



THE
**JERUSALEM
STRATEGIC
TRIBUNE**

Israel
The Surfacing
Submarine
Submerging (Again)

China
America's
Sharpening
Focus on Technology
Competition
with China

America, The Balance of Power and the Post-1945 World Order



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Dear reader,

As publisher of *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, it is my pleasure to welcome you to our first issue.

It may strike some of you as curious that of all people, a Moroccan Arab Muslim would move to create a US-based journal about the US–Israel relationship. I hardly blame you: Unlike Western countries, where many become passionate about a given subject that is distant from their own background or heritage, the Middle East and North Africa remain a region in which collective identities dominate the mindset, and too few bridges are built between them. But I wanted to take a stand in favor of something new and different—because as an individual, I have formed a personal worldview that considers this venture to be a virtue. Permit me to explain.

As a champion of US leadership around the world for all of my professional life, I have traveled to America dozens of times and have

formed a deep affinity for its resilient culture, institutions, and system of government. When at times my American friends lamented their country's widening political polarization, I was the one who gave them a pep talk: Even in its darkest moments, the United States remains a beacon of hope to hundreds of millions around the world.

As I came to know the United States, I naturally drew near to the American Jewish community. On my first visit, American Jews hastened to help me discover their country and find my way. I was moved by their patriotism and love for American values, as well as their commitment to their heritage and the welfare of the Jewish state. American Jews have been my partners and mentors, as well as my bridge to their ancestral homeland.

How can someone who loves America not value and admire the state of Israel? While both countries have their share of polarization, extremism, and misguided policy, the Israelis I know and count as friends represent the promise of an open, democratic, and tolerant society, safeguarded by a strong state of institutions. They share the American

capacity for introspection; their patriotism manifests in a hunger to reach for better and better things, right wrongs, and serve the common good. They are the Israelis whom many Arabs also look to as potential friends and partners—a rising trend manifested so profoundly in the diplomatic breakthroughs of the past year. Nurturing their aspirations, and building bridges between them and like-minded people beyond their borders, is a key facet of the larger struggle to heal and rebuild our troubled region.

The US–Israel alliance will always be an essential component of that effort. Americans’ love for Israel grows as the country expands its commitment to the universal values that the two countries share. So much rides, in turn, on the deepening of that relationship—a massive, multi-sector alliance—interwoven into every realm of government and society. The alliance is also an anchor of international security policy, with profound implications for every country in Israel’s extended neighborhood.

And so I had always found it surprising, when shuttling between these two great countries, that no public media platform exists for the expressed purpose of examining the alliance. Perhaps such a platform could help policymakers and civic actors alike better understand their own role in ensuring that this unique, time-honored relationship yields maximal benefit, both for them and their many allies. Perhaps in addition to Israelis and Americans, Arab and other voices with a stake in the relationship could contribute to such a journal, weighing in crucially on the implications of a given development for them. Such

a forum, I felt, would bring together its own alliance of thought partners, perhaps differing politically in some ways but agreeing on an essential principle: The US–Israel alliance can, and must, always be a force for good in the world.

Iknew, of course, that to create such a platform I would need all the help I could get. I am honored to have found it in some of the most capable and experienced practitioners of US–Israel engagement in the world. In these pages, they will develop new ideas about the world we live in and the potentialities of the alliance, as well as engage an audience from all walks of life in the process.

If you find this platform compelling, I hope that you will join us as a friend and a voice.

Warm regards,
Ahmed Charai

AHMED CHARAI

Publisher

Ahmed Charai is the chairman and CEO of a media conglomerate and a Middle East adviser in the United States and abroad. He is on the board of numerous think tanks and NGOs, including the Atlantic Council, the International Center for Journalists, International Crisis Group, and the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. His articles have appeared in leading American and Israeli publications.

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BACK TO MODERNITY:

Can Biden ‘Build Back Better’ the Post-1945 Order?

by Eran Lerman

This is an exciting moment in which to publish a new contribution to the policy debates in both the United States of America and the State of Israel, and hopefully beyond. What The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune aspires to be, what led to its creation—the rationale and the passion driving us—are all powerfully captured in the

opening note from our publisher, Ahmed Charai. A man of letters and a builder of human bridges, his initiative reflects the recognition that we have much to talk and write about.

