from mixed to positive. Ukraine was drifting Westward, but the province was one of the few places where Putin's mangled view of history had some basis: the Crimean Peninsula, transferred within the Soviet Union from Russia to Ukraine in 1954, was culturally closer to Moscow than to Kyiv. (Over 75 percent of its population speaks Russian as their first language.) The swift and bloodless takeover elicited little protest among us and was extremely popular at home. Lavrov used it as an opportunity to grandstand, giving a speech blaming "radical nationalists" in Ukraine for Russia's behavior. I and many colleagues thought that it would have been more strategic for Putin to turn Crimea into an independent state, an action we could have tried to sell as less aggressive. Subtlety, however, is not in Putin's toolbox. An independent Crimea would not have given him the glory of gathering "traditional" Russian lands.

Creating a separatist movement in and occupying the Donbas, in eastern Ukraine, was more of a head-scratcher. The moves, which largely took place in the first third of 2014, didn't generate the same outpouring of support in Russia as did annexing Crimea, and they invited another wave of international opprobrium. Many ministry employees were uneasy about Russia's operation, but no one dared convey this discomfort to the Kremlin. My colleagues and I decided that Putin had seized the Donbas to keep Ukraine distracted, to prevent the country from creating a serious military threat to Russia, and to stop it from cooperating with NATO. Yet few diplomats, if any, told Putin that by fueling the separatists, he had in fact pushed Kyiv closer to his nemesis.

My diplomatic work with Western delegations continued after the Crimean annexation and the Donbas operation. At times, it felt unchanged. I still had positive relations with my colleagues from the United States and Europe as we worked productively on arms control issues. Russia was hit with sanctions, but they had a limited impact on Russia's economy. "Sanctions are a sign of irritation," Lavrov said in a 2014 interview. "They are not the instrument of serious policies."

But as an export official, I could see that the West's economic restrictions had serious repercussions for the country. The Russian military

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industry was heavily dependent on Western-made components and products. It used U.S. and European tools to service drone engines and motors. It relied on Western producers to build gear for radiation-proof electronics, which are critical for the satellites Russian officials use to gather intelligence, communicate, and carry out precision strikes. Russian manufacturers worked with French companies to get the sensors needed for our airplanes. Even some of the cloth used in light aircraft, such as weather balloons, was made by Western businesses. The sanctions suddenly cut off our access to these products and left our military weaker than the West understood. But although it was clear to my team how these losses undermined Russia's strength, the foreign ministry's propaganda helped keep the Kremlin from finding out. The consequences of this ignorance are now on full display in Ukraine: the sanctions are one reason Russia has had so much trouble with its invasion.

The diminishing military capacity did not prevent the foreign ministry from becoming increasingly belligerent. At summits or in meetings with other states, Russian diplomats spent more and more time attacking the United States and its allies. My export team held many bilateral meetings with, for instance, Japan, focused on how our countries could cooperate, and almost every one of them served as an opportunity to say to Japan, "Don't forget who nuked you."

I attempted some damage control. When my bosses drafted belligerent remarks or reports, I tried persuading them to soften the tone, and I warned against warlike language and constantly appealing to our victory over the Nazis. But the tenor of our statements—internal and external—grew more antagonistic as our bosses edited in aggression. Soviet-style propaganda had fully returned to Russian diplomacy.

HIGH ON ITS OWN SUPPLY

On March 4, 2018, former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned, almost fatally, at their home in the United Kingdom. It took just ten days for British investigators to identify Russia as the culprit. Initially, I didn't believe the finding. Skripal, a former Russian spy, had been convicted for divulging state secrets to the British government and sent to prison for several years before being freed in a spy swap. It was difficult for me to understand why he could still be of interest to us. If Moscow had wanted him dead, it could have had him killed while he was still in Russia.

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My disbelief came in handy. My department was responsible for issues related to chemical weapons, so we spent a good deal of time arguing that Russia was not responsible for the poisoning—something I could do with conviction. Yet the more the foreign ministry denied responsibility, the less convinced I became. The poisoning, we claimed, was carried out not by Russia but by supposedly Russophobic British authorities bent on spoiling our sterling international reputation. The United Kingdom, of course, had absolutely no reason to want Sergei dead, so Moscow's claims seemed less like real arguments than a shoddy attempt to divert attention away from Russia and onto the West—a common aim of Kremlin propaganda. Eventually, I had to accept the truth: the poisonings were a crime perpetrated by Russian authorities.

Many Russians still deny that Moscow was responsible. I know it can be hard to process that your country is run by criminals who will kill for revenge. But Russia's lies were not persuasive to other countries, which decisively voted down a Russian resolution before the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons meant to derail the prominent intergovernmental organization's investigation into the attack. Only Algeria, Azerbaijan, China, Iran, and Sudan took Moscow's side. Sure enough, the investigation concluded that the Skripals had been poisoned by Novichok: a Russian-made nerve agent.

Russia's delegates could have honestly conveyed this loss to their superiors. Instead, they effectively did the opposite. Back in Moscow, I read long cables from Russia's OPCW delegation about how they had defeated the numerous "anti-Russian," "nonsensical," and "groundless" moves made by Western states. The fact that Russia's resolution had been defeated was often reduced to a sentence.

At first, I simply rolled my eyes at these reports. But soon, I noticed that they were taken seriously at the ministry's highest levels. Diplomats who wrote such fiction received applause from their bosses and saw their career fortunes rise. Moscow wanted to be told what it hoped to be true—not what was actually happening. Ambassadors everywhere got the message, and they competed to send the most over-the-top cables.

The propaganda grew even more outlandish after Navalny was poisoned with Novichok in August 2020. The cables left me astonished. One referred to Western diplomats as "hunted beasts of prey." Another waxed on about "the gravity and incontestability of our arguments." A third spoke about how Russian diplomats had "easily nipped in the bud" Westerners' "pitiful attempts to raise their voices."

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Such behavior was both unprofessional and dangerous. A healthy foreign ministry is designed to provide leaders with an unvarnished view of the world so they can make informed decisions. Yet although Russian diplomats would include inconvenient facts in their reports, lest their supervisors discover an omission, they would bury these nuggets of truth in mountains of propaganda. A 2021 cable might have had a line explaining, for instance, that the Ukrainian military was stronger than it was in 2014. But that admission would have come only after a lengthy paean to the mighty Russian armed forces.

The disconnect from reality became even more extreme in January 2022, when U.S. and Russian diplomats met at the U.S. mission in Geneva to discuss a Moscow-proposed treaty to rework NATO. The foreign ministry was increasingly focused on the supposed dangers of the Western security bloc, and Russian troops were massing on the Ukrainian border. I served as a liaison officer for the meeting—on call to provide assistance if our delegation needed anything from Russia's local mission—and received a copy of our proposal. It was bewildering, filled with provisions that would clearly be unacceptable to the West, such as a demand that NATO withdraw all troops and weapons from states that joined after 1997, which would include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Baltic states. I assumed its author was either laying the groundwork for war or had no idea how the United States or Europe worked—or both. I chatted with our delegates during coffee breaks, and they seemed perplexed as well. I asked my supervisor about it, and he, too, was bewildered. No one could understand how we would go to the United States with a document that demanded, among other things, that NATO permanently close its door to new members. Eventually, we learned the document's origin: it came straight from the Kremlin. It was therefore not to be questioned.

I kept hoping that my colleagues would privately express concern, rather than just confusion, about what we were doing. But many told me that they were perfectly content to embrace the Kremlin's lies. For some, this was a way to evade responsibility for Russia's actions; they could explain their behavior by telling themselves and others that they were merely following orders. That I understood. What was more troubling was that many took pride in our increasingly bellicose behavior. Several times, when I cautioned colleagues that their actions were too abrasive to help Russia, they gestured at our nuclear force. "We are a great power," one person said to me. Other countries, he continued, "must do what we say."

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CRAZY TRAIN

Even after the January summit, I didn't believe that Putin would launch a full-fledged war. Ukraine in 2022 was plainly more united and pro-Western than it had been in 2014. Nobody would greet Russians with flowers. The West's highly combative statements about a potential Russian invasion made clear that the United States and Europe would react strongly. My time working in arms and exports had taught me that the Russian military did not have the capability to overrun its biggest European neighbor and that, aside from Belarus, no outside state would offer us meaningful support. Putin, I figured, must have known this, too—despite all the yes men who shielded him from the truth.

The invasion made my decision to leave ethically straightforward. But the logistics were still hard. My wife was visiting me in Geneva when the war broke out—she had recently quit her job at a Moscow-based industrial association—but resigning publicly meant that neither she nor I would be safe in Russia. We therefore agreed that she would travel back to Moscow to get our kitten before I handed in my papers. It proved to be a complex, three-month process. The cat, a young stray, needed to be neutered and vaccinated before we could take him to Switzerland, and the European Union quickly banned Russian planes. To get from Moscow back to Geneva, my wife had to take three flights, two cab rides, and cross the Lithuanian border twice—both times on foot.

In the meantime, I watched as my colleagues surrendered to Putin's aims. In the early days of the war, most were beaming with pride. "At last!" one exclaimed. "Now we will show the Americans! Now they know who the boss is." In a few weeks, when it became clear that the blitzkrieg against Kyiv had failed, the rhetoric grew gloomier but no less belligerent. One official, a respected expert on ballistic missiles, told me that Russia needed to "send a nuclear warhead to a suburb of Washington." He added, "Americans will shit their pants and rush to beg us for peace." He appeared to be partially joking. But Russians tend to think that Americans are too pampered to risk their lives for anything, so when I pointed out that a nuclear attack would invite catastrophic retaliation, he scoffed: "No it wouldn't."

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Perhaps a few dozen diplomats quietly left the ministry. (So far, I am the only one who has publicly broken with Moscow.) But most of the colleagues whom I regarded as sensible and smart stuck around. "What can we do?" one asked. "We are small people." He gave up on reasoning for himself. "Those in Moscow know better," he said. Others acknowledged the insanity of the situation in private conversations. But it wasn't reflected in their work. They continued to spew lies about Ukrainian aggression. I saw daily reports that mentioned Ukraine's nonexistent biological weapons. I walked around our building—effectively a long corridor with private offices for each diplomat—and noticed that even some of my smart colleagues had Russian propaganda playing on their televisions all day. It was as if they were trying to indoctrinate themselves.

The nature of all our jobs inevitably changed. For one thing, relations with Western diplomats collapsed. We stopped discussing almost everything with them; some of my colleagues from Europe even stopped saying hello when we crossed paths at the United Nations' Geneva campus. Instead, we focused on our contacts with China, who expressed their "understanding" about Russia's security concerns but were careful not to comment on the war. We also spent more time working with the other members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—a fractured bloc of states that my bosses loved to trot out as Russia's own NATO. After the invasion, my team held rounds and rounds of consultations with these countries that were focused on biological and nuclear weapons, but we didn't speak about the war. When I talked with a Central Asian diplomat about supposed biological weapons laboratories in Ukraine, he dismissed the notion as ridiculous. I agreed.

A few weeks later, I handed in my resignation. At last, I was no longer complicit in a system that believed it had a divine right to subjugate its neighbor.

SHOCK AND AWE

Over the course of the war, Western leaders have become acutely aware of Russia's military's failings. But they do not seem to grasp that Russian foreign policy is equally broken. Multiple European officials have spoken about the need for a negotiated settlement to the war in Ukraine, and if their countries grow tired of bearing the energy and economic costs associated with supporting Kyiv,

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they could press Ukraine to make a deal. The West may be especially tempted to push Kyiv to sue for peace if Putin aggressively threatens to use nuclear weapons.

But as long as Putin is in power, Ukraine will have no one in Moscow with whom to genuinely negotiate. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will not be a reliable interlocutor, nor will any other Russian government apparatus. They are all extensions of Putin and his imperial agenda. Any cease-fire will just give Russia a chance to rearm before attacking again.

There's only one thing that can really stop Putin, and that is a comprehensive rout. The Kremlin can lie to Russians all it wants, and it can order its diplomats to lie to everyone else. But Ukrainian soldiers pay no attention to Russian state television. And it became apparent that Russia's defeats cannot always be shielded from the Russian public when, in the course of a few days in September, Ukrainians managed to retake almost all of Kharkiv Province. In response, Russian TV panelists bemoaned the losses. Online, hawkish Russian commentators directly criticized the president. "You're throwing a billion-ruble party," one wrote in a widely circulated online post, mocking Putin for presiding over the opening of a Ferris wheel as Russian forces retreated. "What is wrong with you?"

Putin responded to the loss—and to his critics—by drafting enormous numbers of people into the military. (Moscow says it is conscripting 300,000 men, yet the actual figure may be higher.) But in the long run, conscription won't solve his problems. The Russian armed forces suffer from low morale and shoddy equipment, problems that mobilization cannot fix. With large-scale Western support, the Ukrainian military can inflict more serious defeats on Russian troops, forcing them to retreat from other territories. It's possible that Ukraine could eventually best Russia's soldiers in the parts of the Donbas where both sides have been fighting since 2014.

Should that happen, Putin would find himself in a corner. He could respond to defeat with a nuclear attack. But Russia's president likes his luxurious life and should recognize that using nuclear weapons could start a war that would kill even him. (If he doesn't know this, his subordinates would, one hopes, avoid following such a suicidal command.) Putin could order a full-on general mobilization—conscripting almost all of Russia's young men—but that is unlikely to offer more than a temporary respite, and the more

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Russian deaths from the fighting, the more domestic discontent he will face. Putin may eventually withdraw and have Russian propagandists fault those around him for the embarrassing defeat, as some did after the losses in Kharkiv. But that could push Putin to purge his associates, making it dangerous for his closest allies to keep supporting him. The result might be Moscow's first palace coup since Nikita Khrushchev was toppled in 1964.

If Putin is kicked out office, Russia's future will be deeply uncertain. It's entirely possible his successor will try to carry on the war, especially given that Putin's main advisers hail from the security services. But no one in Russia commands his stature, so the country would likely enter a period of political turbulence. It could even descend into chaos.

Outside analysts might enjoy watching Russia undergo a major domestic crisis. But they should think twice about rooting for the country's implosion—and not only because it would leave Russia's massive nuclear arsenal in uncertain hands. Most Russians are in a tricky mental space, brought about by poverty and huge doses of propaganda that sow hatred, fear, and a simultaneous sense of superiority and helplessness. If the country breaks apart or experiences an economic and political cataclysm, it would push them over the edge. Russians might unify behind an even more belligerent leader than Putin, provoking a civil war, more outside aggression, or both.

If Ukraine wins and Putin falls, the best thing the West can do isn't to inflict humiliation. Instead, it's the opposite: provide support. This might seem counterintuitive or distasteful, and any aid would have to be heavily conditioned on political reform. But Russia will need financial help after losing, and by offering substantial funding, the United States and Europe could gain leverage in a post-Putin power struggle. They could, for example, help one of Russia's respected economic technocrats become the interim leader, and they could help the country's democratic forces build power. Providing aid would also allow the West to avoid repeating their behavior from the 1990s, when Russians felt scammed by the United States, and would make it easier for the population to finally accept the loss of their empire. Russia could then create a new foreign policy, carried out by a class of truly professional diplomats. They could finally do what the current generation of diplomats has been unable to—make Russia a responsible and honest global partner.

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JANUARY 20, 2022

America's Coming Age of Instability

Why Constitutional Crises and Political Violence Could Soon Be the Norm

STEVEN LEVITSKY AND LUCAN WAY

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When Joe Biden was sworn in as president a year ago today, many Americans breathed a heavy sigh of relief. President Donald Trump had tried to steal the election, but he had failed. The violent insurrection he incited on January 6, 2021, had shaken the United States' democratic system to its core, but left it standing in the end.

One year into Biden's presidency, however, the threat to American democracy has not receded. Although U.S. democratic institutions survived the Trump presidency, they were badly weakened. The Republican Party, moreover, has radicalized into an extremist, antidemocratic force that imperils the U.S. constitutional order. The United States isn't headed toward Russian- or Hungarian-style autocracy, as some analysts have warned, but something else: a period of protracted regime instability,

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marked by repeated constitutional crises, heightened political violence, and possibly, periods of authoritarian rule.

