

VOLUME 18 ISSUE 4 | FALL 2024

*in*FOCUS

QUARTERLY

Our World



David Reaboi on Disjointed US Foreign Policy | **R. Evan Ellis** on Mexico's New President | **Tomas Sandell** on Europe's Right and Left | **Stephen Blank** on Tsarist Russia | **Guermantes Lailari** on China's Palestinian Diplomacy | **Dan Blumenthal** and **Derek Scissors** on China's Economic Rise | **David Wurmser** on the Houthis and China | **Stephen D. Bryen** on NATO's Future | **Ken Timmerman** on Iran's Malign Behavior | **François Baird** on Energy in Africa | **Shoshana Bryen** reviews *Elon Musk*

An Interview with **Clifford D. May**

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

As we surveyed “Our World” for this issue of *inFOCUS* Quarterly, the number of times and ways we ran into China was more than a little bit disconcerting.

First though, we can't expect to form a coherent and forward-looking foreign policy if our own political house is in disorder. And it is. David Reaboi explains in our Essay.

Turning then to China, Daniel Blumenthal and Derek Scissors assess long-range Chinese trade policies – which are not the same profit/loss calculations made in the West. Assessing Mexico's new president; African agriculture and energy policy; and the Houthis in the Red Sea – as R. Evan Ellis, Francois Baird, and David Wurmser do – we found China. Kenneth Timmerman touches on China in his assessment of the Biden-Harris administration's Iran policy. And China's direct involvement with Hamas and the broader Palestinian movement, dissected by Guermantes Lailari, was shocking.

That, I believe, is the lesson. China is pursuing goals and interests that we, in the US and the West, have not yet recognized as goals and interests.

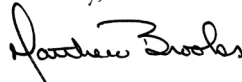


There is more to our world than China, but it didn't make us feel much better. Stephen Blank explains Russia as a continuation of Tzarist themes, with Vladimir Putin as today's Tzar. Stephen Bryen assesses the change in NATO from a singular, defensive alliance to a broad pact with more sweeping goals. And Tomas Sandell addresses the rise of the Right in Europe, finding it far more pro-Israel and pro-American than the European Left.

Shoshana Bryen interviews Clifford May of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies about these and other issues, and she reviews *Elon Musk* by Walter Isaacson. The first is a broad and compelling look at China and other threats to Western interests. The second is a broad and compelling look at one of the most odd and interesting people of our century.

If you appreciate what you've read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the JPC. You can use our secure site: <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate>.

Sincerely,



Matthew Brooks
Publisher

inFOCUS

VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 4

Publisher

Matthew Brooks

Editor

Shoshana Bryen

Associate Editors

Michael Johnson

Joel Himelfarb

Published by:

Jewish Policy Center

PO Box 77316

Washington, DC 20013

(202) 638-2411

Follow us:



JewishPolicyCenter



@theJPC

The opinions expressed in *inFOCUS* do not necessarily reflect those of the Jewish Policy Center, its board, or its officers.

To begin or renew your subscription, please contact us: info@jewishpolicycenter.org

© 2024 Jewish Policy Center

Cover Art: Shutterstock AI

www.JewishPolicyCenter.org

FEATURING

DAVID REABOI is the president of Strategic Improvisation. (3)

R. EVAN ELLIS is research professor at the US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. (7)

TOMAS SANDELL is the Founding Director of the European Coalition for Israel. (11)

STEPHEN BLANK, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. (14)

GUERMANTES LAILARI is a JPC Fellow and visiting researcher at Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research. (17)

CLIFFORD D. MAY is the founder and president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). (20)

DAN BLUMENTHAL and **DEREK SCISSIONS** are senior fellows at American Enterprise Institute (AEI). (25)

DAVID WURMSER is a senior fellow at the Center for Security Policy and a senior fellow at Misgav Institute. (29)

STEPHEN D. BRYEN, Ph.D., is a former Undersecretary of Defense. (32)

KEN TIMMERMAN is a senior fellow at the America First Policy Institute. (35)

FRANÇOIS BAIRD is a founder of the FairPlay NGO. (40)

SHOSHANA BRYEN is the editor of *inFOCUS* Quarterly and Senior Director of the Jewish Policy Center. (41)

Foreign Policy in the Disunited States

by **DAVID REABOI**

The acute level of partisanship and polarization in modern America is often treated as a kind of unfortunate mass indulgence or moral deficiency across the ideological spectrum. When we're not pointing accusatory fingers at our political adversaries for exacerbating tensions across party lines, the contempt we have for one another's politics is often blamed on a toxic combination of technology and media.

Indeed, the explosion of social media encourages informational silos and "epistemic closure." These cloistered environments invariably lead their inhabitants – millions of normal American citizens – toward progressively more militant poses. The decline in real-world relationships and the social media replacement of an increasing number of in-person interactions leaves millions in virtual hot-boxes, with little to temper growing partisan and ideological antagonism toward the hated "other."

The antidote to this acrimony, then, should be found in tempering Americans' dance with poisonous algorithms and political discourse. But, like any addiction, detox is merely a temporary reprieve. No doubt, some detachment from the online world of politics is essential for an individual's mental health but, at a national level, this solution is unsatisfactory; short of an impracticable and massive censorship regime, millions can neither be persuaded nor forced to "touch grass." While we can focus blame solely on social media and contrive temporary solutions to online rage-bait, technology is merely pouring gasoline on a fire that has long been burning.

Most Americans intuitively sense that the differences between Red and Blue America are far deeper than any of the daily controversies and debates we argue about on the surface. What social media is exposing is that America is now – if not physically and politically, but ideologically, spiritually, and aesthetically – two distinct countries. What truly divides us is political, in the original and most elemental sense: radically different and mutually exclusive conceptions of The Good, of justice, and of the proper role of the state in its interactions with its citizens.

■ *Two Countries*

These foundational conflicts naturally carry over into the debate about the country's foreign policy. In order to relate to other nations – or to assess our own interests, whether correctly or incorrectly – America must first have a relatively coherent understanding of it-

self. If we are divided on who we are as a nation, it should not be surprising that we differ just as profoundly on the nature of other countries and civilizations, and how we interact with them.

In our current state of ideological disunion and polarization, the foreign

policy debate we find ourselves in is no longer about different means to the same end; it is about making war on foreigners who remind us of our domestic enemies, and allying with those who remind us of ourselves.

■ *Allies and Adversaries*

As destructive for both domestic and foreign policy as it is, the source of these inclinations is natural; the ancient Greeks noticed that we feel most comfortable with the peoples nearer to us – as we are more likely to share a common understanding of the most basic things – and more skeptical of those farther away. Now that we have less in common as Americans, however, foreigners with whom Red and Blue Americans have affinity have largely shifted in opposite directions that mirror their own priorities and ways of seeing the world.

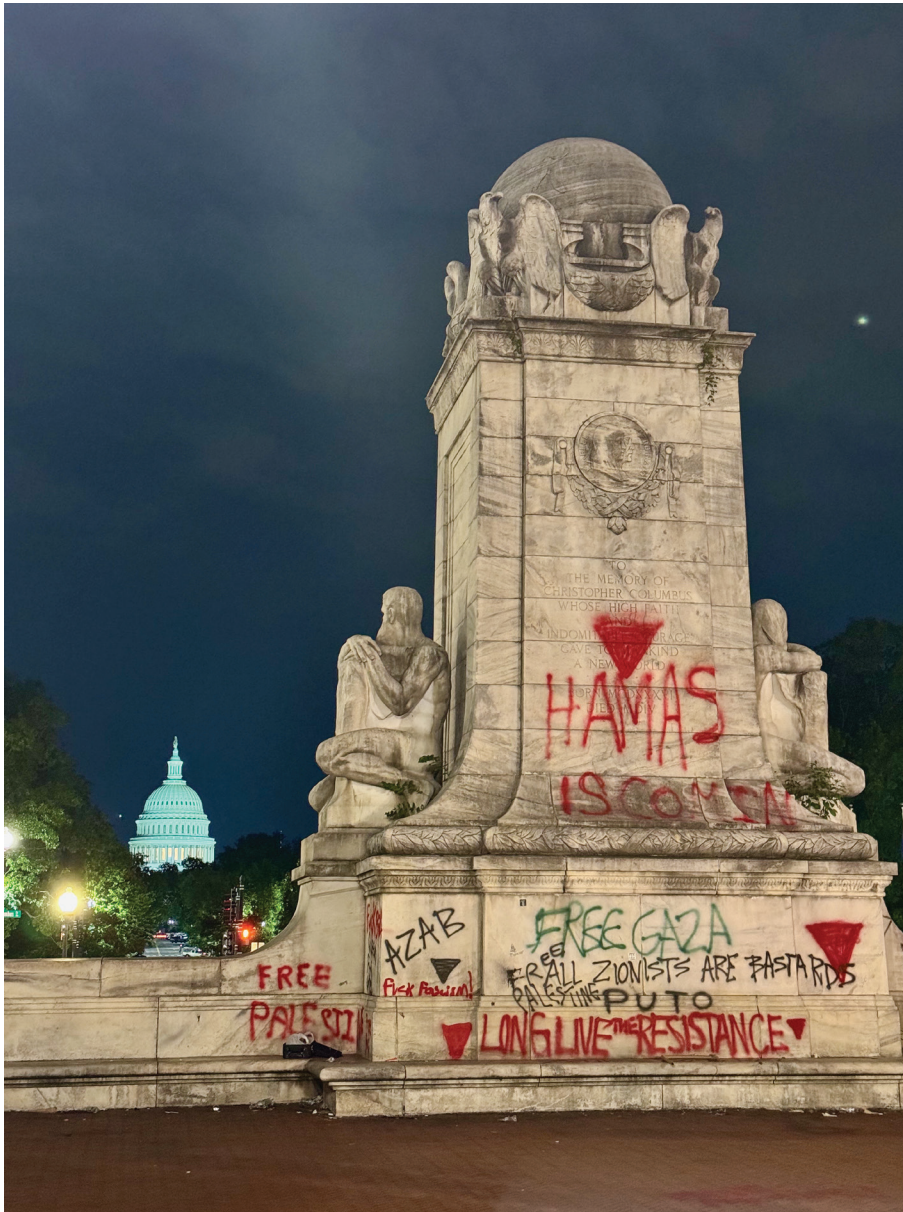
As the pot has come to a boil, both Americas have clung more fiercely to

The antidote ... should be found in tempering Americans' dance with poisonous algorithms and political discourse. But, like any addiction, detox is merely a temporary reprieve.

their most fundamental domestic ideological preoccupations, seeking foreign allies that share them.

■ *Blue America*

Blue America now looks abroad and sees itself mirrored in the European



Pro-Hamas activists spray graffiti outside of Union Station in Washington, DC. (Photo: Michael Johnson)

Union (EU), a permanent bureaucracy led by a constellation of post-national urban elites and NGOs committed to advancing a neoliberal vision of Progress. As within the United States, its commitment to this project is energized by the idea of overcoming what it sees as the irresponsible, retrograde (and, of course, racist) protestations of the citizens of their countries.

Over the last half-decade, Blue America has appropriated a millennia-old form of government (“Democracy”) for use as a banner and cudgel against

its enemies within and without, redefining the term to be synonymous with its electoral fortunes and ideological program.

While the hard-Left had long had its own allies and enemies based on the needs and alliances of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, fringe sympathies for Marxist, Third World revolutionary movements and communist police states were rare among the Democratic Party’s mainstream voices. Now, however, Blue America’s domestic fixation on the evils of racism, colonialism,

equity, gender, and sexual liberation overlay onto geopolitics to provide ready-made enemy nations that stand in the way of eradicating the sins of the past. The Intersectional “progressive stack” is in play here, too, as the fiercest opponents of colonialism trump the privilege of minority groups and social issues in Blue America’s understanding of its allies and enemies.

■ **Red America**

Red America, at first, clung to its more traditional and, arguably, now outdated view of the country’s foreign policy. But, in time, it began to seek allies and enemies that more closely corresponded to its understanding of its domestic predicament: those under siege by elites. Today, Red America relates more closely to countries and leaders willing to buck the post-national, bureaucratic consensus, favoring localism and greater accountability to voters.

These Americans believe, correctly, that a nation’s health and success depends on the coherence of a nation’s history, culture, and mores, which are intimately tied to demographics. To that end, their foreign allies are those who oppose the homogenization sought by Blue America’s allies in Brussels and in Turtle Bay, none more pressing than limitless immigration.

■ **Where Israel Fits**

There are still vestiges of what was once called the “bipartisan consensus.” But these are historical remnants, existing mostly in public opinion polls and the national political leadership that, by nature, must reflect them. While Americans of both parties back Israel by wide margins, in Blue America, this support declines sharply by generational cohort and, even more importantly, by activist enthusiasm.

Since the Obama administration, Democrats have negotiated this through rhetorical sleight-of-hand: mantra-like repetition of pro-Israel statements intended to mask a far more antagonistic

Each shift, though, is not cost-free; for the world's lone superpower, inconsistency is destabilizing and, in the long or even medium-term, undermines any conceivable understanding of American interests, Red or Blue.

policy toward the Jewish State. Over time, however, even that rhetoric will shift with the polls, as younger voters will demand more open opposition to Israel and Zionist Jews more generally.

■ *The Water's Edge*

While the old adage “politics stops at the water's edge” was never entirely embraced, the desire to maintain a united front against foreign adversaries was, at least, an expectation within mainstream political discourse – and its flagrant violation was understood to be punishable by voters rather than rewarded. In our state of disunion, however, that is no longer the case.

The consequences of our disunion for American foreign policy are many. We have already seen radical shifts between administrations, as one set of policymakers is replaced by others with opposite (and equally strong) convictions about ends, not just means. To be sure, a certain amount of change is to be expected with any White House turnover; prior to this current era, the differences between the postures of Carter and Reagan toward communism, for example, were stark.

But the shift from the Obama to Trump to Biden administrations has been a kind of whiplash, as each does its best to dismantle not just the policies, but the ideological premises of the prior one and erect a new one in its place. Each shift, though, is not cost-free; for

the world's lone superpower, inconsistency is destabilizing and, in the long or even medium-term, undermines any conceivable understanding of American interests, Red or Blue.

This is especially confusing for allies, who are aware that they could become one party's designated hate object when it's politically expedient. In some Middle Eastern and European capitals, officials were shocked when the Democratic allies they'd made over decades inside the Beltway suddenly abandoned them. The fallout from these severed relationships

The debate... is no longer about different means to the same end; it is about making war on foreigners who remind us of our domestic enemies and allying with those who remind us of ourselves.

extends far past politicians and into the adjacent world of lobbying, business, and media. A quick shift in the domestic political winds makes it difficult for nations predisposed to friendship with the United States to do long-term planning and, more importantly, to make hard choices that would materially benefit this country's interests. Why assist an

American effort, when that cooperation could be politicized?

■ *Advantage: Adversaries*

This situation is advantageous to our enemies for the same reasons. The basic ethos of a good foreign policy has always been that, in order to encourage friendship rather than enmity, one must reward one's friends and punish one's enemies. Our disunion allows for neither. Adversaries recognize they have a free hand for mischief and little incentive not to pursue their own advantage at our expense. And, inside government, cutthroat ideological battles between policymakers allow much to fall between the cracks to the detriment of any conception of our national security.

■ *Our Ideological Establishment*

In principle, though, these dramatic shifts are preferable to the current situation: a foreign and defense establishment pursuing an agenda of its own, unresponsive to its citizens. Today, the leadership of the permanent national security bureaucracy – like

other branches of the administrative state – is temperamentally and ideologically Blue. It is, at the very least, unresponsive to direction from Red presidents, understanding its mission to “protect and defend... from all enemies foreign *and domestic*” as synonymous with its fierce ideological and partisan commitments.

The foreign policy of the United States, the credentialed tribunes of Blue America argued, is far too important to be decided by a president from Red

domestic politics, and the primary concern for our relations with other nations. There is always the temptation to force a consensus on the two competing world-

morality, but by modestly articulating our national interests. These national interests and priorities should focus on: (a) the lives and safety of our citizens; (b) their material or economic welfare; and (c) our particular American way of life, free from the predations of foreign nation-state or non-nation-state actors.

Why assist an American effort, when that cooperation could be politicized?

America, regardless of his constitutional mandate. It's difficult to imagine more of an affront to the spirit of democracy than unelected functionaries entrusted by the American people with tremendous power to defend their lives determining, largely in secret and without real oversight, to veto the decisions of an elected president.

In the name of "Democracy."

■ *Implications of Disunion*

As the implications of our disunion are so dire, it's not surprising that professional foreign policy and national security elites largely avert their eyes. Grand Strategy is still discussed in war colleges, think tanks, and in Georgetown salons. At worst, the intelligentsia take for granted the unified country of their youth: the Cold War or the multipolar world of unconstrained American power. At best, sharp analysts perceive future conflicts abroad and attempt to address them while taking into consideration the limits of popular opinion on American action.

While the latter is strongly preferable, it also papers over internal conflicts that will, in time, become more contentious and make devising a coherent foreign policy for the United States impossible.

Those concerned with American foreign policy must, going forward, anticipate continued conflict about the most fundamental things. They should address the state of our disunion explicitly: as the primary concern of our

views, supposedly in the dire interest of national security. While it is appealing – and the nostalgia for simpler, less contentious times is potent – this unity would be illusory. As it is in control of the bureaucratic engine of foreign policy, a consensus foreign policy would be little more than acquiescence to Blue America's understanding of the world, and of this country.

Since the end of the Cold War, Americans have been confused about the most basic things, as public intellectuals, policymakers, and politicians have

allowed ideological abstractions such as "democracy promotion" or the lattice-work of post War international agreements, to become ends in themselves. These preoccupations are, at best, means (of varying degrees of effectiveness), and chasing them at the expense of our material interests has wasted American prestige, resources, and power.

Statesmen have a responsibility to draw sharp distinctions between worldviews, and to explain their consequences, not by appealing to broad abstractions based on a shared sense of

■ *Explaining Ourselves*

Those of us with strong opinions about the direction of American foreign policy or national security must explain ourselves in light of these things, always making clear how our preferences align best with the basic material interests of the American people. We cannot be content with repeating slogans, yelling ever louder, and depending on a crumbling consensus. Simply articulating these things will not solve our disunion or return us to a less complicated and perilous time, when Americans largely agreed on ends but fought over the means. There will always be a debate about the way we understand our foreign policy; injecting some truth and first principles into the

We cannot be content with repeating slogans, yelling ever louder, and depending on a crumbling consensus.

public discourse, however messy, is better than abandoning the field to incoherence and conspiracies. There is no guarantee of convincing anyone, but doing so will, at least, appeal to those with the capacity to think clearly about the truly important things.

