



# HOOVER DIGEST

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RESEARCH + COMMENTARY  
ON PUBLIC POLICY

FALL 2022 NO. 4

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## ON THE COVER

Among the warriors Americans celebrate this Veterans Day are the Tuskegee Airmen, the pioneering black fighter pilots who helped break the color bar during World War II. One such pilot was Robert W. Deiz, portrayed here in this 1944 bond-drive poster by artist Betsy Graves Reyneau, a suffragist and civil rights activist. Just as the new Juneteenth holiday memorializes black Americans' rising up from slavery, the Tuskegee Airmen became a living symbol of African-Americans' hopes taking wing. See story, page 220.



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# What Must Be Done

Hoover fellows **John F. Cogan** and **Kevin Warsh** have designed a strategy to revive America's economic first principles.

By **Jonathan Movroydis**

**H**oover fellows John F. Cogan and Kevin Warsh are concerned that American leadership and institutions have strayed from the nation's foundational principles of private property rights, individual liberty, limited government, and free and competitive markets. They explore this theme in a new research paper, *Reinvigorating Economic Governance: Advancing a New Framework for American Prosperity*, published by the Hoover Institution Press.

## Key points

- » Crises in the early twenty-first century spawned government expansion and a sharp erosion of American first principles.
- » Frustration with the ineffectiveness of American government unites left and right.
- » Americans must search for leaders who will uphold private property, individual liberty, limited government, and free markets.

*John F. Cogan is the Leonard and Shirley Ely Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and participates in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project and its policy task forces on energy, the economy, and health care. Kevin Warsh is the Shepard Family Distinguished Visiting Fellow in economics at the Hoover Institution and a lecturer at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. Jonathan Movroydis is the senior content writer for the Hoover Institution.*

Societies that have maintained these principles, they argue, have achieved strong, sustained economic progress, and those that have failed to adopt them have not.

They give particular attention to what they call the “four great shocks” in this first quarter of the twenty-first century: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; the global financial crisis of 2007–8; the COVID-19 pandemic; and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

These shocks have destabilized societies and roiled markets, Cogan and Warsh write, but the US government’s response to each of them has also caused problems. Each shock has led to growth in the size of the state, increased government intrusion, and ultimately greater distrust in political institutions.

Cogan and Warsh believe that current US policy choices will determine the future of the country. In promoting a revitalization of first principles for a twenty-first-century America, they advocate a rigorous policy framework that renews focus on the “three i’s”: liberating the *individual*, encouraging the promulgation of new *ideas*, and ensuring the proper functioning of strong, faithful *institutions*.

**Jonathan Movroydis:** What are the origins of this project?

**Kevin Warsh:** It really came to be when as an eighteen-year-old freshman at Stanford University, I walked through the doors of the Hoover Institution and knocked on John Cogan’s door. Three decades later, I became a colleague of John’s at Hoover, and he remains a great friend, from whom I’ve learned much about what kind of fiscal policies best ensure individual freedom and prosperity.

In fall 2020, Condoleezza Rice was appointed director of the Hoover Institution, just six months after COVID-19 reached America’s shores. Condi, John, and I met for dinner, as we often have over the past thirty years. But this time, Condi was our boss. At some point in the conversation, she turned to the subject of economic policy. She asked an open question (it might have been rhetorical), which implied that people who advocated for individual liberty and free markets seem to be losing in the public policy arena. We all agreed that the nation had been moving in the wrong direction, whether in the spending habits of our government, schools that are failing our children, rising crime, the erosion of trust in institutions, or the divisions at every level of our society.

Drawing from this experience, John and I began designing a new framework for how we could best address today’s daunting challenges, grounded in the nation’s foundational principles. We write in the paper that “a sound economic



governance framework liberates the individual, encourages the promulgation of new ideas, and ensures the proper functioning of institutions.”

**John F. Cogan:** If the direction of the country is to change, we need a course correction in public policy. In order to alter the course the country is on, we need a framework in which policy can be assessed. And so, Kevin and I decided to put pen to paper to provide a framework aimed at that goal. In considering public policy, the

role of institutions often gets too little attention.

Condi, Kevin, and I share a deep concern about the functioning of our major institutions. So many of

our institutions are failing to deliver what citizens have rightfully come to expect from them. It is important to keep in mind that well-functioning institutions have made America the strongest and most prosperous democracy in the history of the world. They need to be reformed and revitalized.

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**“Each shock produced corresponding growth in the size of the state and more government intrusion on individual liberty.”**

**Warsh:** To add to John’s point, I believe we are living during a seminal point in US history. Our great colleague, the late secretary George Shultz, called it “a hinge of history.” This is a moment at which we can either double down on our current path or pave a new course for America. It struck us that we needed to fill in some of the considerable white space between the ideas of the Enlightenment and the challenges of today. This framework is designed to provide high-level guidance to inform policy for the next decades.

**Cogan:** The timing is right. The American public has been awakened to the dangers of the path that we’re on. They are ready for a change and will be receptive to new policy ideas. Hopefully, the framework we have proposed will lead to better policies.

**Movroydis:** In the paper, you write, “The major pillars of US society, government, business, and other private organizations are failing to deliver on realistic expectations of the citizenry. Americans are losing faith in institutions of all sorts, making our common creed harder to sustain, and economic progress more difficult to achieve.” What do you think are the cultural conditions responsible for this turning away from America’s founding principles? And could you also explain how the four shocks that you mention in the paper—9/11; the Great Recession of 2007–8; the COVID-19 pandemic; and the Ukraine war—are exacerbating these underlying trends?

**Cogan:** I wouldn't describe our leaders as necessarily turning away from these foundational principles but instead as gradually straying from them. This trend didn't begin within the past few years. It's been occurring for several decades now. America has always had extremists on each side of the political spectrum, but we've always also had a vital center, and that vital center has always kept policy grounded in the first principles of private property rights, individual liberty, limited government, and free and competitive markets. If anything, that vital center has been shrinking over time. And that's the concern.

The four shocks that we describe in the paper have really led Americans to question the security of our system. Certainly, 9/11 made the public realize that we were at risk of transnational terrorism. The Great Recession made

us very concerned about our nation's economic stability. COVID-19 led Americans to understand how vulnerable we are to the global proliferation of infectious diseases. And

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***As Hayek wrote, "If old truths are to retain their hold on men's minds, they must be restated in the language and concepts of successive generations."***

I think Russia's attack on Ukraine has led our citizenry to wonder whether we're heading back to the past century of world wars, if not worse.

The first three of these events have shaken Americans' confidence in all levels of government. And the governmental policy response to each of these crises has further eroded that confidence. This is particularly true of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdowns of schools and businesses and the mandates for masks and vaccines were based neither upon hard science nor assessments of costs and benefits. The public now understands this. Each shock produced corresponding growth in the size of the state and more government intrusion on individual liberty. These types of policy responses have also led Americans to question whether our government can respond properly to future policy challenges. And Americans, I believe, are now awakening to the consequences of the government's decisions.

**Warsh:** Political commentators talk a lot about the polarization of the US citizenry, but the frustration with the ineffectiveness of our governing institutions, that's what unites the left and the right. Three-quarters of the American people currently believe the economy is on the wrong track, and substantially similar numbers have little or no confidence in the key institutions of US economic life, private and public. And what concerns John and

me is that the extraordinary government responses to the shocks mentioned in our paper have become normalized.

The size of the federal budget today is about 60 percent higher than it was the day before the government's initial response to COVID-19. The fear is that this becomes a permanent new baseline for purposes of fiscal spending moving forward. If this is the case, then the United States, as we've come to know it, becomes a different country.

**Movroydis:** What were some of the philosophical inspirations for this paper?

**Cogan:** It's impossible to do justice to all those philosophers and economists who have contributed to our thinking over time. In some sense, our views represent a lifetime of learning from them. Our paper mentions Adam Smith, both his *Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*, two very important books for understanding the principles and benefits of proper economic governance.

Also, in the twentieth century, Friedrich A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* and, of course, Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* and *Free to Choose* have been powerfully important in influencing our understanding of basing policy on the foundational principles we mentioned above. Hayek was wise, not only in his thoughts on private property rights, individual liberty, limited government, and free and competitive markets, but also in his advice on communicating ideas to younger generations. We quote his advice at the top of the paper: "If old truths are to retain their hold on men's minds, they must be restated in the language and concepts of successive generations." Through our writing and speaking, we hope to reach the current generation of young people as well as more mature audiences with these "old truths," as Hayek called them.

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***"Does the policy ensure that institutions are accountable for their performance?"***

I'll mention three twenty-first-century books that I have also found to be very integral to my thinking: *Modern Times*, by Paul Johnson; *Why Nations Fail*, by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson; and *First Principles*, by John Taylor. These works provide a great sense of the importance of foundational principles for determining whether nations succeed or fail.

The accumulated experiences from youth to one's maturing years are very important in helping a person understand just how important adherence to these principles is for economic progress. Actually witnessing historical

events is, more often than not, more important than reading about them. For me, watching the deterioration and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union's command and control economy and, at the same time, the thriving free-market economies in the United States and Europe, and observing the remarkable divergence in living standards between West and East Germany and between South and North Korea, were powerful teachers about the importance of free markets and free individuals.

**Warsh:** This paper is a blend of both philosophy and practice. By that I mean we postulate a theory and advance our sense empirically of what has worked and not worked in the American experience. Our own tours of duty in government informed our thinking immeasurably.

I'd also cite some more recent work. Irving Kristol in 1978 wrote a book called *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. He describes the American system of natural

liberty and contrasts that with the economic woes of the late 1970s. I read Kristol's work for the first time when I was an undergraduate. As I reread that

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***“We’re hoping that the American people demand leaders who are competent and humble.”***

during the course of this project, that period of the 1970s resonated. What's happening now is not identical, but today's conversation about the end of the American dream, questions about the United States' role in the world, and skyrocketing inflation certainly rhymes with events a half century ago.

I'll end this long answer to a short question by quoting Milton Friedman, who in 1978 said there has never been a time in American history with more hope and more danger than he found at that moment. I think, in some sense, that's where John and I see the world as we speak. We remain optimists.

**Movroydis:** How would you apply this framework to current twenty-first-century policy challenges?

**Cogan:** The next step in the development of our work is to apply our framework to specific challenges that confront the country. The application begins by asking questions about specific policies and policy proposals: Does the policy maximize human welfare? Does the policy allow individuals to use their talents and ideas to improve their standards of living in ways that fit their preferences and are within the norms of society? Does the policy provide governing institutions with clearly defined responsibilities? Does it ensure that institutions don't stray outside of these responsibilities? And



then, finally: Does the policy ensure that institutions are accountable for their performance?

**Warsh:** If you agree with those framing questions, then we believe we will end up with better answers to strengthen the purpose and prosperity of the country in the twenty-first century. The questions aren't loaded to achieve a particular policy result.

**Movroydis:** Does our political environment make it difficult to make the reforms you propose?

**Cogan:** Perhaps a more appropriate question is, "Will the American public recognize the value of the foundational principles and elect leaders who will faithfully pursue policies that are consistent with these principles?" Kevin and I believe they will. As we've said earlier, we think the American public has been awakened and is ready for a change. Once the public reflects on the role that the foundational principles have played in making America so strong and prosperous, it will measure political candidates by the consistency of their policies with those principles.

**Warsh:** What we're hoping is that the American people demand leaders who are competent and humble, who believe in the strength and vitality of American individuals and businesses, who trust their fellow citizens, and who conduct themselves publicly in a manner that accrues benefit to the whole country. The kind of leaders who would serve well within this framework don't have to be the world's experts in every area of policy. They just need to acknowledge, in some sense, the genius of the American experiment that was formed nearly two hundred and fifty years ago. ■

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Available from Stanford University Press is **The High Cost of Good Intentions**, by John F. Cogan. To order, visit [www.sup.org](http://www.sup.org).



# No More Wishful Thinking

**The laws of economics can't be suspended, no matter how one spins the politics of bailouts and "stimulus."**

**By John H. Cochrane**

**I**nflation's return marks a tipping point. Demand has hit the brick wall of supply. Our economies are now producing all that they can. Moreover, this inflation is clearly rooted in excessively expansive fiscal policies. While supply shocks can raise the price of one thing relative to others, they do not raise all prices and wages together.

A lot of wishful thinking will have to be abandoned, starting with the idea that governments can borrow or print as much money as they need to spray at every problem. Government spending must now come from current tax revenues or from credible future tax revenues, to support noninflationary borrowing.

## Key points

» Excessively expansive fiscal policies are at the core of the current inflationary problem.

» Governments are fueling even worse inflation through unwise subsidies, such as student loan forgiveness.

» If we want growth, it will have to come from unleashing supply, not printing more money.

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*John H. Cochrane is the Rose-Marie and Jack Anderson Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of Hoover's Working Group on Economic Policy, and a contributor to Hoover's Conte Initiative on Immigration Reform. He is also a research associate of the National Bureau of Economic Research and an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute.*

Stimulus spending for its own sake is over. Governments must start spending wisely. Spending to “create jobs” is nonsense when there is a widespread labor shortage.

Unfortunately, many governments are responding to inflation by borrowing or printing even more money to subsidize energy, housing, child care, and other costs, or to hand out more money to cushion the blow from inflation—for example, by forgiving student loans. These policies will lead to even more inflation.

Expanded social programs and transfers must be funded from stable, long-run tax revenues, from taxes that do not impose undue costs on the economy. These facts will make it much more difficult for policy makers to continue ignoring budgets and the disincentives that are embedded in many social programs.

The bailout bandwagon will end. The 2008 financial crisis was met with a torrent of borrowed and printed money to stimulate the economy and bail out banks and their creditors. The COVID-19 recession was met with a tidal wave. Once again, government money went to bail out creditors, prop up asset prices, and provide more stimulus.

Given these precedents, our financial system now firmly trusts that the government will borrow or print money in the event of any future crisis.

But once fiscal space has run out and given way to inflation, the government’s ability to stop the next crisis may evaporate. When

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***The Biden administration’s effort to brand inflation “Putin’s price hike” is both comically inept and patently false.***

people no longer have confidence that the borrowed money will be repaid, or that the printed money will be soaked up again, they will not lend more. Today’s inflation is a taste of this fundamental change.

The “secular stagnation” debate is settled. Since 2000, long-term growth has fallen by half, representing one of the great unsung economic tragedies of the twenty-first century. After rising by an average of 3.6 percent per year between 1947 and 2000, US real (inflation-adjusted) GDP growth has since averaged just 1.8 percent per year.

Was this sclerosis a case of demand-side “secular stagnation” that, given persistently low interest rates, had to be addressed with oodles of “fiscal stimulus”? Or did it follow from a reduction in supply owing to the corrosive effects of protected and overregulated industries, or to deeper problems such as the erosion of educational performance or a lack of innovation?

We now know that it was supply, and that more stimulus will bring only more inflation. If we want growth—to reduce poverty; to pay for health, environmental protections, and transfers; or for its own sake—it will have to come from unleashing supply. Tariffs, industrial protections, labor-market distortions, restrictions on skilled immigration, and other supply-constraining policies have direct costs that cannot be offset by printing more money.

The return of inflation and Russia's war in Ukraine signal the end of stupendously counterproductive energy and climate policies. Our govern-

ments have been pursuing a dangerously myopic strategy of shutting down US and European fossil-fuel development before

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### ***The bailout bandwagon will grind to a halt.***

alternatives are available at scale, strangling nuclear energy, and subsidizing grossly inefficient (and often carbon-intensive) projects such as California's high-speed train to nowhere.

The folly of this approach is now plain to see. After blocking the Keystone XL Pipeline and limiting oil and gas exploration, President Biden's administration has now gone begging to Venezuela and Iran to make up for a shortfall in energy supply. Similarly, although cracks have appeared, the Germans still can't bring themselves to allow nuclear power or fracking for natural gas. Efforts to strangle domestic fossil-fuel companies via financial regulation continue unabated. For example, on March 21, just as Russia's attack on Ukraine was driving gas prices sharply higher, the US Securities and Exchange Commission decided to announce expansive new climate-related disclosure rules designed to discourage fossil-fuel investment.

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### ***When people no longer have confidence that borrowed money will be repaid, or that printed money will be soaked up again, they will not lend more.***

measures to force banks to stop lending to them. But reality must now remind everyone of a lesson from Economics 101: when supply is restricted, price (and profits) goes up, not down. Those who have been insisting that climate change is the greatest risk to civilization, or to financial markets, surely

For years, climate regulators have repeated the mantra that fossil-fuel companies would soon be bankrupt—stuck holding “stranded assets”—because of such regulation, and that this justified

must now acknowledge that there are other more likely near-term threats, such as pestilence, military aggression, and now possibly even nuclear war.

Yet the spin continues. One still hears that inflation comes from vulnerable supply chains, nefarious price gouging, profiteering, monopoly, and greed. The Biden administration's latest effort to brand inflation "Putin's price hike" is both comically inept and patently false. Inflation is widespread and has been surging for a year, while Russian President Putin wants nothing more than to sell us lots of oil to finance his military. Such spin trivializes a war that is a fight for the soul of Europe and for the security of the world; it is not about Americans' inconvenience at the gas pump.

The era of wishful thinking is over. Those who come to grips with that fact now will look a lot less foolish in the future. ■

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# “Friend-Shoring” Isn’t Friendly

**This new form of protectionism—trade only with trusted partners—won’t solve supply bottlenecks. What it *will* do is keep developing nations from sharing in the world’s wealth.**

**By Raghuram G. Rajan**

In an important speech to the Atlantic Council in April, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen issued a welcome call for revitalizing the world economic order. But she also generated headlines with a single sentence advocating what she called “friend-shoring”: that is, limiting the trade of key inputs to trusted countries in order to reduce risks to the supply chains on which the United States and its partners rely.

This should worry us. Today’s global supply chains—made possible by reductions in tariffs and lower transportation and communication costs—have transformed

## Key points

- » A new surge of protectionism—fueled by new geopolitical rivalries—threatens free and fair trade.
- » Protectionists often broaden the idea of “essential” goods too far.
- » An efficient global supply chain involves countries with very different income levels. Each brings its comparative advantage to the table.
- » On-shoring doesn’t necessarily solve supply problems. Remember the baby formula shortage?

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production by allowing firms to manufacture goods wherever it is cheapest to do so. This has generally meant that while high-value-added inputs (such as research and development, design, advertising, and finance) are sourced in advanced economies, manufacturing moves to emerging markets and developing countries.

The benefits are obvious. Final products are significantly less expensive, so even the poorest people in rich countries can buy them.

At the same time, developing countries participate in the production process, using their most valuable resource: low-cost labor. As their workers gain skills, their own manufacturers move to more sophisticated production processes, climbing the value chain. As workers' incomes rise, they buy more rich-country products.

By 2017, for example, China had more iPhone users than any other country. Knowledge workers in rich countries then earn higher incomes as the market for high-value products grows.

## **STRETCHING “SECURITY”**

Of course, even though trade yields net benefits, the distribution of gains and losses matters. Trade is not simply “win-win.” Hollowed-out small towns in the American Midwest attest to the downside of offshoring production.

It has ever been thus: across the advanced economies, today's Rust Belt towns and cities initially

grew by putting traditional craft workers elsewhere out of work. With the right policy support, however, trade need not

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***While some labor unions would welcome the reduced global competition, the rest of us would regret it.***

leave people or communities behind. In Scandinavia, firms constantly focus on upgrading their workers' skills so that they are ready for change.

These are the basic, Economics 101 arguments in support of free and fair trade. But in recent years, global supply chains have displayed new vulnerabilities. In their desire to maximize efficiency, companies have sometimes overlooked resilience. Climate disasters (including floods, droughts, and wildfires) and shocks like the pandemic-induced lockdowns have highlighted “just in time” supply chains' many chokepoints.

As a result, firms are now considering whether they should increase their inventories as an additional buffer. They are also looking for ways to reduce chokepoints by diversifying production locations across countries, and to increase flexibility by making inputs more substitutable.



**READY: John Kerry, then secretary of state, tours a Ford factory in Sanand, India, in 2015. The benefits of global trade include final products that are significantly less expensive, so that even the poorest people in rich countries can buy them.** [US Department of State]

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Such private-sector responses can preserve the viability of global supply chains.

But resurgent protectionism—cloaked and augmented by new geopolitical rivalries—constitutes a more dangerous threat. The tit-for-tat tariffs between the United States and China during Donald Trump’s presidency were the opening salvos. The West’s subsequent restrictions on the Chinese telecom giant Huawei’s sales, and China’s restrictions on Australian imports, added more policy uncertainty to the mix. Now, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has introduced the possibility of an angry public broadening official sanctions beyond what policy makers intend.

If all that is not enough to make corporate CEOs rethink the value of their global supply chains, government advocacy of friend-shoring certainly will. True, national security can never be taken lightly. It is legitimate for a country to ensure that goods and services essential to its national defense are produced domestically or by friendly neighbors. The problem is that “essential”

is often broadened by protectionist interests to include even widely produced commodities like steel or aluminum.

If any forthcoming friend-shoring mandates were to apply such a broad categorization, they would have devastating effects on international trade. After all, friend-shoring will typically mean trading with countries that have similar values and institutions; and that, in practice, will mean transacting only with countries at similar levels of development.

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***With the right policy support, trade need not leave people or communities behind.***

The benefits of a global supply chain stem precisely from the fact that it involves countries with very different income levels, allowing each to bring its comparative advantage to the production process—PhD researchers from one, for example, and unskilled assembly-line workers from another. Friend-shoring would tend to eliminate this dynamic, thereby increasing production costs and consumer prices. While some labor unions would welcome the reduced competition, the rest of us would regret it.

## **PROTECTIONIST PROBLEMS**

Moreover, it is not even clear that on-shoring or near-shoring production helps to increase resilience or the reliability of supply. In the United States, baby formula is supplied by a government-supported oligopoly of four domestic firms that are protected from foreign competition by high tariffs. But for many months this year, there was no baby formula to be had in some American states, owing to problems in just a single facility. So much for building resilience through domestic production!

By the same token, concentrating production within a gated community of advanced economies would not necessarily increase the security of the community. As Brexit showed, friends do not always stay friends. Even countries as close in temperament as the United States and Canada had serious disagreements during Trump's presidency.

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***Economic entanglements may be messy, but they help keep the peace.***

Even more to the point, existing economic interdependencies can make geostrategic rivals more reluctant to launch missiles at one another. Many observers have noted that China will think twice before invading Taiwan now that it has seen the damage that sanctions are doing to Russia.

But if China *were* to prepare for an invasion, it would start by reducing its reliance on Western economies, a process that Western friend-shoring would inadvertently advance. Economic entanglements may be messy, but they help keep the peace.

Finally, friend-shoring would tend to exclude the poor countries that most

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***In their desire to maximize efficiency, companies sometimes overlook resilience.***

need global trade in order to become richer and more democratic. It will increase the risks that these countries become failed states, fertile

grounds to nurture and export terrorism. The tragedy of mass emigration will become more likely as chaotic violence increases.

Friend-shoring is an understandable policy if it is strictly limited to specific items directly affecting national security. Unfortunately, the term's public reception already suggests that it will be used to cover much else. ■

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# *Amnesia at the Fed*

**How did the Federal Reserve lose control over inflation? By forgetting a hard-earned lesson of the 1970s: to tighten the money supply *before* inflation takes hold.**

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***By Thomas J. Sargent and William L. Silber***

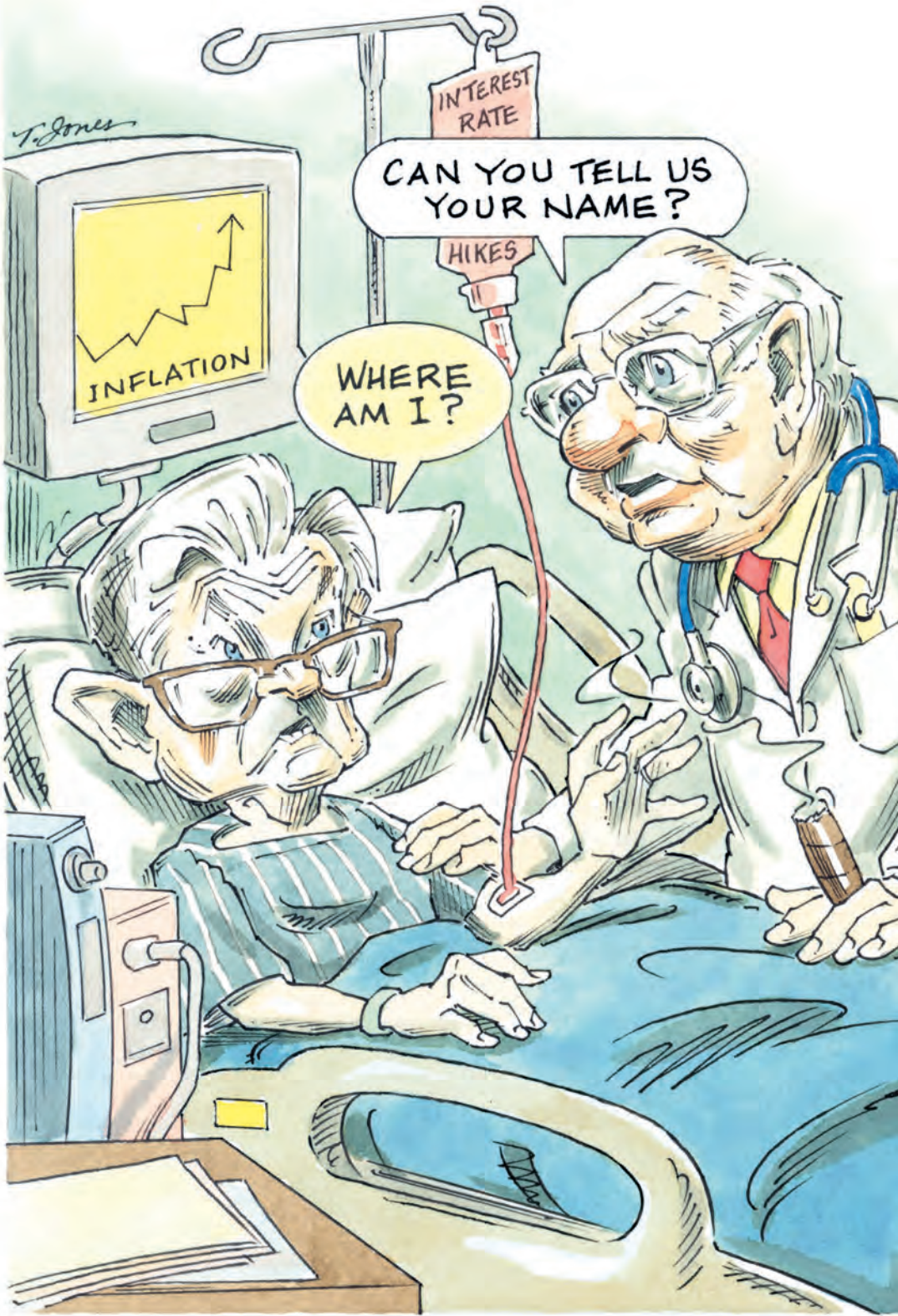
**I**s the Federal Reserve reviewing the connection between high inflation and the past two years of US monetary policy? A reporter asked Fed Chairman Jerome Powell that question at a June news conference. After acknowledging that the Fed is doing so “very carefully,” the chairman deflected. He said that for decades inflation was “dominated by disinflationary forces,” but recent history has been plagued by “extraordinary shocks.” Pointing to the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and shutdowns in China, he concluded: “We’re aware that a different set of forces are driving the economy.”

Yet Powell neglected to mention the expansionary monetary and fiscal policies of 2020 and 2021, which surely contributed to upward pressure on prices. More important, he missed the main culprit: the Federal Reserve itself. The Fed lost control of inflation by abandoning its decades-long strategy of pre-emptive restraint—that is, tightening before inflation takes

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hold. That policy, promoted by Fed Chairman Paul Volcker in the 1980s, has delivered price stability for nearly forty years.

The mistake started in August 2020, when the Fed began to target “inflation moderately above 2 percent for some time” to make up for past shortfalls. This attitude encouraged the central bank to label the emerging inflation as “transitory.” In June 2021 congressional testimony, Powell nailed the coffin on pre-emptive restraint precisely when it was most needed: “We



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

will not raise interest rates pre-emptively because we think employment is too high, because we fear the possible onset of inflation. Instead, we will wait

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***Pre-emptive restraint delivered price stability for nearly forty years.***

on this type of thinking. He told his Fed colleagues: “We have lost this game in the past by staying with an expansionary policy too long during a recovery period.” He then followed through by raising rates early in the economic recovery of 1984—with the unemployment rate still at 7.8 percent—to avoid inflationary pressure.

Alan Greenspan, Volcker’s successor, continued pre-emptive restraint, most famously by surprising financial markets with a sharp rate increase in

for actual evidence of actual inflation or other imbalances.”

Volcker blamed the run-away inflation of the 1970s

mid-1994 while inflation during the first half of the year averaged 2.5 percent.

The last pre-emptive rate increase occurred in December 2016 under

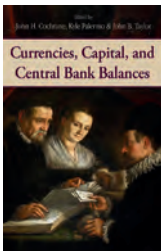
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***Fed chair Powell nailed the coffin on pre-emptive restraint precisely when it was most needed.***

Janet Yellen. That month, the Fed raised the federal-funds target by 25 basis points as inflation was running at 1.3 percent for the year.

We believe that the policy of pre-emptive restraint is what anchored inflationary expectations after the mid-1980s by preventing inflation from taking hold. The country is now paying for the Fed’s amnesia. ■

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# *Ukraine Belongs in Europe*

**Ukrainians have proven that they deserve what they want, and what they want is membership in the European Union.**

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**By Timothy Garton Ash**

**W**hat a difference a war makes. In February, the leaders of France, Germany, and Italy would not have dreamed of supporting Ukraine's candidacy for EU membership. But there they were in June, on a sunny day in Kyiv, all emphatically endorsing it. If the process continues, this really could be, as President Volodymyr Zelensky put it after meeting his visitors from luckier parts of Europe, "one of the key European decisions of the first third of the twenty-first century." It could mark the beginning of a further round of eastern enlargement of the EU, as significant as the first big post-Cold War round in the 2000s, which in two waves took in countries from Estonia to Bulgaria. The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus scores again: "war is the father of all things."

There are two good reasons to accept Ukraine as a candidate for membership in the EU: because Ukraine has earned it, and because this is in the long-term strategic interest of all Europeans. The second is even more important than the first.

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Ukraine's aspiration to join the EU did not start yesterday. I will never forget standing on a freezing Maidan in Kyiv during the Orange Revolution in 2004, amid a sea of European flags such as I have never seen in any EU capital. Ten years later, the 2014 protests in Kyiv were sparked by President Viktor Yanukovich's rejection of an association agreement with the EU—and those demonstrations were christened the Euromaidan.

The war has confirmed this settled will of the Ukrainian nation. From the outset,



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

Zelensky made candidacy for EU membership one of his three main asks to the West, alongside his urgent request for more weapons and sanctions. A recent poll in Ukraine’s western and central regions—polling was impossible in the east because of the war—found 89 percent support for EU membership.

Who can doubt that Ukrainians have been fighting and dying for Europe? Explaining the commission’s positive recommendation, a senior Brussels official said: “The commission does not forget that Ukraine is the only country in Europe where people died, where people were shot at because they were on the streets carrying EU flags. Now we cannot tell them, ‘Sorry, guys, you were waving the wrong flags.’ ”

But this is also a strategic choice for Europe as a whole. At issue is not just Europe’s second-largest country. Besides recommending that Ukraine should be given candi-

date status, “on the understanding that” certain specific steps will be taken, the EU commission proposes the same status for Moldova, which is

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***EU candidates Ukraine and Moldova might find themselves in the limbo that much of the western Balkans has endured for nearly two decades.***

sandwiched between Ukraine and EU member Romania, “on the understanding that” somewhat broader changes are made. It has also recommended opening accession negotiations for Albania and North Macedonia. Beyond that, there will be the rest of the western Balkans, Georgia, and potentially, one day, a democratic Belarus.

Handled right, this second great eastern enlargement would make the European Union not just bigger but also more self-sufficient in food, stronger militarily, and with more potential for economic growth. We Europeans would end up better able to defend our interests and values. This widening of the EU would also require further deepening, since otherwise a community of thirty-five member states would be dysfunctional. In the long run, the inclusion of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia would mean that Russia would finally have to reconcile itself to having lost an empire—and start seeking a role as a modern nation-state. (Britain shows how long that process can take.) So this second wave of eastern enlargement would be another big step towards a Europe whole and free.

Yet there are many ifs and buts along the way. Countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Portugal are still trying to complicate, if not block,



this very first step. Will there be the political will to sustain a long-term strategy for enlargement? The costs of reconstruction in Ukraine will be huge. War damage is already estimated at \$150 billion. Ukraine has a chance to build back better, but only if substantial European funds for reconstruction are effectively linked to major reforms, including the battle against corruption.

Currently there is popular support for this step inside the EU: 66 percent of European citizens approved of opening the door to Ukraine in a Eurobarometer survey in April.

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***A poll in Ukraine’s western and central regions found 89 percent support for EU membership.***

Foreign Relations (ECFR) poll. But the ECFR figures for France, Germany, and Italy were just under 50 percent. As the wave of wartime sympathy with Ukraine subsides, and all of Europe is hit by the economic consequences of both the COVID-19 pandemic and Vladimir Putin’s war, that support may erode. Mediterranean countries say, “You keep talking about the East, but what about the South?” Dire conditions in the Middle East and Africa, exacerbated by soaring food prices due to missing Ukrainian and Russian grain exports, may result in new crises there.

Another danger is that widening could go ahead without the necessary deepening. That was the big flaw of the first eastern enlargement. The result: Viktor Orbán has demolished democracy in Hungary with the help of billions

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***In the long run, Russia might finally reconcile itself to having lost an empire—and start seeking a role as a modern nation-state.***

More likely, the momentum of enlargement would stall. Ukraine and Moldova might find themselves in the limbo that much of the western Balkans has endured for nearly two decades. North Macedonia has waited seventeen years, since 2005, to proceed from candidate status to actual negotiations, thanks to blocking first by Greece and then by Bulgaria. Macedonians have kept the faith, but in Serbia support for EU membership has declined from 70 percent to 37 percent. Local elites elsewhere might conclude that their

of euros in EU funds and, thanks to the requirements for unanimity on such questions, recently held the rest of the EU to ransom over a new round of sanctions on Russia.



best bet is to play Europe, China, and Russia off against each other, as the Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, does. The EU's eastern and south-eastern perimeter would then be an unstable mush, inviting penetration by China, Russia, and other hostile powers.

The path is strewn with obstacles and possible wrong turnings. Still, as the Chinese proverb has it, a journey of ten thousand miles begins with a single step. At least this first step is in the right direction. ■

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# *A Pyrrhic Victory?*

**Even if Russia achieved the complete subjugation of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin would never be able to proclaim “mission accomplished.”**

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*By Robert Service*

Vladimir Putin has never been completely clear about his war aims. But he gives clues. He endlessly talks of the brotherhood of Russians and Ukrainians—and in this relationship he always puts Russia first. In Ukraine he wants Russian language schooling to be restored, and he of course wishes to annex more Ukrainian territory. He would like Russian businesses to receive privileged access and for Ukraine to be barred from having an independent foreign and security policy. In other words, he wishes to pursue “Russification.”

Russification is an objective that has taken changing forms over the centuries. Under the Russian empire, the czars saw Ukraine as a problem as they feared the growth of nationalism. The Ukrainian language was restricted in the press. Ukraine made no appearance on official maps. The territories around Kyiv were called Malorossia (Little Russia) while those near the Black Sea were dubbed Novorossia (New Russia). These names expressed an insistence that the entire destiny of Ukrainian speakers lay with Great Russia.

Imperial Germany coveted Ukraine’s wheat fields and iron mines during the Great War. When Soviet Russia went down to defeat in 1918, the Germans established a Ukrainian puppet state that was obliged to supply them with

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the grain and labor they craved. Ukrainians nevertheless cherish those brief months as their first experience of statehood. When the communists took charge after the ensuing civil war, Vladimir Lenin saw that Ukraine would remain difficult to rule inside the USSR unless granted the status of a Soviet republic and permitted a degree of cultural and linguistic autonomy—as Putin sees it, this was a cardinal blunder of statecraft that prepared the way for a split between Moscow and Kyiv.

Josef Stalin eyed Ukraine as crucial for his forcible imposition of collective farming from the late 1920s. Ukrainian agriculture had been Central Europe’s breadbasket before 1914 and the intention was to fund Soviet industrialization by means of massive cereal exports. Instead, there was searing damage to peasant farms and millions of Ukrainians

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***Under the Russian empire, the czars saw Ukraine as a problem.***

perished in the avoidable famine. Stalin also reintroduced restrictions on the Ukrainian language. More Russians than ever moved to Ukraine, seeking work in the mines and steel plants. Moscow offered the Ukrainian people little except poverty and repression. This was one of the reasons why many initially welcomed the Nazi invaders in 1941—another event Putin has not forgotten.

Throughout the decades that followed, Soviet rulers met with trouble in Ukraine. Stalin’s occupation forces at the end of the Second World War had to contend against partisans who fought to thwart the reimposition of Soviet rule. The communist order was restored by the 1950s. The Ukrainian Soviet republic acquired a seat at the United Nations—perhaps Putin thinks this a blunder on Stalin’s part. Ukraine never became the “model” of Marxist-Leninist affluence that Lenin and Stalin had envisaged and the USSR failed to grow enough food for itself, far less to export grain to foreign parts.

When Mikhail Gorbachev announced reforms of communism in the late 1980s, he tried to keep a lid on Ukrainian nationalism. But the collapse of the Soviet economy intensified Ukrainians’ resentment about their treatment by Moscow. Leonid Kravchuk, the communist leader in Kyiv, sniffed the nationalist wind in 1991 and aligned himself with Ukrainian opinion by demanding a referendum on independence. That December, after Ukraine voted overwhelmingly to secede, the USSR fell apart, an event Putin describes as the century’s “greatest geopolitical catastrophe.”

Throughout the 1990s, the Ukrainian economy was in a deep depression and was mocked by Russian rulers who themselves had little to boast about. Ukraine’s politics, however, were looser than Russia’s. In the present century,



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]



they have given rise to presidential electoral contests won by candidates who wanted close ties with the European Union and an open democratic system under the rule of law. Under Volodymyr Zelensky, this orientation was consolidated. Putin's Crimean land grab in 2014 convinced even the millions of pro-Russia Ukrainian citizens that Ukraine should prioritize cooperation and alliance with the West. Putin's bullying of Russia's "brother people" turned that nation into a hotbed of Ukrainian nationalism.