The celebration is, nevertheless, tinged with sorrow. We mourn the passing of one of our first contributors and a leading light in the community of Israeli scholars concerned with world affairs, Professor Aharon Klieman. His paper—prefaced by a eulogy—



Joe Biden at the White House. Photo credit: REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein

offers a cogent argument for the return to the essential perspectives of realism, as a school of thought in international relations. In light of the pertinent questions that constitute the core of the discussion in this first issue, this essay—sadly, his last—is more relevant than ever.

In many ways, the most important question of this era for all of us—on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as on the shores of the Pacific—seems to be the willingness and ability of the new

American administration to restore coherence, balance, and a sense of purpose. In his book *Diplomacy*, Henry Kissinger, another great realist, had this comparison to offer about the challenge faced by the Nixon administration:

Wilson had guided a country that was new to international affairs and confident in its ability to follow any problem through to its final resolution; Nixon inherited a society rent by frustration,

whose future would depend on its ability to frame attainable long-term goals and to persevere in those goals even in the face of adversity without yielding to self-doubt.

Two generations later, much the same words—with even greater urgency—can be said about the tasks facing the Biden Administration. Can it indeed, as its own campaign phrase went, “build back better” the world we had once known? Can it return to the central themes of what was once the modern world—after two “post-modern” presidents who cast doubts, each in his own way, on the central concepts of the era that followed World War II? As Major General Yaakov Amidror, formerly Israel’s national security adviser, reminds us in a compelling tour d’horizon, the changes and challenges are far-reaching and dramatic, in a world buffeted by COVID-19, technological transformations, and a shifting balance of power.

The cheery music and slogans—“Yes, We Can,” “America is Back,” and “Make America Great Again”—sound at times as pertinent to the present predicaments as Elgar’s “Pomp and Circumstance” is to the current condition of the British Empire. American leadership is easily asserted in campaign slogans. But can the promise be delivered upon?

In his regular column, *Window on Washington*, Dov Zakheim rings a warning bell about the costs of American retreat. William Wechsler adds a topical perspective on US military actions in Iraq and Syria. Several contribu-

tors—including former deputy secretary of defense John Hamre and former National Security Council director for China Ryan Hass—address the challenge posed by the People’s Republic of China, as do Amidror and Bilahari Kausikan, former permanent secretary of the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Robert Silverman’s review of Obama’s memoir, too, raises the question of the former president’s failure to foresee how fast China would rise to the status of a peer rival.

The long, dark shadow of Graham Allison’s title, *Destined for War*, and of his powerfully suggestive “Thucydides Trap”—the conflict between an established power and a rising one—falls upon significant parts of this issue. And yet, there is also evidence that powerful counterforces can be mobilized and brought to bear to avert such outcomes. Unlike the Cold War dyad, the US and China are mutually dependent in economic terms. Victoria Coates points out the possibility—and importance—of American leadership in the energy markets, which are still a key pillar of the world economy even in the presumably “green” era. As Micky Aharonson reminds us, sophisticated management of the relationship with Russia, as well as with India and the rest of the so-called Quad, can make a difference.

Turning to Middle Eastern affairs, Daniel Gordis, in his perspective on Biden’s policies, adds to the insights of Amidror’s essay over what ails the region and what needs to be

done to stabilize it. Ambassador James Jeffrey suggests that despite the heated rhetoric, Turkish policy under Erdoğan has hewed quite closely to traditional national interests, leaving room for a reset in relations. Even as attention shifts to the Chinese challenge, it is fair to argue that a pivot to Asia needs a firm Middle Eastern—or should we say, Eastern Mediterranean—hinge.

The *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune* will also carry regular columns in each issue, ranging from a book review by one of the editors to a political profile by former Israeli lawmaker (and journalist) Ksenia Svetlova—this time, of Vladimir Putin—and including observations on grand strategy and identity politics, on military matters, intelligence operations, and diplomacy. Against the background of Israel’s recent experience in Gaza, Pnina Shuker’s column offers observations about so-called “information operations” and their role in military affairs, and Eran Lerman discusses deterrence in the problematic context of asymmetrical warfare. This issue also includes Amir Oren’s extensive insider’s seat at the changing of the guard in the Mossad, and Robert Silverman’s suggestion that even in a world of emails, diplomacy still needs a well thought out “long letter” from time to time.