DAVID REABOI *is the president of Strategic Improvisation, a consulting firm dealing with national security and communications, and a longtime writer on political warfare, information operations, and the Middle East.*

China's Prospects in Mexico Under Claudia Sheinbaum

by R. EVAN ELLIS

As the People's Republic of China (PRC) expanded its engagement with the countries of the Western Hemisphere during the past three decades, Mexico's integration with the US economy, its comparative distance from and structural competition with the PRC economy, and Mexico's close cooperation with the United States on security issues under the governments of Felipe Calderon and Enrique Pena Nieto, limited the projection of a "threatening" PRC presence and influence in Mexico. Or at least the perception of it in Washington.

■ *China's Little-Noticed Deep Roots in Mexico*

In reality, the PRC and its commercial agents have long had a substantial political and commercial presence in Mexico. Mexico was the fourth country in the hemisphere to establish diplomatic relations with the PRC, doing so in February 1971. It was one of the first in the region to be recognized by the PRC as a "Strategic Partner," with the Chinese foreign ministry conferring the title on Mexico in 2003, subsequently upgrading the relationship to "Comprehensive Strategic Partner" in May 2017.

With respect to trade, with China's acceptance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, according to the International Monetary Fund, PRC bilateral trade with Mexico grew from \$4.55 billion that year, to \$136.74 billion by 2022, a thirty-fold increase. That trade has consistently been dramatically in China's favor, with the \$4.27 billion in PRC exports to Mexico 15 times

greater than its \$281.8 million in imports from Mexico in 2001, and still 11.5 times its \$125.8 billion in exports to Mexico in 2022. This was still 11.5 times greater than its \$10.9 billion in imports from Mexico that year, contributing to the perception among many Mexicans of the PRC as more of a competitor than a benefactor.

With respect to PRC investment and other involvement in Mexico, in the period from 2000 through the end of 2023, Chinese Overseas Foreign Direct Investment (OFDI) in Mexico totaled \$22.5 billion through 166 recorded major transactions. This represented 12% of the total \$193.2 billion invested in Latin America and the Caribbean by PRC-based firms through 625 transactions during the period. Although most of those investments came after 2015, investments by PRC-based companies in the country began much earlier.

Beginning in 2001 with a concession

ultimately operating seven facilities. These were located not only in Veracruz, but also in Ensenada, Manzanillo, Lazaro Cardenas. In addition, they included a land port in Hidalgo.

Both the Chinese telecommunication company Huawei and the computer company Lenovo established major facilities and sales networks in the country during the same early period, and gradually moved from a position of competitor to that of a partner and supplier, to Mexico's key telecommunications companies, including the conglomerate America Movil.

Over the past 20 years, Chinese manufacturers in the garment, auto parts, and other sectors, quietly set up factories in the country, taking advantage of Mexico's privileged access to the US market under NAFTA. They began with modest initiatives such as the Sinatex garment factory in Ciudad

Mexico was one of the first in the region to be recognized by the People's Republic of China as a "Strategic Partner"...

to operate port terminal in Veracruz, the Hong Kong-based shipping firm Hutchison Whampoa won the right to operate several of Mexico's largest ports on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts in close proximity to the United States,

Obregon and a plant in Coahuila for manufacturing metal tubes owned by Golden Dragon Precise Copper Tube Group, and an auto parts manufacturing facility in Veracruz by the Chinese automaker Foton.



Claudia Sheinbaum during her presidential victory speech on June 2, 2024. (Photo: EneasMx)

When Mexico opened up its oil sector during the Peña Nieto term of office (including an important auction of exploration and drilling rights in 2016). The China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) paid a premium to establish a presence in the Perdido basin of the Gulf of Mexico. Unfortunately for CNOOC, the field did not turn out to have commercially viable quantities of oil.

In intellectual terms, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, Mexico had more Confucius Institutes than any other Latin American country. There were five by 2009 when most other countries had only one or two, although Mexico has added only one new one in the 15 years that followed. Mexico established what is today one of the region's most respected China-Latin America studies centers, CECHIMEX. Still, despite such a legacy, Mexican academics and businesspersons continued to lament the inability of their government to effectively promote the country's own interests in, or with, the PRC.

■ ***The Legacy of Chinese Problems in Mexico***

As the PRC presence continued to expand throughout the region,

skepticism and resistance toward China in Mexico was arguably more notable than in many other parts of the region. From the days of the Mexican Revolution and before, the Chinese had been regarded as culturally “other” and competitors. The legacy of violence against Chinese immigrants at the beginning of the century, including during the Mexican Revolution, by those who saw them as competing for scarce local jobs, is carried forth today. It can be seen in those who feared that cheap Chinese imports would undermine Mexican manufacturing, both within the country and in third markets such as the United States.

The Mexico-China relationship has been fraught with difficulties, tied not only to structural competition and a legacy of cultural mistrust, but also to politics. Examples include the harsh PRC government reaction when then-President Felipe Calderon received Tibet's Dali Lama in 2011, the legal fight in Mexico over “Dragon Mart,” a major Chinese wholesale/retail complex in Quintana Roo, ultimately stopped by a legal action by the Mexican government in January 2015, and the cancellation of a Chinese bullet train project between Mexico City and Queretaro by the Peña

Nieto administration that same year. In July 2018, the Peña Nieto administration also suspended work on the Chicosen II hydroelectric project, in which China's Sinohydro was the key contractor, following years of conflicts between the Chinese company and workers and the local community on the project.

■ ***China's Restrained Advance***

Under Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), China's position and its potential for future expansion grew significantly, although it was simultaneously restrained to some degree by the nationalistic policies of his administration.

In the port sector, Chinese companies explored an investment in a new Pacific-coast port in Nayarit. Yet during the same period, the AMLO government threatened to take away Hutchison's concession to operate its terminal in Veracruz. China Construction Communication Corporation (CCCC), along with the Portugal-based construction firm Mota-Engil (in which CCCC acquired a 30% stake in 2020), won the bid for phase one of the President's signature \$7.5 billion, 1,500-kilometer Maya tourist train across the south of the country. China's Zhuzhou Locomotive, a Subsidiary of China Railway, won a \$1.6 billion contract to modernize Line 1 of the metro of Mexico City, where President-elect Claudia Sheinbaum was mayor. Driven by such opportunities, in 2021, China Railway announced plans to build a factory in Mexico for the railcars it was selling to the country.

Although these major projects positioned PRC-based companies for an expanded role in Mexico's construction and logistics sector, Chinese opportunities were restrained by AMLO's difficulties in taking construction sector projects forward in the context of pushback on environmental and other issues, and his lack of success in invoking “national security” authorities to expedite them.

Lithium: In August 2021, the Chinese mining giant Ganfeng acquired

the rights to the Bacanora lithium deposit for \$391 million. But it was stymied in its development by AMLO's April 2022 decision to nationalize the sector, precipitating a conflict that ultimately led to the state to attempt to revoke its license.

infrastructure and playing a key role as component provider as the country rolled out 5G networks. The Chinese security systems company Hikvision also substantially expanded its presence in both the commercial and residential surveillance markets with the 2022 ac-

quisition of Chinese origin. In the first 11 months of 2023, Chinese companies announced 19 major investments in Mexico, totaling \$8.14 billion, second only to the United States.

In the international relations domain, China's advance was arguably limited by AMLO's focus on the United States and Latin American politics rather than broader global issues. In contrast to his more conservative predecessors, AMLO never visited the PRC, nor hosted the Chinese President Xi Jinping in Mexico, only meeting him in San Francisco at the 2023 APEC Leaders Summit.

In security affairs, it is likely that Sheinbaum will continue to restrict engagement by the PRC to... relatively minor institutional engagements, in deference to sensitivities of the US.

Renewable Energy: China's State Power Industrial Corporation (SPIC) acquired Zuma Energy in November 2020, obtaining the rights to 800 MW of wind and photovoltaic energy generation assets across four Mexican states. In 2023, SPIC expanded its presence through Zuma's acquisition of 3 solar parks in the state of Chihuahua, adding an additional 213 MW of generation capacity to its portfolio. Nonetheless, SPIC's option to expand its work in the Mexican electricity sector more broadly was arguably restricted by AMLO's privileging of the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) over the private sector in selling electricity to the national grid.

In the same fashion, China's ability to expand its holdings in Mexico's petroleum sector was constrained by AMLO's prioritizing the state oil company PEMEX over the private sector, including suspending new petroleum auctions.

Technology-intensive Sectors: In 2021, computer manufacturer Lenovo made a major expansion of its presence in Mexico at its "Gigafactory" in Monterrey. Under AMLO, Chinese telecom companies substantially expanded their presence. This included Huawei's expansion of its cloud services

acquisition of Syscom, Mexico's largest security systems distributor. Even the Chinese ride-sharing company Didi substantially increased its presence in Mexico under AMLO, capturing 56% of the Mexican market by late 2022.

■ **Supply Chains**

The most substantial advance in the PRC commercial presence in Mexico was ironically driven by the increased tension between the US and the PRC, combined with the interruption of international supply chains through Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the attack by Houthi rebels on ships transiting the Red Sea. This combination of events drove companies focused on the US market to move supply chains out of the PRC to sites closer to the US, including Mexico.

A major effect of such "nearshoring" was to push Chinese suppliers in large numbers to invest in facilities in Mexico, as they sought to preserve their access to the US market under USMCA as "Mexican" companies. Between 2019 and 2023, the acreage of commercial real estate owned by Chinese firms in Mexico increased by a factor of five, with a tripling of the number of tenants

■ **Opportunities for the PRC**

The July 2 election of AMLO's hand-picked successor, Claudia Sheinbaum, by a margin of more than 30 points over her closest rival, Xochitl Galvez, promises to simultaneously bring more competence to Mexican public administration and a better working relationship with the United States in some areas. But it also has accelerated an advance of Mexico-China relations that is likely to profoundly deepen discomfort in Washington.

Ironically, much of this expansion is likely to come as the biproduct of Sheinbaum's demonstrated capabilities as a competent administrator with a more internationalist orientation than her mentor and predecessor. Implementation of her agenda, and as a biproduct, the likely advance of China, will be facilitated by her party MORENA's control of 2/3 of the Chamber of Deputies and almost 2/3 of the Senate. That political capital will permit her to take forward infrastructure projects and other initiatives, including changing laws and constitutional provisions that stand in the way. This is in contrast to AMLO, whose initiatives were often blocked or limited by the Mexican courts.

Complementing Sheinbaum's political capital in the legislature, MORENA's expanded dominance at the state level,

now controlling 24 of Mexico's 32 governorships, will give her enormous latitude to ensure successful implementation of her policies at the local level, including green energy, infrastructure and nearshoring projects involving Chinese companies.

■ **Infrastructure**

During the campaign, Sheinbaum emphasized her commitment to facilitating greater nearshoring investment through the construction of public infrastructure to support warehousing

Sheinbaum may increase the pace of key infrastructure projects. This will be advantageous to Chinese firms, which have accumulated a strong position in the country to win them.

and manufacturing facilities and other activities. To the extent she succeeds in doing so, she will accelerate the movement of PRC-based companies into the country in pursuit of such opportunities.

To the extent that Sheinbaum proves a more effective administrator than AMLO, with the backing of the MORENA legislative supermajority to circumvent legal obstacles, Sheinbaum may increase the pace of key infrastructure projects. This will be advantageous to Chinese firms, which have accumulated a strong position in the country to win them. These include later phases of the Maya train project, new roads, ports and airports, and commercial development of the strategically important trans-seismic corridor, which connects Mexico's coasts across Isthmus of Tehuantepec, from Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz on the Atlantic to Port Salinas Cruz, Oaxaca, on the Pacific coast.

Energy: Sheinbaum's enthusiasm

for renewable energy and her administrative competence is likely to facilitate a more private-sector-friendly, if still state-led, approach in which already well-positioned Chinese companies such as Zuma, using Chinese finance and Chinese products such as Photovoltaic panels that already dominate the sector, to take forward major projects.

Lithium: If Sheinbaum applies a more nuanced approach to state leadership than did her predecessor, it could reopen the opportunity for Ganfeng to develop Bacanora, perhaps in partner-

ship with the Mexican government. As has occurred in other countries in the region, the expressed interest of PRC-based carmaker BYD in setting up a large electric vehicle production facility in Mexico will give added impetus for a deal giving Ganfeng the right to extract and refine the lithium used to supply the batteries for the carmaker and other Chinese electric vehicle companies in Mexico.

Digital: Policy enhancements under Sheinbaum, reflecting a better understanding of the market and technical imperatives of the sector, could accelerate the implementation of cloud computing, 5G and Internet of things (IoT) infrastructure that Huawei and other PRC-based companies dominate.

Space: Sheinbaum, with her technical orientation, could facilitate an expanded profile for the Mexican Space Agency, established in 2010, in ways that position it to work more closely with

its Chinese counterparts, as the PRC has done with other Latin American governments.

Security: It is likely that Sheinbaum will continue to restrict engagement by the PRC to participation in Mexico's Independence Day parade, military education and training exchanges, and other relatively minor institutional engagements, in deference to sensitivities of the US. But that will depend in part, on the future relationship between the US government and the Sheinbaum administration, and the degree to which the US indicates to Mexico that expanded military cooperation with the PRC is a redline issue.

■ **Conclusion**

For the US, it will be important to maintain an ongoing, frank dialogue with the Sheinbaum administration, respectful of Mexico's sovereignty, to help prevent Mexico's likely improvement in public administration from opening the door to an expansion of PRC presence harmful to both Mexican and US interests. The question of Chinese companies seeking to disguise themselves as Mexican ones to preserve access to the US markets will be particularly important in this regard, as the July 2026 review of the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement (USMCA) approaches.

As throughout history, Mexico's contiguity with the United States gives each nation an inherent interest in the conditions, policies, and foreign relations of the other that goes beyond the topics of migration, drugs, and arms that currently dominate the discourse. The question is not whether the two countries can, or should, coordinate on the issue of China, but rather, how to conduct that necessary coordination in the most effective fashion respectful of the sovereignty and interests of both.

R. EVAN ELLIS is research professor at the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. The views expressed here are strictly his own.

Political Changes in Europe

by **TOMAS SANDELL**

Will the rise of the far right spell trouble for Europe and its Jews?

The first-ever European Parliament Israel vote ranking in 2023, commissioned by the European Coalition for Israel and conducted by the Brussels based research institute EU-Matrix, counted actual votes by political parties related to the safety and security of Israel. The ranking revealed what many EU-observers had known for years but did not want to say out loud: The political parties on the so-called “Far Right” are, in fact, the most supportive of Israel of any political groups in the European Parliament.

The progressive Left, on the other hand, is highly critical and even struggling with outright antisemitism in its ranks.

■ *The New Right*

The term “Far Right” is used differently in Europe than it is in the US.

While there is currently no exact definition of the term, in the European context, any right wing party which is not part of the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), which includes the German Christian Democrats, is considered “Far Right.” It includes social conservatives, Eurosceptics, nationalists, and many anti-establishment parties. In the current European Parliament, it includes the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), the former home of the British Conservatives, as well as the new Patriots for Europe group, created after the recent EU elections by leading EU critics Marine Le Pen of France and Prime Minister Victor Orban of Hungary.

To the right of these is Europe of Sovereign Nations, which includes Alternative for Germany (AfD), which was expelled from Marine Le Pen’s

group just before the European elections because of its growing radicalization, making it an extreme right-wing outlier. Whereas most other Far Right parties are trying to move toward the mainstream, AfD is choosing another path, flirting with ethno-nationalism. It is becoming increasingly pro-Putin and pro-Hamas, thus finding a common cause with the extreme Left.

■ *Blacklisted Friends*

The Israeli Foreign Ministry is embarrassed by the vote ranking. Most of the political parties with the highest scores, meaning that they were the most supportive of Israel, belong to the Far Right. They are thus blacklisted by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, meaning that their diplomats are prevented from making contacts with them.

Take the situation in Sweden. Having previously had the dubious distinction of

which became the second-largest party in Sweden, behind the Social Democrats.

■ *A Troubling Past*

The party has a troubling past.

As many as one-third of its 80 or so founders in the late 1980’s were connected to Nazi or fascist organizations, although many of them left the party soon after. But, like similar populist right-wing parties (SD prefers today to be called Social Conservative) the Sweden Democrats have evolved, matured and become more pragmatic over time. The new party leadership has been open about its dark past and is today applying a zero-tolerance policy for what they consider right wing radicals.

The party has a clear pro-Israel stance. In fact, in the latest EP Israel vote ranking in April 2024 (covering the whole electorate period from 2019 to 2024) the Swedish Democrats came

...the first Western nation to honor the late PLO leader Yassir Arafat with a state visit and later championing the cause of Palestinian statehood, Sweden, like many other nations in the EU, has made a political turn to the right.

being the first Western nation to honor the late PLO leader Yassir Arafat with a state visit and later championing the cause of Palestinian statehood, Sweden, like many other nations in the EU, has made a political turn to the right. An important factor in the election victory of the new center-right government in 2022 was the electoral success of the populist Far Right Sweden Democrats (SD)

in third place out of 196 national political parties represented in the European Parliament!

SD supports a Swedish Embassy move to Jerusalem and was willing to use this as a bargaining chip in the government negotiations in 2022 where only one of the coalition parties was resistant to the idea. Meanwhile the Israeli Ambassador refused to meet with party

representatives and instead criticized them openly in Swedish media, to the delight of the enemies of Israel, who fear a change in Swedish policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The boycott by the Israeli government has placed the Sweden Democrats in a delicate dilemma and many ask how they can justify their strong support for Israel for their electorate, while the Israeli government continues to avoid any contact with them.

■ ***Fascist Past or “Intersectionality”?***

This dilemma applies to many other friends of Israel in Europe. By applying the principle of “intersectionality,” some believe Israel has painted itself in a corner by simply accepting the progressive Left’s demand for respectability by refusing to engage with democratic parties on the Right that do not fully subscribe to the current EU-orthodoxy or are more socially conservative than the mainstream.

Officially, the Israeli Foreign Ministry justifies its refusal to interact with these parties by citing their past. While this may seem logical indeed if applied without distinction, the number of parties that would qualify for friendship would be small. In fact, some of the parties most supportive of Israel – and transatlantic relations, which seem to go hand in hand – have similarly questionable pasts. They include the onetime Franco-loyalist Partido Popular in Spain, which is today a close ally of both Israel and the US, and part of the mainstream EPP-group in the EU.

The same could be said about a range of other parties across Europe, despite their Fascist past, are today in the political mainstream. This would include the German Free Democrats as well as the Swedish Center Party, both with a well-documented Nazi past but which have since become traditional center-liberal parties.

■ ***The “Extreme Right Wing”***

Not all populist right-wing parties have succeeded in their transformation.