So how could Putin ever go about denationalizing Ukraine and making it more Russia-friendly? The collapse of Ukrainian statehood seems to be held in abeyance, at least for now, thanks to the bravery of its politicians and armed forces. Territorial annexation is another matter. Russian forces occupy large parts of the Donbas region. They have overrun the Black Sea coast. Currently the Russian navy is blockading what is left of Ukraine.

In order to hold what he already has, Putin has imposed puppet administrations in the occupied territories. He has recognized the Donetsk and

Luhansk so-called people's republics, and he may well arrange plebiscites for their incorporation in the Russian

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***Even in victory, Russia would remain the world's pariah state and economy.***

Federation on similar terms to Crimea. He has already deported thousands of Ukrainian citizens deep into Russia. A further campaign of ethno-political cleansing is probable. The Russian language will be reimposed. Russian business interests will be privileged. All this is possible, but it would require a massive enduring presence of security forces to stamp out Ukrainian resistance.

A Russian military victory even in Donbas and along the Black Sea coast could never be without horrendous costs for Russia's ruling group and big business. Russia would remain the world's pariah state and economy. Resentment of Russia both in the conquered and still-free parts of Ukraine would be greater than anything known to Nicholas II, Vladimir Lenin, or Josef Stalin. Putin will surely at some point—let's hope it is soon—be asked whether his “special military operation” was worth it all. And it will be the Russians, including some of their ruling group, who will be putting the question. ▣

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# *Back to the Dangerous Future*

**The West dreamed of perpetual peace—and now is awakening to perpetual danger.**

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***By Josef Joffe***

**D**uring the Cold War, “Whither NATO?” was a classic yawner. Suddenly, the Soviet empire collapsed. After the last Russian soldier had left Central Europe in 1994, “whither” turned into “Why NATO?” Europe was reunified, and peace would reign forever.

This happy denouement after fifty years of Cold War triggered a disarmament race in Europe. The West began to cash in its peace dividends. Just a couple of numbers: Germany’s 3,000 main battle tanks shrank to 264. Roughly half of its heavy gear was in the repair shop or dock. The Bundeswehr was cut by almost two-thirds. At the height of the Cold War, the United States had 320,000 troops in Europe; last year, they were down to 65,000, strewn across Europe from Portugal to Poland. Just a couple of brigades were actually configured for combat.

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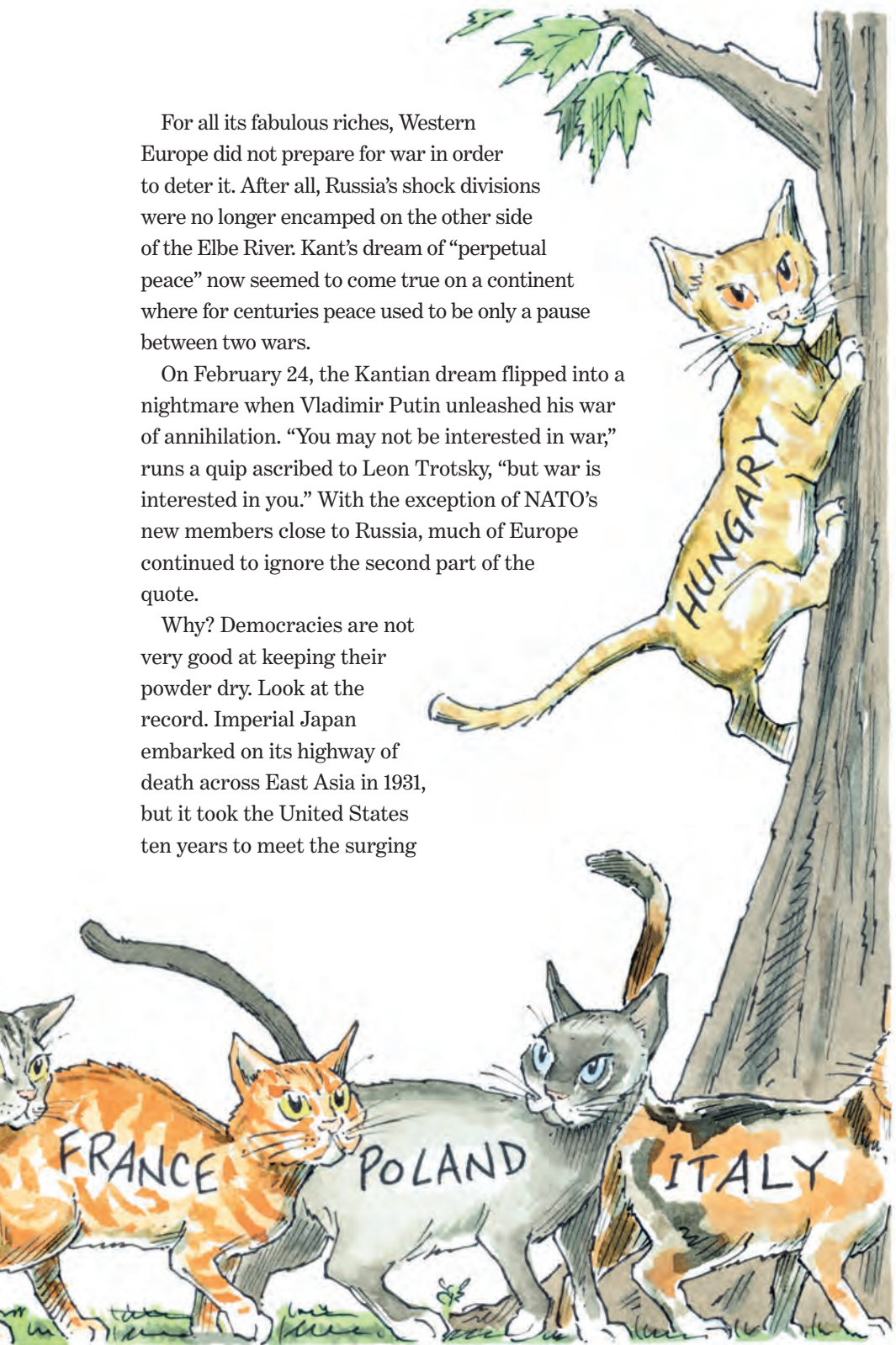


[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

For all its fabulous riches, Western Europe did not prepare for war in order to deter it. After all, Russia's shock divisions were no longer encamped on the other side of the Elbe River. Kant's dream of "perpetual peace" now seemed to come true on a continent where for centuries peace used to be only a pause between two wars.

On February 24, the Kantian dream flipped into a nightmare when Vladimir Putin unleashed his war of annihilation. "You may not be interested in war," runs a quip ascribed to Leon Trotsky, "but war is interested in you." With the exception of NATO's new members close to Russia, much of Europe continued to ignore the second part of the quote.

Why? Democracies are not very good at keeping their powder dry. Look at the record. Imperial Japan embarked on its highway of death across East Asia in 1931, but it took the United States ten years to meet the surging



threat—and then only after Pearl Harbor. Britain and France should have known that *Der Führer* was preparing for the Big War from day one. Tearing up disarmament treaties, he proceeded to re-arm at breakneck speed. Yet “England slept,” as John F. Kennedy’s little book of 1940 had it, and so did France. They thought they could appease Hitler, and only eleven months after Munich, they had World War II on their hands.

## EVER EXPANDING

History teaches again and again how imperialists expand. They start out by testing the will of their adversaries and watching the reaction to their gains. Hitler annexed Austria, the Sudetenland, and finally all of Czechoslovakia. It didn’t rouse the West. Putin’s playbook reads like a rewrite. When he went to the top in 2000, he launched a massive re-armament program. In 2008 he

subdued Georgia; in 2014 he grabbed Crimea while chopping off Ukraine’s Donbas region. Suddenly, Russia was back in the Middle East, whence Kis-

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***Vladimir Putin could not have imagined that the West would rise in righteous anger.***

singer and Nixon had evicted the USSR decades before. All the while, Putin kept testing NATO defenses on the alliance’s periphery. In Syria, he was practically ushered in when Barack “time for a little nation-building at home” Obama vacated his “red line.”

The West kept dozing. Obama and Donald Trump pulled troops out of Europe. Trump badmouthed NATO as “obsolete” and Emmanuel Macron called the alliance “brain dead.” Future historians will not be kind to Angela Merkel, who sheltered Russia against serious sanctions. In spite of ever-growing dependence on Russian energy, she defended Nord Stream 2 until her last days in office. “Reden statt rüsten”—to talk is better than re-arm—was the official mantra. Plus, the mother of all follies: “Security can be had only with, not against, Russia.”

Would Europe stop the flow of gas and shiver for Kyiv? Would the West openly arm Ukraine, let alone deploy division-sized forces to NATO’s eastern borders? Too provocative. And with what, when its tanks spend more time in the shop than on maneuver? If Putin was crazy, then only like a fox.

And yet he did miscalculate. He must have thought blitzkrieg, but the Ukrainians fought brilliantly—and the Russians like conscripts just out of boot camp. That confounded this author as well as fellow experts. In his wildest dreams, Putin could not have imagined that the West would rise in



righteous anger after an endless peace. We should have reread what George F. Kennan wrote ages ago. He compared democracies, especially the United States, with one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin: he lies there in his comfortable primeval mud and pays little attention to his environment; he is slow to wrath—in fact, you practically have to whack his tail off to make him aware that his interests are being disturbed.

But then it is fury unbound.

Britain slept; by 1940 it was a fight to the death. In World War I, it took Woodrow Wilson three years before he went after the kaiser. FDR deployed America's war machine against Hitler and Hirohito two years into World War II.

## **ROUSED TO ACTION**

This is where Putin made his gravest mistake, though we can't blame him for casting caution aside. After all, he had been on a low-cost roll since 2008 from Georgia to the Donbas. The price was sanctions that did not really bite. So, why not keep going? When the West did come together as one on February 24, he must have been as flabbergasted as a lap dog who is suddenly banished from the master bedroom.

In his worst nightmare, Putin could not have foreseen that the Germans, who had turned pacifism into a state religion, would suddenly dispatch anti-air and anti-tank missiles

to the Ukrainians, nor

that tiny Slovakia would transfer S-300 missiles

that take down high-fly-

ing planes. He must have

felt contempt for Joe Biden, who had pledged, "We will lead by the power of our example, not by the example of our power."

Back to Kennan's dinosaur. In the end, power does displace lethargy in the affairs of nations. Never mind that, like Obama, Biden had earnestly tried to re-induct Russia into the community of nations, ended America's combat role in Iraq, and decreed the not-so-glorious pullout from Afghanistan, following through on Trump's deal with the Taliban. Retrenchment ruled, and Putin took notice. Why should Putin have worried about an America that had slid into a retractionist mode after George W. Bush?

In the run-up to the Russian invasion, Biden at last reversed America's inward-bound course, beefing up the US presence in Europe. His current request for defense spending is \$70 billion above what he had asked for last year. Biden

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***Bipartisan unity on Ukraine might wane once the war begins to look indecisive.***

began to signal that the United States would be the “indispensable nation” again, to invoke a self-congratulatory line used by both Bill Clinton and Obama.

Putin now faces a global coalition that encompasses not only NATO and the EU. Even perennially neutral Switzerland has joined the hardened sanctions regime. Count in Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, and tiny Singapore on the other side of the globe. Finland and Sweden are sidling up to NATO.

It is an astounding testimony to Western cohesion. But only in fairytales do such miracles come out of thin air. True, the revulsion triggered by Russia’s slaughter of the innocents and the flight of four million Ukrainians have also galvanized the West. Still, heartbreak and outrage are not enough to cor-

ral cold-eyed states that always weigh moral duty against self-interest.

A posse does not arise spontaneously. There has to be a Great Organizer who convinces, co-opts,

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***Ukraine is not a “quarrel in a far-away country, between people of whom we know nothing,” as Neville Chamberlain said in 1938 during Hitler’s rise.***

and cajoles. Britain, France, and Germany—Europe’s big three—could not do it. They cannot trade on the enormous economic and strategic power at the disposal of the United States.

Never before has a US administration managed to harness so many unruly allies in so short a time. It takes fast-paced diplomatic footwork to recruit nations, plus muscle and trust. Clout breeds convening power, agenda setting, and “follow the leader.” Trust reassures would-be partners. The posse fell in behind the sheriff because he would not drag them into all-out war in the shadow of nuclear weapons. Plus, Biden offered reinsurance: he would not abandon the allies in case Putin attacked NATO territory. Good umbrellas make for good friends.

## **GROWING WEARY**

Now to the darker side of the Ukrainian war—Phase II. Phase I was heartening to no end. The Ukrainians fought bravely and well, aided by the moral revulsion fed daily by Russia’s war against cities and civilians. Phase II will be more treacherous. Those valiant Ukrainians will lose the advantage of fighting an invader who turned out to be badly led and trained.

Any army learns from its failures, and so will the clumsy, top-down military of the Kremlin. It will seek to consolidate its grip on the southeast, populated by Russian-speaking loyalists. Reversing conquest is harder than halting it. Fighting closer to home in the second round, the aggressors enjoy Clausewitz’s “interior lines” previously held by the Ukrainians in the battle for Kyiv.

Russia still rules the skies. Escalation and more mass murder loom—what Biden has termed genocide.

The cold logic of war now bids the West to raise the ante, and mounting risks will strain the coalition. It will have to intensify the training of Ukrainian fighters and send thousands of tons of ammunition, both smart and dumb. The United States will have to broaden intelligence sharing, space-based as well as tactical, to enable the Ukrainians to achieve surprise and disrupt the Russian order of battle. NATO will have to deliver heavy weaponry, not just artillery but also long-range anti-air and anti-ship hardware that will dent Russia's air and naval superiority. And all this while Putin keeps waving the nuclear club to intimidate the West.

Hence, the biggest question of them all: how long will this wondrous Western amity last? Will Berlin practice propitiation again while Paris shifts, as so often, toward mediating between East and West in order to pocket the broker's fee? On the home front, Biden will continue to be beset by raging inflation, which saps his domestic support. Bipartisan unity on Ukraine might wane once the war begins to look indecisive and the electorate is no longer glued to the TV screen that brings the horror into its living rooms.

This is where Biden will be tested in the months (and perhaps years) to come. War does concentrate the mind, and so Biden might even get a shot at greatness, as many previous war presidents did, if we can save Ukraine.

We always know how wars begin, not how they end. But make no mistake about the stakes in Russia's war of conquest. Ukraine is not a "quarrel in a far-away country, between people of whom we know nothing," as Neville Chamberlain said in 1938 when he gave away the Sudetenland. Ukraine is where the future of Europe and a decent world order will be decided. Realism warns that even furious dinosaurs eventually tire of the burden when their own lives are not on the line. ■

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# *Shocks to the World System*

**The battlefields of Ukraine offer invaluable military lessons. They also teach free nations about diplomacy, self-defense, and the risk of self-delusion.**

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***By H. R. McMaster***

**T**he Biden administration has been given an opportunity to align diplomatic efforts, defense strategies, energy security, and economic resilience across the free world. Discussions of these vital issues should aim for a common understanding of what free nations can learn from the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. The lessons to be absorbed from that conflict will lead to the development and implementation of new policies and strategies.

Six key lessons and their implications must drive those policies and strategies.

» ***Great-power competition is not a relic of the past.*** The brutal invasion of Ukraine revealed that many across the free world had clung to overly optimistic assumptions about the post-Cold War world, in particular that an “arc

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of history” had guaranteed the primacy of free and open democratic societies over closed, authoritarian systems.

Obviously, China’s Chairman Xi Jinping and Russia’s President Vladimir Putin did not share that assumption. Beyond the misinformation, double-speak, and Orwellian violation of the truth that ran through their joint statement on the eve of the Beijing Olympics was a clear message: they were assuming the mantle of international leadership from what they regarded as divided, decaying, and declining democracies.

The implication of this lesson is that the Quad nations (the United States, Japan, India, and Australia), alongside like-minded partners, must find new ways to compete against Russia and China. The only alternative is to accede to Xi’s and Putin’s vision of the future.

» ***“Triangular diplomacy” of the Kissinger-Nixon variety is no longer feasible.*** President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once sought closer relations with Russia and China than those two nations enjoyed with each other, an unworkable approach in today’s world, in which the two revanchist powers have declared that the “friendship between the two states has no limits.”

China has amplified Kremlin disinformation and taken actions to soften the financial and economic damage associated with the sanctions imposed on Russia. Regardless of how appealing it might be to imagine China and Russia moderating the other, our adversaries are in fact coordinating action against the free world.

» ***It’s past time to strengthen collective defense across the Indo-Pacific to restore deterrence and prepare for potential aggression.*** Russian aggression and Ukrainian courage have confirmed that while war is not the preferred means of settling differences, it may be the only way to ensure that they are not settled for you. The Quad and other like-minded nations should not only race to improve their own military capabilities but also help Taiwan improve its defenses—bearing in mind what might have been done before February 23 to help Ukraine deter a Russian invasion.

» ***It’s a grave mistake to rely on authoritarian regimes for energy.*** Germany’s leap to renewable energy sources while canceling nuclear power was a leap off a cliff—and into Moscow’s arms. Dependence on Russian oil and gas blunted Germany’s initial response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and has remained a threat to Berlin. Germany has been forced to burn more coal and emit more carbon to keep the lights on.

The United States has not yet absorbed what this means. Federal policies continue to constrain oil and gas infrastructure development, even as Biden

administration officials exhort authoritarian regimes such as Venezuela and Iran to export more gas and oil. We need policies that integrate energy security with national security, not just with efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

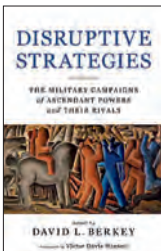
» ***Single points of failure in supply chains undermine sovereignty and impair responses to aggression.*** Examples include not only Europe's dependence on Russian oil and gas but also India's dependence on Russian weapons. Xi Jinping has learned this lesson well. China is crafting an economy that depends little on overseas markets, finance, and technology while deepening other nations' dependence on Chinese manufacturing and upstream components and materials. For example, China is pursuing dominance of supply chains essential to the clean-energy transition.

Governments and businesses must work together and invest to reduce the risk of supply chain disruption and maintain competitive advantages in critical technologies.

» ***Authoritarian regimes appear stronger than they are.*** The Kremlin leadership was applauding a well-choreographed military parade even as its poorly led, ill-trained, and undisciplined military faltered in Ukraine. The Chinese Communist Party has doubled down on a self-destructive zero-COVID policy.

Authoritarian regimes are brittle. Democracies are resilient. Citizens of the Quad nations, and others across the free world, can demand better policies that will empower them to compete with Russia and China. At the same time, the courage and determination of the Ukrainian people to defend their rights should inspire citizens of the free world to cherish the freedoms they enjoy as they learn these geopolitical lessons. ■

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# *Beyond Soft Power*

**Vladimir Putin turned a war of words—against “decadent” democracy—into an actual war. But Russia isn’t the only power determined to win this war. So is China.**

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***By Larry Diamond***

**R**ussia’s brutal and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine is the most important event in the world since the end of the Cold War. September 11 changed our lives in profound ways, and even changed the structure of the US government. It challenged our values, our institutions, and our way of life. But that challenge came from a network of nonstate actors and a dead-end, violent jihadist ideology that were swiftly degraded. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the larger rising tide of authoritarian power projection, represent the return of great power competition. And more, they denote a new phase of what John F. Kennedy called in his 1961 inaugural address a “long twilight struggle” between two types of political systems and governing

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*Larry Diamond is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the chair of a new Hoover research initiative, China’s Global Sharp Power Project. He is the Mosbacher Senior Fellow in Global Democracy at the Freeman Spogli Institute and a Bass University Fellow in Undergraduate Education at Stanford University, where he is a professor by courtesy of political science and sociology. His latest book is **Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency** (Penguin, 2019).*

philosophies. Two years after JFK's address, Hannah Arendt put it this way in her book, *On Revolution*:

No cause is left but the most ancient of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history has determined the very existence of politics: the cause of freedom vs. tyranny.

That is what the war in Ukraine, the war *for* Ukraine, is about: not about Ukraine someday joining NATO, but about Ukraine—a country so important to Russia's cultural heritage and historical self-conception—becoming a free country, a functioning liberal democracy, and thus a negation of and an insult to everything that Vladimir Putin and his kleptocratic Kremlin oligarchy cynically represent.

But it is not simply a “Resurrected Russia” (as Kathryn Stoner has termed it) that is counterposed to the global cause of freedom. The greater long-term threat comes from China's authoritarian Communist Party-state. China has the world's fastest growing military and the most pervasive and sophisticated system of digital surveillance and control. Its pursuit of global dominance is further aided by the world's most far-reaching global propaganda machine

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***Russia's aggression must be understood in a broader context of authoritarian coordination and ambition.***

and a variety of other mechanisms to project sharp power—power that seeks to penetrate the soft tissues of democracy and obtain their acquiescence

through means that are covert, coercive, and corrupting. It is this combination of China's internal repression and its external ambition that makes China's growing global power so concerning. China is the world's largest exporter, its second-largest importer, and its biggest provider of infrastructure development. It is also the first major nation to deploy a central-bank digital currency, and it is challenging for the global lead in such critical technologies as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, hypersonics, autonomous and electric vehicles, and advanced telecommunications.

While China now innovates in many of these technologies, it also continues to acquire Western intellectual property through a coordinated assault that represents what former NSA Director General Keith Alexander calls “the greatest transfer of wealth in human history.” And every technological innovation that China can possibly militarize it does, through a strategy of “civil-military fusion.” With this accumulated power, Beijing plans to force Asia's most vibrant liberal democracy, Taiwan, to “reunify with the motherland.” It



also seeks to establish unilateral Chinese control over the resources and sea lanes of the South China Sea, and then gradually push the United States out of Asia.

## **RUSSIA AND CHINA COLLUDE**

Russia's aggression must be understood in this broader context of authoritarian coordination and ambition, challenging the values and norms of the liberal international order, compromising the societal (and where possible, governmental) institutions of rival political systems, and portraying Western democracies—and therefore, really, democracy itself—as weak, decadent, ineffectual, and irresolute. In this telling, the democracies of Europe, Asia, and North America—especially the United States—are too commercially driven, too culturally fractured, too riven by internal and alliance divisions, too weak and effeminate, to put up much of a fight.

At the same time, China, Russia, and other autocracies have been denouncing the geopolitical arrogance of the world's democracies and confidently declaring an end to the era in which democracies could “intervene in the internal affairs of other countries” by raising uncomfortable questions about human rights.

On the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics on February 4, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping issued a joint statement denouncing Western alliances and declaring that there were no limits to the strategic partnership between their two countries. Four days

after Xi's closing Olympics fireworks display, Putin launched his own fireworks by invading Ukraine. It has been

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***“The cause of freedom vs. tyranny,”  
as Hannah Arendt pointed out, is the  
most ancient of all.***

anything but successful or quick. Xi cannot possibly be pleased by the bloody mess that Putin has made of this, which helps to explain why China twice abstained in crucial UN votes condemning the Russian invasion, rather than join the short list of countries that stood squarely with Russia in voting no: Belarus, Eritrea, Syria, and North Korea. Xi must think that Putin's shockingly inept and wantonly cruel invasion is giving authoritarianism a bad name.

It is also costing China a lot of money in global trade at a time when China's economic growth rate has slowed dramatically. And it's undermining the narrative China was trying to push that the autocracies know what they are doing and represent the wave of the future. Moreover, this is coming at a

moment when one of China's two most important cities, Shanghai, wrestles with panic and lockdowns over the COVID-19 virus, which Xi's regime has no other means to control *except* lockdown because it has refused to admit that the vaccines it developed are largely ineffective and instead import the vaccines that work.

All of this explains why this moment could represent a possible hinge in history as significant as the 1989–91 period that ended the Cold War. Last

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***We need to promote democratic narratives and values with greater imagination and vigor.***

of the global South and East, the reputation of democracy has taken a beating. A narrative has been gathering that democracies are corrupt and worn out, lacking in energy, purpose, capacity, and self-confidence.

**RECOMMIT TO DEMOCRACY**

The Germans have a word for these trends in the global narrative: *Zeitgeist*—the spirit of the times, or the dominant mood and beliefs of a historical era. In the roughly seventy-five years since World War II, we have seen five historical periods, each with its own dominant mood. From the mid-1940s to the early '60s, the mood had a strong pro-democracy flavor that

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***In both the older democracies of the West and the newer ones of the global South and East, the reputation of democracy has taken a beating.***

went with decolonization. It gave way in the mid-1960s to post-colonial military and executive coups, the polarization and waste of the Vietnam War, and a swing back to realism, with its readiness to embrace dictatorships that took “our side” in the Cold War. Then, third, came a swing back to democracy in Southern Europe, Latin America, and East Asia, and a new wave of democracy, from the mid-1970s to around 1990. That period of expanding democracy was then supercharged by a decisively pro-democratic *Zeitgeist* from 1990 to 2005, the so-called unipolar moment in which one liberal democracy, the United States, predominated. That period ended during the Iraq debacle, and for the past fifteen years, we have been in the tightening grip of a democratic recession and a nascent authoritarian *Zeitgeist*.

year marked the fifteenth consecutive year of a deepening democratic recession. In both the older democracies of the West and the newer ones

went with decolonization. It gave way in the mid-1960s to post-colonial military and executive coups, the polarization and waste of the Vietnam War, and a swing back

Could Russia's criminal, blundering invasion of Ukraine launch a new wave of democratic progress and a liberal and anti-authoritarian *Zeitgeist*? It could, but it will require the following things.

» ***Russia must fail in its bid to conquer and extinguish Ukraine.*** The United States and NATO must do everything possible, and much more than we are doing now, to arm and assist Ukraine militarily, and to punish Russia financially and economically.

» ***We must wage a more effective and comprehensive battle of information and ideas.*** Thus, we can expose Russia's mendacity and criminality and document its war crimes—not only before the court of public opinion but in ways that reach individual Russians directly and creatively. We need an intense campaign of technological innovation to circumvent authoritarian censorship and empower Russian, Chinese, and other sources that are trying to report the truth about what is happening and to promote critical thinking and the values of the open society.

In general, we need to promote democratic narratives and values much more imaginatively and resourcefully. The message of the Russian debacle in Ukraine is an old one and should not be dif-

ficult to tell: autocracies are corrupt and prone to massive policy failures

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***American democracy must shake off political polarization and distrust.***

precisely because they suppress scrutiny, independent information, and policy debate. Democracies may not be the swiftest decision makers, but they are over time the most reliable and resilient performers.

» ***We must ensure that we perform more effectively as democracies.***

This also will involve greater coordination among democracies. The goal is to meet the challenges of developing and harnessing new technologies, creating new jobs, and reducing social and economic inequalities.

» ***We must open our doors wide to the best talent from all over, including China, to win the technological race.*** Examples include semiconductors, artificial intelligence, biomedicine, and many other fields of science, engineering, and production. We urgently need immigration reform to facilitate this. As our late colleague George Shultz said: admit the best talent from all over the world to our graduate programs in science and engineering, and then staple green cards to their diplomas.

» ***Finally, we must reform and defend our democracy in the United States.*** It needs to function more effectively to address our major domestic and international challenges, and to be seen once again as a model worth

emulating. We cannot do this without reforming the current electoral system, which has become a kind of death spiral of political polarization, distrust, and defection from democratic norms.

I believe we entered a new historical era on February 24. What the Ukrainian people have suffered already has been horrific. But their courage and tenacity should renew our commitment not only to them but also to ourselves—that freedom is worth fighting for, and that democracy, with all its faults, remains the best form of government. ■

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# Welcome to the Ice Age

The long-forecast second cold war has begun in earnest, argues Hoover fellow **Matt Pottinger**, and the West must study the original conflict “not least because we won.”

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*By Adam O’Neal*

**R**ussia’s invasion of Ukraine has brought death, destruction, and debate over historical analogies. Is this the summer of 1914, with great powers stumbling into a horrific global conflict? Or is it the Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939? What about Moscow’s 1939–40 Winter War against Finland? Will Vladimir Putin’s gambit end like the Soviet Union’s 1979–89 misadventure in Afghanistan?

Matt Pottinger has been thinking of another conflict. Putin’s attempted conquest, and his burgeoning partnership with China’s Xi Jinping, reminds Pottinger of the Korean War. “In 1950, Stalin and Mao and Kim Il Sung badly miscalculated how easy the invasion would be and miscalculated American resolve, much as we’re seeing today,” Pottinger, who served in the Trump White House’s National Security Council, says. “The roles are now reversed, with Xi playing the role of Stalin and Putin playing the role of Mao sending his troops to the slaughter. It’s even conceivable that this

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*Matthew F. Pottinger is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution. He served as deputy White House national security adviser in 2019–21. Adam O’Neal is an editorial page writer for the **Wall Street Journal**.*



# Ackerstraße

1961



war may end in a similar fashion, with some kind of a stalemate in a divided country.”

The analogy extends to the free world. Although the Cold War began in 1945, “it really took several more years for public attitudes in the West to catch up to what strategists like Winston Churchill and George Kennan knew about the nature of the Soviet Union.” With the Korean conflict, “the Cold War crystallized in the public imagination in the West.” Today, it’s “really hard to avoid the conclusion that these developments reflect a new cold war that Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin have initiated against the West.”

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***“In 1950, Stalin and Mao and Kim Il Sung badly miscalculated how easy the invasion would be and miscalculated American resolve, much as we’re seeing today.”***

Pottinger believes the new conflict’s ideological underpinnings formed as the old one was winding down. “The Chinese leadership was badly rattled by the events of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests, the lopsided American-led victory over Saddam Hussein’s forces in the first Gulf War, and then the collapse of the Soviet Union.” They came to regard the United States as their “primary adversary.”

In this view, Ukraine is the “hot opening salvo in a cold war pitting Washington and its allies against a fragile but increasingly powerful bloc of dictatorships.” The logic of the Cold War “will provide us with explanatory and predictive value. It’ll help us understand and anticipate the moves by Putin and Xi and the other dictatorships that play supporting roles in their global strategy, such as Iran,” he argues. “We would be remiss not to learn lessons from the original Cold War, not least because we won.”

## **WASHINGTON WAS SLOW TO REACT**

In recent decades, American policy makers tried and failed to convert Beijing into a responsible contributor to the US-led international order. Today there is a bipartisan consensus that the Chinese Communist Party is the greatest

***TOTAL RECALL: Visitors examine an image (opposite) on a building that stood alongside the former Berlin Wall. Matthew Pottinger points out that after the Cold War began in 1945, “it really took several more years for public attitudes in the West to catch up to what strategists like Winston Churchill and George Kennan knew about the nature of the Soviet Union.”*** [ImageBROKER/Schoening Berlin]

external threat to American security, but much of Washington was slow to accept it. As President Trump's senior director for Asia, then deputy national security adviser, Pottinger urged them along.

He contributed to the 2017 National Security Strategy, which called China a "revisionist" power and warned that "great-power competition" had returned. H. R. McMaster, who served as White House national security adviser in 2017–18, called Pottinger "central to the biggest shift in US foreign policy since the Cold War, which is the competitive approach to China."

His understanding of the Chinese threat and the dangerous new global environment is more widely held now, though not everyone accepts the idea

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***Of Putin and Xi: "These two guys have a mind meld that we've not seen between a Chinese and Russian leader since Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin."***

of a new cold war. A former *Wall Street Journal* reporter in China fluent in Mandarin, Pottinger says reading Chinese government documents that aren't translated into English has shaped his views.

"When Xi Jinping gives speeches—especially important ones and ones where he is laying out an aggressive case for Chinese actions in this de facto cold war that he's waging—those speeches are kept secret, but they're not kept secret forever," he says. "They surface in Chinese-language-only party publications. More often than not, those speeches are ignored by Western analysts, news reporters, and even intelligence agencies."

An example is a November 2021 address in which Xi said, in Pottinger's paraphrase, "that the Korean War was an act of enormous strategic foresight by Comrade Mao Zedong, as he calls him in the speech. It's a recurring theme in a lot of Xi's speeches, the idea that China now needs to study the spirit of that war."

Xi laid out what Pottinger describes as almost a case for pre-emptive war: "He says that Mao Zedong in that war had the strategic foresight to 'start with one punch so that one hundred punches could be avoided.' He talked about how Mao had the determination and bravery to adopt an attitude of not hesitating to ruin the country"—that is, China—"internally in order to build it anew."

Pottinger puts this in contemporary terms: "The attitude of being willing to destroy institutions, companies, attitudes, and even political norms is something that neither Xi nor the Communist Party that he leads should shy away from."

The personal relationship between Xi and Putin has become central to China's conflict with the West. "It is an unnatural partnership in many ways, because it's not deep and wide, society to society, economy to economy, nation-state to nation-state. But it is extremely meaningful from the standpoint of two men," Pottinger says. "Those two men happen to be the dictators that make all of the important decisions in their respective systems. And these two guys have a mind meld that we've not seen between a Chinese and Russian leader since Mao Zedong and Josef Stalin met six months before the North Korean invasion of South Korea."

On February 4, Moscow and Beijing released a statement declaring their relationship had "no limits." It's important to take that claim seriously, Pottinger says: "What you really have are two revanchist, authoritarian dictatorships that have decided, like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, to go back to back and point their guns outward to say, 'Look, we're not going to worry about our long border dispute, which has been a recurring theme for centuries. We're going to help each other expand our respective spheres of influence to undermine democracies.' "

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***Pottinger says Trump's foreign policy approach included a "willingness to kneel his counterparts in the groin."***

They saw an opportunity in signals of weakness from President Biden: "When Biden came into power, one of the first things he did was end the negotiation over New START"—the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty—"and gave Putin the five-year renewal that Putin was seeking. He eased off on restrictions on Nord Stream 2"—Russia's gas pipeline to Europe—"and he also began to restrict lethal aid to Ukraine."

At the same time, the administration began negotiations to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, which President Trump had left in 2018. "We're not actually even negotiating directly, but using Russian and other diplomats as a go-between," Pottinger says. "This sends a profound signal of weakness." Israel and Arab states "see a Biden administration that's more eager to cut deals with our common adversary than to engage meaningfully with longstanding partners."

## **WHAT TO MAKE STRONGER**

Does all that suggest Russia wouldn't have invaded Ukraine if Trump had won in 2020? "We'll never know," Pottinger answers. Putin might have "wanted to see whether President Trump would unilaterally take action to undermine



NATO, and he didn't want to interrupt that process while it was a possibility." That said, "there was a genuine unpredictability about President Trump and what he might or might not do, and that may have, more frequently than people appreciate, caused Xi and Putin to delay some of their plans."

Pottinger thinks Trump's record isn't viewed with enough nuance: "President Trump's statecraft, as idiosyncratic as it was, was a lot more sophisticated than either the press or even American adversaries really understood." Pottinger sums that approach up as a "close and respectful diplomacy at the top, but also his willingness to knee his counterparts in the groin." In Russia's case, that included Trump's opposition to Nord Stream 2, hard bargaining on New START, supplying lethal aid to Ukraine, expulsion of Russian spies and diplomats, and sanctions.

Pottinger argues that Russia's aggression has discredited the idea that the United States can divert its attention from other regions while confronting China. "The war in Ukraine underscores why we cannot compartmentalize

our cold war to a specific geography or even to a specific player. There's no question that Beijing is the mother ship of authoritarianism in the world now," he says. "But

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***"Winning involves permitting the weaknesses of the authoritarian powers to erode their advantages over time."***

if we fail to see how these adversaries are linked with one another and how they are increasingly coordinated with one another, we run the risk of making big blunders."

America has a powerful counter in its alliances. The thirty-nation North Atlantic Treaty Organization has shown impressive cohesion in the face of Russia's onslaught in Ukraine. Asian-Pacific alliances are looser, but Pottinger talks up the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. "India made the disappointing, and in my view mistaken, decision not to hold Russia accountable for its invasion of a peaceful sovereign neighbor," he says. "We shouldn't get ahead of ourselves on what the Quad can ultimately achieve. But it is nonetheless a substantive group that gives Beijing quite a lot of heartburn." The group is "talking about things like supply chains and building in resiliency and figuring out ways to counter Chinese disinformation."

What about Taiwan? In light of Putin's difficulties in Ukraine, "a logical and dispassionate analysis would suggest that Chinese war planners are having second and third thoughts," Pottinger says. "But logic and dispassionate



analysis are not the hallmarks of Xi Jinping. Xi is viewing the world in the reflection of fun-house mirrors at this point.”

He says unwinding Taiwan’s economic ties to the mainland is critical and that President Tsai Ing-wen “has made significant progress in really taking charge of the military services that she commands and getting them to focus on truly asymmetric

capabilities, by which

I mean ones that are not only quite lethal to China, but also quite

affordable for Taiwan.” The Taiwanese “need to show China that the war doesn’t end at the beaches. It will continue in the ports, in the cities, in the countryside, and in the mountains.”

The United States, he says, also needs a show of strength and determination: “What we have to do is double our defense spending immediately. We’re still spending about half of what we spent as a percentage of GDP during the Reagan administration, and the Reagan administration wasn’t even the peak of our Cold War spending.” Can the United States afford a \$1.5 trillion Pentagon budget? “Our defense expenditures are minor in comparison to our entitlement programs. Universal health care is an amazing thing, but it’s not going to save Europe and Taiwan or, in the end, our own national security and way of life.”

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***“Logic and dispassionate analysis are not the hallmarks of Xi Jinping.”***

## **WHAT WINNING LOOKS LIKE**

If this is a new cold war, what would victory look like? “It involves trying to manage the conflict so that it does not become a head-on confrontation between nuclear great powers. Winning involves permitting the weaknesses of the authoritarian powers to erode their advantages over time. Winning involves maintaining solidarity and common cause with the people of Russia and China even as we call out candidly the actions of the dictators who lead those two nations.”

Pottinger is fundamentally bullish on the West’s chances against Putin and Xi. “We need to shed a sense of defeatism, and we need to have the courage of our convictions about what makes our system unique and powerful. That means doubling down on capitalism and democracy and freedom but containing—I’ll use the C-word—China and Russia’s ability to exploit our freedoms and our markets in ways that are parasitic,” he says.

“The longer the dictators stay in power, the sharper the paradox between confidence and paranoia. And I think both of these men are getting less and

less reliable information in their diets and are therefore prime to make strategic miscalculations,” he says.

While Putin and Xi may share an antipathy for the democratic West, their countries aren’t natural allies: “I think that the logic of national interest will eventually reassert itself over the interests of two dictators who drew up this pact. That’ll take time to play out, but I think in many respects, it’ll be only downhill from here between Moscow and Beijing.” ■

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# *Weakness and Grandeur*

**The curse of Russian history: the country always wants more than it can get.**

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**By Stephen Kotkin**

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

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

## **Key points**

» Many Russians view their country as a providential power, with a distinct civilization and a special mission in the world.

