



HOOVER DIGEST

RESEARCH + COMMENTARY
ON PUBLIC POLICY

WINTER 2024 NO.1

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ON THE COVER

“Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live forever.” These famous lines from a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930)—titled, perhaps a bit obviously, “Vladimir Ilych Lenin”—express a wish for eternal remembrance of the Bolshevik revolutionary he adored. Lenin’s embalmed body has been on public view in Moscow for a hundred years, since his death in January 1924. Mayakovsky was at times a symbol of radical liberation and, at other times, of an oppressive state. He killed himself in 1930 amid personal and political tumult. See story, page 198.



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Winter 2024

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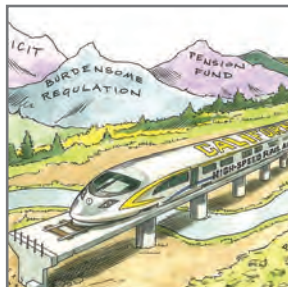
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Inflation: No Mystery Here

There are lots of theories about what triggered the recent bout of inflation. But the strongest one is this: that government created trillions in debt with no thought of paying it back.

By John H. Cochrane

As inflation eases, representatives of different schools of thought are taking victory laps. But who really deserves one? What have we learned about inflation?

I think the episode is a smashing confirmation of the fiscal theory of the price level. Where did inflation come from? Our government borrowed about \$5 trillion and wrote people checks. Crucially, and unlike in 2008, there was no mention of how the new debt would be repaid, no promise of debt reduction later. The spending was couched as an “emergency expenditure” not going through the usual budget process or requiring offsets. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen argued that “with interest rates at historic lows”—they were then—debt isn’t a concern, so “the smartest thing we can do is act big.”

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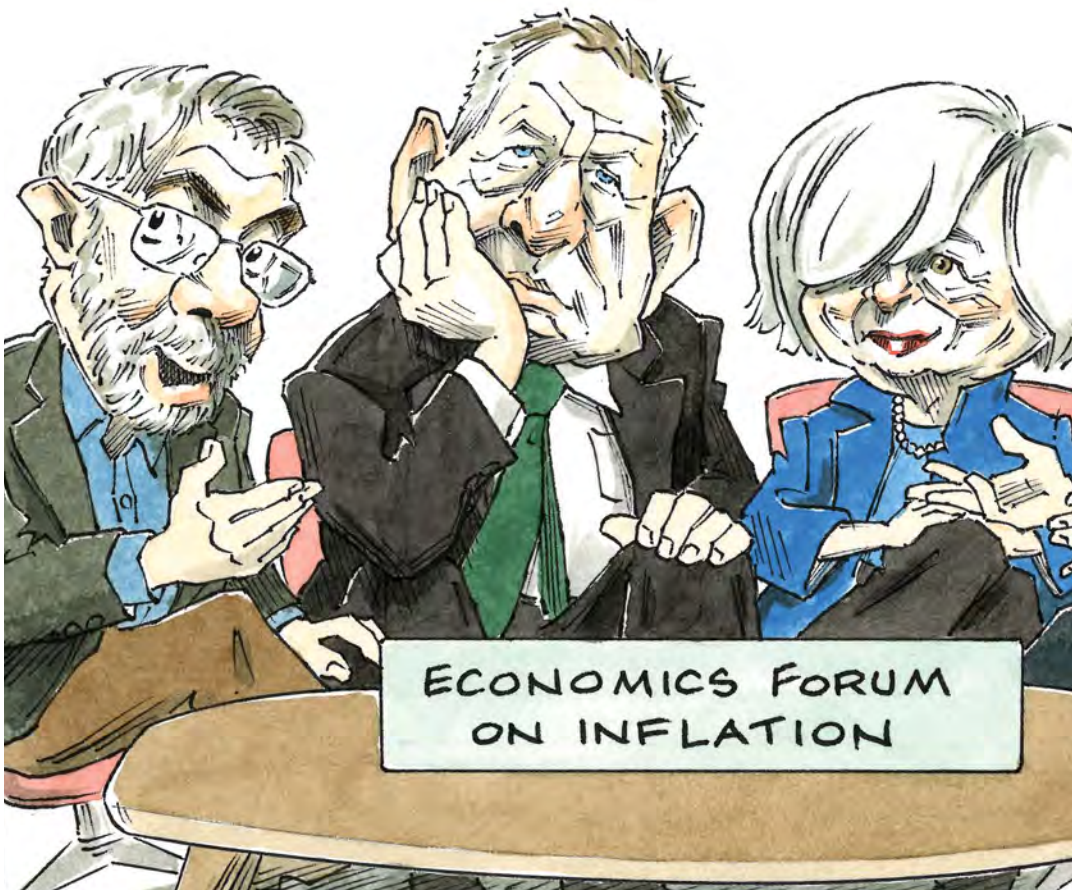
People could have looked at all this new debt, thought it would be repaid with interest, and therefore regarded it as a good investment. They didn't. They chose to try to spend the new debt rather than save it. But we can't all sell, so that drives up prices.

A one-time \$5 trillion fiscal blowout causes a one-time rise in the level of prices.

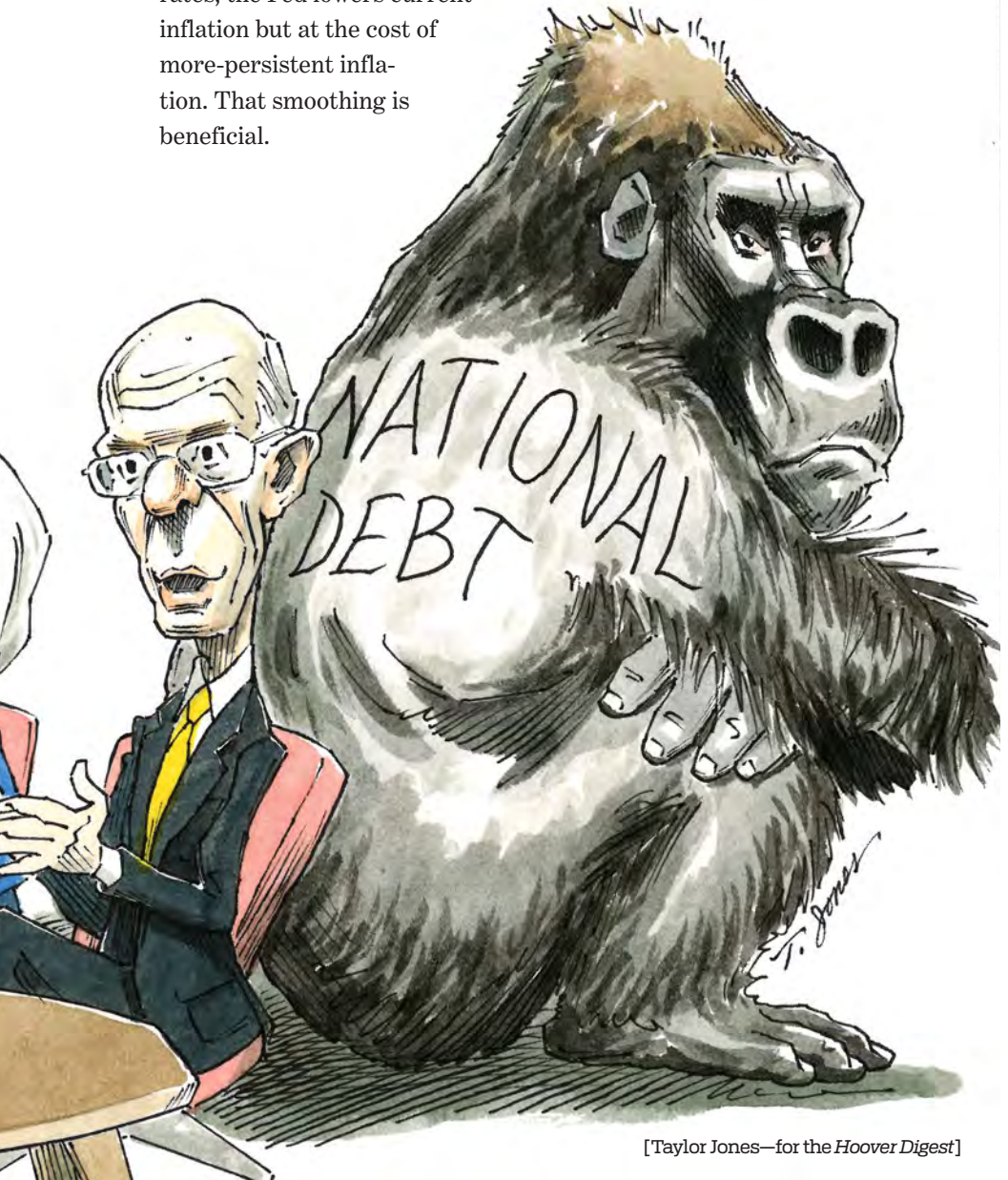
provides a straightforward answer. A one-time \$5 trillion fiscal blowout causes a one-time rise in the level of prices, just enough to inflate away the value of the debt by \$5 trillion. Then inflation stops, even if the Federal Reserve does nothing.

Inflation peaked in June 2022 and continues to ease, with interest rates below inflation until April 2023 and no recession.

Why? Again, fiscal theory



The Fed is still important in fiscal theory. The Fed bought about \$3 trillion of the new debt and converted it to interest-paying reserves. Giving people checks backed by reserves is arguably a more powerful inducement to spend than giving people Treasury bonds. Now, by raising interest rates, the Fed lowers current inflation but at the cost of more-persistent inflation. That smoothing is beneficial.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

These are core propositions of fiscal theory, stated ahead of time and at odds with conventional theories.

What of supply shocks, as espoused by “team transitory”—for example, Alan Blinder recently in the *Wall Street Journal*? In this view, as Blinder describes it, “most of the rising inflation wasn’t due to an overheated economy fueled by monetary and fiscal policy, but rather to several ‘special factors’ that would disappear on their own. Principal among them were rising prices for food and energy and supply-side bottlenecks from the pandemic.”

There are two problems with this view. First, it confuses relative prices with the price level. If televisions are in short supply, the price will rise relative to other goods and wages. A supply shock can’t make the price of everything go up unless the government gives people enough money or debt to afford the higher prices. Second, it predicts that the price level, not the inflation rate, will return to where it came from—that any inflation should be followed by a period of deflation.

Monetarists also took a victory lap, noting the \$4 trillion rise in M2 between the onset of the pandemic and inflation’s breakout in early 2021. This rise was almost mechanical: the Treasury deposited checks in people’s bank accounts, which are part of M2. After decades, M2 finally seemed to have something to do with inflation.

But does money alone drive inflation? Suppose there had been no deficit, and the Fed had done another \$5 trillion of quantitative easing, buying \$5 trillion of bonds in exchange for \$5 trillion in reserves. Would people with

\$5 trillion more cash but \$5 trillion less Treasury bonds, and thus no net increase in wealth, have tried to spend money, driving up prices? We

Witch hunts for “greed,” “price gouging,” and “monopoly” have followed inflation for centuries.

pretty much know the answer—similar QE throughout the 2010s had basically no effect on inflation. In the monetarist view, more money and less bonds has exactly the same effect as more money and more bonds. In the fiscal view, overall government debt, including reserves, matters, not its particular maturity.

The Phillips Curve remains the predominant mode of thinking about inflation, but this view has utterly failed. In this view, inflation is driven by output and employment. A year ago, a loud chorus said that inflation couldn’t be tamed without a recession, and without interest rates substantially above

inflation, as in the early 1980s. Yet inflation has eased, with interest rates barely poking above inflation at all, and no recession in sight.

Witch hunts for “greed,” “price gouging,” and “monopoly” have followed inflation for centuries. They too at best confuse relative prices for the level of all prices and wages.

A fiscal point of view isn’t encouraging about the future, however. Inflation is easing but remains high. The United States is running a scandalous \$1.5 trillion deficit with

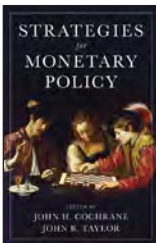
unemployment at 3.8 percent (as of August) and no temporary crisis justifying such huge borrowing. Unfunded entitlements loom over

any plan for sustainable government finances. The Congressional Budget Office projects constantly growing deficits, and even its warnings assume nothing bad happens to drive another bout of borrowing.

Do people believe that the United States now can raise future taxes over spending by \$1.5 trillion a year to finance new debt without more inflation? When the next crisis comes and Washington wants to borrow, say, \$10 trillion for more bailouts, stimulus, transfers, or perhaps a real war, will markets have faith that the United States can repay that additional debt? If not, another cycle of inflation will surely erupt, no matter what the Fed does with interest rates. ■

When the next crisis comes, will markets have faith that the United States can repay that additional debt?

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Sound as a Dollar?

Rising US government debt threatens the value of the US currency. Investors around the world are acting accordingly.

By Kevin A. Hassett

With Fitch's shocking downgrade of the United States' credit rating last summer, the question of whether the United States will default on its debts in the coming years has become painfully urgent. Just how pressing the question is can be shown by examining the debt held by the public relative to gross domestic product from 1939 to 2022 and then projecting its growth through 2053, using the latest Congressional Budget Office forecast. Today, this measure is almost as high as it was at the end of World War II, and it's on track to almost double by 2053. To put the 2053 number of 194.6 percent in perspective: it would be roughly 75 percent higher than the peak of Weimar Germany's indebtedness before it experienced hyperinflation.

But perhaps Weimar Germany was an outlier. Such spikes in debt are common throughout history. The question, of course, is what typically happens next.

Governments have often found themselves with massive amounts of debt after wars or natural disasters. As a practical matter, a government in such

Kevin A. Hassett is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and recently served as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers.

a situation has but four options. It can, as Senator Bernie Sanders might recommend, confiscate the property of citizens to repay the debt. Exactly this approach, Aristotle writes, was adopted in his time by the Ephesians, who seized the jewelry of the rich women of Ephesus and used it to retire government debts. The second approach would be to dramatically cut spending, possibly combining this with option one. The third approach is more direct.

A government can simply default on its debt by refusing to pay it back or by modifying the terms to extend the repayment

History corroborates a connection between crisis and exploding debt.

period indefinitely. But by far the most common approach—option four—has been currency debasement.

To begin a history of currency debasement, one must start with the aptly named Dionysius I of Syracuse. The profligate and ruthless tyrant, who purportedly drank himself to death, employed mercenaries to take command of Syracuse and used them to terrorize his own people and even declare war on Carthage. Mercenaries and wars, of course, can be quite costly, so Dionysius quickly found himself with an unmanageable debt. In response, he laid out the playbook that governments have reliably followed ever since. He ordered, on pain of capital punishment, that all money be turned over to the government. He then reminted the coins and changed the numbers, doubling their value. One drachma was suddenly worth two. With this debased currency, according to a historical account by historian Max Winkler, he “repaid” his debts.

History corroborates the connection between war or crisis and exploding debt. When Rome began the First Punic War, Winkler reports, its coins contained twelve ounces of metal. After the war, Rome reduced the metal content of its currency to two ounces. After the Second Punic War, the metal content was reduced to one ounce. After the Third Punic War, it dropped all the way to half an ounce. Each time, the government repaid its debts, but lenders were left significantly worse off. Rather than engage in outright default, Rome repeated this practice throughout its history, perhaps because Roman law required that someone who reneged on his debts be disemboweled.

Sovereign default has historically put a heavy burden on the citizenry. But as international capital markets evolved, default or debasement became even more common, as it is often more politically feasible for a politician to cheat foreign investors than to cheat his own citizens. But with this increasing



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

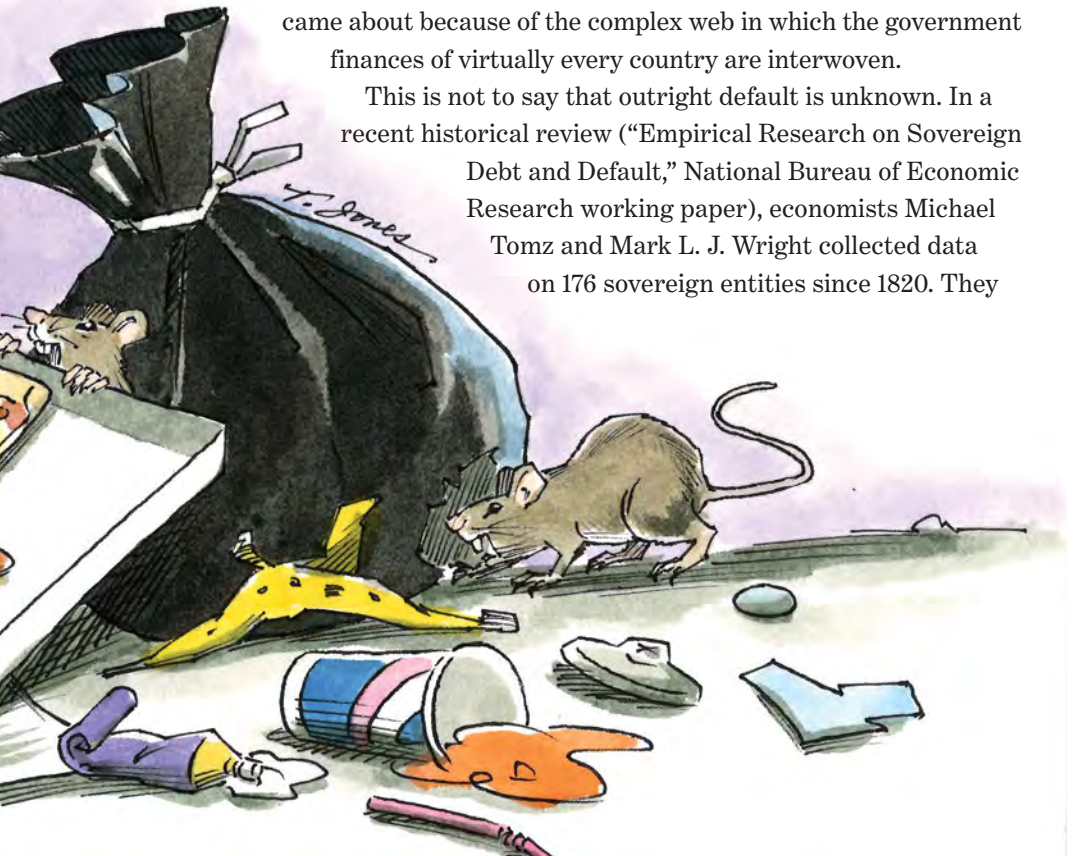
integration of capital markets came an increased sensitivity of the global economy to localized devaluations or defaults.

The worst modern example of this, of course, was the collapse of Weimar Germany, which led to global economic calamity. The fact that the victorious Allies extracted heavy reparations from the Germans is well known. What is perhaps less understood is that the reparations were needed

Rather than engage in outright default, Rome repeatedly debased its currency.

to pay the interest on the massive debts the Allies had incurred during World War I. When the deutschmark dropped to a trillionth of its initial value, and the Germans' ability to pay reparations evaporated, the entire international financial house of cards collapsed. Suddenly, in 1931, international capital flows seized up, and many sovereigns stopped payment on their debts. According to a fascinating IMF study, this episode came about because of the complex web in which the government finances of virtually every country are interwoven.

This is not to say that outright default is unknown. In a recent historical review ("Empirical Research on Sovereign Debt and Default," National Bureau of Economic Research working paper), economists Michael Tomz and Mark L. J. Wright collected data on 176 sovereign entities since 1820. They



found that there had been 248 defaults and that these tended to occur in waves, the most recent of which was just a few decades ago. Given the global explosion of debt after the COVID-19 pandemic, another wave is not unthinkable.

Fine, a skeptic might say, but the United States would never default on its debt. It will somehow find a way, as it always has. But the United States *has* defaulted on its debts, or technically on its promises to pay, four times already. The first default happened during the Civil War, when the convertibility of the currency into precious metals was suspended. A similar decoupling of the currency from the promise to deliver precious metal happened as recently as 1971.

Our skeptic might then turn to the US postwar experience. We honored our debt from World War II, and the economy boomed. Perhaps we can just return to the playbook that delivered that miracle?

Perhaps not. A recent study by economists Julien Acalin and Laurence M. Ball (“Did the US Really Grow Out of Its World War II Debt?” NBER working paper) looked at the methods that the US government used to restore balance and found that it relied on three tools and a bit of good fortune.

Given the global explosion of debt after COVID-19, another wave of defaults is not unthinkable.

The first tool was our old friend, currency debasement. The government printed money, inflation was higher than expected, and bondholders were paid back with devalued money, just as in Syracuse back in the day. The second tool was something the literature refers to as “financial repression.” The government ordered financial institutions to hold large quantities of US debt while it kept the interest rate close to zero. Thus the runaway expense was controlled, and the fact that low interest rates created little demand for our debt was neutralized. The third tool was austerity. The government recognized that it was in a perilous state, and so it regularly ran surpluses. Finally, the economy helped. Until the 1970s, the economy grew at a rate that was significantly higher than the interest rate. Higher incomes made it easier to retire debt.

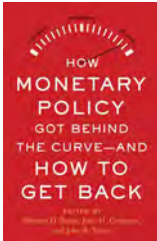
Today, our productivity slowdown and aging population make it unlikely that the economic-growth rate will exceed the interest rate; and financial repression, while an available tool, looks to be a dangerous one in the wake of the failure of Silicon Valley Bank and other banks. Congress could decide to run large surpluses in order to pay back the debt, but neither political

party seems willing to propose such a thing, which leaves us with the most commonly relied-upon tool: inflation and consequent currency devaluation.

In other words, we know how this story has to end. Markets do as well. At the start of the previous administration, the price of gold was about \$1,200 per ounce. Today it is closing in on \$2,000. But gold is illiquid. People would prefer a currency that can be used for everyday transactions but is not exposed to what we might call the “Dionysian risks” associated with government fiat. As a result, alternative, more-liquid stores of wealth have blossomed on the Internet. Back at the start of 2017, Bitcoin was trading at \$1,000 per coin. Last fall, it was trading at close to \$30,000.

One might consider these quests for dollar alternatives to be some sort of speculative bubble. But a look at the exploding US debt and a careful study of history suggest that investors around the world are engaged in a sensible flight to relative safety. ■

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Twisting the Tax Code

The Biden administration is colluding with other countries so that Congress feels pressured to accept a global tax code. American voters and lawmakers never agreed to that.

By Aharon Friedman and Joshua D. Rauh

Our Constitution gives Congress the exclusive right (subject to a president's veto) to impose taxes on the American people. The right of a country to make its own tax law is an important aspect of sovereignty. These United States were founded upon this principle. Taxation without representation prompted the Boston Tea Party and the American Revolution.

Sovereignty means respecting the right of each country to make its own rules. However, the Biden administration, as reflected in a recent article by former Treasury officials Natasha Sarin and Kimberly Clausing, in defending its efforts to enact a global tax code advances a novel explanation of sovereignty and the Constitution: that the agreement negotiated by the administration expands American sovereignty by giving Congress the freedom to choose higher tax rates.

Aharon Friedman is a director and senior tax counsel at the Federal Policy Group. Joshua D. Rauh is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Ormond Family Professor of Finance at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. He leads the Hoover Institution State and Local Government Initiative.



A FOOT IN THE DOOR: Google has operations in countries such as Ireland, with its Dublin headquarters shown here. The Biden administration is crafting a formal agreement with the rest of the world to impose minimum tax rates; the goal is to increase taxes on US firms' domestic profits. [Artur Widak—NurPhoto]

The fact the Biden administration feels it necessary to craft a formal agreement with the rest of the world to impose minimum tax rates proves that not all countries prefer higher taxes. Forcing other countries to enact one's own policy preferences in order to make it easier to enact those policies at home is not sovereignty but imperialism.

The Biden administration's drive for a Global Tax Code, starting with major corporations, violates our Constitution. By colluding with foreign nations, it aims to do what Congress has refused to do: increase taxes on US firms' domestic profits. The administration has proposed trillions of dollars of tax hikes in

Not all countries want higher taxes.

its annual proposed budgets, but a Congress controlled by Democrats in the administration's first two years rejected most of those proposals. The administration responded by asking voters to elect a Congress supporting tax increases. Instead, Republicans pledging to oppose tax hikes gained control of the House.

Rather than respect this decision by the American people, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is trying to circumvent the elections and the Constitution by colluding with foreign powers to raise taxes on American companies by having those other countries raise taxes on profits earned in America. She

openly boasts that the agreement leaves congressional Republicans with no choice but to raise taxes on American companies because, otherwise, other countries will seize those taxes. The Godfather might call this an offer Congress cannot refuse.

Sarin and Clausing misleadingly claim that the agreement merely allows a country like France to tax the French subsidiary

Yellen is trying to circumvent elections and the Constitution by colluding with foreign powers.

of a US company to prevent shifting profits out of France. But the agreement does much more. It purports to give the right to France to tax American companies' domestic US profits, as well as those of all its "undertaxed" foreign subsidiaries, as long as the company has any subsidiary in France. France would claim this right if America's tax rate is below the agreed minimum, or America's tax credits are not structured to France's liking, or if America allows its companies access to other countries' tax breaks. The amount France may seize can be many times the French subsidiary's total revenue, let alone profit.

It is true that from time immemorial, France could (in theory) tax or seize assets from French subsidiaries of American companies on any grounds. But it has not done so because every previous president would have retaliated harshly. Yellen is not only refraining from promising to retaliate but actively encouraging such action.

Do Democrats want to set the precedent that if Congress refuses a future Republican president's request to repeal tax provisions beloved by Democrats, like green-energy tax credits, requesting foreign powers to effectively do so is legitimate?

Sarin and Clausing claim that the global tax code would increase federal tax revenue because companies would have less incentive to book profits outside the United States. They ignore the recent conclusion of Congress's nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) that the agreement would cost the United States more than \$50 billion, even if Congress decided to raise taxes on American companies in order to comply, and \$100 billion otherwise because foreign countries raising taxes on American companies will be credited against US taxes.

Sarin and Clausing can disagree with JCT, but their dismissal of JCT scores as arguments by "Republican lawmakers" is disingenuous. And if JCT's score is so unreasonable, Treasury should share its own scores instead of refusing requests from Congress to do so.

Another argument made by Sarin and Clausing is that this deal reduces the competitive disadvantages faced by US companies because of competitors in low-tax or no-tax jurisdictions. But if the United States and Europe impose a higher tax burden on companies than other competitive parts of the world to partially fund their unsustainable budgets, does that then give us the right to gang up on other countries? And if Sarin and Clausing are concerned about companies within the United States that don't have access to profit-shifting to reduce their tax burden, an easy solution to that would be to simplify our tax code to level the playing field against their multinational competitors—but that is only possible if we retain control over our own tax code.

In addition, Sarin and Clausing want us to be upset that “companies pay effective tax rates on their profits . . . lower than that of many middle-class families.” But this is a false comparison. As Milton Friedman wrote, “Corporate officials may sign the check, but the money that they forward to Internal Revenue comes from the corporation's employees, customers, or stockholders.” Not only that, to the extent that individuals own corporate stock, and to the extent that stockholders bear the benefits of lower corporate-tax rates, the corporate tax is only the first layer—they must additionally pay capital-gains tax and/or dividend taxes (20 percent if long term/qualified). Plus, for wealthier shareholders, there is an additional 3.8 percent net-investment tax and the additional 0.9 percent Medicare tax imposed by the Affordable Care Act. State taxes too will kick in.

The authors allege that Republican concerns about sovereignty and the Constitution are just a subterfuge to hide their real motivations. Accusing members of Congress of not even believing their own arguments reflects the contempt for Congress shown by Yellen's Treasury in circumventing Congress and instead asking foreign countries to impose tax increases on American income if Congress refuses to do so. ■

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NATO Holds the Line

Nothing deterred Russia from invading Ukraine, but deterrence didn't fail completely. Vladimir Putin hasn't crossed any NATO borders—so far.

By Rose Gottemoeller

Deterrence clearly failed in Ukraine. In the run-up to Russia's invasion in February 2022, America and its NATO allies took steps to warn Russia of dire consequences, including deep sanctions and political excommunication. None of that mattered to Vladimir Putin.

Some argue that NATO failed to deter Putin because he has nuclear weapons. The Kremlin's nuclear saber-rattling feeds this view, bringing nuclear weapons to public consciousness in a way that they have not been for many years.

And yet, as the war goes on, Russia has indeed been deterred. Although the Russians

Key points

- » America and NATO are assisting Ukraine, not fighting for it. Russia is refraining from striking NATO territory.
- » The fast-moving nature of the war's strike-counterstrike dynamic makes it impossible to see the future.
- » NATO must take pains to bolster proximity deterrence, lest direct confrontation break out.

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



RED LINES: A Polish soldier takes part in NATO exercises in the San Gregorio training area in Spain. Regarding Ukraine, the status quo for America and NATO means assisting Ukraine, but not fighting for it. For Russia, it means not striking NATO territory. [Michał Zieliński—Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum]

rage against the arms and equipment that NATO countries are sending to Ukraine, they have not once touched NATO territory to try to stop the shipments. The Russians brag, often without confirmation, about destroying NATO weapons in storage or on the battlefields in Ukraine, but they have not disrupted transit in NATO countries.

So Russia and NATO countries are equally deterred from direct confrontation, hewing close to the principle that President Biden

laid down at the outset of the invasion: the necessity to avoid a general war in Europe that could escalate into global nuclear annihilation. For America

Although the Russians rage, they have not once touched NATO territory to try to stop arms and equipment.

and NATO, this means assisting Ukraine, but not fighting for it. For Russia, it means not striking NATO territory.

As the war continues, deterrence is taking on a more nuanced and complex character that bears close watching. Take the efforts to continue

Both Moscow and Washington see the need to avoid a general war in Europe that could escalate into global nuclear annihilation.

grain shipments out of Black Sea ports despite the Russians' withdrawal from the unbrokered grain deal. When Russia left the deal in July, it declared a block-

ade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports, threatened commercial vessels with attack, and began bombing Ukrainian ports, destroying grain silos and infrastructure.

Ukraine responded by appealing to NATO allies to support its efforts to ship grain and turning to its ports on the Danube. Although these river ports do not have the capacity of the large Black Sea ports such as Odessa, they do have certain advantages. One is their proximity to the Bosphorus, which shortens the time it takes for ships to exit the Black Sea.

Another is that a NATO country—Romania—is right across the river. NATO has been alert to Russian missiles straying over alliance territory, warning Moscow sharply and keeping its defenses on high alert. Likewise, it has been policing Black Sea airspace adjacent to NATO countries that border the sea—Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey—using a combination of manned aircraft and drones.

These NATO actions are having a deterrence effect that is benefiting Ukraine. The Russians have attacked the Ukrainian Danube ports of IZMAIL

Russia has attacked Ukrainian Danube ports, but not with the massive firepower that has so damaged Odessa.

and Reni, but not with the massive firepower that has so damaged Odessa. Likewise, for the commercial vessels operating out of Ukraine's Danube ports, the presence of NATO

aircraft over their shipping lanes provides some measure of security from Russian attacks.

One might call this “proximity deterrence”: the closer a Ukrainian facility is to NATO territory, the more it will avoid massive Russian missile strikes. The more sea transport lanes there are close to NATO

shores, the more likely vessels operating there will escape Russian attacks.

How long can this more nuanced notion of deterrence survive? After all, it does have limits: NATO is not providing naval escorts for shipping, and Russia and Ukraine are engaged in a strike-counterstrike dynamic that changes day by day. As Russia has struck hard at Ukraine's Black Sea ports, Ukraine has

responded by going after Russian ports and ships. It attacked the port of Novorossiysk on August 4, severely damaging a naval vessel.

It has also targeted Rus-

sian shipping, attacking a tanker near the Kerch Bridge, which links Russia to Crimea, and which Ukraine also damaged in July.

These attacks delivered a clear message to Putin: we are now able and willing to strike back. The Ukrainians are skilled missileers and they are making the most of their indigenous and rapidly evolving capabilities.

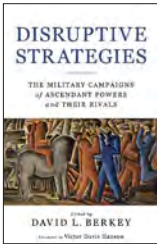
The fast-moving nature of this strike-counterstrike dynamic makes it impossible to see the future. Indeed, on August 13, a Russian naval vessel fired warning shots at a cargo ship headed for Izmail and boarded it for inspection. The Ukrainian government responded by advising ships to sail as close as possible to the northwestern coast of the Black Sea, through the territorial waters of Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania.

As the dynamic continues to evolve, and potentially to spiral, NATO must take pains to bolster proximity deterrence, keeping up its air-policing of Black Sea transit lanes close to NATO states. It must post constant reminders of the NATO promise to defend every inch of the alliance's territory, including Romanian territory across the Danube from Ukrainian ports.

In this way, the alliance can continue to provide the benefits of proximity deterrence—with their inherent limits—to Ukraine's Danube ports and to shipping in and out of the Black Sea. However, were Russia to increase the pressure in that neighborhood, NATO would face growing danger of attacks straying onto its territory. That could be the moment at which NATO-Russia deterrence fails, leading to direct confrontation. The stakes could hardly be higher. Escalation, particularly nuclear escalation, must be avoided at all costs. ■

There is evidence of “proximity deterrence”: the closer a Ukrainian facility is to NATO territory, the more it will avoid massive Russian missile strikes.

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Pushkin Gets the Shove

As Ukraine sheds itself of everything Russian, it's hard times for an imperialist poet.

By Timothy Garton Ash

Last summer, I stood at the corner of what used to be Pushkin Street in Kyiv. Since Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it has been renamed Yevhen Chykalenko Street, after a major figure of the early twentieth-century Ukrainian independence movement. To lovers of literature and opera, canceling Alexander Pushkin, poet and author of *Eugene Onegin*, might seem a bit over the top. Putin, yes, but why Pushkin?

For Ukrainians, however, engaged in an existential struggle for their independence against Russia's war of recolonization, Pushkin is a symbol of the Russian imperialism that has long denied Ukraine's right to a separate national existence. Pushkin was a great poet but he was also a poet

To Ukrainians, Alexander Pushkin symbolizes the Russian imperialism that has long denied Ukraine's right to a separate existence.

