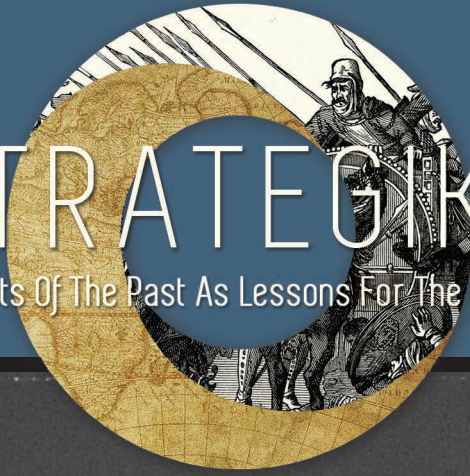


STRATEGIKA

ISSUE 94

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

JANUARY 2025



ISRAEL AND ITS ENEMIES

IN THIS ISSUE

JERRY HENDRIX • MICHAEL DORAN • DAVID P. GOLDMAN

EDITORIAL BOARD

Victor Davis Hanson, Chair
Bruce Thornton
David Berkey

CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS

Peter Berkowitz
Josiah Bunting III
Gordon G. Chang
Admiral James O. Ellis Jr.
Niall Ferguson
Chris Gibson
Jakub Grygiel
Josef Joffe
Robert G. Kaufman
Edward N. Luttwak
Peter R. Mansoor
Mark Moyar
Williamson Murray
Ralph Peters
Paul A. Rahe
Andrew Roberts
Admiral Gary Roughead
Kiron K. Skinner
Barry Strauss
Bing West
Miles Maochun Yu

CONTENTS

January 2025 • Issue 94

BACKGROUND ESSAY

Is Permanent Peace for Israel Even Possible?
by Jerry Hendrix

FEATURED COMMENTARY

Can Israel Win?
by Michael Doran

Complete Victory in Gaza Is Not in Israel's Grasp
by David P. Goldman

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Discussion Questions



ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

Is Permanent Peace for Israel Even Possible?

By Jerry Hendrix

Can a war be won while a deeply buried root of hatred remains? The ongoing conflict surrounding Israel provides us with a case study. While it is possible to achieve a military victory over Hamas in the sense that a militant terrorist organization can be reduced to non-military effectiveness through the force of arms, the idea that Israel could “permanently” defeat Hamas, a nationalist Islamic Sunni organization, Hezbollah, a radical Islamic Shiite sect, or even the Houthis, a Shia movement in Yemen which has recently targeted Israel as well as disrupted shipping in the vital Red Sea shipping lane, would entail something either very complicated or very simple.

Israel effectively has been at war since its founding in May 1948. Since then, Arab states, often in conjunction with one another, have repeatedly sought its extermination. However, in recent decades Israel has found paths to peace with many of its Arab neighbors, while tensions remain with others. Often the tensions that persist surround the fate of the native population who lost either land or identity (and often both) via the creation of the Jewish state. While some of these peoples eventually found permanent homes in surrounding nations like Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, or Arabia, others remained but relocated to either the region around the west bank of the Jordan river or the narrow strip of land near Gaza.

In both locations these people became increasingly radicalized in their religious and political views, and gained support from national and religious extremist patrons, not the least of which was the Shia Islamic Republic of Iran, which had declared itself the enemy of both Israel and its sponsor, “The Great Satan,” the United States. Iran is not Arab, but rather is Persian in its cultural descent, a fact that has placed it at odds with surrounding Arab states for much of its history. The Houthis, who count Iran as their primary sponsor, have been largely aligned against the House of Saud for much of their existence. This point, Iran’s use of proxies in a hydra-like organization allied against its enemies, is the important factor when considering that while Israel has been at war nearly continuously since its founding, the defeat of its current enemy, who is really one enemy, is achievable.

This change has come about because there is a growing international understanding of Iran’s strategy to use proxies to carry out military attacks upon its targets. Rocket attacks from Lebanon on Israel’s northern cities find their origin in Iran. The terrorist massacre of over 1,000 Israeli and international citizens, to include the raping of women and slaughter of children, also came at the direction of Iran. Attacks upon shipping in the Red Sea and the destruction of cargo are the result of plans from Iran’s leadership. The entire strategy and chain of events that have issued forth from it originate from the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the subsequent installation of a terrorist state under the leadership of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Hence, any attempt to defeat Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis to create a stable peace within the Middle East can only find success if the original source of the threat is the target. In other words, Iran.



Image credit: Poster Collection, 03581, Hoover Institution Archives.