German MEP Jörg Meuthen, once co-leader of the AfD, had no choice but to leave the party in January 2022 after it refused to distance itself from members with openly antisemitic and racist views. In the 2023 Israel ranking, he had the highest scores of any Member of the European Parliament, while his

...some of the parties most supportive of Israel – and transatlantic relations, which seem to go hand in hand – have similarly questionable pasts.

former party is moving in a completely opposite direction. Eighty years after the Holocaust, some Germans seem to have distanced themselves from their historical commitments and have even given up on democracy. This may explain the recent attempt by an extremist far right group to topple the German government with the aim of re-establishing monarchy. Here, the term “extreme right-wing” is certainly applicable.

■ ***National Success but Banned in Brussels***

Like Meuthen, most other European Far Right leaders, such as Giorgia Meloni, have distanced themselves from the fascist past of their respective parties. By defining herself as “a woman, mother, Italian, and a Christian,” she struck a chord with the Italian people, who elected her prime minister in 2022. She is also pro-Israel with close links to the current US administration.

While her combination of pro-Israel policies and social conservatism has been successful at home, it is the antithesis of the current EU orthodoxy and has thus disqualified her from any real political influence on the EU level. When government leaders from Germany, France, and Spain met in Brussels to divide up the top posts in the new European Union after the elections in June, Italy was missing from the table.

By applying the principle of *cor-don sanitaire*, the old established parties are currently trying to disqualify the new Right from gaining power and influence in Brussels in proportion to its new electoral strength – which now consists of one quarter of all the MEPs. Their enemies are backed up by strong

political allies on the local level. Just a few weeks before the European elections a conference organized by the National Conservatism movement – which has the support of Meloni – was abruptly shut down in Brussels by the Belgian police on the command of District Mayor Emir Kir, who cited public safety concerns but added that “the Far Right is not welcome in Brussels.”

The ban was eventually overruled by Belgium’s top administrative court which stated that the shutdown violated the country’s constitutional right to peaceful assembly. But this happened only after international media had reported on the ban and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had called the action “extremely disturbing.”

■ ***Political Comeback of Geert Wilders***

Nobody illustrates the rise of the Far Right and its appeal to the electorate better than Dutch *enfant terrible* Geert Wilders. In 2009, he was denied entry into the UK for “threatening community harmony and public safety” after having, among other things, compared the Quran to *Mein Kampf*. Wilders has not changed his views, but the electorate seems to have swung his way.

In the national elections earlier this year, Wilders made his Freedom Party the largest single party in the Dutch

parliament, making it impossible to ignore. In a rare compromise, Wilders agreed to personally stay out of the new government as long as the Freedom Party was able to form a coalition in line with its own policy recommendations. It is today joined by other like-minded parties, most of which are united in their firm opposition to what they consider to be overreach by the European Commission.

The Chief Rabbi of Paris, Moshe Sebag, made a splash... by stating, “There is no future for Jews in France...” after the extreme Left had scored a decisive victory.

For many years Wilders demanded that The Netherlands, one of the founding members of the European Community in 1958, leave the Union due to its federalist ambitions. The new, pragmatic Wilders 2.0 has given up on his more radical approach and is instead demanding a complete reform of the system. This nationalist approach is shared by a growing number of national governments in the EU, among them Hungary, Slovakia, Czechia, and, until recently, Poland. The Italian and Finnish governments include populist parties, which in the past have campaigned for leaving the EU. However, none of the current Far Right leaders, including Le Pen in France, demand a full Brexit anymore. If you can't leave, then fix it, they seem to reason.

With the rise of the Far Right and the shift of the mainstream EPP group to the right, they may soon be in a position to do just that.

■ *Is it Good for the Jews?*

The Israel vote ranking may have proven that most of the far-right parties are clearly pro-Israel – and also pro-transatlantic relations. But what is good for Israel is not necessarily good for the Jews of Europe. When it comes to public

safety, those in the democratic Far Right are, of course, friends of good order and will do whatever it takes to beef up security around synagogues and other communal institutions, especially as most attacks tend to come from radical Islamists and the extreme left.

Still, other policies of theirs risk causing collateral damage for the Jews. In an unholy alliance between the par-

ties of the radical Right and the progressive Left, efforts are being made to ban religious animal slaughter both for Jews and Muslims. The ban, motivated by a concern for animal welfare among the Progressives and anti-Muslim sentiments among the Far Right, mobilizes a wide spectrum of political parties beyond the fringes. Hence, in Finland a proposed ban on religious slaughter under the former Socialist government was supported by a broad parliamentary majority, before it was stopped last-minute, due to geopolitical considerations. Finland was in the process of applying for NATO membership and did not want to jeopardize its good relations with either Washington or Berlin, where support for kosher slaughter is well-grounded. But the proposal could be re-introduced at any time now that Finland has become a member of the alliance.

■ *The Future for Jews in Europe*

For the time being, a ban on kosher slaughter has limited practical consequences for observant Jews in Europe as they can buy their kosher meat from neighboring countries. But what happens the day a majority of the EU countries

ban kosher meat and religious circumcision? Will there be any future for the Jews in Europe?

The Chief Rabbi of Paris, Moshe Sebag, made a splash when he recently commented on the results from the snap election in France by stating, “There is no future for Jews in France.” The comment came after the extreme Left had scored a decisive victory and was expected to form a new government. Rabbi Sebag, like many other Jewish leaders in France, had made an appeal to not vote for either extreme. Explaining the rationale behind his appeal, he said that most Jews tend to stick to the political center because they do not know who hates them more, the extreme Left or the extreme Right. For others, like renowned Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld or left-leaning public intellectual Alain Finkielkraut, the choice was clear. Having to choose, they chose the Far Right. Klarsfeld no longer considers the Far Right an enemy.

This dilemma applies to the whole of Europe. The former Chief Rabbi of Russia, today President of the Conference of European Rabbis, Pinchas Goldschmit, is more diplomatic. He thinks there are no good choices, either from the political Right or the progressive Left. In an article in *Politico* just days before the European elections, he wrote, “We fear for the future of Europe and our place in it as a minority, no matter how we vote and no matter who wins.”

If Jews no longer feel welcome in Europe, it will not be simply because of the rise of the Far Right, but due to a broader ideological shift within the political mainstream which in recent years has grown increasingly anti-Western, and as a consequence, hostile both to Israel and Europe's Jews. In this civilizational battle, Israel and the Jews may need new allies, including the Far Right.

TOMAS SANDELL is the Founding Director of the European Coalition for Israel. Before helping to found the coalition in 2003, he was an accredited journalist to the European Union in Brussels.

Russia's State and Its Foreign Policies

by **STEPHEN BLANK**

At least once a year, if not more, somebody publishes a book or article trying to determine the nature of the Russian state or political power there. Invariably they conclude that Russia is an authoritarian state, not a totalitarian one. A sub-group debates whether Russia is a Fascist state, for there is little doubt that Moscow has appropriated some of the repertoire of Fascist states. Since Western – and especially American – political science emphasizes comparative political science at the expense of any other explanatory modes, the consensus inevitably embraces the authoritarian perspective and excludes other concepts.

Unfortunately, this explanatory approach is not very illuminating. Saying that Russia is authoritarian is akin to saying the sun rose in the East and will set in the West. Neither does it explain the recrudescence of phenomena associated with Stalinism or Russian foreign policy, not just the war against Ukraine. To understand the currents of both Russian domestic and foreign policy, we need to turn to earlier theories by one of the founders of modern social science, Max Weber, and the tendencies of Russian history, not Western theory.

■ **Patrimonial Autocracy**

Russia today has reverted to the model of patrimonial autocracy, a model of governance that has lasted throughout Russian history with brief exceptions, and remains its default option. Today, Putin functions as Tsar in actuality if not in name. This model, not a Western one, is highly protean and can

embrace Communist or Fascist attributes without shedding its basic nature. “Patrimonial” means the Tsar or the state owns the national economy, hence neither property nor civil rights, not to mention human rights, exist. Meanwhile the Tsar and the state are unbound by any law or institution. The Tsar can thus bequeath the state to anyone like a father giving it to his son. Vladimir Putin can do so if he wants, but if he fails to do so, the oligarch-bureaucrats or men of force (*Siloviki*) will do so after him, just as Russian Boyars tried to do when the original dynasty expired.

In this state, not only does the Tsar own the state and national economy, but possession of all property is also

civil society or intelligentsia.

Putin's state and his circle own the economy, have suppressed the rule of law and talk of rights, and killed or suppressed dissidents and opposition at home and abroad as did medieval Tsars. The state also absorbed the Church, which had promulgated an idea of Russia as a uniquely predestined Christian nation historically empowered to lead the world to the triumph of the true faith.

Consequently, since the 16th century, Russian Tsars, or their spokesmen, have also been religious-ideological leaders. And given the inevitable paranoia surrounding autocrats (as Shakespeare wrote, “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown”), dangerous

“Patrimonial” means the Tsar or the state owns the national economy, hence neither property nor civil rights, not to mention human rights, exist. Meanwhile the Tsar and the state are unbound by any law or institution.

conditional upon service to the state and can be expropriated at any time by the state if it so wills. We have seen this phenomenon innumerable times and it is still occurring. The nature of the state therefore precludes the emergence of an independent propertied class, middle class or bourgeoisie, and any genuine

foreign ideas and ideologies and foreigners were always suspect, if not repressed. However, those foreign ideas that were deemed useful were welcomed, albeit often in greatly altered form and certainly under circumstances far removed from those where these ideas originated.

■ Empire

Consequently, a homegrown ideology evolved over the centuries, combining the providential Christianity cited above with the belief that the Tsar's task was to regather supposedly lost Russian lands, diverted from the true faith by enemies, and restore them to Russia, which must perform to be an unbounded great power, i.e. empire.

This idea that Russia, under all circumstances, must be accepted as an empire, lies at the basis of Russia's efforts to restore the empire in Georgia, Ukraine, and throughout the Soviet inheritance. Russia, whatever the reality is, believes it must play a Great Power or Imperial role in world politics because the continuity of the empire and of autocracy depends upon acknowledgment of it as such by both its subjects and foreign governments. Indeed, that is the autocracy's primary mission. Thus, autocracy and empire are joined at the hip and are mutually reinforcing.

If that nexus is broken, then autocracy's future is gravely undermined.

Hence the continuing obsession in foreign policy with Russia's Imperial status, as acceptance of that status endows the autocracy with legitimacy and vice versa. Russia's objective, therefore, is to recover the status claimed by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko at the XXIV Party Congress in 1971, where he stated that no question in world politics could be decided without the participation of the Soviet Union. Similarly, in 1997, when the economy and state were prostrate, Sergei Rogov, director of the prestigious USA Institute, stated that, as its first priority, Moscow should seek to preserve the special character of Russian-American relations. Washington, he said, should recognize the exceptional status of the Russian Federation in the formation of a new system of international relations – a role different from that which Germany, Japan, or China or any other center of power plays in the global arena.

Dmitri Trenin, Director of the



Russian President Vladimir Putin. (Photo: Maxim Shipenkov / Shutterstock)

Carnegie Endowment's Moscow office, similarly observed that Russian analysts argue that current difficulties are transient, but Russia is entitled to this "presidium seat" on global issues in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. As one official told the journalist Edward Lucas in 2000, the aim is, "Nothing happens that we don't know about, and nothing happens that we don't like – apart from that, it is up to them." Or, as Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says, quoting Catherine the Great's advisors, "Not a cannon can be fired in Europe without our consent."

Putin's speeches too are filled with such mantras.

■ Permanent War

Unfortunately, today empire entails the diminished sovereignty of Russia's subjects and neighbors, i.e. permanent war. Putin's Russia cannot survive absent an unceasing program of forcing a state of siege in world politics to force onlookers to accept it as an empire. Beyond all the polemics on Ukraine, it is this obsession with empire and status that lies behind the war there. Moscow's Imperial thrusts throughout the former Soviet Union emerge from the same ideological-political framework, for it is widely believed that if Russia is not a Great Power, i.e. an empire, then it is

nothing, a mere object of other powers' intrigues. This prescription entails permanent war and the preservation of this permanent state of siege at home as well. This mentality characterized pre-Gorbachevian Soviet politics, and Putin has restored it along with the institutionalized paranoia that is the logical outcome of state-controlled media.

These attributes of autocracy, providential religious ideology, and empire – both as embodied social structures and intellectual frameworks – that pervade "Putinism" may well survive him, especially if Russia prevails in Ukraine. Indeed, as Eastern European governments that have an all-too-clear awareness of Russian ambitions know, anything that can be billed as a Russian victory there will merely encourage further efforts to undermine international security. Catherine the Great famously observed that she had no way to defend her frontiers other than to expand them. The same holds true for Putin and any subsequent autocrat. Therefore, for the West to have any kind of European security – for which we fought two World Wars and a Cold War – Russia must be defeated in Ukraine. Ukraine's borders must be restored, and its sovereignty defended. Also, to ensure its security, Ukraine must join NATO and the EU as soon as possible.

The ideological-political makeup of Putin's Russia also drives its other global foreign policies. Russian political culture, deriving from its historical experience, asserts that its enemies, now led by the United States, aim to thwart Russia's achievements and status as an empire. Moreover, since this regime fully grasps

across multiple socio-political domains, including nuclear threats. The purpose of these attacks is, frankly, coercive and aims to destroy international order as such, returning world politics to a jungle of pure *Machtpolitik* where unfettered power rules and they each possess unchallenged spheres of influence.

lines of multipolarity, i.e. regional spheres of influence, e.g., Eurasia. But given the dynamics of its autocratic, Imperial, and ideological drivers, Russian politics cannot remain content with the status quo or even with Ukraine. Catherine the Great's dictum, cited above, remains the mantra of the Russian state.

Catherine the Great famously observed that she had no way to defend her frontiers other than to expand them. The same holds true for Putin and any subsequent autocrat.

Thus, this multipolarity cannot assure smaller states or the Great Powers any semblance of security. Instead, Russia, not unlike its Soviet predecessor, can only flourish in a condition of permanent warfare in world politics, albeit a level of strife that does not reach Superpower war. The wars in Ukraine and the Middle East are thus ultimately two manifestations of the shared impulse of Russia and its partners, China which finances Iran, and Iran which employs its proxies to subvert Israel and any basis for a regional order, to undermine that order. Indeed, Russia flirted with providing the Houthis in Yemen with anti-ship missiles only to be deterred by American diplomacy.

its illegitimacy abroad, it believes its domestic enemies who advocate for reform are merely tools of the West that seek to deny Russia its status and reduce it to an object of other powers.

■ *The Axis*

By the same token, Moscow's global offensive to insert itself in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Africa is part of its obsession with forcing domestic and foreign audiences to accept it at its own valuation. Russia is fully prepared to exploit every possible cleavage and source of political tensions within or among states to insert itself as an indispensable interlocutor in world politics. Its alliance with countries including China, Iran, and North Korea, grows out of its elective affinity with these states. They, like Russia, are not just autocracies, they are states that wish to be seen and see themselves as empires or unjustly thwarted (by the US and its allies) empires who wish to recover their alleged place in the sun.

Therefore, Russia and its allies and partners are seriously cooperating against the West globally by inciting and instigating persistent, sustained attacks

Consequently, their warfare exemplifies what Dmitry Adamsky called in 2015 "multi-domain coercion," with warfare occurring simultaneously in multiple theaters across multiple socio-political domains. Tactically their operations comprise limited but targeted and unceasing attacks below the level of full-scale war – so called "gray area or gray zone" attacks that are backed up by the threat of conventional and nuclear strikes.

Indeed, all four of these actors appear to have fully incorporated nuclear threats into their strategic doctrines and repertoires.

■ *The Consequences of Failure*

For these reasons, failure to defeat Russia in Ukraine or, for that matter, Iran's proxy strategy in the Middle East that Moscow now supports, ensures a permanent attempt to undermine any pretense of order in world politics in the belief that multipolarity is supplanting Western hegemony and that it entails spheres of influence.

In this theory, regional orders along with global order must be reorganized to Russia and its allies' benefit along the

Although Putin's personal obsession with restoring the empire now drives Russian policy, removing him from the equation is not a strategic response. Defeating him in Ukraine and foreclosing any renewal of the Russian Empire which is incompatible with any concept of European or international security is the sole response to his challenge. And in the Middle East, deterring if not defeating Iran and its strategy is the precondition for regional security there. Sadly, there are no other ways to induce Russia to realize that the autocracy-empire nexus must be broken for its peoples' own sake.

Otherwise, we and Russia will face permanent strife as Moscow, not unlike the Habsburg Empire in 1914, recklessly tries to force the world and its own people that it is the great power it so desperately craves to be.

STEPHEN BLANK, *Ph.D.*, is a Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

China's "Pro-Palestine" Diplomacy

by GUERMANTES LAILARI

Previously for inFOCUS Quarterly, I highlighted the direct involvement of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with Hamas, including military training, supply of weapons, and technical tunneling assistance. The PRC's political involvement with Palestinian factions, with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League is deep and longstanding. In addition, China's votes in the UN General Assembly and in the UN Security Council have clearly been anti-Israel.

The four Abraham Accord countries (UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan) normalized relations with Israel during the Trump administration. All four were represented at the OIC summits and voted in favor of the OIC resolutions.

Iran, Qatar, and Turkey are ardent supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic revolution. Their goal for Israel's destruction is evident in their many denunciations of Israel and their support of terror proxies including Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthis, Iraqi groups, IRGC-QF, ISIS, and Boko Haram.

■ Key Events Before October 7th

1988: China recognizes the State of Palestine.

July 2017: Palestinian Authority strongman Mahmoud Abbas awards the highest Palestinian medal to Xi Jinping, President of the PRC, for China's support for Palestine.

December 2020: Hamas and other terrorist groups practice the first of four "Strong Pillar" invasion exercises.

December 2021: Hamas and

other terrorist groups practice the second "Strong Pillar" invasion exercise.

October 2022: Algeria Declaration of National Reconciliation

The UN Secretary General announced "the signing on 13 October of the Declaration of Algiers by 14 Palestinian factions as a positive step towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation."

December 2022: China and Palestine sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) "on Matters of Common Interest under the Joint Construction of the 'Belt and Road' Initiative" (BRI).

December 2022: First China-Arab [League] States Summit and the China-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia). President Xi attends the two summits and visits Saudi Arabia to meet with the Saudi leadership and sign a \$30 billion trade deal.

December 2022: Hamas and other terrorist groups practice the third "Strong Pillar" invasion exercise.

March 2023: Trilateral Statement by the PRC, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran; highlights include:

- Affirmation that Iran and Saudi Arabia would re-establish diplomatic relations and respect each other's internal affairs.

- "In response to the noble initiative of His Excellency President Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, of China's support for developing good neighborly relations between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran..."

- OIC General Secretariat welcomed Saudi Arabia and Iran's Agreement to

resume diplomatic relations, praising the leadership of the PRC.

June 2023: President Xi holds talks at the Great Hall of the People with Palestinian President Abbas who was on a state visit to China and announces the "Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the State of Palestine on Establishing a Strategic Partnership."