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[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

of Russian imperialism, just as Rudyard Kipling was a great poet but also a poet of British imperialism.

Pushkin's "Poltava" depicts the Ukrainian Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa as a fickle traitor to the heroic Russian czar

Peter the Great, who nonetheless triumphed over the Swedes in the 1709 Battle of Poltava—and twelve years later formally founded the Russian Empire.

As Russian forces bombarded Ukraine in 2022, an officially distributed video showed Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov reciting lines from Pushkin's "To the Slandereers of Russia," a poem fulminating against Western supporters of Slavs rebelling against Russia. Cutaways to photos of US President Joe Biden and a G7 summit made the message plain. When Russian forces occupied Kherson, billboards

featuring Pushkin were deployed in a propaganda campaign that proclaimed Russia was “here forever.”

Small wonder some Ukrainians now refer on social media to “Pushkinists” launching missile attacks on their cities. For example: “Pushkinists didn’t allow us to sleep properly—it was very loud in Kyiv.” (After a couple of late-night hours in an air-raid shelter, I didn’t feel all that friendly to Pushkinists myself.)

When Russian forces occupied Kherson, Pushkin’s face appeared on billboards boasting that Russia was “here forever.”

Behind this Ukrainian rejection of Pushkin is a much larger story. With hindsight, we can see that the decline of the Russian Empire has been one of the great drivers of European history over the past forty years. And with foresight, we should expect it to remain one of Europe’s greatest challenges for at least the next twenty years, if not another forty.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Russian Empire continued in a rather peculiar form as the Soviet Union. When the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was founded in 1922, Vladimir Lenin decided it should be a state of notional equality between its constituent union republics. (Josef Stalin, like Putin a hundred years later, wanted Ukraine to be part of the Russian Federation.) After the Second World War, this novel version of empire dominated





IN SYNC: A Russian literacy poster from the 1920s quotes “A Bacchic Song,” a Pushkin poem: “Long live the sun! And down with the night!” Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov set the poem to a choral score in 1876. Russia’s fondness for Pushkin’s outlook and works has made him poet non grata in Ukraine.

[Poster collection—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

Central and East European countries all the way to an Iron Curtain running through the middle of Germany. From Warsaw to Washington, people saw it as both a Soviet and a Russian empire.

In the 1970s, this imperial superpower still seemed to be a formidable rival to the United States, even in parts of Africa and Latin America—but by the 1980s it was already in visible decline. Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempted reforms culminated, between 1989 and 1991, in the most spectacular peaceful collapse of any empire in history. This collapse dissolved not just Soviet/Russian control of Central and Eastern Europe, but also the much older imperial bonds between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Unusually, and precisely because of the complex relationship between Soviet and Russia, it was the leader of the core imperial nation, Russia’s Boris Yeltsin, who gave the final push.

Foolishly, many in the West assumed this was the end of the story, but declining empires don't give up without a struggle. The first signs of a push-back were there already in 1992 in a Russian army occupation of what is still the breakaway territory of Transnistria, at the eastern end of the newly sovereign state of Moldova, as well as subsequently in two brutal wars to subdue Chechnya inside the Russian Federation.

The Soviet collapse severed the much older imperial bonds between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

The empire then struck back decisively, across international frontiers, with the occupation of two large areas of Georgia in 2008; the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014; and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. In his speeches and essays, the Russian leader makes it perfectly clear that his primary reference point is the Russian Empire. Surprised by his boss's decision in February 2022, Foreign Minister Lavrov reportedly muttered to a friendly oligarch that Putin has only three advisers: "Ivan the Terrible. Peter the Great. And Catherine the Great."

This history won't be over even if Ukraine regains every square meter of its sovereign territory, including Crimea. There will still be Belarus, a country of more than nine million people that at the beginning of this decade witnessed one of the most sustained efforts of civil resistance in modern history, against the increasingly autocratic rule of President Alexander Lukashenko. There are the independent post-Soviet states of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, as well as those in Central Asia. Inside the Russian Federation, there are republics such as Chechnya, Dagestan, and Tatarstan. At the moment, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov is one of Putin's most loyal henchmen, but if Russia enters a "time of troubles," Kadyrov might begin to make other calculations.

We in the West should not kid ourselves that we can "manage" the decline of this nuclear-armed empire, any more than European powers could "manage" the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Western democracies have a chronic tendency to overestimate their ability to influence the domestic politics of authoritarian regimes. Our possibilities of direct influence are especially minimal in today's Russia, a personalist dictatorship in an advanced state of paranoia and repression.

After Putin, and perhaps his immediate successors, there should come a moment when we have more possibilities of constructive engagement, and

we should prepare for that. But it will be a long time before Russia finally accepts that it has lost an empire and begins to find a role.

What we can and must do in the meantime is to ensure that those countries that seek a better future outside a declining Russian Empire are able to do so in peace, security, and freedom. Geopolitics, like nature, abhors a vacuum. In the long run, bringing Ukraine and its smaller neighbors into both the European Union and NATO, thus securing them against any future attempt at recolonization, will be a service also to Russia. With the door to empire finally closed, it can start the long walk to nation-statehood. That walk will, however, be especially difficult because, unlike old European states such as France and Portugal, which acquired and then lost overseas empires, Russia has no historically, geographically, or constitutionally well-defined state to return to.

Another post-imperial future was possible. Russian-language literature could have been enriched by the work of Ukrainian and other postcolonial writers, as English literature has been enriched by the work of South Asian,

African, and Caribbean writers. Trying to restore the “Russian world” by force, Putin has destroyed it. In May 2013, 80 percent

***Trying to restore the “Russian world”
by force, Putin has destroyed it.***

of Ukrainians said they had a positive general attitude to Russia. In May 2023, only 2 percent of the Ukrainians that pollsters could still reach gave that answer. And Pushkin Street has been renamed. Putin has done for Pushkin.

Only when Ukraine is securely embraced by both the strong arms of the geopolitical West, the EU, and NATO, will its people be able to sleep easily, as Estonians and Lithuanians do, untroubled by nightly attacks from “Pushkinists.” Then Ukrainians might even go back to reading *Eugene Onegin* with pleasure. ▣

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Cold Comfort

If Cold War truly has returned, so have its many lessons, including this one: authoritarians will be proven wrong.

By Condoleezza Rice and Niall Ferguson

The intensifying rivalry between America and China has led many to speak of a second Cold War. Others reject the analogy. We can say this: the world's two largest economies seem to have little space for cooperation and a great deal of room for conflict.

The greatest difference with the first Cold War is, of course, the origin of this rivalry. After the Second World War, the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, settled quickly into confrontation. They had little in common. The Soviet Union was a military giant but an economic recluse, isolated from most of the global economy.

China, conversely, was brought into the international economy by its own choices under Deng Xiaoping and by the decisions of global capitalists. For thirty years it benefited from integration and access to foreign capital and know-how. Along the way, China acquired an aptitude for indigenous innovation, not just intellectual-property theft.

Condoleezza Rice is the Tad and Dianne Taube Director and the Thomas and Barbara Stephenson Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution. She is the Denning Professor in Global Business and the Economy at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business as well as a professor of political science at Stanford. Niall Ferguson is the Milbank Family Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, where he is chairman of the History Working Group and co-leader of the Hoover History Lab. He also participates in Hoover's task forces on military history, digital currency, global policy, and semiconductors.



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

lives in antagonistic ‘capitalist
with which in the long run
permanent peaceful coexistence...



China had been chipping away at American power for years. But it took the more frontal approach of Xi Jinping, who speaks of surpassing America in frontier technologies and calls the Taiwan Strait Chinese national waters, to shock America and its allies into fully understanding the challenge ahead.

FIVE COLD WAR LESSONS

China has built an impressive global network of telecommunications infrastructure, underwater cables, port access, and military bases (or rights to build them) in client states. With each project, Chinese influence has evolved from pure mercantilism to a desire for political influence. If nothing else, the scale of China’s market has a magnetic attraction.

America has been slow to react. Too often it resorts to public cajoling of other countries to resist Chinese investment, while offering too few alternatives.

The truth is, though, that China’s foreign-investment strategy is beginning to show cracks. Its “loan to own” approach, its reliance on Chinese rather than local workers, and infrastructure construction failures—including some spectacular accidents—are arousing resentment in Latin America, Africa, and elsewhere.

In the Cold War and after, the Marshall Plan, the Peace Corps, the American-backed “green revolution” in Indian

T. Jones

agriculture, and the PEPFAR initiative to tackle HIV/AIDS showed that America could improve the lives of people abroad. The question today is how far it can take advantage of Chinese missteps with an equally effective strategy.

From the 1940s to the 1980s, the Hoover Institution, where we are both fellows, fostered the study of the Cold War. Its archives remain

It took Xi Jinping to shock America and its allies into fully understanding the challenges.

matter, for both good and ill. China has clients that are beholden to it in one way or another. The most important, Russia, has become a liability because of Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine. For now, China finds itself trying to support its Russian "partner without limits" while staying on the right side of the American and European sanctions line. It is a tough balancing act.

America, meanwhile, is blessed with a European alliance revitalized by its firm response to Russia's aggression and a measurably stronger NATO with the addition of Finland and, assuming holdouts ratify its membership, Sweden. America also has strong allies in Asia such as South Korea and Japan, and in Australia. Its relationship with India is deepening.

The second lesson is that deterrence requires military capability that matches the rhetoric surrounding it. China has been improving every aspect of its military capability while the war in Ukraine and wargaming about

A war between America and China could be even more dangerous than one with the Soviet Union would have been.

Taiwan have revealed weaknesses in the West's. The West must respond immediately by procuring more advanced weaponry, developing secure supply chains for critical materials and components, and rebuilding the defense-industrial base. Peace through strength really does work.

Third, engage in efforts to avoid accidental war. To this day we benefit from contacts between the American and Russian armed forces (established during the Cold War) to prevent an accident between them. Given the

crucial to scholars of the period. We would do well to understand it and to take its lessons to heart. Five stand out.

The first is that allies

Taiwan have revealed weaknesses in the West's. The West must respond immediately by procuring more advanced weaponry, developing secure supply chains for critical

nature of today's technologies, not least artificial intelligence, a war between America and China could be even more dangerous than one with the Soviet Union would have been. China has been unwilling to discuss accident prevention, despite near-misses between Chinese and American planes and ships. That is a mistake.

Fourth, remember George Kennan, the American diplomat based in Moscow who wrote the "Long Telegram." The

In the past, authoritarian rulers have mistaken the cacophony of freedom for weakness.

greatest insight in Kennan's essay-length message, wired to Harry Truman's State Department in 1946, was to point clearly to the disadvantages that plagued the Soviet Union. He advised his government to deny Moscow scope for external expansion, and argued that the Soviet Union's own internal contradictions would eventually weaken it.

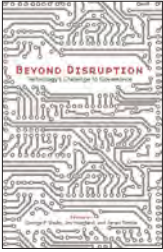
China is economically stronger than the Soviet Union ever was, but there, too, contradictions are showing. A deflating property sector, high youth unemployment, and disastrous demographics all plague China. Authoritarian leaders prefer the certainties of political control over the risks of economic liberalization.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE

The final lesson of the first Cold War is that nothing is inevitable. The leaders of that time never underestimated the challenge before them. Success today will require democracies to come to terms with their own flaws and contradictions—not least, fractures in society caused by ethnic, social, and class differences and the tendency for these to be amplified in online echo chambers. Failure to safeguard the legitimacy of political institutions that protect freedom has led to plummeting confidence in democracy itself.

Still, it is worth remembering that democracies have been counted out before by authoritarian rulers who mistook the cacophony of freedom for weakness and assumed that the suppression of dissenting voices in their own societies was a sign of strength. From Harry Truman to Ronald Reagan to George H. W. Bush, the best Cold War presidents understood that the authoritarians were wrong. If this generation of leaders can show similar resolve, the outcome of this new superpower rivalry—whether it is a second Cold War or something new—should be another victory for the free world. ■

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Beijing's Bill Comes Due

China favored socialist dictates over market principles. Now it must pay for its economic mismanagement.

By Mickey D. Levy

China has evolved from an engine of global growth to a source of weakness and risk, and it has its leaders and their economic policies to blame. Sizable government-generated excesses in real estate and debt are unraveling, weighing heavily on economic performance and government finances. Declines in household net worth are undercutting confidence and consumer spending. Many of the largest land developers have gone into bankruptcy or defaulted on their debt. Global economies and trade are also adversely affected. The US and Japanese experiences with real estate bubbles suggest that China will probably need years to unwind its excesses and revive dampened economic activity, and a fundamental assessment points to dramatically slower potential growth.

China will probably need years to revive economic activity.

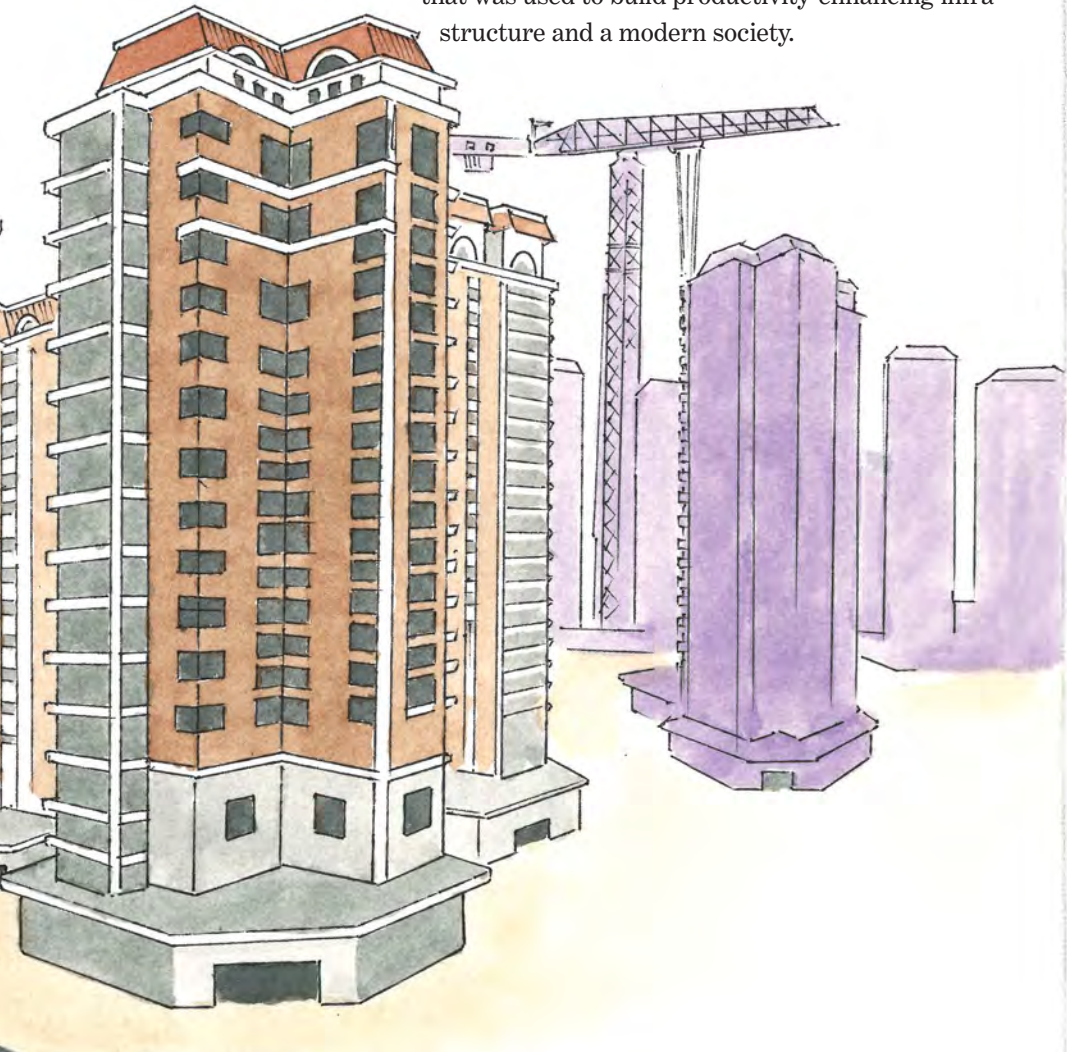
China's path from impoverished nation to the world's second-biggest economy and leading exporter was built on an odd combination. Chinese leaders

Mickey D. Levy is a visiting scholar at the Hoover Institution and senior economist at Berenberg Capital Markets.



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

allowed US-style free enterprise to thrive alongside their central command-and-control regime, which dictated the allocation of resources. The capitalist elements took advantage of China's abundant low-cost labor, ramped up capital investment, and drove innovation and entrepreneurship that generated sizable gains in productivity. Foreign physical and financial capital flowed into China, which acquired international technological know-how through both legal and illegal avenues. The economic results were remarkable: during the period 2000–14, China accounted for 30 percent of global growth and its share of global exports rose from 4 percent to 14 percent. Profits from its world-leading export-related manufacturing generated substantial wealth that was used to build productivity-enhancing infrastructure and a modern society.





COOLING OFF: A Chinese steelworker fabricates materials at a mill in Huaian City, Jiangsu province. Starting around 2000, profits from China's world-leading export-related manufacturing generated substantial wealth, which was used to build productivity-enhancing infrastructure and a modern society. Productivity gains have now slowed. [Cfoto/ZUMAPRESS/Newscom]

Chinese leader Xi Jinping began clamping down on free enterprise in 2012 in favor of China's socialist ideals and enhanced central control. He mistakenly believed that adhering to a socialist regime would maintain strong economic growth. China's potential growth began to decelerate naturally as its labor and capital usage rose toward capacity, and productivity gains slowed, raising costs of production. The crackdown on the high-productivity high-tech and social media firms has been particularly damaging.

Xi continued China's long-standing central-planning practice of establishing annual GDP growth targets, and as potential growth decelerated, those targets became unrealistically high. While growth in consumer spending, private business investment, and exports simmered down, the high GDP targets were achieved through more and more government investment focused on infrastructure and real estate that relied heavily on debt financing.

Two telltale signs suggested that the run of strong GDP growth was unsustainable. First, gross capital formation (private plus government investment) remained above 40 percent of GDP, far above that of other nations, with a high and rising share investment in residential properties. This resource misallocation pointed to lower productivity and future problems. Second, financing the government investment relied heavily on debt, and the murky web of flows that serviced the debt spelled trouble.

ANALYZING THE PROBLEM

Unlike in the United States, Chinese fiscal policy is financed partially by the central government and heavily by local governments, and administered largely by local governments, as dictated by leaders in Beijing. Local government leaders met their GDP targets largely through investment spending on infrastructure and residential real estate activities. They relied heavily on land sales to real estate developers and borrowing through massive bond issuances. Local government financing vehicles (LGFVs) and shadow banks were heavy purchasers of the local government bonds. The LGFVs also invested directly in infrastructure projects, financed by leverage, and purchased land (on orders from Beijing when real estate softened). The LGFVs and shadow banks relied on fragile funding sources, including wealth managers that sought higher returns than provided by yields on deposits in the large state-owned enterprise (SOE) banks. Individual purchasers of bonds and investors in wealth management funds bore the risks, with large and often unspecified exposures to real estate. Private land developers also relied heavily on leverage and bond issuance. Before defaulting in 2021, Evergrande, a top Chinese developer that subsequently filed for bankruptcy, had an estimated \$340 billion of debt.

Official government statistics place the central government's debt-to-GDP ratio at 22 percent through 2022, significantly below the United States' 123 percent or Europe's 89 percent. However, LGFVs are treated as private entities and their debt is counted as corporate debt, which has ballooned. Total Chinese government debt, including central government, local government, LGFV, policy bank, and implicit (schools, hospitals, etc.), is conservatively estimated at 142 percent of GDP. This ratio is above those of the United States and Europe but well below Japan's 264 percent. As in Japan, the largest portion of Chinese government debt is held by domestic creditors, particularly as foreign holders have reduced their exposure in response to mounting credit problems of China's real estate developers.

China's fiscal policy and debt financing hinged critically on rising real estate values and expectations. The mounting excesses in real estate began unraveling in late 2021 as expectations shifted down and housing demand fell. Land sales and construction collapsed. This undercut local government finances. More than fifty developers have filed for bankruptcy or defaulted. Some cash-strapped local governments are having trouble servicing their debt and have requested financial support from Beijing.

CONSEQUENCES

The Chinese economy must now adjust to the unwinding of the government-generated excesses in real estate and debt. Signs of weakness are spreading. Real estate activity and prices are falling. A reported sixty-

The economy must now adjust to the unwinding of China's government-generated excesses in real estate and debt.

four of sixty-nine cities report declining prices of existing residences, and mounting anecdotal evidence and debt defaults by leading land developers suggest

declines are steeper than data provided by China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Expectations that prices will fall further are deterring home purchasers.

Consumer spending is weak, reflecting job losses and lower wages in manufacturing, while household net worth that had become overweighted on real estate has fallen sharply. Consumer confidence has fallen sharply and will undercut government efforts to stimulate spending. The NBS has decided to stop publishing the unfavorable confidence survey data.

Gross capital formation is now a key source of weakness in the domestic economy. Private business investment is soft, and the financial challenges facing local governments and LGFVs are severely constraining government investment spending.

China's exports and imports are both falling. Exports fell in July 2023 by 14.6 percent year over year in US dollar terms (9.3 percent in yuan terms). Weak global demand for Chinese goods reflects slow growth globally, with softer US goods consumption; overall weak conditions in Europe; and efforts by advanced economies to reduce reliance on Chinese goods and supply chains. China's exports to advanced nations fell by larger percentages, but

its exports to Russia have soared over 70 percent in the past year from a relatively small base.

The sharp decline in Chinese imports in July—down 12.2 percent year over year in USD terms and 6.7 percent in yuan terms—is associated with weak domestic demand. Falling imports of consumer goods reflects soft consumption, while the slump in production in China’s export-related manufacturing sectors lowers the demand for imported capital goods.

The unreliability of China’s official data increases the difficulty of assessing true economic conditions. Not surprising, the NBS has stopped publishing select data that are particularly downcast; besides consumer confidence (no longer released after April 2023), the youth unemployment rate, over 21 percent in its last reading, is no longer published. Forecasting China’s GDP growth is perhaps more a game of estimating what China’s leaders and the bureau of statistics choose to publish than a forecast of realistic trends. Anecdotal evidence is dominated by signs of empty apartment complexes rather than construction cranes; weaker consumer spending is confirmed by declining imports from Japan and South Korea; and the highly publicized failures and bankruptcies of China’s major building developers continue to jar bond markets. A critical issue influencing GDP forecasting is whether China has the financing bandwidth to maintain rapid spending of government.

GLOBAL JITTERS

China’s economic weakness is spreading internationally, contributing to declining global trade volumes that have fallen below pre-pandemic levels. Nations and companies with large export exposure to China have been the hardest hit. Asia, the world’s biggest trading bloc, is feeling the biggest impact. Exports of every major Asian nation (China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, India) and Australia are falling, although levels remain above their pre-pandemic trend lines. Many emerging economies that rely heavily on exporting commodities and industrial materials to China are also experiencing declining exports and falling prices.

China’s economic weakness is spreading around the world.

European economies have significant exposure to China, both directly and indirectly, and are experiencing declining manufacturing production. Germany has significant export exposure to China, particularly in motor vehicles

and parts. China is excelling in the production of electric vehicles (EVs) and has surpassed Japan and Germany as the world's largest auto exporter.

The United States is better situated, with relatively less export exposure to China. Its export of merchandising goods as a percentage of GDP is nearly one-third less than Europe's share, according to OECD data. Moreover, the United States' largest trading partners—Canada and Mexico—are better positioned than most nations and may benefit from an increase in production facilities as global companies reduce their supply chain exposures to China.

HARD LESSONS IN JAPAN AND AMERICA

The history of excesses in real estate, debt, and asset price bubbles—Japan in the late 1980s and the United States in the early 2000s—suggests China's unwinding will be long, and likely an economic drag for years.

The US debt-financed housing bubble of the early 2000s offers a useful comparison. Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two government-sponsored enterprises that finance and support mortgage lending, infused excessive risk-taking and leverage into the mortgage market, creating systemic risk. The Federal Reserve kept interest rates low. These factors led to excessive reliance on debt and boosted home values. When expectations of home values shifted down, complex derivatives of the mortgage debt unraveled and devastated the mortgage market.

The origin of Japan's excesses had different parallels to China. Japan's economy boomed from the conclusion of World War II through the mid-1980s, and then slowed as it approached capacity. Japanese leaders failed to acknowledge that its potential growth had slowed, and the Bank of Japan kept rates artificially low to pump up growth. The low rates did not generate faster growth or consumer price inflation but instead generated a severe asset price bubble, with the Nikkei and property prices rising to dizzying heights. At the peak, Japan's debt levels were moderate, far below China's current ratios as a percent of GDP. The Bank of Japan raised rates to let some air out of the bubble, which led to a collapse of 75 percent in the Nikkei and a 70 percent decline in land values.

Both episodes, the unwinding of the US debt-financed housing bubble and Japan's asset price bubble, were long and dampened economic performance. The unraveling of the US mortgage and short-term funding markets provoked a financial crisis. Household balance sheets were crippled. Insolvent big banks that were overinvested in risky mortgage-backed assets required capital infusions from the government. Bank loans declined

through 2013 and the recovery from the “global financial crisis” was soft. Japan’s government did not acknowledge that the collapse in asset prices had generated insolvent conditions in banks, which were allowed to continue operating. Bank lending fell and Japan incurred a “lost decade” of on-and-off recession and mild deflation. The Japanese government finally recapitalized and reorganized the banking system in 1997, financed by rising government debt.

China has already acknowledged its real estate woes and is providing capital and regulatory support, but the harm to consumer balance sheets and government finances poses major challenges. In particular, the blow to government finances will severely crimp fiscal stimulus and the ability of government investment spending to prop up GDP growth. China’s leaders will probably manage to avoid a financial crisis or an extended Japan-style bout of recession and mild deflation, but they will be unable to avoid the drag on growth.

THE GROWTH OUTLOOK

Beyond the necessary unwinding of excesses, China faces diminished longer-run potential growth. Its biggest problem is its leaders’ rejection of US-style free enterprise and capitalism, the primary driver of its sustained robust growth that made it an economic powerhouse in the first place. Realistically, China’s leadership will continue to be guided by communist ideals while clamping down on entrepreneurship and capitalistic behavior deemed inconsistent with those ideals. In this context, consider the basic foundations of potential economic growth: growth in labor force and capital, and productivity.

China’s population and labor force are declining. The realities of its one-child policy have caught up with demographics and will persist. That leaves capital and productivity to pick up the slack. Gross capital formation will continue to grow rapidly, but a high and rising share will be government investment spending, including government allocations to low-productivity state-owned enterprises. Weakened local-government finances will limit investment spending and fiscal stimulus. Business investment in capital will be constrained by government mandates and regulations and by slower growth of the economy, profits, and cash flows.

The prospects for sustained rapid productivity gains are diminished by the high and rising government share of gross capital formation and outsized allocations to the large, low-productivity SOEs, while the government continues to suppress China’s highly productive private sector.

Meanwhile, the large and highly productive export-related manufacturing sectors have begun to feel the impact of efforts by Western nations to reduce their reliance on Chinese supply chains. This trend is gathering momentum, with measurable impacts on China's exports. The Biden administration

has placed limits on US exports of advanced semiconductors and quantum-computing capabilities to China and investments in China that are deemed

A reasonable intermediate-term estimate of China's potential growth is approximately 2 to 3 percent.

important to US national security. Other Western nations are following suit. China needs such key inputs for its advanced semiconductor and AI development, and for its ability to acquire critical technological know-how. This will constrain productive capacity.

The last official government target for real GDP was 5 percent, but Chinese leaders have backed away from that. They understand that the economy is sputtering and that fiscal stimulus is limited by the government's stretched finances. A reasonable intermediate-term estimate of China's potential growth is approximately 2 to 3 percent. Straining for a higher target would require excessive reliance on government investment in unproductive activities that would further lower potential growth. Setting a much lower growth target would be economically rational but the government is highly unlikely to take such a sharp departure.

Obviously, this puts Chinese leaders in a bind. They are struggling with the tradeoff between adhering to socialist ideals and maintaining central control

over their citizens, and weaker economic performance and the unwelcome social effects that may follow.

While no longer the engine of global growth, China is still a powerhouse, the world's second-largest economy.

While China is no longer the engine of global growth, it remains a powerhouse as the world's second-largest economy and is highly innovative in an array of high-tech sectors. Its market for many consumer goods is the biggest in the world. The surge in China's production and export of EVs highlights its economic prowess. Even if its domestic demand growth remains weak and foreign demand for Chinese goods gradually slows, China will remain the largest and most important manufacturing and global trading hub for years to come.

But China's biggest trading partners and the world's economies must adjust to—and brace themselves for—permanently slower growth and continuing challenges. Beyond the implications for economic conditions, this new climate will have profound implications for China's geopolitical posture and strategies. ■

Special to the Hoover Digest.



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Silicon Triangle

Taiwan and the semiconductor industry are intertwined. In a time of Chinese aggression, keeping them both secure calls for partnerships and preparedness.

By Larry Diamond, Jim Ellis, and Orville Schell

Two of the biggest areas of risk in an increasingly fraught US-Chinese relationship are the security of Taiwan and the security of the semiconductor supply chain. Each is high stakes and difficult in its own right. But taken together, they become even more challenging. Although each is critically important to the United States, their solutions do not always neatly align. The most obvious ways to reduce the risk in one area can easily increase risk in the

Key points

- » The United States has two intertwined interests: safeguard the security of global chip supply chains and ensure security and autonomy for Taiwan.
- » The United States must ensure that its demand for semiconductors is met by friendly countries in stable trading partnerships.
- » Federal and state governments should ease regulatory obstacles to domestic chip-making capacity.

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CHIPS AHOY: The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. factory takes shape in north Phoenix, where full-scale operations are scheduled to start in 2024. President Biden gave a speech celebrating the project at the site in December 2022, during his first trip to Arizona of his presidency. The United States is making a priority of such investments to create jobs and enhance the resilience of US supply chains. [Kyodonews/ZUMAPRESS/Newscom]

other. Finding a way to manage this treacherous “silicon triangle” among Beijing, Taiwan, and Washington is thus one of the most important—and trickiest—challenges for US foreign policy today.

The United States remains a world leader in semiconductor research and design, but its share of global manufacturing has fallen from 37 percent in 1999 to 12 percent today.

Taiwan now accounts for the largest share of fabrication by far—producing 60 percent of the world’s chips and more than

China could suddenly gain dominance over the most critical manufactured commodity in the world.

90 percent of its leading-edge logic chips, key components in the world’s most advanced communications tools and computers and critical in the race for leadership in artificial intelligence. After Taiwan, the other top manufacturers of semiconductors are South Korea (which leads in the production of

memory chips), Japan, and China, in that order. The United States has fallen to fifth place.

Policy makers broadly recognize the dangers of leaving the supply chain of such an essential component in an increasingly digital economy vulnerable to prolonged disruption—or worse, to deliberate denial by an adversary. The “chip famine” that emerged globally in 2020 wreaked havoc across a wide variety of industries. Worse still would be a chip shortage, or an embargo imposed by a hostile power, that crippled the production and maintenance of advanced US weapons systems.

That fear is one of many reasons for concern about the security of Taiwan. Beijing’s escalating military and geopolitical pressure raises an enormous risk for the United States and its allies: if Beijing were able to successfully seize Taiwan, Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s regime could suddenly gain dominance over the most critical manufactured commodity in the world—if the conflict did not disable or destroy much of Taiwan’s capacity to produce semiconductors.

Some strategists assume that the semiconductor industry constitutes a “silicon shield” for Taiwan, because chips are now so critically important to the global economy and to China’s economy that in the absence of an extreme crisis or provocation, Chinese leaders would be unlikely to risk a conflict that could destroy or severely disrupt China’s own (and the world’s) supply of chips. What is more, the reliance of much of the rest of the world on Taiwan’s semiconductor industry gives a host of other governments an added stake in deterring conflict over Taiwan. Yet placing too much stock

in this logic would be unwise; if Beijing decides to use force, it will be impelled principally by other political and geopolitical reasons.

In this silicon triangle,

the United States has two intertwined interests: to safeguard the security of global supply chains for semiconductors—which must include some prudent degree of reshoring of production—and to ensure security and autonomous choice for Taiwan. The challenge is to forge a cooperative strategy in which the pursuit of each goal does not undermine the other. That requires building on the unique geopolitical strength of the United States—its dense web of partnerships and alliances—to enhance the resilience of the supply chain while at the same time working with Taiwan to

Chips may be “the new oil,” in one view, but their journey from raw material to end use is far more complex.

jointly strengthen military and economic capabilities to deter aggression by Beijing.

The United States needs investment from Taiwan to expand semiconductor manufacturing on American soil, thus creating jobs and enhancing the resilience of US supply chains; Taiwan needs the security assistance of the United States to protect both its semiconductor industry and its democracy from aggression. Pursued together, while also deepening cooperation with other US partners and allies crucial to global semiconductor production, these aims can reinforce one another in ways that will enhance both supply chain resilience and the security of Taiwan.

BRINGING THE CHIPS HOME

In strategic terms, chips may be “the new oil,” as one formulation posits, but their journey from raw material to end use is far more complex. Their production depends on advanced designs and enormously sophisticated (and expensive) equipment. The most advanced chips are “fabbed” by state-of-the-art machines that use extreme ultraviolet lithography. These machines are produced by just one company, Advanced Semiconductor Materials Lithography, which is based in the Netherlands. In addition to raw materials and highly capital-intensive plants and equipment, production requires a close-knit, highly educated, and well-trained workforce of engineers and technicians. Once fabricated, chips must go through assembly, testing, and packaging, which are most often done in other plants in other countries.

And each fab is also dependent on continual program upgrades and technical maintenance. Often,

these critical roles are divided among different countries. The United States, accordingly, must aim to ensure that the

bulk of its demand for semiconductors (including the most advanced chips) is filled at each step in the supply chain by friendly countries committed to maintaining stable trading partnerships.