For a lasting peace to be established in the region, Iran must be the focus of an overwhelmingly destructive aerial strike composed of cruise missiles and bombers targeted to severely damage Iran's economic, industrial, and military capabilities and capacities. However, this is not to say that there should be a plan for the introduction of ground forces. There should be no plans to occupy Iran and rebuild its fractured state infrastructure. Five decades of suffering under terrorist attacks and two decades of war in the region have created an aversion to "long wars." Any strike campaign for Iran should not be conceived, sold to the public, or executed as a "Pottery Barn" campaign in which the nation, or coalition of nations, that inflicts damage upon that state would expect to contribute to its rebuilding. There will be no reparations. The attack itself would represent the accumulated repayment for decades of terrorist attacks by Iran.

Such an attack would be aided if the strike force included the many nations who have suffered blows from Iran and its proxies over the past fifty years. Beyond Israel and the United States, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, as well as many European nations should be approached to join the coalition. Such a combined force could create the potential to hit the broadest portfolio of economic, industrial, and military targets necessary to destroy Iran's ability to defend itself, generate wealth, and even administer itself. Planning for this attack should be done in secret, but the intent of the attack must be openly discussed in public for one simple reason: The attack need not happen.

Should the Iranian people come to understand the Damocles sword that has been forged and then suspended over their nation by their own leaders, they might, at last, summon the courage to overthrow the despotic religious zealots who have controlled their destinies for far too long, thus sparing their nation and themselves massive destruction.

Should Israel and its allies lack the national will to pursue such a strategy for fear of "escalation," there is no other path to either victory or an enduring peace. While there is a school of thought that asserts that peace can be found by addressing the "root causes" of terrorism in the region, the terrorists themselves state that the "root cause" is Zionism and the presence of a Jewish state in the region. As such, their desired solution is a "from the river to the sea" Palestinian state, and, by implication, another attempt at the extermination of the Jewish people. Another much discussed strategy is the "two-state solution," but this ignores the facts that Israel was founded as the result of a two-state solution when the British Mandate was subdivided into Transjordan and Palestine, with the latter forming the basis of the Jewish homeland. Still later, during a 2000 summit meeting at Camp David, the Palestinians were offered a sovereign state composed of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip but walked out of the negotiations over the status of East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. They then declared the bloody Second Intifada.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has raged back and forth for decades. Israel has taken the step of building tall walls to separate Palestinians from Israelis, creating isolated political and economic enclaves. However, the enduring nature of the Jewish state—as well as the rampant economic success of Israel in their portion of the Middle East, while the Palestinians continue to live in squalor despite billions in economic aid—has dug a moat between the two peoples that cannot be filled. Certainly, the wanton, horrific nature of the October 7, 2023, massacre will continue to divide Israelis from their nearest neighbors for years, if not decades, to come. Additionally, the clear and incontrovertible evidence that the massacre was perpetrated with the financial backing as well as political and military support of Iran serves as a line in the sand within the region, especially since Iran has further fanned the flames of chaos through their support of the Houthis and Hezbollah.

A permanent peace in the Middle East can only be achieved when the nations of the region reconcile themselves to the return of the Jewish people to the lands of their ancient ancestors following two millennia of diaspora, oppression, and genocide. While there are clear signs of advancement that track from the Camp David Accords in 1978 to the 2020 Abraham Accords wherein increasing numbers of regional actors have signed economic and diplomatic agreements with Israel, the extremists in Iran continue to block the path to a stable comprehensive regional security arrangement.

Thus, the only path to a lasting peace in the Middle East must go through Tehran and the removal of its ruling Islamic Republican government. Israel understands this, and its actions since the October 7th massacre once again demonstrate that the Jewish state has no intention of going quietly into any state or non-state actor's gas chambers again. Now the rest of the region and the broader Western community must recall that ancient Roman dictum, *si vis pacem, para bellum*. If you desire peace, prepare for war. If a people are not willing to die for peace, they will nonetheless die slowly at first, then all at once.



HENRY J. "JERRY" HENDRIX, a senior fellow at the Sagamore Institute, is a retired U.S. Navy captain with twenty-six years of active service. During his career Hendrix served in a variety of maritime patrol aviation squadrons as well as on supercarriers and light amphibious assault ships. His shore duty assignments were as a strategist on the staffs of the chief of naval operations, the secretary of the navy, and the under secretary of defense for policy, and within the Office of Net Assessment. After retiring from the navy, following a stand-out tour as the director of the Navy History and Heritage Command, he worked as a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security and as a vice president at a Washington, DC, defense consultancy. Hendrix holds a bachelor's degree from Purdue University in political science, a master's in national security affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School, a master's in history from Harvard University, and a PhD in war studies from Kings College, London. He is the author of *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy* (2009) and *To Provide and Maintain a Navy* (2020).