July 2023: 18th Extraordinary Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia) notes:

- Appreciates the "Algeria Declaration" ... to end division and achieve reconciliation as a positive step toward national unity... and appreciates the unremitting efforts made by the President of the Republic of Algeria, Mr. Abdel Majid Tebboune for the success of this historic endeavor.

- Calls on the Islamic Group of the OIC to intensify its efforts at the level of international organizations and take the necessary measures to force Israel, the colonial occupying power, to stop all its violations and illegal measures in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

August 2023: High-Level Delegation from OIC Member States and OIC General Secretariat visits China.

- According to the OIC website, "[D]uring the delegation's visit, they met with the Deputy Minister of the Unified Action Front Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The meeting discussed the strategic partnership between the OIC, its Member States, and the People's Republic of China."

September 2023: Hamas and

other terrorist groups practice the fourth “Strong Pillar” invasion exercise.

■ **After October 7, 2023**

November 2023: The OIC and the Arab League meet in Riyadh to set a plan of action against Israel. This is the first time the Arab League and the OIC have a combined meeting.

Dozens of leaders attended including the presidents of Iran, Turkey, and Syria (allowed back into the Arab League in 2023), as well as the Emir of Qatar. Highlights of their resolution (the English translations of the OIC resolution and the Arab League resolution are similar):

- “Confirming all the resolutions of the Organization [OIC] and the [Arab] League regarding the Palestinian Cause and all the occupied Arab territories...” (Reaffirming the declarations of jihad against Israel approved at the OIC Third and Fifth Summits.)

- “Demand that all countries stop exporting weapons and ammunitions.”

- Request the International Criminal Court to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity (committed by Israel).

- “Establish two specialized legal monitoring units to document the Israeli crimes committed in the Gaza Strip ...” Pursue Israeli officials “for their crimes against the Palestinian people for the International Court of Justice...”

- Request the “Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to investigate into Israel’s use of chemical weapons...”

- “Call on the Palestinian factions and forces to unite under its umbrella and to assume their responsibilities within a national partnership led by the Palestine Liberation Organization...” (Key statement related to the Beijing Declaration)

- Convene “an international peace conference, as soon as possible” including the “land for peace” principle, within a “specific time limit and with international guarantees, leading to an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967” ... and the

implementation of the two-state solution.”

Although the Islamic countries agree with the final wording of the joint resolution, some Muslim countries call for a total cut in diplomatic ties; Algeria and Iran led this group. Other countries including Bahrain and the UAE, members of the Abraham Accords, reject this path. Tehran also attempts to designate the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a terrorist organization similar to the terrorist designation of Iran’s Islamic

Summit held in Riyadh on 11 November 2023.”

March 2024: The Extraordinary Session of The Council of Foreign Ministers of The Member States of The OIC to consider the continuing Israeli aggression against the Palestinian People (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia). The meeting is held at the request of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and Islamic Republic of Iran.

Although many Israeli scholars, businesses, and politicians seek friendly diplomatic relations and extensive trade with China, it is time for Israel to pause its relationship with the PRC.

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) by Bahrain, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and the US. This is rejected.

November 2023: Ministerial Committee Mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit meets with Chinese Foreign Minister (Beijing, PRC)

November 2023: Ministerial Committee Mandated by the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit holds meeting with Vice-President of China (Beijing, China)

“...members of the Ministerial Committee commended the positions taken by China with regard to the crisis in Gaza, which are aligned with the Arab and Islamic positions.”

February 2024: Extraordinary Session of Islamic Conference of Information Ministers of the Member States of the OIC (Istanbul, Republic of Türkiye)

“Provide support for the OIC Media Monitoring Unit to organize a media workshop to accomplish its mission as stipulated by the joint Arab and Islamic

Key points discussed in this meeting are:

- Asserts “all the resolutions adopted by the OIC regarding the issue of Palestine and the Holy City of Al-Quds...” (reaffirms the declarations of Jihad during the OIC’s Third and Fifth Summit)

- Calls for Israel’s membership in international organizations, particularly in the UN, to be suspended.

- “Appreciates the efforts of the Islamic Group within the UN Security Council, specifically the distinguished efforts of the United Arab Emirates and the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, the current member in the Security Council, to stop the Israeli barbaric aggression against the Palestinian people...”

March 2024: Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh meets PRC Ambassador to Qatar, Cao Xiaolin and Foreign Ministry envoy Wang Kejian in Qatar. Amb. Cao notes “the close and historic relationship between the Palestinian and Chinese peoples and China’s firm positions towards the Palestinian issue and its standing by the just demands of the Palestinian

people for freedom, independence, and statehood.”

April 2024: The PRC Foreign Ministry announces that Hamas and Fatah representatives held “in-depth and candid dialogue” in Beijing to promote reconciliation. They agree to continue the dialogue again in Beijing in June.

May 2024: 15th OIC Islamic Summit (Banjul, The Gambia) is attended by “their Majesties, Excellencies, and Highnesses, heads of states, and governments of the OIC member States, and high-level dignitaries from non-member states.” The following are noted highlights:

- The Secretary-General emphasized that the Palestinian cause remains the OIC’s central issue.
- The 15th Islamic Summit Conference was addressed by several dignitaries including the Special Envoy of the President of China.
- The Banjul Declaration: “Urge our Palestinian brothers and sisters to unite in their struggle to achieve their objectives, under the banner of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”

May 2024: The Arab League summit in Manama, Bahrain produces the “Bahrain Declaration,” similar to the OIC and Arab League original joint statement on 11 November 2023. But also:

- Calls “for the deployment of United Nations international protection and peacekeeping forces in the occupied Palestinian territory until the two-state solution is implemented.”
- “We call on all Palestinian factions to join together under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and to agree on a comprehensive national project ...”

May 2024: Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin meet in Beijing and vow to deepen their strategic partnership. They issue an 8,000-word joint statement outlining their shared view on issues from Taiwan, to Ukraine, to the war in Gaza and other topics: they “discussed the need to

achieve an immediate settlement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to resolve the Palestinian issue based on the two-state solution and in keeping with the UN resolution.”

May 2024: President Xi attends the opening ceremony of the 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (Beijing, PRC). According to the PRC MFA website, “China firmly supports the establishment of an independent State of Palestine that enjoys full sovereignty based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. It supports Palestine’s full membership in the United Nations, and supports a more broad-based, authoritative and effective international peace conference...” In attendance are the King of Bahrain, Presidents of Egypt, Tunisia, and the UAE. The Secretary-General of the Arab League delivers remarks.

June / July 2024: The PRC Ministry of National Defense hosts a series of seminars for senior military officers from China and Arab States at the PLA National Defense University (Beijing, PRC). The officers attend a two-week “Future-oriented China-Arab Security Cooperation” course focused on the CCP’s Global Security Initiative.

June 2024: Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and his senior military officers meet with their PLA counterparts. Al Saud meets with Defense Minister Dong Jun and Zhang Youxia, vice chairman of China’s Central Military Commission (Beijing, PRC)

June 2024: The 22-nation Arab League drops its designation of Hezbollah as a terror organization. This could reflect a sense of confidence from Chinese and Russian future support of the upcoming Beijing Declaration.

July 2024: President Xi meets again with Russian President Putin before the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting (Astana, Kazakhstan).

July 2024: “Beijing Declaration” is signed (Beijing, PRC). The Palestinian factions decide to continue the

implementation of their previous agreements to end their division with the help of Egypt, Algeria, China, and Russia. Previous Palestinian agreements included references to the EU and the US.

According to an several unconfirmed sources, the agreement notes:

“Based on the National Accord Agreement signed in Cairo on 5/4/2011 and the Algiers Declaration signed on 10/12/2022, we will continue to follow up on the implementation of the agreements to end the division with the help of our sisters Egypt and Algeria and our friends in the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation.”

- They will “work toward the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.”
- They have the right to “resist and end occupation.”

2026: Second China-Arab League States Summit will be held in China.

■ Conclusion

Although many Israeli scholars, businesses, and politicians seek friendly diplomatic relations and extensive trade with China, it is time for Israel to pause its relationship with the PRC. The Palestinian narrative of victimhood aligns with the PRC narratives of the “100 years of humiliation,” which reinforces the trade and economic incentives of allying with OIC states. Consequently, the PRC will continue to service the OIC’s obsession with Israel’s annihilation.

This is in line with Russia’s and China’s coalition (OIC/Arab League, North Korea, and others) of countries that intend to remove democracies from their regions, including Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan.

GUERMANTES LAILARI *a visiting researcher at Taiwan’s Institute for National Defense and Security Research and JPC Fellow. He is also a retired USAF Foreign Area Officer specializing in the Middle East and Europe as well as counterterrorism, irregular warfare, and missile defense.*

Cold War 2.0; A More Difficult Cold War

An *in*FOCUS interview with CLIFFORD D. MAY

Clifford D. May is the founder and president of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a nonpartisan institute focusing on national security. He has had a long and distinguished career in international relations, communications, and politics, and was a news reporter, foreign correspondent and editor at The New York Times and other publications. He has covered stories across the Middle East and Africa, China, Russia, and more. *in*FOCUS editor Shoshana Bryen spoke with him in September.

***in*FOCUS:** THE ISSUE IS CALLED “OUR WORLD,” BUT EVERY TIME WE TURNED AROUND, WE ENDED UP SEEING CHINA.

Clifford D. May: I worry about China. China is the most important participant in what I would call the “Axis of Aggressors.”

China wants to displace the United States as the most important power on earth. It is the strongest Communist Party in history with the strongest military any Communist Party has ever had. And when I talk about the Axis of Aggressors, I’m thinking of China’s junior partners, Vladimir Putin in Moscow and Ali Khamenei in Tehran, and Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang. And also, Cuba and Venezuela.

This is an axis that means to diminish the United States and replace the “liberal, rules-based world order” that has been American-led since the end of World War II, with something else that would be a very illiberal world order with China making most of the rules. Probably allowing the Islamic Republic of Iran, at least for a few years, to be the hegemon in the Middle East.

And Beijing doesn’t care what happens to Israel, whether it survives or not, and allowing Vladimir Putin to become hegemonic in Eastern Europe and as far as he can. If he brings down NATO, for example, I think Xi Jinping would think, well, he’s earned his pay today.

iF: IS PUTIN OKAY WITH BEING THE “JUNIOR HEGEMON?”

May: I think he understands that’s an unfortunate reality that he has to deal with because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia has a rather small economy and a much smaller population. Putin sees himself as a tzar, a modern-day tzar, and his mission is to restore the Russian Empire. That very much requires him to attempt to reunite Ukraine with Russia. Why? Because the proper title for tzar is “Tzar of all the Russias.”

That means Russia proper. It means Belarus, which is essentially a vassal state at this point. It means Georgia, where he’s taken two provinces. It certainly means Ukraine because Ukraine was a very important part of the Russian Empire

Does he think, “If we succeed in this replacement of the United States and making America a second-rate power, Russia will have problems with China 10 or 20 or 30 years down the road?” I think he’s smart enough to know that when Xi Jinping looks straight north from Beijing, he sees what we call the Russian city of Vladivostok. What does “Vladivostok” mean? It means “Ruler of the East.” It’s part of the Russian Empire.

At a certain point, Xi may want to take that. China has a large population that can move; Russia does not. There are resources there. Xi may want them. But for now, it is a marriage of convenience, as it were. We united with the Soviet

Union to fight the Nazis, not because we had the same ideology.

So yes, this is an Axis of Aggressors, but it’s also an axis of convenience. Putin knows that he cannot be the major player, and he accepts that, but he wants to achieve the goals he can achieve in the remainder of his life.

■ NATO

iF: THIS HAS A LOT TO DO WITH THE FUTURE OF NATO. CAN YOU GIVE US A STATUS CHECK?

May: NATO is stronger now that members see Russian aggression as a reality. It wasn’t that long ago that I remember talking to very senior German diplomats, and they clearly thought that Russia presented no threat to NATO members or to anybody else.

I’d say, “Look, you’re getting dependent on Russian oil and gas from the Nord Stream pipeline.” “No, no,” they said, “Cliff, you don’t understand. Russia is dependent on the Euro, on our money. It’s really just fine. It’s all okay.” And most of these NATO members were not spending nearly enough on defense and what they were spending was wasted.

That is better now, but it’s not uniform. We have Finland and Sweden, which have given up generations of neutrality to join NATO, and that strengthens NATO. There’s no question about it. NATO is much stronger. You now have the Baltic Sea with NATO members

around it, which is important because the Russian Baltic fleet is there in a non-contiguous province of Russia taken from the Germans after World War II.

But I do think that Germany and France and Italy and Spain are not strong enough NATO members; they are not doing enough for the collective defense.

Poland is doing a great deal. Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia know how threatened they are. They believe that if Putin should succeed in Ukraine, he will go on from there. Probably Moldova, not a NATO member, it would be easy pickings, then perhaps Lithuania.

If he could get even a piece of Lithuania, he could have a land bridge to Kaliningrad, which used to be Königsberg. Are we really going to fight Russia over a land bridge through southern Lithuania to Kaliningrad? I don't think so. Is Germany? I don't know.

But Putin will understand that if he can do that and if NATO doesn't fight, then NATO collapses. And again, he believes as Xi Jinping does, if he can collapse NATO, he's earned his salary for that week.

iF: LATVIA AND LITHUANIA ARE PULLING THEIR PROPORTIONATE WEIGHT; MAKING THEIR 2 PERCENT OF GDP. BUT 2 PERCENT OF LITHUANIA IS NOT 2 PERCENT OF GERMANY, AND GERMANY'S NOT THERE YET.

May: Germany is not contributing adequately to the collective defense of the West. The US should be working on that, making sure Germany understands what it has to do and is spending the money. But money has to be spent properly; you don't increase pensions. And when we talk about Lithuania and Finland and these countries, it's not just spending, they're also putting on the ground very good forces that can fight against the Russians.

Now, will they resist forever? Will they be able to? No, but a war that most people don't know much about, but I find



Clifford D. May (Photo: FDD)

fascinating, is the Winter War of 1939. The Soviet Union wanted to take over Finland, and Finland is a small country. But the Finns had soldiers who were really brave, who dressed in white, who buried themselves in the snow and simply took out hundreds, maybe thousands, of Russian troops.

Finland lost about 10 percent of its territory in the Winter War but kept its independence; it wasn't complete independence. For years during the Cold War, we all talked about something called "Finlandization," a country that is independent but couldn't dare to offend or antagonize the Soviets.

That's also why it's important that Finland is now in NATO and Finland now understands that.

iF: THERE IS A VIEW THAT THE EUROPEANS SHOULD BE IN CHARGE OF RESPONDING TO UKRAINE AND RUSSIA. THE CHIEF US PRIORITY SHOULD BE THE PACIFIC BECAUSE THERE IS NO COUNTRY THAT CAN RESPOND THERE EXCEPT US. WOULD THE US PULLING AWAY AND TURNING MOST OF ITS ATTENTION TO THE PACIFIC ENCOURAGE GERMANY TO STEP UP AND BE WHAT IT SHOULD BE?

May: I think not for a couple of reasons. One, it sends the message, "We have to pivot toward China and we're going to have to let the Europeans save themselves – or not. It's not our concern." It is a very dangerous message, a little like we sent toward China and Russia that led to Korean War.

The Soviet Union and China thought, "They're not going to defend South Korea, we might as well take it." Same thing with Kuwait. The message was given to Saddam Hussein, "We don't really have an interest in Kuwait," so he attacked.

That says we're no longer the leader of the Free World. We're going to concentrate on Asia. That's all.

■ **Four Democracies**

There are four democracies in the world that are specifically threatened. Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan, and South Korea.

South Korea is not imminently endangered because there are 28,000 American troops there. They've been there since 1953 when we made the decision not to end the war with the defeat of our enemy or victory for ourselves, but with essentially a stalemate. So that war is in an armistice, but it still goes on. And the result is that Kim Jong-un, who's the

third in a line of dynastic dictators, has nuclear weapons and increasingly sophisticated missiles to deliver them.

But then there's Ukraine. Putin wants to subjugate the Ukrainians. There is Israel, the Islamic Republic does not want to subjugate the Israelis. It wants to exterminate the Israelis. So, with Taiwan – of the four threatened democracies at war – where are we? Taiwan is a vibrant, free, prosperous society, super important to the American economy and to the global economy. The Taiwanese ask, “Are we going to be more like South Korea and be able to stave off this threat or are we going to be like Ukraine and Israel that have not asked for our troops, only our weapons and support?”

The problem is the message you send. And that is a very important lesson we should have learned over the last four years, after Biden decided to capitulate to the Taliban and to betray our allies in Afghanistan. That had a huge impact globally. Putin looked at that and invaded Ukraine; the Islamic Republic Iran looked at that, and two years later, Hamas invades Israel on October 7th; and one day later, Hezbollah begins to bomb the north of Israel, and it hasn't stopped yet.

When America is seen as in retreat, when America is seen as not able or willing to defeat its enemies, it sends messages to our allies that we're not reliable and to our enemies that we are feckless. That's dangerous.

■ **America's Strategic Position**

iF: HR McMASTER SAID, “PERSISTENT DECLARATIONS OF WITHDRAWAL ACROSS THE OBAMA, TRUMP AND BIDEN ADMINISTRATIONS EMBOLDENED OUR ENEMIES.” YES, THE CULMINATION IS BIDEN IN EACH EXAMPLE YOU GAVE, BUT THERE ARE ROOTS.

WHAT DO WE DO TO ENCOURAGE OUR ALLIES TO THINK THAT WE STILL HAVE, NOT JUST THE ABILITY, WHICH WE MAY OR MAY NOT, BUT THE WILL?

May: There's nothing more important to America's strategic position than deterrence – a combination of capabilities and will. You must have both and you must be perceived as having both. We should be demonstrating our capabilities and our will in all cases. The Houthis would be a good case where we've been figuratively, you might say, shooting the arrows rather than the archers.

The Houthis are supplied, funded, instructed by Tehran. They have been violating the most basic international law, which only the US can enforce, which is

We should be demonstrating our capabilities and our will... The Houthis would be a good case where we've been figuratively ... shooting the arrows rather than the archers.

freedom of the seas. There's now a huge environmental disaster looming with a Greek oil tanker that's been not only hit, but the Houthis have come aboard and lit fires. You'd think the environmental community, as we like to say, would be up in arms over this. Somehow, this doesn't bother them as much as some soccer mom driving an SUV that has an internal combustion engine rather than an EV.

The US should go strong right there by defeating the Houthis, and/or I would say, understanding and acting upon the knowledge that the Houthis are proxy of Iran. And if you made it painful for Iran to continue to support them, I think you would show your allies that they have no better friend than you, and to your enemies, that it can be no worse enemy than you. That's not what we're doing. It's not what we have been doing.

■ **Bagram**

Biden gave up Bagram Air Base, which was a hugely important asset for the US from a national security point of view. Central and East Asia are teaming with terrorist groups. And because Afghanistan shares a border with the

People's Republic of China, that base was important from an intelligence and national security point of view.