Our own long letters will keep on coming. In this era of Zoom meetings, the launching of this new ship didn’t even require us to be all on the same pier at the same time. The team has now put before you a product

that we believe in, and we hope to do so on a regular basis from now on. We are grateful to Sarah Feuer for helping to set things in motion, to our webmaster (and taskmaster) Amit Meyer for streamlining our work, and to Ela Greenberg for her meticulous language editing. Above all, we owe thanks to Ahmed Charai for his vision, his passion, and his friendship *

ERAN LERMAN

Editor-in-chief

Col. (ret.) Dr. Eran Lerman is a former senior intelligence officer. He served as Israel’s deputy national security adviser (2009–2015), and prior to that as director, AJC Israel and ME office (2001–2009). He is currently the vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security and a lecturer at Shalem College.

AMERICA, THE BALANCE OF POWER, AND THE POST-1945 WORLD ORDER





The role of balancer needs to be re-established. Blinken and Gantz at the State Department, in June. Photo credit: Jacquelyn Martin/Pool via REUTERS



by Aharon Klieman

The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune *mourns the passing of Professor Aharon Klieman, one of our first contributors and a leading light in the community of Israeli scholars concerned with world affairs. Read his eulogy by Dr. Yoel Guzansky page 23.*

American foreign policy has traditionally honored the concept of the balance of power in practice, while negating it in theory. This paradoxical disconnect between word and deed has continued almost uninterrupted throughout the post-1945 world order to the present, coloring the American approach to regional and global affairs, including policies toward the Middle East.

THE ISOLATIONIST IMPULSE

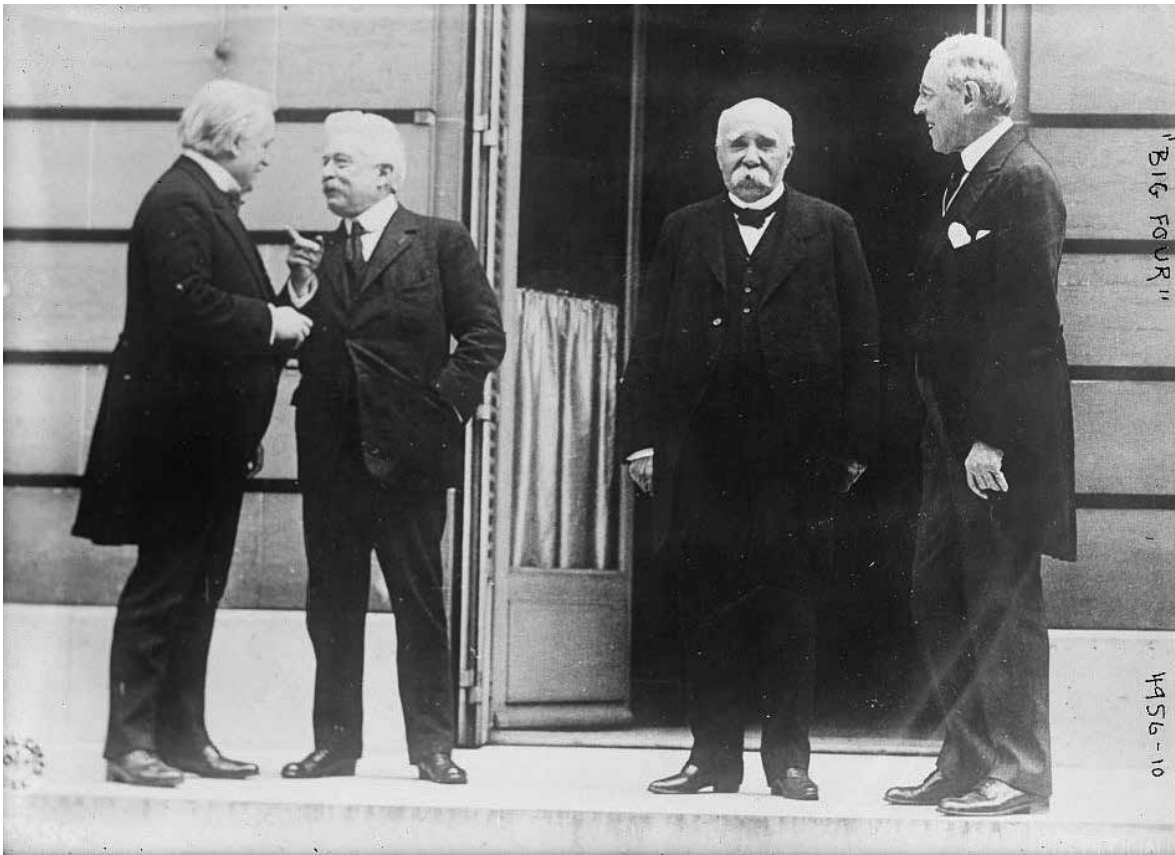
Historically, this a priori disqualification of the balancing principle as an ordering concept for basing a realistic strategy traces back to the founding of the New World republic and its early faith in its exceptionalism. Otherwise preoccupied with solidifying their own country's newly gained independence, Americans did take cognizance of Poland's