» In Russia, the drive for a strong state invariably devolves into personalist rule.

» The West's brief respite from great-power competition with Russia after the Berlin Wall fell was just a historical blink of an eye.

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[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

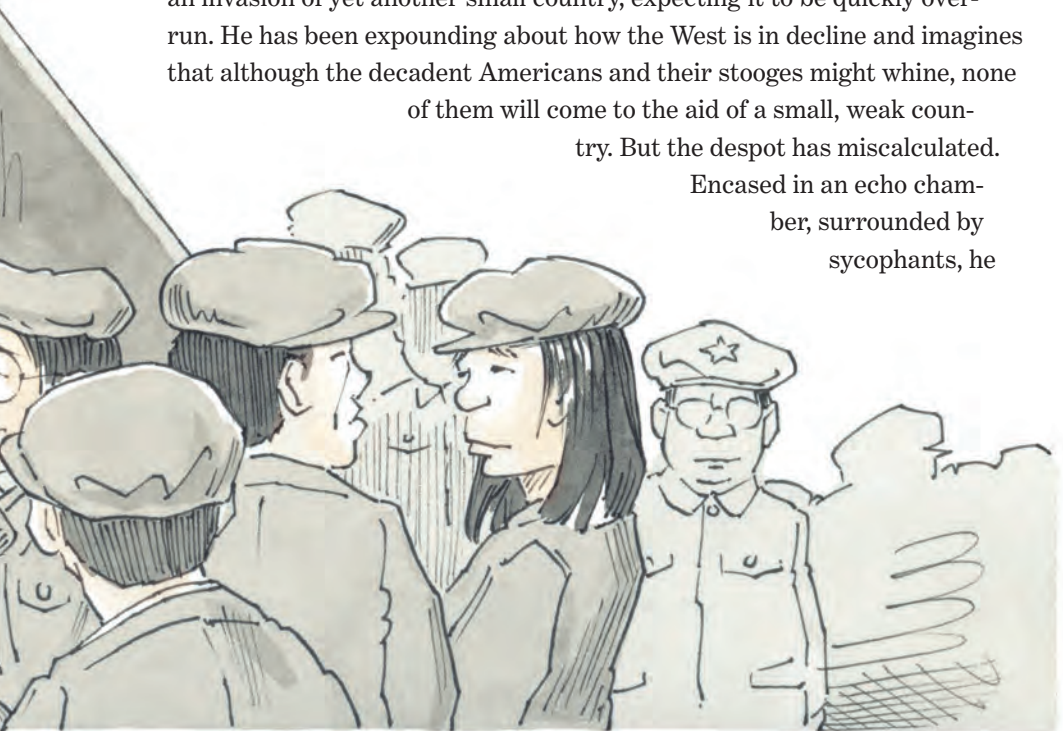
stretch of land at the southern end of which sat Leningrad. In exchange, he offered an expansive but boggy forest in Soviet Karelia, bordering Finland far to the north of the isthmus. To Stalin's surprise, despite serial modifications of his original demands, the Finns rejected the deal. Finland, a country of around 4 million people with a small army, spurned the Soviet colossus, an imperial power with 170 million people and the world's largest military force.

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

Now flash forward. A despot in the Kremlin has once again authorized an invasion of yet another small country, expecting it to be quickly over-

run. He has been expounding about how the West is in decline and imagines that although the decadent Americans and their stooges might whine, none

of them will come to the aid of a small, weak country. But the despot has miscalculated. Encased in an echo chamber, surrounded by sycophants, he





has based his strategic calculations on his own propaganda. The West, far from shrinking from the fight, rallies, with the United States decisively in the lead.

The year was 1950. Stalin was still in power, but this time, the small country in question was South Korea, invaded by North Korean forces after he gave the despot in Pyongyang, Kim Il Sung, a green light. To Stalin's surprise, the United States formed an international military coalition, supported by a UN resolution; the Soviets, boycotting the UN Security Council, had failed to exercise their veto. UN forces landed on the southern tip of the Korean

Peninsula and drove the North Koreans all the way to the Chinese border. Stalin, aided by Washington's failure to

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***Over and over, Russian rulers have set themselves the same geopolitical trap.***

heed its own intelligence reports, effectively managed to shunt his blunder onto the Chinese leader Mao Zedong. China's People's Liberation Army intervened in huge numbers, surprising the US commander, and drove the US-led coalition back to the line that had divided the North and the South before the North's aggression, resulting in a costly stalemate.

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

## **THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD**

What these parallels show is not that history repeats itself or rhymes; the point, rather, is that the history made in those earlier eras is still being made today. Eternal Russian imperialism leaps out as the easiest explanation, as if

there were some sort of innate cultural proclivity toward aggression. There is not. Conversely, however, it would also be simplistic to see Russia's invasion as a mere reaction to Western imperialism, whether in the form of NATO or its expansion, when the pattern long predates NATO.

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

After 1991, when the gap with the West widened radically, Russia's perpetual geopolitics endured. It will persist until Russian rulers make the strategic choice to abandon the impossible quest to become a great-power equal of the West and choose instead to live alongside it and focus on Russia's internal development.

All of this explains why the original Cold War's end was a mirage. The events of 1989–91 were consequential, just not as consequential as most observers—myself included—took them to be. During those years, Germany reunified within the transatlantic alliance, and Russian power suffered a sharp temporary

reduction—outcomes that, with Moscow's subsequent withdrawal of troops, freed up small Eastern European countries to adopt

democratic constitutional orders and market economies and join the West in the EU and NATO. Those events transformed the lives of the people in the countries between Germany and Russia and in those two historical frenemies themselves, but they changed the world far less. A reunified Germany largely remained a nonfactor geopolitically, at least until the weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, when Berlin adopted a far more assertive posture, at least for the moment. Parts of Eastern Europe, such as Hungary and Poland, which happened to be among the biggest losers in the world wars and their peace settlements, started to show illiberal streaks and in this way confirmed

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***A mistaken belief—that the Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union—spurred fateful foreign policy choices.***

limitations in the EU's framework. Although the radical diminution in the size of the Russian state has mostly held (so far), the collapse of Russian power was hardly permanent, just as it was not after the Treaty of Versailles of 1919. The West's relatively brief respite from great-power competition with Russia constituted a historical blink of an eye.

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

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

From a geopolitical standpoint, the historical hinge of the late twentieth century was located less in 1989–91 than in 1979. That was the year that the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping normalized relations with the United States and began the Chinese Communist Party's acquiescence in economic liberalization, which exponentially expanded China's economy and global

power. In the same year, political Islam came to power in Iran in a revolution whose influence reverberated beyond that country, thanks

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***The events of 1989–91 were consequential, just not as consequential as most observers took them to be.***

partly to the US organization of Islamist resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Around the same time, amid the depths of stagflation and social anomie, the Reagan-Thatcher revolution launched a renewal of the Anglo-American sphere with an emphasis on free markets, which ignited decades of growth and would eventually force the political left back to the center, with the advent of Tony Blair's New Labour in the United Kingdom and Bill Clinton's New Democrats in the United States. This remarkable combination—a market-Leninist China, political Islam in power, and a

revived West—reshaped the globe more profoundly than anything since the postwar transformations of Germany and Japan and the consolidation of the US-led West.

## **FEVER DREAMS OF ORDER**

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

Fever dreams of a limitless liberal order obscured the stubborn persistence of geopolitics. The three ancient civilizations of Eurasia—China, Iran, and Russia—did not suddenly vanish, and by the 1990s, their elites had clearly demonstrated that they had no intention of participating in one-worldism on Western terms. To the contrary, China took advantage of its integration into the global economy without fulfilling its economic obligations, let alone liberalizing its political system. Iran embarked on an ongoing quest to blow up its neighborhood in the name of its own security—unwittingly assisted by the US invasion of Iraq. Russian elites chafed at the absorption into the West of former Soviet satellites and republics, even as many Russian government officials availed themselves of the money-laundering services provided by top Western firms. Eventually, the Kremlin rebuilt the wherewithal to push back. And nearly two decades ago, China and Russia began developing an anti-Western partnership of mutual grievance—in broad daylight.

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

The next iteration of the great global contest is likely to revolve around Asia partly because, to a degree underappreciated by many Western observers, the last two did, as well. For the millions of Asians caught up in World

War II, the war had little to do with Hitler or Stalin or Neville Chamberlain and everything to do with Japan and its clash with the United States.

Asia casts a harsh light on a number of Americans celebrated for their grand statesmanship in Europe and the Soviet Union: the envoy George Marshall and his failed mission to China to reconcile Chiang's Nationalists and Mao's Communists; the diplomat George Kennan and his ignored recommendations to abandon the Nationalists and to launch a US military invasion of Taiwan that would deny it to both the Nationalists and the Communists; Secretary of State Dean Acheson and his exclusion of the Korean Peninsula from the US defense perimeter.

Stalin, more than US policy makers, feared the competitive weight of China, which after his death, in 1953, vied for supremacy within the com-

munist bloc (and across what was then called the Third World). Many analysts blame President Bill Clinton for naively encouraging communist

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***The Trump presidency spurred a remarkable shift to a hawkish national consensus on China.***

China's accession to the World Trade Organization without proper conditionality or reciprocity. Fair enough. But one could just as well point the finger at President Jimmy Carter for restoring "most favored nation" status to China, a nonmarket economy with a totalitarian regime.

In truth, the original source of the endemic US fumbling over modern China was President Franklin Roosevelt. The wartime leader had a vague intuition about China's significance in the postwar world he envisioned, but he effectively gave up on China, even as he elevated its status by making it one of the four countries (eventually five) that wielded veto power at the Security Council in the newly formed United Nations. Churchill was apoplectic over Roosevelt's notion that China should be afforded the role of a great power (a mere "affectation" on Beijing's part, in the British prime minister's view). By pursuing his communist and anti-Western convictions, Mao imposed bellicose clarity on the confused bilateral relationship, and although Americans debated the question "who lost China?" for decades after, under Mao, China lost the United States. Today, more than forty years after the two countries normalized relations, Xi risks doing much the same.

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



nearly two centuries, as the United States ascended to become the world's largest economy and greatest power known to history, China not coincidentally entered a long, dark tunnel of external and especially internal depredations. That ended as the two countries became intertwined in profound ways. That process had less to do with US President Richard Nixon's kowtowing to Mao, aiming at widening the wedge that Beijing had opened with Moscow, than with Deng's historic decision to ditch the Soviets, don a cowboy hat during a 1979 visit to Texas, and hitch China's wagon to the insatiable American consumer market, following the trail that had been so spectacularly blazed by Japan, then South Korea and Taiwan.

In the 1990s, Chinese President Jiang Zemin recuperated a vital relationship with a jilted Russia and its military-industrial complex, while retaining China's strategic orientation toward the United States, allowing Beijing to have its cake and eat it, too.

Regimes in Eurasia have a way of reminding the United States and its allies, no matter how deep they have sunk into delusions, about what matters and why. President Donald Trump exhibited strongman envy and wanted only to cut trade deals, but his presidency spurred a remarkable shift to a hawkish national consensus on China, which has endured the advent of the Biden administration even though many members of President Joe Biden's team served in the all-

too-submissive Obama administration. Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Xi's evident complicity, in turn, shook Europe

out of its dependence on Russian energy and its trade-above-all complacency about China and its leader. The view is now widespread that Putin cannot be allowed to triumph in Ukraine not only for the sake of Ukraine and Europe but also for the sake of the Asian strategy that the United States is pursuing with its allies. Moscow is now a pariah, and business as usual with Beijing is no longer tenable.

Going forward, nothing is more important than Western unity on both China and Russia. This is where the Biden administration has taken an important step forward, despite its fumbles in the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the rollout of the AUKUS security pact.

In fact, the West has rediscovered its manifold power. Transatlanticism has been pronounced dead again and again, only to be revived again and again, and perhaps never more forcefully than this time. Even the most committed

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***For the first time in history, China and the United States are great powers simultaneously.***

liberal internationalists, including some in the Biden administration, are coming to see that enduring rivalries constitute an ongoing cold war—that the world as it is came into being not in 1989–91 but in the 1940s, when the greatest sphere of influence in history was deliberately formed to counter the Soviet Union and Stalin. It is fundamentally a voluntary sphere of influence that offers mutual prosperity and peace, in contrast to the closed, coercive sphere pursued by Russia in Ukraine and by China in its region and beyond.

American leaders frequently err, but they can learn from their mistakes. The country has corrective mechanisms in the form of free and fair elections and a dynamic market economy. The United States and its allies have strong institutions, robust civil societies, and independent and free media. These are the advantages afforded by being unashamedly and unabashedly Western—advantages that Americans should never take for granted.

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

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# *The Virtues of Cold Restraint*

Détente may have a bad name these days, but it kept the first Cold War cold—and could do the same in the second. **Why rapprochement with China is worth exploring.**

**By Niall Ferguson**

**B**ack in the 1970s, *détente*, that little French duosyllable, was almost synonymous with “Kissinger.”

Despite turning ninety-nine in May, the former secretary of state has not lost his ability to infuriate people on both the right and the left—witness the reaction to his suggestion at the World Economic Forum that month that “the dividing line [between Russia and Ukraine] should return to the status quo ante” because “pursuing

## **Key points**

- » Détente, as it developed in the 1970s, was a way of playing for time—while avoiding World War III.
- » To speak of compromise in Ukraine is to be accused of appeasement. But the longer the war goes on, the greater the danger.
- » Washington risks making unwise parallels between Ukraine and Taiwan.
- » “Tough on China” may prove to be a losing domestic strategy.

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the war beyond that point could turn it into a war not about the freedom of Ukraine . . . but into a war against Russia itself.”

Nearly half a century ago, when he was in office, Henry Kissinger’s efforts to achieve détente with the Soviet Union were no less controversial. It is sometimes forgotten how much Ronald Reagan’s rise to prominence in national politics owed to his critique of détente as a policy and of Kissinger as a statesman. Throughout the 1970s, Reagan’s radio broadcasts regularly taunted Kissinger for failing to save South Vietnam from communism and acquiescing as the Soviet Union cynically exploited détente to extend its power.

In 1976, Reagan repeatedly pledged to fire Kissinger as secretary of state if his campaign for the Republican nomination and the presidency was successful. “Under Messrs. Kissinger and Ford,” he declared in March of that year, “this nation has become number two in military power in a world where it is dangerous—if not fatal—to be second best. . . . Our nation is in danger. Peace does not come from weakness or from retreat. It comes from restoration of American military superiority.” In a televised speech, Reagan defined détente as “negotiat[ing] the most acceptable second-best position available.” The neoconservative Norman Podhoretz went further, accusing Kissinger of “making the world safe for communism.”

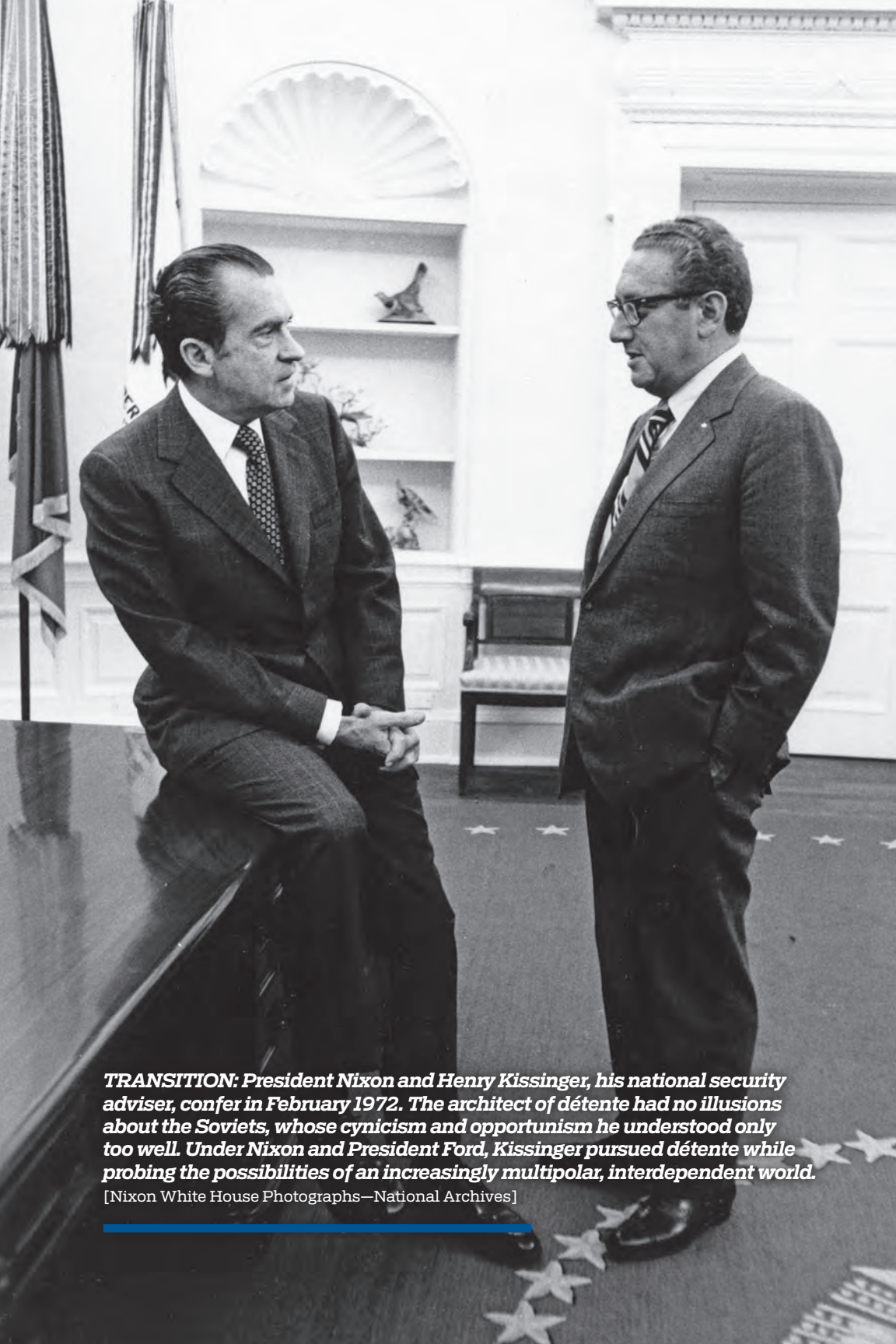
Few academic historians today are neocons. They are more likely to attack Kissinger from the left, for the slack he cut right-wing dictatorships in pursuit of his grand strategy. Yet they, too, have little positive to say about détente. A little like *appeasement*, which started life a respectable term in the diplomatic lexicon, détente is now disreputable.

And yet détente in the 1970s was not like appeasement in the 1930s: it successfully avoided a world war. The more I ponder that troubled, turbulent decade, the more I see détente as a smart solution to the mess the United States was in by the beginning of 1969, when Richard Nixon took up residence in the White House, with Kissinger down in the basement of the West Wing as his national security adviser.

Unable to win its war against North Vietnam, deeply divided over that and a host of other issues, the United States was in no position to play hardball with the Soviet Union, as John Kennedy had and as Reagan would. Moreover, with a mounting inflation problem, the US economy was in no fit state to increase spending on defense.

## PRECIOUS TIME

The architect of détente had no illusions about the Soviets, whose cynicism and opportunism Kissinger understood only too well. Under Nixon and



***TRANSITION: President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his national security adviser, confer in February 1972. The architect of détente had no illusions about the Soviets, whose cynicism and opportunism he understood only too well. Under Nixon and President Ford, Kissinger pursued détente while probing the possibilities of an increasingly multipolar, interdependent world.***

[Nixon White House Photographs—National Archives]



Gerald Ford, he pursued détente for two main reasons: to avoid World War III and to play for time, exploring the possibilities of an increasingly multipolar, interdependent world. And, as it turned out, that worked.

Détente could not deliver “peace with honor” in Vietnam. The interval between peace and conquest that it bought for South Vietnam was less than decent. Yet Armageddon was averted. And precious time was bought.

Emboldened, the Soviets mounted a series of ill-judged and costly interventions in what was then called the Third World, culminating in Afghanistan in 1979. Meanwhile, as my colleague Adrian Wooldridge has smartly pointed out, the US economy took advantage of America’s retreat from Cold War confrontation to innovate in ways that would leave the Soviets in the dust, creating the financial and technological resources that made Reagan’s (and George H. W. Bush’s) Cold War victory possible. Apple, Charles Schwab, Microsoft, Oracle, Visa—the list of world-beating companies founded in the 1970s speaks for itself.

There is a lesson here.

In purely foreign-policy terms, the grand strategy of Joe Biden’s administration is open to criticism. “What began as an effort to make sure Russia did not have an easy victory over Ukraine,” wrote David Sanger and his *New York Times* colleagues on May 26, “shifted as soon as the Russian military began

to make error after error, failing to take Kyiv. The administration now sees a chance to punish Russian aggression, weaken Mr. Putin, shore up NATO

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***The Biden administration has become the arsenal of Ukraine’s democracy, not the broker of a peace.***

and the trans-Atlantic alliance, and send a message to China, too.” That is a well-grounded assessment, in line with numerous statements by President Biden, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, the US ambassador to NATO, Julianne Smith, and other American officials.

But what exactly does Russian “strategic failure” look like? And how much assistance will the United States have to give Ukraine to achieve it?

Some influential figures in and around Washington seem eager to ramp up American support for Ukraine in remarkable ways. In spring, my old friend James Stavridis wrote that “an escort system for Ukrainian (and other national) merchant ships that want to go in and out of Odessa” was “worth considering” by the United States and its NATO allies. The Black Sea should become “the next major front in the Ukraine war.”

Another commentator I respect, Eliot Cohen, wrote on May 11 that Ukraine was “winning the war” and that Kyiv now had the option of not

merely restoring the pre-February 24 line of contact but “recovering portions of Donbas lost in the 2010s, or recovering everything, including Crimea, that was part of Ukraine in 2013.” The soon-to-be-victorious Ukrainians, he added, would also have to decide “whether to seek reparations and reconstruction aid, and whether freedom to join the European Union and the possibility of joining NATO have to be part of the eventual peace settlement.”

To his credit, Biden dialed back his administration’s goals in a measured op-ed for the *New York Times* on May 31: “We do not seek a war between NATO and Russia. . . . [T]he United States will not try to bring about [Putin’s] ouster in Moscow. So long as the United States or our allies are not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict. We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia.” But the reality is that the administration has become the arsenal of Ukraine’s democracy, not the broker of a peace that it is leaving to Ukraine to define.

Three of Europe’s most important leaders—French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi—are distinctly uneasy about this. They would much prefer to see an imminent cease-fire and the start of peace negotiations. But to speak of compromise in the current febrile atmosphere is to invite charges of appeasement. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reacted angrily to Kissinger’s argument for a peace based on the status quo ante. “I get the sense that instead of the year 2022,” Zelensky snapped, “Mr. Kissinger has 1938 on his calendar.”

Yet Zelensky himself has said repeatedly—as in an interview May 21—that he would regard as “victory” a return to the territorial position on February 23, which was what Kissinger plainly meant by the status quo ante. That would mean Ukraine taking back Kherson and the ravaged city of Mariupol. It would mean pushing Russia out of its “land bridge” from Crimea to Russia. And it would mean completely reversing all the gains the Russians have made in the eastern Donbas region.

Zelensky knows, and so should we, what a daunting task that represents. Even with an open-ended commitment from the United States to supply them with weapons, do the Ukrainians have the trained manpower to drive Russia out of all the territory it has occupied since February? And if this brutal war is still being fought as the year wanes and the temperatures begin to fall in Europe, what then? Vladimir Putin is surely counting on the usual divisions within the Western alliance and within American politics to resurface sooner or later.

## INCOHERENCE ON CHINA

The most remarkable thing about the foreign policy of the Biden administration is that helping Ukraine defeat Russia is not even its top priority. “Even as President Putin’s war continues,” declared Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a speech at George Washington University on May 26, “we will remain focused on the most serious long-term challenge to the international order—and that’s posed by the People’s Republic of China.”

Blinken’s speech repays close study. About one-tenth of it was conciliatory. “We are not looking for conflict or a new Cold War,” he declared. “We do not seek to transform China’s political system. . . . We will engage constructively with China wherever we can.”

But the rest was as hawkish a speech on China as the one delivered by then-vice president Mike Pence in October 2018, which for me was the moment Cold War II got going in earnest. In Blinken’s words:

Under President Xi, the ruling Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad. We see that in how Beijing has perfected mass surveillance within China and exported that technology to more than eighty countries; how it’s advancing unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea, undermining peace and security, freedom of navigation, and commerce; how it’s circumventing or breaking trade rules . . . and how it purports to champion sovereignty and territorial integrity while standing with governments that brazenly violate them.

Blinken spelled out how the United States intends to “shape the strategic environment around Beijing,” citing the new Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, announced by Biden on his recent Asia tour, and the Quad of the United States, Australia, India, and Japan, with its new Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, not forgetting AUKUS, the US deal on nuclear submarines with Australia and the United Kingdom.

But the most startling lines in Blinken’s speech were the ones on “the genocide and crimes against humanity happening in the Xinjiang region”; on US support for “Tibet, where the authorities continue to wage a brutal campaign against Tibetans and their culture, language, and religious traditions”; on Hong Kong, “where the Chinese Communist Party has imposed harsh anti-democratic measures under the guise of national security”; on “Beijing’s aggressive and unlawful activities in the South and East China Seas”; and—the coup de grace from a Chinese vantage point—on “Beijing’s growing coercion” and “increasingly provocative rhetoric and activity” toward Taiwan.

The response of the Chinese Foreign Ministry to this confrontational speech was, I thought, surprisingly restrained.

Taiwan is, of course, the key issue. As if to confirm Xi Jinping's darkest suspicions, Biden went off script again at a press conference in Tokyo with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on May 23. A reporter asked if the United States would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack. "Yes," the president answered. "That's the commitment we made. We agree with a one-China policy. We've signed on to it and all the intended agreements made from there. But the idea that, that it [Taiwan] can be taken by force, just taken by force, is just not, is just not appropriate."

Almost immediately, US officials, led by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, walked back this latest gaffe. But when is a gaffe not a gaffe? When the president of the United States says it three times. By my count, that is the number of occasions Biden has pledged to come to Taiwan's defense since August of last year.

What are the practical implications of ditching the half-century-old policy of "strategic ambiguity" on Taiwan, which dates to Kissinger's compromise with Zhou Enlai in 1972? In his book *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict*, Elbridge Colby argues that the United States can and must prioritize the defense of Taiwan. Colby was deputy assistant secretary of

defense for strategy and force development under Donald Trump. His book has been a hit with China

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***Helping Ukraine defeat Russia is not the Biden administration's top priority.***

hawks precisely because it gets specific about how the United States could cope with a Chinese attempt to seize Taiwan.

"There's a very real chance of a major war with China in the coming years," Colby tweeted earlier this year. "Everyone with influence should be asking themselves: Did I do *everything* I could to deter it? And make it less costly for Americans if it does happen? . . . China has the will, the way, and increasingly a sense of urgency to take us on over stakes that are genuinely decisive for us (and the world, for that matter)."

Yet it is far from clear, as retired Taiwanese admiral Lee Hsi-Min has argued, that Taiwan would be capable of putting up as tenacious a fight as Ukraine has against Russia in the event of an invasion by the People's Liberation Army. Moreover, in all recent Pentagon war games on Taiwan, the US team consistently loses to the Chinese team. To quote Graham Allison and Jonah Glick-Unterman, my colleagues at Harvard's Belfer Center, "If in the near future there is a 'limited war' over Taiwan or along China's periphery,

the US would likely lose—or have to choose between losing and stepping up the escalation ladder to a wider war.”

## **VOTERS CARE ABOUT INFLATION**

Meanwhile, according to the head of the US Strategic Command, Admiral Charles Richard, “We are facing a crisis-deterrence dynamic right now that we have seen only a few times in our nation’s history. The war in Ukraine and China’s nuclear trajectory—their strategic breakout—demonstrates that we have a deterrence and assurance gap based on the threat of limited nuclear employment.”

Last spring, Richard told the Senate’s strategic forces panel that China is “watching the war in Ukraine closely and will likely use nuclear coercion to their advantage in the future. Their intent is to achieve the military capability to reunify Taiwan by 2027 if not sooner.” China has doubled its nuclear stockpile within two years, increasing the number of solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile silos from zero to at least 360.

For its part, the Biden administration is proposing to cancel the sea-launched cruise missile nuclear development program, as part of a package of military cuts that are projected by the Congressional Budget Office to reduce the defense budget as a share of gross domestic product from 3.3 percent in 2021 to 2.7 percent in 2032.

If all this adds up to a coherent grand strategy, then I’m Sun Tzu.

The truly amazing thing is that Biden’s foreign policy not only fails the basic tests of strategic coherence and credibility. It also seems exceptionally poorly designed to serve the Democrats’ domestic interests.

The Biden administration’s number one problem is inflation. The polling is clear on that, and we are only a few months away from midterms that are set

to hand both chambers of Congress back to the Republicans. The Fed has the job of bringing inflation back down, but most

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### ***If we’re already in Cold War II, then Ukraine is Korea.***

monetary economists know that it will be very hard to do this through raising interest rates and shrinking the balance sheet without causing a recession at some point.

Currently, however, the administration’s foreign policy isn’t helping fight inflation—quite the opposite. Large-scale support for Ukraine is not only expensive (the total thus far is \$53 billion, according to economist Larry Lindsey), but it also restricts supply via sanctions on Russia and further



restricts supply by prolonging the war, cutting off Ukrainian exports of wheat and other goods. Continuing Trump's trade war and ramping up the support for Taiwan add a further inflationary pressure by keeping Chinese imports more expensive than they otherwise would be, and also encourage the process of "decoupling" China's economy from ours.

If a competent Democratic strategist were to rethink Biden's foreign policy, what might she come up with? Well, how about *détente* 2.0 (or *deuxième*, if you prefer)? If—as I've argued for the past four years—we're already in Cold War II, then Ukraine is Korea. It's early innings in the superpower struggle, the time when the United States still has military superiority but can't help getting dragged into peripheral conflicts. We now clearly have the option to proceed from the 1950s to the 1960s, with the Taiwan Semiconductor Crisis substituting for the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Alternatively—and a lot less terrifyingly—we could take a historical shortcut and proceed straight to the 1970s.

## GRANDER STRATEGY

*Détente* has a lousy reputation, as we have seen. Neoconservatives continue to argue that it was a misconceived strategy that mainly benefited the Soviet Union and that Reagan was right to ditch it in favor of a more confrontational strategy.

But this is misleading. First, Reagan ended up doing his own version of *détente* with Mikhail Gorbachev—involving more radical disarmament than Kissinger himself thought prudent! Second, *détente* in the 1970s made a good deal of sense at a time when the United States was struggling with inflation, deep domestic division, and a war that grew steadily less popular the longer it lasted.

If that sounds familiar, then consider how *détente* might be helping Biden today if, instead of talking tough on Taiwan in Tokyo, he had taken a trip to Beijing—fittingly, on the fiftieth anniversary of Nixon's trip there in 1972. He could have:

1. Ended the trade war with China.
2. Begun the process of ending the war in Ukraine with a little Chinese pressure on Putin.
3. Applied joint US-China pressure on the Arab oil producers to step up production in a serious way, instead of letting them play Washington and Beijing off against one another.

Would Xi Jinping take *détente* if Biden offered it? Like Mao in 1972, the Chinese leader is in enough of a mess himself that he might well. Zero COVID

has become Xi's version of the Cultural Revolution, a policy that is ultimately destabilizing China, whatever the original intent. As for China's international position, the decision to back Putin has surely weakened it.

Mao's problem in 1972 was that he had quarreled bitterly with Moscow. Half a century later, as Kissinger pointed out at Davos, Xi's problem is that he is too close to Moscow for comfort.

Do I think détente stands a chance of being revived? No, I don't, because I think the Biden administration is deeply committed to the containment of

China as the keystone of its foreign policy. But it is worth remembering that their hawkishness had its origins in domestic politics. This time two years ago, Biden's handlers decided he had to

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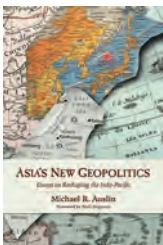
***Détente in the 1970s made a good deal of sense at a time when the United States was struggling with inflation, domestic division, and a lingering, unpopular war.***

be tougher on China than Trump to win the presidency. Well, maybe they were right about that as a matter of electoral tactics. But does the same logic apply today, with a midterm shellacking fast approaching? I think not.

It is conventional to argue that partisan polarization is the curse of modern American politics. There is only one thing that scares me more, however, and that is bipartisan consensus. Democrats and Republicans agree on almost nothing nowadays. But they do agree that resisting China's rise should be the foundation of American foreign policy. I, too, would loathe living in a world where China called the shots. But is Biden's deeply flawed grand strategy making such a world less likely? Or more?

If the choice is between war over Taiwan and a decade of détente, I'll take the dirty French word. ■

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# “To Secure Freedom at Home”

**Our foreign relations must be built on the Constitution itself. Hoover fellow Peter Berkowitz talks with Daniel Burns.**

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**F**rom 2019 to 2021, Hoover senior fellow Peter Berkowitz was the director of the State Department’s Office of Policy Planning. In this interview, he discusses his experience serving in the Trump administration and considers some of the major challenges facing US foreign policy today; the relation between academic study and on-the-ground political experience; and the question of what constitutes a distinctively conservative approach to foreign policy.

**Daniel E. Burns, Public Discourse:** Please tell us a bit about the Office of Policy Planning. What was your specific role in the State Department during the last two years of the Trump administration?

**Peter Berkowitz:** It’s good to be with you for this conversation, Dan. The Office of Policy Planning was created in 1947, and it stems from the most famous document ever produced by a State Department official. That’s the “Long Telegram” that George Kennan wrote in February 1946, from Moscow, in response to queries from the State Department. Less than a year after the end of World War II, he addressed the question: what are we to make of the

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Soviet Union? The Long Telegram is Kennan's 5,000-word-or-so reply about how to understand "the Soviet challenge." Then-Secretary of State George Marshall, impressed by the document, established a small office in the State Department, within the Office of the Secretary of State, that focused on the bigger picture, on long-term questions.

The office would not, as so much of American diplomacy must, deal with day-to-day events and putting out fires (metaphorical fires) in regions around the world but would instead consider America's strategic imperatives; evaluate the implementation of various lines of effort; propose options for more effectively securing the department's objectives; and anticipate, and contend with, unintended consequences of policy. The policy planning staff's principal job is to write short memos that go directly to the secretary of state, without clearance from other offices.

**Burns:** I'd like you to fit your work at the State Department into bigger questions about the present and future state of conservatism. You've been part of the intellectual ferment that's been going on in the conservative movement since at least 2016, if not before. Tell me what you see as distinctively conservative about a conservative foreign policy.

**Berkowitz:** That's a huge question. Let's begin with the Commission on Unalienable Rights, which Secretary Pompeo created in July 2019. He named his mentor, the great Mary Ann Glendon, head of the commission. When I

was named head of policy planning in August 2019, I was also named the commission's executive secretary. Mary Ann put together a formidable team of commissioners, and I worked closely with her and fellow com-

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***"The great post–World War II human rights project had been to a significant extent hijacked by individuals and organizations that tended to equate human rights with a progressive political agenda."***

missioners to execute the commission's mission. The mission came from Secretary Pompeo. It was to provide advice to the secretary of state based on America's founding principles and constitutional traditions, and on the obligations that the United States took on in 1948, when the nation voted in the UN General Assembly to approve the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Secretary Pompeo's announcement of the commission was immediately greeted with denunciations. Some two hundred and fifty human rights

scholars, activists, journalists, and organizations sent Pompeo an open letter—this may have never happened in the history of independent commissions—demanding that he immediately dismantle the commission before it had even begun its work, and indeed before its members had been appointed. Why the outrage? It came mostly and perhaps exclusively from progressives. They were particularly upset about the idea of grounding America’s commitment to human rights in America’s founding principles and constitutional traditions. To them, this smacked of patriotism and nationalism, which they have a hard time distinguishing from jingoism.

In contrast, Mike Pompeo saw, on the one hand, that the great post-World War II human rights project had been to a significant extent hijacked by individuals and organizations that tended to equate human rights with a progressive political agenda. But here, I think,

Secretary Pompeo also saw an error on the right. That is, the right jumped to the conclusion that because of abuses

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***“In addressing the China challenge, it is inadequate to think, as did the Obama administration, in terms of a ‘pivot to Asia.’ ”***

on the left, human rights are inherently aligned with progressive political preferences. Secretary Pompeo understood that in the eighteenth century, “unalienable rights” was the language Americans used to speak about the rights inherent in all human beings. You don’t have to pass a test; you don’t have to receive a license from the state; and such rights are independent of any characteristics you possess or groups to which you belong.

Secretary Pompeo understood that to the extent that you’re devoted to conserving what’s best in the American political tradition—and surely that includes America’s founding principles and constitutional traditions—you have a profound interest in conserving unalienable rights, human rights.

Despite the initial and persistent outrage, the commission’s report enjoyed a significant diplomatic accomplishment. Affiliates of the largest Muslim organization in the world, Nahdlatul Ulama, reached out to me in September 2020, a month after the report was published, to say that they had found in it an excellent expression of their own understanding of human rights and of the relationship of human rights to the diverse peoples and nations of the world and to international affairs. This vindicated our aspiration to produce a report that was not only useful to the secretary of state, colleagues in the State Department, and fellow citizens, but that also invited peoples and nations around the world—not in the first place to learn Jefferson and



Madison and Lincoln and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Martin Luther King Jr., although that would be good—but to turn to their own distinctive moral, philosophical, and religious traditions to affirm the basic rights and fundamental freedoms shared by all.

**Burns:** That sounds to me continuous with, for example, President Reagan's own defense of human rights, not merely as a tool against communism (although also that), but as representing the best of our own American tradition applied to our foreign policy. So now tell me the other side: what about possible discontinuities? In what ways did you see the Trump administration as offering a course correction to previous American, and even previous Republican, foreign policy?

**Berkowitz:** Of course, we know that Donald Trump ran against the elites. He differed from other Republicans in that he opposed not just Democratic Party elites, but also Republican Party elites. He associated the Republican

Party elite with—in my view, it was a caricature, but one that's widely accepted—neoconservatives and neoconservatism. He charged that neoconservatives were responsible for the

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***“To the extent that you're devoted to conserving what's best in the American political tradition . . . you have a profound interest in conserving unalienable rights.”***

mistakes of Afghanistan and Iraq and maintained that a central feature of neoconservative foreign policy is using the American military to undertake regime change to promote democracy. Donald Trump rejected all that. He was going to bring our troops home, he was going to end endless wars, and he was going to make America great again by putting America first. That did not entail isolationism. Putting America first did not mean only America.