We abandoned it with billions of dollars of equipment left there for the Taliban to take over, and they paraded it out on the third anniversary of their reoccupation of Kabul. And in Kabul, people, especially women, had gotten very accustomed to the freedoms that America had helped them achieve – going to school, serving in government.

They were abandoned and that just had huge repercussions.

iF: IRAN. POST OCTOBER 7TH AND GIVEN THAT THERE'S A WAR IN THE REGION, DO YOU THINK THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAS COME TO UNDERSTAND THE CONVENTIONAL PROBLEM OF IRAN?

May: Insufficiently.

If you asked the Obama administration, it would say that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was an achievement, but that was a dreadful, dreadful deal that only maybe delayed, but didn't stop, the Islamic Republic from acquiring nuclear weapons.

It gave them a patient path into the nuclear weapons club. Trump was against that and had serious sanctions and was strangling the economy and that was a very good policy of his. And then Biden has tried to get back and has probably helped the Islamic Republic of Iran get \$150 billion that they're using for terrorism and to attack Israel and to develop nuclear weapons, and it's a totally failed policy.

Ali Khamenei has been the Supreme Leader since in 1989. He is very smart and very strategic, and he figured out, “I'm

going to wage a war in Israel, and this is an existential war, a genocidal war. I want to wipe it off the map. How do I do this? I should use pawns. I should use Arabs to get this job done.”

Now he has Hezbollah in Lebanon. There are no territorial disputes really between Israel and Lebanon; that’s not what this is about. Khamenei has supplied Hamas in all these ways. They have this tunnel infrastructure. You’ve got the Houthis. Khamenei is sending weapons through Jordan into the West Bank and has both Hamas and other groups like Islamic Jihad that it supports there.

This is what is called the “Ring of Fire Strategy.” Neither the US nor Israel have been sufficiently engaged in a strategic way.

The Israelis have been distracted with one enemy at a time and not said, “This is a war being waged against us. They’re trying to checkmate us by surrounding us on all sides, having us fight a multi-front war while they move ahead to develop nuclear weapons and missiles deliver them, which will provide an umbrella for these groups. What’s our strategy for defeating the Islamic Republic of Iran? Militarily? Helping to bring down the regime? What?”

The Israelis knew that tunnels were being built. For some reason, they didn’t know how elaborate they were, that there were more than 50 coming from Egypt under the Philadelphia corridor into near Rafah, bringing in huge amounts of weaponry. The Chinese were likely involved in the engineering for these tunnels.

So no, I don’t think America has an adequate response to the hegemonic ambitions and the genocidal ambitions of Tehran, and I think Israel is only barely beginning.

■ *The Caliphate*

You have is within the Islamic world, on the Sunni and Shia side, what we would call *revanchists*, who say, “We have to reestablish an Islamic caliphate and empire, and its goal is to conquer the world. And nothing irritates us more

than Israel because in this little, tiny sliver of land, you have the Jews exercising self-determination. They’re not ruled by Muslims. We can’t accept that.”

That’s why when people say, “land

rather than in Doha, Qatar because the US has a very close relationship with Qatar. I don’t think it should, but it does. So, they wouldn’t want to hit him there, and they thought they had the opportu-

We have to be as good as the Greatest Generation.

We have to be as good as the Cold Warriors.

for peace,” that doesn’t answer the question – that is not the cause of the war. When people say a “two-state solution,” a two-state solution doesn’t work if you’re Hamas or you’re Hezbollah or you’re the Houthis or you’re the Islamic Republic of Iran or you’re al-Qaeda.

The problem is not that there’s not a Palestinian state, the problem for them is that there is a Jewish majority state. That’s the problem they want to solve, and they want to solve it with the extermination of Israel and have to kill as many Israelis, Jewish, Arab, Bedouin, Christian, whatever, as they possibly can. Until we recognize that that’s the problem, you can’t solve it.

iF: YOU WROTE ABOUT IRAN’S DECISION NOT TO RETALIATE AFTER THE KILLING OF ISMAIL HANIYEH, AT LEAST NOT IMMEDIATELY. SOME REASONS ARE QUITE PRACTICAL. ON THE OTHER HAND, IS NOT RETALIATING A SHAMEFUL THING?

May: My guess is that that both arguments were made to Ayatollah Khamenei, one that said, “Let’s be patient. Let’s not do this now because it could bring problems with Israel that we don’t want at this point. We don’t want them to set back our nuclear weapons program.”

But yes, they want to retaliate for the killing, which was Israel’s retaliation his role in killing well over a thousand Israelis. Israel chose to do it in Tehran

and the means to do it in Tehran.

And the regime in Iran is very sophisticated. They don’t like this idea and at some point, they’ll want to get revenge. They did various things in response or retaliation to the assassination of Qassem Soleimani.

Americans, quite a few of them, are threatened with assassination currently and have to have special security, but the US government doesn’t say to Iran, “There will be consequences for threatening Americans. You can’t do that to Americans.”

Years ago, they tried to assassinate a Saudi ambassador in Georgetown. They’ve had a number of failed efforts like that, and they say, “Is it shameful if we failed? Yes.” But then they say, “We’ll try, try again until we succeed, and we’ll see what we can do.”

iF: LET’S FOCUS THERE. THE US AND OUR WORLD WAR II ALLIES DECIDED AFTER THE WAR THAT THE BEST WAY TO PROMOTE PEACE AND HAVE PEACE WAS THROUGH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS. WE MADE THE UN, AND PEOPLE THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO BE A GOOD THING. NOW, IT IS 2024. CAN WE GET RID OF THEM?

May: It’s not easy. I used to think the UN was dysfunctional. I wish that’s all it was. It is now an enemy of democratic nations. not least because Beijing has taken over a lot of it.



IDF troops operating near the border with Gaza. (Photo: IDF)

But, yes, if you wanted to be serious you would begin to defund it. The US pays about 27 percent of the UN total budget. You could starve the budget of some of that money, make it more of a debating society and really make clear that its ambitions to be a world government are going nowhere.

And then I think you would also consider seriously, if you can, maybe building onto NATO. Or maybe what the late Senator John McCain called a League of Democracies. Democratic countries, or those clearly aligned with democratic countries could be involved in an international organization and work together.

But the first step is to begin to defund the UN. We have a lot of things to spend money on in the US. That tends to not be a good investment for us.

■ Gaza

iF: FINALLY, GAZA. IS THERE A “DAY AFTER”?

May: First, there’s no day after unless Hamas is incapacitated, militarily and as a governing institution.

iF: THE US IS STILL DOING THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION THING.

May: I don’t think there can be a two-state solution. What you might do is

mollify various pragmatic Arab regimes, saying, “We are going to establish a pathway to a two-state solution.” It may be a long pathway because you will need to have Palestinian leaders who agree, “We can settle for peaceful coexistence with a Jewish state. It will not be our job to wipe the state, Israel, off the face of the earth.” We don’t have that right now.

Without Hamas, you might find a way to work with the Saudis, the Emiratis, with other technocrats to begin to establish law and order and begin some reconstruction of Gaza, which has been hit hard by tunnels, armories, and military installations Hamas installed under their own people.

Israel will need the Philadelphia Corridor.

But yes, you can talk about a Palestinian state in the future – not under Hamas’s leadership or rulership, not under Islamic Jihad, and certainly not under the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas.

Without Hamas pressure, maybe a lot of them will say, “You know what? I don’t want to go through this again. Let’s rebuild our lives. This kind of war is not like when the Israelis are doing precision strikes against a bedroom in a building where a Hamas leader is staying, and we don’t want to go through this again.” Maybe that’s possible.

iF: IF YOU EVER LISTENED TO THE JPC WEBINARS, YOU KNOW I ALWAYS LIKE TO GO OUT ON A POSITIVE NOTE.

May: American leadership is indispensable. And when I say indispensable, I mean there’s nothing else. We fought World War II so that terrible authoritarian regimes would not take over most of the globe. If authoritarian regimes take over in the 21st century, it turns out that World War II was a battle won in a war that we eventually lost; the Cold War is also a war that it will turn out we lost – if the Chinese Communist Party comes to dominate most of the world.

We have to be as good as the Greatest Generation. We have to be as good as the Cold Warriors.

We can’t say, “We’re tired. Let’s just give up.” That would be particularly wrong for our children and grandchildren. They should inherit a world that is no worse than the one that we inherited from our fathers.

iF: I AM NOT AS GOOD AS MY FATHER WAS – HE WAS THE GREATEST GENERATION, THE DEPRESSION, WWII, RAISING US. I AM NOT AS GOOD AS MY FATHER. I KNOW THAT.

May: I don’t think we’ve recognized the enormity of the challenge – we are in Cold War 2.0, and this is a more difficult Cold War than the first one. But I do meet a lot of younger people who I think are up to this challenge. They understand and care and are up for this and if they become our leaders, then I’m much more optimistic about the future.

iF: CLIFF MAY, ON BEHALF OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER AND THE READERS OF inFOCUS QUARTERLY, THANK YOU FOR A GREAT LOOK AT THE WORLD.

China's Technology Strategy: Leverage Before Growth

by DANIEL BLUMENTHAL and DEREK SCISSORS

Editor's Note: To see the footnotes listed, please visit the online version: www.jewishpolicycenter.org/inFOCUS/

Whether China likes it or not, sustained and fast economic growth is not in its present or future. Political and military strategies dependent on fast growth are no longer viable options. This hardly means Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Chairman Xi Jinping has given up. He has outlined new objectives, and his regime has implemented new strategies flowing from those objectives. (1) The US and others have only partly recognized this shift and have barely begun to respond to it.

Similar to its military strategy, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) current economic competitive strategy is asymmetric. Beijing focuses on the PRC's "strengths," which include being able to produce at scale, having some of the world's largest consumer market segments, employing predatory regulatory practices, and using coercive technology acquisition. China is trying to neutralize American advantages stemming from an open, wealth-seeking, highly innovative economy. If the US keeps competing as if its rival is another open-market economy organized for individual prosperity, it risks losing the crucial contest for economic leverage and political influence. To defeat the PRC's geo-economic strategy, the US needs to ensure it no longer helps Chinese companies seeking to catch up and consider defending its most innovative companies.

■ Xi's Vision

Despite obstacles to economic growth, Xi's speeches meant only for the party cadre exude optimism about the Chinese socialist system's ultimate victory over American-style capitalism. In what may have been Xi's first speech to party leaders in January 2013 (kept secret for six years), he called on Communist leaders to stick to this ideological struggle, even if it takes a good while:

Facts have repeatedly told us that Marx and Engels' analysis of the basic contradiction of capitalist 1 A society is not outdated, nor is the historical materialist view that capitalism will inevitably perish and socialism will inevitably triumph. This is the irreversible overall trend of social and historical development, but the road is winding. The ultimate demise of capitalism, and ultimate triumph of socialism, will inevitably be a long historical process. (2)

His policies are aimed at proving his version of Marxist theory to be well-founded. Indeed, Xi is confident that what the CCP calls "socialism with Chinese characteristics" will not only survive but also offer an edge in long-term strategic and technological competition. In a 2016 speech on building a leading scientific and technological power, Xi said:

Our greatest strength lies in our socialist system, which enables us to pool resources in a major mission. This is the key to our success. We have

relied on this in making noticeable scientific breakthroughs in the past. And today we will still rely on this in achieving leapfrog scientific and technological innovations. We will develop a new mechanism under the socialist market economy to pool our resources in scientific initiatives. (3)

Xi's case to the Communist cadre is that, unlike the US, the PRC can conduct long-term planning and organize resources on a large scale to advance commercial and technological objectives. (4)

Where American analysis can go astray is in assessing the competition with China using comparative wealth or broad technological leadership. China's system is not designed for maximum prosperity or innovation. Rather, policy buttresses the PRC's economic power and leverage, which in turn give it geopolitical advantages. At the 19th Party Congress in 2017, Xi went further than pronouncing the advantages of socialism for the PRC. He announced the advent of a new era in which Chinese-style socialism will become the center of global affairs. His argument was that the Chinese system has more to offer than the American democratic capitalist system, particularly in developing countries for whom the PRC's successful socialist modernization is "blazing a new trail." (5)

Xi is therefore attempting to reorder the international system to the extent of undermining genuinely competitive markets. He unveiled the Global Development Initiative in September 2021, offering developing countries an ostensibly new development pathway based

on the PRC's state-centered approach focused on the good of the "collective." (6)

Xi is not subtle about his desire for much of the world to emulate Chinese socialism. And his immodesty about the PRC's system may be well-founded. The US has been naive in interacting economically with China as if free-market principles hold, even as it has become clear that China is manipulating markets for strategic advantage.

To be sure, Beijing is not succeeding in outpacing the US in economic size. The gross domestic product gap barely shrank from 2012 to 2022, and the wealth gap expanded. (7) Xi's ceaseless crack-down on the private sector generally and technology firms in particular invites more of the same. Taking the proverbial whip to the most innovative sectors, disallowing market forces to determine apportionment of capital, limiting property rights, and inhibiting labor movement is not a formula for catch-up. Stir in horrific demographics pressuring personal and national finances as the cohort of retirees mushrooms, and the result is dimming

certainly not economically efficient; it's occurring because it serves other aims.

■ **The Resulting Challenge**

Xi's strategy of global competition is consistent with his notion of the strengths of the "socialist market." Beijing is trying to dictate what Leninists call the commanding heights of the economy. What constitutes these heights can be debated and obviously changes over time. In this case, Xi may have chosen supply chains on which the US and its allies have come to depend. A slowly growing PRC will still be in a competitive, even menacing, geopolitical position if it can effectively dictate global availability of pharmaceuticals, mass-use semiconductors, and telecom equipment, among others. Deteriorating competitiveness means China cannot support high final-stage production in as many sectors as before. But supply chains offer the opportunity to strongly influence industries merely by taking the premier position in one or two elements of the chain. (9)

with PRC national champions.

Consider the "Huawei model" of competition. The model did not originate with and is hardly limited to Huawei, but the firm is the best-known example. The first step is regulatory protection of Chinese enterprises at home, so some cannot fail. The process continues with cooperative and coercive intellectual property (IP) transfer to the PRC in exchange for market access or access on better terms. Domestic firms are subsidized as needed to capture more of the home market. Guaranteed income there plus subsidy-enabled excess capacity then power an international expansion.

Next, major foreign competitors are targeted overseas, for acquisition or further IP transfer, via partnership or theft, clearing the way for Chinese leadership. Early on, there appears to be high competition and innovation globally, but this is misleading, because the Chinese side of the competition is not market-based. Eventual consolidation leaves Chinese firms with a stranglehold, where consumer welfare falls versus a competitive market.(10) The telecom sector became less innovative as Huawei's competitors died off. It also happened in photovoltaics, where the PRC is globally dominant. (11) Competition and innovation may begin to ebb in autos, where China will not be dominant but has become the top exporter and is displacing foreign production.(12) (Elsewhere, the PRC is becoming a vital supply-chain partner, most prominently through electric batteries.) (13)

A future target for Chinese predation could be biopharmaceuticals. Currently, the US leads in gene-editing innovation, biologics, and of course mRNA research—the most innovative segments of the industry. However, China has named the sector as a high priority and will again try to use dominant sales and export positions, for example in chemical precursors, to induce firms to locate related research and production in the PRC. If the pattern holds, subsidized Chinese competition and coercive IP acquisition are inbound.

But outpacing the US in wealth, prosperity, or even broad innovation is not Beijing's plan. Growth is still welcome, of course, but the primary goal is durable state control.

long-term prospects. The PRC is on a path to Japan-style stagnation before attaining Japanese levels of income.

But outpacing the US in wealth, prosperity, or even broad innovation is not Beijing's plan. Growth is still welcome, of course, but the primary goal is durable state control. Despite decades of experimentation with markets, the CCP still directs factors of production—land, capital, and labor—to a considerable extent. The State Council in 2020 labeled data a new factor of production and is implementing plans to ensure data come to China and stay in China.(8) This is

While that could serve as the PRC's primary goal, it would not be the only one, just as growth was aimed first but not solely at urban employment. Related to supply-chain influence is greater Chinese state influence over both domestic and foreign innovation, through imposed corporate dominance. Here, Beijing does not need to have the most innovative or profitable industries to gain leverage over the US and others. Rather, it can use its competitive advantages and market-warping strategies to try to drive out of business highly innovative US companies, then replace them

This may not work; China does not always win. But when Beijing is successful in using monopoly or oligopoly revenue from its own market, conventional subsidies, and coercive IP transfer to kill some of the most innovative American companies, innovation will slow in the US and around the world. An early version of this has already occurred. The historical pace of American corporate research and development slowed with China's accession to the World Trade Organization. (14) Moreover, sectors facing greater import competition saw weakness in research and development spending and patenting. (15)

Replacement Chinese enterprises will not be as innovative; they are not even designed to be as innovative. American standards of living will be lower than they would be otherwise, and the same will ultimately be true for global standards of living. Even Chinese living standards may not rise; what the PRC primarily gets is greater capacity to coerce and deter others' coercion. Consider a dozen more Huaweis playing central roles. This will not occur everywhere—only in sectors Beijing prioritizes and where China is capable. But it is certainly a goal.

America is not winning the battle for leverage and needs to protect, learn from, and expand its successes.

■ **How to Respond**

The US may be a decade late in recognizing Beijing's strategy of gaining economic leverage, but it does not have to accept a world in which the PRC controls critical industries through dominant firms or supply chains. China faces its own challenges. With regard to technology in particular, it has tried but failed to reach the leading edge in some sectors. Beijing has been reminded, in the form of slowly progressing



Aerial view of a container ship at Yantian port in Shenzhen, China. (Photo: Asharkyu / Shutterstock)

restrictions imposed by others, that it depends on multinationals such as Nvidia and Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company for anything close to advanced semiconductors. It has painfully failed to match the US in COVID-19 vaccines. Airline champion Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China cannot make quality turbofan jet engines and needs General Electric. (16) None of this is for lack of devoted resources.

as the development and manufacturing of semiconductor chips with the strongest computational power. (18) But setting out goals is actually harmful if it becomes cover for not making material changes. As of late spring 2023, the interim semiconductor export controls introduced in fall 2022 have not been finalized, likely due to objections from US and allied-country companies. Long-promised restrictions on outbound investment in semiconductors have not materialized. While spending heavily on chips at home, the US still helps China catch up.