CLOSE CALL

In 2017, we warned in *Foreign Affairs* that Trump posed a threat to U.S. democratic institutions. Skeptics viewed our concern for the fate of American democracy as alarmist. After all, the U.S. constitutional system had been stable for 150 years, and reams of social science research suggested that democracy was likely to endure. No democracy even remotely as rich—or as old—as the United States' had ever broken down.

But Trump proved to be as autocratic as advertised. Following the playbook of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, and Viktor Orban in Hungary, he worked to corrupt key state agencies and subvert them for personal, partisan, and even undemocratic ends. Public officials responsible for law enforcement, intelligence, foreign policy, national defense, homeland security, election administration, and even public health were pressured to deploy the machinery of government against the president's rivals.

Trump did more than politicize state institutions, however. He also tried to steal an election. The only president in U.S. history to refuse to accept defeat, Trump spent late 2020 and early 2021 pressuring Justice Department officials, governors, state legislators, state and local election officials, and, finally, Vice President Mike Pence, to illegally overturn the election results. When these efforts failed, he incited a mob of his supporters to march on the U.S. Capitol and try to prevent Congress from certifying Biden's win. This two-month campaign to illegally remain in power deserves to be called by its name: a coup attempt.

As we feared, the Republican Party failed to constrain Trump. In a context of extreme political polarization, we predicted, congressional Republicans were "unlikely to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors who reined in Nixon." Partisan loyalty and fear of primary challenges by Trump supporters outweighed constitutional commitments, undermining the effectiveness of the system's most powerful check on presidential abuse: impeachment. Trump's abuses exceeded Nixon's by orders of magnitude. But only ten of 211 Republicans in the House voted to impeach Trump in the wake of the failed coup, and only seven of 50 Republicans in the Senate voted to convict him.

American democracy survived Trump—but barely. Trump's autocratic behavior was blunted in part by public officials who refused

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to cooperate with his abuses, such as Georgia's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, or who refused to remain silent about them, such as Alexander Vindman, a specialist on the National Security Council. Many judges, including some appointed by Trump himself, blocked his efforts to overturn the election.

Contingent events also played a role in defeating Trump. The COVID-19 pandemic was his "Katrina moment." Just as President George W. Bush's mishandling of the aftermath of the 2005 hurricane eroded his popularity, Trump's disastrous response to the pandemic may have been decisive in preventing his reelection. Even so, Trump very nearly won. A tiny shift in the vote in Georgia, Arizona, and Pennsylvania would have secured his reelection, seriously imperiling democracy.

Although American democracy survived Trump's presidency, it was badly wounded by it. In light of Trump's egregious abuse of power, his attempt to steal the 2020 election and block a peaceful transition, and ongoing state-level efforts to restrict access to the ballot, global democracy indexes have substantially downgraded the United States since 2016. Today, the United States' score on Freedom House's Global Freedom Index is on a par with Panama and Romania, and below Argentina, Lithuania, and Mongolia.

MOUNTING THREATS

Trump's defeat in the 2020 election did not end the threat to American democracy. The Republican Party has evolved into an extremist and antidemocratic party, more like Hungary's Fidesz than traditional center-right parties in Europe and Canada. The transformation began before Trump. During Barack Obama's presidency, leading Republicans cast Obama and the Democrats as an existential threat and abandoned norms of restraint in favor of constitutional hardball—the use of the letter of the law to subvert the spirit of the law. Republicans pushed through a wave of state-level measures aimed at restricting access to the ballot box and, most extraordinarily, they refused to allow Obama to fill the vacancy on the Supreme Court created by Associate Justice Antonin Scalia's death in 2016.

Republican radicalization accelerated under Trump, to the point where the party abandoned its commitment to democratic rules of the game. Parties that are committed to democracy must, at minimum, do two things: accept defeat and reject violence. Beginning in November 2020, the Republican Party did neither. Most Republican leaders refused

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to unambiguously recognize Biden's victory, either openly embracing Trump's "Big Lie" or enabling it through their silence. More than two-thirds of Republican members of the House of Representatives backed a lawsuit filed with the Supreme Court seeking to overturn the 2020 election, and on the evening of the January 6 insurrection, 139 of them voted against certifying the election. Leading Republicans also refused to unambiguously reject violence. Not only did Trump embrace extremist militias and incite the January 6 insurrection, but congressional Republicans later blocked efforts to create an independent commission to investigate the insurrection.

Although Trump catalyzed this authoritarian turn, Republican extremism was fueled by powerful pressure from below. The party's core constituents are white and Christian, and live in exurbs, small towns, and rural areas. Not only are white Christians in decline as a percentage of the electorate but growing diversity and progress toward racial equality have also undermined their relative social status. According to a 2018 survey, nearly 60 percent of Republicans say they "feel like a stranger in their own country." Many Republican voters think the country of their childhood is being taken away from them. This perceived relative loss of status has had a radicalizing effect: a 2021 survey sponsored by the American Enterprise Institute found that a stunning 56 percent of Republicans agreed that the "traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to stop it."

The Republican turn toward authoritarianism has accelerated since Trump's departure from the White House. From top to bottom, the party embraced the lie that the 2020 election was stolen, to the point that Republican voters now overwhelmingly believe it is true. In much of the country, Republican politicians who openly rejected this lie or supported an independent investigation into the January 6 insurrection have put their political careers at risk.

The newly transformed Republican Party has launched a major assault on democratic institutions at the state level, increasing the likelihood of a stolen election in the future. On the heels of Trump's "stop the steal" campaign, his supporters have launched a campaign to replace state and local election officials who certified the 2020 election—from secretaries of state down to neighborhood precinct officers—with Trump loyalists who appear more willing to overturn a Democratic victory. Republican state legislatures across the country have also adopted measures to restrict access to the ballot box and

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empower statewide officials to intervene in local electoral processes—purging local voter rolls, permitting voter intimidation by thuggish observer groups, moving or reducing the number of polling sites, and potentially throwing out ballots or altering results. It is now possible that Republican legislatures in multiple battleground states will, under a loose interpretation of the 1887 Electoral Count Act, use unsubstantiated fraud claims to declare failed elections in their states and send alternate slates of Republican electors to the Electoral College, thereby contravening the popular vote. Such constitutional hardball could result in a stolen election.

The U.S. business community, historically a core Republican constituency, has done little to resist the party's authoritarian turn. Although the U.S. Chamber of Commerce initially pledged to oppose Republicans who denied the legitimacy of the 2020 election, it later reversed course. According to *The New York Times*, the Chamber of Commerce, along with major corporations such as Boeing, Pfizer, General Motors, Ford Motor, AT&T, and United Parcel Service, now funds lawmakers who voted to overturn the election.

The threats to American democracy are mounting. If Trump or a like-minded Republican wins the presidency in 2024 (with or without fraud), the new administration will almost certainly politicize the federal bureaucracy and deploy the machinery of government against its rivals. Having largely purged the party leadership of politicians committed to democratic norms, the next Republican administration could easily cross the line into what we have called competitive authoritarianism—a system in which competitive elections exist but incumbent abuse of state power tilts the playing field against the opposition.

IMPEDIMENTS TO AUTOCRACY

Although the threat of democratic breakdown in the United States is real, the likelihood of a descent into stable autocracy, as has occurred, for example, in Hungary and Russia, remains low. The United States possesses several obstacles to stable authoritarianism that are not found in other backsliding cases. Take Hungary under Orban. After winning election in 2010 on an ethnonationalist platform, Orban and his party, Fidesz, packed the courts and the electoral bodies, suppressed independent media, and used gerrymandering, new campaign regulations, and other legal shenanigans to gain advantage over the opposition. Some observers havewarned that Orban's path to authoritarianism could be replicated in the United States.

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But Orban was able to consolidate power because the opposition was weak, unpopular, and divided between far-right and socialist parties. Moreover, with the country having only recently emerged from totalitarian rule, Hungary's private sector and independent media were far weaker than their American counterparts. Orban's ability to quickly gain control of 90 percent of Hungarian media—including the largest independent daily and every regional newspaper—remains unthinkable in the United States. The path to autocracy was even smoother in Russia, where media and opposition forces were weaker than in Hungary.

By contrast, an effort to consolidate autocracy in the United States would face several daunting obstacles. The first is a powerful opposition. Unlike other backsliding countries, including Hungary, India, Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela, the United States has a unified opposition in the Democratic Party. It is well organized, well financed, and electorally viable (it won the popular vote in seven of the last eight presidential elections). Moreover, due to deep partisan divisions and the relatively limited appeal of white nationalism in the United States, a Republican autocrat would not enjoy the level of public support that has helped sustain elected autocrats elsewhere. To the contrary, such an autocrat would face a level of societal contestation unseen in other democratic backsliders. As Robert Kagan has argued, Republicans may seek to rig or overturn a close election in 2024, but such an effort would likely trigger enormous—and probably violent—protests across the country.

An authoritarian Republican government would also face a much stronger and more independent media, private sector, and civil society. Even the most committed American autocrat would not be able to gain control of major newspapers and television networks and effectively limit independent sources of information, as Orban and Russian President Vladimir Putin have done in their countries.

Finally, an aspiring Republican autocrat would face institutional constraints. Although it is increasingly politicized, the U.S. judiciary remains far more independent and powerful than its counterparts in other emerging autocracies. In addition, U.S. federalism and a highly decentralized system of elections administration provide a bulwark against centralized authoritarianism. Decentralized power creates opportunities for electoral malfeasance in red—and some purple—states, but it makes it more difficult to undermine the democratic process in blue states. Thus, even if the Republicans manage to steal the 2024 election, their ability to monopolize power over an extended

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period of time will likely be limited. America may no longer be safe for democracy, but it remains inhospitable to autocracy.

UNSTABLE FUTURE

Rather than autocracy, the United States appears headed toward endemic regime instability. Such a scenario would be marked by frequent constitutional crises, including contested or stolen elections and severe conflict between presidents and Congress (such as impeachments and executive efforts to bypass Congress), the judiciary (such as efforts to purge or pack the courts), and state governments (such as intense battles over voting rights and the administration of elections). The United States would likely shift back and forth between periods of dysfunctional democracy and periods of competitive authoritarian rule during which incumbents abuse state power, tolerate or encourage violent extremism, and tilt the electoral playing field against their rivals.

In this sense, American politics may come to resemble not Russia but its neighbor Ukraine, which has oscillated for decades between democracy and competitive authoritarianism, depending on which partisan forces controlled the executive. For the foreseeable future, U.S. presidential elections will involve not simply a choice between competing sets of policies but rather a more fundamental choice over whether the country will be democratic or authoritarian.

Finally, American politics will likely be marked by heightened political violence. Extreme polarization and intense partisan competition often generate violence, and indeed, the United States experienced a dramatic spike in far-right violence during Trump's presidency. Although the United States probably isn't headed for a second civil war, it could well experience a rise in assassinations, bombings, and other terrorist attacks; armed uprisings; mob attacks; and violent street confrontations—often tolerated and even incited by politicians. Such violence might resemble that which afflicted Spain in the early 1930s, Northern Ireland during the Troubles, or the American South during and after Reconstruction.

American democracy remains at risk. Although the United States probably won't follow the path of Putin's Russia or even Orban's Hungary, enduring conflict between powerful authoritarian and democratic forces could bring debilitating—and violent—regime instability for years to come.

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JANUARY 26, 2022

China's Immunity Gap

The Zero-COVID Strategy Leaves the Country Vulnerable to an Omicron Tsunami

YANZHONG HUANG

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In mid-November 2021, around the time the Omicron variant was first discovered in South Africa, the Chinese government all but declared victory over COVID-19. For more than 20 months, the country's zero-COVID policy had come at a steep cost, with stringent controls and draconian lockdowns at the slightest sign of a local outbreak. But as Wu Zunyou, the chief epidemiologist of the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said at the time, the strategy had prevented up to 200 million infections and three million deaths. It was an impressive record that seemed to set the stage for the Beijing Winter Olympics, which China has been determined to hold on schedule, in what would be a powerful demonstration of its success at pandemic control.

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Two months later, the situation looks dramatically different. With the games now just days away, China has never seemed closer to an explosive COVID-19 surge. Since December 9, more than 3,000 locally transmitted cases have been reported in about 20 provinces. An outbreak in the northwestern city of Xi'an, with more than 2,000 domestic cases, was the country's single worst since the Wuhan outbreak that began the global pandemic. And although Omicron is not yet dominant in China, cases caused by the highly transmissible variant have now been detected in at least 14 Chinese provinces. And these cases are despite lockdowns that have recently affected as many as 20 million people.

Notably, the city of Tianjin has reported more than 300 Omicron cases, raising concerns about a hidden Omicron outbreak in Beijing, which is just 30 minutes away via high-speed train; by January 15, an Omicron case had been detected in Beijing, one of some dozens of locally transmitted cases. Meanwhile, yet another Omicron outbreak has emerged in Hong Kong, with more than 100 cases detected in a single day this week. Although officials of the Olympics organizing committee insist that Beijing is under control and a full-scale lockdown is unnecessary, the community transmission of Omicron in Tianjin—even before the arrival of thousands of foreign athletes and their support staffs—has clearly rattled them. After the detection of Omicron in Beijing, the government stopped selling Olympics tickets to the general public, creating new uncertainty about the games and raising far-reaching questions about the continued viability of its zero-COVID strategy.

Now the Chinese government faces a growing dilemma. Other countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, have long since moved away from a zero-COVID strategy; China remains the lone holdout. Even though the rapid spread of Omicron could quickly render zero-COVID unsustainable, China has stubbornly clung to the strategy—largely, it seems, out of fear of the perceived consequences of abandoning it. For one thing, the government has instilled deep fear about COVID-19 in the Chinese population. Conditioned to expect a case rate at or near zero, many Chinese are convinced that even a small pullback in the policy would lead to the infection and hospitalization of hundreds of millions of people.

The stakes are even higher because China has linked its zero-COVID strategy to its ideological competition with the United States and the West. For Beijing to give up on zero-COVID and allow the new variant to run its course would be tantamount to admitting that its political

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system is no better than Western liberal democracy in protecting people's health. Yet to keep their zero-COVID strategy alive, central policymakers may find they have no choice but to impose an embarrassing lockdown in Beijing during the Olympics itself.

ZERO MEANS ZERO

From almost the beginning of the pandemic, China has staked its entire approach on a zero-COVID strategy. The strategy began in March 2020 when, as COVID-19 began to retreat in China while beginning its surge in other parts of the world, the Chinese government sought a way to sustain its "hard-won achievements." During the early weeks of the pandemic, the prolonged Wuhan lockdown proved effective in containing the spread of the novel coronavirus. Meanwhile, the development of mass rapid-testing technologies enabled China to quickly ferret out new COVID-19 cases as they emerged, even in megacities. With these two tools—rapid testing and absolute lockdowns—the government set out to stamp out any sporadic local outbreaks, including when there is no evidence of community spread.

The resulting no-tolerance approach has been extraordinarily far-reaching. In June 2020, when a single new case was confirmed in Beijing, the local government quickly identified the origin point of the outbreak, sealed off high-risk neighborhoods, and launched mass testing of ten million people. Within a month, the daily new-case count returned to zero. What happened in Beijing soon became the standard playbook for COVID-19 control throughout the country. Over and over again, the detection of even a single case would trigger aggressive contact tracing and quarantine, mass nucleic acid testing, and severe lockdowns of neighborhoods or, if necessary, an entire city. It may sound quixotic, but the Chinese leadership has been determined to ensure that zero means zero.

For much of the pandemic, this strategy seemed to pay extraordinary dividends for the Chinese government. From April 2020 to December 2021, the case count for the entire country rarely exceeded 100 per day; even now, the official tally of total deaths related to COVID-19 in China is less than 5,000, whereas for much of the pandemic, the United States has surpassed that number every two or three days. Meanwhile, the extremely low level of infection allowed China to begin its economic recovery while the rest of the world remained mired in successive waves of contagion. Beijing's export sector, for example, has remained resilient

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despite power cuts and shipping congestion. And as the world's largest exporter of personal protective equipment and COVID-19 vaccines, China has also used its pandemic-fighting expertise to extend its global influence and reap commercial gains. Constantly talking about the failure of the United States and many other liberal democracies to bring the pandemic under control, Chinese officials touted their own success as a source of national pride, generating overwhelming public support for the government, at least in the realm of public health.