It is wise to seek to locate production of a wide variety of chips on US soil by providing financial incentives for reshoring, as the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act does. But even if the United States doubles its share of global chip production in the coming years, it will still depend heavily on global supply chains, which must engage trusted partners. Principally, these will be the United States’ friends and allies, not just Taiwan but also France, Germany,

It’s wise to locate production of many kinds of chips on US soil. But global supply chains will remain.

Japan, the Netherlands, Singapore, and South Korea. (India is also poised to become a player in the industry, and the United States should help encourage investment in manufacturing there.) And even chip manufacturing in the United States will depend on working with the most technologically capable companies, many of them non-American. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, for example, is already building a \$12 billion manufacturing plant for leading-edge chips in Phoenix. In December 2022, it announced it would build a second, even more advanced plant there, bringing TSMC's total investment in the United States to \$40 billion, already exceeding the \$39 billion in subsidies for US chip manufacturing provided by the CHIPS Act.

In addition to subsidies, the United States must provide lower costs, ample infrastructure, expanded services, and engineering talent to attract further private investment in semiconductor manufacturing. Congress can help by extending 100 percent tax depreciation for short-lived capital assets (a rule that has lapsed). Doing so would reduce the massive upfront costs of semiconductor manufacturing equipment needed to set up a new fab and offset other construction costs that TSMC has estimated to be four times higher in the United States than in Taiwan. Congress should also extend the chip manufacturing tax credit in the CHIPS Act beyond its 2027 sunset provision and broaden the credit to cover key material inputs and the manufacture of equipment.

Federal and state government should also ease regulatory burdens to make it possible to construct plants in the United States more quickly. Given the industry's relatively short technology cycles, multiyear environmental reviews will make a significant expansion in chip manufacturing a futile task. States can also help lure investment by ensuring adequate water and electricity supplies and providing incentives for related service and equipment companies, fostering the kinds of geographic clusters that helped drive Taiwan's semiconductor miracle.

Partnering with Taiwan also offers huge opportunities on the technological front. US research centers and universities can benefit from Taiwanese support on talent development, while Taiwanese firms can benefit from expanding research and development efforts in the United States. US policy could help incentivize such collaborations. It could invite leading semiconductor companies from Taiwan (as well as from South Korea) to join the United States' new public-private National Semiconductor Technology Center, while also building on efforts such as a collaboration between Purdue University and the Taiwanese chip designer MediaTek to develop a

new joint chip design center. Policy makers can also enhance education and training in the United States, by encouraging the “semiconductor colleges” embedded in Taiwan’s top universities to partner with a proposed American Semiconductor Academy, as well as providing more funding for Taiwanese students to study in the United States and for American students to study in Taiwan. Broader economic and technological ties between the United States and Taiwan would also be strengthened by a treaty precluding double taxation of expatriate workers and by completing negotiations on a free trade agreement.

Yet as it fosters chip manufacturing at home, Washington must do more to deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan. Here, key lessons of the war in Ukraine are instructive.

Although it is always better to deter an attack than to try to repel it, both tasks depend on the delivery of effective

Washington must do more to deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan. The war in Ukraine is instructive.

weaponry—especially the kind of mobile weaponry that can help turn Taiwan into a “porcupine” that the People’s Liberation Army would be unable to swallow. The United States must do more to help Taiwan get the additional advanced weapons it needs. Given the long delays in Pentagon procurement, Washington should pursue licensing agreements with Taiwan’s manufacturing sector to rapidly scale up local production of weapons such as Javelin antitank missiles, Stinger surface-to-air missiles, drones, and satellite communications systems.

COMPETITION WILL PERSIST

As it strengthens partnerships with and attracts investment from friends and allies, the United States must also exercise vigilance about China’s semiconductor ambitions. It is not realistic or desirable to freeze China out of the global supply chain entirely. Instead, the goal must be to ensure that neither China nor any other potential future adversary can weaponize its position in semiconductor supply chains. On the domestic front, this will require more vigorous and transparent review of inbound investments by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States to ensure that potential adversaries do not acquire effective control over key US technologies. There may also be value in reviewing and restricting outbound investments in critical foreign technologies, and in implementing new technology export controls to protect the most sensitive US intellectual property—building on the Biden

administration's decision to restrict the export of technologies and tools that would help China make advanced logic chips.

Another risk to guard against is Chinese dumping of certain kinds of lower-end chips, which could allow Beijing to drive out competitors from and achieve a dominant position in important segments of the market. These "legacy" chips are heavily used not only in consumer products but also in US weapons systems. Chinese dominance of this market would thus pose serious economic and security risks.

According to US intelligence and other analysts, Xi has set 2027 as the year by which China must be militarily ready to attack Taiwan. Although Xi may have been given second thoughts by Russian President Vladimir Putin's struggles in his invasion of Ukraine, there is still little time to lose in projecting US readiness and resolve and in strengthening Taiwan's ability to protect its democracy and the world's microchip supply chain. Economic, technological, and strategic competition between China and the United States will remain the dominant feature of geopolitics for years, if not decades, to come. To enhance its chances of prevailing in this competition, the United States will need reliable international partners with whom it can reconfigure and strengthen its semiconductor supply chain. No partner is more important in this effort than Taiwan. ■

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Innovation Is a Marathon

In the advanced-technology race with China, the United States is stumbling. Why we need a new tech strategy.

By Michael Brown and Robert Atkinson

As Beijing has become Washington's overriding challenge of the twenty-first century, the Chinese leadership has made clear that it aims to displace the United States as the world's technological and economic superpower. This form of competition has no historic precedent. China has a much larger and more technologically advanced economy than did the Soviet Union at its peak, and in contrast to its Soviet predecessor it is deeply integrated into the global economy. The rivalry between the two powers has

Key points

- » China is determined to displace the United States as the world's technological and economic superpower.
- » Beijing is using a vast array of tactics in its attempt to overtake the United States. Some have already paid off.
- » Large-scale industrial strategy is nothing new for the United States. Today, however, we lack consensus about where it should be applied.

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INVENTION: Vannevar Bush, president of the Carnegie Institution, appears before a House committee investigating military procurement in 1952. Bush, who chaired the National Defense Research Committee during World War II, proposed a system of federally funded research universities tightly linked with government agencies, industry, and the military. [Warren K. Leffler, Harris & Ewing—Harry S. Truman Library]

significant diplomatic, military, and ideological aspects, but its most important dimensions are technological and economic.

China views dominance of advanced industries as a key to national security. It aims to increase its power by establishing global pre-eminence in a broad array of developing technologies. Many of these, such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and aerospace, are current US strengths. As a result, it is likely that China will continue employing “innovation mercantilist” trade and economic policies—including outright intellectual-property theft and forced technology transfer, along with massive subsidies of domestic industries—to achieve this goal. These tactics have already been successfully

demonstrated in steel, shipbuilding, solar panels, high-speed rail, LCD displays, batteries, and advanced telecommunications.

Washington has yet to grapple with the full range of this threat. US policies thus far have been focused on limiting intellectual-property theft, countering unfair trade practices, constraining China's semiconductor industry through export controls, and strengthening the US military. The CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, passed by Congress in 2022, promise to support domestic semiconductor and clean-technology production, but they fall short of offering a comprehensive approach to winning the technology race. Similarly, the Biden administration's policy to "invest, align, and compete," outlined by Secretary of State Antony Blinken in May 2022, does not support the funding, private sector coordination, or competitive advantages at the scale that is required to retain the country's supremacy in advanced technologies.

Instead, Washington must prepare for an all-out effort to win the competition with China. This means a multi-

generational campaign that will involve large investments in science, technology development, and domestic manufacturing; an engaged private sector to build national capabilities; and sustained actions to make Chinese tactics unprofitable. To carry this out, the United States will need to identify the critical and emerging technologies of the coming century and develop coherent and detailed plans to nurture them.

A multigenerational campaign will involve large investments in science, technology, and domestic manufacturing.

THE CRITICAL ONES

Already, the Trump and Biden administrations have created similar lists of nineteen critical and emerging technologies, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, advanced computing, biotechnology, hypersonics, and space systems. But given that seventeen of these nineteen technologies are being led by the private sector and have both civilian and military uses, there is a pressing need to align the private sector with national leadership. Far too little has been done to coordinate government action and provide incentives to academia and the private sector to focus on these areas, and to create a defensive shield against Chinese technological predation aimed at US firms and universities. Should Washington fail to develop and implement such a strategy and instead allow Beijing to succeed in its quest for technological

dominance, the United States could become a shell of its former industrial self, dependent on China for key imports in many areas, including artificial intelligence, telecommunications, bioengineering, and quantum sciences.

The United States has a long and successful history of large-scale industrial strategy. In 1791, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton proposed the

country's first such policy to encourage growth in domestic manufacturing. As Hamilton understood, without such a base the

The United States risks becoming a shell of its former industrial self.

nation would remain dependent on European imports. During World War II, US policy makers recognized the importance of the coordinated development of future technologies. In June 1945, Vannevar Bush, who as chair of the National Defense Research Committee served as a science adviser to the US government, proposed creating a system of federally funded research universities tightly linked with government agencies, industry, and the military. Its establishment led to significant advances and made the United States the science and engineering leader in the world. In the wake of the Soviet Union's 1957 launch of the satellite Sputnik, the United States focused on developing the technologies required to win the space race, including rockets, satellites, semiconductors, numerically controlled machine tools, solar cells, early software prototypes, and many more advanced technologies.

Yet despite this impressive record, there is no current consensus on US industrial policy or when and how it should be applied. That uncertainty is dangerous given what is now at stake in the global competition with China. Indeed, the country that has the ability to innovate faster and better, increase global market share in advanced industry production, and assimilate new technology across its economy will likely determine the outcome of great-power competition between China and the United States for decades to come. And to be effective, a new US industrial strategy will require recognizing and supporting the large range of technologies now in play, as well as pushing for advancements and breakthroughs in new technologies.

For much of history, a single technology, such as making bronze or harnessing steam power, often defined an epoch. Today, by contrast, multiple technologies are being invented, adopted, and adapted at the same time, with the result that the country that can establish a dominant position in several areas at once stands to accrue the greatest advantage. Never before have there been so many new technologies used in combination, nor have the

benefits of technological leadership for economic growth and military power been more dramatic.

Winning the technology race with China means, first and foremost, that the United States and its allies lead in the technologies—such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, advanced materials, and biotechnology—that are likely to underpin entire industries. At the same time, the United States must work with its allies to defend the West’s economic dominance over China. At \$17 trillion, China’s economy is the second-largest in the world and approaching the United States’ \$23 trillion. But the combined GDP of the United States and its allies and partners amounts to \$50 trillion, compared with just \$19 trillion for the combined GDPs of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. Other nations such as Brazil, Nigeria, Cambodia, Pakistan, and South Africa are not yet in China’s orbit, and strong advanced industry policies by the United States and its partners can help to keep them at least nonaligned.

The country that can establish a dominant position in several areas at once stands to accrue the greatest advantage.

The United States will need to lead a coordinated push to support emerging advanced technologies and to limit China’s capabilities to maintain this edge.

US laws can prevent China from using the United States’ liberal, open society to strengthen its own technology base through stolen IP, cybertheft, industrial espionage, and mercantilist trading relationships. But such actions require both stronger laws and more active engagement and enforcement by allied nations’ intelligence and law enforcement organizations.

Although the US government alone cannot bring an effective allied advanced industrial policy into being, it can do much to get it off the ground. Leadership in Washington will be needed to create an integrated strategy that synchronizes policy choices across government agencies and induces the private sector and research institutions to align their work with national priorities. And this includes setting the conditions and goals for innovation, adoption, and production of specific new technologies over many decades.

A ROBUST FRAMEWORK

The US government should communicate to the American people the importance of this competition, its long timeline, and the large-scale investments that will be required for a successful outcome. A cultural shift will be necessary to get Americans to engage in this race. Among the ways to accomplish

this would be to call greater attention to American achievements in science and technology by recognizing and honoring those individuals and companies who are helping to win this race, just as the United States celebrated its astronauts during the space race with the Soviet Union.

Most important, however, is the need for a comprehensive policy framework for advanced industries. This will be essential to ensuring US leadership in development, adoption, and scaling of emerging technologies. The United States can no longer expect a laissez-faire approach to be successful when competing with China's top-down, well-articulated industrial strategy reinforced by consistent, large investments. Left on their own, the profit-making strategies of advanced technology companies are unlikely to align with US national strategic interests and result in the desired range of dual-use technology development and domestic production.

It would be counterproductive for the United States to imitate China's anointing of "national champions."

On the other hand, it would be counterproductive to adopt China's approach of anointing companies as "national champions" or impos-

ing direct government control. Instead, the United States should support advanced technology sectors, not specific companies, by using policies, such as tax incentives and direct investment in an array of technology programs (such as the Manufacturing USA program), that are aimed at ensuring US global leadership in those areas. In other words, a company can become a market leader in an industry that the government has identified as critical not because the government designated it a winner but because it offers the best solution and it beat out the competition, while receiving some support as well as protection against Chinese techno-predation.

Such a policy framework could include several components. To ensure proper levels of investment, annual federal funding for science and engineering research should increase to 2 percent of GDP. That level would match the historic high point reached in the 1960s and would represent a dramatic increase from the current 0.66 percent of GDP. Notably, it would also amount to a ninefold increase over the spending authorized in the CHIPS and Science Act, or \$460 billion per year.

Such large-scale investment is necessary because the government is the only source of risk-seeking capital that can be sustained to pursue breakthrough technologies over the long term. Although some might expect the private sector to make these investments, company CEOs and venture

capitalists are more focused on far shorter time horizons. Just as it has for the past seven decades, government support for research (both direct funding and tax investments) can stimulate the creation of new industries, which can result in companies such as Google and Microsoft that create global platforms and millions of high-paying jobs. But these efforts must go beyond research to include incentives for companies to scale innovations and manufacture domestically. Otherwise, other countries, including US rivals, will gain from the development of new US domestic technologies. That's why, at minimum, Congress should restore first-year expensing for investments in machinery, equipment, and software, or even better, re-establish an investment tax credit.

An advanced industries policy must also spur training and education to ensure that the US labor force can contribute to the country's leadership in new technologies. Even with the planned incentives for US semiconductor investment in the CHIPS and Science Act, there may not be enough trained workers in the United States to manufacture advanced chips. The country must train more scientists, researchers, engineers, and technicians to leverage increased investment in science and technology. In addition to expanding STEM education—particularly at the college and graduate level—the government needs to enact immigration reforms to encourage more global STEM talent to contribute to the US economy.

At the same time, policies must be designed so that they mutually reinforce one another. Given the federal government's size and complexity, it is far more difficult to achieve mutually reinforcing policies than it was during the Cold War. For example, whereas political and military tools are concentrated in the Departments of Defense and State, many economic tools are diffused across the federal government and state governments, as well as the private sector. Adding complexity, different congressional committees control the spending priorities of these various governmental departments. The broad nature of the technology race with China requires that policies are aligned across departments and all levels of government.

The Defense Department's spending power also needs to be used to build an industrial base for markets in areas such as autonomous systems and space infrastructure. During the Cold War, the Defense Department was an early adopter of new technologies like semiconductors, a practice that allowed new industries to achieve scale, rapid declines in cost, and subsequent penetration of commercial markets. Today, there is an opportunity for the Defense Department to recover that tradition, creating a strong industrial base relative to China through early investment and the

adoption of technologies in which the government remains the principal customer. These could range from satellite technology and space-based communications to unmanned ships and clean-energy technologies such as advanced batteries.

THREE STRATEGIC PATHS

US strategy in the technology race should rest on several additional pillars. The first will be to create more balanced incentives in US capital markets for long-term investments in innovation and domestic production. These incentives will encourage companies to take on more risk over longer horizons and invest more domestically, steps that will be crucial to develop national capabilities in particular areas. Since the later decades of the twentieth century, two trends have reinforced short-termism within corporations.

Globalization has allowed companies to achieve higher profitability (and lower prices) by producing offshore, including manufacturing to leverage lower labor rates as well as more generous tax rates and subsidies offered by foreign governments. And the shareholder revolution has caused short-term shareholder interests to be prioritized far above the interests of other stakeholders, including the nation as a whole. With the increase in institutional ownership of companies, current-period financial returns have become paramount; institutional investors now hold stocks for an average of less than one year, compared with eight years in the 1950s.

Capital-market actors, such as activist investors and private equity firms, also operate on much shorter investment time horizons and encourage CEOs

to buy back stock with cash flow, a strategy that optimizes quarterly earnings per share (EPS) rather than investments in long-term competitiveness. As a result, cor-

Combined with short-term incentives, globalization has led to a dangerous dependence on supply chains from China.

porate R&D labs—such as AT&T’s Bell Labs—have been eliminated, while companies have shed manufacturing, moved away from hardware products, and increasingly relied on overseas suppliers. Over time, this has resulted in a significant loss of design and production capability.

Combined with short-term incentives, globalization has led to dangerous dependence on supply chains from China, which uses economic power coercively. After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, US policy makers discovered that the country depended on China for 97 percent of

its antibiotics, 80 percent of its pharmaceutical ingredients, and 85 percent of its rare-earth-minerals processing, which is essential for a wide array of products, including semiconductors, magnets, and electronics. Until the United States is able to change capital market incentives to reward longer-term, domestic investment, there is an even stronger need for the government to invest in R&D and production to ensure national leadership in crucial advanced industries. Congress should at least double the R&D tax credit for companies, which now lags far behind China's credit. It should reduce capital gains rates for long-term investments to encourage investment in critical and emerging technologies. And the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Financial Accounting Standards Board, and the business community should also develop performance metrics and accounting standards that measure longer-term capability development and R&D productivity and that support measures that discourage corporate short-termism.

It's essential to slow down China's exploitation of US and allied technology to further its own advances.

The second pillar will be to slow down China's exploitation of US and allied technology to further its own advances. Under the Biden administration, in 2022 the Commerce Department introduced export controls on advanced semiconductors and equipment. Congress should also modify the United States International Trade Commission's Section 337 statute to make it easier to exclude Chinese goods and services that benefit from unfair trade practices. Section 337 of the 1930 Tariff Act already gives government the power to do this, but the law needs updating, including eliminating the need to show economic harm before action can be taken. Among other steps Washington could take are preventing Chinese firms from listing on US stock markets; imposing selective tariffs on designated categories of goods such as rare-earth minerals from China; limiting Chinese access to American research, including by increasing investigations, prosecutions, and penalties for intellectual-property theft; ending most scientific and technology collaboration with China; relaxing the enforcement of antitrust rules when US firms agree to avoid sharing technology with China; and banning the US government from procuring Chinese goods and services.

As a third pillar, the United States should collaborate more closely with allies and partners to regulate investment and trade with China. Such steps

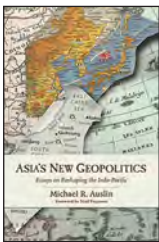
should include more effective screening of Chinese outbound investment, shared export controls and limits on technology transfer, enhanced cooperation on commercial counterintelligence, and jointly enacted import limitations on Chinese goods that benefit from unfair practices.

Washington should also lower trade barriers between its allies and partners. To increase the ability of Asian allies and partners to respond to China, the United States should formalize a pan-Pacific treaty alliance, building on the AUKUS security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, by adding additional countries such as Canada and Japan in a multipurpose arrangement that includes mutual defense, a stronger allied defense industrial base, and an enhanced trading bloc.

Policy makers have long recognized that the United States' asymmetric advantage is its allies and partners. The scale of this network relative to China is the only practical way to influence China's behavior economically, diplomatically, and militarily. Jointly, the United States and its partners can rebuild supply chains to eliminate Chinese-controlled chokepoints and develop alternatives to China for low-cost manufacturing, including by working more closely with India to help establish it as a manufacturing hub, especially in electronics. Finally, Washington and partner governments should collaborate to offer more generous project financing for developing countries that can serve as an alternative to the punitive debt loads that China has imposed through its Belt and Road Initiative. In the process, the United States will attract an even larger set of partners and come closer to making the late Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe's vision of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" a reality. ■

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Armed and Ready

Ever since war erupted in Ukraine, weapons shortages and obsolete facilities have bedeviled the Pentagon. Now there's a potential solution: a "munitions campus" to speed up design, testing, and production of a modern US arsenal.

By Nadia Schadlow

It's now almost trite to point out the cracks in the foundation of the US defense industrial base (DIB). Many facilities are more than a half century old, filled with outdated equipment, unable to meet production requirements, and often dependent on minerals and chemicals produced mainly by our adversaries. The issue is particularly acute for missiles and munitions, both the weapons needed for today's fight in Ukraine and future capabilities such as hypersonic weapons.

However, there is one promising development that has largely flown under the radar: the Defense Department's recent suggestions that it is poised to create a "munitions campus," as well as other campuses for other sectors, such as microelectronics, may be a step toward solving a host of DIB problems.

Key points

- » America's defense industrial base is aging, inefficient, and under great strain.
- » The Pentagon is exploring the idea of a public-private partnership to nurture innovation.
- » The Defense Department already runs testing facilities. An updated model would lead to faster, better innovations.

Nadia Schadlow is a national security visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. She is a former deputy national security adviser for strategy.



UNIVERSITY of the
PENTAGON
~ MUNITIONS CAMPUS
Home of the Eagles!



T. Jones



The Pentagon's Manufacturing Capability Expansion and Investment Prioritization (MCEIP) office—quite a mouthful!—proposes to address some of these challenges by creating a network of campuses consisting of testing and manufacturing facilities. The campus design is a public-private partnership centered around a hub-and-spoke model.

At the center of the hub would be capital-intensive, government-

supported facilities needed to test weapons and components. The spokes around this hub would be a variety of private companies that could use these expensive and specialized tools and facilities to develop materials needed by our armed forces, such as key chemical formulations called energetics.

Such a campus would have several strengths.

First, it provides a missing link in the DIB. It's not just about money. There is a requirement for a physical environment that allows innovations to flourish and find their way quickly into the weapons needed by warfighters. This requires testing. As the Energetics Technology Center (ETC) and Defense Department's recently released National Energetics Plan points out, such testing is critical for moving a technology from one readiness level to the next. As the ETC experts put it, new materials "must be tested and qualified, and the necessary processes are expensive, time-consuming, and arguably outdated."

Testing these compounds is not like testing software. Components of munitions are volatile: they are chemicals that in various formulations ultimately are designed to explode. Without the ability to test new compounds, you can't realize innovations. Thus, the creation of testing facilities means faster innovation for the Defense Department.

Second, relatedly, it would enable innovation by integrating the efforts of smaller companies around the country. Common facilities and testing sites significantly reduce costs from these firms' balance sheets—and could drive collaboration. If a small company has an idea that could pay dividends to the US military, with this approach they would be more able to afford to experiment and try new

We need to let innovations flourish and find their way quickly into the weapons needed by warfighters.

Shared facilities and testing sites significantly reduce costs, especially for smaller companies.

ideas. This is particularly important for startup firms that may not have much cash on hand to invest in expensive testing facilities.

Third, the munitions-campus concept plays to the US government's strengths. DoD already runs several testing facilities in a range of areas, including, for instance, a "Fort Renewable" that allows early-stage companies to test their ideas related to more resilient electrical grids. US national laboratories around the country allow users from universities and the private sector to test innovations and carry out experiments in facilities that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive for one company to build. This is relevant to a range of other sectors too, including space, which requires testing and evaluation of components like large vacuum tubes, and hypersonics, which requires testing to understand how various materials perform.

Fourth, these common facilities are a step toward onshoring domestic sources of critical chemicals and propellants because providing a place where R&D and testing takes place can encourage the production of new compounds at scale. The existing inhospitable environment to testing and producing energetic materials has contributed to driving US producers out of the country or out of business.

Finally, DoD's campus concept gets around the "not in my back yard" problem. Many Americans understandably don't consider a munitions testing or manufacturing facility as a local upgrade. Also, permitting and regulatory issues are serious impediments to building new facilities. However, if the federal government encourages states to identify areas where a campus could be located, it will get bidders who want to compete for the facility. It is not surprising that states like Texas, Indiana, New Mexico,

Maryland, and Arizona are enthusiastically creating hubs of manufacturing and innovation.

DoD's campus model could be a big play. It cre-

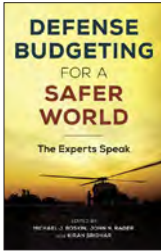
ates a collaborative space for R&D as well as the testing and prototyping of new systems that our military needs. It certainly does not address all of the problems in our DIB. But the concept is a step forward in addressing some of the underlying problems that hamper the modernization of our weapon systems.

The challenge, of course, is actual implementation. Too often, that's where things break down.

Common facilities are also a step toward onshoring domestic sources of critical chemicals and propellants.

But if the munitions campus—and others like it—is built in a timely fashion, it offers an approach that even skeptics of industrial policy might get behind. ■

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Fighting Fires with Data

Dominating future battlefields demands not just better weapons but a better way of using them. Fire suppression—that’s the key.

By Eran Ortal

World order as we have known it since the collapse of the Soviet Union is rapidly changing for the worse. Commentaries link that change with the emergence of Chinese economic strength and ambition, the rise of Russian nationalism, the decline of nation-states and the Arab states in particular, and more. But the defense community cannot escape the fact that a significant part of that worsening global order should be attributed to the decline of Western military deterrence. That decline is due not only to insufficient investments but also to the rapid erosion of Western military supremacy.

The pressing question the defense community faces is what can be done, from our perspective, to effect change in these realities.

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

Much has been written and discussed about military change and emerging technologies. Technology is in fact dominant in the creation of military

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SALVO: German soldiers fire an M270 multiple launch rocket system during training in Grafenwoehr. The American-developed M270 serves in multiple militaries and Britain has sent several to Ukraine for that country's defense.

[Markus Rauchenberger—US Army]

capabilities, but we tend to view it in isolation. Two well-known cases of military disruption from the early years of World War II offer a reminder that in both force employment and force generation, an accurate and focused approach to using that technology is also indispensable.

Part of Nazi Germany's overwhelming success, at least in the initial phases of the Second World War, had to do not with technological superiority but with a more accurate application of capabilities to solve a specific problem. French planners, reviewing the lessons of the Great War, considered the power of artillery to be the dominating force in war. The Wehrmacht, however, viewed that belief not as an unassailable fact but as a problem to be solved.

German forces harnessed established technologies of the time—rapid motorized transport and radio—to enhance their ability to maneuver. The Maginot Line defending France and the slow command-and-control structure of the Anglo-French defenders were overwhelmed. In a second arena, war at sea, the German navy was inferior to that of Britain, with its mighty fleet of capital ships. But the Kriegsmarine was reasonably quick to adapt and shift to submarine warfare, which for a time was devastatingly

successful. Germany addressed its naval deficit through a strategy of blockading Britain, using area-denial asymmetric tactics.

Battlefield disruption is a matter of problem solving.

equipment are essential, as is superior technology, but these are not the whole story. We need a theoretical framework. What is the great problem we are trying to solve?

How focused are war planners today, competing for technological superiority? Numbers of troops, weapons, and

STRATEGY TRANSFORMED

When Russia's initial offensive in Ukraine failed in February–March 2022, most analysts were taken by surprise. Putting aside poor Russian performance in chain of command and logistics as well as Ukrainian will and resilience—all true—what we witnessed that winter in Ukraine was the prevalence of munitions over maneuver. Putting an end to any prospect of rapid long movements, so-called *ranged fires* made the war a huge artillery duel: attrition warfare with few, and very costly, movements on the battlefield.

The second Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020, involving Armenia and Azerbaijan, provides another example of the evolution in combat. Unmanned air surveillance, targeting, loitering munitions, and other forms of accurate long-range weapons swept Armenia's largely mechanized forces off the battlefield. The famous fighting quality of the Armenian forces was no match for the modern targeting-and-strike system deployed by their adversaries.

New, close-in automated targeting will force armies to readapt from their customary "stand off" mindset.

from continuing and escalating the war there. The Houthi forces had good teachers: the Lebanese Hezbollah (HL). Fighting the HL in the war of 2006, Israeli defense forces proved ineffective at stopping rockets fired at Israel's home front. At the same time, they also proved to be vulnerable to modern anti-tank missiles like the Russian Kornet. Since then, Israel seems to have given up its traditional direct approach to defense and is as much deterred by the HL as it is deterring it.

In Yemen, Houthi forces also have successfully used such capabilities, provided by Iran, to deter the Saudi-led coalition

Contested domains, a widely used term, refers to a variety of contemporary military challenges that include cyberwar, electromagnetic measures, and space. But although these do matter, the one decisive element in battle is ranged fires. Accurate ranged fires, integrated with targeting capabilities, simply enable a regional power to deter a global one. In some cases, they enable malign actors to deter legitimate ones. The very thing that made the initial Ukrainian defense a success could work against world order.

THE PROBLEM—AND THE NEXT STEP

Accurate, effective weapons integrated with intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities are no longer exclusive to Western actors or dominated by them. Those capabilities make it easier for local aggressors to commit abrupt violations of international norms and the status quo and get away. Fire dominance defines the problem for any nation that seeks to deploy its forces to uphold international norms and remove threats.

To return for a moment to the twentieth century, one is tempted to describe military transformation between the world wars as an endless list of technologies and capabilities, with the German development of Blitzkrieg, mentioned above, a prominent example. Blitzkrieg exploited technology to regain battle-field maneuverability in the face of industrialized firepower—utilizing the second industrial revolution, built upon the internal combustion engine, to overcome the military consequences of the previous one.

“There are simply not enough interceptors to sit and play catch.”

But I suggest that just like some of the interwar and World War II militaries, we are spending much of our resources, including cutting-edge technology, improving legacy theories and concepts of war. In the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), for example, artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies are put to work mainly to enhance the performance of intelligence gathering and processing, the heart of the IDF’s targeting machine. While the results are significant for targeting, the improvements are still no match for the enemy’s skill in concealment and redundancy. As cyberwar and electromagnetic and information warfare take their place in domain doctrines, the enemy’s fires seem to remain largely untouched.

From a broad perspective, one can look at modern warfare as a history of fire dominance versus maneuver dominance. Platform-centric thinking in today’s armed services means that most responses to the problem

of accurate fire focus on protecting those platforms. Those efforts have exhausted themselves. Our targeting kill-chains are just not complete and fast enough to prevent enemy long-range fires from getting through. Modern force-protection is also insufficient. All single lines of defense are usually breached. As two defense experts, Tom Karako and Wes Rumbaugh, wrote in a Center for Strategic and International Studies analysis, “There are simply not enough interceptors to sit and play catch.”

There is another path, yet to be exploited: regain maneuverability and at the same time render enemy resistance irrelevant by suppressing enemy fires at their source.

WISDOM BEYOND TECH

Let’s consider some of the key developments in weapons and warfare.

The first industrial revolution in warfare involved steam power and machine guns, as in the Western Front of World War I. It was characterized by mass armies and mass slaughter.

The second industrial revolution enabled militaries to regain maneuverability in the face of industrial firepower. It did so thanks to mechanization and mobile command and control, made possible by the internal-combustion engine and radio. Engines and radios were essentially better versions of the older tech (for example, steam engines, telegraph lines, and line-of-sight signaling).

The third industrial revolution brought computers and networks for the targeting of platforms. But battlespace awareness in these new “joint” realms arose only where many people could work behind many computers. And all three industrial eras had large bureaucracies committed to the way things were.

The key today is to fully exploit the fourth industrial revolution—automated and miniature networked components—to successfully target the fires themselves. “Sensor to shooter” networks should be the leaping factor that allows the targeting of ascending projectiles and the quick strike at the fire sources even as they try to disperse. This network of digital artillery radars and aerial reconnaissance assets would be effective only at close ranges, forcing us to readapt from our customary “standoff” mindset. If developed and employed correctly, it would monitor a wide battlespace and slash response time; artillery pieces, anti-tank and anti-air missile teams, and others could be located and hit in less than a minute. Multiple-barrel rocket systems could be struck while they were still firing. Projectiles could be spotted and intercepted in midflight. The enhanced

targeting and strike capabilities will protect not only military forces but also civilian populations.

The fourth industrial revolution's reliance on automated data processing makes it less dependent on human labor. Military application of it will use mobile data networks

empowered by new unmanned aerial and space assets. And, just as with tanks, airplanes, and radios, the military

Enhanced sensing, accuracy, and speed will still not be enough unless soldiers can get it close to the enemy.

modernization of the fourth industrial age will be stillborn if we fail to take it out of our headquarters and into the tactical level. Enhanced sensing, accuracy, and speed will not be enough unless we get it close to the enemy.

Technology is no magic solution, of course. Hitler's obsession with "wonder weapons" in the later stages of World War II attests to that. History also teaches us that fielding technology is just the beginning. New technology should make us rethink our way of war.

World War I locked generals' minds in their chateau headquarters. The modernization of the 1990s again collected senior commanders, this time in their digital headquarters. That habit of remote oversight has proven hard to break. Today, power can and should be shifted to the forces deployed on the ground. They will work within a new envelope of automated air assets, sensors, data processing, fire suppression, and forward-interception capabilities. They will be able to outmaneuver ranged fires while confronting adversaries with a dilemma: fight and be annihilated, or give up. This "data-enhanced anti-fires maneuver" (DAM) concept of operations should become our modern Blitzkrieg. ■

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A Fateful Price

Hoover fellow Bruce S. Thornton's new book investigates a democratic paradox: civilians must restrain, but can also hamper, military leadership.

By Jonathan Movroydis

Hoover research fellow Bruce S. Thornton's new book underscores a paradox in democracy: when people are allowed to be free, it opens the possibility of popular dissent and of opposition to the governing institutions that were intended to protect that freedom. As the editor of *Cage Fight: Civilian and Democratic Pressures on Military Conflicts and Foreign Policy*, newly released by the Hoover Institution Press, Thornton presents case studies on how the demands of democracy come into conflict with military execution—whether in ancient Athens, the American Civil War, the Cold War, or US interventions in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Jonathan Movroydis: How did the book come about?