I should add that Donald Trump also ran against China. But he focused on trade. He complained that because of unfavorable trade deals, China was eating our lunch; that we had outsourced our manufacturing base. Accordingly, we needed better trade deals, and we needed to bring manufacturing home.

Secretary Pompeo gave expression to, but also deepened, President Trump's criticisms of China. Secretary Pompeo concluded that America's number one foreign policy challenge was presented by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which exercised one-party repressive rule over the people of China.

When I was named director of Policy Planning, I did what I presume many of my predecessors did. First, I asked myself, what are the secretary's

priorities? By the summer of 2019, the answer was clear: the China challenge. Second, I reread Kennan's Long Telegram. And on that reading, I took from it several lessons. One lesson involved the importance of grasping the interplay of ideas and interests in foreign affairs. In addition, in the concluding paragraphs Kennan made two observations that really caught my attention. First, for America to prevail in what was likely to be a long struggle with the Soviet Union, it was incumbent on the United States to rally around what was best in the American tradition, to remain faithful to American principles. Second, he emphasized the need to promote the serious study of Russia—culture, history, politics, economics, religion, language, and more—so that we would acquire a better understanding of the Soviet challenge.

Kennan's insights factor substantially into *The Elements of the China Challenge*, our second big project, which my office published in late 2020. Secretary Pompeo agreed that it would be useful for the policy planning staff to undertake a paper that

did not so much “push forward the frontiers of knowledge”—as we say in universities, when

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***“We didn't have enough people studying China.”***

we're advising people about doctoral dissertations—but rather, that would synthesize what was already known about the China challenge and provide a framework for developing a sound policy to secure American freedom. Accordingly, the policy planning staff drew on the best scholarly writings, journalism, and historical documents as well as official papers produced by our colleagues in the Trump administration to distill an accessible account of the character and the magnitude of the China challenge.

I realized that in addressing the China challenge, it is inadequate to think, as did the Obama administration, in terms of a “pivot to Asia.” Yes, the region is home to more than half of the world's population and to the most rapidly growing markets. But turning to China shouldn't mean pivoting from, or turning our backs on, the rest of the world. We must turn to the Indo-Pacific, and simultaneously improve our diplomacy in every other region of the world, because we take the China challenge seriously.

**Burns:** Are there any elements of conservative thought that contributed to whatever it was that blinded us to the rise of China for those decades that we weren't paying enough attention to it?

**Berkowitz:** For a long time and for a number of reasons, the United States overlooked the China challenge. We were overly optimistic. We saw that

China opened its economy in the late '70s and early '80s and incorporated free-market elements. We thought that economic liberalization would bring political liberalization. That's what the political scientists told us. Both parties wanted to engage with China. We were lured by the hope of not just cheap products, but China's enormous consumer markets. Buoyed by such beliefs, the United States supported China's joining the World Trade Organization. All the while, we overlooked or downplayed the CCP's authoritarian rule, and we failed to spot what appears now to many of us to have been the CCP's patiently proceeding in accordance with a saying repeated by its leaders: hiding capabilities and biding time.

We didn't have enough people studying China. We didn't have enough people studying the CCP's actual conduct in regions around the world, and

we didn't have enough people studying what the CCP says about its rule in China, about its domestic priorities, and about its larger aspirations in world politics. One of our key recommendations in

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***“We must always ask: what's the best mix of military might, economic power, diplomacy, and championing of human rights?”***

*The Elements of the China Challenge* is that we must reform our educational system, including ramping up programs for the serious study of the Chinese language and Chinese history.

We say in *The Elements of the China Challenge* that America's goal should be to secure American freedom. That means securing freedom at home and preserving a free and open international order abroad. In contrast, in every area of the world, the CCP seeks an international order more favorable to authoritarianism. Securing freedom at home does not mean that the United States has a license to go around the world, or should go around the world, changing regimes, and compelling non-democratic regimes to become democratic or telling democratic regimes how to govern. We do have a greater affinity for regimes that are better at protecting freedom and better at basing government on the consent of the governed, and we should work with friends and partners who seek greater freedom and democracy. But we fully recognize that in formulating a complex foreign policy to deal with the China challenge, we must partner with a variety of nations. We must always ask: what's the best mix of military might, economic power, diplomacy, and championing of human rights that enables us to secure freedom at home and maintain a free and open international order?

**Burns:** Let me speak for some friends of mine, who can read a report like yours from the Commission on Unalienable Rights, and hear about a foreign policy that secures American founding principles, especially at home and where possible abroad. And they think: “This all sounds wonderful, and I would be fully supportive of it, but when I hear about the US State Department or American diplomacy abroad, that’s not what I see happening.” How would you respond to this complaint?

**Berkowitz:** These are serious concerns. It’s because we took them seriously that in *The Elements of the China Challenge* we insisted that the United States must fundamentally re-examine and reform international organizations. We must consider whether they are advancing the interests they were originally created to serve. Some aren’t. We must re-evaluate and restructure our alliance system to meet the China challenge. We must take account of America’s limitations, including the limitations imposed by our resources, our know-how, and our attention span. And not least, we must rededicate ourselves to what is best in America’s constitutional traditions. We’ve got enormous work to do. The CCP is not sitting on the sidelines while we regroup. ■

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# *We Can Work It Out*

**Competition between China and the United States can still do both countries a world of good.**

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**By Michael Spence**

**I**t is now widely accepted that the economic and technological relationship between the United States and China will be some combination of strategic cooperation and strategic competition. Strategic cooperation is largely welcomed, because addressing shared challenges, from climate change and pandemics to the regulation of cutting-edge technologies, demands the engagement of the world's two largest economies. But strategic competition tends to be viewed as a worrisome, even threatening, prospect. It need not be.

Anxiety about Sino-American competition, particularly in the technological domain, reflects a belief on both sides that a national-security-based, largely zero-sum approach is inevitable. This assumption steers decision making in an unconstructive, confrontational direction and increases the likelihood of policy mistakes.

In reality, there are good and bad forms of strategic competition. To understand the benefits of good competition—and how to reap them—one need only consider how competition fuels innovation within economies.

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*Michael Spence is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, the Philip H. Knight Professor Emeritus of Management in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University, and a professor of economics at the Stern School at New York University. He was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2001.*

In advanced and high-middle-income economies, innovation in products and processes fuels productivity gains, a critical driver of long-term GDP growth. The public sector plays a key role in kick-starting that innovation, through human-capital investment and upstream science and technology research.

The private sector then

takes over in a dynamic competitive process—what Joseph Schumpeter famously called “creative destruction.”

Per Schumpeterian dynamics, the firms that produced successful innovations acquire some transitory market power that provides a return on investment. But, as others continue to innovate, they erode the first-round innovator’s advantages. And the cycle of competition and technological progress continues.

But this process is not self-regulating, and there is a risk that the first-round innovators can use their market power to prevent others from challenging them. For example, they can deny or impede access to markets or acquire potential competitors before they get too big. Governments sometimes aid anti-competitive incumbents by subsidizing them.

To preserve competition—and all its far-reaching benefits for innovation and growth—governments must devise a set of rules that prohibit or discourage anti-competitive behavior. These rules are embedded in antitrust or competition policy, and in systems that define the limits of intellectual-property rights.

The United States and China are leaders in advancing many technologies that can drive global growth. But the extent to which they do so depends, above all, on their core objectives.

Like leading innovative firms within an economy, the primary goal might be technological dominance—that is, to establish and maintain a clear and persistent technological lead. To this end, a country would attempt both to

accelerate innovation internally and to impede its biggest competitor, such as by denying it access to information, human capital, other key inputs, or external markets.

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***There are good and bad forms of strategic competition.***

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***Global supply chains, investments, and financial flows are already being reshaped in a quest for reliable trading partners.***





***ARRIVAL: A China Airlines Cargo jet waits at Taoyuan International Airport in Taiwan. To preserve competition—and all its far-reaching benefits for innovation and growth—governments must devise a set of rules that prohibit or discourage anti-competitive behavior.*** [KCS—Creative Commons]

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This scenario is one of bad strategic competition. It undermines technological progress in both countries—and, indeed, in the entire global economy—not least by limiting the size of the total addressable market. Making matters worse, it serves an objective that is probably not achievable in the long run. As several recent studies have shown, China is rapidly catching up to the United States in many areas.

With long-term technological dominance unlikely, countries might pursue a more practical and potentially beneficial objective. For the United States, that objective is not to fall behind; for China, it is to complete the catch-up process in areas where it currently lags. In this scenario, both China and the United States compete by investing heavily in the scientific and technological underpinnings of their economies.

This does not preclude policies aimed at increasing self-sufficiency and resilience. On the contrary, with trust among countries plummeting and systemic shocks proliferating, a totally open global economy, in which efficiency

and comparative advantage are the defining considerations, is no longer an option. Already, global supply chains, investments, and financial flows are being reshaped and reordered, with a bias toward reliable trading partners, and both China and the United States have devised resilience-oriented strategies.

By itself, diversification is not an anti-competitive stance. China’s “Made in China 2025” and dual-circulation strategies include provisions for bolstering China’s techno-

logical prowess, while reducing dependence on foreign technology, inputs, and even demand. Likewise, the bipartisan America Cre-

ating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology, and Economic Strength Act of 2022 (America Competes Act) seeks to enhance the country’s scientific and technological capabilities and bolster its supply chains, not least by reducing dependence on imports from China. Though the bill has not yet assumed its final form, its provisions can be made largely consistent with good strategic competition.

The one area where good competition is impossible is in matters of national security, defense, and military capabilities. While many technologies can be used in conflict, those that are critical and used mainly for military and security purposes will need to be cordoned off from what is otherwise relatively open global technology competition.

The current danger is that too many technologies will be deemed relevant to national security and thus subject to zero-sum rules. This approach would have much the same

effect as the misguided quest to achieve and maintain technological dominance, eroding the economic benefits of competition.

Ideally, countries should strive to reach or remain at the frontier of innovation, without trying to prevent others from challenging them. Internationally agreed-upon rules are essential to uphold such a system, which would produce far more technological progress and global growth than a system dominated by a single

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***Ideally, countries should strive to reach or remain at the frontier of innovation—without trying to prevent others from challenging them.***

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***The one area where good competition is impossible is national security. Critical technologies will need to be cordoned off from what is otherwise relatively open tech competition.***

technological player like the United States, or a system with a no-holds-barred version of strategic competition.

Given substantial global economic headwinds—including population aging, large sovereign-debt overhangs, rising geopolitical tensions and conflict, and supply-side disruptions—and growing investments to meet environmental and inclusiveness challenges, the world needs the benign form of strategic competition more than ever. ■

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# *A Line in the Sand*

**Borders mean security, and the United States is failing to control its southern border. This endangers not just the country but also the whole world order.**

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**By Nadia Schadlow**

**T**he disaster unfolding on America's southern border since 2020 is both a humanitarian tragedy and a threat to our national security. Hundreds of migrants have died while trying to cross the border, and federal agents have apprehended tens of thousands of unaccompanied children. Fentanyl trafficking has skyrocketed, with agents confiscating some eleven thousand pounds of the drug (each pound of which can kill over two hundred thousand people). More than 1.7 million migrants were detained in 2021. Although border agents do not release how many of those are on terrorist watch lists, they have noted that individuals come from more than one hundred countries.

Aside from these immediate considerations, Washington's failure to control the southern border has longer-term implications: it erodes the principle of national sovereignty. And since sovereignty is central not only to the long-term security of the United States and its allies, but also to the liberal international order, the border crisis is a serious threat to national and international security.

Since the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the nation-state—a formal political entity occupying a set territory—has been the fundamental

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building block in the international system. The Westphalian system is an order in which political authority is based on territory and autonomy. Describing the Westphalian peace in his book *World Order*, Henry Kissinger observed that “each state was assigned the attribute of sovereign power over its territory. Each would acknowledge the domestic structures and religious vocations of its fellow states as realities and refrain from challenging their existence.”

Sovereign states are foundational to international order. In his classic text *The Anarchical Society*, the political scientist Hedley Bull pointed out that it was sovereign states that, through their interactions and regular contacts with one another, formed the international system. The starting point for international relations, he argued, was “the existence of states or independent political communities.”

After World War II—the most destructive war in modern history—key institutions of what would become the liberal international order acknowledged that state sovereignty was essential to the preservation of peace and

the promotion of prosperity. The founding charter of the United Nations is based “on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members.” The

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### ***The failure to control the border erodes the principle of national sovereignty.***

Bretton Woods system (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), is comprised of individual countries, though its goal is to regulate and coordinate economic relations between states. Even the European Union was originally founded on a series of treaties between states, beginning with the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Sovereignty remains a foundational pillar of the liberal international order; it is a starting point for the institutions and agreements that formally comprise this order.

Sovereignty is also fundamental to maintaining a balance of power in the international system, and thus, stability and order. Because no global sovereign exists, states compete with one another to enjoy the benefits of security, freedom, and prosperity. But if competing states are balanced against one another, competition can actually produce order and stability. As Kissinger observed in *Diplomacy*, a balance-of-power system is based on the principle “that each state, in pursuing its own selfish interests, would . . . contribute to the safety and progress of all the others.”

It is noteworthy that over the past few years, the most significant stresses to the European Union have centered on the erosion of sovereignty of its





***STAND FAST: A barrier runs along the US-Mexico border near San Diego. The foundational alliances that constitute key pillars of the liberal international order are built explicitly and implicitly around the concept of sovereignty.***

[Amyyfor—Creative Commons]

member states. As Wess Mitchell, former assistant secretary of state for Europe, has observed, “crises have emerged in the EU in proportion to how much it has moved away from its founding template of state sovereignty.” It has been the efforts to erase borders in Europe that have caused the most stress.

The migration crisis of 2015 generated instability in Europe, challenging the EU’s capacity to provide the most basic competency of a state: control of its borders. Former German chancellor Angela Merkel’s decision to grant asylum to over one million refugees in Europe essentially overrode the sovereignty of all EU members physically located between Germany and the Mediterranean. Merkel’s decision reflected a failure to grasp that this huge immigration influx was a national security issue for many of Germany’s neighbors. (Ironically, migration issues are particularly susceptible to the problems associated with weakened sovereignty since it is the state that provides the first line of protection to the most vulnerable.)



The erosion of the principle of sovereignty also has negative implications for alliances. If the United States does not prioritize the security of its own borders, it will be hard to persuade Americans to defend the sovereignty of other nations.

The foundational alliances that constitute key pillars of the liberal international order and contribute to American power are built explicitly and implicitly around the concept of sovereignty. It is the sovereign states of NATO that form the basis of the agreements and obligations of the treaty, and who provide the military capabilities necessary for the alliance to function. Moreover, it is threats to the “territorial integrity” of states—their borders—that would trigger a response by alliance members.

Adversaries and rivals recognize the importance of borders. That is why Russia and Belarus have weaponized migrants to undermine the European

Union as well as individual states. For example, since December 2020, the Belarusian government has pressured neighboring states by pushing migrants

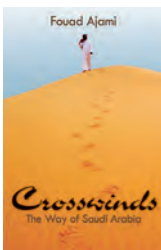
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***The UN founding charter is based “on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members.”***

to the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, which led those states to reinforce their borders. Merkel referred to the actions as a “hybrid attack.” Turkey too has extorted billions of dollars from the European Union with the threat of flooding Europe with migrants and refugees fleeing the Syrian Civil War.

The principle of sovereignty—and Washington’s role in upholding it, in its commitments around the world—is at risk. ■

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# *As the Clever Hopes Expire*

**Have we reached the end of history? Russia and China have answered—in the negative.**

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***By Michael J. Boskin***

**R**ussian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine and Chinese President Xi Jinping's increasing authoritarianism have belatedly awakened much of the world to the failure of a geopolitical wager made by the United States and its allies a generation ago. The necessary response to today's grim new realities reflects the cost of losing that bet, and it will change everything from security alliances, military budgets, and international trade to financial flows and environmental and energy policies.

The bet Western countries made in the 1990s was that integrating Russia and China into the international community through trade and commerce would hasten domestic political, as well as economic, reforms. Nobody expected either country to turn into a capitalist democracy overnight. But it was assumed that greater prosperity would gradually round off their rough ideological and authoritarian edges, allowing for cooperation to replace confrontation.

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## BIRTH OF A HOPEFUL IDEA

To understand the context in which this bet was placed, we need to go back to 1980, when America was still reeling from stagflation and the tragic conclusion of the Vietnam War. The Cold War was in full swing, pitting capitalism against communism and democracy against totalitarianism. Proxy wars erupted regularly, and the sobering risk of a nuclear confrontation was ever-present.

Deng Xiaoping had just announced the opening of China's economy, but the country was not yet on many radar screens in Western capitals or boardrooms. Moreover, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were still intact. With their trade restricted to the Comecon (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) states, they had few ties to countries in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade—a bloc that accounted for the bulk of global GDP. The next year, President Ronald Reagan took office and initiated a military buildup to thwart perceived Soviet threats and ambitions. His administration's economic reforms unleashed a long US expansion.

This was the setting in which Hoover economist Milton Friedman and Singapore's founding father Lee Kuan Yew championed the idea that eco-

economic reform would lead to political reform. Friedman argued that all people—regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or nationality—would

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***It was assumed that greater prosperity would gradually round off Russian and Chinese rough ideological edges.***

demand greater political freedom once they had gotten a taste of economic freedom. Though it may take longer in some contexts than in others, freedom would triumph.

These ideas were extremely and broadly influential among educated elites in academia, government, and multinational businesses in the last two decades of the twentieth century. After Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, he soon became convinced that the Soviets could not match America's economic might. To try to keep up with the Reagan administration's military buildup would bankrupt the Soviet economy, so he launched liberalizing political and economic reforms known, respectively, as glasnost and perestroika.

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, my Stanford University colleague Francis Fukuyama suggested in a famous essay that all countries would wind up as mixed capitalist democracies. In Hegelian-Marxist terms, history

would unfold through a dialectical process culminating in capitalism, not communism.

This idea, too, was infectious. When I accompanied a delegation of American business leaders to Poland shortly thereafter, the Polish president (and Communist Party boss), General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared that historic forces had inevitably led Poland to capitalism. Clearly, he could not escape Marxist teleology; the communists' mistake was simply that they had gotten the end wrong.

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***One can only hope that Putin and Xi will be succeeded by a new generation of reformers.***

## **HELPING GORBACHEV**

Given the perceived stakes, it is easy to understand why Western leaders rushed to help Gorbachev when the Soviet economy started to falter. Declaring “we cannot lose Russia,” British Prime Minister John Major, French President François Mitterrand, and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl called US President George H. W. Bush every week to plead for a US-led \$100 billion bailout (the equivalent of \$220 billion today). I led those negotiations as the chair of the White House Council of Economic Advisers at the time. In the end, we provided some small aid and technical assistance. And soon thereafter, the Soviet Union dissolved into the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Despite the failure of Soviet liberalizing reforms, and despite the massacre in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in June 1989, Bush and successive US presidents continued

to encourage reform in China, which has since become an economic and trading powerhouse, dwarfing Russia. For a

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***The future calls for a healthy dose of skepticism for grand historical narratives.***

generation of leaders who had lived under the shadow of nuclear superpower rivalry fueled by clashing political ideologies, the 1980s and 1990s were truly a remarkable period.

But the champagne corks were popped prematurely. Putin has no intention of respecting global norms, and China has consistently avoided the path it was expected to follow when it was admitted to the World Trade Organization in 2001.

Still, it is worth remembering that Deng's reforms, like Gorbachev's, seemed farfetched only a few years before they were enacted. In today's context, one can only hope that Putin and Xi will be succeeded by a new generation of reformers. If that happens, perhaps Friedman and Lee will be vindicated.

But it is anyone's guess when either leader's rule will end. The challenge for Western leaders is to manage the risks posed by Russia's nuclear weapons and by China's centrality to the global economy and its growing military might. It is a task best performed with open eyes and a healthy dose of skepticism for grand historical narratives. ■

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# Seeking Sanctuary

**Why even conservatives—perhaps especially conservatives—need to think twice before opposing sanctuary cities.**

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*By David L. Leal*

**D**onald Trump fought “sanctuary cities” from the very start of his presidency, but these efforts came to an unsuccessful end in 2020 for two reasons. The first was that sanctuaries beat the administration at the Supreme Court in June of that year; technically, the justices declined to hear *United States v. California*, thereby letting stand an appeals court ruling that upheld the bulk of California’s sanctuary laws. The second was that Joe Biden won the presidential election. The federal government is no longer opposed to state and local sanctuary policies. This raises a question: when a Republican returns to the White House, should that person carry on the Trump administration’s fight against sanctuaries or choose other battles?

This is a consequential matter. Sanctuary jurisdictions impede the ability of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to identify and remove unauthorized immigrants. A report by Stanford political scientist David Hausman in *PNAS* found that sanctuary policies reduce deportations by

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about a third. Alex Nowrasteh, writing in the *Cato at Liberty* blog, noted a 50 percent decline in deportations during the first seventeen months of the Trump administration in comparison to the same period during Barack Obama's first term. He attributed this primarily to local jurisdictions becoming less likely to cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

Because the political debate about these local and state laws can generate more heat than light, this essay addresses the following questions: what is an immigration sanctuary; must states and localities follow the immigration enforcement priorities of the federal government; and what are the implications of the sanctuary controversy for policies beyond immigration?

A successful federal attack on sanctuary legislation could lead to spillover effects in many policy areas, and in ways that go against core conservative values. Many conservatives would be unwilling to pay such a price, so it is crucial for the sanctuary debate to consider this larger context.

For example, some conservatives rely on the constitutional principle that underlies sanctuary cities to resist federal gun control legislation. As the *New York Times* noted about a recent Missouri law, "The bill's supporters said they were adopting a strategy that has been used frequently for liberal causes, such as 'sanctuary city' laws that prohibit local officers from enforcing federal immigration laws." Undermining sanctuary cities could endanger these "Second Amendment sanctuary" laws.

In addition, principled conservatives must ask whether attacks on sanctuary cities, and the more general impulse toward immigration restriction and enforcement, are consistent with prosperity, freedom, and family values. In his "Farewell Address to the Nation," President Reagan said the following:

I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, windswept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.

Any discussion of sanctuary cities needs to keep in mind Reagan's vision, which welcomed the world to America. Maybe the root problem is not "sanctuaries" but the problematic "walls" and "doors" of contemporary immigration law and policy that lead to illegal immigration.



***SHINING: People gather in Tijuana, Mexico, to watch Fourth of July fireworks over San Diego this year. Legal issues aside, principled conservatives must examine whether a general impulse toward immigration restriction and enforcement is consistent with their values of prosperity, freedom, and family, as articulated by Ronald Reagan. [Omar Martinez—DPA/Picture-Alliance]***

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## **THE ISSUE IS FEDERALISM**

What is a sanctuary city or state?

The legal answer is that no city or state is a true sanctuary. Federal immigration law applies everywhere in America, and unauthorized immigrants can be arrested and removed from any location in the United States. States and their localities cannot stop federal immigration operations, and federal immigration laws override state and local immigration laws. As Justice Kennedy wrote for the majority in *Arizona v. United States* (2012), “the state may not pursue policies that undermine federal law.”

The debate is hampered by the various ways in which the media, politicians, and pundits portray and discuss sanctuary cities. This reflects the many tools available for jurisdictions that do not want to participate in immigration enforcement. For example, the American Immigration Council’s “Fact Sheet: Sanctuary Policies: An Overview” lists eight dimensions to the term. It can therefore mean different things to different people, and some of the uses we encounter are vague, inaccurate, or misleading. Because a sanctuary city is not defined in federal law, it is as much a rhetorical device as a meaningful category.

In everyday politics, the term is primarily used for localities and states that seek to avoid cooperation with federal immigration enforcement efforts. The most common description is something like that found in a 2018 *Fox News* story: “Sanctuary city policies overall limit just how much local law enforcement officials cooperate with federal immigration authorities.”

The most contentious element is whether local officials honor what is called a “detainer” or “hold” request from ICE. As explained in another *Fox*

*News* story, “ICE issues detainers to federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to provide notice of its intent to assume custody of a removable alien. A detainer requests

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***Because a sanctuary city is not defined in federal law, it is as much a rhetorical device as a meaningful category.***

that the law enforcement agency notify ICE, ideally within at least at least forty-eight hours, before a removable alien is released from local custody so that ICE can assume custody.”

Jurisdictions that decline such detainer/hold requests are often labeled as sanctuaries. Even this definition is not precise, as they can cooperate to varying degrees. For example, as Ballotpedia notes, some jurisdictions characterized as sanctuaries refuse detainer requests “for minor offenses or non-capital crimes” but not for more serious crimes. As this suggests, considerable variation can exist within the sanctuary label.

Another component of the sanctuary debate is 8 USC Section 1373, a federal statute enacted in 1996. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, it “prohibits state and local jurisdictions from restricting communication to federal officials of information regarding citizenship or immigration status.” When you work through the double negative, it means state and local government entities and employees may voluntarily provide such information about individual immigrants to federal immigration authorities. As discussed below, however, it is unclear if any jurisdictions actually have a policy that prevents such communications, and the statute may soon be found unconstitutional.

Critics see sanctuaries as local jurisdictions that harbor criminal aliens, threaten the rule of law, and undermine federal authority. Why, critics ask, should local law enforcement agencies *not* help ICE to deport illegal immigrants?

Defenders see sanctuaries as local jurisdictions that make lawful decisions about whether to participate in what they consider intrusive, overbearing

national enforcement efforts. Why, defenders ask, should states and localities in our federal system voluntarily enforce policies that tear families apart, hurt the economy, and reduce freedom?

Federal courts have largely found national government efforts to curtail city and state sanctuary policies to be unconstitutional. For instance, the Trump administration threatened to withhold federal funds from states with sanctuary policies, but federal appeals courts largely blocked such efforts.

To change this status quo would require a dramatic weakening of federalism, which would be contrary to core conservative values and could come back to haunt conservatives. As Ilya Somin of George Mason University and the Cato Institute discusses in an essay in *The Hill*, such a constitutional change would be “a major blow to state and local autonomy in our constitutional system. Both left and right have good reason to fear such an outcome.”

For example, consider the policy implications of a more “unitary” federal government with Democrats in power in Washington. Such a government could potentially deny funding to conservative locales unless they changed their laws and policies,

thereby pressuring “red” states and locales into directly carrying out and enforcing “blue” federal policies. This could allow Washington to override state and local decisions

about the best way to promote safety, health, growth, and education.

Is the squelching of sanctuary cities worth such consequences? Many conservatives would say no. Any legal precedents or policy tools created today to fight sanctuary jurisdictions could be used tomorrow in other policy realms. Imagine if Trump had won in *US v. California*. While some conservatives would have celebrated, the party would have ended on January 20, 2021. What Trump can do, Biden can do, and the targets over the next four to eight years could have been red states.

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***President Reagan described his vision of the “shining city” as having doors that “were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.”***

## **LAWFUL DISCRETION**

Conservatives have long asserted that local voters and elected officials know best. In the sanctuary debate, by contrast, some have demanded that localities do whatever the federal government says, even if not legally required to do so.

Unless there is also a federal judicial warrant, localities and states have every right to refuse federal immigration detainer/hold requests from ICE,

just as they are free to refuse many other requests from Washington. When they do so, they are not acting illegally or contrary to federal law. They are following the Constitution and exercising the local discretion that conservatives have historically supported.

The only jurisdiction that can pre-empt city or county non-compliance laws is a state, as follows from Dillon’s Rule, and this is a policy choice that cannot be required by the federal government. The Fifth Circuit upheld such a Texas law, and Florida enacted one in 2019. Whether such legislation—and the more general recent spate of state pre-emptions of local laws across policy areas—is consistent with a properly balanced federalism is another question for principled conservatives to ponder.

Politicians and pundits may use phrases like “flouting” or “non-cooperative” to imply that sanctuaries are breaking the law, but this only confuses

the issue. Nor are sanctuary policies a modern form of *nullification*, an attempt by a state to prevent the enforcement of federal laws or judicial decisions in its territory.

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***Legal precedents or policy tools created today to fight sanctuary jurisdictions could be used tomorrow in other policy realms.***

Federal law does not require state and local authorities to hand over immigrants because of their unlawful presence.

At issue is the *commandeering* doctrine. This says that the federal government may not require states and localities to enforce federal laws. While such units cannot violate federal law, they cannot be turned into de facto agents of the national government. They can voluntarily agree to follow federal requests, but they cannot be forced.

Justice Antonin Scalia made this explicit in *Printz v. United States* (1997), writing for the majority that “the framers rejected the concept of a central government that would act upon and through the states, and instead designed a system in which the state and federal governments would exercise concurrent authority over the people.” Looking more historically, he also noted that “the court’s jurisprudence makes clear that the federal government may not compel the states to enact or administer a federal regulatory program.”

In *Printz*, the Supreme Court overturned a gun control provision of the Brady Bill that would have required local law enforcement to conduct background checks on potential gun purchasers until the federal government could create a new, national system.

Those who want the national government to force state and local governments to act as federal agents when it comes to immigration enforcement should ponder this: you are endorsing the power of the federal government to “commandeer” subnational governments not just for immigration enforcement but for all sorts of other purposes. If you oppose the attempt to compel states and localities to enforce federal gun control legislation, you are in favor of the bulwark imposed by the commandeering principle.

Furthermore, Section 1373, mentioned above, may ultimately be found to violate the commandeering doctrine. This is the statute that says a state or local jurisdiction would be in violation of federal law if it prevented the voluntary communication of citizenship or immigration information. It is also unclear if this type of sanctuary policy exists anywhere in America.

In *Murphy v. NCAA* (2018), the Supreme Court struck down the

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***Localities and states have every legal right to refuse federal immigration detainee requests.***

Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA), a federal law that prohibited state laws allowing sports gambling. According to Somin, “Like PASPA, Section 1373 qualifies as an ‘order’ to state and local officials, and—like PASPA—it undermines states’ control over their governmental machinery and partially transfers it to the federal government.”

## **TRUST AND SAFETY**

Rather than escalating legal battles in a way that puts federalism at risk, both political parties might benefit from respecting the decisions of local democracies. Moreover, principled conservatives should be alert to the possibility that anti-sanctuary policies have unintended consequences.

Sanctuary jurisdictions make the case that such policies reduce crime, while some police chiefs have argued that local enforcement of immigration laws actually encourages criminality. The reasoning is that immigrants grow fearful of contacting the police, which gives criminals greater latitude. Such criminality may also spread out beyond immigrant communities. Blanket bans on sanctuary policies may therefore increase the very lawbreaking that sanctuary critics decry.

As Matthew Feeny of the Cato Institute has argued, “Although some might like to portray sanctuary cities as lawless holdouts run by politicians who consider political correctness their North Star, the fact is sanctuary policies can help improve police-community relationships.” He observes that



“such trust is crucial to policing” and that “it’s not hard to see why officers in some communities prefer sanctuary policies to being perceived as deputized federal agents.” More generally, he notes that Republicans often make the case for federalism, including in the 2016 GOP platform, so perhaps they should “consider that local officials know more than White House staffers about what policing strategies are best for their constituents.”

Recent research finds no support for the claim that sanctuary cities increase crime. For example, a 2017 review of the literature by Daniel Martínez, Ricardo Martínez-Schuldt, and Guillermo Cantor found that “the few

empirical studies that exist illustrate a ‘null’ or negative relationship between these policies and crime.” A 2019 study of city crime statistics by Martínez-Schuldt and

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***Justice Scalia wrote, “The federal government may not compel the states to enact or administer a federal regulatory program.”***

Martínez found evidence that becoming a sanctuary is “associated with a reduction in robberies but not homicide.” A 2021 study by Martínez-Schuldt and Martínez also found that “Latinos are more likely to report violent crime victimization to law enforcement after sanctuary policies have been adopted.”

Some politicians and pundits respond by pointing to instances of violence committed by individual unauthorized immigrants who might have been deported but were not. This is a serious concern, but it also shows the difficulty of seeing the big picture. If a locality declines an ICE detainer and that individual later commits a crime, the effect of non-cooperation is highly visible. On the other hand, if a crime is not committed because a locality declines to cooperate with ICE, that non-event is invisible (but still germane). Because politics are often driven by what is immediate and visible, elected officials may choose policies contrary to their goals or unsubstantiated by evidence.

In time, as the constitutionality of sanctuary jurisdictions is further established and the political heat on them reduced, some locales may decide to expand their voluntary cooperation with federal immigration authorities when it comes to the most serious crimes. Some local officials do so already, taking a pragmatic approach.

## **UNITED, NOT DIVIDED**

President Reagan saw immigration as key to America and its success. He would be appalled to see the disparaging of immigrants and the disrespecting

of federalism, and he would be shrewd enough to know that decisions made today in the name of fighting sanctuary cities might come back to haunt conservatives when party fortunes change, as they always do.

In the 1980s, Reagan worked with lawmakers of both parties to find a legislative compromise. Through the leadership of Alan Simpson (R-Wyoming) in the Senate and Romano Mazzoli (D-Kentucky) in the House, the result was the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Although we see varying opinions today about this law, the problem-solving spirit of its authors is something the United States needs more than ever. We can do no better than follow their example. ■

*Special to the Hoover Digest.*



Available from the Hoover Institution Press is **The Debate in the United States over Immigration**, edited by Peter J. Duignan and Lewis H. Gann. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit [www.hooverpress.org](http://www.hooverpress.org).



# Classroom Windows

The latest book by Hoover fellow **Chester E. Finn Jr.** defends the National Assessment of Educational Progress, “the nation’s report card,” as an indispensable way of measuring actual results in an age of educational fads and politics.

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**By Jay Mathews**

**C**hester E. Finn Jr., known as Checker, is seventy-eight. His first contact with the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as our nation’s report card, goes way back to 1969. That was when he received an office visitor who wanted to discuss NAEP, pronounced “nape.”

Finn was twenty-five. He had a desk in the Old Executive Office Building in Washington. He had graduated from college four years before with a degree in history. He also had a master’s degree in social-studies teaching, an indication of how early he acquired his lifelong obsession with schools in America. He has done enough since to be called our nation’s education expert.

In his latest book, *Assessing the Nation’s Report Card: Challenges and Choices for NAEP*, Finn, a senior Hoover fellow, provides a much-needed appreciation of those federally funded and managed exams that periodically sample the

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progress of about five thousand children per state. He thinks NAEP is the most important testing program in the country but worries it could be blown away by the ideological winds rattling schoolhouse windows these days.

NAEP is an old but solid anchor in any debate over whether our schools are going to hell. Senior citizens I know often take a pessimistic view. They tend to remember their school days fondly and overlook the fact that schools then weren't teaching as much to as many different kids, particularly those with disabilities, as they do now.

The most recent NAEP summary of reading progress indicates that, over the long term, we are not falling back: "The percentage of fourth-grade students performing at or above NAEP Proficient in 2019 was higher in comparison to a decade ago, as well as to 1998 and 1992. The percentage of eighth-graders performing at or above NAEP Proficient in 2019 was not significantly different from a decade ago or from 1998, but was higher in comparison to 1992."

I suspect Finn, a careful optimist, may mention NAEP data when he runs into feverish pessimists at parties. He first went deep into the realities of federal support for education when his graduate school mentor, Daniel P. Moynihan, became a key adviser to President Richard M. Nixon and took Finn with him to Washington.

That visitor who told Finn about NAEP was the executive director of the Education Commission of the States. He wanted the well-placed kid to know the project needed more money. Finn went on to get an EdD in educational policy and become a much-quoted sage as professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, US assistant secretary of education, president of the nonprofit Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, and several other assignments.

This is his twenty-fourth book. It is full of bureaucratic history and would be a heavy slog except that Finn is a gifted writer who spotlights the most interesting stuff, like the recurring battle over NAEP's long-term trend assessment. Some people don't like measuring today's schools the same way we did in 1992. Finn disagrees. Having some legitimate way to compare our schools to the past "is NAEP's single most valuable function and solemn responsibility," he said.

Looking back at old data "is certain to raise concerns as curricular emphases, education reform priorities, and testing technologies evolve over time," he said. "How informative are assessment results in 2025, say, if they're based on what was being taught in American schools at the turn of the century? . . . On the other hand, how valuable are 2025 results on a measure

like NAEP if they cannot be compared with previous results? Is achievement improving or not, and for which kids?

He quotes *Education Week* reporter Stephen Sawchuk pointing out that “the exam’s technical properties make it difficult to use NAEP data to prove cause-and-effect claims about specific policies or instructional interventions,” even though distinguished experts use the results that way all the time. It is not uncommon to see enraged debaters hurling NAEP data at each other.

Not everyone likes government officials pointing out achievement gaps between different ethnicities, Finn said, “at least not unless it’s accompanied by causal explanations and—more important—remedies for the situation.” NAEP people consider that beyond their capabilities. NAEP results can illuminate knowledge and skills in certain subjects that groups of students might have, Finn said, but “they’re not good at gauging creativity, motivation, grit, research prowess, or one’s ability to work with others.”

Even worse, legislators and regulators keep messing with vital data. The correlation between academic achievement and socioeconomic status as measured by the percentage of students eligible for lunch subsidies has been a favorite topic of NAEP consumers like me. Finn informs us that “beginning in 2010 . . . and nationally implemented in 2015, the ‘community eligibility’ feature enables high-poverty schools to supply free meals to all their pupils regardless of individual poverty status.”

There are NAEP exams in reading, math, science, writing, arts, civics, history, geography, economics, technology, and engineering.

Politicians and other special interests will still misrepresent the results. But as we try to comprehend our schools’ progress, there is no better measure than that obscure testing project Finn first heard about fifty-three years ago. ■

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# *To Thine Own Self*

**“Know thyself” has always been good advice. New software has made that advice even more useful.**

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***By Michael J. Petrilli***

**A**t the end of high school, most graduating seniors collect their diplomas with a heaping side of platitudes, many of them patently preposterous. Such as, “if you can dream it, you can do it.” Or “you can be anything you want to be.” And especially, “with grit and determination, there’s nothing you can’t do.”

The problem isn’t encouraging young people to aim high or dream big. It’s pretending that each of us is a blank canvas. I can dream all I want of becoming the next Michael Jordan, but my five-foot-seven frame and general lack of coordination say otherwise. Better advice came from the Greeks almost twenty-five centuries ago: “To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom.”

Socrates isn’t giving many graduation addresses these days. Yet this wisdom is at the heart of a new generation of aptitude assessments intended to help individuals, including middle and high school students, understand themselves better. These computer-based assessments, such as YouScience Discovery and the updated Ball Aptitude Battery, are designed to identify strengths and talents and point to how those might map onto promising careers. Such personal inventories could help accelerate the shift away from the “college for all” mania that has gripped American education for the past thirty years, toward a system more balanced between college and career.