Image credit: Poster Collection, 00321, Hoover Institution Archives.

Can Israel Win?

By Michael Doran

Mobilizing its entire “Axis of Resistance,” Iran has drawn Israel into a war of attrition, forcing it to conduct costly military operations not just in Gaza and the West Bank, but also in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran itself. Properly understood, this war is the second Iranian–Israeli war, the first being the 2006 conflict in Lebanon.

After nearly a year of fighting in Gaza, Israel is well on the way to victory against Hamas, which has already lost forever its ability to function as a terrorist army, a force capable of posing a threat to southern Israeli communities and of firing rockets into the central region. In another year or so, Israel will probably wrest Gazan political institutions from Hamas’s iron grip. Israel’s slow but steady success against Hamas raises a question: Can it achieve a similarly decisive victory against Iran and its other proxies?

If by “victory” we mean compelling enemies to put down their arms permanently, then the simple and crude answer to this question is no. Two factors

are conspiring to hamstring the Israelis, the first of which is the disruptive military capabilities that Iran has stockpiled at home and distributed to its proxies around the Middle East.

These capabilities include, among other systems, a vast array of unmanned aerial vehicles, ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles. When combined in the same strike packages, these weapons overwhelm and confuse the sensors and interceptors of Israel’s defensive systems. As a result, the Axis of Resistance has achieved “overmatch.” Also known as “an offense-dominant regime,” “overmatch” refers to a military balance that strongly favors the attacker over the defender.

Even when the warheads of the Axis of Resistance fail to hit their targets, they still compel the Israeli military to take very costly political, military, and economic countermeasures. In addition, they deepen Israel’s dependence on the United States. Eager to prevent an escalation in the war, the Biden administration has taken pains to obscure the costs of a defensive strategy by touting the technological wizardry of Israel’s systems. For example, after the April 14 barrage of missiles that Iran launched at Israel, President Biden called Prime Minister Netanyahu to convince him not to retaliate. “Take the win,” he told Netanyahu, stressing that Iran had failed to hit any militarily significant target.

However, when one considers that the civilians from Israel’s northern border region, between 80,000 and 100,000 souls, have been evacuated for nearly an entire year, this “win,” viewed from Jerusalem, hardly feels like victory.

Biden’s advice to Netanyahu brings us to the second factor that makes a decisive Israeli victory impossible, namely, American restraints on IDF operations. The Biden administration has postured the United States in this war less as the leader of a regional coalition against the Axis of Resistance, and more as a mediator between it and Israel.

Arguing that a cessation of fighting in Gaza will lead to a ceasefire on all other fronts, Biden and his aides routinely pressure Israel, often in public, to end the conflict with Hamas. With this goal in mind, Washington has strongly warned the Netanyahu government to refrain from escalating. Strategic analyst Edward Luttwak quips that the American fetishization of “de-escalation” spells out a Biden Doctrine: Iran can attack any country it pleases, including the United States, but no one is allowed to attack Iran.

Instead of mitigating the benefits that Iran’s disruptive military capabilities have delivered to the Axis of Resistance, Biden’s policy has enhanced them. As a matter of hard military science, it is impossible to counter an offense-dominant regime with purely defensive countermeasures. To offset Iran’s weapons, Israel must go on offense, stripping from Iran and its proxies things that they hold very dear, making it clear that a perpetuation of the conflict on terms unacceptable to Israel will lead to the destruction of ever more valuable things.

The Israelis developed their air force and their intelligence services with this very purpose in mind. Recent assassinations attributed to Israel in Beirut and Tehran, to say nothing of the exploding pagers which killed 12 and wounded thousands of Hezbollah operatives, highlight Israel’s resourcefulness. However, Biden’s mania for de-escalation has prevented Jerusalem from deploying its assets to maximum effect.

If backstopped by American power, the Israeli military could certainly force Iran and the other members of its Axis of Resistance to pay a very high price for their aggression. Israel might not be able to defeat Iran, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, but it could certainly deter them. It could ensure a period of prolonged calm, buying Washington time to develop, together with Israel and America’s other allies, a more effective regional strategy. If there is a path to peace and stability in the Middle East, it requires enhancing the fire-power of America and its allies, not redoubling the pursuit of “de-escalation.”