Bruce S. Thornton: *Cage Fight* is the product of Hoover's Military History in Contemporary Conflict Working Group, chaired by senior fellow Victor Davis Hanson. It is the second volume (the first was *Disruptive Strategies*, edited by research fellow David Berkey) to have arisen from the conversations we have

Bruce S. Thornton is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of Hoover's Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict, and an emeritus professor of classics and humanities at California State University, Fresno. Jonathan Movroydis is the senior content writer for the Hoover Institution.

in our annual workshop and from the essays of our bimonthly publication, *Strategika*.

We chose to focus on the topic of civilian-military relations because of the events that took place after the 2020 election. Specifically, we consider the duties of our senior officer corps. These generals and admirals all have obligations to the president under whom they serve. But these officials are also American citizens who have declared an oath to uphold the US Constitution and defend the country from its enemies.

“These generals and admirals all have obligations to the president under whom they serve. But these officials are also American citizens.”

Here is where the dilemma arises. A civilian government enables citizens to participate in political deliberation and, in the voting process, to hold our leaders accountable. The military is based on a hierarchical model. American democracy hasn't done so well with hierarchies. If you study the history of the United States, there have been flashpoints in which tensions between these two institutions have been on full display. I wanted to explore this aspect of American democracy in my introduction.

The affairs of the military often require secrecy and dispatch. A modern military can't go on, as the ancient Athenians did, debating over issues in the middle of a war and taking votes. But an important part of our political order is indeed the right to free speech and to voice our opinions. Our nation experienced vigorous dissent against the war in Vietnam and the second Gulf War. Even today, there is tense debate between people who view American aid to Ukraine as a waste of national resources and others who believe Ukraine is a critical line of defense against Russian President Vladimir Putin's assault on the freedoms of the West and the rules-based international order.

Movroydis: Can this right to hold leaders accountable go too far?

Thornton: In the first essay, Paul Rahe explains how the people of ancient Athens had taken the principle of accountability, in many senses, to a toxic level, because any citizen could accuse any government official of malfeasance or another crime and there would be a trial. This trial would be heard by several hundred Athenian citizens picked by a lottery. The penalties of a conviction could be exile, a fine, or even death. The great fourth-century BC orator Demosthenes alerted the Athenians to the dangers of their justice

system, in the face of aggression posed by Philip II of the northern Greek kingdom of Macedon.

Demosthenes said sardonically of Athenian commanders, known as *strat-egoi*, that they have a greater chance of being executed because of a trial here

in Athens than dying in battle against the enemy.

Eight Athenian admirals suffered such a fate after the Battle of Arginusae during the Peloponnesian War. Even though they were victorious

“The military is based on a hierarchical model. American democracy hasn’t done so well with hierarchies.”

against the Spartans, six of the *strategoi* were indicted on a capital crime and executed because a storm prevented them from retrieving the bodies of their dead sailors.

If you know your Greek literature, in Sophocles’s *Antigone*, you will remember the quarrel between Antigone and the tyrant Creon. Antigone’s brothers Polynices and Eteocles killed each other while fighting in war. The angry tyrant Creon refused to allow Polynices to be buried with honors. The biggest obligation families had in Greek society was to bury their dead. So, this whole business of retrieving the bodies was very important, particularly in a naval engagement. If the drowned men are never recovered, that means they can’t reach the underworld. This wasn’t a trivial political issue, although politics may have played a part. Nevertheless, that level of accountability is very destructive politically for the city-state. The founders of the United States were very familiar with this story and its lesson of excess accountability in public life.

We want accountability. But if accountability becomes excessive, it can constrain our military leaders’ ability to achieve mission success. In Vietnam, for example, the United States was forced to withdraw troops and end material support for the government of South Vietnam, largely because of the mass protests that took place on US soil. So, this isn’t just an ancient issue, it’s a modern one too.

Movroydis: In the second essay, Ralph Peters explores dissent in the efforts of both sides of the American Civil War. How was that dissent expressed?

Thornton: The Civil War was a conflict over our future national identity. Some will say it was just a disagreement over tariffs between North and South. That was part of the problem, but the reason for the war was fundamentally about slavery and the nature of American society, in its economic,

social, and political dimensions. That is why the debates of that era were so passionate. That passion manifested itself in various forms of dissent. For example, conscription of newly arrived Irish immigrants sparked riots in New York during the Civil War. Many of these immigrants were incensed that they were liable for service while slaveowners were spared the potential loss of labor from sending their subjects into harm's way. Both the North and the South also had the challenge of citizens among their populations who sympathized with their military adversary.

Movroydis: In chapter three, Peter Mansoor's essay talks about the history of military dissent against elected powers. What did the founders believe was the appropriate relationship between politicians and high military brass, especially in times of conflict?

Thornton: As the old saying goes, politics ends at the water's edge. In other words, our quarrels shouldn't be seen by anyone outside the family. We don't want our divisions to be exploited by our enemies, especially during war. But then again, do members of the military not have First Amendment rights? Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, military officers aren't permitted to freely criticize or undermine their commanders, including the president of the United States, who is the commander in chief of the US armed forces.

Let's look at this issue from a historical perspective. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European aristocracies were mired in dynastic conflicts. One of those conflicts was the Seven Years' War, in which the British and French fought each other not only in Europe but in North America, where both powerful nations had colonial interests.

For colonists like George Washington, who fought as a militia officer on the side of the British, their experience of fighting was not in the mass conscripted armies of Europe, because the colonies

“European dynastic struggles created a huge distrust among the colonists about ‘standing armies.’”

were granted a great deal of self-governance. By their own consent, they participated in the larger army (what was called the Patriot Army) during that conflict. This quasi-sovereignty that the colonists enjoyed became the basis for later struggles with the British.

In addition, these European dynastic struggles created a huge distrust among the colonists about “standing armies.” The prevailing opinion among

the colonists was that militias were called up and then disbanded when the conflict was over. Militias voted in their own officers. By contrast, professional armies had a process for selecting and appointing officers from the top down.

The distrust of the standing army runs throughout American history. We have movies like *Seven Days in May* about an attempted coup by generals against the president of the United States.

The First Amendment's guarantees of freedom of speech and assembly, which enable citizens to air grievances against the government, just add another layer of complexity to this challenge. I'm not sure it is a challenge that can be solved without a dangerous diminution of freedom. President Abraham Lincoln restricted speech and press freedoms during the Civil War. Shortly after America's entry into World War I, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Sedition Act of 1918, which criminalized certain types of speech, expression, and demonstrations. Some people argue that the Patriot Act of 2001, which expanded state surveillance to combat terrorism, was an unconstitutional breach of citizens' rights to due process.

Movroydis: How do you reform the national security state when threats are so persistent?

Thornton: This type of paradox was noticed by Winston Churchill when he was writing *The Gathering Storm*, the first volume of his history of the Second

World War. To paraphrase Churchill, there are structures of democracy that are inherently paradoxical, and they're just part of the price that we pay to be free. When you make people free, you open the possibility of

“When you make people free, you open the possibility of people undermining governing institutions.”

people undermining governing institutions.

This is a balancing act that we have over the years tried to maintain. I believe that in the post-World War II era, we have been moving too far in the direction of curtailing freedom. The founders created a mechanism of checks and balances to prevent abuse of power by any one of the three branches of government. But that mechanism has come under revision over the past one hundred years. There has been a weakening of those safeguards and a tendency toward transferring power to a technocracy of specialists who govern within the federal bureaucracy.

In recent times, we have seen social media giants working with the FBI to remove content from their platforms that they deem dangerous to our national security. I don't think this is a road we want to continue to go down.

In *Federalist* No. 10, James Madison wrote that factionalism "is sown in the nature of man." These are wise words. By their fallen nature, men will try to aggrandize as much power as possible to serve their interests and thus will inevitably struggle with one another over property or other earthly goods. It would be nice if people thought

about the greater good. Some people do, but it usually doesn't work that way. That is why we need to preserve our constitutional order, in which government is obliged to guarantee individual freedom while also respecting a system of checks and balances that doesn't allow any single individual or faction to become too powerful.

"It would be nice if people thought about the greater good. Some people do, but it usually doesn't work that way."

Movroydis: Williamson Murray's essay addresses how George Kennan's policy of containment of Soviet influence and power prevailed in public debates over isolationist sentiments in America during the early Cold War. Today, both major political parties have their hawkish and dovish factions when it comes to the projection of American power in foreign affairs. What can we learn from the Cold War era about the merits and flaws of these diverging perspectives?

Thornton: The Cold War has unique characteristics that make it difficult to apply to other circumstances, but there are some points of recognition. There are people who study the Peloponnesian War and compare it to the Cold War. Athens was powerful on the seas and Sparta was powerful on the land. Athens and Sparta, respectively, wanted to fight that war on their own terms. The two sides engaged in a tournament of proxy wars and attempted to peel back allies.

During the Cold War, containment worked in the end. But ask yourself: does a leader like Ronald Reagan always come along when you need him? We don't like to think this way, but in many cases fate plays a role in historical outcomes.

If you think about Nazi Germany in May 1941, it had achieved control over most of Europe. It enlisted some countries as allies, coerced others to cooperate, and occupied those who resisted. What if Adolf Hitler hadn't invaded

the Soviet Union? How would that whole postwar world have looked? Hitler might have been able to preserve his reign over Germany.

Also imagine that there was no atomic bomb and the United States hadn't used it to end the war with Japan. Russia had hundreds of thousands of troops in Eastern Europe. If we had redeployed all our troops from Europe to Japan, the whole continent would have been left exposed to Soviet aggression. All the great European powers—Great Britain, France, and Germany—were exhausted by the war. Thus, without US support, the Soviet Union would have been able to take over Europe uncontested.

But before the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, it would have been inconceivable for most American citizens to support US troop presence in both the European and Pacific theaters.

In sum, I think it is very difficult to find historical lessons that could be useful today because many large conflicts are driven by wildcard factors that are almost impossible to identify. But this makes it all the more important that we study the past diligently and carefully so that it speak to us.

Movroydis: The last essay, by Bing West, discusses dissent among the military, civilian government, and citizens during the wars of Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. How does such dissent during wars affect our defense policy making?

Thornton: It is kind of a gloomy assessment, but really, it's an age-old lesson that you must respond to aggression before it reaches a certain point. The Europeans didn't do that in the 1930s. They didn't take on Hitler.

“Governments of sovereign citizens with regularly scheduled elections tend to kick the can down the road.”

I think even in September 1938, during Hitler's meeting with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in Munich, the German army general staff didn't believe there was any way they could take Czechoslovakia,

which was allied with France. Czechoslovakia was not a tiny little helpless country at the time. But Hitler decided to roll the dice earlier when he remilitarized the Rhineland and launched the *Anschluss* in Austria. Hitler was a better psychologist than his generals were. He understood the failure of nerve that had been inflicted on Great Britain and France after World War I.

We should have learned that lesson. At the first signs of aggression, we need to hit the enemy hard. Today, there are continual calls to ramp up support for the Ukrainians against Russian aggression. But why did we let

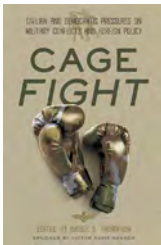
ourselves get to this point, where we have two choices, both of which are kind of bad? And it's not like we didn't know what Vladimir Putin was capable of. We knew just how brutal he could be when in the 1999 Chechen War, he made Grozny look like Thebes, utterly destroyed after Alexander the Great's campaign in the fourth century BC.

We all knew about Putin's vision to restore an ethno-Russian empire. In 2008, Putin tore off parts of Georgia and basically got away with it. He also got away with the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

But again, this falls into another paradox of democracy, which Alexis de Tocqueville talks about in *Democracy in America*: governments of sovereign citizens with regularly scheduled elections tend to kick the can down the road. We believe we can use diplomacy to end the war. But Putin took a year to get his invading army to Ukraine, and what were we doing? We were using inflammatory rhetoric and making threats. Then suddenly, he decides to invade, and we're shocked. And then, once we start to help push back against Russian aggression in Ukraine, we do so with half measures. The president of the United States said, "We're not going to deploy troops to Ukraine." So, he took a piece off the chess board right from the start.

It is unlikely we could have deployed troops in support of Ukraine anyway, because it would be too costly politically. Again, we come back to the paradox: the price we must pay for our political freedom. ■

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A Nuanced Look at Nehru

Seeking political advantage, India's ruling party is denigrating founding figure Jawaharlal Nehru. The government can learn from both Nehru's missteps and his accomplishments.

By Sumit Ganguly

There is no shortage of books about India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who led the country from its independence in 1947 until his death in 1964. From British historian Judith Brown's authoritative *Nehru: A Political Life* (2003) to the more adulatory *Nehru: The Invention of India* by Shashi Tharoor, an Indian opposition lawmaker and former United Nations diplomat, each makes clear that there is little question that Nehru helped forge the modern Indian state.

As prime minister, Nehru tutored the newly independent India in parliamentary democracy and helped knit together a diverse land through imaginative language policy, under which those attending school would learn Hindi, English, and a regional language. He fashioned a distinctive foreign policy, forging a path that sought to steer clear of superpower conflict. And he helmed the country through many challenges, from resettling refugees from Pakistan after the partition of India to integrating India's princely states into the nascent union.

Sumit Ganguly is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and distinguished professor of political science and Tagore Chair in Indian Cultures and Civilizations at Indiana University-Bloomington.



CORDIAL: In this photo from December 16, 1956, President Eisenhower and first lady Mamie Eisenhower greet Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi at the White House North Portico. Vice President Richard Nixon and his wife, Pat Nixon, stand at right. Nehru's vision of nonalignment grew from a specific historical context: he was determined to keep India from being drawn into superpower conflict during the Cold War.

[White House Historical Association]

Like any political leader, Nehru was not without flaws. Even sympathetic observers have admitted that his faith in a mixed economy, which allowed private enterprise while reserving a role for the state in promoting economic development, did not result in sustained growth or significantly reduce poverty. His neglect of the military and attempts to appease China despite a border dispute led to the 1962 Sino-Indian War.

Nehru's achievements, nonetheless, seem to far outweigh his questionable political choices, especially given what nearly two hundred years of

British colonial rule wrought in India. But that is not the view of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In recent years, Nehru's legacy has come under sustained attack. This criticism is mostly polemical: the current government finds it politically expedient to demonize Nehru in the public sphere while it enacts policies that shake the very foundations of the Indian state. These attempts to undermine Nehru's legacy—as well as that of his Indian National Congress party, the BJP's principal opposition—will no doubt gain momentum as national elections approach.

OFTEN VISIONARY

Historian Taylor C. Sherman's book *Nehru's India: A History in Seven Myths* enters the conversation against this political backdrop. Sherman, who teaches at the London School of Economics, writes deftly about Nehru and what he bequeathed to India. Despite the somewhat provocative title, her well-researched book does not seek to discredit the former Indian leader but rather to provide a

This more complex assessment of Nehru is a far cry from the caricature that India's ruling party is trying to foist on the electorate.

nuanced assessment of his achievements and failures. Sherman demonstrates that while Nehru initiated a host of visionary programs, they often met political, institutional, and societal

barriers to implementation. This more complex assessment of Nehru is a far cry from the caricature that the BJP is trying to foist on the Indian electorate, which casts Nehru as inept and idealistic to a fault.

Sherman challenges the notion that Nehru was the sole architect of modern India, which is treated as an article of faith among some of his admirers. She focuses on seven policy areas, arguing that the leader's views were hardly monochromatic for any of them. In Sherman's telling, Nehru was a patron who delegated tasks to those he trusted to carry out his vision; these subordinates did not always share his perspective and were sometimes clumsy in implementing his goals or thwarted by local authorities. (For example, despite Nehru's own commitment to secularism, he could not ensure that its principles took hold at the grass-roots level.) In each case, Sherman shows how myths have developed about Nehru and how careful scrutiny of the available evidence is necessary to understand his policies in their historical context.

Sherman argues that Nehru's doctrine of nonalignment—still embraced by India today, though lacking much of its lofty rhetoric—failed to produce coherent policy outcomes. Despite Nehru's commitment in principle to the doctrine (and

despite Soviet overtures), India remained squarely situated in the Anglosphere in the initial years after independence, with links ranging from trade to defense acquisitions. Meanwhile, Nehru's appeasement of China fit his worldview, yet proved to be a disaster that culminated in the 1962 border war. Among other matters, Nehru devoted insufficient resources to military preparedness. When China's battle-hardened People's Liberation Army attacked, the Indian army found itself underequipped to withstand the onslaught.

Some argue that Nehru's doctrine of nonalignment—still embraced by India today—failed to produce coherent outcomes.

Nehru's vision of nonalignment belonged to a specific historical context: he was determined to keep India from being drawn into superpower conflict during the Cold War and sought to prevent the militarization of the country, instead focusing on economic development. Today, the BJP consciously avoids using the term "nonalignment" in favor of pursuing so-called strategic autonomy. By distancing itself from nonalignment, the ruling party aims to convey to its supporters that it has thrown off the shackles of Nehru's era. But far from adopting a principled foreign policy, India's current government has taken a callously instrumental approach to its diplomacy. The narrow pursuit of India's own interests seems to trump all other considerations.

SECULARISM AND THE ECONOMY

When it comes to secularism, Sherman shows how politicians during the Nehru era—including those in the Congress Party—showed scant interest in protecting the rights of India's religious minorities, especially Muslims. Recruitment to government offices showed blatant bias, and apart from iconic buildings, many Muslim monuments and mosques were at best neglected and at worst vandalized. Despite Nehru's attempts to extend relief to Muslims displaced by the partition of India, local notables stymied his efforts. The policy limitations he faced stemmed from a variety of factors, including a lack of administrative capacity and the inability of high-level officials to compel local authorities to follow through on instructions.

Over the decades, the BJP has suggested that Nehru and his successors pursued a sort of "pseudo-secularism," appeasing India's religious minorities. To be sure, some of those who followed Nehru in the Congress Party have pandered to certain subsets of India's Muslim community. In 1986, for example, then-Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi used his parliamentary majority

to court the Muslim vote by overturning an Indian supreme court judgment that granted alimony to a Muslim woman, overriding the strictures of Muslim personal law. But ultimately, the historical evidence does not justify tarring Nehru with this particular brush. Today, the BJP actively seeks to marginalize Muslims and deny them equal rights under the Indian constitution; the ruling party has attacked Nehru's successors to justify its own policies.

Those committed to free market reforms in India have critiqued Nehru's supposedly unyielding commitment to doctrinaire socialism—essentially calling him an ideologue. But once again, Sherman demonstrates that apart from Nehru's penchant for Soviet-inspired five-year plans that set out specific economic targets, India hardly embraced socialism under his leadership. At the time, the country largely did not nationalize crucial industries and instead exhorted business leaders and entrepreneurs to become good nationalists

and work to improve the country's economic lot. These policies ended up favoring a handful of firms, leading to a mostly

India hardly embraced socialism under Nehru's leadership.

oligopolistic market that did little to benefit the Indian consumer. Today, the BJP also appears to favor a handful of business houses—most notably, those owned by Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani—making its critiques of Nehru's policies ring rather hollow.

Sherman's most telling discussion has to do with how Indian democracy functioned under Nehru's watch. The conventional account suggests that apart from a few lapses, democracy swiftly took root under Nehru and proved resilient. Sherman writes that electoral democracy with universal suffrage did emerge quickly in India, drawing on the work of Israeli historian Ornit Shani. However, she shows that even the Congress Party was not above resorting to political chicanery despite its significant popularity; its stalwarts also used the powers of their office to pursue financial gains. As early as 1956, when the government passed the Companies Act, a provision in the legislation permitted corporate donations to political parties.

Such dubious practices, now rampant in India, appear to have long antecedents. Under BJP rule, the most obvious example is the promotion of electoral bonds, which individuals and companies can purchase from a government-owned bank and then donate to the political party of their choice. With no transparency requirement, well-heeled people and groups can direct financial resources to their preferred party or candidate—presumably with the goal of influencing policy choices.

CLOUDED BY POLITICS

The BJP has made a concerted effort to distance itself from Nehru's legacies, from diplomacy to economic policy making. Given the first prime minister's lionized role in founding the nation and setting it on its democratic course, it seems that the BJP has needed to tear down some of Nehru's myths in order to build its own. The ruling party has characterized Nehru's policy failures as his alone, including the handling of the border dispute with China and his attempts to regulate the economy.

The strategy is designed to divert attention from the BJP's own shortcomings, including its deeply flawed policies toward

Beijing. The ruling party has created its own version of Nehru, depicting him as vainglorious, hopelessly idealistic, and committed to flawed policies. And so far, it has worked, appealing to many people in the BJP's electoral base.

In the face of this narrative, Sherman's book does not fundamentally undermine or celebrate Nehru's contributions to the early Indian republic. Instead, it provides a nuanced account of the extraordinary political leader and his time in office. Like any leader of his stature and tenure, Nehru pursued several questionable policies. But he helped build unity in the wake of India's independence and laid the groundwork for India's industrialization and a host of institutions. A segment of India's reading public will no doubt read Sherman's book with the care it deserves, but amid the current political environment—and as the national election approaches—it is possible that it will not receive the attention that it should. The BJP does not seem interested in recognizing Nehru's achievements, nor willing to learn from his errors. ■

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Afghanistan: Apartheid State

When US soldiers withdrew, systematic violence against women resumed. World leaders should join figures in the Arab and Muslim world to resist this injustice.

By Nader Nadery

More than two years have passed since US forces withdrew from Afghanistan as the Taliban recaptured the country. Unfortunately, there is no cause for celebration, especially for Afghan women.

The United Nations Security Council's Sanctions Monitoring team has found that the Taliban maintains strong and symbiotic links with both Al-Qaeda and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). This and the fact that various terrorist groups have gained increased freedom of movement in the country has been widely reported in the media. Moreover, news outlets regularly highlight the ongoing erosion of rights and freedoms in Afghanistan, particularly for women, as well as the extrajudicial killings of former government officials and those who supported the US military and civilians throughout the two decades of the US presence in the country.

Shaista (a pseudonym), a young police officer and the sole breadwinner for her family of five, represents one of the more than nineteen million

Nader Nadery is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and participates in Hoover's Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on the Middle East and the Islamic World. He is a senior fellow at the Wilson Center.

Afghan women now confined to their homes. Despite her courageous fight for her rights, regularly participating in street demonstrations, and running a secret girls' school at home, she feels abandoned. Fatima, one of Shaista's colleagues, said, "Unfortunately, I can no longer work outside. I am confined to my home, my only role

being household chores. I am like a ghost, erased from the outside world."

"I am like a ghost, erased from the outside world."

Many women and girls are grappling with mental health issues and a sense of helplessness. One girl even expressed a wish that "God had never created women."

DISAPPEARED

The systematic violence against women and the shrinking civic space in Afghanistan present a dire situation. According to Richard Bennett, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, women and girls in Afghanistan face severe discrimination that may amount to gender persecution, a crime against humanity. The de facto authorities appear to govern through systemic discrimination, intending to place women and girls under complete subjugation. Bennett's report, presented to the UN human rights council on June 19, 2023, further highlights these distressing findings.

Prominent international human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have also documented the profound impact of the egregious

and systematic violations on the lives and well-being of Afghan women. Afghan media in the diaspora, alongside courageous journalists

Women and girls in Afghanistan face severe discrimination that may amount to gender persecution, a crime against humanity.

on the ground, report daily on the suppression of the population, particularly women, under the Taliban's authority.

In solidarity with Afghan women's groups and civil society activists, these institutions assert that the Taliban's treatment of women constitutes "gender apartheid."

In 2021, Afghan women accounted for 29.39 percent of the country's four hundred thousand civil servants. This percentage is close to the average representation of women (43 percent) in the public sector in South and

Southeast Asian countries, which is three times higher than in Pakistan. Before the collapse of the Afghan republic, female lawmakers occupied 27 percent of the seats in parliament. Women's leadership in the public sector, including the military, stood at 10 percent.

Historically, most of today's restrictions against women in Afghanistan were never universally accepted or considered Islamic. Constitutional changes in Afghanistan since 1919 consistently preserved the rights and freedoms of Afghan women, with a robust bill of rights. Afghan women gained the right to vote in 1919 and the constitutional right to enter elected politics in 1964. Afghan women have been cabinet ministers since 1964.

Since assuming power on August 15, 2021, the Taliban have implemented edicts, decrees, instructions, and new rules that profoundly affect all aspects of Afghan women's lives in society. These restrictions cover

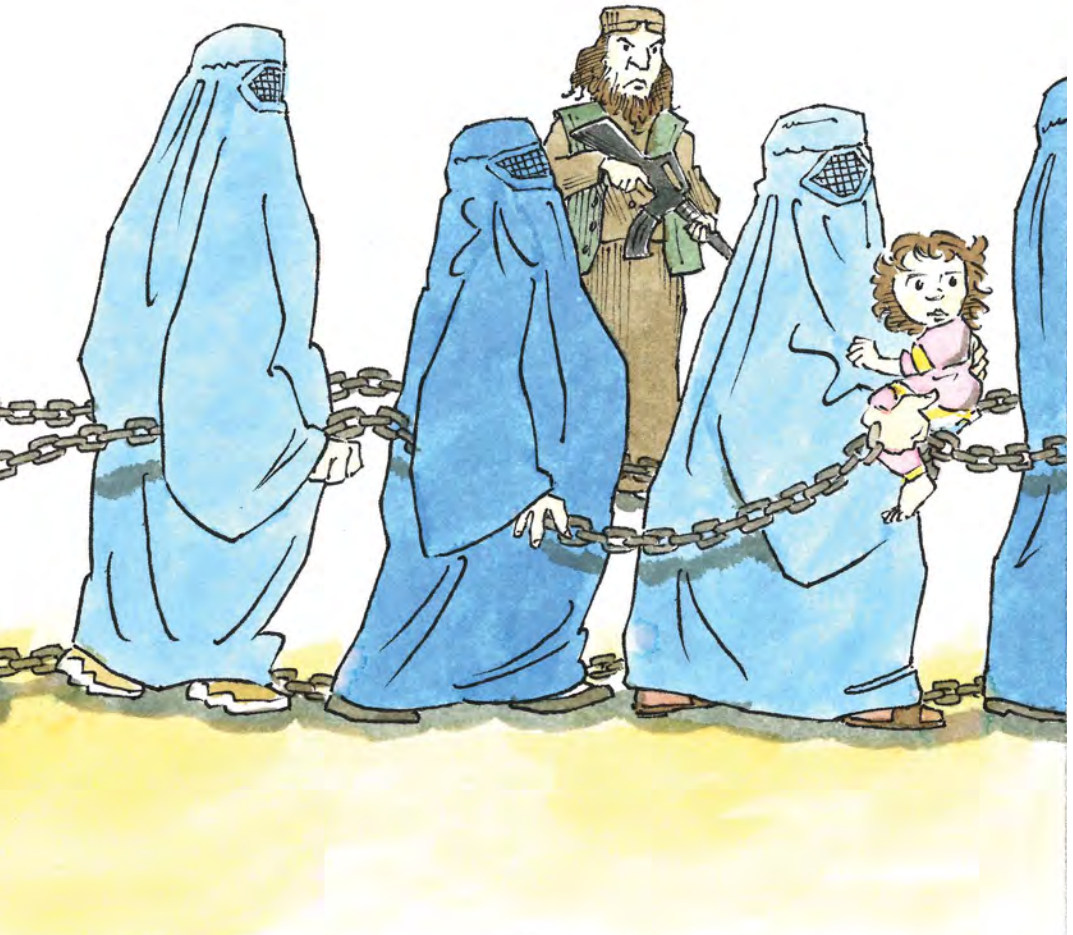


[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

education, health care, employment, economic opportunities, media presence, and access to justice. The enforcement mechanisms, such as the Ministry of Virtue and Vice, and the systematic nature of these policies and practices aim to eradicate women from society entirely and diminish their role in public life.

SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

There is a striking resemblance between the Taliban's treatment of women in Afghanistan and the actions and policies of the former apartheid regime in South Africa. A comparative analysis reveals that both systems aimed to maintain domination and control over specific groups based on gender or race. The Taliban's deliberate efforts to subjugate and marginalize Afghan women mirror the apartheid regime's intent to enforce racial superiority.



Additionally, both the Taliban and the apartheid regime created contexts of systematic oppression.

While the term “gender apartheid” may not be explicitly defined in international law, the policies and actions of the Taliban align with all the elements that define the crime of apartheid as a crime against humanity. These elements are outlined in the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. To understand the severity of the situation, we must interpret at least three key elements of apartheid, as drawn from the Rome Statute:

» *The intent to maintain domination* is evident in the Taliban’s deliberate and sustained efforts to subjugate and marginalize Afghan women. They restrict women’s mobility, education, and work opportunities to maintain patriarchal control and enforce a gender hierarchy that suppresses women’s agency and independence.

» *The context of systematic oppression* is vividly present in the Taliban’s policies and practices. These measures curtail women’s access to education, health care, and participation in public life. The Taliban’s rigid interpretation of sharia law perpetuates a deeply entrenched system of gender-based discrimination, depriving women of their basic rights and freedoms.

» *Inhumane acts* exemplify the Taliban’s brutality and the suffering endured by Afghan women. Public punishments such as flogging and execu-

tions are used as tools of intimidation and control. Testimonies from Afghan women contain harrowing accounts of physical and psychological violence,

Nowhere in the Islamic world—except Afghanistan—are girls banned from school or universities.

forced marriages, sexual assault, and arbitrary imprisonment of women’s rights activists. The UN report on the human rights situation in Afghanistan last May recorded 332 acts of public punishment, including flogging and other corporal punishments of women and men, by the Taliban in six months. These acts not only violate fundamental human rights but also foster a climate of fear and subjugation.

“DISTORTION OF RELIGION”

The rejection of the Taliban’s policy against women as “un-Islamic” has gained widespread support from the Islamic world, including major

institutions and religious authorities such as Al-Azhar and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Hissein Brahim Taha, the head of the OIC, has called on Islamic scholars to form a unified position against the Taliban's ban on women. Ambassador Lana Nusseibeh of the United Arab Emirates has expressed it fittingly, stating, "We must reject the exploitation and distortion of religion or culture as an excuse to deprive women and girls in Afghanistan of their basic rights. There is no religious basis for this in Afghanistan or indeed in Islam. In fact, the opposite is true."

While full gender equality remains elusive in Muslim countries, considerable progress has been made in other places, in contrast to the regression in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia has five female ambassadors, including its ambassador to the United States. In May of last year, the kingdom sent its first female astronaut, Rayyanah Barnawi, to the International Space Station. Nowhere in the

Islamic world—except Afghanistan—are girls banned from school or universities. In coun-

The problem is not Islam. It's the Taliban.

tries like Indonesia and Malaysia, where the majority of the population are Muslim, over 52 percent of civil servants are women, and women are nowhere confined to the home, as they are in Afghanistan. The problem is not Islam. It is the Taliban.

Afghans understand that it is not the responsibility of other countries to protect and defend their rights and freedom. While Afghanistan lacks a figure like South African freedom fighter Nelson Mandela, a large number of Afghan activists, both women and men, are fighting daily against systematic oppression. Activists like Nargis Sadat, who leads the Powerful Women Movement, music activist Musa Shaheen, and education campaigner and civil society leader Matiullah Wesa are just a few examples of individuals who are enduring imprisonment and torture and have been left without access to lawyers and family visits for months. Their bravery inspires many more Afghan men and women to stand up against the Taliban, refusing to let their dreams for a better future be shattered.

ALLIES

In a powerful show of solidarity, a group of female foreign ministers has recently stepped forward for the third time to stand with Afghan women and civil society.

However, the gravity of the situation demands even stronger voices from human rights advocates and leaders, both men and women. Former US ambassador Samantha Power, with her distinguished record of human rights advocacy, could bring significant attention to the recognition of gender apartheid as a crime. Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland; Zainah Anwar, the Malaysian feminist who headed Sisters in Islam; former first lady Laura Bush, a longtime advocate of Afghan women's rights; Hill-

ary Clinton, former US secretary of state; Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former president of Liberia; Najla Bouden,

American commitments to human rights should not remain mere statements of condemnation. They must lead to decisive action.

former prime minister of Tunisia; Retno Marsudi, Indonesian foreign minister; and others should join in the call for action and accountability alongside Afghan women and US Special Envoy Rina Amiri. Together, they could lend their influential voices to the cause, amplifying the urgency and importance of addressing the dire situation in Afghanistan and demanding the recognition of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity.

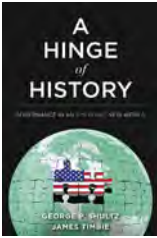
The United States, with its professed commitment to human rights, freedom, and democracy, bears a moral responsibility to stand up against gender persecution in Afghanistan. President Biden has repeatedly emphasized human rights as a focus of his foreign policy priorities, with his administration emphasizing the promotion of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in US engagement with the world. These commitments should not remain mere statements of condemnation; they demand decisive action.

While some will argue that engaging with the Taliban and establishing a field presence in Afghanistan would be in the interest of the United States, lessons learned from dealing with the Islamist group should guide any assumptions about a “changed Taliban.” The administration must not allow the gender apartheid regime of the Taliban to become a new normal for the United States or the rest of the world.

Shifting power dynamics and rising global challenges, including the war in Ukraine, may tempt policy makers to prioritize other concerns over human rights issues. However, if Aysha, a sixteen-year-old girl who lost her father who was fighting alongside US forces in Wardak province, can brave the brutality of the Taliban and take a stand on the street to demand the

right to education, then the United States should not shy away from utilizing its legal, diplomatic, and other foreign policy tools to stand with Afghan women. ■

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“It Leaves People Free to Disagree”

A new book by Hoover senior fellow **Michael McConnell** disputes the idea that the Constitution excludes religion from public life. Instead, he writes, the establishment clause champions individual conscience.

By Monica Schreiber

The establishment clause of the First Amendment, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,” has inspired two centuries of political debate and reams of case law. A new book co-authored by Stanford Law School’s Michael McConnell adds to the often-fraught discussion with a deep dive into what the founders envisioned when drafting the establishment clause—and how that vision can promote religious freedom and diversity in contemporary America.