If and when these failings are addressed, a great deal can be done elsewhere. It's generally recognized that semiconductors cannot be the only sector where the US government considers market intervention. Other industries are necessary to maintain a leading geopolitical position, an additional and important factor beyond what's best for consumers. But more than with chips, recognition has not been followed by action, due first to disputes over which industries might qualify. An obvious step is to quickly formulate and apply investment and export restrictions elsewhere in computing, such as quantum computing, cyber competition, and artificial intelligence and autonomous systems. This may be in progress, but it is not visible. The same is not true

The US will retain considerable economic leverage, and likely a higher standard of living than it would have otherwise, if it can maintain innovation dominance in vital industries. This requires, among other things, preventing the PRC from harming or destroying the competitive position of certain leading American companies (see Motorola).(17)

It is encouraging that the Biden administration has signaled that a major objective is to stay far ahead in such areas

in biotechnology, including biopharmaceuticals and genetics. The easy consensus is this group of products and technologies is important, but action is scant. Research support is ongoing, though not at the same level as promised for chips. The administration consciously chose to exclude biotechnology from outbound investment review, permitting the PRC to continue to draw American money in the sector. (19) The principle should be that technology protected at home by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) should not see development in China financed by American money. The same should apply to exports: Where biotechnology is controlled, it should not be permitted to then substitute American investment in the sector.

A third, still-higher level of challenge is found in new energy materials and applications, where dependence on the PRC is presently heavy. (20) American subsidies may be in progress, but reducing dependence is not. For this purpose, innovative US companies should receive much stronger IP protection. For decades, the US has done nothing more than complain about IP loss, including in new energy, (21) and pretend the next round of negotiations will be different. With Beijing emphasizing many aspects of new energy development, Chinese IP coercion will only intensify. Unless the US can do better on this score, it cannot outperform the PRC in new energy.

The Biden administration and others have identified these three sets of industries, or “families of technologies,” in National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan’s words—computing, biotech, and new energy—that will play an outsized role in overall US competitiveness. (22) Unfortunately, both the administration and Congress have also set out longer lists of “critical” sectors that are more dubiously justified. (23) This is a mistake. Broad intervention would risk widespread distortion of competition, hobbling innovation instead of protecting it.

Given the lack of action even in consensus areas, calling for broader steps is also obviously impractical.

It may not even be called for by Chinese behavior. While there are multiple ways for the US to narrow its focus to a list of genuinely strategic industries, Beijing itself has (indirectly) suggested the best approach. In sectors where the PRC continues to struggle, which at least appears to include commercial aviation, for example, America and its allies should avoid providing assistance to

protected from Chinese predation (only) and studied for lessons on how to perform under this kind of duress.

■ Conclusion

Reasonable people can differ over the state of Sino-American competition, in part because it’s reasonable to differ about what’s being competed over. If it’s wealth and prosperity, China has been shooting itself in the foot with re-centralization under Xi.

But if the contest is over whether the

...if the contest is over whether the Chinese authoritarian socialist system is better than the American democratic capitalist system at accumulating one form of economic power and the associated geopolitical gains, Xi’s strategy is sound and feasible.

China but should not intervene in their own successful markets. The eligible list should be of industries where the US is ahead, but China has demonstrated the ability to narrow the technological gap and displace foreign production with its heavily subsidized firms.

The US should not merely identify these industries and call it a day, as it has up to now. In light of the PRC’s targeting, America should at a minimum stop supporting Chinese enterprises with money and technology and take difficult steps to better protect American IP in the industries where there is consensus the US must lead. In light of Beijing’s goal of having dominant firms, Washington should, when adopting policy about the authors responses, be especially mindful of the most innovative American companies, including those that seem well ahead. They are prime targets and can be killed off by the PRC’s anticompetitive policy mix even if the PRC does not catch all the way up technologically. Successful American firms should be

Chinese authoritarian socialist system is better than the American democratic capitalist system at accumulating one form of economic power and the associated geopolitical gains, Xi’s strategy is sound and feasible. American openness and profit-seeking continue to allow the PRC to warp and eventually suppress market competition. The US is winning macroeconomically, in part because it started out so far ahead and in part because Xi’s China may no longer even be trying to compete in conventional macroeconomic terms. America is not winning the battle for leverage and needs to protect, learn from, and expand on its successes in order to do so.

DAN BLUMENTHAL is a senior fellow at AEI and author of *The China Nightmare: The Grand Ambitions of a Decaying State* (AEI Press, 2020). DEREK SCISSORS is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He is concurrently chief economist for the China Beige Book.

A Win for the Houthis – and China

by DAVID WURMSER

A year ago, the terrorist organization and quasi-state of the Houthis in Yemen launched drone attacks at great distance against Israel, and then proceeded to attack ships passing through the narrow channels separating the Red Sea from the Gulf of Aden. Effectively, these attacks have shut down the bulk of the global maritime trade that passes through this route to devastating impact.

The United States has repeatedly warned both the Houthis and Iran that it will respond to the assault on shipping. But the character of the US response has embodied the larger concept of what the Biden administration terms as legitimate “self-defense.” That concept is limited to blocking an acute attack, but at the same time avoiding use of force to preempt, prevent or address the underlying capability of the aggrieved nation to take the war to their attacker’s territory and terminate their ability to further conduct such attacks.

The enfeebled limits of US strategy – which since October 2023 has failed to stop or deter Houthi attacks – were exposed by Israel, which finally in July struck the Yemeni ports that plagued it so substantially that it led to nearly two months of no long-range attacks on Israel and to a month in which ships passing through the Red Sea suffered no significant attacks.

■ *Freedom of the Seas*

For five centuries, since the British fleet led by Sir Francis Drake defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588, the freedom of the seas and unfettered global navigation for all nations was secure

because the great power leading the West prized its maritime domination and laid as a foundation of its national strategy the prioritization of its naval force and power to secure the seas. It was an essential strategic doctrine that was both inherent to its geostrategic nature as an island and as a free land that valued economic vitality and the global enterprise that underlies it. In other words, global order – the strategic architecture of the world – was anchored to primacy of Western naval power and the securing through it of international navigation as well our prosperity.

It was a fortune of history that when Great Britain declined in will and power, which several far-sighted Americans led by Alfred Thayer Mahan divined early, the United States was already surpassing Britain’s naval power by the 1890s. The United States, thus easily and seamlessly stepped into the breach and assumed the mantle the British Navy had carried through the four previous centuries.

■ *Replacing US Will*

But now, US power declines through a loss of will to commit to securing the vital naval passage of the Ba al-Mandab, through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, to connect Europe and Asia, production and consumption. And this time the nation that has moved to replace receding US power neither upholds global free trade nor freedom of navigation. It is not a force for stability, but one which seeks to undermine the sovereignty of nations by empowering international institutions it controls.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) aggressively fills the void left by

American power and folds it neatly into both its strategically challenging Belt and Road Initiative and its attempt to establish a new order of international rules that seek to undermine American power and sovereignty. Beijing has navigated to evade the threat posed by the Houthis to international shipping and closure of the Bab al-Mandeb straits and through that, also the entire Red Sea – essentially the Suez transit corridor.

Rather than a threat, China an opportunity in its global competition with the United States.

■ *The Chinese Alternative*

China, soon after the closure began, devised with the Houthis and Iran a strategy to forge an alternative, secure shipping structure – a clearing house for Houthi-permitted passage (and by implication Iran-permitted passage through Hormuz) safely through the Bab al-Mandab Straits.

That emerging clearance and de facto international regulatory structure bars any shipping going to Israel, either directly or indirectly boycotting Israel. That includes a primary or secondary boycott of Israeli companies – even companies that are not Israeli, but trade with Israel, or tertiary companies that are known to trade often with Israel, but that have not been going to Israel.

In other words, if Maersk Shipping has any shipping contact with Israel, then the entire Maersk line – even routes that have nothing to do with Israel – will be unable to attain safe passage. Thus, the Houthis, with Chinese and Russian help, are beginning to create a sanitized shipping corridor through the Canal



Houthi rebels in Hajjah, Yemen. (Photo: Mohammed al-Wafi / Shutterstock)

and through the Straits, which then also begins to bar American and European trade that doesn't organize it through the Houthis.

China is creating an entire shipping structure that bars America, as well as Israel and its allies, unless they pay homage to the Houthis. And the Houthis are working most closely on that particular issue – apart from with the Iranians – with the Chinese. And the Chinese are working to create this alternative shipping clearance structure that undermines one of the primary functions of the United States Navy, which is to be the real guarantor of freedom of the seas.

■ **What Happens**

The devastating image being created of eroding American power and perfidious will, also creates conditions for the rise of an alternative shipping structure that's safe for China and bars those Beijing doesn't like. In the end, this will likely evolve to have no connection to the Middle East. If Toyota, for example, competes with China, and China wants the company to be obstructed, it can use its role as the guarantor of global sea traffic to punish Toyota and bar it, in coordination with its allies like Iran and the Houthis, from cortical passage.

A structure is emerging which demands that one agree with China. And nations and companies will be forced to pay the Chinese regime's piper in terms of policies – and not only over policies toward the Houthis or the Middle East more broadly, but also to China (and through this also to Russia and Iran) for its own ambitions – in order to have proper shipping through the Suez Canal.

Nations or companies China deems as competition will have built-in costs that are prohibitive compared to Chinese companies. The denial of passage through more direct routes from Europe to Asia and reverse – which includes not only goods but critical raw materials and rare earth minerals – can add substantial costs to shipping, which render goods non-competitive.

■ **Raw Materials & Rare Earth Minerals**

Indeed, China already has made a strong play for the control of African raw materials through its Belt and Road projects seizing control of the logistics and ports of the African coasts. And the Russians are racing through the Sahel further north in Africa to consolidate the whole of north Africa. Adding the creation of a global shipping structure that

advantages Russia and China essentially helps them monopolize the supply of raw materials and profit from their advantaged control over their transmission.

This is all the more problematic since under China's Belt and Road Initiative, with its domination of African rail and port structures, China has bent the raw material supply chain structures in Africa to run to its eastern coasts along the Indian Ocean – making the closure of the Straits of Bab al-Mandeb, the Red Sea and Suez all the more problematic for European manufacturers.

This structure China is forging with Red Sea closures is in fact a play for a far broader strategy that anchors not only a new global shipping order to replace the freedom of the sea which had been guaranteed over the last five centuries by Britain and the US, but of an entire new, alternative economic order over which China has asserted structural advantages.

■ **WHO**

In addition, the establishment of such a global structure fits into a larger Chinese strategy to invent new or hijack existing international structures to strategically paralyze the United States. One need only look at what should be an innocuous structure – the World Health Organization (WHO) led by Secretary General Tedros Ghebreyesus. It has become inescapable that Ghebreyesus, and thus WHO, clearly answers to China's beckon.

China's main thrust in attacking the West as a whole through such structures is designed to diminish the concept of national sovereignty. We see that in organizations including WHO, in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other UN structures, and in climate agreements, where China is exempt from economically burdensome conditions. But we also see it in international initiatives which allow, encourage, or fully support "resistance" or violence. As a response, they put forward "solutions" that more or less suggest the diminution of sovereignty.

■ *Strategic Initiatives*

In turn, those initiatives to diminish sovereignty are veiled strategic initiatives designed to take away from the United States and Israel their ability to defend themselves or alternatively, provide structures that undermine core American interests.

For example, every time the Iranians lurch forward in their nuclear program, China raises the issue of a “nuclear weapons free zone” in the region as a major strategic assault on Israel. Israel’s 2006 war with Hezbollah came on the eve of the international commu-

termination of missile defense stands central. But then, Iran notes how impossible such a NWFZ will be if the United States fails to force disarmament of Israel’s nuclear program, let alone if the United States continue to carve out its own right to maintain its nuclear arsenal and develop missile defense. China and Iran consistently work together to try to checkmate Israel’s nuclear program, push global nuclear disarmament, and paralyze Western superiority in missile defense by presenting a “nuclear weapons free zone” and a return to the 2000 NPT Review Conference plan.

closures of the Red Sea and Suez Canal remains devastating to production, logistics supply, and costs in Europe and Asia.

And yet, despite the substantial material damage to the West that these economic impacts represent, they are not the most important aspect of this problem.

The far more important and damaging impacts are strategic and geopolitical.

Regionally, as a result of the US failure to uphold its central role as the world’s guardian of the seas, its regional stature as a great power is damaged so much that alignments of nations and their peace agreements with Israel are under stress. Indeed, some of these peace agreements – such as Egypt’s with Israel – may not survive and some regional nations whose very existence is a manifestation of Western involvement and credibility – such as Jordan’s Hashemite monarchy – are in question.

Coordination with the West may shift as the United States becomes ever more perceived not as a strong horse but as a lame donkey. The failure to stand down the Houthis has codified the termination of the United States as an effective and attractive superpower for the region’s nations.

Globally, this failure opens the door to the rise of new international structures that codify new rules and norms that leave America and its allies strategically under siege, economically disadvantaged, its enterprises limping with its raw material supply uncertain as well as costly.

In short, the failure to stand down the Houthis in the Red Sea is emerging as a cornerstone in the construction of a new world order led by our rival, China, designed to diminish US sovereignty, undermine our economic security and impede our geostrategic stature.

DAVID WURMSER is a senior fellow at the Center for Security Policy in Washington as well as in the Jerusalem Center for Foreign Affairs, and the Misgav Institute for Zionist Strategy.

(The US concept of self-defense) is limited to blocking an acute attack, but... avoiding use of force to preempt, prevent or address the underlying capability of the aggrieved nation to take the war to their attacker’s territory and terminate their ability to further conduct such attacks

nity acting through the IAEA Board of Governors against Iran for violating the Paris Accords and moving ahead on its nuclear program. There is consistent regional escalation encouraged by Iran every time it jumps forward in its nuclear program.

While the West focuses on the regional, tactical and actual strategic movements in the region, we’re not paying as close attention to the nuclear arena.

China and Iran engage in a tango wherein Iran leads by moving ahead and then China comes forward with its “nuclear weapons free zone” (NWFZ) proposal as well as resurrection of the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty 2000 Review Conference 13-point plan, of which the disarmament of the nuclear arsenals of the great powers and the

■ *Conclusion*

It is a festering, ongoing national humiliation that the Houthis, with their comical bravado, non-existent air power, and low-quality army have brought the greatest sea power in history into paralysis in protecting its own vital trade through a critical sea passage. Iran has not yet even cut off the Straits of Hormuz, but it has through its proxy already achieved a great victory on the seas over the United States.

This has imposed great economic costs on the region and on the world. And it will continue to do so. The first signs of new patterns of trade and transmission routes are emerging, some of which would actually be a very positive and powerful economic development, but overall, the economic impact of the

Not Your Grandfather's NATO

by **STEPHEN D. BRYEN**

NATO, once a simple defensive alliance, now faces a crisis.

Today, NATO is a huge multinational alliance of 32 countries, far larger and covering vastly more territory than the original 12 countries. In raw numbers, it has a potential military force of 3.5 million people and covers 25.07 million square kilometers (15.58 million square miles) of territory.

While that would seem to be massive, for a variety of reasons NATO's power and capability depend on the United States. This was true from the start, and it remains so today. Initially an American led anti-Communist defensive alliance, NATO has morphed into a US-led power bloc that is aggressively expanding. The alliance no longer coordinates with the United Nations (at least on any consistent basis), despite declarations in the NATO Treaty.

Despite efforts to reinforce its presence in Poland, Romania, and Estonia, the alliance faces significant problems: a critical shortage of armaments; untested and undermanned armed forces; and a US presence that is still mostly expeditionary.

■ *Ukraine*

Although NATO has expanded and continues to feed arms into Ukraine, the prospect for Ukraine surviving Russian attacks seems poor. Meanwhile, Russia has learned a great deal about how to deal with NATO weapons using its air defenses and electronic jamming capabilities. The cupboards in the United States are noticeably empty as a result of the conflict, and there is no reason to

think that, aside from air power, NATO could do any better in Ukraine than the Ukrainians.

NATO is still strident when it comes to Ukraine and its posture toward Russia. Some non-factors such as the European Union are even worse rhetorically. But the new NATO is facing a dire situation in Ukraine and the risk of a wider European war. Will NATO cross the Rubicon of conflict, or seek some accommodation with its sworn enemy, Russia?

■ *The Threat*

It is no small matter that the alliance is no longer focused on communism as a threat, but rather on Russia as a threat to Europe (and by extension, to the United States.) The American commitment to Europe puts Washington in a difficult logistical and military position to deal with the far more potent threat of China. But, it seems, US policymakers prefer to deal with the Russian threat – perhaps because that assures US dominance in European affairs and favors American interests.

If Russia was an actual threat, and if the Europeans were really committed to their own defense, then Europe could easily assemble a military force comparable to, if not bigger than, anything Russia could muster. Europe has a population of more than 700 million. By comparison, Russia has a much smaller population (144.2 million), a much smaller economy, and an army of around 470,000 soldiers. (The US Army numbers around 452,000 active-duty personnel).

■ *The Original Threat*

The NATO Treaty was adopted in Washington in 1949. Europe was under siege from surging domestic Communism, the Russians had mostly completed their work of taking over eastern Europe and putting Communist governments in place, and the Berlin Airlift was still underway.

Four months after the Treaty was signed, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb (dubbed Joe-1 after Joseph Stalin) ending the US atomic monopoly.

The original members did not include Germany, Turkey, Greece or Spain. Greece and Turkey would join in 1952; Spain only in 1982, well after dictator (Caudillo) Francisco Franco's death in 1975. Germany was divided and occupied. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) under allied occupation (US, UK, and France) was declared in May 1949, but it remained an occupied area until 1955. In May of that year, the FRG joined NATO. In response, Russian-occupied East Germany became a state on October 7, 1949. It would join the Warsaw Pact, or Warsaw Treaty Organization, Russia's answer to NATO founded on May 14, 1955. NATO and the Warsaw Pact defined the Cold War until the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

NATO was part of a strong program launched by the United States to rebuild Europe after World War II, end the domestic Communist threat in a number of European countries (Greece, Italy), protect the allied part of Berlin (a divided city), and create strong defenses

against any Soviet military threat to Europe. As a result, the US established a permanent military presence in Europe including important bases in Germany, the UK, and Italy. Belgium became the home of the NATO command known as the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, commanded first by General Dwight D. Eisenhower (April 1951 to May 1952).

The prospect for Ukraine surviving Russian attacks seems poor. Meanwhile, Russia has learned a great deal about how to deal with NATO weapons using its air defenses and electronic jamming capabilities.

■ Article 5

The NATO Treaty defines the alliance as defensive. The key provision, Article 5, states:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Article 5 was only used once, on September 12, 2001, a day after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States. A decision was reached, after some controversy, by the North Atlantic Council, the political decision-making part of NATO.

NATO carried out a program called Eagle Assist, sending NATO AWACS aircraft to patrol US skies. Although a symbol of support, NATO's intervention was militarily largely meaningless. What NATO AWACS planes could do in US airspace was never explained.

NATO itself, however, has been involved in a number of operations that used military force – in Afghanistan,

Kosovo, Bosnia, and Algeria. NATO also is directly involved in Ukraine, though not with ground troops.