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



Of course, most parents already expose their kids to lots of activities to figure out what sparks an interest. Is my kid more of a team-sports person, or someone who might prefer an individual pursuit, like playing the piano? Is his idea of a perfect day getting to hang out with friends, or sitting on the couch reading a book? When she is immersed in the world of screens, what kinds of games and activities most light a fire?

Similarly, American high schools offer a smorgasbord of sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities to encourage experimentation and help students find a good fit. These also can help them gain real-world skills and perhaps kick-start thinking about how they might apply their strengths and interests to a vocation. Still, the default assumed goal for teenagers is college, with or without a specific career in mind.

## **CALLOW YOUTH**

I recall taking a diagnostic assessment in high school, more than thirty years ago, that was designed to help us figure out our job interests. Such assessments were ubiquitous at the time. This particular questionnaire tried to ferret out whether we were more drawn to people, ideas, data, or physical objects. Would we prefer to spend our time in lots of brainstorming sessions, it would ask, or taking apart an engine? Then, based on our answers, it spat out a list of jobs that might be a good fit.

It was better than nothing, but it's not hard to identify myriad problems with such an approach. First, we humans are great at deluding ourselves, all the more so when we are young. In my case, the results indicated a

strong interest in ideas and people, and a clear lack of interest in data and things. That wasn't entirely off the ball—as the president of a think

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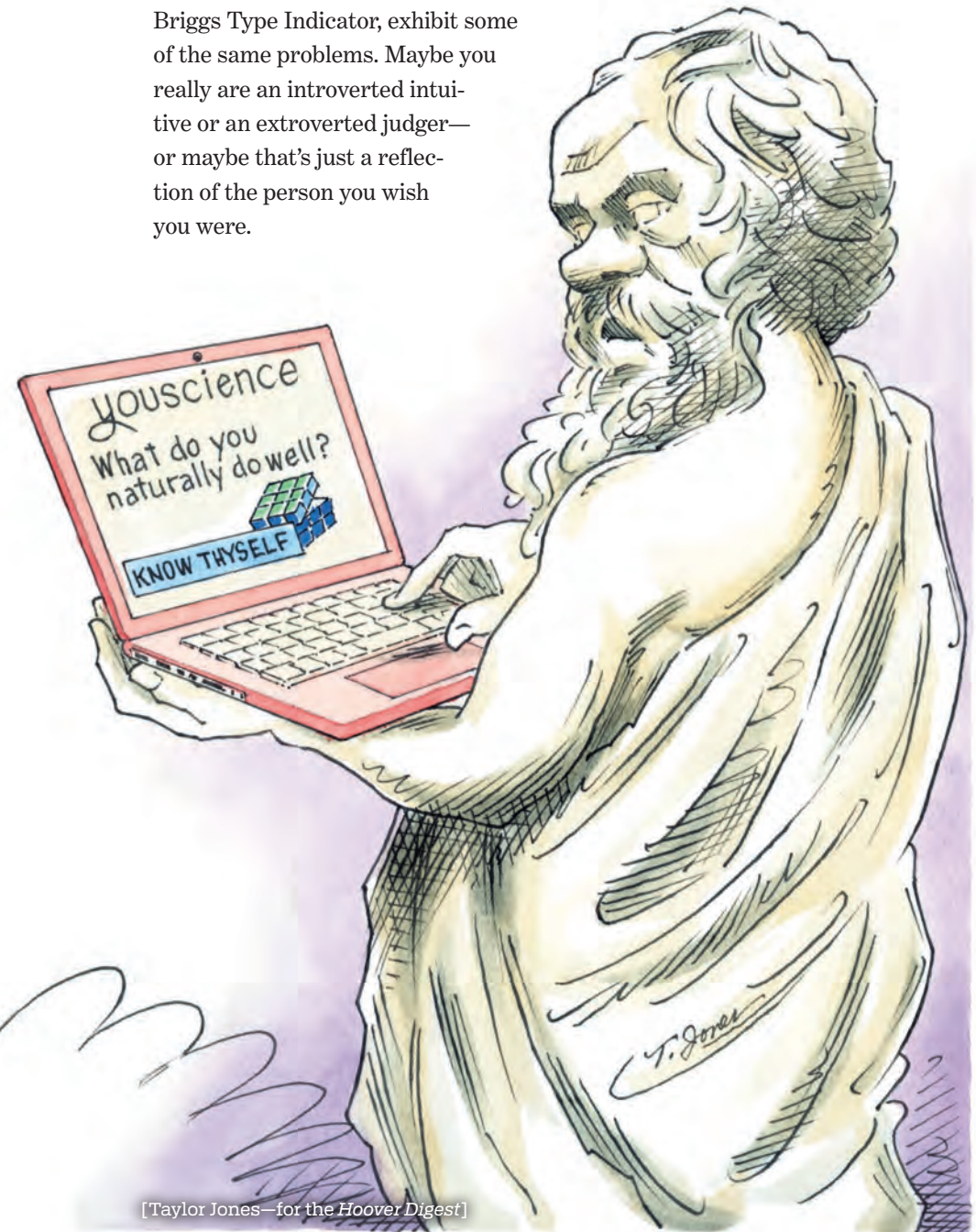
### ***A “college for all” mania has gripped American education for the past thirty years.***

tank, I produce ideas for a living. Meanwhile, I can't put together a piece of Ikea furniture to save my life. Truth be told, however, I'm more introverted than I wanted to admit to myself back then, and can only handle a certain amount of time around other people on any given day. And while I thought it was nerdy back then, I do enjoy a good spreadsheet.

Because of these self-delusions, that old diagnostic tool encouraged me to become a high school history teacher—which I actually tried as a student teacher, and at which I mostly failed. I enjoyed creating lesson plans but found it exhausting to be around kids all day and longed for some time alone.

I hadn't been honest with myself, or the test, about my interests or even my traits, and it showed.

Personality inventories, like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, exhibit some of the same problems. Maybe you really are an introverted intuitive or an extroverted judger—or maybe that's just a reflection of the person you wish you were.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

And it's hard for kids to project a potential interest onto a career with which they have no experience. If you don't know anyone who's an engineer, engineering isn't going to spark much interest. It's like asking a kid if she might enjoy playing lacrosse when she's never even heard of it, much less seen someone playing it. Not surprising, then, the old-style interest inventories can steer poor kids away from certain high-paying jobs. They also tend to exhibit gender biases.

## INTELLIGENCE—MACHINE AND HUMAN

A new generation of assessments promises a better approach. Instead of assuming that individuals already know themselves, it puts them through a series of exercises to gauge what they're actually good at. Many are based on the work of the Ball Foundation, founded by Carl and Vivian Elledge

Ball. In 1981, the couple published a set of sixteen ability tests designed to identify aptitudes across a range of domains, such

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### ***We humans are great at deluding ourselves, especially when we are young.***

as analytical reasoning, short-term memory, eye-hand coordination, and vocabulary. Aptitudes, in the Balls' way of thinking, can be thought of as an individual's unique potential—"how quickly and easily a person will be able to acquire particular skills" and "the level of proficiency that the person can expect to reach, given comparable opportunities for training and practice."

Now a new set of organizations is building on the Ball Foundation work, often with the help of artificial intelligence, to design assessments that they claim are highly effective at pinpointing people's aptitudes and matching them to potential careers. Most are focused on employers, offering assessments that can be given to applicants to see if they are a good fit for a particular opening. But a few are targeting the K-12 world.

One such assessment is by YouScience, in use in seven thousand schools nationwide. Founded by serial entrepreneur Edson Barton, the company offers aptitude assessments for middle and high school students. The "snapshot" assessment for seventh- and eighth-grade students is designed to be more exploratory, while the "discovery" assessment for high school students is more in-depth.

My fourteen-year-old son and I both took the YouScience ninety-minute "discovery" assessment, which the company prefers to call a series of "brain games." Almost all the items were nonverbal and designed to tease out "inherent talents," as Barton put it—strengths that are independent from

traditional measures of academic achievement. Right- or left-handedness is a good analogy. As he explained:

We all have a dominant hand that we use. Whatever your dominant hand is, you end up being able to do things more naturally with it. It comes more naturally to write my name with my right hand. As I pick up painting or try to play the piano, that natural ability makes it easier for me to pick up on certain things using my right hand. That's not to say I can't use my left hand. I do it all the time. If I really focus myself, I could write just as well with my left hand as my right hand, but it's painful, it hurts, it takes mental exertion. It's a beautiful spot when aptitudes and interests and skills evolve into something wonderful.

Whether it's possible to untangle aptitudes from achievements goes over the head of this particular writer, but it's an intriguing possibility.

The activities in the brain games varied. In one that supposedly tested my spatial visualization prowess, I was given a series of pictures of folded papers with holes punched

into corners or other

locations and asked

where those holes would

appear if the paper were

unfolded. In a test of

my idea-generation abilities, I was presented with a scenario out of science fiction (think alien landing) and asked to come up with as many ideas as possible for what it would mean for our society.

Another test measured my "visual comparison speed," whether I could spot discrepancies in pairs of digits, while others assessed my inductive reasoning abilities and sequential and numerical reasoning. Within minutes of finishing the exercises, the system generated a thirty-five-page "strengths profile," plus a list of well-matched careers.

The promise, according to Barton, is that students will see career paths for themselves that line up with their aptitudes and are free of the race, class, and sex biases that tended to plague old-style interest inventories. Because the assessment focuses on potential, rather than achievement, the results often tell kids about strengths in areas the children had thought were weaknesses.

In particular, the YouScience results tend to identify lots of people who would have potential in STEM fields and other high-paying careers. For

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***It's hard for students to project a potential interest onto a career with which they have no experience.***

example, in a sample of three thousand Tennessee students, just 9 percent of girls expressed interest in technology careers like engineering and computer programming, but 64 percent had the aptitudes associated with those careers, according to YouScience's assessment.

Indeed, my son and I were both surprised that several jobs popped up for us that were quite techy, even though we view ourselves as more history pro-

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***Aptitudes do show potential, but people can only realize that potential if they get the chance to train and practice.***

fessor types. But I must have done all right on the sequential and numerical reasoning questions, at least in comparison to the typical high schooler, and as a result jobs like

“economist” popped up for me. Though my teenage self may not have imagined it, it's true that there are days when I like nothing more than to immerse myself in test-score data, looking for patterns others might have missed. More important: the results have given my fourteen-year-old son some new possibilities to consider for himself.

Understandably, YouScience strives to make the experience and the resulting “strengths profile” as positive as possible. The post-assessment report doesn't harp on what kids are *not* good at. It also doesn't tell anybody that the best fit is an unskilled, low-wage job. The five hundred careers in its database all require at least some post-high school training. The hope is that focusing on students' strengths will motivate them to put in the hard work it will take to fulfill their potential, said Lesley Vossenkemper, the company's vice president of strategic initiatives. “We know that motivation is a big part of achievement,” she told me. “If students see they have the ability, they may put in the effort.”

## **BETTER BEGINNINGS**

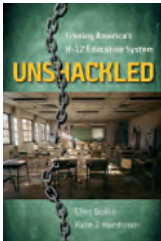
That's all well and good, but I worry that this is yet another example of us in education not wanting to level with kids about what's feasible for them based on their level of academic achievement. Aptitudes do show potential, but people can only realize their potential if given the opportunity for training and practice.

Sadly, we know that many young Americans today do not have the opportunity to reach their potential. Difficult early childhood experiences and poor instruction in elementary and middle school cause many students to arrive at high school desperately behind in basic skills. I worry that giving

underprepared students a report about their aptitudes and career potential without shoring up the basics could amount to false hope. A student might be told, for example, that he has the aptitude to make a great computer engineer. What he won't be told is that a failure to master math facts in elementary school, or a weak foundation in algebra, or inability to pass calculus, amount to high barriers that will be difficult to overcome.

The lesson, as is often the case, may be that we need to start earlier. So let me offer a suggestion for anyone preparing to congratulate a kindergarten graduate. Please tell those little tykes' parents that one of their most important jobs is to help their children figure out who they are and what they are good at. And that another critical job is to watch like a hawk for any signs that their children are struggling academically and, if so, to do something about it—the sooner the better. That's the kind of message that might actually let kids reach for the stars. ■

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# *No Case for Reparations*

**A state committee has come up with precisely the wrong way to help African-Americans.**

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**By Lee E. Ohanian**

**W**hite supremacy. Systemic racism. These concepts form the theme of the interim report from California's Reparations Task Force. The choice to focus the report along these lines misses the factors that are far more important in understanding the struggles of black Americans. And because of this, the report will fail to advance the lives of those it was tasked to help.

As cruel and dehumanizing as the processes of bigotry and racism are, these are not the primary reasons why so many black Americans are struggling. If white supremacy is the major factor, as alleged by the task force, then other nonwhite groups would be struggling similarly to blacks. But they are not. The differences in socioeconomic outcomes between black Americans and other nonwhites, including black immigrants, are so large that they compel us to search elsewhere to understand and address these differences.

Sadly, California's Reparations Task Force chose to ignore these differences. By focusing its report on "white supremacy" and "systemic racism," terms that are now so overused as to have lost their meaning, the report will

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further divide us at a time when it is so important for us to come together to improve our institutions and policies so that opportunities to succeed are available to all.

This is not to say that nonwhites do not face significant bigotry and prejudice. Rather, it is to say that the socioeconomic differences between black Americans and other nonwhites are so large that they indicate other factors are the primary drivers of depressed socioeconomic outcomes for black Americans. But nearly all the discussion in policy circles, including the task force's report, presumes that racism is virtually entirely responsible for black Americans' difficulties.

If the task force wishes to facilitate lasting socioeconomic gains for black Americans, then it must look beyond race.

Asian-Americans have a median household income of \$86,000 per year, nearly twice as high as the median household income of black American households, which is \$44,000. Asian-Americans also earn significantly higher incomes than the median non-Hispanic white household (about \$77,000),

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***If white supremacy were the big problem, then other nonwhite groups would be struggling similarly to blacks. But they are not.***

which stands in sharp contrast to the white supremacy/systemic racism narrative of the task force's report.

Hispanics' median household income is about \$56,000, 27 percent higher than that of black households, which is notable in that employment and earning opportunities are considerably limited for the 30 percent of Hispanics in the United States who are not fluent in English.

Median household income of black immigrants is more than 30 percent higher than that of black people born in the United States, even though black immigrants are much less familiar with American culture, society, and institutions than those born here.

Asian-American economic gains are particularly striking for the Hmong, refugees from Laos who emigrated to the United States primarily in the 1980s and early 1990s. The Hmong came to the United States having little knowledge of America or Western culture, having lived much as their ancestors had a century before.

The Hmong faced enormous hardships as they settled in the United States, including significant racism. The poverty rate among the Hmong was 64 percent in 1990, compared to 14 percent for all Americans at that time. But as

the Hmong have assimilated and accumulated skills relevant for the American labor market, their poverty rate has declined to 17 percent recently, compared to 11 percent for all Americans and 19.5 percent for black Americans.

In roughly thirty years, the Hmong have made huge economic gains, including a median household income of \$68,000, a 52 percent homeowner-ship rate, and a 67 percent employment rate, all of which show signs of continued progress. These statistics are all consider-

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***Real solutions exist. Schooling is at the top of the list.***

ably higher than comparable statistics for black Americans, statistics that sadly do not show much sign of getting better.

The economic successes of other nonwhite groups, including those who are severely impoverished and disadvantaged, show we can hope and indeed expect that many more black Americans can replicate these success stories.

But the fact that they aren't doing so means we must move beyond monocausal, race-based explanations of black American struggles. And doing so identifies several factors that policies can help, with schooling at the top of the list.

Black Americans tend to have less formal education than other nonwhite groups, particularly Asian-Americans, who attend college at a high rate (58 percent) and who also complete college at a high rate (74 percent of those attending), including those from very low-income households or whose parents did not attend college. Black Americans attend college at a much lower rate (36 percent), and only about 40 percent of those attending finish college.

Addressing this disparity would be a game changer. But it requires increasing the number of black students who are prepared to attend and succeed at college. One step in achieving this goal is improving school quality, as black students are often stuck in terribly performing schools which leave them unprepared to attend college.

Improving schools means expanding charter school options so families have some choice, hiring better teachers and administrators, and raising learning expectations at deficient schools, where many students fail to come close to achieving proficiency in mathematics, science, or English.

Another step is providing black families with the tools to enhance their own children's educations within the home, including access to high-speed Internet and other learning resources, while at the same time increasing their own expectations of their children's learning outcomes. Yet another is expanding after-school and summer programs so that learning and

socialization can continue outside the days and hours that school is in session.

But making progress on several of these fronts is next to impossible, given the existing nexus of K-12 public schoolteacher unions and the Democratic Party, a deliberately opaque morass involving hundreds of billions of tax dollars for schools, millions of dollars in political donations for friendly politicians, and a fierce protection of the overall status quo befitting such a largesse.

The task force's report also recommends educational changes. But by focusing on white supremacy and racism, the task force reaches a remarkably different set of proposals, including the requirement of culturally relevant pedagogy, mandatory teacher anti-bias training, the elimination of racial bias in curricula and in standardized tests ranging from the SAT to the LSAT (law school admissions) and the MCAT (medical school admissions), the creation of black identity courses, hiring more black teachers, and providing black students with free in-state college.

None of these recommendations addresses the issue of increasing the number of college-ready black students, and I am unaware of any evidence suggesting that these changes would have any indirect benefits toward achieving this goal.

The leaders of the state's one-party system are responsible for the status quo that hurts the most vulnerable while protecting themselves and other political elites. Perhaps it is then not so surprising that the party created a task force that would deliver such a politically expedient narrative and set of recommendations rather than advancing ideas that would upset the state's political apple cart—but that could do so much more for black Americans. ■

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# “We’ve Stopped Believing”

Hoover fellow **Harvey Mansfield**, venerable and contrarian Harvard professor, speaks with his usual candor on what America lacks—and what it needs.

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By **Peter Robinson**

**Peter Robinson, Uncommon Knowledge:** The political philosopher Harvey Mansfield arrived at Harvard University as an undergraduate in 1949 and has remained at Harvard ever since. After receiving his undergraduate degree from Harvard in 1953, he received his doctoral degree from Harvard in 1962, and in 1963 he joined the Harvard faculty. Earlier today, fifty-nine years after joining the Harvard faculty, Mansfield taught a seminar in political philosophy. He has published more than a dozen books, including the standard edition of Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, published in 2000, which he translated and edited with his late wife, Delba Winthrop.

My first question is: Do our underlying social institutions remain healthy enough to support self-government? Two quotes from your book *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction*. First, “In Tocqueville, religion and the family represent an indispensable supplement to politics that keeps it under restraint with the reminder of a higher and more intimate life than political life. Both

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*Harvey C. Mansfield is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Government at Harvard University. Peter Robinson is the editor of the Hoover Digest, the host of Uncommon Knowledge, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

religion and family are necessary to self-government.” And second, “For Tocqueville, despotism can do without religious faith, but freedom cannot. Though Americans do not allow religion to mix directly in government, he says, it should be considered as ‘the first of their political institutions.’ ”

According to Gallup, the proportion of Americans reporting membership in a church, synagogue, or mosque in 2000 was 70 percent; today, it’s 47 percent. The proportion of Americans over 76 years of age who claim no religious affiliation is 7 percent; between ages 58 and 76, 13 percent; between 42 and 57, 20 percent; and between 26 and 41, 31 percent. What do we do with this?

**Harvey Mansfield:** Those are disturbing figures.

**Robinson:** I’m offering you the opportunity to cheer us up, Harvey.

**Mansfield:** From the standpoint of Tocqueville, religion is not just a value; it’s a higher value. It’s something that makes you look to a power that is above and stronger than you are. But religion is also within the realm of what he called civil society. It’s not the work of government. So, strongly as he believed that religion is a political institution, he also believed in the separation of church and state. America got started through theocracy of Puritans, but that had

to be corrected in the American Revolution.

At about that time, most of the colonies abolished established religion and

instituted what amounted to separation of church and state. So, it’s not so much worship that he worries about or what he thinks will make republics and democracies stronger, it’s about what you think.

The real danger for democracy intellectually is materialism. Democracy has a tendency toward materialism because people, having no authority over them, look around and find nothing and satisfy themselves with petty pleasures and immediate gratifications. And those material pleasures can lead you out of your political interest or concern into the sense that you are the victim of vast impersonal forces, which you can’t do anything about. In a democracy, you feel: yes, I’m free, but I’m one among so many that I’m also weak. Materialism accentuates your sense of being weak. It tells you that you are determined by causes other than yourself. To combat that, you need a sense of what’s spiritual. So, one can make a general category of spiritual versus material. We need the spiritual for the sake of our self-control, so it’s

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***“Self-control comes with religion—the sort of self-appointed authority over yourself.”***





***“HIGHER AND MORE INTIMATE LIFE”*: Harvard government professor and Hoover senior fellow Harvey Mansfield still teaches at age ninety, fifty-nine years after joining the faculty. He is the co-author, along with his late wife, Delba Winthrop, of the standard edition of Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*. [Suproteem K. Sakar—*Harvard Crimson*]**

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complicated. You have to think that there is an authority above yourself, but it’s something you accept for yourself and understand as something which gives you a sense of control over your future and your country’s control over your future. A sense of self-control is necessary for the health of self-government. And self-control comes with religion—the sort of self-appointed authority over yourself.

So, it’s not so much a loss of piety that he’s worried about, but, among intellectuals, the loss of a sense of wholeness that can arise from putting yourself in God’s place. God is above us, and God generalizes but also particularizes. Our polities, however, do one or the other. We generalize—we treat men as roughly similar, if not perfectly equal. That’s democracy. We particularize—that’s oligarchy or aristocracy, where certain people, the few, are more important, interesting, or powerful than the others and deserve to be respected

and rewarded. So, your political thinking is much improved by any step in the direction of a divine point of view. This is his sort of intellectualist view of religion. And that is what's lost as well now.

**Robinson:** So, the notion of the divine, of God, feels like a paradox. On the one hand, it enforces a certain humility of outlook. But on the other hand, it enhances the meaningfulness of the political endeavor. I'm humble before you because I believe there's somebody much smarter than both of us. We're both limited, so let's talk this over and let's do the best we can. But at the same time, our joint project is meaningful because we are both the creatures of this remarkable something. Is that roughly correct?

**Mansfield:** Yes. And the political danger of religion is thinking that God is on your side. You have to get above that and you have to see that there are limitations to your side. Politically, liberals and conservatives need to understand that both sides are going to continue to exist. Liberals, I think, have more trouble than conservatives in believing that they're stuck with their opponent for as far as the eye can see.

**Robinson:** In a great big bumptious country like this, coexistence is the only possibility.

**Mansfield:** Yes. And religion can help. It puts something above you, but it doesn't do it in a way that makes you think that God is your partner.

## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

**Robinson:** There's a debate taking place on the right, and certain conservatives insist we need a new conservatism. Christopher DeMuth wrote recently in the *Wall Street Journal*: "When the American left was liberal and reformist, conservatives played our customary role as moderators of change. When the leftward party in a two-party system is seized by such radicalism, the conservative instinct for moderation is futile. Conservatives need to move to nation rebuilding." The principles that the founders made explicit in the Declaration and the Constitution are no longer enough. We now need to make explicit aspects of the founding that they were able to take for granted, like a certain sense of common nationality. They didn't have to worry about borders—who knew where the western border was at that stage? It never crossed anybody's mind who signed the Declaration that there might be pressure on English as a common language.

So, one aspect of the national conservative impulse is that we're not trying to reject the founding, we're trying to draw out what is implicit and what

we now need in our current day to make explicit. But then you've also got in Chris DeMuth a second impulse, I think, which is that we need to fight back. Playing fair and moderating doesn't work anymore. The left is now in the mood to turn the country upside down and we cannot prevent it. What do you make of what I take to be two impulses in national conservatism?

**Mansfield:** I, too, like and admire Chris DeMuth very much. I worry about the national or integrous or common-good conservatism, but I do agree that there's a problem. And you could say that the problem of the border is that we don't know how to make definitions. We've stopped believing in essentialism. Whereas common sense tells you that every country has a border, the intellectual delusion, there are no definitions, tends to deny this. There isn't even a difference between an alien and a citizen that deserves to be respected. Somehow, we need to recover our essentialism, but at the same time one should hesitate to constitutionalize our differences. We have a Constitution that is supposed to unite us, within which both parties have to live.

I come back to my point about the importance of liberals and conservatives expecting that the opponent of each of them will survive. And that means

that, yes, we have to fight.

But what about the fact that people don't believe in the nation or that people have a different

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***“The political danger of religion is thinking that God is on your side.”***

view of the nation? When that gets to be dominant because a president like Biden is elected, that's worrisome and it's something to oppose, but I don't think it's anything fundamentally new. I don't think it requires a rethinking of that sphere of civil society that is between government and the individual.

**Robinson:** Harvard in 1949 when you entered as a freshman, and indeed Harvard in 1963 when you become a member of the faculty, is a very different Harvard by 1968–69. But the center did hold; the Constitution contained all of that ferment and violence. In many ways, the 1960s are actually a creative moment. The civil rights movement is one of the glories of American history. Having lived through that, you don't look at the present and say, “Uh-oh, this is unprecedented”?

**Mansfield:** The '60s at Harvard were rough. *Disgusting* is the word I'd use. That's the emotion I felt. So, yes, conservatives have had trouble on culture issues. But I like a remark that Yuval Levin made recently about culture issues and economic issues. Conservatives think more about culture issues,

which they're losing on, than economic issues. Liberals care more about economic issues, where they're losing, and take for granted cultural issues, where they're winning. So, both sides think they're losing. This adds fuel to our hyper-partisanship and leaves both sides highly dissatisfied. Conservatives should look at the prosperity and rather high standard of living that our country enjoys, especially compared to our immediate competitors.

**Robinson:** Is wealth a solvent of character and common sense? In 1949, as a college freshman, you'd lived through the Second World War and your parents had come up during

the Depression. In some basic way, every member of your generation understood the stakes. You now teach undergraduates at Harvard

who've known nothing but prosperity. Does every generation need to relearn the virtues necessary to pursue democracy? Does every generation have to experience the stakes?

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***“Whereas common sense tells you that every country has a border, the intellectual delusion, there are no definitions, tends to deny this.”***

**Mansfield:** Yes, it certainly does. But I think now we are experiencing those stakes. You see that in the clash between “the woke” and conservatives. The woke take things for granted.

**Robinson:** Like wealth and health.

**Mansfield:** Thanks to our wealth and certain medical interventions that I've enjoyed, I feel pretty good at ninety years old.

**Robinson:** I should let everybody know that not only did you teach a seminar at Harvard today then drive all the way to Dartmouth for this interview, but when you arrived, there was a power outage and you had to walk up three flights of stairs. You're doing fine at ninety.

**Mansfield:** That's nothing, thanks. And you're right that people often behave better when they're under pressure. We are under stress, conservatives especially. We have the pleasure of losing, and it gives us something to be worried about and to think about.

**Robinson:** Again, from your introduction to Tocqueville: “The greatest danger to democracy comes out of democracy. Instead of people's sovereignty, Tocqueville warns of the ‘immense being’ of big government and a new ‘mild

despotism' resulting from that government." We now live in an America in which government at all levels absorbs something like 50 percent of GDP; federal agencies have absorbed much of the legislative function of Congress; federal research grants and other subsidies make up a third or more of the budgets of our major universities; and a president who attempted to confront the administrative state—I am slyly introducing the subject of Donald Trump—found himself denounced by the universities and the press and impeached twice. Have we succumbed to mild despotism? Was Tocqueville warning about the deep state that Donald Trump railed against?

**Mansfield:** Tocqueville was warning about what he saw then. And we're seeing the same thing now. He had wonderful foresight. But he also listed things

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***"We have a Constitution that is supposed to unite us, within which both parties have to live."***

that are good about our country and said there are ways to combat this mild despotism. He ended with the question of whether it will continue. I think it's a

challenge for each generation that comes. But in response to your questions, I think we need to count our blessings.

**Robinson:** In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky has the Grand Inquisitor say to Christ, "Receiving their bread from us, the people will clearly see that we take the bread from them to give it back to them and they will be only too glad to have it so as it will deliver them from their greatest anxiety and torture—that of having to decide freely for themselves. Never was there anything more unbearable to the human race than personal freedom." Sustaining a free society is too much to hope; we human beings cannot bear it.

**Mansfield:** Tell that to the Ukrainians.

## **IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES**

**Robinson:** A 2020 study by the National Association of Scholars shows that registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans among university faculty by a ratio of 8.5 to 1. In election cycles between 2015 and 2018, university faculty who donated to Democrats outnumbered university faculty who donated to Republicans by a ratio of 94 to 1. According to a faculty survey by the *Harvard Crimson*, 78 percent of the Harvard faculty called itself liberal or very liberal, compared to 3 percent that called itself conservative. That's you, and maybe two or three of your friends.

**Mansfield:** It wasn't me, because I don't answer surveys.

**Robinson:** Let's say it's 3.5 percent—we'll toss you in.

When I was an undergraduate at Dartmouth, conservatives used to say, "Don't worry. When the '60s generation begins to retire, all of this will correct itself." They've retired, and it's gotten worse. Then conservatives said in the '80s and '90s, "Don't

worry. When the kids graduate, they'll get jobs, they'll start paying taxes, they'll need to scrape together down payments

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***"We have the pleasure of losing, and it gives us something to be worried about and to think about."***

for their first homes, they'll want to raise families. They'll encounter reality and they'll become conservative." Both of these arguments sound plausible and they both seem to be wrong. The faculty is overwhelmingly left even though the '60s generation is retired. And younger generations are farther to the left than the older generations. The kids don't correct themselves in anything like a decade. How come those arguments are wrong?

**Mansfield:** They do sound plausible, and they have been wrong. Ideas have consequences—I think that's a conservative saying. And education really does have an effect.

**Robinson:** So, you mean that what you've been doing at Harvard all these years sticks?

**Mansfield:** Now you're getting me indignant and a bit more pessimistic, because I think our universities are in very bad shape in this regard.

**Robinson:** Where's the mechanism for self-correction?

**Mansfield:** Politics. For example, Harvard got charged \$143 million in tax on its endowment, put in there by Republicans. Harvard has become a figure of fun and it's the most prestigious institution with such ill repute. That's not good. Harvard politicized itself, and it's perhaps going to have to start paying for it. But I cannot see that its present policy of replicating the Democratic National Convention at every commencement is in any way satisfactory or in its interest to maintain.

**Robinson:** You're a man who's seen the rise and fall of empires. In the 1970s we had stagflation, the collapse of national morale with the defeat in Vietnam and Watergate, and the erosion of our position in the Cold War as the Soviets



advanced. And then in the 1980s, the very next decade, we had economic expansion, restoration of national morale, and victory in the Cold War. From

1979 to 1989, we went from the national humiliation of the Iranian hostage crisis to the fall of the Berlin Wall. That was a stunning national revival. Family, religion, the uni-

versities—are we capable of another such revival today?

**Mansfield:** Yes. I guess you're asking whether Ronald Reagan was an accident or not.

**Robinson:** I suppose that's what it comes to, in a certain sense. Was he a product of the Constitution? Did something happen in the 1980s that wouldn't have surprised Tocqueville or the founders, and can it happen again?

**Mansfield:** He was a man whom we found and elected, and he was a consummate politician, a man of principle, and a charmer. Those are three things we could look for again. And I think the opportunity is open.

**Robinson:** The job has not been spoken for.

OK, last question. Can you sum up why the United States of America is still worth studying and fighting for?

**Mansfield:** We're trying to do the most difficult thing possible, which is to build and keep a successful republic—a successful experiment in self-government. Human beings don't have those instincts. We're left free by nature, and many things are left open to us: puzzles and mysteries and so on. We have to find our own sense of government, and that's what America is about and that's what it's doing. I think, and hope, it will continue. ■





# *Freedom for Native Americans*

**Hoover fellow Terry L. Anderson is enthusiastic about a new initiative to help American Indians, long robbed of autonomy, rebuild their traditional economic foundations.**

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**By Jonathan Movroydis**

**T**he new book *Renewing Indigenous Economies* is the product of a Hoover research project led by senior fellow Terry L. Anderson. He describes it as fifty years in the making. Born and raised in south-central Montana near the Crow Indian Reservation, Anderson developed an interest in Native American history that continued into adulthood. Throughout his education and early career as an economist, he wanted to better understand why life on the reservation has been characterized by abject poverty for so many American Indians.

In his early research, he discovered that those tribes and individual Indians who have had greater access to property ownership were more prosperous than those whose lands have been under the trusteeship of the federal government. The reason, as he explains, is that tribes and individual Indians

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who own land in “fee-simple title” can put their property up as collateral to banks to get loans and in turn make investments and improve productivity. This is not the case for property held in trust by the federal government because those properties are, for all intents and purposes, owned by the federal government, cannot be used as collateral, and are subject to stringent bureaucratic control.

This led Anderson to search history to understand how economies for Indigenous people worked before contact with Europeans and before the federal government extended its authority over Indian lands. Before the colonization of North America, he says, Indigenous economies did more than survive—they thrived. They did so, Anderson maintains, because they respected the principle of private property. Native Americans maintained agriculture, fisheries, and wildlife, and they traded their goods across vast networks.

Anderson describes how he is sharing research conducted in the project and wisdom gleaned from tribal success stories with Native American students through seminars at the Hoover Institution, so that younger generations can envision what is possible in their communities.

***Jonathan Movroydis:*** What were the origins of this project?

***Terry L. Anderson:*** Throughout much of my youth, I lived in areas surrounding Indian reservations. During summers, I lived on a ranch that my uncle managed in north-central Montana that was located on the Blackfeet Reservation. At that time, I was too young to understand the reality of living conditions on Indian reservations, namely abject poverty and a set of institutions that continued to keep Indians in bondage even after the period of European colonialism had ended and the United States declared its independence.

As a young economist in the early 1970s, I conducted a substantial amount of research on land use in the area where I grew up in Montana and in the nearby reservations. As I drove through those reservations, I started to notice a pattern that many of their lands were unkempt. A parcel of land, for example, could be overgrazed, with a couple of wrecked cars and rundown sheds, and no residential dwelling.

I don’t say this to be critical or suggest that the people who live on reservations are irresponsible. I make this point to say that most land on a reservation is held in trust by the federal government, meaning that government administrators, namely from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), control its use. Next door, a person could live on fee-simple land, that is, a parcel that he or she owns. That land is usually cultivated. It may have an irrigation system, a tractor, and a farmhouse.

When I first started to deeply analyze life on reservations, I thought, “These are places where it’s ripe to think about how property rights and incentives affect people’s use of the land in addition to their well-being.”

**Movroydis:** How did you conduct your research into Indigenous societies and economies?

**Anderson:** The description of land use that I just gave, namely each parcel having very different characteristics of use, led me and another young coauthor at the time, Dean Luke, to gather data from the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the productivity of

each piece of land on several reservations. This was a challenging task, because at that time, in the early 1970s, the BIA did not even know the size of the reservations

under its control, let alone how many acres were held by private landowners and how many were held in trust. We had to use a computer model that scanned maps to obtain the size of a given reservation. The data we collected helped us estimate differences in agricultural productivity between fee-simple ownership and trust ownership.

Later, another research project, with Dominic Parker, examined the effect of the rule of law on reservation incomes. As a result of a law passed by Congress in 1953, Public Law 280, some tribes were declared “lawless” and forced to turn their legal jurisdiction over to the states in which they lived. We hypothesized that state courts followed a more stable rule of law that would contribute to higher incomes and higher growth rates for those tribes under state jurisdiction. Our research confirmed that expectation.

This is not to say that tribes can’t develop their own rules of law, as many tribes are demonstrating today. The Hoover Project on Renewing Indigenous Economies conducts the kind of research that can help tribes understand what it takes to get out of poverty by earning revenue rather than depending on federal grants.

**Movroydis:** The thesis of this project is that Indigenous economies thrived prior to European colonialism. How did they do so, and what hampered their development?

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***“This is not about inventing some new system that tribes need to adopt in order to be like the non-Indian people who don’t live on reservations. It’s about going back to the roots.”***

**Anderson:** The title of the project and of the book includes “renewing” as the first word to suggest and show that this is not about inventing some new system that tribes need to adopt in order to be like the non-Indian people who don’t live on reservations. It’s about going back to the roots of the institutions that enabled tribes, prior to European contact, not just to survive but to thrive.

I’m a historian by nature. I just love history. I like seeing what something was like before and understanding why it had changed. I have enjoyed studying the history of Indigenous people in the United States, Canada, and New Zealand.

What I found about Indigenous societies in North America is that they clearly understood property rights. In the Pacific Northwest, tribes owned clam gardens. Those were beaches where they cleared big boulders, gathered

in sand, and bred clams.

Those gardens belonged to and were cared for by individual families who then had the right to harvest their clams. Tribes in this region had very

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***“Indian tribes’ relationship to the federal government was akin to ‘that of a ward to his guardian.’ Imagine what that means.”***

secure fishing rights on salmon streams. They built weirs and traps, which allowed them to gather salmon during the harvest season and selectively harvest by letting the larger salmon migrate upstream to spawn and yield larger fish in the future.

In the Southeast, tribes explicitly staked ownership claims over property by marking boundaries with cornerstones. One group of Indians, for example, carved the stones into sculptures of rabbits, signifying that the property belonged to the “rabbit clan.”

The Lakota Sioux had territories in which they permitted their tribe—and forbade other tribes—to hunt buffalo. The Lakota Sioux sometimes burned the prairie lands to ensure a better habitat for their livestock. Clearly the idea of ownership was part of Indigenous history.

When societies have valued property ownership, it follows that they would have engaged in trade. Indians clearly understood the benefits of trade as much as Adam Smith did. Prior to colonization, there were trade networks across North America. Those networks ran from the Great Lakes to what is now Washington State and down into the Southwest to Chaco Canyon in New Mexico. Across the continent people traded obsidian, buffalo robes, dried fish, and various other goods. They also maintained routes—highways, roads,

and trails that were used for this trade. Some Indian cities were just as big as some of those in Europe. Tribes even made enormous investments in their cliff dwellings, which included elaborate walls and other structures. In short, these were civilized people. The myth of the wild Indian is partly what we are trying to debunk in this project.

In order to implement the doctrine of discovery, the Europeans had to create an illusion and promulgate falsities, such as that the tribes were nomadic and didn't own land. It follows that if land wasn't owned, then another person could take it without displaying remorse or paying restitution.