McConnell is a former judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. Widely recognized as one of the country’s foremost advocates for and scholars of religious liberty, McConnell recently received the Canterbury Medal from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. The award is the

*Michael McConnell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the Richard and Frances Mallery Professor of Law and the director of the Constitutional Law Center at Stanford Law School. **Monica Schreiber** is assistant director of communications at Stanford Law School.*

group's highest honor for an individual "who embodies an unfailing commitment to religious freedom."

Here, he discusses some of the key arguments in *Agreeing to Disagree: How the Establishment Clause Protects Religious Diversity and Freedom of Conscience* (co-written with University of Georgia School of Law Professor Nathan Chapman), including why he thinks too many "separation of church and state" arguments have misconstrued the establishment clause's original intention for a religiously pluralistic society.

Monica Schreiber: What are your central arguments in *Agreeing to Disagree* and what are some of the key points you hope readers will glean from the book?

Michael McConnell: The establishment clause, probably more than any other provision of the Constitution, has been at the center of many of our modern culture-war debates. It specifically pertains to religion, but in a broader philosophical sense, it has a bearing on a number of issues about which Americans disagree quite strongly. The basic thrust of the establishment clause is that matters of deep, personal conviction should be left to individual choice. The establishment clause is very often misunderstood and seen only under the rubric of separation of church and state. It is seen as having the goal of secularizing the

public sphere, walling off religion from the public sphere, but it is the contention of our book that that is not only historically inaccurate

"The basic thrust of the establishment clause is that matters of deep, personal conviction should be left to individual choice."

but also normatively unattractive for today. As we explain, the importance of the establishment clause is that it leaves people free to disagree. And it keeps us from trying to use the state's coercive power to win these battles.

I believe the framers thought that this would enhance freedom of conscience at an individual level because there would be less likelihood of government coercion, but also that it would bring about more civic peace and harmony than if we are constantly engaged in trying to make sure "our side" wins these conflicts. To put it plainly, we are supposed to agree to disagree.

Schreiber: How have different interpretations of the establishment clause informed the many decades of debate over school prayer and religious expression in public schools?

McConnell: The first big cases were in the 1960s, but the issues have been debated all the way back to the very first American public schools in the 1840s. Initially the cases were about the leading of a classroom prayer, which may not technically be coercive, but in a very practical sense, the pressure on kids to conform was enormous. The argument was that the government should not be the institution responsible for teaching our children how, when, and whether to pray. But unfortunately, partly because of the way the Supreme Court wrote its opinions, that idea was often read to be a somewhat different principle, which was that religion has to be kept outside of schools completely.

So in the 1980s, when schools were allowing students to form extracurricular clubs of various sorts, including political clubs, environmental clubs, and sports clubs, many schools were forbidding religious clubs. Students who wanted to have, for example, a Bible study club, began going to court arguing free expression. Virtually every lower court, every federal court, was siding with the schools saying that such clubs would be a violation of the establishment clause. But that simply makes no sense in light of the real purpose of the establishment clause. These clubs were being formed by the students, not the state. In no sense was the state imposing religious views upon students. Congress got involved and passed the Equal Access Act, which said that if a school was going to have any non-curriculum-related, student-organized clubs, that they could not discriminate on the basis of the philosophical, religious, or ideological content or speech of those clubs. That

“These clubs were being formed by the students, not the state. In no sense was the state imposing religious views upon students.”

law was struck down by the Ninth Circuit, but ultimately upheld, in *Westside Community Schools [Board of Education] v. Mergens*, with the Supreme Court finding that allowing stu-

dents the freedom to form clubs without interference is perfectly in line with the establishment clause and, indeed, is the opposite of “the establishment of religion.”

Schreiber: What might people be surprised to learn about the framers of the Constitution with regard to their views on the role of religion in America?

McConnell: The Supreme Court has said on many occasions that the establishment clause is in tension with the free exercise clause, which gives a special protection for people’s actions when they are exercising their religious

beliefs. Many people assume this tension to be true. It is one contention of our book that these two clauses are not in tension at all. In fact, they are entirely complementary. What I think would really surprise many people if they looked at the history is that the very same people who were favoring the establishment clause were also the ones favoring free exercise. I think people would be surprised at just how unified the arguments against the establishment of religion were between the intensely religious minority sects and the secular Enlightenment figures like Madison and Jefferson.

Schreiber: What cases and developments in the area of religious freedom are you watching now?

McConnell: There will always be genuinely difficult questions, and the cases are not going to go away. There will always be hard lines to draw when an individual teacher is expressing religious ideas or practicing their own religion in the presence of students who might be affected or influenced.

Teachers are rights-carrying individuals with their own freedom of

“There will always be genuinely difficult questions, and the cases are not going to go away.”

speech and freedom of religion. But at the same time, they also wear a hat as a kind of authority figure within the school. And it’s often difficult to tell exactly where that line is going to be.

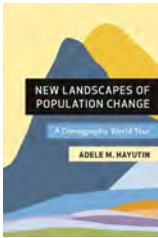
I do think things have been going in the right direction with the courts, but I also think that religious intolerance is actually on the rise in the United States, and that worries me. I think in the area of civil liberties, the court is not doing a bad job, but the hostility to the court is increasing. And the use of the court as a kind of political punching bag is on the rise, which is bad for all of us.

Schreiber: What are some broader lessons you think could be taken from the ten words of the establishment clause?

McConnell: This goes to the last chapter of our book, which is more speculative and doesn’t make a legal argument, but more of a cultural argument. There are a lot of things in our culture that are like religion in the sense that they touch very closely on issues of identity and fundamental ideas that are not usually susceptible to much compromise and change. The establishment clause does not apply directly to these ideas, but our suggestion is that maybe the wisdom of the establishment clause could apply to them. If people

would think more about how we could get the government out of deciding the questions and allowing more individual choice and conscience—in other words, I go one way, you go a different way, and we don't try to use the power of the state to impose our worldview upon anyone else—that would provide the same sort of benefits for our broader culture-war battles that the establishment clause provides in the religion context. ■

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The Climate Cudgel

In their attacks on energy companies, cities and states are abusing the legal system.

By John Yoo

Climate change has become the latest opportunity for abuse of the legal system. For many decades, liberals have turned to the courts when the democratic policy-making process has posed obstacles to their grandiose plans. Now, left-leaning cities and counties want to distort tort law, our nation's basic system for resolving accidents and harms, to seek outlandish damages from energy companies for the alleged harms of global warming.

In the latest example, Multnomah County, Oregon, sued energy companies

Key points

- » Tort law is being distorted to seek outlandish damages from energy companies for the alleged harms of global warming.
- » Countries other than the United States produce roughly 85 percent of the world's greenhouse-gas emissions. US states can't touch them.
- » Energy companies have federal licenses to extract and sell fossil fuels. Limiting that work would be up to Congress.

*John Yoo is a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, the co-host of the Hoover Institution podcast **The Pacific Century** (<https://www.hoover.org/publications/pacific-century>), the Emanuel S. Heller Professor of Law at the University of California, Berkeley, and a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the co-author, with Robert J. Delahunty, of **The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Supreme Court** (Regnery Publishing, 2023).*



UNREFINED: A protester in a dinosaur suit joins a climate-change protest in 2019 outside the US Capitol. Left-leaning cities and counties are twisting tort law to seek damages from energy companies for the alleged harms of global warming. [Angela N—Creative Commons]

last June for \$50 billion for their alleged contribution to the “2021 Pacific Northwest Heat Dome.” Last summer, four Democratic senators called on the Department of Justice to follow suit, literally, and pursue energy companies for allegedly misleading the public about climate change.

Led by New York and San Francisco (of course), liberal cities and counties have invented lawsuits against every energy company imaginable, from major producers to refiners and gas sellers, for their role in creating climate change. Joined by Baltimore; San Francisco; Honolulu; Rhode Island; Oakland, California; San Mateo, California; and Boulder, Colorado, among others, public officials in these communities suddenly discovered around 2017 that global warming constituted a “public nuisance” that harmed their residents and justified financial penalties.

These cities claim that the energy companies have caused broad injury through the “production and promotion of massive quantities of fossil fuels.” These businesses allegedly have triggered a “global-warming-induced sea level rise,” followed by flooding, erosion, and harm to municipal infrastructure and water systems. These cities also demand that the energy companies fund a “climate change adaptation program” to build sea walls, raise the elevation of buildings, and construct “such other infrastructure as is necessary.”

These lawsuits may provide a welcome political distraction for liberal mayors and lawmakers, who have presided over the rising crime, stubborn homelessness, and failing schools that are ruining our inner cities. But they're not serious cases, and no court should treat them as such.

Energy companies receive licenses from the federal government to extract and sell oil and gas. National approval of their operations should dispel the notion that they should pay damages or that the damages would have any real effect on global warming.

Such lawsuits may offer politicians a welcome distraction from issues like crime, homelessness, and failing schools.

These lawsuits also plainly misuse states' traditional control over tort law to control conduct beyond their borders. States have the right to regulate the harms that occur on their territory, such as pollution or accidents. But global warming does not take effect primarily within any single state. Countries other than the United States produce roughly 85 percent of the world's greenhouse-gas emissions. And as the Supreme Court unanimously observed in the 2011 case *AEP v. Connecticut*, emissions do not remain local but quickly disperse and commingle in the atmosphere. "Emissions in [New York or] New Jersey may contribute no more to flooding in New York than emissions in China," it said. China alone accounts for about one-third of all greenhouse-gas emissions.

Moreover, blaming fossil fuels for climate change, which might then affect city budgets, amounts to the type of extraterritorial regulation forbidden by the Constitution. Under the "dormant" commerce clause, the Supreme Court has long struck down state laws that advance economic protectionism under the guise of health and safety or environmental goals. States also cannot

No state can impose its own views of economic or environmental policy on the rest of the nation.

impose regulations on imports that effectively seek to control activity that primarily takes place beyond their borders.

The Supreme Court, however, has defended a state's right to control health and safety even against a dormant commerce clause challenge. Just last summer, for example, the court allowed California to regulate the raising of pigs sold in California, even though more than 90 percent of the livestock came from outside of California.

But even with the court’s revival of federalism in that case, states do not have the right to control conduct beyond their territory. A state cannot seek to impose its own views of economic or environmental policy on the rest of

the nation. Limiting energy use or replacing fossil fuels with renewable sources should be up to our elected representatives in Congress. The US legislature, not California, Texas, or

In the end, cities and counties can’t show that their lawsuits would have any effect at all on rising sea levels or other harms.

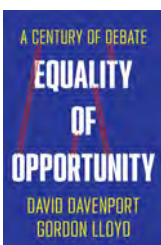
Florida, has the constitutional power “to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states.”

These principles show that the city and county lawsuits should fail. These jurisdictions even have difficulty identifying the discrete benefits of their claims within their territories. The lawsuits are based on a faulty theory of public nuisance that holds only select energy companies responsible for the global rise in temperatures over many decades without assigning their share of responsibility or considering other sources of carbon dioxide, such as China and India or manufacturing and agriculture.

Finally, these cities and counties cannot show that their lawsuits would have any effect on rising sea levels and their harms. The energy companies might produce carbon dioxide in the single digits as a share of all human emissions; even if they paid massive damages, other countries and industries would continue to emit greenhouse gases undeterred.

Blue cities and states should not have the power to use the law to decide the nation’s balance of energy between renewables, nuclear, and fossil fuels. Those “major questions,” the court reminded us in striking down the Biden administration’s student-debt-cancellation program last summer, remain for Congress to make. ■

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More Smoke, Less Fire

No, the world is not “on fire”—in fact, areas burned by wildfire have been shrinking. It’s the rhetoric that’s overheated.

By Bjorn Lomborg

One of the most common tropes in our increasingly alarmist climate debate is that global warming has set the world on fire. But it hasn’t.

For more than two decades, satellites have recorded fires across the planet’s surface. The data are unequivocal: since the early 2000s, when 3 percent of the world’s land caught fire, the area burned annually has trended downward. In 2022, the last year for which there are complete data, the world hit a record low of 2.2 percent burned area.

Key points

- » Since the early 2000s, the area of Earth’s surface burned annually in wildfires has trended downward.
- » The latest report by the UN climate panel does not attribute the area burned globally to climate change.
- » Prescribed burns, wise zoning, and enhanced land management work better to prevent fires than climate policy does.

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COOL IT: An activist protests in London in late 2022. In that year, despite the sign's accusation, US fires burned less than one-fifth of the average burn in the 1930s and likely only one-tenth of what caught fire in the early twentieth century. [Creative Commons]

Yet you'll struggle to find that reported anywhere. Instead, the news media act as if the world is ablaze.

In late 2021, the *New York Times* employed more than forty staffers on a project called "Postcards from a World on Fire," headed by a photorealistic

animation of the world in flames. Its explicit goal was to convince readers of the climate crisis's immediacy through a series of stories of climate-change-related devastation across the world, including the 2019–20 wildfires in Australia.

Last summer, much of the focus was on Canada's wildfires, the smoke from which covered large parts of the Northeastern United States. Both the Canadian prime minister and the White House blamed climate change.

Yet the latest report by the United Nations' climate panel doesn't attribute the area burned globally by wildfires to climate change. Instead, it vaguely suggests the weather conditions that promote wildfires are becoming more common in some places. Still, the report finds that the change in these weather conditions won't be detectable above the natural noise even by the end of the century.

Fewer acres burning each year has led to overall lower levels of smoke. This probably prevents almost 100,000 infant deaths a year.

The Biden administration and the *Times* can paint a convincing picture of a fiery climate apocalypse because they selectively focus on the parts of the world that are on fire, not the much larger area where fires are less prevalent.

While the complete data aren't in for 2023, global tracking up to July 29 by the Global Wildfire Information System (GWIS) showed that more land had burned in the Americas than usual. But much of the rest of the world had seen lower burning—in Africa and especially in Europe.

Globally, the GWIS shows that burned area is slightly below the average between 2012 and 2022, a period that already saw some of the lowest rates of burned area.

The thick smoke from the Canadian fires that blanketed New York City and elsewhere was serious but only part of the story. Around the world, fewer acres burning each year has led to overall lower levels of smoke, which today likely prevents almost 100,000 infant deaths annually, according to a recent study by researchers at Stanford and Stockholm University.

SELECTIVE OUTRAGE

Likewise, while Australia's wildfires in 2019–20 earned media headlines such as "Apocalypse Now" and "Australia Burns," the satellite data show this was a selective narrative. The burning was extraordinary in two Australian states but extraordinarily small in the rest of the country.

Since the early 2000s, when 8 percent of Australia caught fire, the area of the country torched each year has declined. The 2019–20 fires scorched 4 percent of Australian land, and this year the burned area will probably be even less.

That didn't stop the media from cherry-picking. They ran with a study from the World Wildlife Fund that found the 2019–20 fires impacted—

meaning took habitat or food from, subjected to heat stress, killed, or injured, among other things—three billion animals. But this study looked mostly at the

The 2019–20 burning in Australia was extraordinary in two states, but extraordinarily small in the rest of the country.

two states with the highest burning, not the rest of Australia. Nationally, wildfires likely killed or harmed six billion animals in 2019–20. That's near a record low. In the early 2000s, fires harmed or killed thirteen billion animals annually.

It's embarrassingly wrong to claim, as climate scientist Michael Mann did recently, that climate policy is the “only way” to reduce fires. Prescribed burning, improved zoning, and enhanced land management are much faster, more effective, and cheaper solutions for fires than climate policy.

Environmental Protection Agency modeling showed that even with a drastic reduction in emissions, it would take fifty to eighty years before we would see a small impact in the area burned in the United States.

In the case of American fires, most of the problem is bad land management. A century of fire suppression has left more fuel for stronger fires.

Even so, in 2022, US fires burned less than one-fifth of the average burn in

the 1930s and likely only one-tenth of what caught fire in the early twentieth century.

In the case of US fires, most of the problem is bad land management. A century of fire suppression has left more fuel for stronger fires.

When reading headlines about fires, remember the other climate scare

tactics that proved duds. Polar bears were once the poster cubs for climate action, yet are now estimated to be more populous than at any time in the past half century. We were told climate change would produce more hurricanes, yet satellite data show that the number of hurricanes globally since 1980 has trended slightly downward.

COUNT THE COSTS

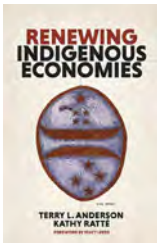
Global warming is a real challenge.

Over the next century, the costs associated will be the equivalent of one or two recessions.

The commonsense response would be to recognize that both climate change and carbon-cutting policies incur costs, then negotiate a balance that puts the most effective measures first. Surveys repeatedly show that most voters are unwilling to support the very expensive climate policies activists and green politicians have proposed.

Overheated headlines about climate Armageddon are an attempt to scare us into supporting them anyway, at the cost of sensible discussion and debate. ■

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Can We Say That?

Censorship may amplify the power of elites, but it both offends and endangers free societies.

By Peter Berkowitz

In the United States and Britain, ill-informed and poorly reasoned opinions about transgenderism, climate change, COVID-19, Islamist extremism, working-class political inclinations and voting patterns, race, sex, hate speech, and identity politics dominate progressive elites' thinking and drive their policy making. This alone would pose no special challenge to freedom and democracy. Misguided views, shortsighted laws, moralizing, and abuse of power leave their mark in the best of times. They will persist as long as human beings remain fallible, self-interested, subject to appetite and emotion, and desirous of wealth, status, and dominion.

The deeper concern is the determination of journalists, professors and university administrators, K-12 educators, government bureaucrats, high-tech titans and social media moguls, entertainment-industry movers and shakers, and corporate executives—a preponderance of what was once called “the establishment”—to silence dissent from progressive orthodoxy through law and

Key points

- » Censorship degrades the quality of information available to voters and officeholders.
- » Free speech undergirds the rights to religious liberty, assembly, petition of government, self-defense, property, and due process of law.
- » Censorship is a symptom of anti-democratic contempt.

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popular opprobrium. That puts liberal democracy itself at risk, not least by prompting the right to injudiciously retaliate with bans of its own.

Censorship degrades the quality of information available to voters and officeholders. Flawed assumptions, bad ideas, and haughty attitudes can be rectified by confrontation with sounder assumptions, better ideas, and suppler attitudes. The suppression of speech, however, deprives

error of illumination. It converts legitimate positions to suspect products

of special pleading and coercion. And it insulates true opinions from that contact with alternative perspectives, messy realities, and fiercely held conflicting convictions that transforms inert knowledge into living wisdom.

Censorship also undercuts the respect for fellow citizens and the rights of others that sustain political cohesiveness in a liberal democracy. By designating some opinions as unquestionable and others as unutterable, an overbearing majority—or a crafty and resolute minority—can purge the public square of those citizens who harbor proscribed thoughts and refuse to genuflect to authoritative conclusions. The right to free speech, moreover, is indissolubly bound up with all the other basic rights and fundamental freedoms. I cannot vindicate my equal rights to religious liberty, assembly, petition of government, self-defense, prop-

erty, and due process of law without the opportunity—unencumbered by fear of formal government sanction and of informal social ostracism—to advance my views publicly and, also of crucial importance, to hear others offer their perspectives.

Suppressing speech prevents error from being exposed.

Censorship also undercuts the respect for fellow citizens that sustains political cohesiveness in a liberal democracy.

KEEPING LIBERTY ALIVE

In his short book, *A Heretic's Manifesto: Essays on the Unsayable*, Brendan O'Neill shows himself a hero of free speech and a champion of the moral and political conditions in which it thrives. The chief political writer for the maverick British magazine *Spiked*, O'Neill argues “that the constant churn of political correctness—or cancel culture or wokeness or intolerance or whatever we're calling it—represents not just an over-the-top clampdown on speech, but a crisis of Enlightenment.”

The phrase *cancel culture*, he stresses, fails to capture the gravity of the threat. He writes:

Every enlightened idea—science is real, race is not, women should have rights, freedom is good, reason is the best tool for making sense of our world—risks being crushed under the forever spinning wheel of correct thought. . . . Our curse is not just to bear witness to the intermittent silencing of controversial commentators, but to watch as liberty, objectivity, democracy, equality, and the other great gains of the modern era are sacrificed one by one at the altar of new orthodoxies that pose, so falsely, as progressive thought.

O’Neill is not content, though, to faithfully record the outrages against liberty and clear thinking. His sizzling essays, which draw effortlessly on history and maneuver deftly through contemporary political culture, summon readers to keep liberty alive. The censors “can cancel our speeches, our jobs, our respectability, sometimes even our rights,” he acknowledges, “but they cannot cancel this: the freedom of every person to think and believe as he sees fit.”

One can appreciate, for example, O’Neill’s indignation over the contorted language pertaining to the transgender phenomenon—even while affirming that all human beings are equal in rights, so compassion and concern are due to those who suffer gender dysphoria and respect is owed to those adults who have made an informed decision to alter their bodies in line with their understanding of gender. His objection is simple. If you are a woman, you don’t possess XY chromosomes and male genitalia, and if you possess XY chromosomes and male genitalia, you are not a woman. Yet the phrase “her penis,” as he copiously documents in one essay, now appears routinely.

The casual coupling of those words, O’Neill contends, reflects not only the corruption of journalists and jurists but also a failure of judgment and reason. It shows that wokeness, contrary to progressive apologists, has sunk into official discourse. It demonstrates the willingness of experts and the authorities to deny nature on behalf of the new transgender orthodoxy. It confirms the power “of the cultural despotism plaguing Anglo-American society,” which erodes clarity of expression, common sense, and science. And it brings into focus how, instead of honoring individuals, the proliferation of pronouns and the coercive measures employed to spread their use—and punish their misuse—induces subservience to “the religion of gender fluidity.” The amazing inroads in recent years—in schools, government bureaucracies,

and corporations—made by the dogma that one’s gender is whatever one says it is illustrate George Orwell’s signature insight that control over language confers control over thought.

Progressive thought police, O’Neill argues in a chapter titled “Islamocensorship,” also enforce the absurd view that the very notion of Islamic extremism expresses Islamophobia. One example is the charge made by British academics that criticism of the hijab—various head coverings worn in public by Muslim women—must reflect gendered hostility to Islam. It follows, O’Neill mordantly points out, that the Islamic Republic of Iran suffered a severe bout of Islamophobia last year when, following the death of twenty-two-year-old Mahsa Amini at the hands of the police who had arrested her for failing to wear her hijab properly, young people across the country rose to protest Tehran’s mandatory hijab laws.

Just as it is a crime in Iran to criticize Islam, so too is it an offense against intellectual orthodoxy in the English-speaking academic world to call attention to oppression and violence within Muslim communities and Muslim majority nation-states. The penalties differ: “Here you’ll find yourself accused not of blasphemy, but of Islamophobia. Here you’ll be subjected not to physical lashes, but to a tongue-lashing—‘phobic,’ ‘racist,’ ‘bigot,’ all of it. Here you won’t be locked up, but you might be locked out—exiled from polite society and blacklisted

from campuses for your profane thoughts.” But the silencing is similar. Reminiscent of Iran’s ayatollahs, British and US professors and bureaucrats in effect enforce prohibitions on blasphemy against Islam.

“You won’t be locked up, but you might be locked out—exiled from polite society and blacklisted from campuses for your profane thoughts.”

HERETIC HEROES

Where blasphemy is barred, cursing of the impure, the unclean, and the vulgar is required. A favorite target for the West’s woke is older, white, male members of the working class.

In “Rise of the Pigs,” O’Neill explores the casual contempt with which British intellectual and political elites refer to white men who voted for Brexit as gammon—cured ham or bacon. “So widespread was the use of the gammon slur in liberal and leftish chatter post-Brexit that, in 2018,” writes O’Neill, “the *Collins English Dictionary* chose it as one of its words of the year.” The reduction of fellow citizens to pig meat signifies their unfitness for politics. The evidence?

They voted against elite wishes. The elites' solution? Limit public discussion by controlling the information that reaches the people. While the proffered justification for the new censorship—as for the old—is separating true from false, in practice the restriction of access to supposed “misinformation” or “disinfor-

mation” aims to conceal or delegitimize facts, considerations, and arguments that distract from or weaken the progressive narrative. At bottom, the progressive assault on free speech reflects anti-democratic ire. The educated must censor because otherwise the clash of opinions will confuse the ignorant and gullible masses or, worse, empower them to vote as they see fit.

The real reason for attacking “misinformation” or “disinformation” is to conceal or delegitimize facts and arguments that contradict the progressive narrative.

O’Neill warns that in the struggle to preserve free speech it is a mistake to deny its enemies’ insistence that words wound: “It is precisely because words can wound, precisely because of their power to unsettle, that they should never be restricted.” Although not the goal, pain and perplexity are inseparable from the exploration through which we learn who we are as citizens and human beings. Only by risking the wounds and daring to be disoriented can we arrive at a responsible understanding of what in our political societies must be conserved and what must be improved.

Woke censorship renders heretics—especially those who defy the prejudices of the age by defending free speech—more vital than ever to liberal democracy. ■

Woke censorship renders heretics—especially those who defy the prejudices of the age by defending free speech—more vital than ever to liberal democracy. ■

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Learn by Example

Why do Asian-American students excel? Let's stop being afraid to ask.

By Michael J. Petrilli and Amber M. Northern

The summer of 2023 brought a seismic shift to higher education: the Supreme Court's striking down of affirmative action in college admissions.

Putting aside the rancorous debates about the rationale and implications of the decision, at the heart of the Harvard case was clear evidence that the university was discriminating against Asian-American students.

A revealing 2022 study of Harvard admissions (“Asian American Discrimination in Harvard Admissions,” in the *European Economic Review*) found a “substantial penalty against Asian-American applicants relative to their white counterparts.” Given that the overall admissions rate for Asian-American applicants at Harvard was around 5 percent, the scholars estimated, removing what amounted to a handicap would increase their admissions chances by at least 19 percent.

What's more, the researchers took on a surprisingly candid tone when noting the differences between the Asian and white applicant pool:

While it is widely understood that Asian-American applicants are academically stronger than whites, it is startling just how much stronger they are. During the period we analyze, there were

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42 percent more white applicants than Asian-American applicants overall. Yet, among those who were in the top 10 percent of applicants based on grades and test scores, Asian-American applicants outnumbered white applicants by more than 45 percent.

Startling indeed.

Findings from the Fordham Institute's new study, "Excellence Gaps by Race and Socioeconomic Status," reminded us of this eye-popping imbalance.

Two decades ago, Asian-American students were already disproportionately reaching advanced levels.

Written by Fordham's Meredith Coffey and Adam Tyner, the report digs into how race and socioeconomic status (SES) interact to shape

academic "excellence gaps"—disparities in performance among groups of students achieving at the highest levels.

Their analysis uses nearly twenty years of eighth-grade reading and math assessment data (2003 to 2022) to document the progress of America's highest-performing students, meaning those who earned "Advanced" scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a.k.a. "the Nation's Report Card." Among other things, it finds that fewer black and Hispanic students from the highest-SES group (those with college-educated mothers) are achieving at Advanced levels than we would expect given their socioeconomic status. That's a disparity clearly worth our attention.

But so are the study's findings on Asian-American high achievers—who deserve our attention for a different reason. Two decades ago, Asian-American and Pacific Islander students (AAPI) were already disproportionately reaching the Advanced level of performance, and they've only made more progress since then. Part of that progress is due to raising the floor: Coffey and Tyner find that among students in the lower-SES ranks (those whose mothers have a high school diploma or less), there's been a substantial increase over time in the proportion of AAPI students who are Advanced.

Add it up and we can see that the AAPI advantage has only grown.

Now let's put these numbers into a context that is familiar to admissions officers at highly selective colleges. If we consider both the percentage of students in each racial subgroup achieving at the Advanced level and their share of the student population, what does the racial composition of students scoring Advanced look like?

It's clear that the proportion of Advanced students who are white dropped significantly, from 82 to 61 percent, between 2003 and 2022. Yet most of the diversity gains came from Asian-American students (who went from 10 to 22 percent) and, to a lesser degree, Hispanic students (from 3 to 8 percent). The proportion of Advanced students who are black decreased over that time, from a tragically low 3 percent to 2 percent.

Now let's see how it looks for reading scores in 2003 and then in 2022. The pattern is largely the same: big declines in the proportion of white students, with large gains for Asian-American and Hispanic students. The black proportion is again down, from 5 to 3 percent.

What can we take from all of this, particularly when it comes to Asian-American high achievers?

First, they are making solid gains and their success deserves to be recognized.

Second, although high-achieving students in eighth grade in the United States are a more diverse group than they were twenty years ago, most of this growing diversity is driven by gains by Asian-American and Hispanic students. For Hispanic students, that largely tracks the growth of their population as a whole, which has nearly doubled over the past two decades. That's part of the story for Asian-American students, too (their numbers are up by a third), but it's also due to their improved performance. Case in point: our study finds that Asian-American students are so high achieving that even those in the lowest-socioeconomic-status group often equal or outperform higher-SES students of other racial and ethnic groups.

Third, we need to learn from the success of AAPI students and their families—not be threatened by it or seek

to depress their chances of gaining admission to prestigious institutions. At the national, state, and local levels, policy makers and educators should ask: are there observable practices among AAPI students that could apply more broadly? For instance, are they more likely to participate in extra-curricular activities, sign up for more challenging classes, or take part in

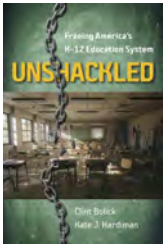
Reformers should ask: are there practices among Asian-American students that could apply more broadly?

High performers are often left to fend for themselves.

academic tutoring, clubs, or competitions? Are these behaviors helping AAPI students reach the highest level of academic achievement? If so, how could smart policies expand those opportunities to students from other communities?

Education reformers spend an inordinate amount of time, energy, and resources (rightly so) supporting low-performing students. But high performers are often left to fend for themselves. Let's just say this: it's not right. We can do better. And we should start doing better today. ■

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COVID's Lifetime Tax

Learning losses can persist for decades. Why we can't close the books on the young victims of pandemic policies.

By Eric A. Hanushek

Reports of drops in student achievement due to the COVID-19 pandemic are now treated as old news. Amid abstract reporting of test results, a sense of inevitability and complacency has developed. After all, could the fact that students' math scores fell by "nine points" truly be important?

The reality is that the cohort of students in school in March 2020 has been seriously harmed—implicitly facing a lifetime tax on earnings of 6 percent. And the harm is not going away.

A simple way to assess learning loss from the pandemic is to compare the performance of students tested in 2023 to students taking the same tests in 2020. The most recent data come from

Key points

- » The Nation's Report Card (NAEP) shows declines in students' math and reading skills since the pandemic.
- » People who know more, as measured by tests like NAEP, earn more throughout their working lives.
- » The pandemic learning losses imply that the American population will be less skilled than it would have been—to the tune of \$28 trillion in economic losses.

Eric A. Hanushek is the Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution. He was awarded the Yidan Prize for Education Research in 2021.

FACE MASK REQUIRED FOR ENTRY

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MCPS Fall 2020
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MCPS follows the guidance provided by the Maryland Department of Health, the Maryland State Department of Education, and the CDC.

THERE'S ONLY ONE CORRECT WAY TO WEAR YOUR

FACE MASK



Your mask should cover your nose, your mouth, and your chin. Remove your mask by the ear straps. Don't touch the front part. Remember to wash your hands often with soap and hot water!

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MCPS follows the guidance provided by the Maryland Department of Health, the Maryland State Department of Education and the CDC.



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In at the Main Office

the National Assessment of Educational Progress for thirteen-year-olds. Often called the Nation's Report Card, NAEP provides regular assessments of American students' math and reading skills at different ages. Comparing 2023 results with those for students tested just before the pandemic reveals that losses averaged nine points in math and four points in reading. This drop erased all the gains in students' math scores since 1990 and moved reading scores back to where they were in 1975! Low-achieving students lost more than high achievers, poor students lost more than nonpoor students, and both black and Hispanic students lost more than white students.

But NAEP, like most tests, uses an arbitrary scale to report scores that makes the size of changes hard to interpret. The implications of lost learning are better seen by translating these sterile numbers into economic losses. Past research confirms that people who know more, as measured by their performance on tests like NAEP, earn more. The research considers how individuals' earnings throughout their working lives differ according to the skills measured by scores on standardized math and reading tests. Importantly, the US labor market rewards these cognitive skills more than almost all developed countries—which in turn implies that the United States punishes the lack of these skills more than almost all developed countries.

Historical earnings patterns make it possible to estimate what the learning losses documented by NAEP will cost the average student in the COVID cohort: 6 percent lower lifetime earnings than those not in this cohort. In other words, the pandemic learning losses for this cohort are equivalent on average to a 6 percent tax surcharge on income throughout the students' working lives. This rises to 8 percent for the average black student, who suffered greater learning losses according to NAEP.

The economic costs do not end there. The economies of nations with more skilled populations grow faster in the long run, and the pandemic learning losses imply that the US population will be less skilled in the future than it would have been. Using historical growth patterns, it is again possible to project the aggregate losses to the US economy of having this lower-skilled cohort move through the labor force. The economic

CAUTION: Signs at Walter Johnson High School in Bethesda, Maryland (opposite), mandate the wearing of face masks in October 2021. Historical earnings patterns indicate the pandemic learning losses of the 2020 cohort amount to an average of a 6 percent tax throughout the students' working lives. This rises to 8 percent for the average black student. [G. Edward Johnson—Creative Commons]

loss from the lower-skilled workforce amounts in present value terms to \$28 trillion.

Costs in trillions of dollars are perhaps no easier to understand than drops in test scores. To put this figure in perspective, consider that the projected loss of \$28 trillion amounts to more than one year's gross domestic product. Or that the aggregate losses that are due to unemployment, business closures, and related economic fallout from the pandemic totaled about \$2 trillion. The losses from the "Great Recession" in 2008 totaled about \$5 trillion. In short, the impact on the economy we should expect from pandemic-era learning loss dwarfs the impacts that have so captured public and policy makers' attention in recent years.

PERMANENT LOSSES

We are struggling as a nation even to get our schools back to where they were in terms of supporting student learning, but these costs will be permanent if we just return schools to the status quo of March 2020. Our schools must improve if we are going to eliminate the burden of lost

learning. Evidence from a variety of experiences in other nations shows that the losses students experienced will persist

If schools simply return to business as usual, the losses will persist.

if schools simply return to business as usual. For example, several German states had short school years in the 1960s when policy makers sought to standardize school calendars nationwide. The earnings of students educated during that period stand out throughout their careers from those of students educated before and after the adjustment, and not in a good way. Other examples of extended school disruptions—for example, due to prolonged teacher strikes—show similarly persistent impacts.