dismemberment (1772, 1793, 1795) in the name of preserving an Old World balance among contending European powers. This undoubtedly left a deep imprint on the American psyche. If nothing else, such an act of brute, naked force led the generation of founding fathers to recoil from territorial partition, imperialism, and similar coercive practices associated with power politics.

In 1764 Benjamin Franklin wrote in his distinctive style: "Abroad, the Poles are cutting one another's throat a little ... if they are fond of this Privelege [sic], I don't know that their neighbors had any right to disturb them of the enjoyment of it." While most commentators faulted Poland for its internal divisiveness, the fact remained, as Alexander Hamilton noted, that Poland was long at the "mercy of its powerful neighbors."

Thus, already at an early, formative stage, the isolationist impulse expressed itself in an aversion to foreign entanglements. The same sentiment applied to the balance of power's imperative for eternal vigilance, constant involvement, and ceaseless maneuvering on behalf of narrow self-interests. These measures—so central to the workings of balancing and counterbalancing (i.e., "the Game of Nations")—ran directly counter to America's self-perception as a nation apart and above.

With the emergence of the United States as a major actor in the immediate post-



Britain's Lloyd George, Italy's Orlando, France's Clemenceau and Wilson in Versailles at the Paris peace conference, May 27, 1919. Photo credit: REUTERS/Handout via US Library of Congress

1918 world order, this moralistic opposition to the balance of power—as alien to American values and as the root cause of the European catastrophe—not only came to dominate American thinking but also became declaratory policy. Addressing the US Senate on January 22, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asserted, “There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.” Ideas embodied in neo-liberal Wilsonianism continue to resonate in present-day foreign policy discourse.

Confirmation of this deeply ingrained conceptual and intellectual bias against the Realist school of thought—and its corollary, the concept of the balance of power—can

readily be found today in both standard college course syllabi and scholarly journals devoted to international relations theory. The balance of power is either given short shrift, or else critiqued along the lines of Richard Cobden’s classic 1836 depiction as “a chimera”—“an undescribed, indescribable, incomprehensible nothing”—before being summarily dismissed as untenable on ethical grounds, inoperative in practice, and, for added measure, wholly irrelevant in today’s nuclearized world.

Save for this traditional aversion to the balance of power, American behavior abroad remains unanchored in any overriding conceptual or prescriptive framework for ordering an increasingly complex global



The time has come to restore realist balance-of-power thinking to the center of international relations theory. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets Henry Kissinger in Beijing, in 2018. Photo credit: REUTERS/Thomas Peter

system, and for defining the US role in promoting international peace and security. The absence of either consensus or consistency is mirrored at two levels: ideationally, by the still unsettled debate in professional literature over contesting alternative theories, and politically, by the pendular swing from one extreme posture to another in the modern history of American diplomacy—from estrangement to engagement and back.

Among the contending paradigms are idealism and its ultimate goal of world federalism; isolationism and neo-isolationism, popularized in slogans like “Fortress America” and “America First,” and pursued through policies of neutrality and appeasement; neoliberalism and its offshoot, liberal institutionalism; collective security;

and the now discredited neoconservative zeal for aggressively transforming other nations’ politics. Added to the list in recent decades are two theoretical postulates for assuring the minimum of global stability, often mischaracterized as peace: the balance of terror, predicated upon rationality; and hegemony under enlightened US leadership.