The US Supreme Court further entrenched the idea that Indians were "uncivilized" when Chief Justice John Marshall, writing the majority opinion in *Cherokee Nation v.*

*Georgia* (1831) articulated that Indian tribes' relationship to the federal government was akin to "that of a ward to his guardian." Imagine what

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***"The Ute now own buildings in Houston and oil wells in the Gulf of Mexico. They build their own roads and schools."***

that means. It means that Indians were wholly dependent, incompetent, and incapable, and thus, according to Marshall, could not bring an original suit before the nation's highest court. *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* was the first of a trilogy of decisions made by Marshall in the 1830s that were the basis of future laws placing the US government in authority over lands where American Indians lived. Even today, that trusteeship is still a cloud that hangs over virtually every reservation, especially the larger and poorer reservations in the West.

**Movroydis:** How would you reply to someone who says, "Wouldn't it just be better for Indians to adopt principles used in the most advanced Western economies instead of looking back to their own histories?"

**Anderson:** The challenge is that Indian tribes don't trust Western institutions, especially government, because it was those institutions that took their land and hold them in colonial bondage.

A good friend of mine, Joe Austin, an attorney from the Navajo tribe, explains that when he tries to persuade tribes that they need to focus on reviving some of their traditional governance structures, they aren't very receptive. This is partly because Native Americans have been taught that their tribes didn't have a strong rule of law and property rights, that they lived communally and didn't understand markets. As the new book explains,



these are myths that need to be replaced with a better understanding of how Indians lived in the past and how they can thrive today.

Many tribes are indeed beginning to wake up to this reality. They are not just saying, “Let’s become like people in Illinois, Montana, Nebraska, or Florida.” They’re saying, “Let’s resurrect our historic institutions, adapt them to the modern age, and empower our citizens to lead productive lives and achieve prosperity.”

**Movroydis:** Today, do North American tribes have strong systems of governance that enable their citizens to thrive—such as those that protect individual liberty and private property and provide access to free and competitive markets?

**Anderson:** America’s tribes are wrapped in what my good friend Ernest Sickey, from the Coushatta tribe in Louisiana, calls “white tape.” This means that the federal bureaucracy prevents tribes from having governance structures in which they can act autonomously.

The federal government has given the tribes a blueprint that says, “Here’s how to run a tribe. You need a tribal chairman. You need to have a democratically elected group of people who will be the commissioners and oversee the chairman’s decision making,” and the list goes on. This sounds very nice, but

it seldom comes even close to comporting with history. Most tribes have been obstructed by this boilerplate set of governance institutions, while others have tried to break

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***“It follows that if land wasn’t owned, then another person could take it without displaying remorse or paying restitution.”***

free from them. The focus of this project is on tribes that are renewing their economies by making this break.

Take the Southern Ute, for example, a tribe on the southern border of Colorado. It has significant oil and gas reserves. It had trouble developing those reserves because tribal lands were held in trust by the federal government. Eventually, the Ute tribe managed to get control of these resources. When it tapped the energy resources, started pumping oil and gas, it did so in an environmentally responsible manner. It then took the revenues and invested them through a tribal business and diversified the portfolio. The Ute now own buildings in Houston and oil wells in the Gulf of Mexico. They build their own roads and schools. The tribe basically said, “We will build an economy based on revenue, not grants.” And there are other tribes adopting similar policies. The Salish and Kootenai tribes on the Flathead Reservation in Montana have

control of their timber resources. They earn \$2 for every dollar they spend and have a much better managed forest than the Lolo National Forest, where the US government spends a dollar and makes 98 cents.

These are examples of tribes who are saying, “Let us do it our way. And it doesn’t mean we’re going to live together in some big communal village. It means we are going to revitalize our own governance structures.” I think giving Native Americans the freedom to enact these development policies is a key to renewing Indigenous economies.

**Movroydis:** How has this research been advanced in the classroom and in policy making, especially in informing younger generations of American Indian leaders?

**Anderson:** As in any society, we old people get a bit set in our ways. And I think tribal leaders who have seen generation after generation work through the bureaucracy and the white tape in which they have been wrapped find it difficult to adjust and

make changes. For that reason, we developed a seminar for Native American college students. On an annual basis, we convene a

weeklong seminar with Indigenous college students and tell them what we have learned about the history of Indigenous economies. We bring in tribal leaders who are developing governance structures that are driving prosperity on reservations.

Ernest Sickey and his son David have participated in our seminars. Both have served as chair of the Coshatta tribe, which is now the third-largest private employer in Louisiana. My hope is that having the opportunity to hear from leaders like Ernest or David motivates students to envision what is possible in their own communities.

Our seminars have featured legal experts such as Bob Miller, a law professor at Arizona State University. Bob has written a wonderful book, *Reservation “Capitalism.”* The title tells it all. Bob, a citizen of the Eastern Shawnee and a judge for various other tribes, has a wealth of policy experience in Indian affairs and has been a very effective educator to our student audiences.

We believe that these up-and-coming Native American leaders will take the ideas they learn during the seminar, digest them, and advance those that are most relevant to their respective tribes.

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***“If we live in a country that believes in freedom, then we should all enjoy the freedom to think, talk, and act for ourselves.”***

**Movroydis:** Is there anything else you hope readers will gain from *Renewing Indigenous Economies*?

**Anderson:** I always get a cold chill when I look back to the history of American Indians and, in particular, the history of Chief Joseph, a famous Nez Perce chief who left his reservation in Washington State to return to his ancestral lands. He was attacked by federal troops when his tribe was encamped in the Big Hole Basin in Montana. The troops eventually decimated the tribe with artillery fire. Chief Joseph and a small group of survivors attempted an escape to Canada, where they would be free men and women. They almost made it to the border when Chief Joseph and his band were captured by US Army cavalry. He was then “civilized,” and that meant trotting him in front of congressional committees and making him give speeches before audiences of influential people. And in one of those speeches, he embodied what tribal economies wrapped in colonial white tape are trying to break out of today. Chief Joseph said, “Let me be a free man, free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to talk, think, and act for myself—and I will obey every law or submit to the penalty.”

These words always cause me to become emotional. If we live in a country that believes in freedom, then we should all enjoy the freedom to think, talk, and act for ourselves. Those are freedoms that Native Americans haven’t yet fully realized. If the Hoover project can bring these ideas to the fore with tribal leaders, policy makers, and all of us who value liberty, this effort will be successful. ■

*Special to the Hoover Digest.*



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# *A Time for War— But Why?*

**In the shadow of Ukraine, economist Chris Blattman takes on the mysteries of violence: the nuances of group decision making, of personalities, and of the economic choices that trigger conflict.**

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**By Russ Roberts**

**Russ Roberts, EconTalk:** My guest is economist and author Chris Blattman. Our topic for today is his book, *Why We Fight: The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace*. Why did you write a book, of all things, on war?

**Christopher Blattman:** Well, I was working in conflict zones from about 2004 and initially working on how to relieve the worst effects of war on kids, on families—especially those who had been participating in the war. And that got me down a path, a part of my research, of just trying to figure out what works in terms of poverty alleviation in these extreme scenarios. When you're in these places, you can't help but wonder all the time, what is going on? Why is this happening? Why did this even occur in the first place?

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*Chris Blattman is the Ramalee E. Pearson Professor of Global Conflict Studies at the University of Chicago and author of **Why We Fight: The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace** (Viking, 2022). Russ Roberts is the John and Jean De Nault Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, a participant in Hoover's Human Prosperity Project, host of the podcast **EconTalk**, and the president of Shalem College in Jerusalem.*

Most of my research turned to understanding: Who participates? Why do people fight? Why are individuals violent? And then, more and more: Why are *groups* violent?

**Roberts:** This book is in a tradition that I both love and am suspicious of, which is using the economist's toolkit to understand various forms of human behavior. Before we go into the specifics of how you frame the problem, I'd

like you to talk about what we're going to call a meta-issue in this kind of work, incentives—you and I face incentives all the time, financial incentives,

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***“If we always assume everybody's crazy, we're not going to be very good at preventing future wars.”***

psychological incentives—and that's the bread and butter of much of economics work. Nations are a little more complicated because although it's easy to say Ukraine is resisting the Russian invasion or Russia invaded Ukraine, it of course is not—a nation is not an actor, a single, unified, purposive creature. Talk about how you think about that issue and how your book deals with that.

**Blattman:** There are two ways that I thought about this. Let's call them *principal-agent problems*—the fact that a group can't necessarily control its decision maker, right? We see that going on with, say, autocrats today and Putin's invasion of Ukraine. This isn't the people of Russia invading Ukraine. This is a cronyistic elite with some popular support, but by no means all.

But then there's also this problem—and I think it's maybe under-researched—where a lot of people are very quick to say, “Oh, so-and-so

misculated.” That's the classic explanation for World War I: “The foibles of these unaccountable leaders marched Europe into war. They

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***“War is costly. It's ruinous. So ruinous that it very seldom makes sense to fight.”***

sleepwalked into war.” The narrative that Vladimir Putin, for example, is the master strategist playing four-hundred-dimensional chess has disappeared overnight. It was just his foibles.

I give these narratives some credence. I think there's a lot of behavioral, psychological miscalculations. But people personalize it too much. We like to do this. We like to over-personalize groups by their leaders and over-attribute mistakes. Yet we have these big bureaucracies: even if Putin runs a

personalized state, there's a huge military and political bureaucracy. There's a big coalition that has a say, and they can't all be stupid and making all the same mistakes all the time.

And so, this book forced me to think more about the mistakes we make in groups—in group thinking, in bureaucracies.

**Roberts:** The easiest explanation for anything that's puzzling is, "Well, it's a mistake." Not a helpful explanation, although it could be true, of course. We understand people do miscalculate; they are overconfident; all of us make these kinds of mistakes all the time.

But there are often very strong forces working to make decisions that are maybe not mistakes. And, if we always assume everybody's crazy, we're not going to be very good at preventing future wars.

**Blattman:** There is this weird bifurcation. I think political economists and some realists, and a lot of international-relations scholars, are really quick to over-weight these systematic, root, strategic forces, which are really important. And then they totally discount any of the psychological stuff, whether it's mistakes or whether it's just what people have as principles or values. Everybody keeps making the same mistakes.

**Roberts:** It strikes me, in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that one of the common mistakes people make is assuming that Vladimir Putin is something like them. He's not. He's not like you. He's a Russian, which most people in the West literally don't understand. He's a former KGB person, which you don't understand. He is a member of a former Soviet set of actors who have all kinds of chips on their shoulders and baggage that you don't understand.

I remember the words of Hilaire Belloc, who wrote "The Pacifist." It's a very short poem:

Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight  
But Roaring Bill (who killed him) thought it right.

People have different attitudes toward violence, honor, territory, culture, their homeland, and their nation.

**Blattman:** One of the things that really struck me as I read account after account of different conflicts at different levels, whether it's gang wars, or insurgencies, or international wars, is that we're really bad at knowing what other people think. This is not a new insight from behavioral science. We tend to project our own preferences and our own beliefs on other people in a way that's incredibly stubborn.





[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

I have a friend who had written several books on the Irish, the Provisional IRA in particular. I went to visit him in Belfast for a few days, and I talked to him and to many people involved with the conflict. I toured the city a little bit. And my overall impression was, how many people thought that their response to some act of violence was just? That “oh, the other side would recognize that this punishment, the fact that I’m throwing a bomb at a police station, seems like an appropriate response to the latest challenge to me or the latest sort of injustice that was done to me. And they’ll surely understand that I’m not going to escalate things further.” Of course, that’s not true. The other side thinks, “Well, everyone will realize that I can’t find the person who threw that firebomb, but I can go into this neighborhood and arrest the thirty or forty suspects, round them up, beat them up a little bit, put them in jail. Everybody will understand that this is reasonable.”

## FATAL UNCERTAINTY

**Roberts:** So, let’s get to your book. You give five reasons for war. What are they?

**Blattman:** Even to explain the five, I think you have to start with this insight: war is costly. It’s ruinous. So ruinous that it very seldom makes sense to fight.

This is a game-theoretic insight; it’s also a commonsense insight. Sun Tzu and virtually every general who’s written a book on conflict for centuries has, in some sense, said this: it’s better to bargain than fight.

And most of the time, people do. Then this gravitational pull that peace has because of these costs—somehow, something rips you out of that orbit.

Two of the reasons are familiar to political economists and game theorists, who like to talk about imperfect information or, more broadly, a lot of uncertain situations.

One, if you genuinely don’t know the strength of your opponent and they have, in addition, an incentive to bluff—to pretend they’re strong in order to get the best deal—on occasion, your best incentive might be to attack to find out.

Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.

The second is what game-theorist political economists called the *commitment problem*. One of the best examples is called a preventative war. If your opponent’s going to be much stronger in the future, and you could do



something to head that off right now—say, by invading them and stopping them from doing that—then you’ll do so.

Now, your opponent could say, “Whoa. OK. Before you do that, why don’t I promise—I’ll give you a good deal in the future when I’m powerful, don’t worry.” Or “I’ll give up something that’s going to make me powerful, just enough to make you not attack me now.” And in fact, that happens a lot. But when they can’t commit to do that, perhaps because there’s no international architecture to make sure you do, you have this so-called commitment problem.

Both of these are dominant explanations for everything from World War I to the US invasion of Iraq. There’s a lot of relevance for understanding Russia and Ukraine: the power shifts, the rise of Russia vis-à-vis Germany, the rapid rise of Russia vis-à-vis Germany in World War I. The possibility that Saddam Hussein could get a nuclear bomb or other weapons of mass destruction. And, in this case, the possibility that Ukraine could grow close to the West and be armed by the West to the point where maybe it has the long-range missiles to harm Russia.

And then you layer on the uncertainty. We can send in weapons inspectors to Iraq and say, “Well, maybe we can be *mostly* confident that the capability is not there.” But are we 100 percent confident? Are we 100 percent confident not just now, but that it can’t be restarted in six months or a year or five years? Are we pretty confident that Saddam Hussein would like to do this?

**Roberts:** I want to reiterate a couple of ideas in the book, which I love. Most of the time, there isn’t a war. Nations that don’t get along don’t fight all the time, because each side does realize that there’s an enormous cost.

**Blattman:** We forget that because we write millions and millions of blog posts and articles and TV coverage of the wars that happen. And then, for these conflicts that didn’t happen, we don’t write books. No one is going to write a book about the cruise missile that landed in peace.

**Roberts:** I don’t know if this Ukraine war is costly to Putin or not, yet. There’s a lot of deaths. I don’t know if he feels any harm. I don’t think he goes to bed at night saying, “What have I gotten myself into?” Is it costly to him? Stalin thought nothing, it appears, of sacrificing millions of his citizens to the German war machine. It was his defense mechanism for victory. I don’t know if there’s any cost to him. So, the costs are not necessarily borne by the decision makers.





***"IT'S BETTER TO BARGAIN": University of Chicago Professor Chris Blattman seeks to treat warfare as an exercise in group decision-making, a complex interplay of realism and psychological factors.*** [Jason Smith]

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**Blattman:** Which brings us to reason number three: if war is to be avoided precisely because it's costly, if the decision-maker doesn't bear those costs . . .

**Roberts:** Absolutely.

**Blattman:** . . . we still see the bargaining space, but it narrows. We talk about the *democratic peace* in political science [the proposition that democrat-

ic states never or almost never wage war on one another]. And this may be a self-serving statement for democracies, but I think there's a lot of truth

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**“No one is going to write a book about the cruise missile that landed in peace.”**

to that. There's this thing I call *unchecked leaders*, which is to say they're not internalizing costs; or they have their own private incentives to go to war.

Over-centralized power may be the most fundamental root of all conflict and warfare. I argue it accentuates uncertainty, it accentuates commitment problems, and it accentuates these psychological problems. It's a much deeper and more systematic problem and helps us understand where we're going to see conflict in the world, why we might see more, why we might see less over time.

**Roberts:** What are the next two reasons?

**Blattman:** The next two, I think, are gifted to us by a mix of sociology and psychology and behavioral science. I won't say they've been ignored by game theory and political economy, by any means, but I think they get overlooked and understudied.

Sometimes we have stable, arguably rational preferences—things that we just value. We have tastes, we have preferences, we have principles, and they're not all summed up by how much we value that material pie. We can also value status, we can value vengeance, we can value an ideal, we can value the extermination of a competing idea or identity, and pursuing those is potentially terrible but comprehensible.

**Roberts:** So, the fourth one—this would be when I have an offer from someone who wants to buy my house, and he makes me an offer that's 25 percent higher than anybody else's, but he treats me dismissively and without respect, and he's obnoxious. And I just can't stand the idea of him living in my house, so I don't take the highest bid. I think some economists would call that irrational, and you're pointing out it's *not* irrational. We care about things other than how much money we have.

**Blattman:** Right.

**Roberts:** We don't just care about how many toys and vacations and shirts we have. We care about our dignity and our pride and our respect. And we also, by the way, can be a little bit vengeful. So, we might get a lot of pleasure from keeping that person from enjoying our house.

**Blattman:** The thing that might be irrational is that the guy who is buying your home, who treats you like dirt, that might be a mistake. Or maybe it's chance. So, it's hard to explain how you're going to turn to vengeance as a "state of preference"—a thing that could lead people to fight. If you look at, say, James Scott's studies of Southeast Asian peasant uprisings or Elisabeth Woods's work on Salvadoran insurgents, this is a major reason people join fights. And it may be a reason why entire societies go to war. "Yes, it was costly, but I get this other ethereal thing that I can only get through violence."

## THE PERSISTENCE OF ERROR

**Roberts:** Sometimes people lash out, right? There are a lot of reasons people do things where you say, "Gee, that was selfish. That was cruel." I don't think that proves people have a taste for violence. However, I do think we have *some* violence in our heart, many of us. You ignite it, and it will come to life.

**Blattman:** In the fifth area, we form persistent erroneous beliefs about the other side. And now you think about the strategic interaction that we started with, which is that I've got to assess your strength. You've got to assess mine, including my resolve.

And we've got to assess the costs of war. Any reasonable assessment of relative strength and cost of war, even if we're off a bit, we can both see that we need

to go to peace. But if we are way off—like, if I grossly overestimate—amidst the uncertainty . . . and maybe you do the same to me. That kind of error is amazingly common. Not just in war—it's amazingly common in finance, high-stakes economic interactions, the decisions of CEOs. There's a huge management literature on overconfident CEOs, overconfident investors, fund managers. It's astonishing in its persistence.

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***“Are we 100 percent confident? Are we 100 percent confident not just now, but . . . in six months or a year or five years?”***



Do Putin and his cabal, wide or narrow as it may be, think it's in their interest to keep fighting or not? If they think that giving up—rather, if they think that fighting will be more likely to preserve themselves in power—then it can

keep going. What's more, they might look at peace and say, "Actually, peace looks pretty costly now. Number one, all these sanctions, I'm not sure if

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***"There's a huge management literature on overconfident CEOs, overconfident investors, fund managers."***

they're going to go away. Maybe the US government would wipe this away, but all these private companies, all these boycotts, I'm not sure if that's going away. Maybe no one will buy our oil, and maybe we've lost this European customer for our oil and gas. So, peace might be less attractive if we're unable to unravel this."

And then he says, "Wait a second. The US president just called me a war criminal. They're formalizing proceedings, and that's going to make it hard for me to step down, because if I step down, eventually—even in ten years—whatever apparatus of control I've built, I'm no longer going to be a retired statesman. There'll be some incentive for them to extradite me." Or there's an added incentive for a palace coup. So, does that make him more likely to settle, or not?

We don't know. It's really complicated. The West is doing some things that are not obviously making peace more attractive. There's this famous quote from Sun Tzu, "You build your enemy a golden bridge to retreat along." I wish we were doing it. ■

*This interview was edited for length and clarity. Reprinted by permission from Russ Roberts's podcast EconTalk ([www.econtalk.org](http://www.econtalk.org)), a production of the Library of Economics and Liberty. © 2022 Liberty Fund Inc. All rights reserved.*



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# *Juneteenth and the Freedom Writers*

Those who celebrate liberty today stand on the shoulders of **African-American literary giants.**

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**By Mimi E St Johns and Russell A. Berman**

**J**uneteenth bequeaths a legacy of freedom, for all Americans and especially for African-Americans. The nineteenth of June marks the date in 1865 when Union troops reached Galveston, Texas, to proclaim slavery definitively ended. The holiday provides an opportunity to reflect on the long tradition of liberty that pervades American culture. For all the experience of inequality, unfairness, and racism that has coursed through the nation's history, so too has the aspiration for freedom. While we should not forget the bad of the past, it is vital to celebrate the good, the accomplishments of freedom, and the sacrifices they demanded. Remembering that legacy is never more appropriate than on Juneteenth “in the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

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

Focusing on the emancipatory accomplishments in American history is all the more important today, in the face of efforts to redefine the movement for equality, which has long been based on the freedom of opportunity, by distort-

ing it into appeals for “equity” that prescribe outcomes in advance, thereby degrading individual effort. This hostility to individual freedom was

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***Today, the movement for equality is being distorted into appeals for “equity” that degrade individual effort.***

clearly evident in the embrace of Marxism that originally informed the Black Lives Matter agenda. Yet the real freedom tradition—the tradition from the Declaration of Independence through Juneteenth and until today—is richer than the bizarre ideologies promoted by activists and media during recent decades. As an antidote to wokeness, it is salutary to turn to three brilliant writers from the African-American tradition—Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright—who testify to the rich breadth of freedom thinking.

### **“I DO NOT WEEP AT THE WORLD”**

Despite the differences among these writers, they share literary accomplishment. We turn to them not as career politicians who advocated particular programs, nor as social policy analysts, although at times they came close to policy in their descriptions of the experiences of African-Americans in the unequal structures of American society. What distinguishes them is their excellence in a medium that has a special relationship to freedom: literature or, more broadly, the aesthetic imagination. Through literary creations, writers have been able to criticize the failures of their surroundings and to imagine alternative possibilities.

Literary autonomy acts as a role model for the autonomy, the freedom, of individuals. This is why there is a tight bond between the world of imaginative writing and the freedom movement, nowhere more apparent than in the emancipatory ambitions of these three great authors. Their thinking of

***SHARPENED: Fiercely independent and outspoken, Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960) was a pillar of the Harlem Renaissance. She wrote, “I am not tragically colored. . . . Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less.”*** [Carl Van Vechten]

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liberty represents a challenge to any effort to constrain human creativity, whether as slavery, as discrimination, or as the thought and language policing of today's cancel culture. Literature and liberty are inseparable.

Zora Neale Hurston, a heterodox and staunchly libertarian thinker, was born in Alabama and raised in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, where

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***Their thinking of liberty represents a challenge to any effort to constrain human creativity. Literature and liberty are inseparable.***

sharecropper and Baptist preacher) would move the family to Jacksonville. Here she was no longer treated simply as little Zora, but as a colored girl in pre-civil rights America.

Regardless, Hurston would never view herself as a victim of her circumstances—she was fiercely independent and outspoken. Hurston penned a 1928 essay about her upbringing, titled “How it Feels to be Colored Me,” and in it she writes:

I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Sharpen her knife she did. Hurston attended Howard University and then became the sole black student at Columbia University. Despite the station of

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***The Communist Party, as Richard Wright observed, claimed a monopoly on advocating for African-American causes but in fact only exploited them.***

Hurston became a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance—a cultural

many of her stories were set. Until she was thirteen, the only whites she knew were the ones who passed in automobiles on their way to bigger cities. Soon, her father (a

black Americans at the time, she did not endorse the collectivist dogma of the American left. Instead, Hurston believed that hurt feelings or excuses should not stop anyone from success.

While at Columbia,

revival of African-American art, fashion, and literature. Her first book was a nonfiction work called *Barracoan*; it contained an interview with Cudjoe Lewis, the last presumed survivor of the Middle Passage. Hurston's best-known work, *Their Eyes*

*Were Watching God*, was published in 1937. The characters of her books were also in battles for self-determination and individualism. In *Their*

*Eyes Were Watching God*, the central figure, Janie Mae Crawford, is in a battle to liberate herself from the prejudice and violence she experiences.

Hurston forged her own path not only personally but also politically. During World War II, she began to write significant amounts about politics. In these writings, she challenged both communism and American imperialism. Hurston became a vocal opponent of the New Deal. In today's terminology, Hurston was incredibly anti-woke; she railed against what would eventually become known as affirmative action and was vehemently against social assistance. She once wrote:

It seems to me that if I say a whole system must be upset for me to win, I am saying that I cannot sit in the game and that safer rules must be made to give me a chance. I repudiate that. If others are in there, deal me a hand and let me see what I can make of it, even though I know some in there are dealing from the bottom and cheating like hell in other ways. Simply put, the world is not fair but that is no reason for the color of one's skin to change how they feel about things.

## **"I AM AN INVISIBLE MAN"**

Another author, Ralph Ellison, is heralded by thinkers on both the left and the right for his refusal to be defined by his race. He was born in 1913 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma—a common post-Emancipation destination for blacks looking to establish new communities and farms. His father, a construction foreman and delivery man,

loved literature and hoped his son would become a poet. Tragically, Ellison's

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***Writers such as these have long been able to criticize the failures of their surroundings and to imagine alternative possibilities.***

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***Black Americans are part of the American project, not separate.***





***VISIBLE: Ralph Ellison (1913–1994) focused on black Americans' quest for personal identity, defying not only racism but racial essentialism. "I was never more hated than when I tried to be honest," he wrote. "On the other hand, I've never been more loved and appreciated than when I tried to justify and affirm someone's mistaken beliefs."*** [Courtesy of Everett Collection–Newscom]

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father would die in an accident while moving a block of ice. As a child, Ellison worked as a busboy, a shoeshine boy, a hotel waiter, and a dentist's assistant to support the family. Eventually, he gained admission to the Tuskegee Institute.

Ellison's most famous work, *Invisible Man*, was published in 1952. (His posthumous novel is titled, appropriately, *Juneteenth*.) *Invisible Man* deals with a struggle for individuality in a world where black Americans were often assigned an identity. The narrator, an unnamed black man, finds not only racism to be an obstacle to his personal identity but political ideologies from his own race. Critiques of fanatical Black nationalists and the insidious nature of Marxism are prevalent throughout the book. The narrator eventually finds his own voice, saying,

I was never more hated than when I tried to be honest. Or when, even as just now I've tried to articulate exactly what I felt to be the truth. No one was satisfied—not even I. On the other hand, I've never been more loved and appreciated than when I tried to justify and affirm someone's mistaken beliefs. . . . I was pulled this way and that for longer than I can remember. And my problem was that I tried to go in everyone's way but my own. . . . So after years of trying to adapt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man.

Ellison rejected the beginnings of what would become the continual infusion of race into American higher education. Black Americans were part of the American project, not separate—black culture was ingrained in American culture. During a protest at Amherst College over racism on campus, Ellison told an audience: “Race is a factor in American life. . . . But it is also an excuse for not seeing ourselves as we really are, for not becoming what we thought we would become, for not creating what we promised to create. Let's stop being victims” [cited in *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*, by Arnold Rampersad]. Everyone, regardless of skin color, is ultimately in control of their own destiny. We should not view ourselves as victims of our circumstances; instead, we must craft ourselves into what we are—personal identity does not derive completely from one's race.

### **“WRITING WAS MY WAY OF SEEING”**

Ellison's longtime friend Richard Wright also deviated from the conventional path of black intellectual thought. He was born in 1908 in Mississippi. His grandparents had been slaves, and both his grandfathers had fought against the Confederacy, one joining the United States Colored Troops, the other, having escaped slavery, enlisting in the Navy. The meaning of Juneteenth was therefore inscribed in the family history. Wright moved to Chicago as part of the Great Migration. His novel *Native Son* of 1940 and his 1945 autobiography, *Black Boy*, were very successful, making Wright the first bestselling



African-American author. In his writings, over decades, he described the conditions of African-American life and the virulence of racism.

In Chicago, Wright became involved with the Communist Party, joining in 1933 and remaining a member until the early 1940s. It was an era, the depths of the Great Depression, when intellectuals fell under the sway of communism. But as party members, they had to face demands to subordinate their intellect to directives from Moscow, the dramatic shift in world politics when Stalin entered a pact with Hitler in 1939, and the manipulative behavior of Communist leaders toward their own members. Wright's eventual break with the party is one example of the many departures from communism that marked American—and not only American—cultural life in the face of Stalinism. Wright has much to contribute to the tradition of thinking freedom through his analysis of his experience with Communists. As an increasingly existentialist thinker, he insisted on the individual's claim to autonomy and dignity, whether against bigoted structures of racial discrimination or against the authoritarian control of a political party.

Wright makes his criticism of communism explicit in his epic novel *The Outsider* of 1953, written in the midst of the Cold War, when few could have any illusions about Soviet ambitions: the Iron Curtain had long ago fallen across Europe. The novel looks back to the 1930s, describing a scene in which the protagonist has just been recruited into a Communist cell, despite his own internal doubts. Suddenly, he witnesses how a party boss dresses down a dissident party member:

“Goddamn your damned feelings! . . . Who cares about what you feel? Insofar as the Party is concerned, you’ve got no damned feelings. . . . And being a Communist is not easy. It means negating yourself, blotting out your personal life and listening only to the voice of the Party. . . . Don’t think that you are indispensable because you’re black and the Party needs you. Hell, no! The Party can find others to do what it wants! . . . The Party needs this obedience to carry out its aims. And what are those aims? The liberation of the working class and the defense of the Soviet Union.”

***HEARD: A champion of African-American autonomy and freedom to speak (opposite), Richard Wright (1908–1960) refused to yield to fear or ideological manipulation. Recalling his disillusion with communism, he wrote, “It was inconceivable to me, though bred in the lap of Southern hate, that a man could not have his say.” [Gordon Parks]***

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The Communist Party claimed a monopoly on advocating for African-American causes but in fact only exploited them for other goals.

Wright makes the internal hypocrisy of communism crystal clear: the party preaches liberation but demands subordination. At the core of Wright's anti-communism is his insistence on individual freedom. In an important earlier autobiographical essay, "I Tried to be a Communist," published in the *Atlantic* in 1944—this was his public break with the party—he linked his resistance to the Communist demands to the strength he had developed in the face of adversity in America: "It was not courage that made me oppose the party. I simply did not know any better. It was inconceivable to me, though bred in the lap of Southern hate, that a man could not have his say. I had spent a third of my life traveling from the place of my birth to the North just to talk freely, to escape the pressure of fear. And now I was facing fear again." In other words: racism in the South and communism in the North were twin forms of abuse.

For Wright, the ex-Communist, the crux of the matter was his refusal to succumb to fear, a refusal grounded in his commitment to writing and the very core of his being: "My writing was my way of seeing, my way of living, my way of feeling; and who could change his sight, his sense of direction, his senses?"

Richard Wright wanted to have "his say"—no language policing for him, whether in the old Communist manner or today's woke talk. Ralph Ellison advocated for black Americans to craft their own identities in the midst of people and ideologies telling them who to be. Zora Neale Hurston's free-thinking libertarianism and anti-collectivism were entirely her own liberated path. Together these three writers remind us of the treasure of freedom which we celebrate on Juneteenth. ■

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# Warriors for Good

**What, exactly, is worth fighting for? A Veterans Day reflection by Hoover fellow H. R. McMaster.**

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In war, the moral is to the material as three to one.

—Napoleon Bonaparte

**T**he warrior ethos that emerged in the modern Western world has its origins in the warrior myth as embodied by Achilles, the hero of the Trojan War in the *Iliad*. In America, the warrior ethos evolved into a covenant that binds warriors to one another and to the citizens in whose name they fight and serve. It is grounded in values such as courage, honor, and self-sacrifice. The ethos reminds warriors of what society expects of them and what they expect of themselves.

One might wonder why this esoteric topic deserves attention, especially when our nation has experienced multiple traumas and faces many challenges at home and abroad. Understanding war and warriors is necessary if societies and governments are to make sound judgments concerning military policy. American citizens' expectations help the military establish standards that guide recruitment, training, personnel policies, and even how forces organize and modernize to deter war and defend the nation. In democracies,

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if citizens do not understand war or are unsympathetic to the warrior ethos, it will become difficult to maintain the requirements of military effectiveness and to recruit the best young people into military service.

The warrior ethos is what makes combat units effective. And because it is foundational to norms involving professional ethics, discipline, and discrimination in the use of force, the warrior ethos is essential to making war less inhumane.

The warrior ethos is at risk. If lost, it might be regained only at an exorbitant price.

## **WHY SACRIFICE?**

The warrior ethos is normative, and it appears in various forms across the armed services. For example, the US Army lists its values as loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Recognizing the demands that protracted conflicts against brutal and determined enemies in Afghanistan and Iraq were placing on soldiers, the Army formalized the warrior ethos as the heart of a creed that every soldier is meant to internalize in basic training.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

Apparent in those four pledges is willingness to sacrifice for the mission and for one another.

Good combat leaders put mission accomplishment and the survival and well-being of those they lead before their own well-being, to inspire warriors to act in ways contrary to the natural drive of self-preservation. But warriors fight mainly for one another and to preserve their own and their unit's honor. Good combat units are like a family whose brothers and sisters in arms feel deep affection for one another. As Paul Robinson points out in *Military Honour and the Conduct of War*, "honour spurs men to fight in two ways: positively, through the desire to display virtue and win honour; and negatively, through a desire to avoid dishonour or shame." Warriors expect to take risks and make sacrifices to accomplish the mission, protect their fellow warriors, and safeguard innocents.

The warrior ethos is a constant through changes in tactics and weapons. As John Keegan observed in *The Face of Battle*, his classic 1976 study of

combat in the same geographic area across five centuries, from Agincourt (1415) to Waterloo (1815) to the Somme (1916), what battles have in common is human: “the behaviour of men struggling to reconcile their instinct for self-preservation, their sense of honour, and the achievement of some aim over which other men are ready to kill them.” He observed that the study of battle is “always a study of solidarity and usually also of disintegration—for it is toward the disintegration of human groups that battle is directed.” The warrior ethos is foundational to maintaining the cohesion of one’s “human group” and generating the courage and combat prowess necessary to disintegrate the enemy’s. Unit cohesion derives from soldiers’ trust and confidence in their leaders and in their team.

The need to develop confident, cohesive teams to withstand the test of battle is timeless. In her book *Stoic Warriors*, Nancy Sherman quotes the Stoic philosopher Seneca to

describe training as a form of “bulletproofing” warriors against the debilitating effects of fear: “A large part of the evil consists in its

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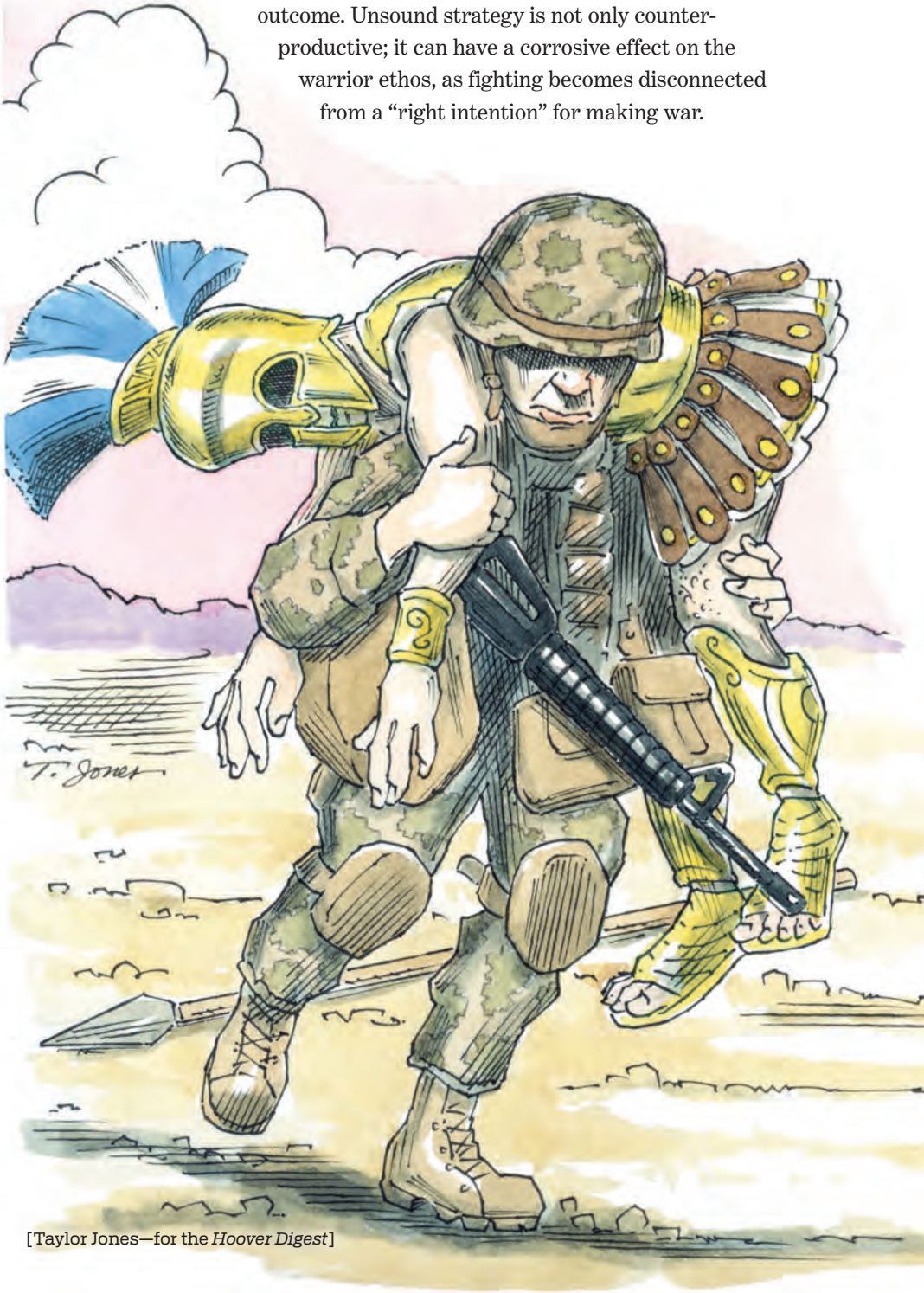
***The warrior ethos is what makes combat units effective. It also is essential to making war less inhumane.***

novelty,” but “if evil has been pondered beforehand, the blow is gentle when it comes.” Confidence is a necessary ingredient for courage because it serves as a psychological and emotional bulwark against fear. Fear is debilitating in battle because it can lead to hesitation and allow the enemy to gain the initiative. Fear can also lead to poor decisions that place fellow soldiers or noncombatants at unnecessary risk. Fear can erode discipline and, over time, cause the psychological, moral, and ethical disintegration of the small units (e.g., squads, platoons, and companies) that are the foundation of combat effectiveness.