What has been done so far to address learning loss? The federal government provided almost \$190 billion in COVID relief aid to schools under three separate appropriations. Only a small portion, however, was required to be spent on ameliorating learning loss, and most schools have yet to spend much of these funds even though they disappear in a year.

States and districts have adopted a variety of strategies that most frequently include added instructional time or intensive tutoring. Unfortunately, the results of these efforts to date have not been good. Even if we optimistically project that the best available programs will be implemented with fidelity, the losses will not be erased. The scale of current recovery efforts is

simply not enough to overcome the deficits. Moreover, when recovery programs are voluntary, as is typically the case, higher-achieving students are more likely to participate, leading to a widening of achievement gaps.

At the same time, the pandemic strengthened a number of harmful policy trends that may cause

school quality to decline. For one, it reinforced a general drift away from test-based accountability policies. Additionally, teachers' unions saw the pandemic as an opportunity to push a variety of their preferred policies—including policies well beyond pay, benefits, or anything related to learning. For example, the Oakland Education Association in the Bay Area, after agreeing to a substantial pay and benefits hike, nonetheless went on an eight-day strike in May 2023 over “common good” clauses, including reparations for black students and “environmental justice.”

When recovery programs are voluntary, higher-achieving students are more likely to participate. The learning gap widens.

ANSWERS

There is a clear roadmap to success, albeit one that leads to political tension. The one policy that is known from research to be effective is ensuring that all students have an effective teacher. Recruiting and retaining more effective teachers has, of course, been the goal of many policy initiatives, but a variant

of this emphasis can be the solution to the learning loss problem: simply provide incentives for the most

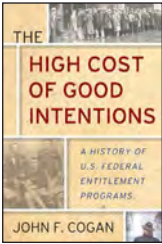
One solution: give incentives to the most effective current teachers to teach more students.

effective current teachers to teach more students. The highly effective teachers could teach larger classes or added sections of courses with both monetary incentives and additional support for this work. Unused federal funds could immediately support this tactic. Indeed, one could go further and use part of the funds to buy out the contracts of the least-effective teachers. These steps could instantly improve the average effectiveness of instruction, both making up for pandemic-era learning losses and improving schools going forward.

Such policies have been shown to work in a few large districts, including Washington, DC, and Dallas. Deploying them now at scale could save the

COVID cohort from a 6 percent lifetime tax. The alternative, saying change is “too hard,” amounts to accepting the lifetime injury to current students along with a \$28 trillion national loss. ■

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May the Talented Students Bloom

States don't serve gifted learners well. Here's a detailed plan for doing better.

By Chester E. Finn Jr.

Getting advanced learners (a.k.a. “gifted” students) the education they need, and ensuring that this works equitably for youngsters from every sort of background, is substantially the responsibility of state leaders.

Districts and individual schools, charters included, do the heavy lifting, but states create the policy structures (and funding flows) within which this happens. They create guidelines for which students are eligible, how they should be identified, what services must be provided for them, how to track their progress and the performance of their schools, what qualifications must their teachers possess, and how to ensure fairness across the board.

Today, sadly, America's high-flying students—and those with the potential to soar—face a dizzying array of inconsistent and incomplete state policies and practices. This is meticulously—and depressingly—documented in the National Association for Gifted Children's “State of the States” report. Working through its tables and analyses yields much insight into what a jumble

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is this policy domain between states—and how inconsistent many states are within their own policies.

In Fordham’s home state of Ohio, for example, statutes supply a reasonably clear definition of who’s eligible for “gifted and talented” education, a mandate for their identification, and guidance as to what methods should

be used to identify them.

The Buckeye State also does a credible job of tracking the achievement growth (on state assessments) at the school level

America’s high-flying students face a dizzying array of inconsistent, incomplete state policies.

of those who do get identified, and it reports how many within that population actually receive some sort of extra services from their districts. Good start, sure.

Yet Ohio has absolutely no requirement for serving those kids, i.e., nothing that obligates Buckeye schools to do anything different for their advanced learners at any level—not elementary, not middle, not high school—let alone any mechanism for ensuring equitable participation. As a result, just 5.2 percent of those identified as “gifted” in Ohio are black and 21.4 percent come from low-socioeconomic-status families (these data are from 2020–21), though the state’s public school population that year contained approximately 16.8 percent black youngsters and 48.4 percent from lower-SES households. Unsurprisingly, Ohio loses large quantities of high-potential human capital—and does far less well than it might on upward mobility—by virtue of the fact that gifted poor kids are much likelier to “lose altitude” as they pass through school than their more prosperous peers.

What, then, should state leaders do—assuming, as we should, that they care about giving every child the fullest and most challenging education that those youngsters can effectively use, developing their state’s human capital, deploying rational policies, and narrowing the yawning “excellence gaps” that exist today?

Rejoice! An answer is at hand. They should turn to and follow the useful nine-part policy roadmap for state leaders that was recently developed by the National Working Group on Advanced Education in its excellent report, *Building a Wider, More Diverse Pipeline of Advanced Learners*.

Here’s the plan—noting up front that all nine of these steps must be taken in synchronized fashion. It’s not “pick and choose” your policy—or today’s chaos will persist.

First, in their school and district accountability systems, states should place significant weight on student-level progress over time, not just grade-level proficiency, so as to encourage all schools to help all students achieve their full potential, including high achievers. When all the focus is on getting kids over the proficient bar, those who have already cleared it might be ignored.

Second, states should eliminate any policies that bar early entrance to kindergarten, middle school, or high school. This allows high performers to start sooner, move faster, and get farther.

Third, states should mandate the use of local, school-based norms for identifying students for advanced programs, in

Gifted poor kids are much likelier to “lose altitude” as they pass through school than their more prosperous peers.

particular at the elementary level. That means that every elementary school in the state should have a “gifted program” of some kind, serving at least the top 5 or 10 percent of its students or ensuring that they’re well served elsewhere.

Fourth, states should implement specific requirements about the services provided to advanced learners, services such as achievement grouping, accelerated learning, serious enrichment, specialized schools, and more. Too many states—as in the Ohio example above—require identification but nothing to ensure that those who get identified will get the schooling they need.

Fifth, states should mandate that districts and charter networks allow for acceleration (including grade skipping) for students who could benefit from it, and should clarify that middle school students who complete high school courses can earn high school credit.

Sixth, states should publicly report on the students participating in advanced education, including their achievement and growth over time, as well as their demographic characteristics.

Seventh, states should ensure that preparation and in-service professional-development programs offer evidence-based instruction in advanced education, both for district-level coordinators and for teachers.

Eighth, states should enforce the federal requirement that states explain how teacher-preparation programs address education of special populations, including advanced learners. (Today, this is a requirement for Title II reports that is widely ignored.)

Ninth and finally, states should provide funding and other incentives to encourage schools to frequently and equitably evaluate all students and provide a continuum of services to every student who could benefit.

Take that list to heart, state leaders, put its precepts into practice—all, not some of them, and in time your state will do right by its advanced learners, strengthen its economy, encourage upward mobility, and boost equality of opportunity. ▣

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California or Bust

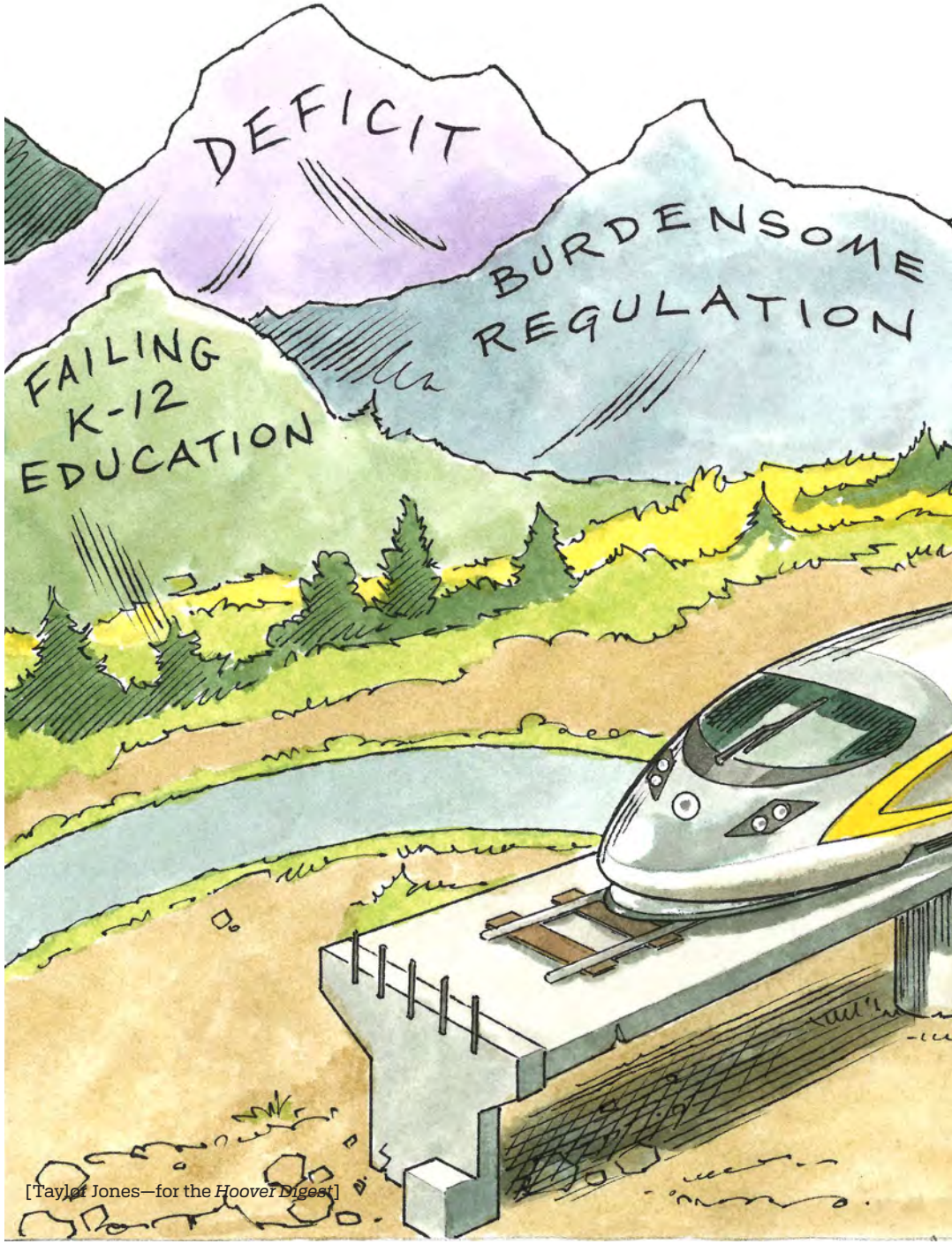
It's bust. California's problems show no sign of fixing themselves.

By Lee E. Ohanian

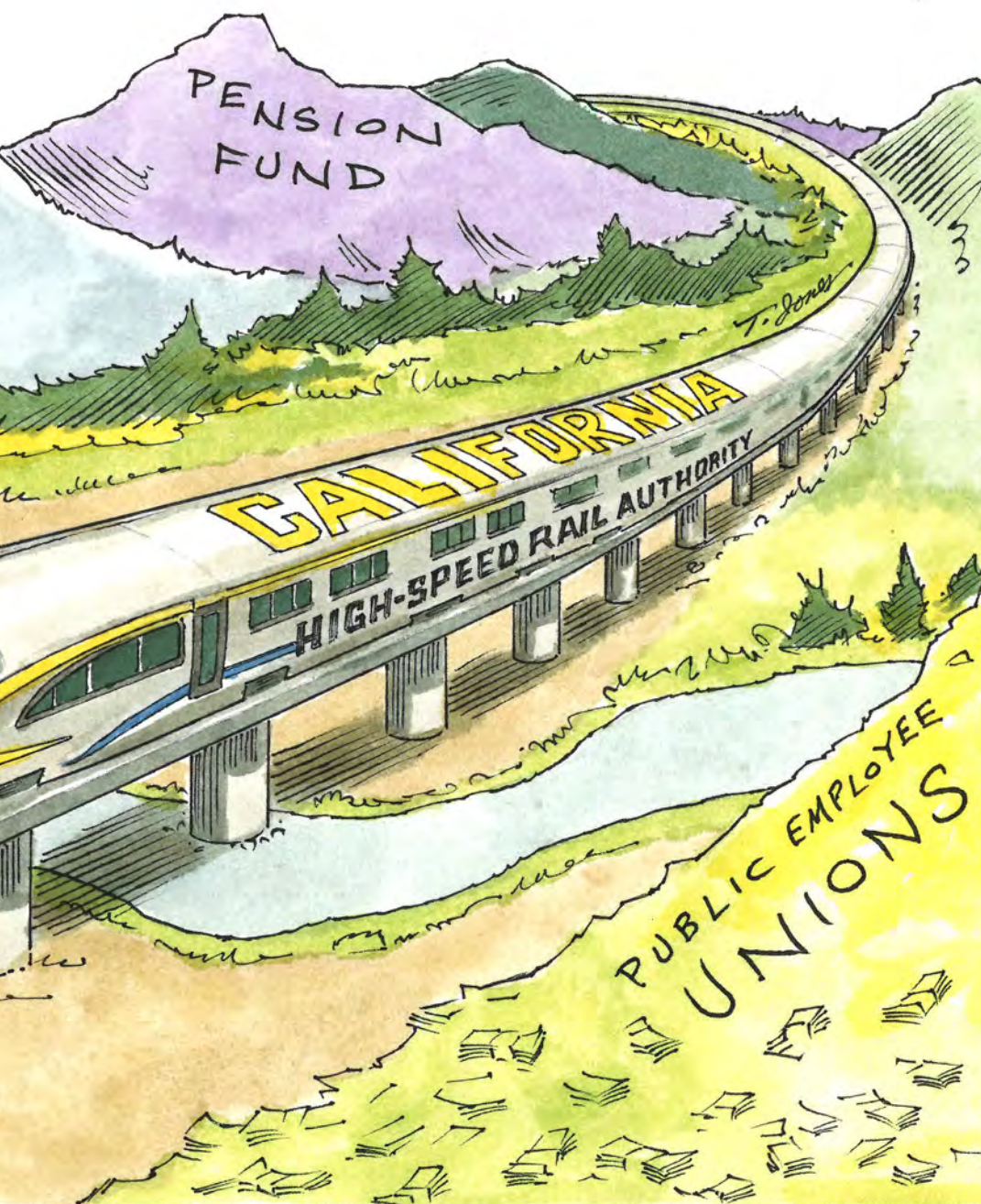
For the past five years, my Hoover colleague Bill Whalen and I have written about the economics of California, its state policies, and its state politics. Before I began writing in the Hoover Institution online journal *California on Your Mind*, I knew that some of California's economic policies were poorly designed and creating significant waste and dysfunction. But it wasn't until after I began studying these issues in detail that I found out just how badly California is politically managed. The problems are so numerous, so glaring, and so costly that I thought California politicians would self-correct. I was wrong.

Every major policy error I have observed has become worse in the past five years, including budget waste, the failure of politicians to prioritize what Californians want, the lack of oversight and accountability within state and local government, and a deepening of the costly symbiosis between state politicians and the political interest groups who lie at the center of nearly all of California's policy failures. And this nexus will preserve California's deeply flawed policy status quo until voters decide that they have had enough.

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



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]



PENSION
FUND

CALIFORNIA
HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE
UNIONS

BLOATED PAYROLLS

Overpayment and waste within state government is considerable, and it largely reflects the lack of incentives for state agencies to be efficient and the lack of accountability when they make costly mistakes. California's state budget has grown more than 50 percent in the past five years, rising from \$201 billion in 2018–19 to \$311 billion this fiscal year, totaling nearly \$24,000 per California household. Despite this budget, I doubt one could identify any major activity or department within state government that performs at a high level and is operated at a reasonable cost.

State employee compensation is one major cost component that appears to be too expensive. State workers on average received about \$143,000 in total compensation in 2019, roughly twice as much as private sector compensation that year. This reported difference understates the gap, however, because public sector pension contributions are understated, prefunding of public sector retirement health benefits are not included in compensation, and the value of additional public sector compensated days off is not included. A state public-private compensation comparison has not been performed since 2019, but average state worker compensation today could be as high as \$170,000 if it has kept up with inflation.

One reason state government compensation significantly exceeds private sector compensation is because few public sector agencies seriously bench-

mark their compensation practices to those in the private sector. Private sector compensation is disciplined by the value created by employees.

Private sector pay is linked to the value created by employees. Public sector pay isn't.

In a competitive marketplace, private sector employers need to pay enough to attract the talent they seek but will suffer losses if they overpay. These compensation dynamics are largely absent in the public sector, which leads to public sector workers receiving higher compensation than they would in the private sector.

For example, average compensation in the California Highway Patrol was \$209,000 in 2019. For comparison, total compensation in the highest paying private sector industry in the country (utilities) averaged about \$128,000 in 2019. This is for an industry that is extremely capital intensive and that tends to hire highly skilled specialists. In contrast, the primary requirements for becoming a highway patrol officer are high school

graduation or equivalent, a valid California driver's license, and no felony convictions. The reason highway patrol employees receive such high compensation is because they are represented by a powerful union, and there are inadequate incentives within state government to do anything other than agree every three years to the union's lucrative collective bargaining agreements.

The same issue holds for many other state workers, including California state prison guards, who earn twice as much as prison guards in the rest of the country and who are also represented by a powerful union. Total compensation for a senior prison guard exceeds \$200,000 annually, and this compensation doesn't include overtime. In 2021, overtime pay within the prison system totaled over \$500 million, reflecting union contracts that provide generous overtime rates. But the cost to taxpayers goes beyond inflated prison system salaries because the prison guard union effectively fights prison reforms, ranging from those that would rein in the behavior of corrupt guards to those that would enhance job training and rehabilitation of inmates, which in turn would help support their social transition and job prospects after leaving prison.

TOO MUCH TROUBLE TO FIX

The significant waste within state government reflects poor decision making by state agencies, which can have disastrous effects. One example is California's Employment Development Department (EDD), which is responsible for the administration of state unemployment benefits. The EDD manages this activity using a patchworked mainframe computer from the 1980s, running software developed in the

1950s. The system has long been susceptible to fraud, which was successfully managed using third-party software that was costing about \$1 mil-

Jobless benefits are calculated on a patchworked mainframe computer from the 1980s, running software from the 1950s.

lion per year—about 0.5 percent of the department's budget. But the department chose to discontinue the software because of its cost. This led to more than \$30 billion in fraudulent unemployment claims being paid during the height of the COVID pandemic, and many legitimate claims affecting nearly one million workers being held up for months. To benchmark the size of this fraud, it is about 50 percent larger than the annual budget of Tennessee, the country's fifteenth-largest state.

Why is the EDD running an ancient IT system that can't reliably detect fraud or pay legitimate claims on time? Because there are inadequate incentives and accountability within the department. The EDD has performed poorly for years and has been the subject of five audits in the past decade, but those audits have had little if any effect. Sharon Hilliard, who directed California's EDD during the pandemic, had been working at the EDD for thirty-seven years, having started at the age of nineteen. She had been steadily promoted to the top in an agency that had become increasingly antiquated and inefficient during her tenure. No one within state government ever asked

whether she was qualified to lead the agency because it was simply easier to continue to run the EDD on autopilot.

Once upon a time, a vision of high-speed rail was sold to voters.

But the saga of the EDD didn't end when the public health emergency did. The fraudulent payments led the state to take out a loan from the federal government to replenish the state's unemployment funds—a loan the state subsequently defaulted on last year. Federal unemployment-insurance law transfers the state's liability to California's private businesses, which now must pay higher unemployment taxes for years to pay off the state government's debt.

The EDD is now the subject of a House of Representatives Oversight and Accountability Committee investigation, in which the agency appears not to be complying with the committee's document requests.

TRAIN IN VAIN

California's high-speed rail is perhaps the most striking example of the state's pet political spending that provides no value to Californians. In 2008, voters were promised a transportation system that would connect Northern with Southern California and the Central Valley with the coast, with trains traveling more than two hundred miles per hour, at a cost of about \$33 billion, to be built by 2020. Voters agreed to a \$9.95 billion bond issue for seed money in 2008, with the expectation that private investment would be forthcoming.

Fifteen years later, the taxpayer seed money has been spent, and costs have increased to the point that the original \$33 billion budget will not be enough to complete even a route between Bakersfield and Merced, which is perhaps more than a decade away—if it's completed at all. The project has never attracted private funding, as it has been plagued by mismanagement,

lawsuits, and neglected oversight. Nearly all aspects of the project's management were turned over to consultants who were among the project's largest political supporters in 2008.

The project should never have even been initiated: reports from the state Legislative Analyst's Office in 2008 and 2009 showed that the original business plan and subsequent plans were deficient, including a failure to account for project risks and their mitigation, how funds would be secured, the allocation of costs, what methods were used to forecast ridership, the type of equipment to be used, an estimated date of completion for environmental reviews, or a ridership break-even point.

Even high-speed rail's most ardent defenders admit that the project requires substantial federal funding if it's ever to have a chance, but the current makeup of the House of Representatives is likely to object, given the project's enormous delays and cost overruns.

The vision sold to voters in 2008 has become a fantasy, yet the state's Democratic Party continues to fund what has become a pet project, with no path to

completion. There is so little accountability within the state that lawmakers don't feel the need to explain the failures of the project to their constituents. The state Senate's Transportation Committee hasn't issued a report on high-speed rail since 2016, and the state Assembly's Transportation Committee has no documents on it.

Three-fourths of the students in California schools don't learn enough to succeed in the world they will inherit.

SHAMEFUL SCHOOLS

California's K-12 public education system is the best illustration of the damage created by relationships between state policy makers and political interest groups. More than 75 percent of California students lack proficiency in math or reading, despite a \$128 billion state education budget that exceeds the entire budget of most states. And as the system fails to educate our children, the state's Department of Education threatens to sue education experts who would testify against the department for this failure.

Education in California fails because there are inadequate incentives and accountability within the system. Teacher tenure is frequently awarded after only eighteen months of teaching, and it is extremely costly to fire a tenured teacher for poor performance. Education economists have estimated that

replacing the worst teachers from California classrooms would substantially boost the achievement and future lifetime earnings of students. Teacher compensation is divorced from teacher effectiveness within unions' collective bargaining agreements, which means that highly performing teachers are not financially rewarded. But modifying teacher tenure rules and implementing merit-based pay have been impossible to accomplish, and this is entirely due to the close relationship between state politicians and teachers' unions.

In 2018, two Democrats—Tony Thurmond and Marshall Tuck—ran for the office of state school superintendent. Tuck was a reform candidate

A powerful environmental lobby blocks reforms that would increase California's water supplies and create more housing.

who had turned around several failing schools in Los Angeles, within just one year, by implementing modest reforms. Thurmond had no experience running a school yet was

the candidate supported by California's education establishment. In August 2018, just three months before the election, Tuck addressed the California state Democratic Party's annual convention about his ideas to improve California schools. But he was shouted down until his time to speak had expired. He couldn't say one word. If he had been permitted to speak, he would have explained his ideas about creating lifelong training programs for teachers, raising pay for teachers and principals in poor communities, and rewarding teachers based on their performance.

But any change to the status quo is anathema to education interest groups and the politicians they support. Those who pay the ultimate price for this are the three out of four children who go through our K-12 classrooms without learning enough to succeed in the world that they will inherit. It's not as if we don't know how to teach our kids. One extremely successful California charter school is achieving outstanding learning outcomes by giving teachers the flexibility they need and by eliminating confrontational union-management relationships. The blueprint is there for us to follow. If we did, we could immediately improve the lives of more than five million children. It is hard to imagine anything sadder within the realm of our state policies.

INERTIA IS TOO STRONG

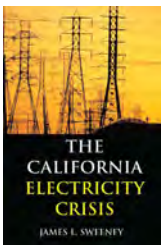
I had hoped that California's political leaders would implement sensible policy reforms that would benefit so many Californians, particularly the

thirteen million people within the state who live in or near poverty, whose children suffer from the worst schools, and who try to manage on an annual household income of \$41,000 or less per year for a family of three.

But after watching California policies and politics up close for the past five years, I now realize that my hope that California's politicians would self-correct was misplaced. California's policy failures won't be resolved because that would mean California politicians breaking away from the status quo interest-group cocoons in which they are so fully enmeshed. These include a powerful environmental lobby that blocks policy reforms that would increase California's water supplies and reduce building costs to create more housing; a host of unions that block the implementation of market-based pay and work rules to enhance worker efficiency; and other obstacles.

The policy reforms are there for the taking. Better policies would create better schools, less costly housing, better roads, more water, and lower energy costs. But those reforms will sit on the shelf until voters choose differently. I hope that in another five years I will be able to write that voters did just that. ■

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Does Merit Still Matter?

Hoover senior fellow **Thomas Sowell** expounds on a familiar theme: society's never-ending delusion that equality can advance at the expense of merit.

By Peter Robinson

Peter Robinson, Uncommon Knowledge: After growing up in Harlem, Thomas Sowell served in the United States Marine Corps, then received an undergraduate degree from Harvard, a master's degree from Columbia, and a doctorate from the University of Chicago. After teaching at universities that included Cornell, Brandeis, and UCLA, Dr. Sowell became a fellow at the Hoover Institution in 1977. Thomas Sowell is the author of some forty books, including his newest volume, *Social Justice Fallacies*. And this past spring, he turned ninety-three. Tom, welcome back.

Thomas Sowell: Oh, good being here.

Robinson: Dr. Martin Luther King said in 1963: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." You write that Dr. King's message was equal opportunity for individuals regardless of race.

*Thomas Sowell is the Rose and Milton Friedman Senior Fellow on Public Policy at the Hoover Institution. His latest book is **Social Justice Fallacies** (Basic Books, 2023). Peter Robinson is the editor of the **Hoover Digest**, the host of **Uncommon Knowledge**, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*



HE PERSISTED: Hoover senior fellow Thomas Sowell reminds readers, “Adam Smith had a very low opinion of abstract theorists who imagine that they can control a whole society with the ease with which one puts chess pieces where you want them on a chess board.” [Uncommon Knowledge—Hoover Institution]

In the years that followed, the goal changed to equal outcomes for groups. What now rose to dominance was the social justice agenda. If those backing the social justice agenda could have everything they wanted, what would the country look like?

Sowell: We’d be killing each other.

Robinson: What is the social justice agenda? What do they want?

Sowell: They want everybody to have equal outcomes or as close as they can get to it. Unfortunately, you don’t have the preconditions for that, even in the same family. One of the examples I use in the book is among five-child families, the National Merit finalist is the firstborn just over half the time. That is, more often than the other four siblings combined. The fifth-born is 6 percent of the time. And so it was, even where you have almost ideal conditions.

They're born to the same parents, raised under the same roof, and they're not the same.

Robinson: Because all kinds of things matter, including birth order.

Sowell: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Robinson: You take on various fallacies here. Let's take on a couple of them. The "equal chances" fallacy, I'm quoting you: "Even in a society with equal opportunity, people from different backgrounds do not necessarily even want to do the same things. In American sports, blacks are very overrepresented

in professional basketball, whites in professional tennis, and Hispanics in Major League Baseball." Why is that telling?

Sowell: Because the implicit assumption and sometimes explicit assumption is that in

"There's this notion of this inert mass of people down there and then the wonderfully brilliant people at the top who ought to be telling them what to do."

a world where everything was fair, where everyone was treated fairly, things would be representative of the population, the demographics of the whole in all these various activities. Imagine a black kid born in Harlem and he's born with a body identical to that of Rudolf Nureyev, the great ballet dancer; the odds are a thousand to one that he'll become a ballet dancer, much less another Rudolf Nureyev. Chances are, he wouldn't even think about it.

Robinson: So, you mean to say that when you tried out for the Brooklyn Dodgers—you tried out for a pitching position and they didn't hire you—you were not being discriminated against?

Sowell: Actually, I was trying out for first base, and the real reason I messed up was that my position was center field. But in order to be a good center fielder, I needed hours and hours of practice, and it was a very bad spring. I got very little practice. And so I figured I'm going to go out and make an idiot of myself in center field, so I made an idiot of myself at first base.

Robinson: Chess pieces fallacy: explain that one.

Sowell: Well, Adam Smith had a very low opinion of abstract theorists who imagine that they can control a whole society with the ease with which one puts chess pieces where you want them on a chess board. And so, there's this notion of this inert mass of people down there and then the wonderfully

brilliant people at the top who ought to be telling them what to do. And there's no thought that first of all, those at the top don't even know the people's individual conditions who are very different from themselves. And when they try to help, they can make things disastrous.

Robinson: You discuss a theory of justice, which is in certain circles . . . every university in the country, the philosophy department, political science, sociology. There is the big book on social justice written by John Rawls, philosopher at Harvard. "Rawls refers to things that society should arrange," you write. And then Tom Sowell says, "Interior decorators arrange, governments compel. It is not a subtle distinction."

Sowell: Well, if you're going to try to get some kind of result, you have to specify through what kinds of mechanism you expect to get that result. And different mechanisms, whether it's the governments, the market, the Red Cross, whatever, they have their own individual things that they're good at and not so good at. And so, you can't get the social justice result that you want unless you have the kind of institution that's likely to produce that result. Politics is not that kind of institution.

Robinson: And yet they all implicitly rely on government.

Sowell: Yes.

Robinson: Redistribution of wealth, using legal regimes to adjust the proportions of various groups that get certain jobs. They all rely on government. And what's distinctive about government is it's the one institution that can send you to jail.

Sowell: Yes, one of the real problems is that you have people making decisions for which they pay no price when they're wrong, no matter how high a price other people pay.

Right now, the homicide rates are beyond anything that were around, let's say, prior to 1960. And I mention 1960 in this case because that's when the Supreme Court remade the criminal law. They discovered rights in the Constitution that no one had noticed for over a century and they were impervious to evidence.

Robinson: Contrast your neighborhood in Harlem when you were an eight- and nine- and ten-year-old boy with what we see in neighborhoods in Chicago today, say.

Sowell: Oh my gosh, people are astonished when I tell them I grew up in Harlem. I can't remember ever hearing a gunshot. I've checked with my

relatives who grew up in similar neighborhoods in Washington and down in North Carolina; they never heard a gunshot when they were growing up. I remember going back to Harlem some years ago to do some research at a high school. And I looked out the window, and there's this park there near the high school. I mentioned in passing that when I lived in Harlem as a kid,

I would take my dog for a walk in that park. And looks of horror came over the students' faces. People have no idea how much has retrogressed over the years

“People are astonished when I tell them I grew up in Harlem. I can’t remember ever hearing a gunshot.”

in the black community and how much of what progress has been made has not been made by politicians or by charismatic leaders.

DURABLE DELUSIONS

Robinson: The big fallacy—at least, I take this is in many ways the heart of the book—racial fallacies. Almost all of your book is addressed to the current moment, but in racial fallacies, you start by going back about a hundred years to lay out the Progressive position in the 1910s and '20s and for some years afterward in addressing immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe: “This massive increase in immigration begins toward the end of the nineteenth century and carries on through the 1920s. In addressing the massive increase in immigration, Progressives claimed that these new immigrants were inherently genetically, and therefore permanently, inferior.” So, your argument is that a century or so ago, Progressives believed roughly the same about Polish and Italian immigrants that whites in the South had long believed about blacks.

Sowell: Oh yes.

Robinson: I'll read a quotation: “With the passing years, more and more evidence undermined the conclusion of the genetic determinists. Jews, who had scored low on the 1917 Army mental test, began to score above the national average on various tests as they became a more English-speaking group. A study showed that black orphans raised by white families had significantly higher average IQs than other black children.” You call them genetic determinists, which is one way of putting it. Some races were permanently inferior.

Sowell: Yes, and should be eliminated.

Robinson: And we've learned that's total nonsense. Jews are stupid in 1917 because they score badly on tests . . .

Sowell: Yes, on tests written in English. And people who spoke English did better on those tests.

Robinson: Or that blacks have a certain fixed IQ ranking.

Sowell: Yes, but even as of the time of World War I, the data show that black soldiers scored below white soldiers. The people who believed that this was genetically determined, they said, that's it, that's the answer, and they moved on. Some other people said, let's look at it more closely. They discovered that black soldiers from New York,

Pennsylvania, Ohio, and one

or two other states scored

higher than white soldiers

from Mississippi, Alabama, et

cetera. And as I mentioned in the book, people's genes do not change when

they cross a state line. When you have people who are crusading for some

idea, whatever the idea is, and they find some data that fits what they believe,

that's the end of the story as far as they're concerned.

***“People's genes do not change
when they cross a state line.”***

Robinson: And then get listened to.

Sowell: Yes, yes.

RACIAL ESSENTIALISM

Robinson: From the Progressive position a century ago to the progressive position today, racial assertions have ranged from the genetic determinism that we just discussed, which proclaimed that race is everything as an explanation of group differences, to the opposite view that *racism* is the primary explanation of group differences. How did this happen?

Sowell: Well, it happened because a lot of people arrived at the same conclusion and they had high IQs and PhDs, and that was the end of the story as far as many people were concerned. I mean, a high IQ and low information is a very dangerous combination.

Robinson: You once told me, “Peter, the main advantage of earning a Harvard degree is that you never again in all your life have to be intimidated by anyone who has a Harvard degree.” Tom, as I read this book, for the most part, it's objective, it's calm, it's analytical, but when you take on this modern

progressive position that racism accounts for anything, there are passages in which you're angry. I felt that there are passages in which there's emotion that is very close to this.

"Median black family income has been lower than median white family income for generations, but the median per capita income of Asian groups is more than \$15,000 a year higher than the median per capita income of white Americans. Is this the white supremacy we're so often warned about? For more than a quarter of a century, in no year has the annual poverty rate of black married-couple families been as high as 10 percent. And in no year has the poverty rate of Americans as a whole been as low as 10 percent. If black poverty is caused by systemic racism, do racists make an exception for blacks who are married?"