Far less noted, however, has been the colossal financial and social toll that the zero-COVID strategy has imposed on the country. The government has not made clear the economic costs of its policies, but local examples provide some indication of the staggering amounts in question: in order to stamp out a single outbreak of less than a few hundred cases in Guangzhou during May and June 2021, for example, the local government reportedly spent approximately $1 billion on testing for 32 million people. And because lockdowns have frequently involved entire municipalities, local businesses in disparate parts of the country have been forced to close abruptly for long stretches, keeping many people off-balance. In Zhengzhou, the capital of central Henan Province, more than 40 percent of local shops with street frontage closed down during a 26-day outbreak last August. According to Tianyancha, a business data and investigation platform, in the first 11 months of 2021, 4.37 million small businesses in China closed while only 1.32 million new ones registered, compared with 6.13 million new small businesses opening in 2020.

Arguably more significant to the regime, however, have been the accumulating social costs of zero-COVID: the continual inconvenience of invasive lockdowns, testing regimes, and limitations on movement; the separation of families due to stringent travel restrictions; the lack of access to run-of-the-mill health care; the disruption in local supply chains. In Ruili, a southwestern border city, repeated lockdowns have exacted so much disruption that the former deputy mayor described "serious emotional and material losses" and "piling-up resentment" among the local population. During one outbreak in that city in August 2021, when officials failed to lift a lockdown after two weeks as originally planned, some desperate residents set up a WeChat group calling for a demonstration against the policy.

Until recently, such discontent could be discounted as collateral damage to what was clearly a winning strategy against COVID-19.

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And as long as the outbreaks were small and sporadic, the costs were disproportionately borne by a small number of localities or people and did not seem to affect the national psyche. Government media censorship also ensured that any complaints or criticisms of the strategy were rarely heard or quickly silenced. In the WeChat case in Ruili, Public security officials quickly took down the group and issued warnings to eleven of the people involved.

Over the past six months, however, the rise of the Delta variant has created new cracks in China's COVID-19 defenses. As outbreaks have become more concurrent and consecutive, the government has stuck to its policies even amid signs of growing public pushback. Moreover, given what the Chinese Communist Party had already invested in the strategy, the policy had by now become dangerously self-reinforcing: aware that even a single case cannot be tolerated, risk-averse local officials have little interest in pursuing a calibrated or targeted approach. Instead, as the outbreaks have grown, the measures have only become stricter. Now, it is routine to have multiple rounds of citywide nucleic acid testing and indiscriminate lockdowns. And although the government has put enormous resources into zero-COVID, it has done comparatively little to ensure that the population has built up the requisite immunity to stave off a broader outbreak, should its strategy prove no longer viable.

THE UNRULY HERD

For Chinese planners, one of the initial aims of the zero-COVID strategy was supposedly to buy time for a mass vaccine rollout. According to this plan, the entire population would be vaccinated while case levels were low or nonexistent, thus allowing the country to achieve herd immunity without the devastating public health consequences that broader exposure to the virus might entail. At first, the plan seemed to work: China's vaccination campaign—using its homegrown inactivated vaccines—proceeded apace while the government sought to quash every single local outbreak. In November 2020, Zhong Nanshan, the former president of the Chinese Medical Association and the public face of China's campaign against COVID-19, claimed that Chinese vaccines were "as good as Pfizer's in terms of their efficacy." The following spring, the chair of Sinopharm's vaccine business touted that China was leading the world in COVID-19 vaccine development. And by early January of this year, Zhong announced that 83 percent

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of the population had received two doses of the Chinese vaccines. "Theoretically China has achieved herd immunity," he said.

But herd immunity against COVID-19 is not achievable without an effective vaccine, and China's inactivated vaccines have proved far less effective than the messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines used in Europe and the United States. And because of the low efficacy rates of Chinese vaccines—particularly against Omicron—most people in China still do not have the necessary neutralizing antibodies to prevent infection. Indeed, the government's own lack of confidence in its vaccines might explain why it has not actively promoted vaccine use among the elderly population and why it continues to center its strategy around zero-COVID measures rather than vaccination. Moreover, the failure to make mRNA vaccines available appears to be driven mainly by politics: Beijing has preferred to develop home-grown mRNA vaccines before authorizing their use. (China's mRNA vaccine went into phase 3 clinical trials in November, with formal approval expected to take place later this winter.)

Combined with the zero-COVID strategy, the paradoxical result of this ineffective vaccination effort has been to make the Chinese population more vulnerable to COVID-19 than almost any other population on earth. A rough estimate of clinical data, for example, suggests that no more than a small fraction of one percent of the Chinese population has acquired natural immunity through a prior infection. In India, by contrast, already by July 2021—well before the Omicron surge began—an estimated 67 percent of the population had been exposed to the virus and were carrying antibodies. Such a large "virgin" population in China means the Omicron variant could potentially multiply and spread unhindered. Unless China abandons the zero-COVID mentality, it may have to adopt ever more draconian social controls until the virus completely disappears or face an Omicron tsunami of almost unimaginable proportions.

Here, the sharp divergence of China's policies with those of the rest of the world becomes clear. In most other parts of the world, where COVID-19 has spread widely through local populations, the most likely outcome is that the virus will become endemic: with most people having acquired immunity through infection or vaccination, the virus will be reduced to an ordinary seasonal disease such as influenza. But in China, as long as the current policies prevail and the population has very little built-up immunity, new variants will pose a far more devastating threat.

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A DANGEROUS GAP

Is there a way out of China's COVID-19 conundrum? In late August, Zeng Guang, a top government health adviser, said that the zero-COVID strategy would no longer be necessary once it ceased to pay a "dividend" in social stability and economic development. But in the absence of an effective policy feedback mechanism, the Chinese government may not realize that it has already arrived at that inflection point. Instead, it seems likely to wait until Omicron has spread widely throughout the country, forcing the system to break down, even amid what will likely be a repressive series of lockdowns.

A far better approach would be for Chinese officials to stop regarding COVID-19 as an existential threat that can be met only with overwhelming security measures. Instead, the state could invest more in building surge capacity—the ability to respond to a sudden increase in patient care demands. It could make effective COVID-19 antiviral pills widely available, and it could immediately approve the use of MRNA vaccines as booster shots for those who are immunosuppressed or over 65. Equally important, the government should seek to educate the Chinese population on the actual risk that COVID-19 poses to individuals and society and discourage state and social media from continuing to highlight the danger of the Omicron variant or denigrate the pandemic response in other countries. Above all, the government should stop making adherence to zero-COVID the crucial benchmark that it has become for the career prospects of local government officials.

Such a policy shift will not enable China to fend off future outbreaks, but it would help to begin to close the country's huge immunity gap. And it would do much to reestablish a sustainable balance between protecting public health and allowing social and economic life to return to a normal trajectory. To make that happen, top decision-makers must change the zero-COVID mentality. Ultimately, this is a decision for political leaders, not public health authorities.

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The Putin Doctrine

A Move on Ukraine Has Always Been Part of the Plan

ANGELA STENT

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The current crisis between Russia and Ukraine is a reckoning that has been 30 years in the making. It is about much more than Ukraine and its possible NATO membership. It is about the future of the European order crafted after the Soviet Union's collapse. During the 1990s, the United States and its allies designed a Euro-Atlantic security architecture in which Russia had no clear commitment or stake, and since Russian President Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia has been challenging that system. Putin has routinely complained that the global order ignores Russia's security concerns, and he has demanded that the West recognize Moscow's right to a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space. He has staged incursions into neighboring states, such as Georgia, that have moved out of Russia's orbit in order to prevent them from fully reorienting.

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Putin has now taken this approach one step further. He is threatening a far more comprehensive invasion of Ukraine than the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in the Donbas that Russia carried out in 2014, an invasion that would undermine the current order and potentially reassert Russia's preeminence in what he insists is its "rightful" place on the European continent and in world affairs. He sees this as a good time to act. In his view, the United States is weak, divided, and less able to pursue a coherent foreign policy. His decades in office have made him more cynical about the United States' staying power. Putin is now dealing with his fifth U.S. president, and he has come to see Washington as an unreliable interlocutor. The new German government is still finding its political feet, Europe on the whole is focused on its domestic challenges, and the tight energy market gives Russia more leverage over the continent. The Kremlin believes that it can bank on Beijing's support, just as China supported Russia after the West tried to isolate it in 2014.

Putin may still decide not to invade. But whether he does or not, the Russian president's behavior is being driven by an interlocking set of foreign policy principles that suggest Moscow will be disruptive in the years to come. Call it "the Putin doctrine." The core element of this doctrine is getting the West to treat Russia as if it were the Soviet Union, a power to be respected and feared, with special rights in its neighborhood and a voice in every serious international matter. The doctrine holds that only a few states should have this kind of authority, along with complete sovereignty, and that others must bow to their wishes. It entails defending incumbent authoritarian regimes and undermining democracies. And the doctrine is tied together by Putin's overarching aim: reversing the consequences of the Soviet collapse, splitting the transatlantic alliance, and renegotiating the geographic settlement that ended the Cold War.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Russia, according to Putin, has an absolute right to a seat at the table on all major international decisions. The West should recognize that Russia belongs to the global board of directors. After what Putin portrays as the humiliation of the 1990s, when a greatly weakened Russia was forced to accede to an agenda set by the United States and its European allies, he has largely achieved this goal. Even though Moscow was ejected from the G-8 after its annexation of Crimea, its veto on the United

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Nations Security Council and role as an energy, nuclear, and geographic superpower ensure that the rest of the world must take its views into account. Russia successfully rebuilt its military after the 2008 war with Georgia, and it is now the preeminent regional military power, with the capability to project power globally. Moscow's ability to threaten its neighbors enables it to force the West to the negotiating table, as has been so evident in the past few weeks.

As far as Putin is concerned, the use of force is perfectly appropriate if Russia believes that its security is threatened: Russia's interests are as legitimate as those of the West, and Putin asserts that the United States and Europe have been disregarding them. For the most part, the United States and Europe have rejected the Kremlin's narrative of grievance, which centers most notably on the breakup of the Soviet Union and especially the separation of Ukraine from Russia. When Putin described the Soviet collapse as a "great geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," he was lamenting the fact that 25 million Russians found themselves outside of Russia, and he particularly criticized the fact that 12 million Russians found themselves in the new Ukrainian state. As he wrote in a 5,000-word treatise published last summer and titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians," in 1991, "people found themselves abroad overnight, taken away, this time indeed, from their historical motherland." His essay has recently been distributed to Russian troops.

This narrative of loss to the West is tied in to a particular obsession of Putin's: the idea that NATO, not content to merely admit or aid post-Soviet states, might threaten Russia itself. The Kremlin insists that this preoccupation is based on real concerns. Russia, after all, has been repeatedly invaded from the West. In the twentieth century, it was invaded by anti-Bolshevik allied forces, including some from the United States, during its civil war from 1917 to 1922. Germany invaded twice, leading to the loss of 26 million Soviet citizens in World War II. Putin has explicitly linked this history to Russia's current concerns about NATO infrastructure nearing Russia's borders and Moscow's resulting demands for security guarantees.

Today, however, Russia is a nuclear superpower brandishing new, hypersonic missiles. No country—least of all its smaller, weaker neighbors—has any intention of invading Russia. Indeed, the country's neighbors to its west have a different narrative and stress their vulnerability over the centuries to invasion from Russia. The United

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States would also never attack, although Putin has accused it of seeking to "cut a juicy piece of our pie." Nevertheless, the historical self-perception of Russia's vulnerability resonates with the country's population. Government-controlled media are filled with claims that Ukraine could be a launching pad for NATO aggression. Indeed, in his essay last year, Putin wrote that Ukraine was being turned into "a springboard against Russia."

Putin also believes that Russia has an absolute right to a sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space. This means its former Soviet neighbors should not join any alliances that are deemed hostile to Moscow, particularly NATO or the European Union. Putin has made this demand clear in the two treaties proposed by the Kremlin on December 17, which require that Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries—as well as Sweden and Finland—commit to permanent neutrality and eschew seeking NATO membership. NATO would also have to retreat to its 1997 military posture, before its first enlargement, by removing all troops and equipment in central and eastern Europe. (This would reduce NATO's military presence to what it was when the Soviet Union disintegrated.) Russia would also have veto power over the foreign policy choices of its non-NATO neighbors. This would ensure that pro-Russian governments are in power in countries bordering Russia—including, foremost, Ukraine.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

So far, no Western government has been prepared to accept these extraordinary demands. The United States and Europe widely embrace the premise that nations are free to determine both their domestic systems and their foreign policy affiliations. From 1945 to 1989, the Soviet Union denied self-determination to central and eastern Europe and exercised control over both the domestic and foreign policies of Warsaw Pact members through local communist parties, the secret police, and the Red Army. When a country strayed too far from the Soviet model—Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968—its leaders were ousted by force. The Warsaw Pact was an alliance that had a unique track record: it invaded only its own members.

The modern Kremlin's interpretation of sovereignty has notable parallels to that of the Soviet Union. It holds, to paraphrase George Orwell, that some states are more sovereign than others. Putin has said that only a few great powers—Russia, China, India, and the United States—enjoy absolute sovereignty, free to choose which alliances they join or reject.

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Smaller countries such as Ukraine or Georgia are not fully sovereign and must respect Russia's strictures, just as Central America and South America, according to Putin, must heed their large northern neighbor. Russia also does not seek allies in the Western sense of the word but instead looks for mutually beneficial instrumental and transactional partnerships with countries, such as China, that do not restrict Russia's freedom to act or pass judgment on its internal politics.

Such authoritarian partnerships are an element of the Putin doctrine. The president presents Russia as a supporter of the status quo, an advocate of conservative values, and an international player that respects established leaders, especially autocrats. As recent events in Belarus and Kazakhstan have shown, Russia is the go-to power to support embattled authoritarian rulers. It has defended autocrats both in its neighborhood and far beyond—including in Cuba, Libya, Syria, and Venezuela. The West, according to the Kremlin, instead supports chaos and regime change, as happened during the 2003 Iraq war and the Arab Spring in 2011.

But in its own "sphere of privileged interests," Russia can act as a revisionist power when it considers its interests threatened or when it wants to advance its interests, as the annexation of Crimea and the invasions of Georgia and Ukraine demonstrated. Russia's drive to be acknowledged as a leader and backer of strongmen regimes has been increasingly successful in recent years as Kremlin-backed mercenary groups have acted on behalf of Russia in many parts of the world, as is the case in Ukraine.

Moscow's revisionist interference also isn't limited to what it considers its privileged domain. Putin believes Russia's interests are best served by a fractured transatlantic alliance. Accordingly, he has supported anti-American and Euroskeptic groups in Europe; backed populist movements of the left and right on both sides of the Atlantic; engaged in election interference; and generally worked to exacerbate discord within Western societies. One of his major goals is to get the United States to withdraw from Europe. U.S. President Donald Trump was contemptuous of the NATO alliance and dismissive of some of the United States' key European allies—notably then German Chancellor Angela Merkel—and spoke openly of pulling the United States out of the organization. The administration of U.S. President Joe Biden has assiduously sought to repair the alliance, and indeed Putin's manufactured crisis over Ukraine has reinforced alliance unity. But there is enough doubt within Europe about the durability

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of U.S. commitment after 2024 that Russia has found some success reinforcing skepticism, particularly through social media.

Weakening the transatlantic alliance could pave the way for Putin to realize his ultimate aim: jettisoning the post–Cold War, liberal, rules-based international order promoted by Europe, Japan, and the United States in favor of one more amenable to Russia. For Moscow, this new system might resemble the nineteenth-century concert of powers. It could also turn into a new incarnation of the Yalta system, where Russia, the United States, and now China divide the world into tripolar spheres of influence. Moscow's growing rapprochement with Beijing has indeed reinforced Russia's call for a post-West order. Both Russia and China demand a new system in which they exercise more influence in a multipolar world.