Warriors fight mainly for one another, but their willingness to sacrifice and ability to overcome fear are based also on their knowledge that they are fighting to realize a worthy, just intention. Understanding that their efforts are meaningful bolsters resilience under conditions of hardship and persistent danger. “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*,” as Nietzsche observed.

That is why flawed policies and strategies originating in Washington can have a debilitating effect on combat units fighting halfway around the world. A true test to determine the soundness of wartime strategy is to ask platoon leaders whether they can explain to their soldiers how the risks they will take or the sacrifices some may make on an operation will contribute to a worthy

outcome. Unsound strategy is not only counter-productive; it can have a corrosive effect on the warrior ethos, as fighting becomes disconnected from a “right intention” for making war.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

Knowing that sacrifices made in war are in pursuit of a just and worthy end is important to preserving the warrior ethos, sustaining the will to fight, and helping combat veterans cope with the residual effects of physical and emotional trauma.

## **MISTRUST AND DIVISION**

The lost war in Afghanistan evokes memories of the lost war in Vietnam. Sadly, the analogy goes beyond counterposed images of the evacuations of the Saigon embassy in 1975 and the Kabul airport in 2021.

Flawed strategy during the Vietnam War, combined with destructive personnel and draft policies, eroded trust within the military while the war's unpopularity eroded trust among the military, civilian leaders, and the American people. Military professionalism eroded, as did the quality of the force. Racial and social tensions, drug use, and loss of confidence in the officer corps led to breakdowns in discipline and unethical conduct. The bonds of sacred trust foundational to the warrior ethos reached a breaking point.

In the 1970s, multiple crises, including stagflation, oil shortages, the Watergate affair, the first resignation of an American president, and the 444-day hostage crisis that followed the Iranian Revolution added to the trauma of a lost war. Pessimism pervaded.

The experiences of recent years seem to rhyme with those of the 1970s. The traumas of a pandemic, a recession, vitriolic partisan political divisions, social divisions laid bare by George Floyd's murder and the violent aftermath, an assault on the Capitol, and false claims of widespread election fraud reduced confidence in our democratic institutions and processes. The erosion of trust and America's shrinking confidence are diminishing the trust that binds warriors to one another and to society at a time when dangers to our security are increasing.

Most Americans understand little about war or warriors. Because fewer than 1 percent of the population serves, fewer and fewer Americans are connected to our professional military. Unfamiliarity with the warrior ethos, the promotion of philosophies inimical to the sacred trust foundational to it, and leaders' lack of commitment to achieve outcomes worthy of the risks, costs, and sacrifices in war are eroding America's ability to fight and win.

Popular culture waters down and coarsens the warrior ethos. Warriors are often portrayed as fragile or traumatized human beings. Hollywood tells us little about the warrior's calling or commitment to his or her fellow warriors, or about what compels him or her to act courageously, endure hardships, take risks, or make sacrifices.

The most damaging misconception of warriors and the warrior ethos may be the tendency to portray warriors as victims who enjoy no authorship over their future. Resilience in combat depends on soldiers' confidence in their ability to exert agency over the enemy through a sustained effort. Reporting during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, focused mainly on US and coalition casualty figures without an explanation of the purpose of military operations

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***Understanding that their efforts are meaningful bolsters warriors' resilience under conditions of hardship and danger.***

or their effects on the enemy. A lack of reporting about the enemy contributed to the idea that it was time to end an “endless war”; the American people had lost perspective on

what was at stake. An imaginary version of the Taliban was then presented as an organization willing to share power, separate from Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, and be sympathetic to Western priorities.

Fundamental misunderstanding of the warrior ethos is apparent even among those who command and have oversight of the military. Lincoln's words at Gettysburg—that the nation would remain “dedicated to the great task remaining”—contrast with the postmodern tendency to assume that warriors want pity instead of leaders who will follow through politically and integrate the military with other instruments of national power to secure worthy outcomes.

Warriors are neither victims nor machines. Combat is a profoundly human experience. American warriors are also humanitarians, accepting risk for themselves to protect noncombatants, consistent with the laws of warfare.

## **SHORTSIGHTED DOCTRINES**

Some see the warrior ethos as a relic. They pursue exclusively scientific and technology-based solutions to the problem of future war. Misinterpretation of the lopsided military victory in the 1991 Gulf War gave rise to what became the orthodoxy of the “revolution in military affairs” (RMA), according to which American technological advantages would shift war fundamentally from the realm of uncertainty to the realm of certainty. The United States would use “dominant battlespace knowledge” to achieve “full-spectrum dominance” over any opponent. The US military would “shock and awe” opponents in its conduct of “rapid decisive operations.”

This flawed thinking ignored war's nature as a human and political activity that is fundamentally a contest of wills. It was a setup for many of the



difficulties the United States would encounter in the long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As the historian Conrad Crane has observed, there are two ways to fight: asymmetrically and stupidly. Potential enemies develop countermeasures to defeat what the United States might regard as the latest “decisive” capabilities. Today’s hopes for artificial-intelligence technologies echo what the historian Mark Clodfelter has described in *Beneficial Bombing* as the “progressive doctrine”—it returns in a new guise every few decades—of rapid victory from a distance through airpower. But as Clausewitz observed in *On War*,

kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.

Others will argue that the warrior ethos is unnecessary since war itself will soon be made a relic. Arguments that technology has fundamentally changed war and that war no longer has any utility are reminiscent of wishful thinking before World War I. In Europe, Jan Bloch, Norman Angell, and others believed in 1914 that war had become so irrational a means of settling disputes that sensible people would never again fight one.

Based on the conceit that wars end when one side disengages, the complete US withdrawal from Iraq set conditions for the rise of ISIS less than three years later. In a further astonishing failure to learn from even proximate historical experience, the United States withdrew from Afghanistan under the assumption that surrender to the Taliban would be a step toward “ending endless wars.”

If the Defense Department fails to focus on ensuring the ability to fight and win, confused priorities threaten to dilute the warrior ethos and create uncertainty about what the military is for. A failure to think clearly about future war and recognize the enduring need for the warrior ethos could also dissipate the military’s abilities to deter war and to recover from strategic surprise once the true contours of a war reveal themselves.

## **IDEOLOGICAL HARM**

Still, wishful thinking, fantastical theories of future war, and confused priorities are in fact not the greatest threat to the warrior ethos.



Once confined to academia, the categorization of people as either hapless victims or privileged oppressors has infected the broader culture and has, under the Biden administration, made inroads into military institutions. For example, elements of critical race theory (CRT) blame power structures and intractable corrupting forces for a victim-oppressor dichotomy. But nothing could be more debilitating to combat effectiveness than adherence to CRT's proposal that people be judged mainly by identity category rather than by character and ability to contribute to a team. Such ideas would, if accepted by the military, destroy unit cohesion in an institution in which the stakes are life and death.

Such theories are incompatible with the warrior ethos in other ways. They valorize victimhood and view people as fragile creatures who must be protected from all threats, including injurious and offensive words. They advance a culture of "safetyism" and risk aversion that robs warriors of their agency, cedes the initiative to the enemy, and stifles the bold action, creativity, and innovation that are essential to winning battles at the lowest possible cost.

Other harmful theories amount to expressions of societal self-loathing and threaten to weaken the bonds of sacred trust among warriors. Postcolonial theory, which sees the ills of the world today in part as derivative of the political, economic, and social impact of European colonial rule across much of the world in the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, has reinforced the New Left interpretation of history, which gained influence across much of the academy during and after the Vietnam War. Postcolonial and New Left

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***Hollywood tells us little about the warrior's calling or commitment, or about what compels him or her to act courageously, endure hardships, take risks, or make sacrifices.***

history is often warped by the desire to support social and political agendas such as advocacy of social-justice activism and demands to "decolonize" everything from academic curricula to scientific

research to hairstyles. Postcolonial and New Left historians are often joined by those in the so-called realist school, who see assertive US foreign policy and military engagement as a form of imperialism that generates enemies and perpetuates conflicts.

As a result, many college and secondary-school students learn that the ills of the modern era before 1945 were due to colonialism and that the ills of the world after 1945 are due to "capitalist imperialism." Schools are driving an interpretation of history in which America's framers, rather than being celebrated for

inaugurating an unprecedented and enduring experiment in democracy, must be condemned for complicity in the evils of slavery and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. If children in our free society are taught that their nation is not worth defending, why should they volunteer to defend it?

An observation that G. K. Chesterton made in the *Illustrated London News* in 1911 holds true today: “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”

If, as in Afghanistan, leaders send men and women into battle without dedicating themselves to the achievement of a worthy outcome, how can warriors be expected to volunteer for service, take risks, and make sacrifices? Multiple US administrations stopped actively targeting the Taliban, gave the enemy a timeline for US withdrawal, and then pursued a negotiated settlement. Winning in war still means convincing the enemy that he is defeated, but America’s short-term approach to the long-term problem of Afghanistan and the persistent promises of imminent withdrawal lengthened the war, made it more costly, weakened our Afghan allies, and strengthened the Taliban, their jihadist terrorist allies, and their Pakistani sponsors.

In contrast to the mass mobilization of World War II and the mainly draft armies of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, today’s small volunteer armed forces leave many Americans without a direct stake in the fighting. As three consecutive presidents told the American people that the war in Afghanistan was not worth continued sacrifice, it was typical for many citizens to profess support for the troops but not the war. Although their sentiment was preferable to the scorn many people directed at those who did their duty in Vietnam, it will prove difficult for American warriors to maintain bonds of trust with citizens who do not believe that they are engaged in an endeavor that justifies killing others and risking their own lives.

## **CONFIDENCE AND PREPARATION**

All Americans have a role in preserving the warrior ethos. This will demand efforts to better understand war and warriors, a rejection of the destructive elements of critical theories, and a concerted effort to improve not only our nation’s strategic competence but also our confidence in our democratic principles and institutions.

Those who confuse the study of war and strategy with militarism might be reminded of George Washington’s words: “To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.”

Military and diplomatic history can also help improve strategic competence and strengthen trust between warriors and those responsible for

consolidating hard-won military gains into political outcomes. Strategic studies might adopt Richard Betts’s definition of strategy as not only the “link between military means and political ends, the scheme for how to make one produce the other,” but also the “essential ingredient for making war either politically effective or morally tenable.”

Leaders must explain to the American people the nature of the wars and conflicts in which their sons and daughters fight. Citizens need to know what is at stake and what is the strategy to achieve an outcome worthy of costs, risks, and sacrifices. As General George C. Marshall observed in an address

to the American Historical Association in 1939, “in our democracy, where the government is truly an agent of the popular will,” foreign policy and military

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***Winning in war will always mean convincing the enemy that he is defeated.***

policy are “dependent on public opinion” and our policies and strategies “will be as good or bad as the public is well informed or poorly informed regarding the factors that bear on the subject.”

Restoring confidence in our common identity as Americans and in our democratic institutions is crucial to attracting young men and women to serve. Ignorance of history—compounded by the abuse of history—saps our national pride and undermines our ability to work together and improve our nation and our society. Pride in the nation should derive not from a contrived happy view of history but rather from a recognition that the American experiment in freedom and democracy always was, and remains, a work in progress. ■

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# *The Man Who Told the Truth*

**The late Hoover historian Robert Conquest devoted himself to exposing the truth about Soviet communism and its atrocities, and his writings helped end those atrocities. Why he remains relevant today—and is celebrated as a hero in Eastern European nations, including Ukraine.**

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**By Elizabeth Conquest**

History is not some past from which we are cut off. We are merely at its forward edge as it unrolls.

—Robert Conquest, 1993 Jefferson Lecture

**R**obert Conquest once asked whether the present leaders of Russia would be willing to kill millions of foreigners or suffer a loss of millions of their own subjects. Once again this has been definitively answered in the affirmative. In *The Harvest of Sorrow*—his book on the 1932–33 Ukrainian famine—he wrote:

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*Robert Conquest (1917–2015) was a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and the author of twenty-one books on Soviet history, politics, and international affairs. Elizabeth Conquest, his widow, is the author of **The Colour of Doubt**—a study of “Movement” poetry—and the editor of Robert Conquest’s **Collected Poems** (Waywiser Press, 2020). She is currently editing **The Selected Letters of Robert Conquest**.*

The main lesson seems to be that the Communist ideology provided the motivation for an unprecedented massacre of men, women, and children. . . . The fact that the older leaders were direct accomplices in the actual killing of millions of Ukrainians and others, in order to establish the political and social order prescribed by their doctrine, and that the young leaders still justify the procedure, may perhaps be regarded as not without some relevance. Thus, as we have suggested earlier, the events described in this book cannot be shrugged off as part of the dead past, too remote to be of any current significance. On the contrary, until those events can be freely and frankly investigated the present rulers of the USSR remain—and ostentatiously so—the heirs and accomplices of the dreadful history recounted in this book.

Conquest gave three reasons these events had not become public knowledge. First, they seemed far removed from Western experience. Second, Ukraine enjoyed a precarious and interrupted independence for only a few years, otherwise appearing on our maps for two centuries as merely part of

the Russian empire or the Soviet Union—with a language comparatively close to Russian. But the main obstacle was the ability of Josef Stalin and

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***The desire for knowledge about the Stalinist period remains—though once again it has been thwarted.***

the Soviet authorities to conceal or confuse facts, so that the true history of the country remained obscured not only to its own population but even more so to those in the West.

Conquest himself was a case in point. For a short period, like so many of his generation, he once thought of himself as a “communist,” standing as Communist candidate in the Winchester College Debating Society mock election of 1935; briefly carrying a rifle in the Spanish Civil War; and at Oxford in 1937 joining the Communist Party of Great Britain—leaving in 1938 after asking what the CP’s response would be should Chamberlain ever declare war on Germany. Having been told “Comrade, it is impossible that the bourgeois Chamberlain would ever declare war on Hitler,” it became clear to him then that the party line could not be taken seriously—though after the war, as a diplomat in Bulgaria, he observed what could happen when it *was* taken seriously.



***PROPHET: Robert Conquest stands in Red Square in 1989. After the fall of the Soviet Union, his works about the communist era were published in Russia and widely read. Today, schools in Ukraine teach *The Great Terror* and *The Harvest of Sorrow*; the US embassy in Kyiv assisted in these translations and Conquest waived all royalties for the Ukrainian editions.*** [Special to the Hoover Digest]

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In the summer of 1937, accompanied by a fellow undergraduate, he had backpacked across Europe from the Arctic to the Aegean. Originally, they had planned to include the USSR, but his companion was refused a visa, so he went on alone, reuniting with his friend in Bucharest. Fifty-two years would elapse before he returned to the country. Of that first visit, he wrote, “I missed what was hidden, I saw what was shown. In the Ukraine I was taken to a collective farm, doubtless the Potemkin kolkhoz ‘October Revolution’ then usually shown to foreign visitors.”

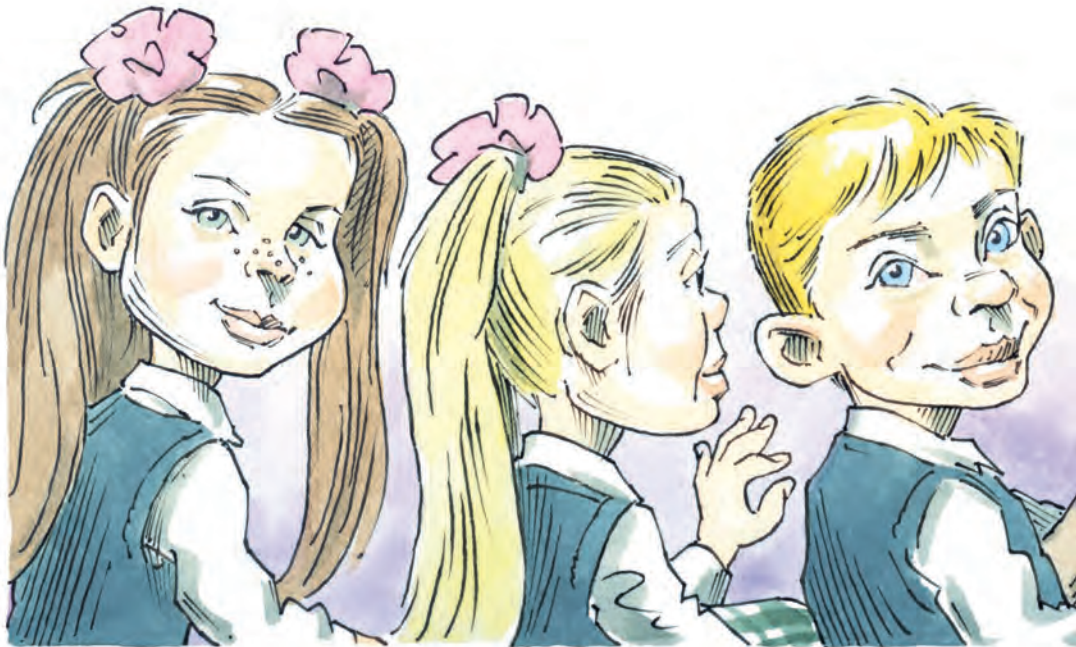
Even after 1964, and Khrushchev’s fall, there were serious attempts to clear Stalin’s name publicly, as well as by implication. The old apparat



continued to control all sources of knowledge; most of the recorded facts remained in the millions of secret files of the party, state, and secret police, and in myriads of minds.

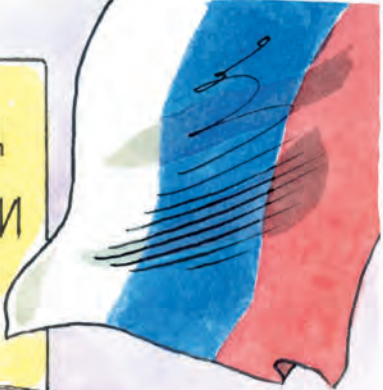
This was to change in 1968, with the publication of Conquest's *The Great Terror* (which has become the conventional term for the purges of the Stalinist period). The first printing sold out within weeks; it was reprinted time and time again to meet demand. And it was soon published in most Western languages—though also in Hindi, Arabic, Japanese, and Turkish. Its successor, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, has been continuously in print since 1991; a fiftieth-anniversary edition was issued in 2018. In the foreword to that edition, Anne Applebaum wrote:

More than four decades ago, back when the Soviet Union still existed and the Berlin Wall still stood, the KGB searched the apartment of a Russian friend of mine. Inevitably, they found what they were looking for: his large collection of *samizdat*—illegally printed magazines and books. They pounced on the bleary mimeographs, rifled through them, put some aside. One of them held up my friend's copy of *The Great Terror* in triumph. "Excellent, we've been wanting to read this for a long time," he declared.



T. Jones

Аа Бб Вв Гг Дд  
Ее Ёё Жж Зз Ии  
Йй Кк Лл Мм Нн  
Оо Пп Рр Сс Тт  
Уу Фф Хх Цц  
Шш Щщ  
Ъъ Ээ Юю



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

Nowadays, it's difficult even to conjure up the background necessary to explain that scene. Can anyone under forty imagine a world without satellite television and the Internet, a world in which television, radio, and borders were so heavily patrolled that it really was possible to cut off a very large country from the outside world?

Unfortunately, today we are seeing just how possible that can be in Putin's Russia.

The desire for knowledge about the Stalinist period remains—though once again thwarted. Memorial International, founded in 1989 to document political repressions carried out in the Soviet Union, built a database of victims of the Great Terror and gulag camps, but on December 28, 2021, the Russian Supreme Court ordered the closure of that organization. Conquest had visited their office in Moscow in 1991; the following year he wrote to a fellow poet

I am now hearing a lot from Russian friends who are only now finding out how their fathers and so on died, often devastating records of perishing under torture, or by forced starvation or sweated to death in Arctic camps. The sudden immediacy after so long is hell for the survivors, but they feel they have to know.

As Putin pumps out his delusional version of history, refuting that version becomes even more important. Conquest argued that Ukrainian liberty is, and should be, a key moral and political issue for the world. So long as Soviet suppression of the country cannot be seriously investigated or discussed in the country where those decisions took place, they are in no sense part of the past, but, on the contrary, a living issue.

Russia has made every effort to shield its population from the reality of the assault in Ukraine, closing down all independent news outlets and amending the criminal code to punish anyone publishing what the authorities deem to be false information about military operations in Ukraine. In a further attempt to control information, schoolchildren in Russia were bombarded with propaganda describing the invasion as “a special peacekeeping operation.” As Ann Simmons reported in the *Wall Street Journal*:

The almost hourlong session, broadcast online at noon local time, was conducted as part of the federal government's “patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation” project. School students were shown a video about the common history of the Slavic people. They were provided with lesson plans that explained





***IT ISN'T EVEN PAST: Vladimir Bukovsky, left, a Russian-born human rights activist, talks with Robert Conquest. As Conquest wrote in *The Harvest of Sorrow*, his book about the 1932–33 Ukrainian famine, “the events described in this book cannot be shrugged off as part of the dead past, too remote to be of any current significance.” The Soviet leaders of the time, he wrote, are “the heirs and accomplices of the dreadful history recounted in this book.”*** [Hoover Institution]

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that Russia and Ukraine are one nation, and the latter didn't even exist until the twentieth century. “We have always been part of the same family with a long history,” the video said. The students were also told that nationalists had falsely rewritten Ukraine's history and now ethnic Russians were the target of discrimination and the erasing of Russian language and culture. “So Russian-speaking Ukrainians are forbidden to speak Russian?” one student asked the instructors directing the lesson. “Yes, exactly,” the instructor replied. “In general, the Russian language is being expelled.” “I find it hard to believe that this is all happening,” the student responded.

Such disbelief may in part be due to widespread dissemination in the 1990s of Conquest's books on the Soviet period. The whole direction of glasnost, amongst other things, brought a mass of officially banned knowledge out

of hiding. In 1985 Conquest had been unfavorably compared with Joseph Goebbels, yet in 1990 almost everyone he met, including Soviet officials and scholars, had read *The Great Terror* (and increasingly, *The Harvest of Sorrow*)—either in the émigré Russian edition published in Florence or in *samizdat*—“under the pillow.”

*Novy Mir*, then the leading intellectual journal in Moscow, published a long chapter from *The Harvest of Sorrow* on the famine. Other excerpts appeared in *Rodin*. By that time a Russian edition of *The Great Terror* was being serialized (in a million copies each month) in *Neva*. The editor had made the decision to publish the book in whole not only as “by far the most serious work” on the period, but also because it exemplified the commitment of *Neva* to “a legal state and the deepening of democratization.” This was no more than one sign, if a very striking one, of the surrender of falsehood to truth, of the repudiation of the fearful interim of terror and lies.

The same may be said of Ukraine. *The Great Terror* and *The Harvest of Sorrow* have long been used in their schools; many of those fighting today know their country’s history through these books. The American embassy in Kyiv assisted in the translations, while Conquest waived all royalties for these Ukrainian editions.

Their existence was the result of a request made by the Ukraine 3000 International Charitable Foundation not long after Conquest had been invited to Kyiv to be awarded the Ukrainian Order of Merit.

One of the letters in the forthcoming *Selected Letters of Robert Conquest* is a response to the foundation’s request:

16 November 2005

Dear Oleksiy Kopytko,

Thank you for your inquiry about the possibility of translating and reprinting in Ukrainian for charity purposes (free distribution to libraries, universities, secondary schools, etc.) *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* and *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. I’m honoured, and happy to give you permission.

With best wishes,  
Robert Conquest

Conquest was unable to travel to Kyiv but the following June, Oleh Shamshur, Ukrainian ambassador to the United States, came to Stanford to present the medal to him. At the ceremony he praised Conquest: “For a new democratic Ukraine, you are a real national hero. . . . You have done

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***The Soviet authorities obscured the true history of Ukraine not only to their own people but to the West.***

a service to humanity.” Echoing lines from a poem by the national poet Taras Shevchenko (“Who are we? Whose sons? Of what sires? / By whom and why enchained?”), Ambassador Shamshur told the audience

Ukraine needs to know and understand its history in order to be able to make the right decisions for the future, and this is why the groundbreaking books of Dr. Conquest are so important for the developing Ukrainian democracy and its current and future generations of historians.

The terror-famine inflicted on Ukraine in 1932–33 was accompanied by a wide-ranging attack on all Ukrainian cultural and intellectual centers and leaders. Today, invading forces pursuing a scorched-earth policy are intent not only on bringing the country back into Russia’s orbit but also on destroying any vestige of Ukrainian history and culture. Museum staff across the country have raced to protect and hide their country’s cultural heritage, but much has been lost. In libraries in Russian-occupied territories in eastern Ukraine, military police have confiscated and destroyed Ukrainian literature and history textbooks. Children are being enlisted in the Russian cadet core, and a Moscow-dictated school curriculum has been imposed, using revisionist Russian history textbooks.

Reports of Russian atrocities continue to pour in; deliberate shell-

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***In the 1930s, it became clear to Conquest that the party line could not be taken seriously.***

ing of civilian targets is a hallmark of this war. Tens of thousands died in Mariupol alone, though the actual number may never be known: hiding evidence of mass murder, Russian forces brought in mobile cremation equipment to dispose of bodies, dumping thousands of others in mass graves in nearby villages.

Russia justifies mass murder by falsely claiming all Ukrainians are Nazis. The official Russian press service RIA Novosti published a lengthy op-ed



piece calling for a complete Russian takeover of Ukrainian territory and culture; liquidation of the Ukrainian elite (who might otherwise nurture Ukrainian culture); and punishment of the “social bog” that supported it by “retraining through ideological repression and fierce censorship, not only

in the political sphere but also in the sphere of culture and education. . . . The terms of denazification can in no way be less than one generation, which must be

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***Conquest argued that Ukrainian liberty is, and should be, a key moral and political issue for the world.***

born, grow up, and reach maturity under the conditions of denazification.”

In *The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (1960) and *The Nation Killers* (1970), Conquest documented deportations on an enormous scale: first, natives of the North Caucasus were forced from their homeland for allegedly collaborating with the Germans; then, between 1941 and 1949 in Ukraine and the Baltic states, half a million of those countries’ citizens were sent to Siberia on Stalin’s orders.

We now see a repeat of that strategy: in Mariupol, residents fleeing the shelling of their city were transported by Russian troops through Russian-controlled republics in eastern Ukraine to “filtration camps” before being forcibly deported to distant cities in Russia.

In late June, the Kremlin acknowledged taking 307,000 Ukrainian children—those separated from their parents, orphans from foster homes and

orphanages, and children whose parents had been killed in the fighting—across the border, pledging to integrate them into Russian society after

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***Many of the Ukrainians fighting today know their country’s history through Robert Conquest’s books.***

three years of “re-education.” Russians can now adopt Ukrainian children with minimal background checks and Moscow has made it easier to give them the country’s passport.

In a grim echo of the 1930s, when Ukrainian peasants had their grain expropriated, Russian troops have stolen more than 400,000 metric tons of Ukrainian grain, unlawfully exporting it via the Crimea. Elsewhere, farms are simply being taken over by invaders claiming the land, grain, and equipment now belong to them.

As of this writing, Putin has declared victory in seizing the eastern Ukrainian province of Luhansk. With his troops escalating their offensive

in neighboring Donetsk, we cannot know what the endgame will be. But on March 8, in an impassioned video link address to the British House of Commons, an exhausted but resolute Volodymyr Zelensky—paraphrasing Winston Churchill—vowed his country would continue to repel Russian invaders “in the forests, in the fields, on the shores and on the streets. . . . We will fight till the end. At sea. In the air. We will continue fighting for our land whatever the cost.”

Conquest was fond of quoting the passage in *Doctor Zhivago* where Pasternak refers to the “inhuman power of the lie.” Putin has been rewriting the history of Russia and will attempt to do the same in Ukraine if he succeeds in taking over the country. One hopes that his attempt to crush Ukraine ends in failure, but if not, we can expect *samvydav* editions of Conquest’s books.

Slava Ukraini! 🇺🇦

### *Special to the Hoover Digest.*



Available from the Hoover Institution Press is **485 Days at Majdanek**, by Jerzy Kwiatkowski. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit [www.hooverpress.org](http://www.hooverpress.org).



# *In the Room Where It Was Taped*

**Fifty years after the infamous Watergate break-in, scholars can now view the long-anticipated papers of John Ehrlichman—one of President Nixon’s most trusted aides, and an eyewitness to the power politics of 1970s Washington.**

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***By Jean McElwee Cannon***

**L**awyer, decorated war veteran, Eagle Scout, top political aide, environmentalist, writer, artist, wisecracker, strategist, and conspirator: John Ehrlichman, who lived a life that took him from land-use law in sleepy suburbs of Seattle to advising the president in the Oval Office to painting the beautiful deserts of New Mexico, witnessed the far reaches of the American experience throughout his storied life. This summer, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Watergate break-in that ultimately dissolved the presidency of Richard Nixon and the political careers of aides such as Ehrlichman, the Hoover Archives opened Ehrlichman’s personal papers—documents that will serve as a boon to researchers seeking to better understand the Nixon era and the influence over policy of Nixon’s trusted assistant to the president for domestic affairs.

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*Jean McElwee Cannon is curator for North American Collections at the Hoover Institution Library & Archives.*

Reflecting Ehrlichman's keen mind and myriad talents, the collection—which contains a medley of media, including scrapbooks, drawings, documents, photographs, letters, notes scrawled during Senate hearings, and even a bar of special edition Republican Convention soap—communicates the wide variety of episodes Ehrlichman experienced and his dedication to documenting his intersection with historic events. The abundance of documentation in the Ehrlichman collection also reminds us that the Nixon era and the Watergate scandal were watershed moments for the field of archives itself—moments in American history when the reaches of executive power were questioned, culminating in the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act of 1974 and the Presidential Records Act of 1978.

Similar to this year's January 6 hearings, Watergate testimonies captivated the nation, challenged the boundaries of presidential privilege, and emphasized the need for retaining government and personal documents in order to provide accountability at the top levels of power.

## AN ADVANCE MAN HITS THE TRAIL

Surprising for someone who in his forties would become part of the inner ring of advisers at the White House, Ehrlichman did not express grand political ambitions as a young man. Ehrlichman was born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1925 and moved to

Southern California

with his family in 1931,

where he attended Santa

Monica High School and

became an Eagle Scout.

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***The Nixon era and the Watergate scandal were watershed moments for the field of archives itself.***

Serving as a navigator with the Eighth Air Force during World War II, Ehrlichman was awarded a coveted Distinguished Flying Cross. Taking advantage of the GI Bill after the war, Ehrlichman earned a BA at UCLA in 1948 and graduated from Stanford University Law School in 1951. He then headed to Seattle to join a prominent firm, where he became a partner and an expert on land-use and zoning laws.

Ehrlichman's seemingly settled life would change, however—dramatically and irreversibly—when his old college friend, H. R. “Bob” Haldeman, phoned Ehrlichman to recruit him as what was known as an “advance man” for Richard Nixon's 1960 presidential campaign against John F. Kennedy. In his 1982 memoir *Witness to Power*—a galloping read packed with colorful anecdotes and wry character studies—Ehrlichman indicated that he moved toward political campaigning more out of restlessness than ideological conviction,

# THE WHITE HOUSE

JOHN D. EHRLICHMAN  
Assistant to the President  
for Domestic Affairs

IN RECOGNITION OF MY SPECIAL TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN YOUR INTEGRITY, PRUDENCE AND ABILITY, YOU ARE HEREBY AUTHORIZED TO DO AND PERFORM ALL SUCH MATTERS AND THINGS AS TO THE SAID OFFICE PERTAIN, OR AS MAY BE GIVEN YOU IN CHARGE HEREAFTER, AND TO HOLD SAID OFFICE DURING THE PLEASURE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

January 20, 1969

APPOINTED:

  
RICHARD NIXON  
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

  
SIGNATURE OF HOLDER



***WELCOME ABOARD: John Ehrlichman began his career at the White House tending to Richard Nixon's personal and official legal woes. By quickly earning Nixon's trust as a problem solver, he moved on to advising on issues of domestic public policy.*** [John Ehrlichman Collection—Hoover Institution Archives]

going so far as to describe his political leanings in the early 1960s as moderately middle-of-the-road. Seeking adventure and avoidance of sedentary life at a law office desk, Ehrlichman took Haldeman up on his offer and joined the whirlwind of the campaign trail.

As an advance man, Ehrlichman was responsible for duties as disparate as booking hotels to thanking high school bands who marched in parades to observing rival campaign activities. Scrapbooks from the Ehrlichman collection, meticulously con-

structed and annotated by their creator, speak to the excitement and adrenaline that advance men felt while crossing the country in the throes

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***Ehrlichman reflected that he moved toward political campaigning more out of restlessness than ideological conviction.***

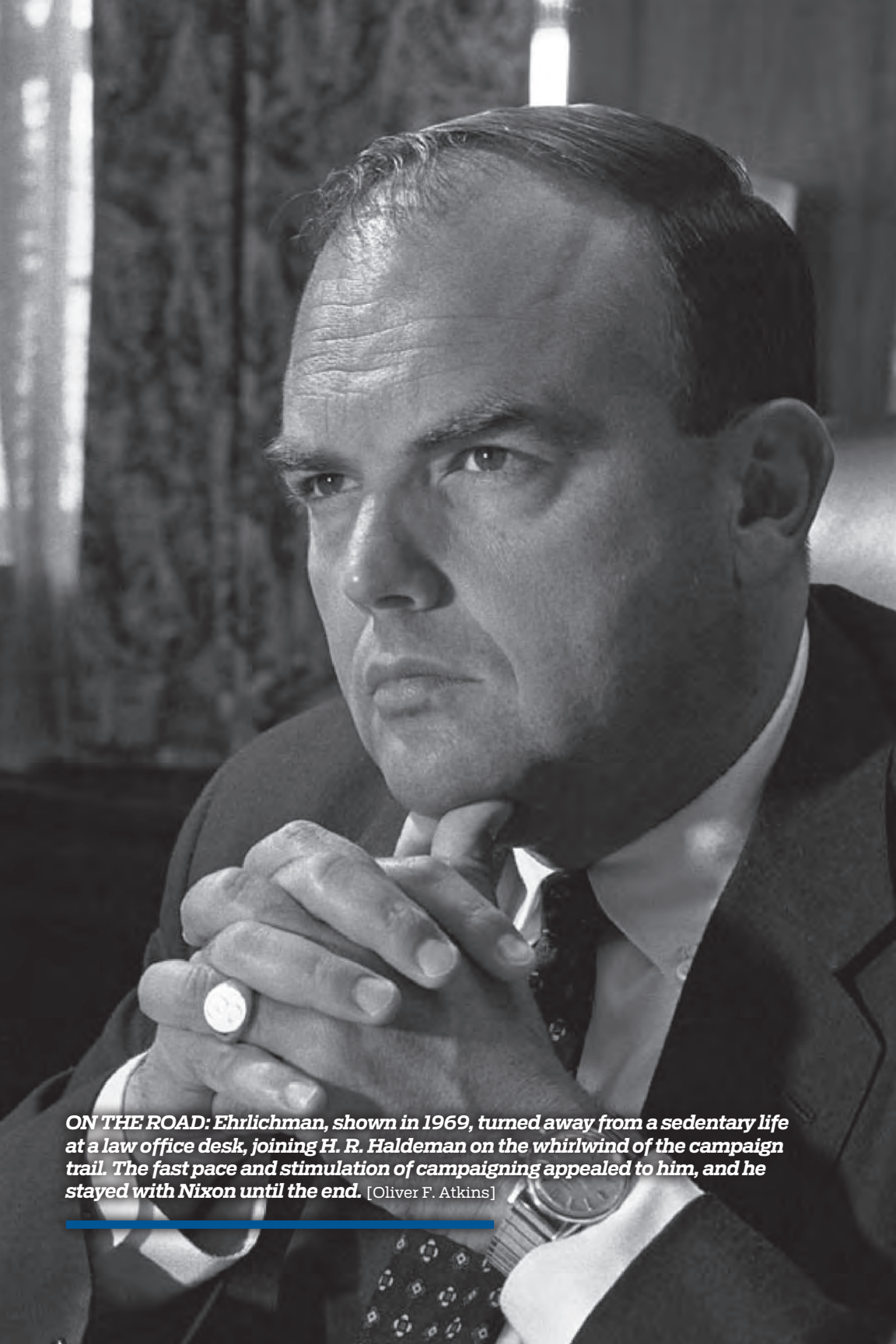
of a campaign. Ehrlichman kept photographs, ticket stubs, pins, maps, and detailed chronologies of his campaign trail travels. The fast pace and stimulation of campaigning appealed to Ehrlichman and thus he would remain faithful to Nixon through two failed campaigns, handling scheduling for Nixon's 1960 run against Kennedy and his 1962 gubernatorial race in California. He then served as tour director and organizer of convention activities for the victorious 1968 presidential bid against Hubert Humphrey. And the destination of that long road was, of course: the White House itself.

## **“THE BERLIN WALL”**

Ehrlichman began his career at the White House as counsel to the president and would cycle through many titles before resigning under the pressure of the Watergate investigation. Most notably he served as assistant to the president for domestic affairs, which launched him into the inner ring of Nixon's confidants. Ehrlichman and his old friend Haldeman, who had become Nixon's chief of staff and Man Friday (Haldeman famously quipped: “Every president needs an SOB—I'm Nixon's”) were quickly nicknamed “The Berlin Wall” by members of the White House staff. The moniker referenced not only the German roots of the duo's names, but their ability to isolate Nixon from other advisers and exert their own influence over consequential decisions being issued by the president.

Tough-minded and demanding lieutenants, they became gatekeepers to the Oval Office for many key figures of the administration and staff members involved in the Watergate cover-up, including White House counsel John Dean (whose testimony in front of the Senate investigative committee would





***ON THE ROAD: Ehrlichman, shown in 1969, turned away from a sedentary life at a law office desk, joining H. R. Haldeman on the whirlwind of the campaign trail. The fast pace and stimulation of campaigning appealed to him, and he stayed with Nixon until the end. [Oliver F. Atkins]***

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serve as a bombshell of blame in the Watergate scandal), Attorney General John Mitchell, who also ran Nixon's Committee to Re-elect the President (CREEP), and Mitchell's deputy director, Jeb Stuart Magruder, whose personal papers also are housed at the Hoover Archives and contain office files and notes from his time with CREEP.

Nixon's presidency saw many accomplishments, including the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency, the end of the Vietnam War, and the Apollo 11 moon landing, and Ehrlichman was privy to discussions on almost all major events and decisions at the White House. In domestic affairs, Ehrlichman had

great success utilizing his land-use legal expertise in expanding the Legacy of Parks Program alongside first lady Pat Nixon. The program

led to the transfer of 80,000 acres of underused federal land to state and local governments for recreational use—an accomplishment still enjoyed by millions of Americans today, in the form of public parks, playgrounds, jogging trails, bike paths, and environmental education centers.