MICHAEL DORAN is a senior fellow and director of the Center for Peace and Security in the Middle East at the Hudson Institute. He specializes in Middle East security issues and cohosts the *Counterbalance* podcast. In the administration of President George W. Bush, Doran served in the White House as a senior director in the National Security Council, where he was responsible for helping to devise and coordinate U.S. strategies on a variety of Middle East issues, including Arab-Israeli relations and U.S. efforts to contain Iran and Syria. He also served in the Bush administration as a senior advisor in the State Department and a deputy assistant secretary of defense in the Pentagon. His latest book, *Ike’s Gamble*, was published by Free Press in 2016. He appears frequently as a television commentator and has published extensively in *Foreign Affairs*, the *American Interest*, *Commentary*, *Mosaic*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*. He received a BA from Stanford University and an MA and PhD in Near Eastern studies from Princeton University.



Image credit: Poster Collection, 02113, Hoover Institution Archives.

Complete Victory in Gaza Is Not in Israel's Grasp

By David P. Goldman

Israel cannot “win” the Gaza war, that is, eradicate Hamas and impose a stable and satisfactory political settlement on the territory, because its American alliance makes victory unattainable. The Biden Administration provided a \$14 billion supplemental aid package for Israel, but it also withheld ammunition shipments and twisted Israel’s arm to accept ceasefires that effectively nullify its efforts to extirpate Hamas from Gaza. It has countenanced a vast increase in Iran’s oil exports, indirectly strengthening Hezbollah and other Iranian auxiliaries. Most of all, Washington promoted Qatar’s role as “mediator” while Qatar continues to host Hamas leaders, including individuals under U.S. indictment as terrorists.

The new Cold War with China and Russia constrains Israel’s leverage over Iran. As long as China continues to buy Iran’s oil and sell its industrial goods, there is little that the West can do to undermine it. Russia’s military cooperation with Iran, although constrained by the ex-

igency of the Ukraine war, limits Western maneuvering room. Most of all, Israel faces the decline of American influence in the region and the growing influence of its competitors.

Israel faces internal as well as external obstacles to victory. The Israeli army neglected the training of Israel’s reservists; according to media reports, the average number of days served by Israeli reservists fell to only 2 million a year in 2022, down from an average of 10 million in the 1990s. Only 120,000 of the country’s 490,000 reserves spent more than 20 days a year on duty in 2022. Israel’s military leaders concentrated on high-tech weaponry and special forces rather than infantry, partly due to advice from their U.S. counterparts. In consequence, the Gaza campaign has been constrained by shortages of manpower and training issues.

The outcome will be a prolonged period of continuing political, economic, and psychological strain for Israel. Reducing Hamas has left Gaza to a great extent in ruins, and the territory will remain under Israeli military administration for the foreseeable future; no outside power has the will or means to rule Gaza, and the resettlement of large numbers of Gazans is unlikely. A high level of reserve deployment will continue to drain Israel’s economy and the patience of its population.

In the long term, Israel is on a trajectory to emerge as the most powerful country in the region. The working-age populations of Turkey and Iran will drop by half during the present century, according to UN projections, while Israel’s will double. But the next two years will challenge Israel’s reserves of economic and spiritual strength.

Israel’s widely discussed intelligence failure on October 7 defies simple explanation. Qatar’s deal with the Israeli government to provide \$15 million a month or more to Hamas in cash-filled suitcases was a factor. Qatar became a “major non-NATO ally” of the United States in January 2022, with the same designation

as Israel. Israel was led to believe that Qatar was buying quiescence from Hamas. Either Hamas deceived Qatar about its intentions, or Qatar itself was a party to the deception. Yet Hamas continues to operate out of Doha. If Qatar was deceived by its Hamas client, why did the emirate exact no penalty from its Hamas client for such deception?

This has not passed entirely without notice. Sen. Ted Budd (R-NC) on April 10 introduced Senate 4093 “to review and consider terminating the designation of the State of Qatar as a major non-NATO ally,” citing the official U.S. designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization and Qatar’s support for Hamas.

The indictment on terrorism charges of Hamas official Khaled Meshaal by the U.S. Justice Department should focus the problem: Despite its “major ally” status, Meshaal is based in Qatar, but Qatar has no extradition treaty with the United States.