The nineteenth- and twentieth-century systems both recognized certain rules of the game. After all, during the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union mostly respected each other's spheres of influence. The two most dangerous crises of that era—Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 Berlin ultimatum and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis—were defused before military conflict broke out. But if the present is any indication, it looks as if Putin's post-West "order" would be a disordered Hobbesian world with few rules of the game. In pursuit of his new system, Putin's modus operandi is to keep the West off balance, guessing about his true intentions, and then surprising it when he acts.

THE RUSSIAN RESET

Given Putin's ultimate goal, and given his belief that now is the time to force the West to respond to his ultimatums, can Russia be deterred from launching another military incursion into Ukraine? No one knows what Putin will ultimately decide. But his conviction that the West has ignored what he deems Russia's legitimate interests for three decades continues to drive his actions. He is determined to reassert Russia's right to limit the sovereign choices of its neighbors and its former Warsaw Pact allies and to force the West to accept these limits—be that by diplomacy or military force.

That doesn't mean the West is powerless. The United States should continue to pursue diplomacy with Russia and seek to craft a modus vivendi that is acceptable to both sides without compromising the sovereignty of its allies and partners. At the same time, it should keep coordinating with the Europeans to respond and impose costs on Russia.

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But it is clear that even if Europe avoids war, there is no going back to the situation as it was before Russia began massing its troops in March 2021. The ultimate result of this crisis could be the third reorganization of Euro-Atlantic security since the late 1940s. The first came with the consolidation of the Yalta system into two rival blocs in Europe after World War II. The second emerged from 1989 to 1991, with the collapse of the communist bloc and then the Soviet Union itself, followed by the West's subsequent drive to create a Europe "whole and free." Putin now directly challenges that order with his moves against Ukraine.

As the United States and its allies await Russia's next move and try to deter an invasion with diplomacy and the threat of heavy sanctions, they need to understand Putin's motives and what they portend. The current crisis is ultimately about Russia redrawing the post–Cold War map and seeking to reassert its influence over half of Europe, based on the claim that it is guaranteeing its own security. It may be possible to avert a military conflict this time. But as long as Putin remains in power, so will his doctrine.

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MARCH 4, 2022

What If Russia Loses?

A Defeat for Moscow Won't Be a Clear Victory for the West

LIANA FIX AND MICHAEL KIMMAGE

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has made a strategic blunder by invading Ukraine. He has misjudged the political tenor of the country, which was not waiting to be liberated by Russian soldiers. He has misjudged the United States, the European Union, and a number of countries—including Australia, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea—all of which were capable of collective action before the war and all of which are now bent on Russia's defeat in Ukraine. The United States and its allies and partners are imposing harsh costs on Moscow. Every war is a battle for public opinion, and Putin's war in Ukraine has—in an age of mass-media imagery—associated Russia with an unprovoked attack on a peaceful neighbor, with mass humanitarian

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suffering, and with manifold war crimes. At every turn, the ensuing outrage will be an obstacle to Russian foreign policy in the future.

No less significant than Putin's strategic error have been the Russian army's tactical blunders. Bearing in mind the challenges of assessment in the early stages of a war, one can surely say that Russian planning and logistics were inadequate and that the lack of information given to soldiers and even to officers in the higher echelons was devastating to morale. The war was supposed to end quickly, with a lightning strike that would decapitate the Ukrainian government or cow it into surrender, after which Moscow would impose neutrality on Ukraine or establish a Russian suzerainty over the country. Minimal violence might have equaled minimal sanctions. Had the government fallen quickly, Putin could have claimed that he was right all along: because Ukraine had not been willing or able to defend itself, it was not a real country—just like he had said.

But Putin will be unable to win this war on his preferred terms. Indeed, there are several ways in which he could ultimately lose. He could mire his military in a costly and futile occupation of Ukraine, decimating the morale of Russia's soldiers, consuming resources, and delivering nothing in return but the hollow ring of Russian greatness and a neighboring country reduced to poverty and chaos. He could create some degree of control over parts of eastern and southern Ukraine and probably Kyiv, while fighting a Ukrainian insurgency operating from the west and engaged in guerrilla warfare across the country—a scenario that would be reminiscent of the partisan warfare that took place in Ukraine during World War II. At the same time, he would preside over the gradual economic degradation of Russia, its growing isolation, and its increasing inability to supply the wealth on which great powers rely. And, most consequentially, Putin could lose the support of the Russian people and elites, on whom he depends to prosecute the war and maintain his hold on power, even though Russia is not a democracy.

Putin seems to be trying to reestablish some form of Russian imperialism. But in taking this extraordinary gamble, he seems to have failed to recall the events that set in motion the end of the Russian empire. The final Russian tsar, Nicholas II, lost a war against Japan in 1905. He later fell victim to the Bolshevik Revolution, losing not just his crown but his life. The lesson: autocratic rulers cannot lose wars and remain autocrats.

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IN THIS WAR, THERE ARE NO WINNERS

Putin is unlikely to lose the war in Ukraine on the battlefield. But he could lose when the fighting mostly ends and the question becomes, What now? The unintended and underestimated consequences of this senseless war will be difficult for Russia to stomach. And the lack of political planning for the day after—comparable to the planning failures of the U.S. invasion of Iraq—will do its part to make this an unwinnable war.

Ukraine will not be able to turn back the Russian military on Ukrainian soil. The Russian military is in another league from that of Ukraine, and Russia is of course a nuclear power, whereas Ukraine is not. So far the Ukrainian military has fought with admirable determination and skill, but the real obstacle to Russian advances has been the nature of the war itself. Through aerial bombardment and missile attacks, Russia could level the cities of Ukraine, thereby achieving dominance over the battle space. It could try a small-scale use of nuclear weapons to the same effect. Should Putin make this decision, there is nothing in the Russian system that could stop him. "They made a desert," the Roman historian Tacitus wrote of Rome's warfare tactics, attributing the words to the British war leader Calgacus, "and called it peace." That is an option for Putin in Ukraine.

Even so, he would not be able to simply walk away from the desert. Putin has waged war for the sake of a Russian-controlled buffer zone between himself and the U.S.-led security order in Europe. He would not be able to avoid erecting a political structure to achieve his ends and maintain some degree of order in Ukraine. But the Ukrainian population has already shown that it does not wish to be occupied. It will resist fiercely—through daily acts of resistance and through an insurgency within Ukraine or against an eastern Ukraine puppet regime set up by the Russian army. The analogy of Algeria's 1954–62 war against France comes to mind. France was the superior military power. Yet the Algerians found ways to grind down the French army and to sap support in Paris for the war.

Perhaps Putin can cobble together a puppet government with Kyiv as its capital, a Vichy Ukraine. Perhaps he can muster the support required from the secret police to subdue the population of this Russian colony. Belarus is an example of a country that runs on autocratic rule, police repression, and the backing of the Russian military. It is a possible model for a Russian-ruled eastern Ukraine. In reality, however, it is a model only on paper. A Russified Ukraine might exist as an administrative

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fantasy in Moscow, and governments are certainly capable of acting on their administrative fantasies. But it could never work in practice, owing to Ukraine's sheer size and to the country's recent history.

In his speeches on Ukraine, Putin seems lost in the mid-twentieth century. He is preoccupied by the Germanophile Ukrainian nationalism of the 1940s. Hence his many references to Ukrainian Nazis and his stated goal of "denazifying" Ukraine. Ukraine does have far-right political elements. What Putin fails to see or ignores, however, is the much more popular and much more potent sense of national belonging that has arisen in Ukraine since it claimed independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Russia's military response to the 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine, which swept away a corrupt pro-Russian government, was an additional spur to this sense of national belonging. Since the Russian invasion began, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has been pitch-perfect in his appeals to Ukrainian nationalism. A Russian occupation would expand the Ukrainian polity's sense of nationhood, partly by creating many martyrs to the cause—as imperial Russia's occupation of Poland did in the nineteenth century.

To work at all, then, the occupation would have to be a massive political undertaking, playing out over at least half of Ukraine's territory. It would be incalculably expensive. Perhaps Putin has in mind something like the Warsaw Pact, through which the Soviet Union ruled over many different European nation-states. That, too, was expensive—but not as expensive as controlling a zone of internal rebellion, armed to the teeth by its many foreign partners and on the lookout for any Russian vulnerability. Such an effort would drain Russia's treasury.

Meanwhile, the sanctions that the United States and European countries have imposed on Russia will result in a separation of Russia from the global economy. Outside investment will fall away. Capital will be much harder to acquire. Technology transfers will dry up. Markets will close to Russia, possibly including the markets for its gas and oil, the sale of which has been crucial to Putin's modernization of the Russian economy. Business and entrepreneurial talent will flow out of Russia. The long-term effect of these transitions is predictable. As the historian Paul Kennedy argued in *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, such countries have a tendency to fight the wrong wars, to undertake financial burdens and thus to deprive themselves of economic growth—the lifeblood of a great power. In the improbable event that Russia could subdue Ukraine, it could also ruin itself in the process.

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A key variable in the fallout of this war is the Russian public. Putin's foreign policy has been popular in the past. In Russia, the annexation of Crimea was very popular. Putin's general assertiveness does not appeal to all Russians, but it does appeal to many. This may also remain the case in the early months of Putin's war in Ukraine. Russian casualties will be mourned, and they will also create an incentive, as all wars do, to make the casualties purposeful, to press on with the war and the propaganda. A global attempt to isolate Russia could backfire by walling off the outside world, leaving Russians to base their national identify on grievance and resentment.

More probable, though, is that the horror of this war will backfire on Putin. Russians did not take to the streets to protest the Russian bombings of Aleppo, Syria, in 2016 and the humanitarian catastrophe that Russian forces have abetted in the course of that country's civil war. But Ukraine holds an entirely different significance for Russians. There are millions of interconnected Russian-Ukrainian families. The two countries share cultural, linguistic, and religious ties. Information about what is happening in Ukraine will pour into Russia through social media and other channels, disproving the propaganda and discrediting the propagandists. This is an ethical dilemma Putin cannot resolve through repression alone. Repression can also backfire in its own right. It often has in Russian history: just ask the Soviets.

LOST CAUSE

The consequences of a Russian loss in Ukraine would present Europe and the United States with fundamental challenges. Assuming Russia will be forced to withdraw one day, rebuilding Ukraine, with the political goal of welcoming it into the EU and NATO, will be a task of Herculean proportions. And the West must not fail Ukraine again. Alternatively, a weak form of Russian control over Ukraine could mean a fractured, destabilized area of continuous fighting with limited or no governance structures just east of NATO's border. The humanitarian catastrophe would be unlike anything Europe has seen in decades.

No less worrisome is the prospect of a weakened and humiliated Russia, harboring revanchist impulses akin to those that festered in Germany after World War I. If Putin maintains his grip on power, Russia will become a pariah state, a rogue superpower with a chastened conventional military but with its nuclear arsenal intact. The guilt and stain of the Ukraine war will stay with Russian politics for decades; rare is the

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country that profits from a lost war. The futility of the costs spent on a lost war, the human toll, and the geopolitical decline will define the course of Russia and Russian foreign policy for many years to come, and it will be very difficult to imagine a liberal Russia emerging after the horrors of this war.

Even if Putin loses his grip on Russia, the country is unlikely to emerge as a pro-Western democracy. It could split apart, especially in the North Caucasus. Or it could become a nuclear-armed military dictatorship. Policymakers would not be wrong to hope for a better Russia and for the time when a post-Putin Russia could be genuinely integrated into Europe; they should do what they can to enable this eventuality, even as they resist Putin's war. They would be foolish, however, not to prepare for darker possibilities.

History has shown that it is immensely difficult to build a stable international order with a revanchist, humiliated power near its center, especially one of the size and weight of Russia. To do so, the West would have to adopt an approach of continuous isolation and containment. Keeping Russia down and the United States in would become the priority for Europe in such a scenario, as Europe will have to bear the main burden of managing an isolated Russia after a lost war in Ukraine; Washington, for its part, would want to finally focus on China. China, in turn, could try to strengthen its influence over a weakened Russia—leading to exactly the kind of bloc-building and Chinese dominance the West wanted to prevent at the beginning of the 2020s.

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PAY ANY PRICE?

Nobody inside or outside Russia should want Putin to win his war in Ukraine. It is better that he lose. Yet a Russian defeat would offer little cause for celebration. Were Russia to cease its invasion, the violence already inflicted on Ukraine would be a trauma that will last for generations; and Russia will not cease its invasion any time soon. The United States and Europe should focus on exploiting Putin's mistakes, not just by shoring up the transatlantic alliance and encouraging Europeans to act on their long-articulated desire for strategic sovereignty but also by impressing on China the twinned lessons of Russia's failure: challenging international norms, such as the sovereignty of states, comes with real costs, and military adventurism weakens the countries that indulge in it.

If the United States and Europe can one day help restore Ukrainian sovereignty, and if they can simultaneously nudge Russia and China toward a shared understanding of international order, Putin's greatest blunder will turn into an opportunity for the West. But it will have come at an incredibly high price.

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MARCH 17, 2022

The End of Globalization?

What Russia's War in Ukraine Means for the World Economy

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Over the last three weeks, the Russian economy has been overwhelmed by sanctions. Soon after the Kremlin invaded Ukraine, the West began seizing the aassets of the wealthiest individuals close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, prohibited Russian flights in its airspace, and restricted the Russian economy's access to imported technology. Most dramatically, the United States and its allies froze the reserve assets of Russia's central bank and cut Russia out of not just the SWIFT financial payments system, but of the basic institutions of international finance, including all foreign banks and the International Monetary Fund. As a result of the West's actions, the value of the ruble has crashed, shortages have cropped up throughout the Russian economy, and the government appears to be close to defaulting on its foreign currency debt. Public opinion—and the fear of being hit by sanctions—has compelled Western businesses to flee

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the country en masse. Soon, Russia will be unable to produce necessities either for defense or for consumers because it will lack critical components.

The democratic world's response to Moscow's aggression and war crimes is right, both ethically and on national security grounds. This is more important than economic efficiency. But these actions do have negative economic consequences that will go far beyond Russia's financial collapse, that will persist, and that are not pretty. Over the last 20 years, two trends have already been corroding globalization in the face of its supposedly relentless onward march. First, populists and nationalists have erected barriers to free trade, investment, immigration, and the spread of ideas—especially in the United States. Second, Beijing's challenge to the rules-based international economic system and to longstanding security arrangements in Asia has encouraged the West to erect barriers to Chinese economic integration. The Russian invasion and resulting sanctions will now make this corrosion even worse.

There are several reasons why. First, China is attempting to navigate a nonconfrontational response to the Russian invasion. Both its financial system and its real economy are observing the sanctions because of the potential economic retaliation if they finance or supply Russia, let alone bail Moscow out. But anything short of fully joining the blockade will feed anti-Chinese policies in the West, reducing the country's economic integration. Second, countries fear being subject to the whims of Washington's economic might, now that it is re-enamored with its apparent power. Right now, the United States' economic actions may be just, and there may be little risk of countries not invading Ukraine ending up on the wrong side of U.S. policies. But the next time, the United States may be more selfish or capricious.

Finally, the damage sanctions are doing to the Russian economy and the substantial costs to central Europe if Russia cuts off its access to natural gas and oil in response may make governments pursue self-reliance and disentangle themselves from economic connections. Ironically, this will be self-defeating. Russia's current sharp economic contraction shows just how difficult it is for states to thrive without economic interdependence, even when they try to minimize their perceived vulnerability. In addition, Russia's attempts to make itself economically independent actually made it more likely to be subject to sanctions, because the West did not have to risk as much to impose them. But that will not stop many governments from trying to retreat into separate corners, looking to protect themselves by withdrawing from the global economy.

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Pundits, of course, have cried wolf about such divisions for years, and the smaller countries that attempt to self-isolate will be unable to succeed. But it now seems likely that the world economy really will split into blocs—one oriented around China and one around the United States, with the European Union mostly but not wholly in the latter camp—each attempting to insulate itself from and then diminish the influence of the other. The economic consequences for the world will be immense, and policymakers need to recognize and then offset them as much as possible.