RELUCTANT BALANCER IN PRACTICE

Regardless of how much it is scorned in theory, and official disclaimers notwithstanding, in terms of actual practice, generations of US policymakers have relied upon alliances and a whole array of stratagems altogether consistent with the balance of power. They have done so compelled by sudden exigencies abroad or by direct threats

from rival powers, yet without admitting as much, whether to themselves or to the American people.

The two world wars are outstanding cases in point. Breaking with tradition, in December 1917 and again in December 1941, the US in effect accepted and then filled the pivotal role of balancer—if not in averting, then at least in terminating major world conflicts. In each instance, America’s direct participation—however reluctantly embarked upon—proved decisive, tipping the scales against the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) respectively.

Since achieving a decisive, transformative victory in 1945, the US is no longer a free agent or at liberty to chart its own independent course, unburdened by commitments abroad. Confronted almost immediately with a direct challenge (the so-called “Red Threat”) from the Soviet Union and international communism, Americans—against their inclination to turn inward—found themselves forced into a per-

Even following the final dissolution of the Soviet Union, a reliance on a show of armed force—once popularized as “gunboat diplomacy”—and its actual use when deemed necessary remains the linchpin of American political-military statecraft.

manent state of alertness; once more they were thrust to the forefront of world affairs for the next half century. Adopting a Cold War doctrine of containment as a deterrent against communist-inspired destabilization and overt acts of aggression, on multiple fronts—Europe, the Middle East, and Asia—successive US administrations from Truman to Biden continue to behave in accordance with premises and practices at the very heart of balance-of-power thinking.

First and foremost, this is reflected by falling back upon the basic instrument of hard power. Responding to a series of crises at various flash points around the globe—ranging from the siege of Berlin (1945) to Lebanon (1958), the Cuban missile crisis (1962), Panama (1989), Kuwait (1991), and Iraq (2003–2011); and more dramatically, Korea (1950–1953), the Taiwan Straits (1954–1955 and 1958), and Vietnam (1954–1975) in the Far East—strategists have unfailingly prioritized the buildup of America’s military capability, with conventional power in the post-1945 era backed up by non-conventional nuclear weaponry.

Even following the final dissolution of the Soviet Union by 1991, this reliance on a show of armed force—once popularized as “gunboat diplomacy”—and its actual use when deemed necessary remains the linchpin of American political-military statecraft. It is the key to facing down the newest post-Cold War challengers to the status quo: China, Iran, and Putin’s Russia. No less familiar to students of the balance of power are the many standard nonmilitary levers available for calibrating power—and for preserving an existing favorable or equitable balance and for redressing an unfavorable one.

Whether it is through alliances such as NATO, used for burden-sharing and as

force multipliers, or through competitive arms races, the US learned to use the other traditional levers for balancing power. This has included interventions aimed at regime change, the use of secret channels and espionage, divide-and-rule tactics, and encouraging defections—all aimed at weakening a rival alliance. Various forms of territorial adjustment like demilitarized and buffer zones, and not least, foreign aid with strings attached, as well as boycotts and sanctions under the heading of economic statecraft should also be included. As realists insist, these standard policy instruments are employed by all countries without exception, including the US.

Categorizing US foreign policy behavior, in terms of the balance of power, as unexceptional—rather than atypical—often puts liberal Americans in their ideological discomfort zone, as somehow betraying the foundational ideal of America as a beacon of light and hope for the world. This, in turn, may explain the pronounced tendency for high-ranking government officials to justify interventions abroad as undertaken for higher purposes: in defense of freedom, democracy, human rights, international peace, or, in other words, for any purpose save that of serving the balance of power while preserving or promoting the national interest.

THREE INSTANCES OF SUCCESSFUL BALANCING

A systemic effort at eliminating longstanding foreign policy dualism took place during the presidential administrations of Richard Nixon (1969–1974) and Gerald Ford (1974–1977), owing to the dominant influence of Dr. Henry Kissinger. In his White House years, first as national security advisor and then as secretary of state,

Kissinger successfully bridged the gap between word and deed by unapologetically adopting the vocabulary of the balance of power while also applying it to the chessboard of world politics.