■ The Evolving Russian Threat

After its founding, NATO concentrated on preventing a Russian invasion of Western Europe, mainly focused on West Germany. NATO strategists and outside military experts focused on the idea that the Soviet Union (mainly Russian troops) would invade through the “Fulda Gap,” a lowland corridor running southwest from the German state of Thuringia to Frankfurt am Main that, immediately following World War II, was identified by Western strategists as a possible route for a Soviet invasion of the American occupation zone from the eastern sector occupied by the Soviet Union.

As the USSR built up its forces in the 1970s and 1980, Western strategists worried that the US and its NATO allies lacked enough armor and artillery to stop a Russian attack.

Some of this focus on the Russian threat was reflected in two novels, one written by Sir James Hacket called

The Untold Story: The Third World War (1978) and Tom Clancy and Larry Bond's *Red Storm Rising* (1986).

In 1981, KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov, in a then-secret speech, said it was critical that Russia “not miss the military preparations of the enemy, its preparations for a nuclear strike, and not miss the real risk of the outbreak of war.” According to Andropov, NATO was preparing a first strike on the Soviet Union under the cover of two NATO exercises, Autumn Forge 83 and Able Archer 83. Minister of Defense Dimitry Ustinov told the Politburo that the NATO exercises were “increasingly difficult to distinguish from a real deployment of armed forces for aggression.”

Just as the United States and NATO feared a Russian attack, Russia seems to have had a mirror image of a preemptive attack on the USSR, focused on nuclear weapons. While Russia and the United States would engage in proxy conflicts over the Cold War Years (Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the Middle East), general war in Europe did not happen.

■ Collapse of the USSR

In October 1985, Gorbachev, on a visit to Paris, met with Françoise Mitterrand, the French president. He told Mitterrand that Russia was a third world country with nuclear weapons. In 1991, his insight was demonstrated. On December 26, by Declaration № 142-H of the Soviet of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, the USSR ceased to exist.

With the collapse of the USSR, Russian power was radically downsized. The infamous Soviet military buildup of the 1980s, that had sucked the Russian economy dry, was now left rusting away. Nuclear submarines were abandoned in port, slowly sinking in their berths. Defense factories stopped producing. Workers were not paid. For the next 15 years, Russia would be on its heels, struggling to reinvent itself. The Warsaw Pact disappeared.

Russia was now a dysfunctional state with nuclear weapons. The Russian army itself was falling apart. Russian military gear was for sale in flea markets in eastern Europe to earn a few dollars. The West was worried about ex-Soviet scientists hiring themselves out to rogue states, worried about rotting nuclear submarines and unsafe nuclear power plants, unsure about who was in command and, overall, whether Russia was a stable country.

troop deployments, and operations are focused on stopping a Russian attack. NATO has reinforced its troop deployments and bases to protect the Baltic states (especially Estonia, which NATO sees as vulnerable), Poland, and Romania.

While the USSR was dissolving, NATO started an unprecedented round of expansion. While in 1991 and the following years there was little tangible to fear from Russia, the newly independent states needed defense help. Most

Force (KFOR) and Libya (Operation Unified Protector.) The US tried to get NATO to support the Iraq war (2003) but could not, with Turkey strongly opposed. Instead, the US created a “Coalition of the Willing” (Multinational Force, Iraq) with troops from the US, Australia, UK, and Poland). Other states would subsequently send contingents to Iraq to support stabilization efforts.

■ *Ukraine Again*

NATO’s future is inextricably linked to Ukraine. As the war reaches an end point with Kiev potentially forced to deal with Moscow, Ukraine’s defense minister is working hard to convince Washington to give Ukraine long range weapons to attack Russian territory, especially Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Ukrainians know very well that if Washington cooperates fully, the Ukraine war will invite even more violent Russian attacks. They are counting on this to draw NATO in and have NATO troops replace Ukrainians on the front line. It is easy to understand that if NATO actually sent troops or brought NATO air power to bear on Russian operations in Ukraine, the war would rapidly expand to Europe.

This lifeline for Ukraine would put NATO in the eye of a storm to which it has already contributed in many ways. Could NATO be dragged into a war that will threaten European cities, infrastructure, and military bases? Despite the Ukrainian push into the Kursk area of Russia, and large-scale drone attacks on Russia including shelling of civilians in Belgorod, the Russians have not taken the bait other than to continue to put pressure on Ukraine’s army (AFU). Most reports are that Ukraine’s army is overstretched, short on manpower, and starting to crack.

The question is what is next?

STEPHEN D. BRYEN, *Ph.D.*, is a former Undersecretary of Defense. You can find his at www.substack.com/@stephenbryen.

Initially an American led anti-Communist defensive alliance, NATO has morphed into a US-led power bloc that is aggressively expanding.

Meanwhile, what remained in Russia was mired in corruption. Even as Russia slowly regained its footing, corruption throughout the country continued, including in the military. As this paper is written, anti-corruption investigations, arrests and firings in the Russian military are taking place as Russia’s leadership tries to upgrade army leadership and improve military equipment and supplies released to the troops.

■ *Post-Soviet NATO Expansion*

When the Soviet Union collapsed, NATO still regarded Russia as an existential challenge. That challenge, in the NATO view, took on added gravitas after Russia sent troops into Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014 and 2022). It is easy to overlook the fact that NATO had its own ambitions in Georgia and Ukraine and was actively promoting NATO in both places, including trying to force the Russians out.

Today all NATO military exercises,

had been utterly dependent on Russian weapons, and these would not be forthcoming in future. Moreover, they wanted to be protected. While the Russians, from time to time complained, and on occasion were given assurances that proved false, NATO expanded.

NATO also embarked on programs to offer future NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine. The offer came with NATO advisors and specialists, weapons, and intelligence support. Russian leaders saw the attempts as threats, especially when it came to Ukraine. NATO, along with the EU, put pressure on Ukraine to join Europe and separate itself from Russia. For its part Russia saw NATO in Ukraine as a visceral threat to Russian security.

Along with NATO expansion was the aggressive stance of the alliance beyond its defensive mandate. That includes operations in Afghanistan’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Bosnia and Herzegovina Implementation Force (IFOR), Kosovo

Can the US Change Iran's Malign Behavior?

by **KENNETH R. TIMMERMAN**

The Islamic regime in Iran is on a roll. Since the Biden-Harris administration took office in January 2021, the United States stopped enforcing the Trump-era sanctions on Iranian oil exports. They paid \$6 billion in exchange for the release of five dual-citizen hostages and sought to revive the failed 2015 nuclear deal. They allowed the United Nations sanctions on Iran's missile programs to expire in October 2023, and Iran to access \$10 billion in frozen assets in Iraq. Far from moderating the regime's behavior, these US concessions have only emboldened the regime.

Since 2021, the Iranian regime has expanded its support for terrorist groups in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, and the Palestinian territories, and they've had much more money to devote to them. At home, the regime cracked down on nationwide protests that erupted in September 2022 after the murder of a young Iranian-Kurdish woman for failing to comply with Islamic hijab rules. By the time the Biden-Harris Administration gave up its efforts to revive the nuclear deal in late 2023, the regime was flush with cash, impervious to outside pressures, and emboldened to attack US assets and US allies in the region with impunity. They thought they could do the same with Israel.

■ *Axis of Opportunism*

Further enhancing the Iranian regime's position was the expansion of its alliances with Russia and China. Tehran signed massive long-term oil and investment deals with both powers,

which solidified military and strategic ties to the point where we can now speak of a Russia-China-Iran "Axis of Opportunism." In just three short years, the Iranian regime has gone from being virtually broke and fearful of the US Maximum Pressure campaign of President Trump, to becoming the region's power broker. And now the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is warning that Iran has accelerated the production of highly enriched uranium to the point where it could produce enough weapons-grade

uranium for "nine nuclear weapons in one month, twelve in two months, thirteen in three months... and fifteen in five months."

This is absolutely mind-boggling. So, how did we get here?

■ *Carrots and Sticks*

I argue in a larger piece for the America First Policy Institute that the policies of previous US administrations have failed because all of them, including the Trump Administration, were predicated on the notion that with

enough carrots or enough sticks, they could convince the regime to change its behavior. But that has never happened. When the regime has been given incentives, the mullahs gobble them up and don't even say "thank you" and continue what they were doing before. And when they do get moderately whacked through sanctions, they redirect the economy to the Revolutionary Guard so the elites make more money on the black market through corrupt business deals. Sanctions alone do not have the impact of changing the regime's behavior.

(Iran's) basic values are so completely different from ours that to change the behavior we object to would essentially be to change the regime itself... When we say, "change the behavior" of the regime, the regime hears "change the regime." And so, they utterly resist the changes we seek.

I believe we should give up this notion of trying to change the behavior of the Iranian regime because it has utterly failed. The Iranian regime does not make policy based on a Western cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, their basic values are so completely different from ours that to change the behavior we object to would essentially be to change the regime itself. And that's a point that goes widely unrecognized in the policy community, from left to right. When we say, "change the behavior" of the regime, the regime hears "change the



A Quds Day rally in Tehran, Iran. (Photo: Saeediex / Shutterstock)

regime.” And so, they utterly resist the changes we seek.

■ **The Military Option**

One caveat, however. There is one thing that from time to time has worked to alter regime behavior, and that is military pressure.

In April 1988, the Reagan Administration launched Operation Praying Mantis in response to Iran’s efforts to restrict the flow of Iraqi oil exports by mining the Strait of Hormuz. In twenty-four hours, the US Navy sank a third of Iran’s major surface ships, destroyed two offshore oil platforms and several combat aircraft, shocking regime leaders, including Ayatollah Khomeini himself. Remember, Iran had been fighting a bloody stalemate of a war with Iraq for eight years. As a result of that US military operation, Iran stopped mining the Strait of Hormuz, and less than two months later, the

Ayatollah sued for peace with Saddam.

The only other time the United States exerted significant military pressure on the Tehran regime was on January 3, 2020, when President Trump ordered a drone strike in Baghdad that took out Quds Force commander, Qasim Soleimani.

Soleimani was the most significant Iranian military leader to have emerged from the Islamic Revolution. Not only was he the mastermind of Iranian terrorism and in charge of the IRGC expeditionary forces fighting in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen; he was the kingmaker of post-Saddam Iraq. He personally traveled repeatedly to Baghdad and Erbil to negotiate with Iraqi politicians the makeup of their government. He played a similar role in Lebanon.

Killing Soleimani was controversial. Most of the president’s advisors opposed it as too radical or too provocative. As Senator Lindsey Graham told

author Bob Woodward, he counselled Trump against it over a round of golf at Trump International in West Palm Beach. “[T]his will be almost total war... You kill him, new game. You go from playing \$10 blackjack to \$10,000-a-hand blackjack... That risks major war.”

What was not talked about at the time is the fact that Soleimani traveled to Baghdad to conduct a major military operation against the United States, the storming of the US embassy. I reveal details of that planned attack, and my role in averting it, in a new book, *The Iran House: Tales of Revolution, Persecution, War, and Intrigue* (Post Hill Press). Iranian defectors I was running for the US intelligence community were providing real-time information on Soleimani’s operation in Baghdad, which was relayed directly to the White House.

At one point, I was asked for my recommendation. The Iranian

regime respected force, I said. When the United States failed to respond to the attack that killed 241 US Marines in Beirut in October 1983, Iran took that as a sign of US weakness. Ronald Reagan cured them of that notion with Operation Praying Mantis. We needed to do the same thing today and hit them hard, not sucker-punch them, I said. Two days later, a drone killed Qassem Soleimani.

After four years of Biden-Harris appeasement, restraining the regime's aggressive behavior will be more complicated than ever. Not only are they wealthier than they were when Team Biden took over in January 2021, they have now cemented a new economic, strategic, and military alliance with Russia and China. That increases the stakes of a US-Iranian confrontation significantly.

■ *The Nuclear Equation*

And there is now the nuclear equation. We finally have a secretary general of the IAEA, Raphael Grossi, who takes

In just three short years, the Iranian regime has gone from being virtually broke and fearful of the US Maximum Pressure Campaign of President Trump, to becoming the region's power broker.

Iran's violations of its commitments under the Treaty for the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons seriously. This is refreshing. But without backup from the United States, Grossi's admonitions have had zero impact on regime behavior or the West's perception of a threat from Tehran.

Donald Rumsfeld liked to talk about "known unknowns." We know that we don't know whether Iran has a nuclear weapon, and we know that in part because of the IAEA inspections. We know also that we don't know

whether Iran has an undeclared uranium enrichment plant, or a secret bomb plant. But both are possible. We are also pretty sure that if they have a warhead they have not mated it to a missile or transported it outside of Iran. But we still don't know what we don't know.

However, what we do know is quite a lot.

While Iran has not - as of this writing - conducted a nuclear weapons test, the IAEA has told us repeatedly that they have tested all the non-nuclear components of a nuclear warhead. This is extremely significant because these components are not simple technologies. They include neutron initiators that must time the detonation of the non-nuclear core of the weapon in a precise sequence measured in micro-seconds.

We also know that they have a workable nuclear weapons design thanks to the revelations of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after Israel's Mossad pulled off what I believe is the most astonishing intel-

ligence operation since World War II. Remember, an Israeli team infiltrated Tehran in 2018, located the nondescript warehouse in a working class neighborhood where Iran's nuclear archive was housed, and broke into four gigantic safes. They seized five hundred boxes of documents and CDs, including documents that chronicled the development and testing of non-nuclear warhead components and the warhead design. The Mossad operatives then exfiltrated the archive in panel trucks and got out of dodge before anyone woke up, and all

of it within a six-hour time window.

So, we know that they have a weapon design. We know they have the highly-enriched uranium. We know that they have rockets that are capable of carrying a weapon, should they decide to put it on a rocket, which I'm not entirely convinced they would because of missile defense capabilities in Israel and elsewhere.

■ *The Biggest Unknown*

The biggest unknown is what's in Ayatollah Khamenei's mind. We have been told - falsely - by pro-regime advocates that many years ago he issued a *fatwa* against the development of nuclear weapons. (Without burdening readers with pages of footnotes, I say "falsely" for one simple, self-evident reason: the nuclear weapons development teams whose documents were seized by Mossad could not have carried out their work and spent the enormous sums they spent without the Ayatollah's blessing).

But we do know what the regime says about its intention, which is to eliminate both Israel and the United States. We should take them seriously. We appease this regime at our peril.

To date, only force has had any impact on changing the behavior of the regime. But before anyone leap to the conclusion that I favor a massive military strike on Iran, let me make clear that I have long advocated a very different alternative, and that is enacting policies that enable the people of Iran to overthrow the regime without a US bullet being fired or a US boot on the ground.

I will expand on those policies in the next issue of *inFOCUS* Quarterly.

KEN TIMMERMAN is a senior fellow at the America First Policy Institute, whose 14th work of non-fiction, *The Iran House: Tales of Revolution, Persecution, War, and Intrigue*, was just released by Post Hill Press. This article has been adapted from a longer policy piece commissioned by AFPI.

Focus on Affordable Energy, Not Stifling Africa

by FRANCOIS BAIRD

Africa has the fastest growing human population in the world, untapped energy resources and vast, undeveloped agricultural potential, but struggles to feed its people, spurring unrest and discontent that contribute to growing flows of African refugees into Europe, and increasingly into the US. The key to prosperity and food access for all Africans is affordable energy access.

As Chinese and Russian energy market interventions make inroads in Africa, American risks rise.

Energy security will unlock Africa's latent economic potential and lay a path to prosperity with the right policies enabling investment in electricity infrastructure and leveraging cheap African energy sources. By enabling direct investments in affordable African energy security, the US would advance its national interest after years of decline.

■ *The African Energy Crisis*

Energy in Africa is a contested arena because climate-change policies in the industrialized West are often in conflict with the economic growth and development imperatives of African countries, particularly in benefiting from cheap, locally available fossil fuels.

Africans want to benefit as much from their domestic energy resources as the US has done already, leading Africans to ask why a continent that has never been carbonized must now be de-carbonized at their cost when their continent has not benefited from fossil fuel production. They notice that Western help comes with climate policy

demands, but Eastern help does not. In both cases the cost for Africa is too high.

No wonder then that in 2023 the RAND Corporation concluded that US influence on the continent had waned, while Chinese and Russian influence had grown. American military decline may be eroding even faster in reality, witnessed by the Niger military regime forcing the American military out after also ousting its long-standing colonial master, France, and handing the American-built base over to Russia.

China is now Africa's largest trading partner with its long-standing Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while Russia has renewed interest in the continent in the wake of sanctions following its Ukraine invasion.

Trade relations between Africa and America have cooled remarkably despite the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The value of trade between the US and Africa between 2008 and 2021 decreased by 55% to \$64 billion. The continent's trade with China in 2021 alone was valued at \$254 billion. China is estimated to be active in key infrastructure projects — including energy — in 33 African countries. Like China, Russia promotes its state-linked businesses involved in nuclear and other energy areas. For instance, South Africa had announced Russia's Gazprombank as its partner to refurbish a gas-to-liquids refinery. Gazprombank is under Western sanctions.

■ *Agriculture*

By contrast, Power Africa, an American initiative, was launched in

2013 to expand electricity generation and access, yet its target of 30,000 new connections by 2030 will have negligible impact. The US Development Finance Corporation (DFC) climate mandate since April 2021, which incentivizes the agency to prioritize clean energy infrastructure, may have something to do with it. Significantly, South Africa is fighting the EU carbon tax on trade from Africa. Western energy prescriptions have so far failed Africa, particularly in growing jobs and ending hunger through agriculture.

Food and agriculture production in Africa could grow from its current \$280 billion a year (2023) to \$1 trillion by 2030. Yet, about 80 percent of the continent's food is still produced by small-scale, often subsistence farmers, and more than 200 million Africans still go hungry every day.

While European farmers stage dramatic protests over harm to them from green policies, China is ramping up to support agriculture in Africa, with the aim of increasing agricultural imports from Africa to \$300 billion by 2025. The increase in Chinese market access and potential slowdown in agricultural production in Europe and possibly the US, due to environmental regulations, provide opportunity for Africa.

■ *Understanding the Energy Problem*

Some 600 million Africans — of an estimated population of 1.4 billion — lack access to electricity. Universal access to affordable energy electricity will require additional annual connections

to 90 million people — or triple the existing rate of growth. Although increasing access to electricity has already led to improvements in education, economic growth, and development, the challenges of energy access leave the average African with an energy diet that would be unimaginable to the average Westerner.

The average annual per capita electricity consumption in sub-Saharan Africa is only 488 kilowatt-hours — equivalent to about 5 percent of the consumption in America. If South Africa's

has crippled economic growth, contributing to rising crime and record unemployment and dangerously eroding social stability.

■ *The Renewable Wave is a Mere Ripple*

According to the IEA, energy investment in Africa has been declining due to the Covid-19 pandemic; global disruptions, including Russia's Ukraine invasion; and rising borrowing and debt servicing costs.