THE DOLLAR ENDURES

For all the talk about the "weaponization of finance," the sanctions employed against Russia have been effective only because the international alliance imposing them has been broad and committed. Freezing the Russian Central Bank's reserves, for instance, works only if the majority of the world's financial system is on board with doing so. It is the alliance, not the finance, that has mattered. Since the anti-Russian alliance contains all the major financial institutions except the Chinese banks—and since Chinese banks do not want to be shut out of that system—the financial sanctions will not lead to any fundamental changes in the world's monetary or financial order.

Economies that feel threatened by Washington do now have an incentive to shift their reserves out of holdings in the United States. In theory, this has always been a check on Washington's overuse of financial power; if the country sanctions too frequently, it might induce other states to come up with better alternatives to the dollar and to the payments system around it. And over the very long term, a divided world economy under the threat of sanction will bend in that direction. But in the meantime, what Russia demonstrates is that diversifying into euros, yuan, and even gold will not help states if other market participants are themselves afraid of being shut out of the dollar system, because there will be no other party for them to sell their reserves to. Cryptocurrencies are going to have to decide whether they will observe sanctions and thus lose some of their users (who treat the currencies as a refuge) or whether they will facilitate attempts to elude sanctions, in which case governments are likely to shut down or marginalize them.

The Chinese yuan will struggle to become a major alternative to the dollar, even for economies in Beijing's bloc. As long as China prevents people from freely taking assets out of its domestic financial system,

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investors and even central banks that adopt it would just be trading Washington's sanction threats for Beijing's. Beijing could work around this problem by making the yuan freely convertible, rather than tightly controlled. But if that happened, the value of the yuan would likely decline sharply for an extended period, as it did from 2015 to 2016, when China temporarily opened its capital account, because billions of people who hold their savings in China are desperate to diversify their portfolios by moving their assets elsewhere in pursuit of higher returns. China could, of course, become the reserve currency for the small economies it dominates and for pariah states—countries with no real alternative. But this would do little to diversify or create preferential returns for Chinese savings, and it could backfire by entangling China's financial system in other states' financial instability.

That does not mean nothing will change financially. The more that economic divisions are amplified by hard-power divisions, the more that governments will align their financial systems with their primary military protector. Exchange-rate pegs tend to follow military alliances (as I established in 2008). The world saw this throughout Africa, Latin America, and South Asia during the Cold War, as governments switched the focus of their exchange-rate targets or currency pegs when realigning between the Soviet Union and the United States. But although that may mean some countries move in and out of the de facto dollar zone, it will not create an alternative currency that is attractive on its own terms.

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COME UNDONE

The invasion and sanctions, then, will not result in enormous financial changes to the global economy. But they will speed up the corrosion of globalization already underway, a process that will have broad impacts. With less economic interconnectedness, the world will see lower trend growth and less innovation. Domestic incumbent companies and industries will have more power to demand special protections. Altogether, the real returns on investments made by households and corporations will go down.

To see why this is, consider what may happen to supply chains. Currently, most industrial companies and retailers source each key input or step in their production processes from a single or handful of separate places. There was a powerful economic logic to setting up global supply chains this way, with relatively few redundancies:

not only did they save on costs by encouraging firms and factories to specialize, they also increased the scale of production and provided local marketing and information advantages. But given the current geopolitical and pandemic realities, these global value chains may no longer be worth the risk of relying on specific choke points, particularly if those points are in politically unstable or undependable countries. Multinational companies, with government encouragement, will rationally insure against problems by building redundant supply chains in safer locations. Like any form of insurance, this will protect against some downside risk, but it will be a direct cost that yields no immediate economic returns.

Meanwhile, if Chinese and U.S. companies no longer face competition from each other (or from companies outside their economic bloc), they are more likely to be inefficient, and consumers are less likely to get as much variety and reliability as they currently do. When that consumer is the government, protected domestic firms are even more likely to engage in waste and fraud, because there will be less competition for government procurement contracts. Throw in nationalism and fears of national security threats, and it will be easy for such companies to cloak themselves in patriotism and take it all the way to the bank, knowing that they are politically too big to fail. There is a reason why closed economies are more likely to experience corruption.

Analysts can already see this at work in seemingly patriotic commitments by President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump about "onshoring" manufacturing—relocating the supply chains that make U.S. goods so they take place in the United States. They are using national security and pride to justify policies that shortchange both national defense and the 85-plus percent of U.S. workers not employed in heavy industry. The fetishizing of domestic manufacturing over advancing cross-border trade in services and networks is especially ironic, given that the latter sectors are what has truly advantaged the West over Russia in implementing effective sanctions, and what has deterred Chinese businesses from bailing Russia out.

Similarly, the corrosion of globalization will have negative consequences for technology. Innovation is faster and more common when the global pool of scientific talent is engaged and can exchange ideas and share proof, or disproof, of concepts. But there is a politically compelling reason for states to try to make sure that only allies have access to their technology, even if restrictions are of dubious military relevance (in a world of cyberespionage, it is easy to acquire technological designs).

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The likely result will be a decline in innovation, as U.S. and other Western research institutions deprive themselves of many talented Chinese and Russian students and scientists.

The intensified corrosion of globalization will further diminish the return on capital in the world economy, and it will do so on every side of the economic divide. There will be new limits on where people can invest their savings, driving down the range of diversification and average returns. Fear and nationalism will likely increase people's desire for safe investments at home, in government or publicly backed securities. Governments will also combine national security arguments with fiscal and financial stability measures designed to strongly encourage investment in their own public debt, as they do during wars.

THE CONTINENTAL CONNECTION

There is one beneficial economic side effect to the increasing global divisions: the European Union is being galvanized to unify more of its economic policies. The bloc is putting up joint resources to share the financial burden of the massive Ukrainian refugee inflow coming into Poland and other eastern members. European bonds are being issued to pay for these measures, rather than individual member state debts.

The European Union or eurozone may issue more European public debt in the future, which would further help the global economy. The Russian invasion reinforces the fact that this is a world of low returns, and many investors have a high desire for safety. By creating more safe assets for them, the EU and eurozone can absorb some risk-averse savings, improving financial stability.

Stronger EU unity will also create new opportunities for growth. Led by Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz, almost every EU member has made a multiyear commitment to increased defense spending and a greater public investment in rapidly reducing the continent's dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Both of these investments will go a long way toward ending Europe's free-riding on the United States and China for growth; giving the global economy another engine will help balance out the ups and downs of the business cycle, stabilizing the world against recessions. It will also prevent the faster-growing economies from running up foreign debt as they have when Germany and other European surplus economies exported products but failed to consume.

These initiatives will, in particular, help the eurozone itself. One of the primary causes of the euro crisis a decade ago were the imbalances

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among euro economies caused by German austerity. By increasing German domestic demand, southern members of the eurozone will be able to work off some of their debt through increased exports rather than having to cut back wages and imports to make their payments. This should strengthen the long-term viability of the euro, as well as increase its attractiveness to potential new members in eastern Europe and reserve managers around the world. A euro that is less subject to internal tensions and worries will also be of higher, more stable value, which in turn will reduce trade tensions with the United States.

AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

Unfortunately, the Russian invasion will prove to be far less kind to the developing world. Food and energy price hikes are already hurting the citizens of poorer states, and the economic impact of corroding globalization will be even worse. If lower-income countries are forced to choose sides when deciding where they get their aid and foreign direct investment, the opportunities for their private sectors will narrow. Companies within these countries will grow more dependent on government gatekeepers at home and abroad. And as the United States and other countries increase their use of sanctions, firms will be less likely be less likely to invest in these economies. Anxious multinational companies want to avoid U.S. opprobrium, and so they will forego investing in places that they see as having undependable transparency.

The saddest part of this is that it comes on top of the world's unequal response to COVID-19, in which high-income countries did not provide enough vaccines and medical supplies to the developing world. This political disregard for the well-being of low-income populations globally materially changes the economic conditions on the ground. That in turn provides a commercial justification for the private sector not to invest in those economies. The only way out of this cycle is through public investment and enforced, fair treatment. Division among the major economies, however, is likely to make such investment in the developing world insufficient, unreliable, and arbitrarily disbursed.

Helping poor economies is not the only long-term, development goal that Russia's invasion puts at risk. To survive, societies around the world will need to mitigate and adapt to climate change, but the pivotal role of Russia and Ukraine in global energy supplies sends out contradictory forces that will make the energy transition more challenging. Simultaneously, Western politicians are calling for moving

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away from greenhouse gasses and advocating increased fossil fuel exploration outside Russia. States want to prevent price gouging, cut energy taxes, and compensate households for higher gas prices, but they also want to increase incentives to expand greener energy production and decrease consumption, which require higher prices. The tradeoffs extend beyond climate change. Democracies want to build alliances around liberal values and freer markets, but to cut energy costs, they are going to autocratic governments such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, offering to legitimize their regimes in exchange for increased oil supply.

Underlying all this is an inconvenient reality: to slow rising temperatures, the world needs international collective action, including from China. The alliance of democracies cannot do it alone. The Chinese and the U.S. governments have, at times, been able to make joint progress on climate initiatives even while being in conflict on other issues, and both Chinese President Xi Jinping and Biden have said they want to do so again. But it will get harder as each country retreats into a separate bloc. Meanwhile, as the corrosion of globalization reduces the pace of innovation by restricting research collaboration, it will also become more challenging for scientists to come up with a deus ex machina that can save the planet.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Stopping the corrosion of globalization was already difficult, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine makes it harder. As politicians in the United States and elsewhere spin false narratives about how economic openness is bad for workers, the Russian invasion and the resulting sanctions push China and the United States further apart.

But policymakers are not helpless. The financial sanctions on Russia were so powerful because they were imposed by a strong alliance of higher income democracies. If Australia, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and other important market economies can channel the same might they used to punish Russia toward helping the economy, they can repair the erosion—perhaps encouraging China to stay connected as well.

To do so, officials must pursue a wide range of policies. They can start by making a common market among democracies that is as broad and deep as possible—including for goods, services, and even labor opportunities. They must create common standards for screening cross-border private investment for national security and human rights reasons.

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They should create a relatively even playing field among allies that can foster healthy competition, which would diminish the worst side effects of economic nationalism: corruption, the entrenchment of incumbents, and waste. Policymakers must also set up a sustained, multiyear public investment front across the Western alliance, which would reduce imbalances between economies and raise overall returns on investment.

The world's democracies cannot reverse every corrosive division in the global economy caused by Russian aggression and China's tacit approval. They should not want to; some forms of violence must be met with economic isolation. But they can make up for many of the losses, steadying the planet in the process.

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APRIL 18, 2022

Russians at War

Putin's Aggression Has Turned a Nation Against Itself

ANDREI KOLESNIKOV

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In early April, the coffin containing the body of 75-year-old Vladimir Zhirinovsky—the ultranationalist and populist who was a crucial pillar of the Russian state for two decades—was taken to the Hall of Columns in central Moscow for people to pay their respects. Sixty-nine years ago, it was there that Stalin had lain in state, in the process killing one last wave of Russians, who were crushed to death in the huge crowds that had gathered to bid farewell to the Soviet dictator.

There was no stampede to see Zhirinovsky, although his funeral recalled a different moment from the Soviet era. His body had been brought to the Hall of Columns in an Aurus Lafet—the strictly limited-edition black hearse made by Aurus Motors, Russia's much-hyped new luxury car manufacturer. In Russian, *lafet* means "funeral carriage," and for Russians like me, who are old enough to remember the early 1980s, the name of the car evokes a darkly comic joke: when the elderly Soviet

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leaders Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko all died in quick succession, it was known as the Race of the Lafets.

Could Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle now be facing a new Race of the Lafets? Certainly, there are many Kremlin figures who are of a similar age to their counterparts in the late Soviet years: Putin will be 70 in October; Alexander Bortnikov, the head of his FSB, and Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of his security council, are both 70 now. Sergei Lavrov, his foreign minister, is 72. Much like Brezhnev's aging Politburo when it decided to invade Afghanistan, thus demolishing what remained of the moral foundations of the Soviet empire, these gerontocrats' decision to launch a war in Ukraine has quickly become a disaster for Russia—and especially its youth.

For the moment, the regime has Russian public opinion on its side, and it may continue to delude itself, just as it is deluding the people, that it can turn Russia into a self-sufficient, self-isolating, expansionist rogue state, based on the idea of Russian superiority over other nations. In the medium and long term, however, the "special military operation," as Putin insists on calling it, seems destined to undermine all of Russia's political, economic, and moral foundations.

AT WAR WITH THEMSELVES

The Putin regime seems to regard the Russian people with nearly the same attitude that it does their Ukrainian counterparts. For proof of this, one has to look no further than the public and police pressure now being put on anyone in Russia who dares think differently, the shutting down or purging of almost every independent media outlet and research organization, and the persecution of anyone who protests or even merely disagrees with the patriotic hysteria. Ukrainians are depicted as a faceless, homogenous mass that must be subjugated to the Kremlin by means of denazification, a process that in actual fact means de-Ukrainization, as Putin's propagandists now openly admit. But Russians are also considered by their leaders as an unthinking mass that must blindly follow their leader. Otherwise, they face administrative or criminal charges and social ostracism. Russian soldiers—a group that includes not only military die-hards but also tens of thousands of very young conscripts who are performing obligatory national service—have become cannon fodder, sent unprepared to the slaughter. Putin's senseless ideas are costing Russian teenagers their lives.

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In one of his few speeches in recent weeks, Putin declared open season on "national traitors" and on a "fifth column" that was supposedly undermining the unity of the nation. To root out these malefactors, he urged a "self-cleansing of society." Russians quickly heeded the call: after the speech, there was a wave of denunciations, with students condemning their teachers—and vice versa—and colleagues reporting on each other. The Russian president also encouraged acts of barbarity against his critics. Alexei Venediktov, the editor of Echo of Moscow, the independent radio station that was shut down by Putin's government soon after the invasion began, had a pig's head left outside his door, along with anti-Semitic graffiti. On a train out of Moscow, a man attacked Dmitry Muratov, the editor in chief of the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize last year, by dousing him in red paint mixed with the toxic chemical acetone.

Putin has divided the nation. Both opponents and supporters of the Russian leader have become more radicalized. Of course, most of those who oppose the war are Putin critics and young people. Some soldiers have refused to fight in Ukraine, and some families of those who have been slain are furious with Putin. Young people have bravely taken to the streets to protest the war, despite facing immediate arrest and the prospect of losing their job or place at university. Yet until now, a clear majority of Russians have rallied around Putin, even though, according to independent polling conducted last year, most Russians were afraid of war and didn't believe it could actually happen. Today, the public, or at least the broad mass of ordinary Russians, seems in the mood for war.

Of course, it is difficult to measure opinion in a system that has one leader and that for all practical purposes no longer has any free media. But it is clear that Russians feel besieged and, often, just as embittered as Putin himself. Consider the data of the most recent poll by the independent Levada Center. Contrary to what critics claim, respondents did not refuse to answer questions any more than in past surveys, and the study itself was conducted, as usual, by in-person interviews rather than by telephone. The results are telling: 81 percent of respondents said they supported the "special operation," with a full 53 percent "definitely" supporting it, and 28 percent "rather" supporting it. It is also worth noting another figure: in connection with the special operation, a slight majority—51 percent—of respondents said that they felt "pride in Russia." Those who did not—many of them young people—described their feelings as "anxiety, fear, horror," or simply "shock."

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At the same time, Putin's approval rating, again according to Levada, soared to 83 percent in March, up 12 percent from the previous month. The surge of public support tracks closely with what occurred after the annexation of Crimea in 2014; but back then, the climate was altogether more benign, and those who opposed Putin's actions did not face humiliation by their peers. (Nevertheless, in a speech at the time, Putin labeled anyone who spoke against his policies as a "national traitor.") Moreover, in contrast to Russian actions in Ukraine now, the annexation was accomplished without any bloodshed, and many saw the "reunification" of Crimea with Russia, as the Kremlin called it, as restoring and enhancing Russia's greatness.