German-born, European in the older sense, and schooled in *realpolitik*, Kissinger also drew upon the teachings of Prof. Hans Morgenthau, the 20th century's leading proponent of political realism. His contemporaries, many of them American-born charter members of the eastern establishment, operated from a conservative mindset whereby American foreign policy ought to be directed at preserving an existing state of affairs. Kissinger, by contrast, saw the wisdom as well as the necessity for the US colossus to seize initiatives and to create opportunities in the face of a status quo at once elusive and ephemeral.

Kissinger's understanding of the dynamics of balancing—exhaustively analyzed in countless studies, some of them complimentary but more often than not deriding his Machiavellianism as deviant, “un-American” and “conduct unbecoming”—is best seen in the 1972 opening to China that fostered normalization with Asia's rising power. In strategic terms, integrating China into the international system enabled the US in one masterful stroke to transform the basic geometry of the post-1945 world order. This move converted rigid bipolarity and stressful confrontation with Russia into tripolarity and shifted the tension to the Sino-Soviet axis while catapulting America into the privileged position of an uncommitted balancer solicited by both rival sides.

Second only to the China gambit was the US role in Middle East affairs, illustrating Kissinger's application of the balance of power to real-world situations during his



A first test. US marines disembark from transport helicopters upon landing in Kuwait, 1994.

years in power. Taken by surprise at the sudden outbreak of hostilities in October 1973 between Egypt, Israel, and Syria, Kissinger adeptly exploited the acute crisis and resultant battlefield deadlock to insert himself and the US at the center of crisis management and to initiate what ultimately became a peace process: first, through carefully calibrated brinkmanship in facing down Brezhnev's threat of military intervention, and then by all but excluding the Soviets from any role while patiently applying shuttle diplomacy and step-by-step negotia-

tions. All this firmly established America's credibility as a crucial third-party intermediary sought after by the Israelis as well as the Egyptians—and even the Syrians.

To grasp geopolitics as never-ending power-balancing among competitive state actors depends upon a realistic mindset and favorable predisposition rather than on the accident of personality. Resolute American policy throughout the 1990–1991 Kuwait crisis offers yet a third instance of successful balancing made intelligible only against the backdrop of growing American self-confi-



Now that “doing it alone” is no longer US policy but “burden sharing” is, Mideast partnering becomes the next priority. Bin Salman and Sisi at the Presidential Palace in Cairo. Photo credit: Bandar Algaloud/Courtesy of Saudi Royal Court/Handout via REUTERS

dence at the dawn of the post-Cold War era.

With remarkably poor timing, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s invasion of neighboring Kuwait in 1990 coincided with the idea of yet another new world order then percolating through the corridors of power in Washington, with Iraq therefore providing its first test. Hence, there was heightened resolve of President George H. W. Bush and his secretary of state, James Baker, not to allow Iraq’s flagrant act of aggression to pass with impunity. To their credit, with a fixity of purpose, they patiently orchestrated a sophisticated diplomatic-

legal-military campaign. They marshaled Security Council support under the United Nations Charter’s Article 51 for all “measures necessary to maintain international peace and security” together with formation of a multilateral coalition of 35 countries to compel Iraq’s withdrawal in 1991 from Kuwait. Moreover, they stopped short of ousting the Iraqi dictator from power, since this—in their mind—exceeded their own fixed purpose and threatened to turn a well-contained exercise of power into an open-ended entanglement.

Dispatching troops to unseat Saddam

more than a decade later, in 2003, the US would then fall prey, however, to what Teddy White called the “Law of Unintended Consequences”—so characteristic of Middle East affairs—by undoing its own power-balancing policy of dual containment toward the two regional destabilizers: Baathist Iraq and Islamist Iran. An internally sectarian-divided and politically unstable Iraq thus opened the way for Tehran’s unchecked ascendancy around the Persian Gulf and in other parts of the Arab world. Political realism argues that returning to a status quo ante is a legal fiction even for superpowers; that foreign relations are never static or constant but dynamic; that diplomacy’s concern is not about the exact distribution of power (even or uneven? favorable or unfavorable?) but rather about balancing as an ongoing, never-ending process.