During his tenure at the top levels of power, Ehrlichman was known (happily, for archivists and researchers) as an inveterate note-taker—and doodler. His associates often commented that as an aide Ehrlichman was never without pen and pad, taking detailed notes and sketching the individuals assembled in the room. Many of Ehrlichman's Oval Office notes were transferred to the National Archives after Nixon's resignation, deposited there as official White House documents owned by the federal government. Another batch of Ehrlichman's White House-era drawings were sold at auction in Santa Fe in the 1990s; happily, though, Ehrlichman collected his White House and Watergate doodles into a delightful 1987 self-published volume, *Sketches and Notes: Washington 1969–1975*, a copy of which has been deposited in his collection at Hoover. The drawings illuminate both intimate moments such as Oval Office meetings among Haldeman and Henry Kissinger and Nixon, and also dramatic public moments, such as Alexander Butterfield, the White House staffer who disclosed the existence of Nixon's White House taping system, listening to recordings during the Watergate trial. The Ehrlichman collection at Hoover houses extensive trial notes Ehrlichman created in 1974 as he sat in the courtroom during jury selection and witness testimony. Dozens of

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***Ehrlichman and Haldeman isolated President Nixon from other advisers and exerted their own influence over consequential decisions.***



***CONFIDANTS: Friends from college days at UCLA, John Ehrlichman and H. R. “Bob” Haldeman at first glance seemed unlikely candidates for the hallowed halls of the White House. Ehrlichman was a West Coast land-use lawyer; Haldeman had worked in advertising; neither had held an official federal post before 1969. Here the two confer aboard Air Force One.*** [Oliver F. Atkins]

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sketches in the notes capture the likenesses of lawyers, jurors, witnesses, the judge, and reporters.

## **AND THEN, WATERGATE**

The 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Building—and the slow, sinking political *Titanic* of the cover-up of the event—naturally came to consume members of the Nixon administration who otherwise would have been focused on foreign and domestic affairs. Watergate shifted public attention away from the achievements of the administration toward legal, moral, and political dimensions of the Nixon administration’s covert actions, raising critical questions about the limits, checks, and balances of executive power.

Though the Watergate scandal—then as now—contained a crossfire of testimonies and narratives provided by often-unreliable witnesses, Ehrlichman and his assistant, Egil “Bud” Krogh, are generally credited with overseeing





***AN AGENDA: Ehrlichman was a tough-minded and demanding lieutenant for Nixon, serving with Haldeman as a gatekeeper to the Oval Office for many key figures of the administration. Ehrlichman was instrumental in many of the administration's major undertakings, in one program utilizing his land-use expertise to expand the Legacy of Parks Program alongside first lady Pat Nixon.*** [Oliver F. Atkins]

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“the plumbers,” the group of burglars led by E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, who executed the Watergate break-in and the burglary at the office of the psychiatrist Lewis Fielding, therapist for whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers from the Rand Corporation in 1971. (Searching for files to discredit Ellsberg, the plumbers broke into Fielding’s office filing cabinet: it is now displayed at the Smithsonian as “The World’s Most Famous Filing Cabinet.”)

The complicated, prolonged public probe of the Watergate scandal would include massively scaled investigations, a mad scramble for evidence, back door deals, damning trials, and the resignations of most of Nixon’s top aides—including, in April 1973, Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Approval or knowledge of “Operation Gemstone” (Liddy’s codename for the Watergate break-in) led to trials for nearly all top aides. Ehrlichman was convicted of felony counts of conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and perjury in connection



***POINT MAN: Ehrlichman and his assistant, Egil “Bud” Krogh, oversaw “the plumbers,” the group of burglars led by Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy, who executed the Watergate break-in and the burglary at the office of the psychiatrist Lewis Fielding, therapist for whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg. Approval or knowledge of Watergate malfeasance led to trials for nearly all of Nixon’s top aides.*** [John Ehrlichman Collection—Hoover Institution Archives]

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with the Watergate and Fielding break-ins. Unlike many of his former associates, Ehrlichman did not wait for his appeals to run their long course and willingly entered prison in Safford, Arizona, in 1976 to serve his sentence. His collection at Hoover contains notes and correspondence from his time in Safford.

Released from prison in 1978—but disbarred due to his felony convictions—Ehrlichman settled in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he launched a career as a prolific artist and novelist. His political thrillers *The Company* (1976), *The Whole Truth* (1979), and *The China Card: A Novel* (1987) were best-sellers. Ehrlichman’s collection includes manuscripts and correspondence pertaining to his books and also the many magazine articles he published, mostly in *Parade*, from the late 1970s through the 1990s.

## RECORDS UNLOCK THE TRUTH

As the fiftieth anniversary of the Watergate era unfolds—and with it renewed interest and a publishing blitz on the topic—numerous new studies of the scandal have scrutinized how archives of all types informed (and continue to inform) our understanding of Nixon’s governing philosophies as well as the events of the break-in and cover-up: records official and unofficial; audio and telephonic; burned; possibly forged; shredded; unwittingly donated to the National Archives; imaginary; leaked accidentally to Senate committees; obtained by reporters in parking decks. The story of Watergate—both its execution and legacy—is essentially a story of archives, documentation, the power of record-keeping, and the mysteries of records lost.

As Sam Dash, chief counsel of the Senate Watergate Committee, recalled, “The Nixon White House probably put down on paper more of its ideas and activities, lawful and unlawful, than any other administration in the country’s history.” Historians will continue to probe for new records and scrutinize existing ones.

Garrett M. Graff, in his recently published, extensive study *Watergate: A New History*, makes a powerful argument for the Watergate investigation as a windfall moment for the use of new technologies and policies for evidence-seeking and record-keeping. In one of the many contradictions of Nixon’s personality, the president was secretive and often paranoid about leaks of information, yet also obsessed with documenting his internal activities so as to secure an august legacy as president—a conflict which perhaps explains the extensive White House taping schema that would eventually lead to his fall from grace. After realizing the vast incriminatory potential of the White House tapes, Nixon wanted to destroy the recordings but Congress, backed





***WHITE HOUSE ROCK: This famous picture of Elvis Presley and President Nixon shaking hands in the Oval Office is the most frequently requested photograph in the history of the National Archives. In 1994, Ehrlichman's former assistant at the White House, Egil "Bud" Krogh, published a book about Elvis's surprise visit to the White House in 1970. Records in Ehrlichman's collection show that Ehrlichman advised Krogh on The Day Elvis Met Nixon.*** [Oliver F. Atkins]

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by the Supreme Court, passed the Presidential Recordings and Materials Preservation Act in 1974 to seize the Nixon tapes and White House papers and place them in the National Archives. Four years later, Congress passed the Presidential Records Act of 1978 to establish government ownership of presidential records. A multi-page holograph manuscript documenting the talks between the National Archives and Nixon's lawyers held in the Ehrlichman collection begins frankly, "The relationship between Richard Nixon and the government's archivists has been the worst in history."

Graff also notes that during its investigation the Senate Watergate Committee made an incredible discovery: the Nixon re-election campaign, before



***EPILOGUE: John Ehrlichman appears on a British television show, *After Dark*, in 1987. After his political career ended, he published bestselling political thrillers *The Company* (1976), *The Whole Truth* (1979), and *The China Card: A Novel* (1987), and wrote magazine articles through the 1990s.*** [Creative Commons]

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the scandal broke, had turned over 1,100 boxes of records to the National Archives to be preserved for history and serve as a valuable resource for scholars. Overwhelmed by the volume of the files, archivists had not had the resources to catalog the records by the time the formal investigation started. To the committee's amazement, the files included all the White House political memos sent to CREEP deputy director Jeb Magruder; many of them incriminating. Graff makes the case for Watergate as the prototypical moment for machine-readable technologies, citing, "For the first time in a congressional inquiry, the staff used a computer to track the materials; the computer tapes and microfilms made cross-referencing testimony or inquiring about the events of a given day simple. Investigators were wowed."

Many mysteries of the Nixon and Watergate era were explained during the course of the Watergate investigation, Senate testimonies, subsequent trials, and the explosive publishing of memoirs by participants of the drama after the scandal simmered. But some mysteries may never be solved. Was there damning evidence removed from E. Howard Hunt's safe at the White

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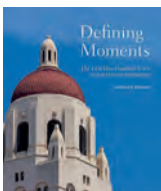
***Ehrlichman was convicted of conspiracy, obstruction of justice, and perjury in connection with the break-ins.***

the recent Watergate-centered Starz television series *Gaslit*—wherein Gray, frowning and morose, torches the documents on his barbecue grill after serving Dean a cheeseburger.) Other questions may be answered in time, and possibly with the assistance of new archival material: the Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, for example, contains restricted interview files to remain closed until the death of the interviewee or release by Woodward and Bernstein.

Bernstein provided probably one of the most prescient and lasting summations of the historic era of Nixon's administration and Watergate: "Everybody learned a long time ago not to try to predict what's going to happen in Watergate. You're always surprised at every turn." Bernstein's reflection is as true today, fifty years after the break-in, as it was when he stated it on the television show *Firing Line* on July 9, 1974. Journalists, scholars, and history buffs will continue to seek overlooked evidence, new narratives, smoking guns, and the truths behind the many allegations. John Ehrlichman's newly opened archives will no doubt allow researchers the chance to interpret both a central figure of the Nixon administration and one of the most fascinating and dramatic moments of American history. ■

House? What documents did John Dean strong-arm acting FBI director L. Patrick Gray into destroying? (This scene was dramatically rendered in

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



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# *Journey to Fascism*

**Ruth Ricci was a determined American who fell in love with adventure, Italy, and, alas, Mussolini's dream of empire. A timely exploration of wartime propaganda and "fake news."**

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***By Brian J. Griffith***

**I**n March 2022, Patrick Lancaster—an American YouTuber and self-styled “independent journalist”—traveled to the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine to “report” on the mounting tensions building up between Moscow and Kyiv. Embedded with a group of Russian soldiers in the coastal Ukrainian city of Mariupol, Lancaster followed the Russians, camera at the ready, as they repeatedly showed him what they claimed was irrefutable evidence of “neo-Nazi war crimes” committed by Ukrainian soldiers against innocent pro-Russian civilians during the preceding months. In one instance, the Russian soldiers led Lancaster through the remains of a primary school, which they claimed had been destroyed in an explosion by fleeing Ukrainian soldiers. In the building’s basement, the soldiers showed an easily convinced Lancaster the body of a local Ukrainian woman who, they alleged, had been brutally murdered by neo-Nazi members of the Ukrainian National Guard; they pointed to a “swastika painted in blood on her chest.”

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*Brian J. Griffith is a visiting instructor at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Scripps College.*



***ADVENTURER: Ruth Ricci (1894–1977), a native of Hilton, New York, was captivated with Italy’s colonial project in Africa, and indignant at what she saw as bigotry against Italians in the United States. She first worked as a volunteer nurse in the Second Italo-Ethiopian war and later roamed Italian-occupied Africa as what today would be termed an “embedded” photojournalist. Here she poses with an unidentified companion.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

While perhaps motivated by a sense of misplaced faith in his mission, Lancaster’s “reporting” on the war in Ukraine serves as little more than recycled Russian propaganda, intended to manipulate international public opinion with respect to the conflict’s origins, its purported moral justifications, and, perhaps most significantly, its intended outcomes. Indeed, as the journalist David Gilbert has subsequently reported, the explosion at the primary school that Lancaster was inspecting had, in fact, been “concocted by the Kremlin as a way to justify its imminent invasion.”

Lancaster’s story is by no means unique. Indeed, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, authoritarian strongmen, much like Vladimir Putin himself, cultivated relationships with sympathetic “independent journalists” whose job it was to reformulate and rebroadcast their dictatorships’ key messaging strategies to unsuspecting audiences well beyond their





***IL DUCE:*** Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's grandiose vision was to reconstitute the Roman empire along the shores of the Mediterranean. Italian forces had initially invaded Libya in 1911. During the campaign known as the "Pacification of Libya," Mussolini's troops attacked indigenous rebels and sealed control of the country in 1932. Italy invaded Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia) in 1935. [Wikimedia Commons]

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***CONQUERORS: Capping a military campaign that Italy carried out before its invasion of Ethiopia, Libyan colonial troops parade in front of King Victor Emanuel III of Italy and Governor Rodolfo Graziani during the king's visit to Cyrenaica in February 1932.*** [Wikimedia Commons]

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borders. Propagandists, often highly skilled, willingly disseminated “fake news” on behalf of authoritarian regimes on both the right and the left. One such figure, whose story I will recount here, was an interwar, pro-Fascist American woman by the name of Ruth Williams Ricci.



The story of Ruth Williams Ricci’s six-year entanglement with Benito Mussolini’s dictatorship begins with the “Ethiopian Crisis.” In October 1935, Fascist Italy invaded the East African kingdom of Ethiopia. Intended to demonstrate Italy’s sovereignty and military prowess to the so-called “plutocratic powers” (that is, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the Duce’s conquest of Haile Selassie I’s kingdom quickly unraveled into an international crisis, pitting Italy against the majority of the international community. And as the front pages of the major dailies in Paris, London, and New York City began to fill up with critical stories about Italy’s “barbaric” and “illegal” military campaign in East Africa, the regime began actively

searching for alternative channels for subtly reshaping public opinion within the non-Italian communities of Western Europe and North America.

It was within this context of an illegal war of conquest in East Africa, growing diplomatic tensions between Italy and the League of Nations, and rising anti-Italian sentiments in New York City and beyond that Ricci's plans for supporting her adopted *Patria* in its hour of need took shape. The weeks leading up to Italy's invasion, Ricci explains in her partially completed political memoir, *Mine Eyes Have Seen*, "were trying days . . . for people of Italian name and sympathy" in the United States, as there had been a "wave of feeling that swept this continent without logic, without justice, against Italy and the Italians." Reprobatations of both Italy generally and Fascism specifically were "bitter and constant," she elaborates, and for many Italian-Americans the "racial prejudices which had slowly faded during the past decade sprang into new being." It was rare, Ricci continues, "to find an individual who could or would discuss" the question of Italy's purported right to Ethiopia "soberly, sanely, [and] without bias or prejudice." Such "clever and subtle propaganda," she writes, constituted a conscious and deliberate campaign to "arouse public opinion" in America against Italy.

With such "injustices" in mind, Ricci began corresponding with the Italian consulate in New York City, offering her services as a registered nurse in support of the dictatorship's military campaign in Ethiopia. Any travel-related expenses, she assured

her contacts at the consulate, would be covered by her vociferously pro-Fascist Italian-American husband, James Vincent Ricci, thereby relieving

the regime of any undesirable financial commitments. In early December 1935, she began the first leg of her voyage to East Africa, *without* her husband, by way of the port of Naples.

Between February and May 1936, Ricci served Fascist Italy as both a "*sorella fascista*" (fascist sister) while aboard the SS *Gradisca*—one of the dictatorship's eight hospital ships—and, after her resignation from the Italian Red Cross in April, as an "independent journalist" embedded with Marshal Pietro Badoglio's military column, heading towards Addis Ababa. On May 5, Ricci was with Badoglio's troops as they entered Ethiopia's capital city, which only days before had been abandoned by Haile Selassie I. "Breathless with excitement and emotion, I hung out of the machine as we rode and jolted along the

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***Journalistic reports either explicitly or subtly manipulated by powerful forces have been common in this century and the last.***

rude pathway that led into the city,” she recounted in one of her subsequently published articles, continuing:

A silver-gray haze of smoke lay all over. Burning straw and mud huts, smoking ruins of homes, smoldering, stark, barren eucalyptus trees resembling half-burned telegraph poles. A sharp acrid smell of filth, and decay, smoky ribbons spiraling upward, dogs, mules, sheep, white-shammaed people, dirty white rags displayed as tokens of peaceable intent, lines upon lines of black people, friendly, grinning, applauding, emitting weird calls of welcome—it was all such a kaleidoscopic jumble of dramatic sounds and sights—and—stenches.

After motoring into the center of the city, Ricci joined Italy’s military leadership in reviewing the rubble-strewn streets of Addis Ababa and collecting anecdotes from eyewitnesses to the days leading up to the entry of Badoglio’s column of troops. For her various services to Italy’s imperial program in East Africa, the dictatorship awarded Ricci the prestigious War Cross for Military Valor.

After returning to the United States in August 1936, Ricci launched herself into a pro-Fascist propaganda campaign. In addition to publishing a wide range of articles with a number of New York City-based publications, she delivered public lectures on her eyewitness experiences in Ethiopia to audiences in and around Manhattan and spoke with just about any journalist who was willing to interview her about Fascism or Italy’s colonization of Ethiopia.

In many of her essays and speeches, Ricci pointed out specific “falsehoods” printed in the pages of the *New York Times*, the *Times* of London, and other major dailies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, with respect to the day-to-day details of Italy’s conquest. For example, she wrote, “I could recall reading the newspaper headlines and my attempts to visualize” the city of Adrigat, Ethiopia, on the border with Italian Eritrea, “as I walked up Fifth Avenue the preceding October.” However, by the time Ricci reached the Ethiopian city with Badoglio’s column in the early spring of 1936, she was surprised to realize that “Adrigat remained . . . undestroyed,” despite “reports to the contrary.” She also frequently addressed the controversies regarding Italian war crimes in Ethiopia. In contrast to the “misleading” Anglo-American press coverage of the Italo-Ethiopian conflict, she explained during one speech, the Italian Army “did NOT pillage, did NOT destroy, did NOT massacre!” Instead, as Italy’s armies advanced into Ethiopian territories, “they preserved the methods of a civilizing expedition,” building “roads, bridges,





**COMMANDER:** *In April 1936, Marshal Pietro Badoglio led his forces toward Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, taking Ruth Williams Ricci with them. Ricci, “breathless with excitement,” gave a colorful and melodramatic account of the entry into the city, which Haile Selassie I had abandoned just days before.* [Wikimedia Commons]

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***ATROCITIES: General Rodolfo Graziani, shown giving the Fascist salute, commanded Italian forces in Libya in the 1920s and later co-led the invasion into the Horn of Africa, proclaiming, “The Duce will have Ethiopia, with or without the Ethiopians.” Graziani was noted for his brutal treatment of conquered Africans, both civilians and fighters, subjecting them to concentration and labor camps, expulsions, and massacres.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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hospitals, wells” and taking every opportunity to consider “the welfare of the inhabitants.”

Ricci, of course, was purposely ignoring the brutality with which the Italians conquered and “pacified” their colonial territories in the Horn of Africa. In addition to the imposition of heavily regulated white and black residential zones, 1937—the year Ricci spent propagandizing in the United States for Fascism’s supposedly benevolent colonization program—saw a “Black-shirt massacre” of Ethiopian civilians by Italian soldiers, an outrage widely reported in the American and British presses.

In April 1938, Ricci wrote to her contacts in Rome requesting permission to pursue a far more ambitious itinerary in Italy’s African colonies. Having recently purchased a customized Dodge coupe, she explained, she wished to drive herself, unaccompanied, between General Francisco Franco’s

Nationalist territories in Civil War-era Spain and the Red Sea shores of Italian East Africa. Ricci's proposal for a follow-up fact-finding mission through Italy's African colonies was ultimately approved by regime officials, and in June she steamed to Nationalist Spain in order to survey the activities of Italy's "legionnaires" who were supporting El Caudillo's ongoing military coup d'état against the Spanish Republic.

After completing her vagabonding throughout Nationalist Spain, both Ricci and her Dodge chugged via ferry from Gibraltar to Morocco. During the subsequent months, she motored across North Africa,

stopping briefly in Italian Libya and British Egypt, and ultimately landing in the Horn of Africa, where she took up short-term residence in Addis Ababa in order to survey the significant "progress" being made by the dictatorship in Italian East Africa.

In June 1939, Ricci returned to Rome and began planning yet another pro-Fascist propaganda campaign in the United States, which she intended to begin during the subsequent year. In her proposal to the Ministry of Popular Culture, Ricci proposed to carry out a "Project for Propaganda Work in [the] USA," whose primary objective, she explained, was not only to significantly improve Italy's complicated public image in the United States but, more significant, to raise \$1 million over the following two years "from the Italians in [the] USA for the Colonies." Such significant financial resources, Ricci explained to her contacts, could very well be used for purchasing "tractors, small hospitals, X-ray and microscopic and analytical equipment . . . vaccines and intravenous injections for use among the native population," as well as "small movie cameras and projection machines for use among the Residents as propaganda for convincing the natives" of Fascism's purportedly benevolent intentions in its African colonies. To accomplish these lofty objectives, Ricci proposed to publish six books "with possible assistance and collaboration by the authorities," and intended for the proceeds to be "utilized for the Empire." In addition to these major publications, Ricci promised to speak via radio broadcasts and carry out a "coast-to-coast trip" across the United States with her collection of photographs, movie reels, and lantern slides, speaking in "every community and village" that would provide her the

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***Ruth Williams Ricci complained that Italian-Americans were being ostracized: "Racial prejudices which had slowly faded during the past decade sprang into new being."***



opportunity to proclaim the wonders of Fascism's colonization program in Italian East Africa.

While she waited for the regime's reply, Ricci decided to pay a "fact-finding" visit to Adolf Hitler's "New Germany." Driving herself from Fascist Rome to Nazi Berlin in her coupe, Ricci motored through urban and rural Germany, photographing, journaling, and talking "with every type of Ger-

man" along the way. "I am tremendously impressed with the resources, the magnificent organization, the storm discipline and superb, machine-like

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***"Lines upon lines of black people, friendly, grinning, applauding, emitting weird calls of welcome."***

development of the army," Ricci recounted in an interview with the *Rochester, New York, Democrat & Chronicle* in November, noting "above all else the people's devotedly passionate faith in Hitler."

After wandering around Germany for the better part of two weeks, Ricci arrived at the Polish Corridor on August 30. "I was on my way to Danzig to make a radio talk in September," Ricci later recounted to the American journalist Doris Allen. But only a few days later, she witnessed, entirely by chance, the first columns of Wehrmacht soldiers marching into Poland, marking the beginning of the Second World War. As the Third Reich's military campaign escalated in both intensity and scale, Ricci promptly returned to Rome.

Back in the relative safety of Mussolini's Italy, Ricci immediately immersed herself in a number of pro-Fascist propaganda initiatives, ranging from essays, newspaper and broadcast interviews, and, perhaps most significant, a book-length collection of "photographic notes." Published in 1940 with

the financial support of the regime's Ministry of Popular Culture, Ricci's *Three Years After: 1936-1939* provided its intended Anglo-American readership with a series of highly staged glimpses into Italy's colonization of

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***In 1937—the year Ricci spent propagandizing for the purportedly benevolent colonization program—Italian soldiers massacred Ethiopian civilians, a fact widely reported in the American and British presses.***

Ethiopia, between the early months of the Italo-Ethiopian War and the three years that had, by this time, elapsed since the occupation of Addis Ababa. In covering nearly thirteen thousand miles across Abyssinia "alone, in a Dodge



***“PACIFIED”:*** Ricci poses with a child in East Africa. Upon returning to the United States in 1936, she launched into a pro-Fascist propaganda campaign, attacking mainstream news coverage and purporting to give the true picture of the Italian campaign. She insisted that the Italian invaders “preserved the methods of a civilizing expedition.” [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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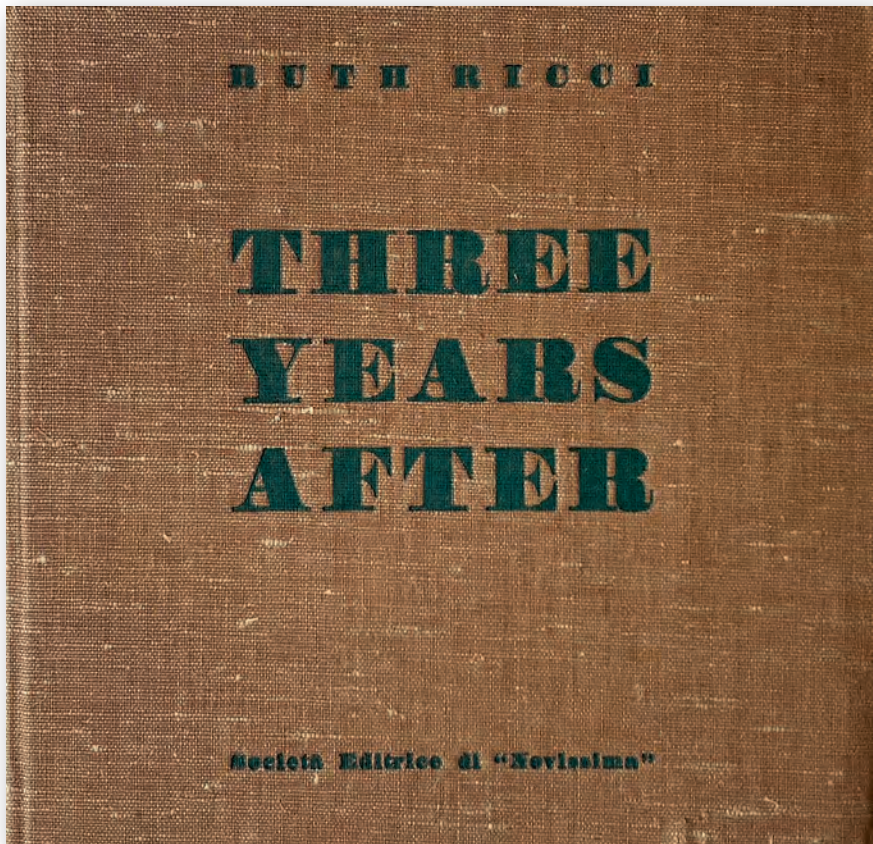




***WHEN IN ROME: Ricci has a photo taken with two Italian officers in Rome. After accompanying the troops in Ethiopia, she requested permission to drive across all the Italian-held territories of North Africa. Her “fact-finding” mission started in Nationalist Spanish territory, where she wrote about the Italian soldiers fighting on General Francisco Franco’s behalf, and reached through Libya, Egypt, and ultimately back to Ethiopia. There she proclaimed the “progress” being made in the Fascist colonies.*** [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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coupe, armed with . . . Leica and movie cameras,” she writes in her introduction, Ricci witnessed how the “lapse of three years has made incredible differences” in terms of Italian East Africa’s infrastructural, agricultural, and hygienic “progress.” Thanks largely to the “determination of the Italian



**ADMIRATION:** *Published in 1940 with the financial support of Fascist Italy, Ricci's book *Three Years After: 1936–1939* provided its intended Anglo-American readership with a series of highly staged glimpses into Italy's colonization of Ethiopia. She singled out the "determination of the Italian pioneers" and "their amazing task of occupying this vast territory."* [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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pioneers who swung sturdily from their amazing task of occupying this vast territory in seven months," she contends, Italy had "succeeded beyond even their fondest hopes" in bringing the light of modern, imperial civilization to "Darkest Africa."

The regime, it appears, was deeply pleased with *Three Years After*. "This could be very effective for our future propaganda in the United States," explained one Fascist official, and "all the more so if you think that Ricci has already given good results in the past by proving to be a sincere and passionate friend of our country." Although intended primarily for persuading





**MISGIVINGS:** *After her Africa adventures and the publication of her book, Ricci began to exhibit second thoughts about the Fascist project once Italy joined forces with Adolf Hitler. She had initially stressed that Mussolini would “steer clear” of getting involved with Hitler’s war in Europe because it wanted to build up its colonies and pursue the rewards of peace.* [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

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American popular opinion with respect to Italy’s colonization program in East Africa, the regime, it appears, sent several hundred copies, out of a total of one thousand, to various Italian embassies and consulates all over the world, ranging from those in Washington and New York City to Tokyo, Shanghai, Bangkok, Kabul, and Tehran.

As Nazi Germany’s military marched across Eurasia, Ricci remained steadfast in her confidence that the Duce would avoid getting involved with the Führer’s military campaign. Italy had “a million reasons to steer clear of the mess,” Ricci informed Henry W. Clune of the *Democrat & Chronicle* in November 1939, including a “huge contract with Isotta Fraschini” to supply Great Britain with engines. Other reasons included the “job of keeping open the Mediterranean routes” and the “time and peace to carry out her projects” in its African colonies. Finally, the regime, Ricci insisted, was planning an exhibition of “tremendous proportions” for the 1942 World’s Fair on the southeastern outskirts of Rome—the so-called E42 fairgrounds complex—which would “see a city extending . . . to the sea and which is already



**COLONIALS:** *This postcard depicts a member of a colonial artillery unit that was part of Italy's forces. Mussolini claimed to be the protector of Arabs in conquered Libya, going so far as to refer to them as "Muslim Italians." Thousands of native Libyans fought for Italy during World War II. As for Ethiopia, Mussolini told reporters that "our cause in Ethiopia is a just one. . . . It will be laid before the whole world—proof that the Ethiopians are a barbaric people, sunk in the practice of slavery."* [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

showing towering buildings and garden-like plantings of trees, shrubs and flowers," along with new subway lines, world-class hotels, and much more. "Is it a wonder that no one here in Italy gives credence to the imminence of war in Italy?" Ricci rhetorically inquired, continuing: "Can anyone doubt of what tremendous import is peace to the Duce, the Italian people and the government?"

By June of the following year, however, Mussolini had declared war on France and the United Kingdom, drawing Italy into World War II and undermining Ricci's formerly sanguine predictions that her beloved Duce would steer clear of the conflict. A few months later, in December 1940, Ricci received word from Hilton, New York, that her mother had suddenly fallen extremely ill. This, along with Mussolini's decision to join his Axis partners in war, appears to have influenced Ricci's decision to return home to the United States.





***THE RETURN: Ricci returned to New York in 1941, and over the next few years gradually repudiated her romance with Fascism. She even joined the Women's Army Corps and served in uniform. By 1944, she said she had destroyed the medal Italy had given her and formed "a deep hatred for Fascist methods and manner." After the war, she moved west and settled in Berkeley as the wife of Ralph Roscoe Eltse, a lawyer who had served one term in the House of Representatives in the early 1930s. In this picture, inscribed "Always Forward!" and dedicated to "dear Captain Bacchiani," she strikes a characteristic pose in her traveling years. [Ruth Ricci Eltse Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]***

Upon her return to New York in February 1941, Ricci began to temper her formerly vociferous pro-Fascist proclamations, for fear of appearing not only anti-American but as a hostile "foreign agent" for the Axis powers. In addition to the pressures of the Second World War, Ruth's marriage to James appears to have begun disintegrating shortly after her return from Rome. After coming home to Manhattan, Ruth had apparently learned of a long-term love affair between James and a much younger American woman in New York City, which she described in one private letter as "beneath the

belt in every instance.” Ricci’s once-zealous commitments to Mussolini’s Italy began to grow weaker and weaker.

In December 1943, Ricci joined the Women’s Army Corps, traveling between the United States, Southeast Asia, and Australia. By 1944, she had completely repudiated her affiliations with Italian Fascism. In one interview with a newspaper in upstate New York, for instance, Ricci proclaimed that she had “destroyed the Italian War Cross . . . some time ago,” largely because she had had “lots of time and opportunity to form a deep hatred for Fascist methods and manner in whatever guise.”

“In explaining ‘then’ and ‘now,’ ” journalist Doris Allen told her readers, “Mrs. Ricci said she had spent years abroad watching the ruthless march of Fascism and Nazism, a thing she feels no one could do without hating the horrors such ideologies instill.”

That same year, just as the Allies were preparing to invade the German-occupied coastline of western France, Ricci published an essay on the importance of newspapers to the preservation of liberal democracy in the United States and beyond. Titled “Fortresses of Freedom,” Ricci’s essay maintained that while the “Allied nations fight with an armed victory,” only the American press, with accurate coverage of domestic and international affairs, was capable of winning a

“lasting peace.” “Our newspapers,” the essay’s subtitle exclaims, “are our spiritual fortresses which preserve the four freedoms they helped

America win.” Only America’s “Fortresses of Freedom, standing side by side with American democracy,” Ricci concluded, perhaps somewhat aware of the extraordinary irony of her words, “can guide the world’s destiny.” Ricci’s essay would go on to receive the first place prize in the American Newspaper Publishers Association’s 1944 monograph competition, which was subsequently covered by nearly every major and minor daily across the United States.

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***“This could be very effective for our future propaganda in the United States,” a Fascist official said of Ricci’s book.***

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***Ricci began to have misgivings about her praise of Fascism, and feared she would be considered a “foreign agent.”***

After the war, Ricci relocated to Berkeley, California, where she and her second husband, Ralph Roscoe Eltse, retired. On April 14, 1977, Ricci died at the age of eighty-two en route to Herrick Memorial Hospital. She and her second husband are buried at the Golden Gate Mausoleum and Columbaria in El Cerrito, California. After she died, Ricci's collected writings, photographs, and newspaper clippings, which she had carefully organized during her latter years, were donated by one of her Bay Area acquaintances to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives.



The significance of Ruth Williams Ricci's story goes beyond the tumultuous two decades between the First and Second World Wars. Indeed, today's political scene bears many of the same sociopolitical markers of Europe's so-called "interwar crisis," including a waning confidence in democratic institutions and practices, a growing number of authoritarian—and, in some cases, openly neo-fascist—political leaders, right-wing militias engaged in campaigns of political violence, and the proliferation of "fake news" as an anti-democratic, mass manipulation strategy.

In aping Mussolini's politics of brinkmanship during the 1930s, Russia's strongman president Vladimir Putin is testing what the world is willing to tolerate, in terms of undermining the primacy of diplomacy over unilateral militarism. As in Italy's North American propaganda campaign of the 1930s, Putin's regime has partnered with, either directly or indirectly, figures who willingly reformulate his dictatorship's talking points regarding the origins,

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***In 1944, having renounced Fascism, Ricci wrote an essay in a publishers' contest praising America's newspapers as "fortresses of freedom." Her essay won first prize.***

and intended outcomes, of the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine. Much as in Ricci's day, Patrick Lancaster's status as an "independent journalist" in the Donbas largely depends upon the

Kremlin's explicit knowledge, approval, and guidance. And with Lancaster's 523,000 YouTube subscribers, many of whom speak only English, and more than 672,000 views of his video report on the aforementioned Mariupol bombing, Putin's propaganda stratagem appears to be paying off.

Ricci, in her various ways, enthusiastically promoted an illegal conquest of a sovereign East African kingdom as a civilizing mission. This military

campaign demonstrated the League of Nations' weakness, emboldened other interwar strongmen to defy the international order—above all, Adolf Hitler—and helped

push the Western world into World War II. The questions for the citizens of today's liberal democracies

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***“Fake news” will no doubt persist as an anti-democratic strategy of mass manipulation.***

are these: Are Putin's international propagandists helping in any way to undermine democratic values and practices, to disseminate “fake news” stories regarding Russia's objectives in Eastern Europe and, in the process, to lay the groundwork for a third world war? Are we in another interwar crisis? And who will tell us the truth? ■

*Special to the Hoover Digest.*



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# On the Cover

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**A**mong the warriors Americans celebrate this Veterans Day are the Tuskegee Airmen, the pioneering black fighter pilots who helped break the color bar during World War II. One such pilot was Robert W. Deiz, portrayed here in this 1944 bond-drive poster by artist Betsy Graves Reyneau (1888–1964), who was also a suffragist and a civil rights activist. Just as the newly declared Juneteenth holiday memorializes black Americans’ rising up from slavery, the Tuskegee Airmen became a living symbol of African-Americans’ hopes taking wing.

Deiz came to Reyneau’s attention when the artist traveled to Tuskegee, Alabama, to paint a portrait of scientist George Washington Carver as part of a series on prominent African-Americans. She met Deiz and decided to paint him, too, placing him in the ranks of Mary McLeod Bethune, Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Thurgood Marshall, and others. Her artworks traveled the country in the late 1940s and early 1950s as “Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin.”

Barbara Lewis Burger, a retired archivist at the National Archives, investigated the identity of the fighter pilot on the “Keep us flying!” poster and wrote about him in 2019. Deiz was born in 1919 in Oregon; his father was from Jamaica and his mother from Nebraska. “Robert Deiz,” she wrote, “attended the city’s public schools. He graduated from (Benjamin) Franklin High School in 1937 and continued his education at the University of Oregon in Eugene. An excellent musician and athlete, he played in the school band and set track records at both institutions. . . . He enlisted in the US Army Air Forces as an aviation cadet on January 24, 1942, and was sent to Tuskegee Army Air Field for training.” After the war—during which he shot down two German fighters—he served as a flight instructor and test pilot, including in jets, and retired as a major in 1961. He died in 1992.

Today, many Americans know the story of the all-black units and their exploits flying often-obsolete aircraft. Deiz’s obituary in the *Oregonian* quoted him looking back on those years of fighting not just the Germans but racism:



“Among those in control, some wanted to see us succeed, and others wanted us to fail. For a while, the ones who wanted to see us fail had the upper hand. We couldn’t get near combat. But combat came to us. . . . At Anzio, we got the job of protecting the beachhead. After that, they couldn’t ignore us.”

The National World War II Museum in New Orleans points out: “During World War II, African-Americans made tremendous sacrifices in an effort to trade military service and

wartime support for measurable social, political, and economic gains.” Those sacrifices included buying war bonds, just as white Americans did. (Black members of “War Bond Savings Clubs” in New Orleans had bought \$5 million worth by 1945, the equivalent of \$69.7 million today, according to the Amistad Research Center.) War bonds were an especially prominent symbol that the American people were working side by side against Hitler, against aggression, and against persecution of people because of race, religion, or ethnicity.

For every dashing hero like Deiz, there were thousands of less-celebrated black Americans working in war industries, undergoing training, and furthering their education. Their momentum would dovetail with the nascent civil rights movement after the war when the nation began to focus not just on the redemption of those war bonds but on Martin Luther King Jr.’s call for redemption of the “promissory note” of America’s founding ideals.

—Charles Lindsey





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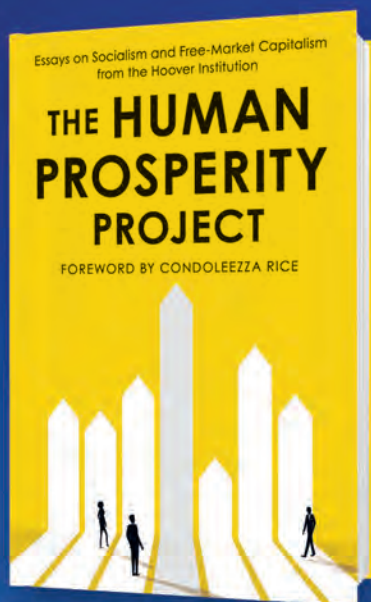
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