Today, the dominant response of ordinary Russians to the war is aggression. It is undergirded by what seems to be an almost subconscious effort to block out any bad news, and with it, any sense that the nation might be in the wrong. Fear of authority not only prevents people from protesting against a barbaric war; it also makes them unable to admit even to themselves that Putin's Russia has committed something dreadful. It is frightening to be on the side of evil. It is frightening to look at the monstrous photographs and video footage coming out of Ukraine—using a virtual private network to circumvent the Kremlin's Internet controls—and to discover just how dangerous the truth is. And so, for many, it is easier to imbibe the official propaganda and know that you're on the good side: the Ukrainians were going to attack us; we just carried out a preventative strike; we are liberating a fraternal people from a Nazi regime supported by the West; all the reports about atrocities supposedly carried out by our army are fake. As one woman in a Levada Center focus group said, "If I watched the BBC, maybe I'd think differently, but I will never watch the BBC, because for me what I watch is enough."

MOSCOW SYNDROME

Putin is backed into a corner, but so is the nation. Russians are collectively experiencing a version of Stockholm syndrome, sympathizing more with their own captor than with his other victims. The politicians, meanwhile—granted that they, too, are tethered to the Kremlin—are divided over what to do next. Some, such as the Putin's chief negotiator Vladimir Medinsky and the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, say they favor a peace agreement. Others, like the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, advocate "seeing it through to the end"—though what kind

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of end?—and consider any negotiations a form of betrayal. This range of views is reflected in society at large: for some, victory means a peace agreement that gives Russia significant new territory; for others, victory requires going all the way and conquering all of Ukraine, which, of course, means perpetual war.

Putin's supporters, intoxicated by what they take to be patriotism, attack anyone who criticizes the war and claim not to understand why some people are protesting against it: 32 percent of respondents in another Levada poll said they believed that protesters were paid to do so. How else to account for the thousands of people who have taken to the streets to oppose the liberation of Ukraine from Nazis? No matter that they cannot explain who and how these thousands of people were paid to risk their freedom and livelihood to protest against the massacre. But such illogical assertions are nothing new: a portion of Russia's hard-bitten mainstream has often said this about political protesters in recent times.

To Russians, the term "fascism" has long served as a convenient label for almost anything bad. During Soviet times it was common to say that "fascists" and "revanchists" have "raised their heads" in various parts of the world, from the United States to Germany. At times, an even harsher term, "Nazis," was used. With characteristic lack of irony, Soviet propaganda first used the term in reference to Israel: after the Six-Day War in 1967, when the USSR broke off diplomatic relations with Israel, the Israelis were written off as Nazis. For Putin, the specter of Nazis has provided a way to indoctrinate the nation, to insist that Ukraine has no right to exist. Putin needs the history of World War II to legitimize his regime, but Russians have yet to realize that in doing so he has also destroyed the foundations of the post-Soviet state. Everything was built on the defeat of fascism in the Great Patriotic War, as Russians call World War II. Yet in the eyes of Ukrainians—and much of the rest of the world—Russians themselves are now behaving like fascists. Russians can hardly draw on their country's experience fighting Hitler to justify their own brutal militarism. On the contrary, they are making themselves in the very image of the Germans in the wake of World War II. This is what Putin has done: Russia is no longer on the winning side of the Great Patriotic War; it is no longer on the right side of history.

The bulk of the Russian population doesn't realize this. And of course, this year, during Victory Day celebrations on May 9—one of Russia's most

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important state holidays, commemorating the end of World War II—Putin will no doubt equate the Soviet victory in 1945 with his own triumph over the powers of reason. By May 9, Putin will have to find the words to describe the specific parameters of the new victory in Ukraine. And they must be convincing enough to make the triumph resemble 1945. But many Russians already seem to view what Russia is doing now as equivalent to the defeat of Hitler: the letter Z, the symbol of the special operation, is often portrayed as a curved St. George's ribbon, the symbol of victory over fascism.

In reality, however, most people feel trapped: the West is more hostile toward them than ever, but there is nothing left for them in Russia. They support Putin as the supreme commander of their fabled army, but deep down they are beginning to understand that the president has led them to a place from which escape may be impossible. For Russians, it is an age-old feeling. As far back as 1863, the brilliant revolutionary thinker Alexander Herzen identified the tension: "The Russian's position is becoming interminably difficult," he wrote from Italy. "He feels more and more foreign in the West, while his hatred for what is being done at home grows deeper and deeper." Then, as now, the hatred is secret rather than overt. And Russians cannot admit it to themselves.

RUNNING AWAY FROM REALITY

Many Russians with a conscience, self-awareness, and a profession—and the means to do so—are voting with their feet and leaving the country. Exact numbers are hard to come by, and in the vast majority of cases, those who go abroad say they are doing so temporarily: they are sitting out the war and waiting for change to come to Russia, but they have no intention of establishing a permanent new life in another country. They are motivated less by a fear of persecution than by a lack of belief in Russia's prospects and disgust at what the regime has become. As a result, Russia is hemorrhaging its professional class, the people on whom its aspirations for a modern, diversified economy have long rested. If this turns into a long-term trend, the exodus will fundamentally harm the country's human capital. And the population that is left behind may well be even less open to Western values and liberal ideas.

Faced with looming economic catastrophe, the state seems likely to aim its efforts at those Russians who can be relied on to support the regime provided they are offered enough cash and other basic rewards to do so. These are the broad masses whose loyalty must be bought

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with social payments and salaries in the state-dependent sectors and who must be fed a steady diet of propaganda in order to stay in line. Yet as the growing effects of sanctions set in, this project has become far more expensive and the resources for supporting these people may begin to dry up. This will be especially true if Russia loses the ability to sell oil and gas.

Over time, the accumulating effects of the war could erode public trust in Putin. As the military campaign and the immense propaganda machine that has gone with it continue to operate at full tilt, social cohesion will begin to break down, and the forces that have traditionally sustained the economy will no longer function. But for now, Russians seem content to project their discontents on the enemy. To the question, Who is to blame? they answer: the United States and Europe.

Putin has hit a dead end, and Ukraine, along with the rest of the world, is suffering as a result. But in the long term, it is a disaster for the Russian people, too. The nation that contributed so much to world culture—that produced so many great novelists and thinkers and three Nobel Peace Prize winners—will now also be for a long time associated with Vladimir Putin. The West has to understand that, as banal as it sounds, Putin's system and the Russian nation are not one and the same. And this understanding will be crucial for building a post-Putin Russia. Otherwise, the country will continue to be regarded as a hostile enclave, to be shunned by the world. But, ultimately, it will be up to Russians themselves to prove by their own actions that their country is more than Putin and what he has wrought.

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MAY 18, 2022

The Russian Military's People Problem

It's Hard for Moscow to Win While Mistreating Its Soldiers

DARA MASSICOT

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Six days before the invasion of Ukraine, a small group of Russian soldiers huddled together in their tents in Belarus. One of them had covertly acquired a smartphone—barred by the military—and together, the group logged on to Western news sites. There, they read a story that shocked them: according to Western intelligence reports, Russia was about to invade its neighbor.

One of the soldiers called his mother in shock about what he had read. She told him it was only Western propaganda, and that there would be no war. She was wrong. Five days later, on the eve of the invasion, the soldiers' commanders revealed they would invade Ukraine. The commanders also threatened to charge their subordinates with desertion if they didn't come along. "Mom, they put us in cars, we are leaving," the soldier told his mother in a call before the unit moved across the border. "I love you, if there is a funeral [for me], don't believe

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it right away, check for yourself." She hasn't heard from him since, and despite pleas for information, the military authorities have provided her with no updates. (Eventually, she went to the press.)

Despite its sophisticated military equipment and multiple advantages on paper, Russia has stumbled strategically, operationally, and tactically in Ukraine. It has been hampered by faulty planning assumptions, unrealistic timelines, and impractical objectives. It has suffered from inadequate supplies, bad logistics, and insufficient force protection. It has been impaired by poor leadership. These problems do not stop at technical equipment issues, poor training, or corruption. Rather, they are linked by a core underlying theme: the military's lack of concern for the lives and well-being of its personnel. In Ukraine, the Russian military struggles to retrieve the bodies of its dead, obscures casualties, and is indifferent to its worried military families. It may spend billions of dollars on new equipment, but it does not properly treat soldiers' injuries, and it generally does not appear to care tremendously whether troops are traumatized.

This culture of indifference to its personnel fundamentally compromises the Russian military's efficacy, no matter how extensively it has been modernized. In the United States, a good soldier is a happy soldier, one that's properly fed, paid, and treated with respect. But the Russian high command behaves as if its troops are an afterthought, making tactical decisions as if it can simply throw people at poorly designed objectives until it succeeds. This is a self-defeating attitude that both lowers troops' morale and degrades combat effectiveness. The results are plain to see.

BY ANY MEANS

The Russian military has a long history of mistreating its personnel and their frightened families. During the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, many conscripts were not informed ahead of time that they were being sent to into combat. When they died or disappeared, Soviet authorities were curt and dismissive to grieving parents, particularly mothers who organized to get answers. In the 1990s, the Russian military sent unprepared conscripts to Chechnya for grueling urban warfare in cities such as Grozny. Many of these troops were killed, wounded, or captured. Soldiers' mothers looking to secure the release of their imprisoned children often pleaded with base commanders for help, only to be ignored. Many mothers traveled directly to Chechnya to find their sons and occasionally brokered deals or arranged prisoner

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swaps with Chechen militant groups for their release. In 2014, when Russia secretly sent forces into eastern Ukraine, military families were again bullied or lied to about the status and circumstances of their sons. Some, for example, were told their sons died in training accidents in Russia instead of in eastern Ukraine.

This culture of disregard has clearly extended to Russia's latest invasion. Had excessive operational security not trumped force protection, for instance, the military could have better prepared and trained the force for the kinds of grinding, urban battles they were certain to face. But because it was worried about leaks, the Russian military kept its plans a secret to almost all of the military (or at least to the rank and file), jeopardizing readiness and handicapping itself. Similarly, if Moscow wanted to avoid high casualties, it would not have proceeded with the same strategy once it became clear that Western intelligence had uncovered and published its invasion plans. But the Kremlin proceeded with the war as planned, sending its troops to face off against Ukrainian forces that were, in some cases, lying in wait.

Indeed, it's difficult to make sense of Russia's preinvasion strategy unless one assumes that operational security trumps all and that soldiers are easily expendable. Commanders engaged in abstract war planning inside the Ministry of Defense's headquarters might logically conclude that they should invade through the Chernobyl exclusion zone because, on a map, it is the most direct and undefended route from Belarus to Kyiv. But if they cared about their troops, they could have taken a different path—or at least prepared their soldiers for what was an incredibly hazardous task. Instead, according to workers at the Chernobyl nuclear plant, Russia sent its troops through the zone without protective gear to shield them from the radioactive dust kicked up by hundreds of their military vehicles. It didn't tell the soldiers occupying the plant about the significance of their deployment. And it had its forces dig vehicle revetments deep into some of the most irradiated soil on earth, where troops reportedly lived for a month before growing sick and being medically evacuated.

Radiation poisoning is a particularly extreme example of how the Russian military's mistreatment of troops undermines its fighting capacity. But there are plenty of others. Soldiers became affected with frostbite thanks to poor planning and then were treated by Russian medics with 44-year-old field dressings. Some Russian commanders simply disappeared in combat zones, leaving their subordinates

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with no shelter, food, or water. The military sent expired field rations to some troops, not enough field rations to others, and field kitchen trucks filled with bags of potatoes, pickles, and oatmeal, most of which rotted within a few days.

The Russian military's disregard for its soldiers has done more than undermine their combat performance. It has also tanked their morale and will to fight. Officers steal the contents of care packages so routinely that some soldiers have called their mothers and told them not to bother sending anything. Officials forget to pay soldiers their entitled combat pay, and units abandon the bodies of the fallen. It is little wonder, then, that some Russian troops simply melted away from the conflict, deserting fully functional modernized equipment in Ukrainian fields. Other soldiers have called their mothers to tell them they were considering shooting themselves in the leg so they could leave.

With discipline and morale faltering, Russian troops began looting what they could from Ukraine and shipping it back home—including washing machines, frying pans, televisions from Ukrainian schools, and even used mascara. They raided Ukrainian convenience stores for meat, cigarettes, and alcohol. When they ran out of food from markets, they stole it (along with livestock) directly from Ukrainian people. According to intercepted phone calls released by Ukraine's intelligence services, some Russian soldiers have even eaten dogs.

Given how the Russian military mistreats its own personnel, it is also no surprise that Russian soldiers have engaged in widespread crimes. None of this is justifiable, and in multiple Ukrainian villages and cities, Russian troops have engaged in unspeakable atrocities—including torture, rape, and executions. But the fish rots from the head, and rather than showing concern about these abuses or issuing directives ordering them to stop, the Kremlin bestowed an honorific title on one of the units accused of committing atrocities in Bucha.

CARELESS CONQUEST

It will be nearly impossible for the Russian military to fix its internal cultural problem during this war. Indeed, even when the invasion ends, it will be difficult for the Russian military to reform, as it did in the aftermath of its five-day war against Georgia in 2008. That's because, unlike with the Georgian war, Moscow cannot blame old equipment; the problem lies with the decision-makers and their decisions, and these individuals have not admitted that the military still

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has a systemic personnel maltreatment problem. The current leaders of the Russian military may even have been willing to actively overlook systemic personnel maltreatment as long as it was kept quiet, rubles flowed into the defense budget, and weapons procurement continued as planned. Russia's top commanders are not apolitical warrior-scholars; they earned their positions by understanding that loyalty is more important than speaking truth to power. They approved the invasion plan despite all its clear flaws, the most obvious being that it could stretch the professional fighting force to the point of breaking. There is no ready follow-on force to relieve the 190,000 troops Russia committed to this war, which means the troops will fight until exhaustion unless the Kremlin declares a mass mobilization.

The Russian military does, of course, understand that losing soldiers makes it harder to win wars. The Kremlin in particular is very sensitive to casualties, and much like in wars past, it has gone to great lengths to obscure them. To that end, Russia has classified discussions of military deaths since 2015. Currently, Russian officials are stonewalling frightened families in search of news about their children. Some parents have been told that there is no information about their sons or that such information is secret. Others have been routed through an endless series of phone numbers as they hunt for updates, where some are accused of "hysterics." Parents have even traveled to bases and hospitals directly for information about missing children, only to be rebuffed. The father of a conscript who disappeared aboard the sunken *Moskva* cruiser, for instance, went to the naval base in the Black Sea to ask where his son was. The local commander replied with a shrug: "Well, somewhere at sea."

These struggles have not stopped desperate Russian parents from continuing to look, and they have gleaned information in other ways—via informal networks, social media, or even the Ukrainian government, which has offered to release some soldiers if their mothers come to take them. Other mothers, continuing a tragic tradition started in Afghanistan, Chechnya, and in Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine, plan to take it upon themselves to travel to war zones to find their sons and bring them home. But these mothers' hard work does not mean the military will correct course. Indeed, the current political climate in Russia is now perhaps even less likely to tolerate collective protests from soldiers' families than it was in the late 1980s and 1990s. New legislation is stifling unwanted narratives about the military,

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and the Russian authorities are working harder than ever to suppress individuals who say anything about the war that deviates from the official line—including by expressing unauthorized grief.

For now, this may allow the Russian military to resist change. But the long run is less certain. The Russian military stands to lose much more than the thousands of pieces of equipment that have been destroyed. The Russian military's experiment in having professional enlisted personnel is almost 20 years old. Its success relies on the prestige of military service and social trust that the Ministry of Defense worked to achieve through a series of new policies, benefits, and improved service conditions. Feeding the country's young men into what U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin recently called a "wood chipper" undermines that contract, and it does not bode well for future recruiting and retention. It is still too soon to tell how much jeopardy the professional enlisted program is in, but Russian men who would have otherwise joined Russia's professional military might stop signing up. The country still has conscripts, but if the invasion's popularity sags as the war drags on, Russian families may return to the old ways of keeping their sons away from the draft, such as through bribes or by hiding them domestically or abroad. The military may then have no choice but to change its personnel culture, but it will be too late to achieve its larger aims in Ukraine. It will also be too late to save the thousands of troops being carelessly sacrificed for Russia's attempt at conquest.