I guess you're allowed to be angry. Do you have the feeling, when you're addressing this notion that racism accounts for everything, that the arguments are subtle, it's persuasive, and you can forgive someone for buying that argument? Or do you have the feeling that it's willful?

Sowell: No, I don't. I think that people don't look for certain evidence and therefore they don't find it. And so, on the basis of what they know at a given

time, this may be very plausible. The problem is that you really need other people with a different orientation who are skeptical and who will then look for things

"I think that people don't look for certain evidence and therefore they don't find it."

and find things that are very different from that. One of the things I found interesting was the fact that there are counties in the United States which are among the poorest counties in the country. And six of those counties have a population that ranges from 90 percent white to 100 percent white.

Robinson: Appalachian counties, Kentucky and Ohio, as I recall.

Sowell: Of course, there's that great book that was written, *Hillbilly Elegy*.

Robinson: J. D. Vance, now Senator Vance.

Sowell: And these are people who have faced zero racism.

Robinson: They are white, after all.

Sowell: And they are white, and zero racism, and also back in the 1930s, when they did IQ studies, their IQs were not only at the same level as those

of blacks, they had the same pattern: namely that the young people, whether they were black or hillbilly, would have an IQ very close to the national average at age six, but by the time they were teenagers, it just kept going down and down and down because it's relative to the other people of that age group. And they were simply falling behind. So, it was clearly not biological, it was social. These hillbilly counties had incomes that were not only lower than the national average, they were lower than the average of black incomes for a period of half a century. Obviously, there must be other things that cause people to be poor other than racism.

FALSE LEADERS

Robinson: Now, this book is dedicated to fallacies, to showing errors in premises and errors in analysis. It's not dedicated to an alternative explanation. Nevertheless, you've got this argument lurking in here that it's the way people live, it's the cultural patterns. So, what are the patterns that pay off?

Sowell: In terms of fallacies for our public policy, what does *not* pay off is having charismatic leaders depending upon government to do things, if you look what has happened to blacks before and after there was a massive government effort on their behalf. The poverty rate among blacks, if you start in 1940 instead of 1960—because 1960 is the magic number for people who say the government did all these wonderful things and blacks advanced because of it—in 1940, the black poverty rate was 87 percent. By 1960, it was down to 47 percent. From 1960 to 1970, it went down to 30 percent. And in 1970, affirmative action is now in place. It went down to 29 percent. So, in the twenty years prior to the 1960s, the black poverty rate went down by 40 points and in the twenty years after 1960, it went down by 18 points.

Robinson: Year zero is 1865 for African-Americans. And the point you make in a number of places is that the black family is overwhelmingly intact. Right up to 1960.

Sowell: Not only do people take credit for things that were not their doing, they overlook the negative things that came in after the 1960s as a result of policy. In 1940, 17 percent of black children were raised in single-parent homes. I forget the exact date in the twentieth century, but after these wonderful reforms were put in, that quadrupled to 68 percent of black children being raised in single-parent homes. Now, there's a whole literature on all the bad things that happen to kids who are raised by single parents; whether they are black or white, American or British, the studies show the same

things. One study said fatherlessness has a bigger effect than even race and poverty. And certainly as I think back on my own life, I realize how fortunate I was because even though my biological father died before I was born and I was adopted, I was adopted into a family where I was the only child in a family of four adults and these were not people who were out having an active social life someplace. The life was there in the home.

Robinson: They gave you their time.

Sowell: Yes, and years later when I became a parent, like other new parents, I wanted to know when a kid was supposed to do this, when he's supposed to do that. And I said, how old was I when I started to walk? And the lone surviving member of the family that raised me said, "Tommy, nobody knows when you could walk. Somebody was always carrying you."

Robinson: From *Social Justice Fallacies*: "The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a major factor in ending the denial of basic constitutional rights to blacks

in the South, but there is no point trying to make that the main source of the black rise out of poverty. Nor can the left act as if the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was

"Consequences matter, or should matter, more than some attractive or fashionable theory."

solely their work. A higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats voted for the act." So, you're saying something here which is . . .

Sowell: Sacrilege.

Robinson: It's shocking, it's heretical. Well, you say the Civil Rights Act ensured equality before the law. It was overdue, it was necessary, it was just. It's an accomplishment in American history, but at about the same time, we get the creation of a vast expansion of the welfare state, and it does people harm. It harms the African-American family.

Sowell: Yes, and the other thing too. The Civil Rights Act was not what got blacks into professional occupations. In the decade prior to 1964, the number of blacks in professional occupations doubled. So, this is not a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Robinson: Tom, let me read a few single sentences from your book and you tell us what you meant. "Stupid people can create problems, but it often takes brilliant people to create a real catastrophe."

Sowell: Oh my gosh, think of the catastrophes of the twentieth century. You mention genetic determinism; they drew the conclusion from their reasoning that you had to put an end to certain races. They had what they called eugenics but what was later called genocide. There was a Progressive who wrote a book with that theme [*The Passing of the Great Race*, by Madison Grant] which was translated into German and Hitler called it his Bible.

During the 1920s, in reaction to World War I, the idea rose among the intellectual elites that the way to prevent war was to stop arming, you see.

Disarmament was the way to avoid a war. No evidence made the slightest impression on them, and they pulled the West into a war that probably would never have happened because the totalitar-

“Do we want a society in which some babies are born into the world as heirs of prepackaged grievances against other babies born on the same day?”

ian dictatorships that started that war were well aware that the United States, Britain, and France had an industrial capacity greater than theirs. And you wouldn't ordinarily attack countries that have greater industrial capacity than yours unless you thought that they were gutless and foolish enough not to remain armed.

Robinson: “In politics, the goal is not truth, but votes.”

Sowell: If you can get people to believe that their problems are all due to racists, you will get their votes. But that's not the case. It's very doubtful whether all the racists in the country today have half the negative effect on blacks as the teachers' unions have. The teachers' unions keep the schools lousy in areas where the people who send their kids to school do not have the option to send them to a private school.

Robinson: Tom, would you close our discussion by reading a passage from *Social Justice Fallacies*?

Sowell: Well, I still agree with it. “Do we want the mixture of students who are going to be trained to do advanced medical research to be representative of the demographic makeup of the population as a whole, or do we want students with the highest probability of finding cures for cancer and Alzheimer's? Do you want airline pilots chosen for demographic representation of various groups, or would you prefer to fly with pilots who were chosen for their mastery of all the complex things that increase your chances of arriving

safely at your destination? Consequences matter, or should matter, more than some attractive or fashionable theory. More fundamentally, do we want a society in which some babies are born into the world as heirs of prepackaged grievances against other babies born on the same day, blighting both their lives, or do we want to at least leave them the option to work things out better in their lives than we have in ours?” ■





A Climate of “Mischief”

In climate research, the science is too often buried under the politics. Scientist and Hoover senior fellow **Steven E. Koonin** shows how.

By Peter Robinson

Peter Robinson, Uncommon Knowledge: A scientist who’s skeptical about climate science, or at least about a lot of what passes for climate science, Steven Koonin is a professor at New York University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. Dr. Koonin received a bachelor of science degree from Caltech and a doctorate in physics from MIT. During a career in which he published more than two hundred peer-reviewed scientific papers and a textbook on computational physics, Dr. Koonin rose to become provost of Caltech. In 2009, President Obama appointed him undersecretary of science at the Department of Energy, a position he held for some two and a half years, during which he found himself shocked by the misuse of climate science in politics and the press. In 2021, Dr. Koonin published *Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn’t, and Why it Matters*.

In *Unsettled*, you write of a 2014 workshop for the American Physical Society in which you and several colleagues were asked to subject current

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climate science to a stress test—to push it, to prod it, to test it, to see how good it was. I quote: “I’m a scientist. I work to understand the world through measurements and observations. I came away from the workshop not only surprised but shaken by the realization that climate science was far less mature than I had supposed.” Let’s start with that. What had you supposed?

Steven E. Koonin: Well, I had supposed that humans were warming the globe. Carbon dioxide was accumulating in the atmosphere, causing all kinds of trouble, melting ice caps, warming oceans, and so on. And the data didn’t support a lot of that. And the projections of what would happen in the future relied on models that were, let’s say, shaky at best.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



DATA AND DISTORTION: NYU professor and former Caltech provost Steven E. Koonin grew skeptical of climate policy making when he realized, in his words, “the projections of what would happen in the future relied on models that were, let’s say, shaky at best.” [Kelly Kollar]

Robinson: Former senator John Kerry, then President Biden’s special envoy for climate, said in a 2021 address to the UN Security Council: “Net-zero emissions by 2050 or earlier is the only way that science tells us we can limit this planet’s warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. . . . Overwhelming evidence tells us that anything more will have catastrophic implications. We are marching forward in what is tantamount to a mutual suicide pact.” Overwhelming evidence, science tells us, what’s wrong with that?

Koonin: Well, you should look at the actual science, which I suspect Ambassador Kerry had not done. You know, the United Nations puts out assessment reports—the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—that are meant to survey, assess, and summarize the state of our knowledge about the climate. Those reports are massive, and you really need to be a scientist to understand them. I can understand this stuff. Ambassador Kerry and other politicians certainly have not done that. But then, he’s getting his information perhaps from the summary for policy makers in those reports,

or more likely from an even further boiled-down version. And as you boil down the good assessment into the summary, into more condensed versions, there's plenty of room for mischief. And that mischief is evident when you compare what comes out at the end of that game of telephone with what the actual science really is.

Robinson: Let's start with what we know. From *Unsettled*: "We can all agree that the globe has gotten warmer over the last several decades." No debunking needed there.

Koonin: And, in fact, it's gotten warmer over the past four centuries.

Robinson: OK, now that's a different assertion.

Koonin: Well, yes, that's correct, but it's equally supported by the assessment reports.

Robinson: Again, from *Unsettled*: "There is no question that our emission of greenhouse gases, in particular CO₂, is exerting a warming influence on the planet." We're pumping CO₂ into the air, into the atmosphere. CO₂ is a greenhouse gas. It must be having some effect.

Koonin: Of course. Absolutely. It's coming from human activities. Mostly fossil fuels.

Robinson: All right. Now, onto what we don't know.

"Even though human influences could have serious consequences for the climate, they are small in relation to the climate system as a whole. That sets a very high bar for projecting the consequences of human influences." That is so counter to the general understanding that informs the headlines, particularly during the hot summer of 2023. So, explain that.

Koonin: Human influences as described in the IPCC reports are a 1 percent effect on the radiation flow, the flow of heat radiation in sunlight in the atmosphere. One percent.

Whereas the average temperature of the earth is about 300 degrees Kelvin, about 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Human influences are a 1 percent effect on a complicated, chaotic, multi-scale system for which we have poor observations."

So, you know, 1 percent change in the temperature you might think is about a 1 percent change in the radiation. So human influences are a 1 percent effect on a complicated, chaotic, multi-scale system for which we have poor observations.

Robinson: Let's continue with what we *don't* know, one of the great themes of this book. Let's start with that IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. I realized as I read the book that I've heard it quoted over and over again and didn't even know what it was. I'll do this quickly. There are 195 countries that nominate scientists to assess climate research and they do these assessments in cycles that last six or seven years.

Koonin: Right.

Robinson: At the end of each of these cycles, which begin way back in 1988, they publish a report. From *Unsettled*: "Most of the disconnect comes from a long game of telephone that starts with the research literature and runs through the assessment reports to the summaries of the assessment reports, and then on to the media coverage. There are abundant opportunities to get things wrong." How can it be that this committee, the IPCC nominated by 195 countries—which means 195 parochial interests at play—how can they produce anything that's any good in the first place? And yet, you seem quite relaxed about the original science.

Koonin: The underlying science is expressed in the data and in the research literature, the journals and research papers people produce, the conference proceedings, and so on. The IPCC takes those and assesses and summarizes them. And in general, it does a pretty good job. There's not going to be much politics in that, although they might quibble among themselves about adjectives and adverbs. This is "extremely certain," or this is "unlikely" or "highly unlikely" and so on.

Robinson: You say this is done by fellow professionals in a professional manner. Now things begin to go wrong.

Koonin: Nobody who isn't deeply in the field is going to read all that stuff. So, there is a formal process to create a summary for policy makers, which

is initially drafted by the governments, not by the scientists. In the end, it's the governments who have approved the summary for policy makers line by line. And that's

"It's the governments who have approved the summary for policy makers line by line. And that's where the disconnect happens."

where the disconnect happens. I'll give you an example.

Robinson: Please.

Koonin: Look at the most recent report, and the summary for policy makers is talking about deaths from extreme heat, incremental deaths. And it says that extreme heat or heat waves have contributed to mortality.

Robinson: OK.

Koonin: And that's true. But what they forgot to tell you was that the warming of the planet *decreased* the incidence of extreme cold events. And since nine times as many people around the globe die from extreme cold than from extreme heat, the warming from the planet has actually cut the number of deaths from extreme temperatures by a lot.

So, that statement was completely factual, but factually incomplete in a way meant to alarm, not to inform.

And so, you get Kerry saying that; you get the secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, saying we're on a highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator.

Robinson: And the statements are preposterous.

Koonin: Yes, of course they are. The climate scientists are negligent for not speaking up and saying that's preposterous.

THE TROUBLE WITH MODELS

Robinson: Here I'll depart from *Unsettled* for a moment to quote from a piece you published in the *Wall Street Journal*: "Projections of future climate and weather events rely on models demonstrably unfit for the purpose."

"That statement was completely factual, but factually incomplete in a way meant to alarm, not to inform."

Koonin: Well, to make a projection of future climate, you need to build this big, complicated computer model, which is really one of the grand computational challenges. And then you have to feed into the model what you think future emissions are going to be. And the IPCC has five or six different scenarios: high emissions, low emissions, and so on. If you take a particular scenario and feed it into the roughly fifty different models that exist that are developed by groups around the world, you get a range of answers. The range is as big as the change you're trying to describe itself. And we can go into the reasons why there is that uncertainty. And in the latest generation of models, about 40 percent of them were deemed to be too sensitive to be of much use.

Robinson: Too sensitive?

Koonin: Yes. You add the carbon dioxide in, and the temperature goes up too fast, compared to what we've seen already. That's really disheartening. The world's best modelers, trying as hard as they can, get it very wrong at least 40 percent of the time.

Robinson: So, I'm reading this and I'm thinking that these problems that Dr. Koonin is describing will become less and less, and then we'll get it.

Koonin: Maybe.

Robinson: And this is one of the most astonishing passages in your book. "Having better tools and information to work with should make the models more accurate and more in line with each other. This has not happened. The spread in results among differing computer models is increasing." As our processing power increases, we should be closing in on reliable conclusions. And yet they seem to be receding faster than we approach them. How can that be?

Koonin: As the models become more sophisticated, what does that mean? That means either you made the "grid boxes" a little bit smaller in the model, so there are more of them, or you made more sophisticated your description of what goes on inside the grid boxes. The globe is divided into ten million of these boxes. The average size of a grid box in the current generation is a hundred kilometers, or sixty miles. And within that sixty miles, there's a lot that goes on that we can't describe explicitly in the computer: clouds are maybe five kilometers big, and rain happens here and not there within the grid box. We can't describe all that detail.

"It's going to be a long time before we get a computer a thousand times more powerful than what we have today."

The current grid boxes are a hundred kilometers. So, you might say, why not make them ten? Well, suddenly the number of boxes has gone up by a hundred. So, you need a hundred-times-more-powerful computer, but it's worse than that. The time steps have to be smaller, also. And so, the processing power actually goes up as the cube of the grid size. If you want to go from a hundred kilometers to ten kilometers, the processing power required goes

up by a factor of a thousand, and it's going to be a long time before we get a computer a thousand times more powerful than what we have today.

Robinson: But am I wrong that it's all reducible to data and we'll get it someday?

Koonin: Well, I think we will do better. But I'm still queasy about that. Take weather prediction. You feed the current state of the weather into the model and you can predict what the weather's going to be tomorrow, next day, and so on. And we've gotten better and better at that over the past twenty or thirty years. But the main reason we've gotten so good is the initial data: we know better and better the state of the atmosphere right now so we can predict it. Climate's a different problem. Climate is really driven by the oceans. We have not-very-good data on the oceans. And to be able to specify the state of the ocean now and then know it ten or twenty, thirty, forty years from now is a much harder problem. It's not obvious to me we're going to get it right. But it's worth trying because it's a grand computational challenge and we will develop technologies and learn techniques that will be helpful in other applications.

MISSION FOR MISINFORMATION

Robinson: CBS News reported this past May: "Scientists say climate change is making hurricanes worse." Your view: "Hurricanes and tornadoes show no changes attributable to human influences."

Koonin: The media, if you'll excuse me, get their information from reporters who have little or no scientific training. Reporters on the climate beat have to produce stories—the more dramatic, the better. When I say something about hurricanes, I quote right from the IPCC reports, and it doesn't say that at all.

"Reporters on the climate beat have to produce stories—the more dramatic, the better."

Robinson: Actually, this is an old headline, from 2020 by the UN Environment Program. "Climate change is making record-breaking floods the new normal." Here you are in *Unsettled*: "We don't know whether floods globally are increasing, decreasing, or doing nothing at all."

Koonin: I would say that the United Nations needs to check their press release against the IPCC reports before they say anything. When I wrote

Unsettled, I tried very hard to stick with the gold standard, which was the IPCC report at the time or the subsequent research literature. And I had available to me the fifth assessment report, which came out in 2014. The sixth assessment report came out about a year ago. And I'm proud to say there's essentially nothing in there now that needs to be changed.

Robinson: All right, agriculture and a 2019 headline in the *New York Times*: "Climate change threatens the world's food supply, United Nations warns." And you write: "Agricultural yields have surged during the past century, even as the globe has warmed. And projected price impacts of future human-induced climate changes through 2050 should hardly be noticeable among ordinary market dynamics."

Koonin: Not what I said, but what the IPCC said.

I've actually gotten to the point where I say, oh no, not another one. Do I have to do that too? This is endemic to media that are ill-informed and have an agenda to set.

Robinson: And what is their agenda?

Koonin: The agenda is to promote alarm, and induce governments to decarbonize. I think that probably their *primary* agenda is to get clicks and eyeballs. But, you know, there are organizations, such as one called Covering Climate Now, and their mission is to promote the narrative. They will

not allow anything to be broadcast or written that is counter to the narrative that we've broken the climate and we're headed for suicide, etc.

"They will not allow anything to be broadcast or written that is counter to the narrative that we've broken the climate and we're headed for suicide."

HEAVY WEATHER

Robinson: Here are more headlines in that vein. "Heat records are broken around the globe as earth warms, fast. From north to south, temperatures are surging as greenhouse gases combined with the effects of El Niño."

And: "Heat waves grip three continents as climate change warms earth. Across North America, Europe, and Asia hundreds of millions endured blistering conditions. A US official called it a threat to all humankind."

"July heat waves nearly impossible without climate change, studies say. Record temperatures have been fueled by decades of fossil fuel emissions."

This is my last one, from July 27: “This looks like Earth’s warmest month. Hotter ones appear to be in store. July is on track to break all records for any month, scientists say, as the planet enters an extended period of exceptional warmth.”

Koonin: All those headlines confuse weather and climate.

Robinson: Give me a tutorial on that.

Koonin: Weather is what happens every day, or maybe even every season. Climate, the official definition, is a multi-decade average of weather properties. So don’t tell me about what happened this year but tell me about what happened the average of the past ten or twenty years, and then we can talk climate. We have data that go back to about 1979. So, we have good monthly measures of the global temperature in the lower atmosphere for forty-something years.

What you see is month-to-month variations, of course, but a long-term trend that’s going up. No question about it. It’s going up at about 0.13, 0.15—I won’t get the number exactly right—degrees per decade. That’s some combination of natural variability and greenhouse gases. Human influences, more generally. And then, every couple years, you see a sharp spike, and that’s El Niño.

Robinson: Take just a moment to explain El Niño.

Koonin: El Niño is a phenomenon in the climate system that happens once every four or five years. Heat builds up in the Equatorial Pacific to the east of Indonesia and so on. And when enough of it builds up, it kind of surges across the Pacific and changes the currents and the winds as it surges toward South America. It was discovered in the nineteenth century and it’s kind of well understood at this point.

Robinson: Nineteenth century means this phenomenon has nothing to do with CO₂.

Koonin: Correct. Now, people talk about changes in that phenomenon as a result of CO₂, but it’s there in the climate system already. And when it happens, it influences weather and climate all over the world.

Robinson: So, let me take you to New York. You spent July there. I happened to visit in July and we had Canadian wildfires, and the press telling us that the wildfires are because of climate change. For the first time that anybody I know could remember, smoke is so heavy in Canada and it gets blown into

New York. And the sky feels as though a solar eclipse is taking place. New York is hot, really hot. And we're reading reports that they're sweltering even in Madrid, a culture built around heat in the midday, where even they don't quite know how to handle this heat. And it's perfectly normal for people to say wait a minute, this is getting scary. It feels for the first time as though the Earth is threatening. Suddenly you can't breathe the air. It feels uncomfortable. It's scary.

Koonin: I understand.

Robinson: And your response to that?

Koonin: I have two responses. We have a very short memory for weather. Go back in the archives of the newspapers and you can read from even the nineteenth century on the East Coast descriptions of so-called "yellow days" when the atmosphere was clouded by smoke from Canadian fires. So, look at the historical record first, and if it happened before human influences were significant, you got a much higher bar to clear to blame CO₂.

The second response is there's a lot of variability. Here in California, you had two decades of drought and the governor was screaming "new normal, new normal!" And look at what happened last year: record, at least historical record, torrential rains. People forgot about the 1862 event where the Central Valley was under many feet of water. Climate is not weather, and the weather can really fool you.

ADAPTATION

Koonin: Let me talk about adaptation a little bit and give you some examples that are probably not well known. If you go back to 1900 and you look from 1900 till today, the globe warmed by about 1.3 degrees Celsius. That's the global temperature record that everybody more or less agrees upon. The IPCC projects about the same amount of warming over the next hundred years. What's going to happen over the next hundred years as that warming happens? We can look at the past to get some sense of how we might fare.

Since 1900 until now, the global population has gone up by a factor of five. We're now at eight billion people. The average lifespan or life expectancy went from thirty-two years to seventy-three years. The GDP per capita in constant dollars went up by a factor of seven. The literacy rate went up by a factor of four, the nutrition, etc. And we've seen . . .

Robinson: Life got better.

Koonin: . . . the greatest flourishing of human well-being ever, even as the globe warmed by 1.3 degrees. And the kicker, of course, is that the death rate from extreme weather events fell by a factor of fifty. Better prediction, better resilience of infrastructure. So, to think that another 1.3 or 1.4 degrees over the next century is going to significantly derail that beggars belief. Not an existential threat—perhaps some drag on the economy. The IPCC says not very much at all. You know, the notion that the world is going to end unless we stop greenhouse gas is just nonsense.

Robinson: This is not a mutual suicide pact?

Koonin: No, not at all.

But the biggest problem in trying to reduce emissions is not the one and a half billion people in the developed world. It's the six and a half billion people who don't have enough energy. And you are telling them that because of some vague, distant threat that we in the developed world are worried about, that they're going to have to pay more for energy or get less reliable sources. They should be able to make their own choices about whether they're willing to tolerate whatever threat there might be from the climate versus having round-the-clock lighting, adequate refrigeration, transportation, and so on.

A great statistic, which I don't think I have in the book: three billion people on the planet of the eight billion use less electricity every year than the average US refrigerator. So, fix that problem first, which is existential and immediate and soluble. And then we can talk about some vague climate thing that might happen fifty years from now.

I was taught that you tell the whole truth and you let the politicians make the value judgments and the cost-effectiveness trade-offs and so on. My sense of that balance is no better than anybody else's. But the thing I can bring to the table are the scientific facts. ■





Pandora's Last Gift

Hope remains: for renewal, for a return to America's founding principles.

By Chris Gibson

The dysfunction and vitriol that characterize our present political age have been unfolding for decades. This is among the reasons Patrick Deneen's thought-provoking 2018 book, *Why Liberalism Failed*, made such an impact on those who care deeply about America and its future. Deneen painstakingly documented our failing political process and the fraying of our social fabric.

But while Deneen provided an accurate and disturbing portrayal of contemporary America, he misplaced the origins of these developments. Deneen traced our dysfunction to the very founding of the country when he claimed America redefined liberty away from self-control, opting instead for one of unbounded freedom. In the process, Deneen argued that James Madison and the architects of the Constitution pivoted away from personal virtue as the cornerstone for our way of life and adopted instead the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, which, similar to Adam Smith's logic, was thought to ultimately produce public virtue. This defining moment in

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the American experiment, according to Deneen, put us on a path towards disunity, decline, and failure.

While highly consequential, Deneen's work was criticized for both mischaracterizing the founding and for not providing alternative approaches, if indeed liberalism had failed. In his follow-up book, *Regime Change*, published in June 2023, Deneen responded to those critics and provided his vision for a postliberal America. Like the initial book, this one is sure to stir debate and I commend him for that, but this book has sharpened my opposition to his work.

REGIME CHANGE?

In both books, Deneen contends that the American founding was a full embrace of John Locke's version of liberalism fraught with fatal philosophical contradictions. He asserts that our two major competing philosophies are actually two sides of the same coin. First, classical liberalism, which advocates unfettered capitalism and the protection of personal liberty. This version, he says, masquerades as "conservatism" in America. The other is progressive liberalism, prominent since the early twentieth century, which favors an ever-expanding national government to promote the general welfare of its citizens. Deneen argues that what they share is a deep fear of the people, and accordingly, despite their occasional narrow differences, often collaborate to implement legal and normative impediments to keep the people far from the levers of power. Deneen also argues that both have a zeal for "progress," a commitment to constantly changing the "rules of the game" in pursuit of better arrangements that ultimately serve the ends of the elite—not the people.

In *Regime Change*, Deneen argues that a new conservative elite class should be fostered, one that is committed to the welfare of the people. Contrary to Marxism, which also purports to advance the cause of the common man, this new elite must also actu-

ally share the values of the people, which Deneen argues are historically conservative; embracing national unity, stability,

tradition, and custom. Deneen believes this new conservative elite will address the vast wealth inequality in America and rein in the social engineering, which has destroyed the family, the church, and the cherished American way of life. Deneen concludes that his approach is nested within traditional conservative philosophy as championed by Edmund Burke and Benjamin Disraeli.

How would we stop a new elite from being corrupted by power like the one we have now?

Although Deneen claims he's restoring "Aristotelian balance," *Regime Change* reads more like an over-correction. While I agree America is clearly out of balance, favoring today over tomorrow, the self over our obligations to others, and the material over the spiritual, and while I concur the current ruling elite are chiefly responsible for these unsustainable developments, if history is any guide Deneen's idealism is more likely to produce tyrannical abuse and more misery than to achieve his intended purpose.

Robespierre and the Jacobins claimed the mantle of leadership of the French Revolution with lofty aspirations of empowering the people too, but their ideological zeal quickly devolved into a Reign of Terror that threatened anyone who would not stand behind the new orthodoxy. From Deneen's idealism more questions arise: if the Constitution is flawed because it's based on self-interest rather than virtue, what replaces it? How do we get this new conservative elite into power? How do we prevent this new elite from being corrupted by power like the one we have now? If capitalism is bad, what replaces it?

For all its faults, the Constitution provided answers to most of these questions, drawn as it was from a keen reading of history and a realistic view of humankind. The delegates at the Constitutional Convention ultimately concluded that what we needed at the time was both a more vigorous central government to adequately defend ourselves and promote prosperity and

upward mobility (hence the embrace of Hamilton's vision of capitalism) and the means for the government to check itself. This could only be realized

The Constitution drew from a keen reading of history and a realistic view of humankind.

by having "ambition counteract ambition." As Madison acknowledged in *Federalist* No. 10 and 51, men are not angels: thus, the separation of powers and checks and balances in the Constitution. Deneen's far-ranging criticism of the founding misses these warrants.

THE FOUNDATION

The Constitution did not usher in a fully Lockean liberal society. Post-Constitution American society was more a hybrid between Lockean liberalism and Puritanical communitarianism, producing something new in the human experience. The conception of the "American dream" provides evidence for this blend. From Locke we promote the individual, possessed with God-given rights secured by the new American state and free to rise

to their potential. But from the Puritans we also embrace the notion that individuals have obligations to others—to their families, churches, communities, and country. Among those obligations was to provide for children so that they could climb the socioeconomic ladder to new heights in America, beyond their parents. This might require individuals to sacrifice their own interests for their children, but such balance was woven into the DNA of the American dream.

The Constitution established the rules of the game to advance the American dream. The legal framework was bound together with a communitarian political culture that sought balance, to provide meaning to a “race of life” unleashed by the capital-

istic spirit that accompanied the Constitution.

Tocqueville acknowledged this “American

The Constitution established the rules to advance the American dream.

exceptionalism” and prophesized that while it, like all human-designed arrangements, was itself flawed, it was best aligned with human nature, and as such, would eventually propel America into global superpower status. That was crazy talk to the heads of state of Europe at the time who still believed, as Thomas Hobbes opined, that common people could not govern themselves. Only monarchs supported by a loyal aristocracy could save the people from the people. Such thinking was the conservative position before the United States of America existed. However, American exceptionalism has changed the world for the better, and now conserving that is the true “conservative” position, contrary to Deneen’s contention.

The steady undoing of American exceptionalism, beginning in the twentieth century (specifically the centralizing of power in the executive branch and shifting away from being a “nation of laws” to one governed by executive orders and bureaucratic regulations and the eroding of balance in our political culture), has caused the angst and travails we now face. While Deneen is right in one sense—what is needed now is “getting it right” and not “progress”—we should not embrace regime change. Giving up on American exceptionalism would ultimately significantly curtail liberty and by extension, limit human creativity, prosperity, and felicity.

WHAT NOW?

Deneen is also right that our current path probably leads to the end of the republic as we know it. However, in considering a course correction, we should turn to the classics.

In Greek mythology we are given the story of Pandora, the unimaginably beautiful woman created by Hephaestus at the behest of Zeus to punish man for his lack of piety for the gods. All of the other Olympian gods supported Zeus's desire to create woman and showed that support by showering gifts upon Pandora. The final gift was a beautiful box that the gods told Pandora contained the most amazing gifts, but that she must never open. Not surprisingly, the temptation proved more than Pandora could resist and when she opened the box, misery and wrath were unleashed upon humanity (the afflictions of old age, disease, wars, etc.). However, at the bottom of the box was the last gift: hope. Zeus actually gave humanity hope as a punishment so that people would press on in the face of hardship, ensuring that all the harsh consequences would be fully experienced. Yet, by giving us hope, in some ways God also provides balance, because hope inspires the desire for redemption and the possibility of “getting it right” the second time. As Americans, we should be inspired to action by this story.

Even in our dire circumstances, if we keep hope and choose wisely, America can find renewal. With the founding principles, we were on the right path, but we strayed from it and now, like Pandora, are facing the consequences. We must now recover those principles.

To do so, we need to immediately enact reforms to strengthen American exceptionalism. This must start with political reforms to restore the people's faith in democracy, which is woefully lacking. Deneen is partially right; we need new people in government, but we don't need a new elite. The found-

ers envisioned citizen-legislators in the House of Representatives, not professional politicians. As we did with the Articles

What's needed are reforms to strengthen American exceptionalism.

of Confederation when we had “rotation in office,” we need term limits for members of Congress in the way we now have for the president. We should also enact independent redistricting, campaign-finance reform of the right kind, stricter anti-lobbying measures, and other actions to empower citizen-legislators. We must also repair the separation of powers. Congress (not the president) was meant to be the “first among equals” to ensure the people were sovereign, and we need to restore that original intent.

We must also restore balance to our political culture and repair our social fabric. *E pluribus unum*—“out of many, one”—is the familiar American motto. We must be able to both celebrate our diversity (Lockean) and honor our unity (communitarian). To help foster unity, we need more common experiences.

It is time to revisit universal national service. Since we can't afford and don't need a ten-million-strong military, we should broaden the definition of national service to include areas that benefit all of society and to partner with the private sector to bring it about. Second, while fluency in multiple languages is always a plus, we should be able to communicate in a common language (English). Third, while recognizing that as a nation we have at times committed grievous acts, we should also be able to carefully study our history and honor the heroes of our past, from all backgrounds. Toward that end, the classroom should be the marketplace of ideas where primary sources are carefully read—before adding ideologically diverse secondary sources that seek to explain and provide meaning. Our unity will be strengthened by recommitting ourselves to classical education, not indoctrination of our young.

We must also find ways to strengthen our support for family, church, and volunteer organizations. Tocqueville focused on the central role that volunteer organizations had on advancing American exceptionalism. It's clear America has witnessed a significant decline in these institutions since World War II, and society is worse off for it. The classics teach us the critical role parents play in shaping the habits of children, an essential dimension of developing good citizens. In religious gatherings, all are united in common purpose regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Such devotion to common cause is habit-forming and would clearly help our country.

America is both a great and a good nation. For all of its faults, there is no question that America has changed the world for the better. We must not turn our backs on the Constitution and American exceptionalism. Now is the time to get it right. ■

Special to the Hoover Digest.



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“*The Americans Were a Godsend*”

Hoover fellow **Bertrand M. Patenaude** tells how American humanitarians, led by Herbert Hoover, fought famine and saved millions of Russian lives.

By Jonathan Movroydis

A new book from the Hoover Institution Press, *Bread + Medicine: American Famine Relief in Soviet Russia, 1921–1923*, tells the story of how the American Relief Administration, led by future president Herbert Hoover, undertook a large-scale humanitarian relief effort that saved the lives of millions of starving people in Soviet Russia from 1921 through 1923. The authors, Hoover research fellow Bertrand M. Patenaude and scholar Joan Nabseth Stevenson, wrote the book as a companion to an exhibition at Stanford University last year.

Jonathan Movroydis: What were the origins of *Bread + Medicine* and how did you get involved in it?