Clean energy investment in Africa

Southern Africa Power Pool (SAPP) represents regional electricity companies who have created a common market and grid in the Southern African Development region, but capacity and transmission constraints have resulted in a deficit of 2154MW, which undermine SAPP ambitions.

These challenges are replicated across other regional grids and power pools on the continent.

■ *Options for the Future*

With enough investment and determination to solve the other challenges, the continent has options to improve energy access for hundreds of millions of people.

For example, solar mini grids are being rolled out in sub-Saharan Africa, rising from about 500 installed in 2010 to 3,000 installed today with a further 9,000 planned. Some estimates predict that these grids can produce electricity for as low as \$0.20/kWh, the most cost-effective solution for deep-rural Africa.

Initiatives are under way to make mini-grid investments attractive for the private sector, but at the current pace only some 12,000 mini grids will be implemented by 2030, far off the 160,000 that are needed to provide power to 380 million people.

Gas offers a significant transitional energy source. Africa's natural gas resources are abundant and are estimated at 800 trillion cubic feet, with half the continent's countries having proven gas reserves. But, like many of the other opportunities for Africa, inadequate infrastructure, lack of financial resources and regulatory frameworks hinder progress.

Progress depends on finding a new financing model for these energy projects.

■ *Mega-farming*

African agricultural production must shift from peasant farming toward large-scale commercial farming, with the ultimate aim of multiplying successful mega-farms in Africa in order to feed its

Energy in Africa is a contested arena because climate-change policies in the industrialized West are often in conflict with the economic growth and development imperatives of African countries...

consumption is removed from the equation, annual per capita consumption in sub-Saharan Africa drops to 150kWh.

This is only enough to run a refrigerator for 6.5 hours a day.

Inadequate energy grid expansion and investment lead to extremely high network losses, averaging 15% — almost twice the global average of 8% — across the continent in 2020.

For example, Nigeria, with a population of 206 million, has a power generation capacity of around 12 gigawatts, whereas Brazil (with a similar population) has a generation capacity of 181GW. Nigeria's grid infrastructure cannot handle more than around 5GW generation capacity at any given time, which results in 43 percent of the population effectively lacking electricity access. No wonder Nigeria already suffered catastrophic grid blackouts in April and July of this year

Energy poverty exacts a price. South Africa's well-documented energy crisis

accounts for less than two percent of the global total despite the continent representing some 20 percent of the world's population. Energy investment will need to rise to \$200 billion a year by 2030 for African countries to meet their energy-related goals.

This is likely a pipedream, because Africa cannot afford the debt burden, even if the money can be raised. Practically, even if the African governments somehow raise the money required, these investments will come to naught without an expansion of power grids.

Despite plentiful solar and wind opportunities, grid expansion is a significant challenge to the use of renewables to alleviate South Africa's energy crisis. Grid capacity must be expanded with an extra 1430 miles per year against the 186 miles currently available.

Southern African regional grid expansion is also vital for sharing electricity resources among countries. The

fast-growing population and to export.

This requires reliable, affordable base load.

In addition to the normal requirements for agriculture, mega-farming becomes feasible through the rule of law, secure land tenure, adequate infrastructure, well-functioning banking and financial markets, and affordable energy access.

The benefits of mega-farming are legion. Mega-farms provide employment for educated people and unskilled labour, a pathway to development and economic growth in rural areas that pre-

livestock farmers. As a mega-farming operation, the Sernick value chain provides support for African farming development through its practical experience of managing a complex value chain and by providing markets and supplies for emerging farmers. The system empowers emerging African livestock farmers to grow from subsistence to commercial status, enabling them to meaningfully participate and benefit from livestock value chains.

Malawi, the fourth-poorest country in the world, relies on agriculture,

contain illegal immigration due to hunger and poverty from the poorest continent with the fastest growing population, they should assist the development of cheap fossil energy in Africa, invest in infrastructure, support rule-of-law institutions, and encourage privately-owned large scale commercial farming, especially mega-farming.

■ **Security, Stability and Prosperity Demands Affordable Energy**

Universal and affordable energy access across Africa is essential for prosperity and economic growth on a continent which remains a largely unrealized market for developed nations. Affordable energy access and security will unlock Africa's economic potential and pave the way to prosperity and food access for its 1.4 billion citizens. Policies enabling investment in affordable electricity infrastructure and African energy resources will help hundreds of millions in Africa to participate in the modern economy, driving development and economic growth.

However, current energy generation and infrastructure are inadequate, expensive, and limit progress. It is a problem that can be solved with flexibility, targeting affordable resources, and focusing on adding value to African resources.

America must re-establish a relationship with Africa, which is increasingly looking to Moscow and Beijing rather than to Washington. At the heart of this relationship lies realistic energy diplomacy. Affordable local energy will enable efficient large-scale commercial farming and mega-farms to feed Africa's fast-growing population and grow African economies and jobs.

If America won't, China and Russia will.

FRANÇOIS BAIRD is an Africa expert, and a founder of the FairPlay trade movement and international consulting firm, Baird's CMC.

Zimbabwe is an example of the cost of destroying privately owned large-scale commercial agriculture. Once called the "breadbasket of Africa" ... Zimbabwe now spends 100 percent of its foreign currency receipts on food imports.

dictably lag behind fast-growing urban areas. Mega-farms encourage stability and food security.

South African mega-farms illustrate the point. The country's sophisticated poultry industry is more competitive than all European poultry producers. Nearly 47,000 South African small-scale farmers left poultry production through dumping of chicken by foreign producers, including Brazil, the US, and Europe, as well as the collapse of electricity supply, infrastructure, municipal services, and the effect of Covid restrictions and Avian influenza. But mega-poultry producers remained competitive and helped South Africa avoid chicken shortages despite these problems.

The Sernick Group in South Africa is another example of a successful single mega-farmer. Founder Nick Serfontein built an integrated livestock value chain farming business and then created a privately owned development company called Serdev, for developing emerging

particularly tobacco production, for most of its foreign exchange earnings. It now aims to encourage mega-farming to boost economic growth and employment, and to combat food shortages. It hopes mega-farming will attract private agricultural investment.

Zimbabwe is an example of the cost of destroying privately owned large-scale commercial agriculture. Once called the "breadbasket of Africa," and one of the largest tobacco producers in the world, along with Guinea and Sudan. Zimbabwe now spends 100 percent of its foreign currency receipts on food imports. The key to this destruction was the suspension of the rule of law, enabling government to confiscate large-scale commercial farms for little or no compensation. Twinned with endemic corruption (157th of 180 countries in 2022), Zimbabwe is mired in poverty, with little hope for the future and fast becoming a Chinese client state.

If Europe and the US want to

“A Maniacal Sense of Urgency”

Elon Musk

book by **WALTER ISAACSON**

review by **SHOSHANA BRYEN**

Start at the end. Elon Musk finalized the purchase of Twitter in October 2022; the book was published in 2023. Two things become clear as you read:

First, Twitter/X’s financial troubles mirror the troubles of all of Musk’s purchases and inventions; there is always a steep learning and profitability curve. The final accounting hadn’t happened before the book was published – and probably still hasn’t. If you want to know how it ends, the book has no answer.

Second, X is the one Musk purchase that involves people, thoughts, emotions, and politics (which involves people, thoughts, and emotions), and about which people are, perhaps, irrationally fervent. This, you will learn after a few chapters, is NOT Musk’s forte.

Once you read the book, you understand the current, maybe-but-not-necessarily-permanent, problem of X. Several chapters are devoted to that, as well as the plusses and minuses of totally free speech, sort of free speech, and not-so-free speech depending on who controls the speech.

Those chapters are worth reading. When a book is 600+ pages long, it is useful to know where to focus.

■ **Now the Review:**

- Love him or hate him
- Admire Tesla, SpaceX, Starlink, Twitter, The Boring Company, Neuralink, and X. AI or hope the next project fails
- Love X or miss Twitter
- Agree with the British government

that he should be arrested for his interview with Donald Trump or thank heaven we had a Revolution

No matter which way you go, *Elon Musk* is one of the most innovative and provocative people in the world today. Riding the ubiquitous world of social media, people think they know all about him.

Walter Isaacson’s biography, *Elon Musk*, gives you the back story. Sort of.

On the one hand, Isaacson has done a masterful job. Musk was a strange and difficult child with a strange, heavy-handed, and difficult father. Physical punishment appears to have been severe and fisticuffs the norm between Elon and his brother Kimbal and their cousins, who, interestingly, are all his friends in adulthood. It seems hard to be Musk’s friend, although a number of people try.

All the chapters about family are interesting.

On the other hand, after a while, you begin to feel that you’ve walked several thousand production lines, seen umpteen million wires, shafts, motors, and tanks, and met most of the engineers in the US and Canada. That appears to be a shortcoming of Isaacson’s – he is enamored of the process of production. You may be less so.

On the third hand, or maybe it is an extension of the other hand, Isaacson enters the story more, perhaps, than an author should. His dislike of Musk’s politics is very, very evident as the subject moves rightward, and sometimes undermines his own high-flown rhetoric. Isaacson concludes: “Do the audaciousness and



hubris that drive him to attempt epic feats excuse his bad behavior, his callousness, his recklessness? The times he's an asshole? The answer is no, of course not."

Thanks, Walter.

■ **Motivation**

Musk himself has three main motivators:

- Technological progress is not inevitable, and civilization can backslide. After the grounding of the Space Shuttle, he said, "Do we want to tell our children that going to the moon is the best we did, and then we gave up?" And "People are mistaken when they think technology just automatically improves... It only improves if a lot of people work very hard to make it better."

- The Earth is not indestructible. Whether a catastrophe is caused by nature or by man, Musk believes that which we have developed should be exportable to other sites in the universe and he is particularly enamored of colonizing Mars.

- His family background. The Musk family was strange but adventurous, and then he moved to the United States, which he called, "literally a distillation of the human spirit of exploration. This is a land of adventurers." The next adventure is always calling.

■ **"Question Every Cost"**

Musk's operating principle appears to be "reduce, reuse, recycle" with a heavy dash of skepticism about government regulation (or any regulation), a firm belief in domestic American production facilities and supply chains, and what appears to be a mania about shortening timelines. All of these operate across all of his inventions, purchases, contracts.

■ **Tesla**

Between 2000 and 2010, the US lost 1/3 of its manufacturing jobs. Globalization of the 1980s was a horror "relentlessly driven by cost-cutting CEOs and their activist investors."

You'd think Musk, cost-driven

himself, would approve. He did not. Fearing American companies had "lost the daily feel for ways to improve their products," he wanted control of the manufacturing process and believed "designing the factory to build a car – the 'machine that builds the machine' – was as important as designing the car itself."

Tesla was almost dead in 2008. In 2010, Musk bought a "used" Toyota factory once valued at \$1 billion for \$42 million and convinced Toyota to invest another \$50 million in Tesla. The late 2010 Tesla IPO was the first by an American carmaker since Ford in 1956.

But when the first cars rolled off the new assembly line, Musk wasn't happy (he's rarely happy in the book) and said the production quality "sucked." He and

contract, any price hikes will simply be passed on to the government, i.e., to you.

It happens a lot.

The second problem Musk discovered, was the number and intricacy of government specifications and requirements. As he found ones that made no sense to him, he would ask, "Who wrote this and why?" One engineer said that for Musk, "All requirements should be treated as recommendations... the only immutable ones were those decreed by the laws of physics."

The same applied to schedules. Cost plus means people will be paid for as long as it takes to do a job. Musk's timeline mantra is "make it shorter, do it faster." In one case, he demanded that the schedule for producing Merlin engines be cut

Between 2000 and 2010, the US lost 1/3 of its manufacturing jobs. Globalization of the 1980s was a horror "relentlessly driven by cost-cutting CEOs and their activist investors." You'd think Musk, cost-driven himself, would approve. He did not.

his engineers dug deeply into both design and production. "Musk joined them two or three nights a week. His focus was on root causes. What in the design was to blame for a production line problem?"

In 2012, Motor Trend picked the Tesla Model S as its "Car of the Year," calling it a "shocking winner."

■ **Cost Plus**

The chapter *SpaceX, 2002-2003* is important. Not only does it walk you through the SpaceX story and emphasize Musk's determination to focus on cost-saving, but it also explains how the US government's "cost plus" contracts for new technology raise prices (which you expect) and stifle innovation (which you might not expect). It starts with sourcing vs producing parts. Since the contract is cost plus, if the supplier produces a successful part and receives an add-on

in half. The chief engineer balked. "You can't just take a schedule that we already cut in half and then cut it in half again." But Musk did and the engineers did. "A maniacal sense of urgency is our operating principle."

It didn't work all the time, and it didn't work for everyone.

■ **The Numbers**

There are interesting savings. The government specified cranes to lift the Falcon 9, planning to spend \$2 million on them. Musk believed the safety standards for the cranes were "obsolete," and had his engineers meet with the military. The standards were revised, and the cranes cost \$300,000. A latch on the Space Station was projected at \$1,500 – SpaceX engineers modified a bathroom stall lock to build one for \$30. Air cooling system for Falcon 9 were budgeted

at more than \$3 million, compared to a home air-conditioning system that cost about \$6,000.

■ **Twitter/X**

Twitter, of course, takes up a lot of mental – if not physical – space. Here, btw, Isaacson inserts himself directly into the storyline – telling you in his own voice why he thinks Musk bought Twitter. It wasn't necessary.

After all the design, hardware, and production chapters, why Twitter? Actually, it fits right into the Musk mode. "I've come to believe it can be part of the mission of preserving civilization" by enlarging the space for free speech. "There seems to be more and more group-think in the media...so if you weren't in step, you're just going to be ostracized, or your voice will be shut off."

After all the design, hardware, and production chapters, why Twitter? Actually, it fits right into the Musk mode. "I've come to believe it can be part of the mission of preserving civilization" by enlarging the space for free speech.

"We want to prevent a world in which people split into their own echo chambers on social media... We want to have one place where people with different viewpoints can interact." "I don't think from a cognitive standpoint it's nearly as hard as SpaceX or Tesla. It's not like getting to Mars. It's not as hard as changing the entire industrial base of Earth to sustainable energy."

Perhaps not. But it comes with an entirely different set of rules and expectations, based on the fact that it is driven by human emotion – which is not engineerable. Musk found that out when Twitter had a massive drop in revenue as activist groups pressured advertisers to drop the platform. The activists were successful, and Musk's response was predictable: his

"trancelike, darkest persona" emerged, writes Isaacson, and he had not "learned how to ride out the storms." He demanded that Twitter ban the "blackmailers" – regardless of his prior commitment to free speech. He called the agitators "immoral."

■ **The "Twitter Files"**

Musk brought in two iconoclastic journalists – Matt Taibbi and Bari Weiss – who discovered what Twitter users had long suspected: the site was doing "visibility filtering" and "shadow banning," with a political bias. "Weiss concluded that Twitter moderators were more aggressive at suppressing right-wing tweets. 'It operated with a secret blacklist, with teams of employees tasked with suppressing the visibility of accounts or subjects deemed undesirable.'" [Also, see Mark Zuckerberg's August 2024 letter

admitting that Facebook submitted to government censorship.]

Musk reinstated Kathy Griffin, Jordan Peterson, and Babylon Bee, but not Alex Jones or Kanye West. Users were asked to vote on the reinstatement of Donald Trump – Trump won. Asked whether he would have kept Trump banned if the vote went the other way, Musk replied, "Yes. I'm not Trump's fan. He's disruptive. He's the world's champion of bullshit." [Have I mentioned that the book was published in 2023?]

Coordination and cooperation between journalists and government agencies grew exponentially during COVID. Should COVID information have been censored? The FBI found Russian bot accounts. Should they be censored? An

account dedicated to stalking Elon Musk resulted in a confrontation with Musk's security guard when Musk was not in the car, but his son was. Should the stalker be banned? There is no answer available in a biography, but Musk's devotion to free speech was compromised in several areas.

■ **AI**

If you worry about self-driving cars, don't read the chapter *Tesla 2022-2023*.

The chapter *X.AI 2023* won't help you either as Musk expresses concern that AI could forge ahead on its own, leaving humans behind. "That could happen sooner than we expected."

■ **SpaceX April 2023**

"This is how civilizations decline. They quit taking risks. And when they quit taking risks, their arteries harden. Every year, there are more referees and fewer doers... When you've had success for too long, you lose the desire to take risks."

That is not his problem

The April 2023 launch of SpaceX appears to have made Musk more nervous than his other risky adventures. It failed.

But failure is a matter of perception. When the "destruct" button was pushed, "the control room applauded – they were jubilant at what they had achieved and what they had learned." His response, "Nicely done, guys. Success. Our goal was to get clear of the pad and explode out of sight and we did. There's too much that can go wrong to get to orbit the first time. This is an awesome day."

They went out and celebrated.

■ **Conclusion**

The best conclusion is Musk's own: "My main regret is how often I stab myself in the thigh with a fork, how often I shoot my own feet and stab myself in the eye."

Buy it.

SHOSHANA BRYEN is Senior Director of The Jewish Policy Center and Editor of *inFOCUS* Quarterly.



SCAN ME!

*Donate to the
Jewish Policy Center*

■ *The Last Word ...*

Controlling Rafah

The city of Rafah in Gaza is only half of the city of Rafah. Therein lies the story of Egypt and terror tunnels — why Israel needs to retain a presence on the Egypt/Gaza border and the Philadelphi corridor.

Gaza should have been part of an Arab country alongside Israel. But the Arab war against Israel short-circuited the plan and Egypt occupied Gaza, using it as a duty-free port for its military.

In 1967, Israel took control of the Gaza Strip along with the Sinai Desert.

At Camp David, Egypt insisted that Israel keep Gaza, and in 1982, when Israel left Sinai, a Gaza-Sinai border was reestablished. Rafah had grown to straddle the line, so Israel suggested moving the border to either side of the city — Egypt refused. Rafah was divided, but smuggling tunnels already connected the two sides.

With Oslo, the PA came to the border alongside Israel. When Israel left Gaza entirely in 2005, a new Egypt-Israel agreement, the Philadelphi Accord, emerged, along with a separate agreement between Israel and the PA. The

European Union Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah Crossing Point (EU BAM Rafah) was created, and the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL COPPS) signed on in 2005 as well.

In 2007, Hamas took Gaza in a bloody civil war. The EU ran and Egypt closed the border — except for the smuggling part, which was part civilian and part Hamas/Muslim Brotherhood-financed-by-Iran. Hamas became bolder in its military support of ISIS in Sinai, and by 2014, Egypt by demolished Egyptian Rafah and evicted the residents. Israel helped Egypt fight a combination of Bedouin tribes and ISIS in northern Sinai and in 2023, Egypt declared an end to the insurgency — although that isn't clear.

Now, Israel is back in Gaza and if the IDF finishes its mission and controls the Philadelphi Corridor, Hamas will not be able to regroup, re-arm, or reconstitute itself.

While Egypt sees the threat to its stability and future. It seems to have trouble accepting that Israel is part of the solution.