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AUGUST 1, 2022

China on the Offensive

How the Ukraine War Has Changed Beijing's Strategy

BONNY LIN AND JUDE BLANCHETTE

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In the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Beijing was on the back foot. For weeks after Russian troops crossed Ukraine's border, China's messaging was stilted and confused as Chinese diplomats, propagandists, and foreign ministry spokespeople themselves tried to figure out Chinese President Xi Jinping's line on the conflict. Xi's "no limits" partnership with Russian President Vladimir Putin was incurring growing reputational costs.

Almost six months after the war's outbreak and with no end in sight, Beijing has largely regained its footing. Its early concerns that the war would significantly increase overall European defense spending have yet to materialize. Although China would prefer the war to end with a clear Russian victory, a second-best option would be to see the

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United States and Europe exhaust their supplies of military equipment in support of Ukraine. Meanwhile, rising energy costs and inflation are threatening the resolve of European governments to hold the line on sanctions, signaling to Beijing a potential erosion in transatlantic unity. And even though in advanced democracies public opinion about China has clearly deteriorated, throughout the "global South," Beijing continues to enjoy broad receptivity for its development assistance and diplomatic messaging.

At the same time, Beijing has concluded that regardless of the war's outcome, its own external environment has become more dangerous. Chinese analysts see a growing schism between Western democracies and various nondemocratic countries, including China and Russia. China is concerned that the United States may leverage this growing fault line to build economic, technological, or security coalitions to contain it. It believes that Washington and Taipei are intentionally stirring up tension in the region by directly linking the assault on Ukraine to Taiwan's safety and security. And it is concerned that growing international support for Taiwan will disrupt its plans for "reunification."

These perceptions of Western interference have put Beijing once again on the offensive. Moving forward, China's foreign policy will increasingly be defined by a more bellicose assertion of its interests and the exploration of new pathways to global power that circumvent chokepoints controlled by the West.

WHO TELLS YOUR STORY

Beijing's reorientation since the invasion is evident in several areas. At the highest level was China's unveiling earlier this year of a new strategic framework, which it dubbed the "global security initiative." Although it is still in its early stages, the GSI consolidates several strands of Beijing's evolving conceptualization about global order. More important, it signals Xi's attempt to undermine international confidence in the United States as a provider of regional and global stability and to create a platform around which China can justify augmenting its own partnerships. The GSI also counters what Beijing perceives to be false portrayals of China's aggressiveness and revisionism.

Xi first outlined the GSI during a virtual speech in April. Strictly speaking, there was little new content in Xi's speech. But in announcing the GSI, Xi was seeking to wrest narrative control on global security away from the United States and its allies in Europe and the

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Indo-Pacific and discourage countries from joining U.S.-led military blocs or groupings. With this initiative, Xi has put something else on the table to compete with a U.S.-led discussion about what an international order should look like after the war in Ukraine. Core to Beijing's broader story is that China is a force of stability and predictability in the face of an increasingly volatile and unpredictable United States.

Just as important, Beijing continues to position itself as an innovator and leader in twenty-first-century global governance. Since the GSI's initial rollout, it has become a standard item to include in meeting readouts from China's bilateral and multilateral engagements across Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, evidence that Beijing is pushing for the diplomatic normalization of its new initiative, and thus, inclusion in the vernacular of global governance. Although the GSI may not gain much traction in Tokyo, Canberra, or Brussels, it will find resonance in Jakarta, Islamabad, and Montevideo, where frustration with elements of the U.S.-led order is manifest.

Xi's April speech also confirmed that the strategic alignment between China and Russia continues, despite Putin's disastrous war in Ukraine. In particular, Xi included a reference to "indivisible security," a phrase that dates to the early 1970s and negotiations between the Soviet Union and the West known as the Helsinki Process, but under Putin, has become a shorthand for Moscow's argument that NATO expansion directly imperils Russia's own sense of security. As Chinese officials have made crystal clear, Beijing sees a direct connection between NATO's expanding presence in Europe and the United States' growing coalition of security partners in the Indo-Pacific. As Le Yucheng, then a top foreign ministry official, said in a May speech, "For quite some time, the United States has kept flexing its muscle on China's doorstep, creating exclusive groups against China and inflaming the Taiwan question to test China's red line." He went on: "If this is not an Asia-Pacific version of NATO's eastward expansion, then what is?" This linkage of the Russian security environment to China's was also a central component of the joint statement put out by Xi and Putin on February 4.

MORE AND CLOSER FRIENDS

As part of its post-invasion reorientation, China is also rapidly strengthening partnerships with countries that fall outside of the Western camp—that is, most of the "global South." China has long sought to deepen

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its friendships abroad, but it is now recognizing that some countries, such as European democracies, will never stand with it when forced to choose. Referring to Ukraine, Le lamented in March that "some major countries make empty promises to small countries, turn small countries into their pawn and even use them to fight proxy wars." Beijing does not want to face the same fate if it were to find itself in a conflict against Taiwan or any of its neighbors. As the Chinese scholar Yuan Zheng has explained, Beijing believes "that a potential proxy war is what some hawkish individuals and groups back in the U.S. are expecting to take place in China's neighborhood." Even if Chinese leaders are still confident about their country's political system and its growing economic and military power, they recognize that it is still dependent on external goods and resources to fuel its development and growing military capabilities. Accordingly, Beijing is moving fast to both deepen and broaden partnerships to increase its immunity to crippling sanctions and to ensure that it is not alone in hard times. This includes strengthening bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. In August, Venezuela is expected to host a sniper competition as part of Russia-led military exercise in the Western Hemisphere that will likely involve China, Russia, Iran, and ten other countries in a show of force against the United States.

China is also keen to cement exclusive blocs of countries that will support it—or at least not support the United States. Chief among these efforts is China's attempt to strengthen and expand the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—as an alternative developing world bloc to compete with the Quad, the G-7, and the G-20. In May, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a meeting of BRICS foreign ministers that hosted an additional nine guests, including from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The next month, as the host of a BRICS summit, Xi advocated expanding the group and proposed new cooperative efforts on the digital economy, trade, and investment, and the supply chain. Xi also invited an unprecedented 13 world leaders to participate in a high-level dialogue on global development with BRICS countries, including Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. Not long after, Argentina and Iran officially applied to join the BRICS group, and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey expressed interest in doing so, as well. In July, Moscow went so far as to suggest that the group's members "create a new world reserve currency to better serve their economic interests."

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In addition to BRICS expansion, Beijing is seeking to transform the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes Russia, into a powerful bloc that can leverage deep political, economic, and military ties. China has long pushed for more SCO economic cooperation and proposed the establishment of a free trade agreement and creation of a SCO bank. Although these ideas fell flat last year, this year, in May, the SCO discussed the need for increased interactions among member states, particularly on international security and economic cooperation. As SCO formal membership expands to include Iran later this year, and potentially Belarus in the future, the organization is primed to become more assertive on the world stage. Indeed, this June, Tehran proposed that the SCO adopt a single currency and expressed hopes that the group can become a "concert of non-Western great powers."

Within both blocs and beyond, it will be increasingly important to observe how much China, Iran, and Russia are able to deepen relations with one another and drive broader alignment among countries that are dissatisfied with U.S. leadership. Similarly, the extent to which China can leverage its close relationship with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to build support among Muslim countries, including with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council, is another variable affecting support for China among developing countries.

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BACKING UP WORDS WITH FORCE

A final component of China's foreign policy rethink concerns military force. Beijing believes that the West is incapable of understanding or sympathizing with what it views as legitimate Russian security concerns. There is no reason for China to assume that the United States and its allies will treat China's concerns any differently. Because diplomacy is not effective, China may need to use force to demonstrate its resolve.

This is particularly true when it comes to Taiwan, and Beijing is now more anxious than ever about U.S. intentions toward the island and what it perceives to be increasing provocations. This has led to discussion among some Chinese foreign policy analysts about whether another Taiwan Strait crisis is imminent and, if so, how China should prepare. Yang Jiechi, a diplomat who serves on China's Politburo, has stated that China will take "firm actions"—including using the military—to safeguard its interests. At the same time, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has engaged in more exercises near Taiwan in an effort to deter potential third-party intervention. These dynamics likely explain why Beijing

is issuing unusually sharp warnings over the visit to Taiwan that Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, is planning, saying that such a trip would "have a severe negative impact on the political foundations of China-U.S. relations."

It would be a mistake to brush aside China's warnings—and its threats of military action—simply because prior warnings have failed to materialize. Although the prospect of an invasion of Taiwan remains remote, Beijing has numerous paths to escalate short of outright conflict, including sending jets to fly over Taiwanese territory. And if Beijing did take more drastic action out of frustration with recent U.S. behavior, this could easily provoke a full-blown crisis.

IT'S UP TO XI

Will China's recent efforts to shift the balance of momentum and power in its direction work? It remains to be seen if the GSI will fundamentally alter the international order, or even become a key pillar of China's approach to global governance. China has tried and failed before to drive the discussion on global security, as was the case with its New Security Concept, a security framework that sought greater economic and diplomatic interactions, which was first articulated in 1996. Back then, of course, China had far less economic and diplomatic leverage. And regardless of its ultimate success, the GSI is an important window into how Beijing will seek to steer the conversation on regional and global security after the upcoming 20th Party Congress, which is expected to be held in the fall.

Beijing's efforts to revitalize and expand existing organizations such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization also face obstacles. India, for instance, is a member of both blocs and may constrain any openly anti-American efforts. But even marginal improvements in the capabilities and cohesion of these groupings would help Beijing blunt any coercive or punitive moves that the United States and its allies may make against China in the years ahead.

But perhaps the biggest factor shaping China's strategic environment moving forward is Beijing itself. On paper, one can begin to glimpse the initial outlines of China's readjusted game plan. Deeper ties with the "global South." A repurposing of existing Beijing-led institutions like the SCO. New concepts of security that align with its own vision for international order. Implemented well, this strategy would no doubt complicate U.S. foreign policy. But these efforts

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take considerable time, and they could unravel if Beijing's increasingly aggressive and coercive behavior against its neighbors generates international pushback or reticence to work with China. Xi's penchant for "own goals" and his dramatic overreach have proved to be the single biggest inhibitor for China's grand strategy. His hunger for power could well doom Chinese foreign policy.

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Nobody Wants the Current World Order

How All the Major Powers—Even the United States—Became Revisionists

SHIVSHANKAR MENON

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The world is between orders; it is adrift. The last coherent response by the international system to a transnational challenge came at the London summit of the G-20 in April 2009, when in the wake of the 2008 financial crash, leaders took steps to avert another Great Depression and stabilize the global banking system. The subsequent international response to climate change, the metastasizing debt crisis in developing countries, and the COVID-19 pandemic can only be described as pathetic.

That failure stems from the fact that fewer and fewer countries, including the ones that built the previous international order, seem committed to maintaining it. The United States led two orders after World War II: a Keynesian one that was not inordinately interested in how states ran their internal affairs in a bipolar Cold War world

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(a socialist India, therefore, could be the largest recipient of World Bank aid in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s), and, after the Cold War, a neoliberal one in a unipolar world that ignored national sovereignty and boundaries where it needed to. Both orders professed to be "open, rules-based, and liberal," upholding the values of democracy, so-called free markets, human rights, and the rule of law. In reality, they rested on the dominance and imperatives of U.S. military, political, and economic power. For much of the era that followed the demise of the Soviet Union, most powers, including a rising China, generally went along with the U.S.-led order.

Recent years, however, suggest that this arrangement is a thing of the past. Major powers exhibit what may be called "revisionist" behavior, pursuing their own ends to the detriment of the international order and seeking to change the order itself. Often, revisionism takes the shape of territorial disputes, particularly in the Indo-Pacific: China's friction with its neighbors India, Japan, Vietnam, and others in maritime Asia comes to mind. Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine was a violation of international norms and a further rebuke to the notion that Russia could find a comfortable role within a U.S.-led order in Europe. Revisionism also manifests in the actions of a plethora of other powers, including the growing skepticism about free trade in the United States, the military buildup in once pacifist Japan, and the rearmament of Germany. Many countries are unhappy with the world as they see it and seek to change it to their own advantage. This tendency could lead to a meaner, more contentious geopolitics and poorer global economic prospects. Coping with a world of revisionist powers could be the defining challenge of the years ahead.

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REVISIONISTS HERE, THERE, EVERYWHERE

Few of the world's major powers are content with the international order as it exists. As the sole global superpower, the United States is committed to extending President Joe Biden's domestic agenda under the rubric of "Build Back Better World." The program's name itself indicates that the order the United States has presided over so successfully for more than half a century needs improvement. The foreign policy establishment in the United States seems riven by fault lines separating those who preach a modern form of isolationism and restraint and those who have embarked on an ideological quest to divide the world between democracies and autocracies. The United States has

turned away from international institutions it built, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. It has stepped back from its commitments to free trade by withdrawing from agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The view from Washington has grown darker, with great-power threats looming on the horizon: not only China but also Russia, which has in many ways been expelled from the international order that sought to remake it in the image of the West.

China was the greatest beneficiary of the globalized order led by the United States. It now wants, in President Xi Jinping's words, to "take center stage." Beijing explicitly seeks a rearrangement of the balance of power in Asia and a greater voice for China in international affairs. But Chinese leaders have yet to present an alternative ideology that attracts others or confers legitimacy to China's quest for dominance. Even in its immediate neighborhood, China's influence is contested. Major flashpoints and security dilemmas, including the future of Taiwan and territorial disputes with India and Japan, surround China. These disputes are a consequence of the real ways that China has disrupted the balance of regional and global power. Taken together, China's assertive actions since 2008 make clear that Beijing seeks to change the global order.

For its part, Russia never really fit in the global order that Western powers tried to squeeze it into in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War. Instead, Moscow resents its decline and reduced influence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The invasion of Ukraine is only the latest expression of this sense of grievance, which leads Russia to work with China to undermine U.S. global leadership and to try to shake up Europe, where Russian power still matters both economically and militarily.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to announce that the world had reached a *Zeitenwende*, or turning point. For decades an economic powerhouse with limited political ambitions, Germany is now taking a more assertive regional and international role by seeking to build up its military, arm Ukraine, and reassess its significant relationships with China and Russia. The fear of abandonment that the Donald Trump presidency induced in U.S. allies, such as Germany and Japan, has encouraged many of them to beef up their security capabilities.

Japan has reassessed its role in the region and the global order thanks to China's rise. Japan is in transition from an economy-focused, pacifist,

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noninterventionist power burdened by the legacy of World War II to a much more normal country, looking after its own security interests and taking a leading role in the Indo-Pacific. Shinzo Abe, the recently assassinated former prime minister, both embodied and made possible this shift, which now enjoys broadening public support. Japan's vocal commitment to the principle of a free and open Indo-Pacific, the Quad (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a partnership with Australia, India, and the United States), and other initiatives arises from its fear of both China's rise and the United States' possible retrenchment. India, which embraced and benefited from the U.S.-led liberal international order after the Cold War, remains a dissatisfied member. Its quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is the most visible example of India's desire to have a bigger say in the international system, commensurate with its economic and geopolitical weight.

LOSING FAITH

If major powers harbor doubts about the rules-based order, weaker countries have steadily lost faith in the legitimacy and fairness of the international system. This is certainly true of countries in the global South. They have seen the UN, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, G-20, and others fail to act on issues of development and, more urgently, the debt crisis plaguing developing countries—a crisis made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic and food and energy inflation caused by the Ukraine war. According to the IMF, over 53 countries are now at risk of serious debt crises.

That recent history of economic failure is compounded by the record, just in this century, of serial invasions, interventions, attempts at regime change, and covert interference engineered by major powers. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is only the most recent and egregious example of such violations of national sovereignty, but many Western powers have also been guilty of these actions. This behavior has led many developing countries to feel even more insecure and to doubt the international order.

Confidence in the pillars of that system is eroding. It has been several years since economic sanctions or military actions against particular countries were taken to the UN Security Council or other multilateral forums for approval. Instead, sanctions regimes and military interventions rely on the force of U.S. or Western power for their efficacy. The fractious nature of major power relations has made

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international institutions progressively less effective. With international law not constraining the actions of the powerful, the legitimacy of these institutions has steadily declined. Long-established norms are beginning to fray; see, for instance, the increased likelihood of nuclear proliferation in Northeast Asia, where Japanese leaders are more willing to discuss acquiring nuclear submarines and the return of U.S. nuclear weapons to the region.