Bertrand M. Patenaude: I’ve spent most of my professional life working on this particular story about the American Relief Administration, led by Herbert Hoover. I’ve spent a lot of time delving into the Soviet famine of 1921 to ’23, and did a lot of work that went into a book that came out in 2002 [*The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine*

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Jonathan Movroydis is the senior content writer for the Hoover Institution.



VICTIMS: The Russian famine of 1921–23 was precipitated by revolution, civil war, food requisitioning, broken-down transportation, and a severe drought that triggered a crop failure. Vladimir Lenin initially resisted the idea of outside help but eventually relented. The task of fending off mass starvation was taken up by the American Relief Administration, which was already relieving hunger across Central and Eastern Europe. [American Relief Administration Russian operational records—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

of 1921], which was the first real book in English about the famine—surprising because that’s a major famine. But the story I really wanted to tell was about the relief mission.

Since completing the book, I’ve always said there were two stories that someone will come along and do one day. One was the story of Ukraine. We’re talking about Soviet Russia, it’s dominated by Moscow, but Ukraine is one of the constituent parts of this fledgling country. But I also said that there’s an untold story still in the archives having to do with the medical relief. The American doctors and their counterparts launched this amazingly complex, vast medical relief effort.

When COVID hit in 2020, I was convinced that what we ought to do is mark the centennial of the Soviet Russian famine and of the Hoover relief mission. Given the COVID pandemic and all the focus on medical issues



LIFELINES: Amid years of internal turmoil, both communist and non-communist forces had been seizing food from civilians, not only to feed their own armies but to deny it to the other side. Many starving peasants resorted to cannibalism. The ARA workers arranged to feed a daily meal to patients in hospitals receiving American medical supplies, such as this one in Petrograd (today St. Petersburg), partnering with local officials to distribute bread, milk, and other foodstuffs. Communist minders kept a close eye on the Americans and their helpers. [American Relief Administration Russian operational records—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

and the fact that in 1922 the ARA introduced a vaccination program which was controversial, I thought it would really resonate with audiences today.

“Maxim Gorky sent out an appeal to anybody who would help. People are dying. The fields are burning.”

Gorky sent out an appeal to anybody who would help. People are dying. The fields are burning. And the very last line of the appeal says, “Give bread and medicine.”

Where does the title come from? The way the world found out about the famine was that in July 1921, the writer Maxim



PESTILENCE: *Hunger was not the only enemy—disease was its ally. Sanitation was critical for clinic hygiene and to fight typhus-carrying lice. Simple soap was an effective weapon. In this photo, people carry branches into a bathhouse for scrubbing. Bathhouses such as this one took care of the masses of refugees roaming the devastated land, while the ARA supplied bandages, instruments, and linens to hospitals that often had nothing—not even anesthesia.* [American Relief Administration Russian operational records—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

I wanted to make clear that in 1921–23, this relief mission succeeds only because there is a collaboration of Americans and Soviets—which means Russians in most cases—and including doctors. We highlight in the book how American and Russian doctors—and Ukrainian doctors as well—work together for the whole two years. American doctors are spread very thin; they are there as administrators and they need staffs. They need the local physicians to help them, people working in the hospitals, nurses, medical students. And the collaborative dimension of the story is one that I really wanted to emphasize.

Movroydis: Herbert Hoover is considered by many to be a rugged individualist and capitalist. How does he extend his relief efforts in Western and Central Europe and parts of Eastern Europe into the Soviet Union?

Patenaude: This is a fascinating part of the story. Gorky's appeal comes out in the West, and there's really only one person who can do anything



MOTHERLAND: The scale of Russia's great famine was almost incalculable, but the ARA workers confronted it as they had other vast humanitarian problems. Millions had to be fed. Russia had not been able to import medical equipment since 1914, when it went to war against Germany, its main supplier. To combat disease, the American workers even had to install new water lines and sewers. [American Relief Administration Russian operational records—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

about the famine: Herbert Hoover. He has the organization, the ARA, the American Relief Administration. He has the experienced personnel, he has the know-how, and he is also by this point secretary of commerce in the Harding administration. He has the contacts and he can make the wheels turn.

The question among historians is, was Lenin's government in Moscow surprised when Hoover responded and offered to feed one million children?

“Hoover did think food would cure it. So, if you started feeding anywhere in Europe or in Russia, eventually Bolshevism would go away.”

were surprised. You see in the internal correspondence that Lenin and company were really panicky about this because Hoover was also known

Eventually that figure goes way up, by the way, and by the summer of 1922 the ARA is feeding 10.5 million Soviet citizens a day, adults and children. I think they



RECOVERY: In the spring and summer of 1922, the worst threat to health was cholera, a disease spread by contaminated water or food. The rescue mission began a vast vaccination campaign. For those leery of getting the shot, the ARA provided reassurance by obtaining the medicine from the Pasteur Institute in Paris, a trusted source. Vaccination was also linked to the provision of food and the ability to travel outside afflicted lands. The ARA left Russia in 1923, with the Soviet government expressing “satisfaction and thanks.”

[American Relief Administration Russian operational records—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

for his anti-communism. He was a strident anti-Bolshevist. He was against any military intervention in Soviet Russia, but he was very hardheaded about Bolshevism. He did think food would cure it. So, if you started feeding anywhere in Europe or in Russia, eventually Bolshevism would go away.

Lenin and company set strict guidelines. They set up a whole hierarchy of secret police minders who would be affiliated and associated with all of the relief operations of the Americans throughout the country. And they occasionally arrested some of the Americans' local staffs. Hoover insisted, “We must have a free hand in hiring our local staffs who would help us choose the beneficiaries.” So, there were strained relations throughout the two years, but ultimately, because Hoover has the food and the medicine, they're able to succeed.

Feeding the enemy . . . there was concern at home that maybe we shouldn't be sending aid over to a communist system. Herbert Hoover has a great quote. He writes a letter to a man in Kansas City who's questioning why we're feeding Bolsheviks. He writes, "You have to separate in your mind the 150,000 communists over there from the 150 million Soviet citizens." We're feeding the Soviet people, Hoover was saying, not the Soviet government.

In 1921, only Herbert Hoover could have led the way in arranging for an American-endorsed relief mission to Soviet Russia. Everyone trusted that Hoover knew what he was doing. Few questioned it.

Movroydis: What was the Russian people's reaction to Herbert Hoover and the American Relief Administration? Did they have a favorable view despite the minders and some of the Soviet propaganda?

Patenaude: Absolutely. They were just coming out of an absolutely tumultuous period of revolution and civil war, and then came famine. The Americans were a godsend. They saw the Americans as a tie to the outside world from which they had been cut off for all of these years. Remember, Herbert Hoover at this time was known as the master of efficiency. The Russians marveled at how quickly these Americans worked. Overall, there

was great admiration and enthusiasm about the Americans. And there was tremendous sadness and a sense of loss when

"We're feeding the people; we're not feeding the government."

the Americans left because they felt that they were losing a lifeline. Their hopes that the Bolsheviks would go away, or that Russia would once again become normal and it would have relations with other countries the way it had before the world war, all those hopes were vanishing.

Hoover's picture shows up in the background of photos we have throughout Soviet Russia, in kitchens and so on. When a few Americans returned just a couple years later, in 1925 and 1927, they noticed that Hoover had been eclipsed by Henry Ford, with his factory system for building automobiles. But for those two years, no other American was as popular as Herbert Hoover.

Movroydis: Could you talk about the vaccination efforts?

Patenaude: The ARA had never mounted a medical program in any of its operations in Central and Eastern Europe. But in the summer of 1921, it's clear that there's a threat of typhus, especially; typhus might even spread into Europe through Poland because there are a lot of people trying to get

out of the country. So Hoover thinks, “Well, the American Red Cross can go in and do a medical program.” But the Soviet government would not allow the American Red Cross in. It had been associated with some of the White, or anti-Red, armies on the periphery during the civil war.

So Hoover decides, “We’re going to have to do this,” and gathers a couple of doctors who had been associated with the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. They don’t understand the enormity of the problem. It’s the same with the food relief: they ended up feeding not a few but many, many millions. Russia had not been able to import medical equipment since 1914. Germany had been its main supplier.

In some areas, 50 percent of the doctors are gone. Some are leaving the country, but most are succumbing to the diseases they’re trying to conquer. Hospitals have no supplies—even basic stuff like linens, surgical instruments, bandages. One of the first American doctors on the scene arrives to see surgery being performed without anesthesia and the wound covered up with dirty newspaper.

This was a surprise to me. The doctors say, “Above all, we need soap.” They set up bathhouses for the kids. They realize that they’re not going to stop a lot of these diseases without that.

Once they get the ball rolling, there are two major threats. The first one is typhus. There is no vaccine for typhus; it’s spread by infected lice. The approach was to sanitize various facilities, provide better hygiene. They fumigate clothing, which they have to import machinery to do. And they also have to gather refugees, millions of whom are on the move, and get them into barracks where they can be cleaned and their clothing can be sterilized.

Then, as the temperatures are warming up toward the spring of 1922, cholera becomes the main threat. Now here, they can do something about it: vaccination. But the head of the relief mission in Moscow realizes that not only will the population be a bit skeptical, but so will Soviet medical doctors. So, even though the vaccines are available more cheaply from the United States, he imports all the vaccine from the Pasteur Institute in Paris because he knows that the Russian doctors regard the Pasteur Institute as the gold standard.

You can imagine vaccine skepticism. But the big deal here is that the ARA has leverage: food, so bread *and* medicine. You go to an ARA kitchen and the kids line up for their meal. You want your food, you get your shot. And if you want to get on a train to leave Soviet Russia for the West, you need proof of the ARA vaccination.

There were cholera outbreaks in 1919, 1920, and the summer of '21, but not in the summer of '22. The ARA basically put an end to that.

Movroydis: What was the overall impact of the bread and medicine mission? Do any data speak to that?

Patenaude: That's a tough one. How do you add up the number of lives saved? Here's the thing that I now know that I wish I had known or been aware of more clearly twenty years ago: in a famine, most people do not die of starvation. Few people starve to death. Most people die of famine-related disease.

There's one exception in recent times: Mao's Great Famine and the Great Leap Forward, with numbers that run up to forty million victims. That's a case where probably most of the victims died of outright starvation.

To go back to the ARA and its work in Soviet Russia, it's hard to add up how many lives were saved there. But if you think about the big picture—and how the ARA took it upon itself to install water filters, to put in new piping for sewers and water lines, and so on—I would feel comfortable saying that six million died, and it probably would have been double that absent the ARA's bread and medicine. ■

Special to the Hoover Digest. This interview was edited for length and clarity.



*New from the Hoover Institution Press is **Bread + Medicine: American Famine Relief in Soviet Russia, 1921–1923**, by Bertrand M. Patenaude and Joan Nabseth Stevenson. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*



Sympathy for the Devil

A fascist-favoring journalist landed an exclusive interview with Adolf Hitler as German tanks rolled into France. Hitler expected public sympathy and the reporter expected praise. Both were badly mistaken.

By Benjamin S. Goldstein

Blitzkrieg had disrupted European flights. So, only after a train, plane, and two separate car rides in early June 1940 did Karl H. von Wiegand, the sixty-five-year-old German-American “dean of foreign correspondents,” arrive at the small red-brick Belgian chateau where he would conduct the most crucial—and most controversial—interview of his long career.

Preserved in von

Wiegand’s papers at the Hoover Institution Archives is a letter he sent to his British assistant, fellow journalist, and mistress Lady Grace Marguerite Hay Drummond-Hay, wherein he recounted, with the flair of a journalist steeped in turn-of-the-century sensationalism, this momentous assignment. After

Karl H. von Wiegand learned from his earliest days in journalism to connect personal politics, sensationalism, and interviews with historic figures.

Benjamin S. Goldstein is a PhD candidate in history and a Roland Marchand Fellow at the University of California, Davis.



Karl H. von Wiegand, the distinguished dean of American foreign correspondents.

International

ITEM: Karl H. von Wiegand (who added the “von” early in his journalism career) was born in Germany and immigrated to the United States as a child. He launched his career in the American Southwest. Von Wiegand had a knack for interviewing famous newsmakers around the world, and the Hearst media empire showcased that talent. As early as 1917, he was also known as a confidant of German officials. [Cosmopolitan]

a luncheon with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop “came the sound of a car on the crunching gravel of the drive. A six-wheeler open type car . . . with sun-top up, drew up. Hitler, sitting in front with the chauffeur, got out.” Recently arrived from the victorious French battlefront, Adolf Hitler brimmed with menacing self-confidence. Von Wiegand remembered that “gone was his former shyness. . . . In its place there had come sureness of himself. . . . His character, his iron willpower, his grim tenacity is beginning to break through the former mask-like face. . . . There is a touch of the sinister, something dark. It suits the face—of a conqueror.”

Von Wiegand was no stranger to Hitler, high German politics, or controversial interviews. Karl Heinrich Wiegand was born in Germany in 1874 and



THE GO-BETWEEN: Von Wiegand cut a distinguished figure, whether acting as an informal diplomat between the Wilson White House and the Kaiser's Germany in 1917 or reporting from distant battlefields. [Karl. H. von Wiegand papers—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

migrated to the United States a few years later. After a peripatetic, galivanting youth throughout the American Midwest and West, he appended the “von” to his last name as he began dabbling in journalism. A few years before the outbreak of World War I in Europe, he returned to Europe as



UP AND AWAY: Von Wiegand stands on the flight deck of the Graf Zeppelin with his confidante and fellow correspondent, Lady Grace Marguerite Hay Drummond-Hay. The two filed numerous dispatches from their travels on the giant German airship, which completed a round-the-world trip in 1929. Years later, the two were interned in a camp in the Philippines when the Japanese invaded in 1941. [Source unknown]

a foreign correspondent. During the war, he quickly established himself as one of the most sensationalist and pro-German US correspondents, cleverly snagging interviews with Crown Prince Wilhelm, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, and perhaps even the pope (the Vatican denied this). After he joined the notoriously pro-German US media empire of William Randolph Hearst in 1917, he was soon appointed as a special diplomatic emissary by Colonel Edward House, the top foreign affairs adviser to President Wilson, to help explore a separate peace deal with Germany via neutral Sweden. Although geopolitics shifted before this mission could come to fruition, von Wiegand learned from his earliest days in journalism to treat personal politics, sensationalism, and interviews with world-historic figures as inseparably connected.

These lessons carried over into von Wiegand's work in tumultuous interwar Europe, where he kept a wary eye on both the emergence of



EMBEDDED: Von Wiegand was well-known for his travels to war zones and hot spots, such as this visit to the Eastern Front during World War I. The reporter (at left, wearing glasses), would snag exclusive interviews with Crown Prince Wilhelm and Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, among others. The signs indicate this photo was taken in Poland. [Karl. H. von Wiegand papers—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]



RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME: William Randolph Hearst had been urging von Wiegand to arrange an interview with Hitler for years. Here, von Wiegand waits with officers on the balcony of the Crillon Hotel in Paris, overlooking the Place de la Concorde, a few hours after the Wehrmacht entered the French capital. Von Wiegand had intrigued German officials with an offer of mediation between Germany and the United States, which he said was on the brink of entering the war on the Allied side. [Karl. H. von Wiegand papers—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

Bolshevism in the new Soviet Union and the explosive politics of early Weimar Germany. Claiming to have met Hitler in 1921, von Wiegand produced the first known English-language interview of the future Führer, profiling

the thirty-two-year-old “man of the people” and his movement in vivid and exaggerated detail. He kept in on-

When the time came, von Wiegand was the Nazis’ interviewer of choice.

and-off contact with Nazi politics as they ebbed and flowed and ultimately cemented power in the early 1930s. When the time came, von Wiegand was the Nazis’ interviewer of choice.

He had been critical of the Nazis at times during the 1930s, but by 1940 he had changed. Witnessing the wars rippling across Europe, Africa, and Asia



RENDEZVOUS: At this chateau in Belgium, von Wiegand came face-to-face with the Nazi dictator, remarking later in a personal letter about Hitler's "menacing self-confidence" and "iron willpower." The interview was in fact carefully scripted—down to having the questions and answers composed in advance—and whatever its impact on Axis audiences, von Wiegand's article aroused mostly disbelief and even derision among Allied readers. [Benjamin S. Goldstein]

and growing increasingly afraid of the spread of communism, von Wiegand was now solidly sympathetic and collaborative towards the Nazis.

OUTREACH TO AMERICA

The interview with Hitler in June 1940 came at a critical time in US and world politics. Hitler's dream of European domination seemed one step closer to fulfillment: France was all but defeated and the British were pinned



SWEPT UP: “Europe for the Europeans, America for the Americans” was the message Hitler wanted von Wiegand to convey. The message from the man von Wiegand had dubbed the “German Mussolini” in 1921 aroused such suspicion in the United States that the FBI opened a file on the reporter and filed it under “espionage.” [Karl. H. von Wiegand papers—Hoover Institution Library & Archives]

down on the beaches of Dunkirk, hoping to dash across the Channel during a fighting retreat. Only one thing seemed able to ruin Hitler’s dream: the Americans. If President Roosevelt were to marshal the industrial and military might of the United States to support Hitler’s enemies, or even declare war, Germany would face serious trouble. So, through this interview and its subsequent publication through both the US media and Nazi propaganda channels, Hitler hoped to reassure the United States that he had limited, justifiable war aims and that he respected US sovereignty. “Europe for the Europeans, America for the Americans,” was the headline on the *New York Journal-American*, Hearst’s New York City flagship paper, on June 14. It was a bold ploy.

L'EUROPE AUX EUROPÉENS

ADOLF HITLER

*expose, pendant la campagne en France,
son point de vue sur la situation mondiale*

Interview accordée à Karl von Wiegand

QUARTIER GÉNÉRAL DU FÜHRER, 11 JUIN 1940

VERY USEFUL: Nazi propagandists translated the interview and distributed copies of it around Europe. Today, the precise relationship between von Wiegand and Nazi Germany remains murky. Nonetheless, von Wiegand clearly developed personal sympathies toward the fascist movement as part of his fear of advancing communism. [UCLA Library]

And it failed. It failed not only for Hitler, in convincing the United States of his peaceful intentions, but for von Wiegand himself. This interview forever marked him as a Nazi dupe at best and a Nazi propagandist at worst. In the short term, it garnered him widespread popular condemnation while also earning him the attention of the FBI, which began investigating him. His file was classified under the category “espionage.”

However, it was not purely the politics of the interview that tainted von Wiegand’s record, both then and now. It was also the particular journalistic style the correspondent used—one enmeshed in a deep tradition of crusading sensationalism, proclivity toward drama and dramatic figures, and difficulty separating reportage from personal politics. By the early 1940s, many Americans understandably viewed this journalistic approach as disturbingly similar to the propaganda pumped out by fascist and totalitarian movements in Europe.

The archival record that has emerged in the ensuing eighty years tells an even darker story. Scholars can investigate not just the papers von Wiegand’s family deposited at the Hoover Archives shortly after his death in 1961 but also an increment to these materials acquired just last year: postwar interviews of Nazi operatives, von Wiegand’s recently declassified FBI file, which runs 398 pages, and intelligence scattered across the diplomatic archives of six countries.

What emerges from these sources adds to the context of his Hitler interview and his broader relationship with fascist powers. The connections are still not entirely clear; the precise depth of von Wiegand’s collaboration—and especially the role of money in this relationship—remains opaque. Yet through the evidence of a very strong working relationship between von Wiegand and the Nazi Party, we see indications of the depth of von Wiegand’s ideological and stylistic overlap with Nazi objectives, as well as the ethical and journalistic sacrifices he made along the way.

A VERY USEFUL REPORTER

How did the interview come about? Von Wiegand had been trying to scoop an interview with the increasingly reclusive Führer throughout the late 1930s. “Mr. Hearst had long wanted it,” von Wiegand privately remarked. He had even flown to Berlin some weeks earlier from his base in Rome, trying to get access. Hitler’s invasion of France in spring 1940 gave him an opening. Shortly after the Nazis launched their Blitzkrieg, as recorded in the German Naval Staff Operations Division’s War Diary, von Wiegand went to the German armed forces with the message that “Germany should now offer peace

on generous terms; an offer of peace by the Führer would find the most ready support in the USA.” Yet if the Nazis did not seize this opportunity—an opportunity von Wiegand was clearly all too willing to facilitate—“the USA will then enter the war on the side of the allies.” In less than a week, he got a call from the German Embassy in Rome asking him to interview the German dictator.

After a long, roundabout journey, von Wiegand had lunch with von Ribbentrop and Wehrmacht General Max Pfeffer. During the luncheon, von Ribbentrop, Germany’s former ambassador to the United Kingdom, “closed his eyes now and then . . . thinking,” and while talking occasionally dipped into English, “beautiful perfect English—much better than my German,” von Wiegand recalled.

The meal itself was “soldiers’ faire, plain.” After lunch, von Wiegand and von Ribbentrop headed

To Nazi propaganda chief Goebbels, “these interviews from a reputable journalist, who has a great name in the world, serve us extremely well right now.”

to another chateau, driving for two hours through a landscape desolate with “broken tanks, overturned motor trucks ... occasional gaunt smoke-blackened ruins of houses or buildings” that marked “the path of war very clearly.” Upon arriving at the next chateau, likely abandoned by its Belgian owners, they made themselves at home in a “cozy drawing room,” decorated with “portraits of Belgian and French beauties of another epoch.”

Then Hitler arrived. In also came Hitler’s press secretary, a diplomat, an interpreter, and a photographer. “No military man had come with him,” Von Wiegand recalled, perfect for an interview promoting peace. Hitler chatted for a bit about the hot weather and how his soldiers must be suffering. Von Wiegand observed the man he had known for nearly twenty years, seeing now in the Führer’s face a “fanatical determination that marks the whole career of this man.” Clutched in Hitler’s hands were sheets of typewritten paper, with prepared questions (which von Wiegand had first drafted in his initial visit to Berlin) and answers (which von Ribbentrop and Hitler had drafted). Von Wiegand claimed that these papers, copies of which are preserved in his papers, formed “only the basis for our 45 minutes talk.” Yet they closely mirror the interview story which von Wiegand cabled, without criticism or comment, back to the United States.

The prepared questions make the propagandistic nature of the interview clear. It is hard to imagine a more softball question than the final one: “What

are the Führer’s conceptions of a peace in Europe and in the world which will last for two to three generations?”

The very first question—“Does Germany recognize the American Monroe Doctrine for the Western Hemisphere”—led to the catchy slogan that began von Wiegand’s dispatch: “The Americas to Americans, Europe to the Europeans.” In other words, if the United States respected Nazi/Fascist rule over Europe, Hitler would respect US domain over the Americas. “This reciprocal basic Monroe Doctrine . . . declared Fuehrer Hitler to me today, not only would ensure peace for all times between the Old and New Worlds, but would be a most ideal foundation for peace throughout the whole world,” von Wiegand gushed. Neither the cost of that “peace,” nor the many times over the years that Hitler had promised peace only to renege on his promises, found a place in von Wiegand’s article.

Von Wiegand knew that the interview served a deeply political purpose. As he confided to American diplomats, the Nazis had offered the interview for two reasons: “to pacify public opinion in the United States” and “to

induce England to make overtures for peace.”

To these diplomats, von Wiegand also passed on confidential, not-for-print information from Hitler: that peace terms for the

Von Wiegand feared that communism would roll across Europe, if not the world, without the dam of Nazism to hold it back.

Western powers would be “drastically revised”—made harsher—if France and England continued “dogged resistance.” He also shared his own opinion that “America’s desire to give increasing assistance to the Western powers” would backfire by causing the Germans to crush their enemies quicker “before American assistance could be really effective.” He even claimed in private correspondence that Hitler had personally asked him to travel to Britain as a German peace envoy, although because of the low likelihood of success, he refused.

The Nazi propagandist minister, Joseph Goebbels, noted in his meticulously kept diary that the interview was a part of “our sharp polemics against England using . . . propaganda.” And indeed, von Wiegand’s interview flooded across Nazi propaganda channels. On the radio, it was broadcast domestically on German radio, while internationally it rode the airwaves to England, occupied Denmark, occupied Holland, Greece, Hungary, and India. In print, it was translated into at least ten European languages and distributed by Nazi propagandists in pamphlets throughout Europe. In the United States, it

was reprinted in a 100,000-copy edition of the German consulate's curiously named propaganda magazine, *Facts in Review*, which bragged that the interview was a "clear answer to widespread propaganda about alleged German intentions concerning the Western Hemisphere."

Most Americans did not see it that way. In a press conference, FDR casually dismissed the interview, noting that Hitler's declarations brought up "recollections" of the German dictator's previous broken promises. Most American newspapers concurred. In local newspapers, the interview was often printed under headlines such as "Hitler has no designs on America—but that's only his side of the story." One Tennessee newspaper, noting von Wiegand's admission that Hitler had read off a list of prepared questions and answers, called the interview a "typical example of Hitler propaganda . . . a tissue of stupid lies and distortions" printed only for its importance as "news . . . not as truth." The syndicated investigative columnists Drew Pearson and Robert Allen disparaged the interview, rightly guessing that von Wiegand's long history (and sympathy) with German politics led him to be "selected as the man who could best put across a message."

In a 1942 article, journalist Sidney A. Freifeld surmised, correctly, that the circumstances of the interview had "converted the interviewer into a mere conveyor of an oral Nazi handout."

ON TO THE NEXT STORY

After the interview, von Wiegand continued in the same vein. Within a few weeks, he had conducted a similarly propagandistic and similarly poorly received interview with Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, commander of the Luftwaffe. Then, after a quick return trip to the United States, he took his

talents to East Asia and tried to explain Japanese imperial ambitions to an American audience. In Manila

The roving correspondent spent his final years in Egypt, in a villa overlooking the pyramids.

on December 7, 1941, von Wiegand was partially blinded in explosions as Japan bombed US possessions across the Pacific. Interned briefly by the Japanese, sent to occupied Shanghai, and then repatriated to the United States in a prisoner-of-war exchange, von Wiegand spent the last months of the war in neutral but fascist-leaning Spain. He increasingly warned about the dangers of the United States' wartime partner, the Soviet Union, which von Wiegand feared would roll across Europe, if not the

world, without the dam of Nazism to hold it back. While he was in Madrid in the waning years of the war, Nazi intelligence reached out to him, hoping that he would serve once again as a journalistic conduit for Nazi peace feelers. Before anything could get off the ground, Allied forces had swarmed Berlin and brought the Third Reich to an end.

But von Wiegand's career was not over. For nearly two more decades, he continued traveling the world, sounding the alarm against communist influence through an inseparable mix of reporting and opinion. He also continued his questionable interview methods, reaching out to anti-communist dictators such as Francisco Franco of Spain and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, where von Wiegand spent his final years, in a villa he constructed overlooking the pyramids at Cairo. After a mysterious last-minute trip to Japan in 1961, the "dean of foreign correspondents" caught pneumonia and flew to Zurich for emergency treatment, where he died at eighty-six.

How deep von Wiegand dug his own grave—how deep into complete collaboration with the Nazis—is still unclear. Yet the surviving evidence, now

He once mused, "fiction is the only way to tell the truth and put your thoughts into the mouth of your characters."

including von Wiegand's FBI file, suggests at the very least a strong collaboration based on mutual interests and methods, and quite possibly a subservient

relationship in which von Wiegand directly received Nazi directions for his journalism. Postwar interrogations of Nazi propaganda operatives suggest that at least by the time he went to Asia after his interview with Hitler, he may have requested to join the Nazi payroll and begun taking orders from the Nazi propaganda ministry. Goebbels himself noted in his diary in 1941 that "Wiegand is no longer quoted in our [German] press, as not to compromise him." The term "compromise" is curious, and hints at a collaborative relationship. Goebbels frequently admired the quality and nature of von Wiegand's journalism, noting that "these interviews from a reputable journalist, who has a great name in the world, serve us extremely well right now."

Even as Goebbels drafted those words in October 1941, they were losing their truth. As one FBI employee noted, von Wiegand's file was "replete with correspondence from irate citizens requesting that the bureau take some action against him." One irate American complained in 1945 that "Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, and Himmler, not to mention some Japs, have laughed

at his work—he is a rare gem to them . . . he must think all Americans are dummkopfs.”

Von Wiegand often defended himself as a mere straight-shooting journalist who wanted “America’s foreign news service . . . [to] remain clean and above . . . suspicion,” as he told his daughter, Charmion, in 1945. Yet his letters also show a different, competing impulse. Von Wiegand was unable to separate his politics, personal beliefs, and flair for drama from his journalism. As he confided to his son-in-law, he often wondered if he should have become a novelist. After all, he believed that “fiction is the only way to tell the truth and put your thoughts into the mouth of your characters.” Denizens of today’s oversaturated media landscape, struggling to separate fact from fiction, substance from drama, and truth from dogma, should pay heed. ■

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On the Cover

“**L**enin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live forever.” These famous lines from a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930)—titled, perhaps a bit obviously, “Vladimir Ilych Lenin”—express a wish for eternal remembrance of the Bolshevik revolutionary he adored. Lenin’s embalmed body has been on public view in Moscow for a hundred years, since his death in January 1924, except for a brief sojourn in Siberia as World War II raged. Mayakovsky killed himself not long after, amid tumult in his personal life and a hot-and-cold relationship with Soviet officialdom.

Mayakovsky, born in Georgia, grew to prominence as a public revolutionary and a flamboyant bad boy of the arts. Tall, glowering, and handsome, he plunged into the Russian Futurist scene (its manifesto: “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste”), which rejected artistic tradition. Being called “unpoetic” was a compliment. Mayakovsky made himself visible as an activist, writer, playwright, actor, editor, and poster designer. He packed an illegal pistol and helped prison breaks. He willingly took to propaganda and agitprop—the crude persuasive materials meant to goad the masses into action. Above all, he wrote in his autobiography, he admired Marx.

Mayakovsky attracted plenty of admiration himself, particularly after he started writing poetry during his own stint in prison. But there was a shadow over his devotion to the revolution: he was an artist, an iconoclast, and artists have a complicated relationship with authority.

He had left the precursor to the party several years before the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, but he met the revolution with enthusiasm. He and other artistic figures swore their allegiance. Mayakovsky lectured and recited, and wrote pamphlets for children, in the service of what he called “communist futurism.” His celebrity grew. He toured outside Russia as a leading light of leftist art. The summit of his fame came in 1924 with the composition of his three-thousand-line Lenin tribute, which was rapturously received and then published as a book. A four-volume edition of his collected works appeared in 1929.

But the scene changed. The Russian Association of Proletarian Writers began to chafe. Younger strivers accused Mayakovsky of being a petit-bourgeois intellectual, a “false leftist”—worse, a favorite of Trotsky. Students shouted him down and the press mocked him.

Mayakovsky had a long trail of lovers, including an interpreter in New York who bore him a child, and a long list of poems about those women. In 1930, after a romantic disappointment with one married woman, he shot himself. A previous lover and muse, also married, said that with the poet, suicide was “a chronic disease inside him.” A fellow artist regretted that he had squandered his once-innovative, rebellious talent to serve the state.

The proletarian writers group shut down all mention of Mayakovsky after his death and canceled publication of his works.

But Stalin liked him, and that made all the difference. After the poet’s muse wrote to the Soviet leader in the mid-1930s asking him to intervene, Stalin declared Mayakovsky “the best and the most talented” poet of the age, and suddenly the country was awash in praise. The town of his birthplace was renamed in his honor, and a Mayakovsky museum and library opened in Moscow.

Sic transit gloria: the Communist Party’s belated sanctification of Mayakovsky led to what his close friend Boris Pasternak called a second death for the poet. After Stalin died, Mayakovsky became in many eyes the pet poet of Stalin’s oppressive state. Yet later still, younger poets and activists saw him with fresh eyes. His reputation in the aging Soviet Union fell and rose a few more times, depending on what passed for avant-garde, but this poster from the Hoover Archives shows his words still held power in the late twentieth century. No one knows whether Mayakovsky—like Lenin, like any shooting star—“will live forever.” The face that scowls from old photos continues to challenge readers to see him as reformer, romantic, rebel, or revolutionary—depending on one’s point of view.



—Charles Lindsey



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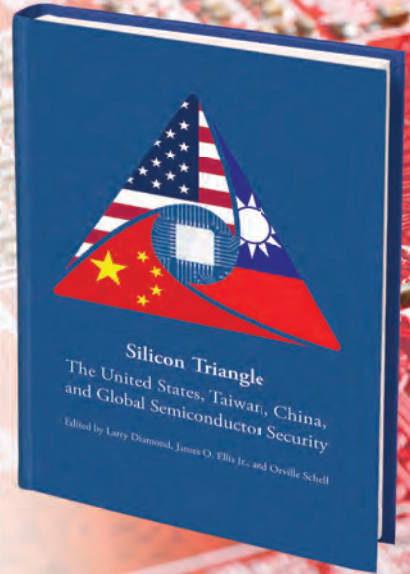
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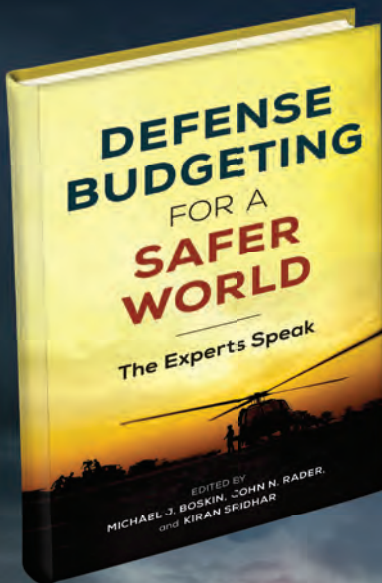
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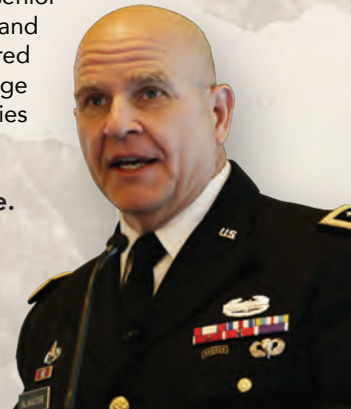
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