Qatar hosts the largest American air base outside the United States and retains enormous influence in American policymaking. Qatar is not only the major funder of Hamas, Israel’s antagonist in Gaza, but also the long-time host to its leadership, and the funder of the propaganda apparatus (through the Al-Jazeera news network and other outlets) that defends Hamas and its peers before the world public. And thanks to the United States, it is the intermediary in negotiations for the return of hostages held by Hamas. Israel has had no choice but to play out a ghastly charade mediated by Qatar in which Hamas pretends to trade the lives of hostages for a cessation of Israeli military operations.

During the Arab Spring, Qatar aligned with the U.S. intelligence community in promoting Sunni jihadists opposed to the old Arab order. Unlike the other Gulf monarchies, Qatar embraced the radicals who overthrew Mubarak and tried to remove the Assad family in Syria. Ultimately this led to the 2018 quarantine of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Iran helped rescue Qatar from the Saudi blockade, and the United States remained neutral.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration’s efforts to court the Iranian regime by easing sanctions on Iran’s oil exports have put tens of billions of additional dollars in the hands of a regime whose Lebanese and Syrian allies threaten to open a second and third front against Israel. Hezbollah’s low-intensity warfare against Israel has forced the evacuation of 60,000 Israelis from the country’s north. The Iranian-controlled militia has fired over 8,000 projectiles at Israel since October 7, 2023.

Although complete victory in Gaza is not within Israel’s grasp, it has drastically weakened Hamas and should be able to prevent any large-scale attacks. It cannot force Iran to stand down its proxies on Israel’s border,

POLL: Is it possible for Israel to defeat permanently through force of arms Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran?

- Israel has nearly destroyed Hamas, and it can do the same with all its other regional enemies.
- Israel might be able to neuter for a generation Hamas and Hezbollah, while protecting itself against Iran.
- Israel on its own can never win a war against a much larger Iran.
- Israel is in mortal danger by fighting simultaneously four separate enemies on four separate fronts.
- Israel and its enemies might spark a theater-wide war that could lead to World War III.

but it can deter Iran effectively. An added factor in Israel's favor is that China, whose influence in the region is growing, is the largest importer of Persian Gulf oil and therefore does not want a wider war. Israel will have to endure a tense and uncomfortable period of prolonged uncertainty. Before October 7, Israel was close to establishing diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, the basis for a long-term peace in the region. Iran seems unwilling to engage Israel directly and has offered no response to the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh on July 31. Despite its heated rhetoric against Israel, Turkey is unlikely to involve itself. Over time, Israel should be able to retrace its diplomatic steps.

A great deal depends on the outcome of the November U.S. elections. The deterioration of U.S. influence under the Biden administration and its ambivalent treatment of Israel may persuade Israel to act less like the outpost of the West in the Middle East and more like a Middle Eastern nation pursuing its own interests amid the tangle of regional politics.



DAVID P. GOLDMAN is deputy editor of *Asia Times*, where he has written the “Spengler” column since 2001. Previously he was an award-winning market strategist and research director at Credit Suisse and Bank of America. From 2013 to 2016 he was a partner at Reorient Group (now Yunfeng Financial), a Hong Kong investment bank. His books include *How Civilizations Die* (2011) and *You Will Be Assimilated: China’s Plan to Sino-Form the World* (2020). He contributes to the *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, the *Claremont Review of Books*, and *Tablet*, among other publications. He has consulted for the Defense Department’s Office of Net Assessment and for the National Security Council. He serves on the advisory board of SIGNAL Group, an Israeli think tank specializing in Sino-Israel relations.

Discussion Questions

1. Will the present tensions lead soon to the use of nuclear weapons in the Middle East?
2. Should Israel and the United States join in a preemptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities?
3. What are the chances that outside actors such as Turkey, China, or Russia might intervene on behalf of their Arab and Islamic allies against Israel?
4. How long can the Israeli economy and military continue fighting Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran, which have all attacked Israel?
5. Is it possible for Israel to defeat permanently through force of arms Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran—and if so, how?

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Declarations of War and Surrender



Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of “War, Revolution, and Peace.” Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: “The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man’s endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life.” From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the “Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict” has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution’s dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.



The publisher has made this work available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license 4.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>.

Efforts have been made to locate the original sources, determine the current rights holders, and, if needed, obtain reproduction permissions. On verification of any such claims to rights in the articles or images reproduced in this publication, any required corrections or clarifications will be made in subsequent printings/editions. The views expressed in this publication are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, officers, or Board of Overseers of the Hoover Institution.

Copyright © 2025 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University

Hoover Institution, Stanford University
434 Galvez Mall
Stanford, CA 94305-6003
650-723-1754

Hoover Institution in Washington
1399 New York Avenue NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
202-760-3200