A DANGEROUS WORLD

A kind of anarchy is creeping into international relations—not anarchy in the strict sense of the term, but rather the absence of a central organizing principle or hegemon. No single power can dictate the terms of the current order, and the major powers do not subscribe to a clear set of principles and norms; it's hard to establish the rules of the road when so many countries are on their own paths. In both word and deed, China and Russia today question major aspects of the Western liberal order, particularly its norms relating to universal human rights and the obligations of states. They invoke the principle of state sovereignty as a shield to operate as they wish while seeking to set new rules in domains such as cyberspace and new technologies. But they do not yet offer an alternative, or one that is sufficiently attractive to others. Indeed, their treatment of their neighbors—in Ukraine, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea and on the India-China border—suggests an overwhelming reliance on hard military and economic power to the detriment of norms and institutions.

Equally, it is misguided to see today another Cold War defined by the sharp bipolarity of two blocs: a "free world" and a realm of "autocracies." The transatlantic alliance has consolidated, and China and Russia appear united in an alliance of animus against the West, but this is far from another Cold War. Several democracies increasingly display the characteristics of autocratic states. The world's reactions to the Ukraine war and Western sanctions on Russia show that there is no unified bloc outside the transatlantic alliance. The economic interdependence of China and the United States has no precedent in the Cold War, when the chief adversaries were poles apart. Besides, there is no equivalent to the ideological alternatives posed by the Cold War rivals, the United States and the Soviet Union; nothing like the appeal of communism and socialism to developing countries in the 1950s and 1960s is apparent today. The prime authoritarian,

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China, does not offer an ideological or a systemic alternative but attracts other countries with financial, technological, and infrastructure promises and projects, not principles.

Instead, geopolitics grows more fractured and less cohesive. A world of revisionists is one in which each country goes its own way. The globalized world economy is fragmenting into regional trading blocs, with partial decoupling attempted in the areas of high technology and finance and ever fiercer contention between the powers for economic and political primacy. In the process, a much more dangerous world is emerging.

COPING MECHANISMS

States must learn to cope with this world of revisionist powers, a world between orders, and prepare for an uncertain future. One solution is to turn inward. China, India, the United States, and others have all done so in recent years, stressing self-reliance in one form or another: China's "dual circulation" model, Biden's pledge to "build back better," and India's commitment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi to pursue *atmanirbharta*, or self-reliance. At the same time as they want to become more economically independent, states also want to be more militarily secure. All of the major powers have sought to expand their defense and nuclear capabilities. Global defense spending crossed $2 trillion for the first time in 2021 despite the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another response to a world of revisionism is for states to forge ad hoc coalitions. The last decade has brought a rash of plurilateral and multilateral arrangements—including the Quad, BRICS (a partnership featuring Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the I2U2 grouping featuring India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. Each problem seems to birth a new abbreviation. These arrangements are expedient and serve particular ends, and although they might help tighten certain bilateral relationships, they do not come close to resembling the more rigid alliances or blocs of the Cold War era.

Inevitably, many middling and smaller powers will straddle divides and seek to balance their ties to greater powers. The response of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to growing contention between the United States and China, and the consolidation of Israel's ties with the Sunni monarchies in the Gulf states through the Abraham

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Accords are examples of this trend. Most recently, many African, Asian, and Latin American countries with strong ties to the West resisted joining sanctions against Russia after it invaded Ukraine. Such balancing and hedging behavior will encourage the pursuit of local solutions to local problems, whether in the form of regional economic and trading arrangements or in locally negotiated solutions to political disputes.

Yet action at the local level is insufficient for grappling with big global problems. Take, for instance, the debt crisis. Sri Lanka's debt default and economic crisis have led the island nation to lean on neighbors in the subcontinent, with India providing food and fuel supplies and credit to the tune of $3.8 billion. Major foreign lenders, including in China and in the West, have yet to reschedule Sri Lanka's debt. For years, wealthy countries have refused to act on calls to reschedule or cancel the debts of developing countries teetering on the precipice of default. Nobody looks likely to offer indebted developing countries a soft landing. More iterations of Sri Lanka's collapse may follow. In effect, a world of revisionists is a world between orders where the great issues of the age—uneven development, climate change, and pandemics—are not addressed.

IN LIMBO

As the old order disintegrates and the new one struggles to be born, the advantage lies with states that clearly understand the balance of forces and have a conception of a cooperative future order that serves the common good. Unfortunately, the capacities of many major powers have diminished, and many of their leaders exhibit little interest in foreign affairs, managing crises, or solving transnational problems, precisely when widespread revisionism makes crises more likely and dangerous. As a consequence of their contentious domestic politics, none of the significant revisionist powers, each of which wishes to change the international system, has a compelling vision of what that change might be. Nor is the rapidly shifting balance of power likely to provide the basis for a stable order for some time. Instead, the powers will probably muddle along from crisis to crisis as their dissatisfaction with the international system and with one another grows, in a form of motion without movement.

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China's New Vassal

How the War in Ukraine Turned Moscow Into Beijing's Junior Partner

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The war in Ukraine has cut Russia off from much of the Western world. Barraged by sanctions, denounced in international media, and ostracized from global cultural events, Russians are feeling increasingly alone. But the Kremlin can rely on at least one major pillar of support: China. Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine has forced Russia to turn to its fellow Eurasian giant, hat in hand.

In the twentieth century, the Soviet Union viewed China—at least until the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s—as a poorer cousin, a country to be steered and helped along in its fitful progress toward respectability. Decades later, the tables have turned decisively. China has for some time boasted a more robust and dynamic economy, greater technological prowess, and more global political and economic clout than Russia. That asymmetry is destined to become only more pronounced in the coming years as Putin's regime depends on Beijing for its survival.

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China will likely gobble up more of Russia's overall trade. It will become an essential market for Russian exports (notably natural resources) while Russian consumers will increasingly rely on Chinese goods. And it will take advantage of Russia's predicament to assert the renminbi as both a dominant regional and major international currency.

To keep China happy, Russian leaders will have little choice but to accept unfavorable terms in commercial negotiations, to support Chinese positions in international forums such as the United Nations, and even to curtail Moscow's relations with other countries, such as India and Vietnam. In the writing of many Western analysts, China and Russia often appear as a pair, two great authoritarian powers seeking to revise the international order. But theirs is not a relationship of equals. The Kremlin's dependence on China will turn Russia into a useful instrument in a larger game for Zhongnanhai, a tremendous asset in Beijing's competition with Washington.

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CAUGHT OFF GUARD

Before the unprovoked Russian attack on Ukraine on February 24, Chinese diplomats and intelligence officers had tried to make sense of the large buildup of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine and to assess U.S. warnings that a war was in the offing. Beijing was decidedly skeptical of the alarms that Washington sounded, assuming, like many European governments, that the costs of the invasion for Russia would far outweigh any potential benefits. Despite speculation that Putin at least partially informed Chinese President Xi Jinping of his plan ahead of time, the outbreak of the war appeared to startle China and presented it with a difficult quandary: What position should it take? If China backed Russia, it could expose itself to sanctions and lose access to Western technology and markets, an unpalatable prospect. But if China decried Putin's actions, it could jeopardize its ties to Russia.

Beijing sees its relationship with Moscow as being of paramount importance for several reasons. The two countries share a sprawling 4,200 kilometer border. Their economic relationship is perfectly complementary: Russia is rich in natural resources but needs technology and investments, while China can offer technology and investments but needs natural resources. Russia is also a key source of sophisticated arms for China, a flow of weapons that has grown in the last decade. As authoritarian states, both countries support each other inside international institutions, chief among them the UN Security Council.

They refrain from criticizing each other on human rights issues and take similar approaches on many global issues, such as setting standards for the governance of the Internet, which both countries think should be more tightly controlled at the national level. Xi and Putin have a close relationship, sharing an at once nostalgic and resentful desire to return their countries to prior states of grandeur. The bilateral relationship is animated by a sense of grievance and purpose—directed chiefly at the United States, which China and Russia accuse of seeking to deny them their rightful standing in the world—a sentiment that has grown only more powerful as the Chinese and Russian political systems have become beholden to the personalist rule of Xi and Putin.

These considerations shaped China's predictable response to the February invasion of Ukraine. Beijing turned to its tried and true approach during previous crises sparked by the Kremlin's adventurism, such as the 2008 war in Georgia, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. China doggedly straddled the fence. With Ukrainian and Western interlocutors, Chinese officials noted that their government supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and sought a swift end to the war. With Russian counterparts, Chinese officials stressed that close relations with Russia remain unperturbed, that Beijing opposed the West's unilateral sanctions, and that it accepted the Russian position that the expansion of NATO and Washington's zeal to push U.S.-led military alliances around the world had precipitated the conflict.

Western attempts to get China off this fence have so far failed. Chinese leaders do not think that they have much to gain from taking a stance critical of Russia's actions. They know perfectly well that the root causes of disagreements between their country and the West, as led by the United States, will not disappear if Beijing sides with Ukraine. China also fears the potential collapse of Putin's regime under the weight of unprecedented economic sanctions, an outcome that would be clearly counter to Chinese interests. China sees a Russia hostile to the West as an asset, and a new regime in Moscow with pro-Western leanings would be a strategic nightmare. Chinese leaders are also aware that they are unlikely to change Russian thinking about Ukraine; Putin believes the war is essential for securing his country and his own legacy. Additionally, China does not have the capabilities or experience to play a meaningful role in negotiations in the war. As a result, Xi and his foreign policy team have not even attempted to assist in mediation.

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SITTING PRETTY

China is threading a needle, refusing to pressure Russia but also trying to avoid possible economic consequences imposed by the West. It has chosen to follow the strictures of the sanctions and U.S. export controls religiously—at least for now. Many Chinese companies have frozen their projects in Russia or are suspending their operations. Similarly, Chinese state-owned energy behemoths have been reluctant to snap up the Russian assets (now available at steep discounts) of Western companies, such as BP and Shell, fearing exposure to future U.S. sanctions.

But China's compliance with the sanctions doesn't mean that Beijing is not supporting Moscow economically. If anything, its support is stronger. China has taken advantage of the economic disruption of the war, positioning itself as an alternative market for Russian goods that used to be sold in European markets. It has fully exploited opportunities to buy Russian commodities on the cheap through short-term arrangements that do not risk sanction violations.

Since February, China has increased its purchases of Russian hydrocarbons. As Europe cuts its dependence on Russian energy and other mineral resources, the Kremlin has few options but to redirect its exports to Asia—mostly to China, a natural choice because of geography, existing land-based pipelines in addition to sea trade, and its ability to provide payment instruments in yuan as an alternative to those tied to U.S. dollars, euros, Japanese yen, Swiss francs, or British pounds. This trend is already underway. Over the last seven months, Russian exports to China have grown by 48.8 percent to $61.45 billion, reflecting not only a spike in global commodity prices but also increased shipments of Russian oil.

Since 2014, Chinese goods have been gradually replacing European ones in the Russian market, and in 2016, China for the first time overtook Germany as Russia's major source of industrial tools. The combined effect of rising logistical costs and sanctions will limit the availability of many European goods in Russia, so Russian consumers and businesses will ultimately switch to more Chinese alternatives. In fact, in the past seven months, imports from China to Russia have grown 5.2 percent to $36.3 billion. As China becomes Russia's main trading partner for both exports and imports for Russia, more of this activity will be conducted in renminbi. The Chinese currency will become the de facto reserve currency for Russia even without being fully convertible,

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increasing Moscow's dependence on Beijing. This shift is already well underway, as evidenced by the exponential growth in the volume of renminbi trade in the Moscow stock exchange, which has, for the first time, overtaken euro trade.

Such dealings with China will be costly for Russia. China won't be able to make up for Russia's losses in European markets. Moreover, Moscow's dependence on Beijing will grant China tremendous leverage, and it will be able to extract concessions from Russia that previously would have been seen as absurdly one-sided. For instance, in current negotiations over a new pipeline that will connect gas fields in Western Siberia to the Chinese market, Beijing will be able to enforce a price formula that benefits Chinese customers, makes the renminbi the contract currency, and limits its legal obligation to buy only the bare minimum of the pipeline's capacity. Additional gas purchases are thus subject to Beijing's desire (or lack thereof) to buy. Moscow is likely to agree to these conditions—it has no alternative—providing Beijing not only with cheap gas but with future leverage in its negotiations with suppliers of liquefied natural gas, such as Qatar and the United States.

Just a year ago, such conditions would have been unacceptable to the Kremlin. But now Russia's options are evaporating, giving China the upper hand. Russian officials are not blind to this dynamic, but war has forced a grudging pragmatism on the Kremlin. As long as China provides a cash flow that can keep the regime afloat and sustain its confrontation with the West, the Kremlin will accept Chinese demands. For China, the main challenge will be managing the risk of U.S. retaliatory measures, such as secondary sanctions on potential Chinese transactions with sanctioned Russian entities or violations of export control regimes. But Chinese leaders are hopeful that they will escape provoking their U.S. counterparts if their business with Russia doesn't explicitly violate sanctions. The United States, they reason, is unlikely to start a trade war with the second biggest global economy amid a looming recession in the vain pursuit of trying to break Putin's war machine.

ADVANTAGE BEIJING

In Moscow, reality is kicking in. Even before the war in Ukraine, the Sino-Russian relationship had been increasingly one-sided. Many Russian officials, including in the highest echelons of power, feared that getting closer to China—without simultaneously improving relations with Western countries and making the Russian economy

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more competitive—would end up restricting Russia's strategic autonomy. But ties with China nevertheless grew steadily. Before Putin's annexation of Crimea in 2014, China accounted for around ten percent of Russia's total trade; by the end of 2021, China accounted for 18 percent. That figure is only likely to climb in the wake of the war in Ukraine. It's not unrealistic to imagine a near future when China controls over half of Russia's trade flows and has become a major source of technology in important areas such as telecommunications, transport, and energy production. In such a scenario, Beijing would have tremendous leverage over Russia that it wouldn't be shy to use. For example, in the future China could ask Russia to abandon its defense ties with India and Vietnam or to be vocal in its support for China's territorial disputes in the South China Sea and its claim over Taiwan.

The schism with the West will not be repaired as long as Putin is in the Kremlin and probably even beyond his rule. Russia is turning into a giant Eurasian Iran: fairly isolated, with a smaller and more technologically backward economy thanks to its hostilities to the West but still too big and too important to be considered irrelevant. China will be Russia's biggest external partner, a major buyer of exports, a major source of imports, and a major diplomatic partner (particularly as India continues to drift away from Russia toward democracies in the Indo-Pacific and Europe). The aging ruling elite in the Kremlin, myopically fixated on Washington, will be even more eager to serve as China's handmaidens as it rises to become the archrival of the United States.

China will benefit greatly. Beijing is unlikely to bail Moscow out or significantly help modernize the Russian economy. China will, however, do enough to sustain a friendly regime in the Kremlin—and advance Chinese national interests—by purchasing Russian natural resources at knockdown prices, expanding the market for Chinese technology, promoting Chinese technological standards, and making the renminbi the default regional currency of northern Eurasia. Given its growing leverage, Beijing will be able to extract from Moscow something that was unthinkable a year ago: access to the most sophisticated Russian weapons and their designs, preferential access to the Russian Arctic, the accommodation of Chinese security interests in Central Asia, and Russia's support—as a permanent member of the UN Security Council—for China's positions in all regional and global issues, most notably in territorial disputes between China and its neighbors. In effect, the Kremlin will have protected itself from Western pressure

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at the expense of losing a very high degree of its strategic autonomy. This state of affairs is likely to persist potentially beyond Putin's rule. China could overreach by pushing Russia too hard and too fast, which might result in a nationalistic backlash and put pressure on Putin to resist Chinese demands. But a real change in the relationship would require a willingness on the Kremlin's part to fully free itself from China's firm embrace and Western openness to reengage with Russia. And for the foreseeable future, neither of those developments seems likely.

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