THE US AND THE MIDDLE EAST: STAY OR GO?

Learned the hard way in Iraq and Afghanistan, this lesson about the futility of chasing after a stable equilibrium in the Middle East helps to explain the strong US desire to pivot away from the region. This may be in order to concentrate on domestic affairs, to redirect foreign policy elsewhere, or to respond to a major mood change that finds Americans no longer regarding themselves as the indispensable nation. The question, however, is not only what motivates America but the room for maneuver that Washington retains, or fails to retain, as it seeks to pursue its disengagement unimpeded.

The bitter experience of former Great Powers, Britain and France in particular—drawn into the maelstrom of 20th century Near and Middle East politics—provides a timely cautionary for the US. Likewise, Kissinger’s cautionary note that “in the end, peace can be achieved only by hege-

mony or by balance of power” deserves to be heeded. Applied to the Middle East, this poses three alternative strategies for the US. Hypothetically, at one extreme, it could return to acting like a hegemonic power by attempting to impose its will on supposedly weaker, subordinate local actors. At the opposite extreme is abnegation and, in effect, abandoning existing interests and allies and thereby creating in its wake a power vacuum to be filled by other players, especially potential rivals. In searching for a third, middle-of-the-road option, “selective balancing” becomes the sole plausible alternative—and, indeed, imperative.

If selective involvement and selective balancing are the realistic policy options, then in operative terms the first priority must be given to regaining clarity after years of confusion. Clarity of purpose serves as a prerequisite for a consensual redefinition of America’s core national interests in the region. This includes putting an end to the glaring policy inconsistency characterizing the Obama, Trump, and Biden presidencies on how to deal with Iran; on policy toward Syria and the Kurds; and regarding the derailed Arab–Israeli–Palestinian peace process and the two-state formula, among other regional issues.

Now that “doing it alone” is no longer US policy but “burden sharing” is, Mideast partnering becomes the next priority. This requires firming up ties with those regrettably few countries, regimes, and leaders sharing similar strategic goals, whose own domestic policies are judged compatible—but not identical—with American values. Much trickier are prospective allies like Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s Egypt and Mohammed bin Salman’s Saudi Arabia, both proven strategic assets but whose record on democratic reform exposes them—



and especially Washington's policy toward them—to telling criticism.

Admittedly, selective balancing in the current Middle East will always be challenging from an American standpoint, primarily because of its proven volatility, whereby any single, usually unforeseen event can

trigger a chain reaction unbalancing any given political equation. Take the 1967 and 1973 Israeli–Arab wars, for example, at an earlier stage; the 1979 Iranian revolution; or, most recently, the latest round of fighting in May over the Gaza Strip that may have been designed (but failed) to put the “Abraham



An end to a glaring policy inconsistency. Obama walks past the Brandenburg Gate during his visit to Berlin, in 2016. Photo credit: REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

Accords” in jeopardy.

But what makes the region singularly challenging at present is that, like the global system itself, the Middle East has become multipolar. Whatever their drawbacks, the Cold War system and then America’s uni-polar moment, however brief or imagined, did provide a certain clarity because lesser and smaller powers knew their place within a hierarchical world order. This is no longer the case, least of all in the Middle East where the US finds itself one actor among any number of aspirants and competitors in a bewildering maze of intersecting multiple balances:

- * Russia and China, investing heavily in select Arab and other regional target countries, pose a dual great power challenge to the US and would gladly welcome America’s self-imposed departure from a region they still regard as strategic.

- * Iran, Israel, and Turkey—three independent-minded non-Arab regional powers—are in a triangular competition with each other. However, in continuing to distance himself from Jerusalem, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, at least for now, violates one of the cardinal principles of balancing by not banding together with Israel in order to offset the far greater threat posed by an expansionist, nuclearizing, militant Shiite Muslim Iran.

- * The remaining smaller Middle East states and non-state actors like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip are likewise in competition against each other; but they are also against admittedly more powerful regional and external powers, not excluding the US, whose “nefarious” role they seek to reduce.

Until a recent renewal of diplomatic ties, Qatar faced off against Saudi Arabia, Bahrain,

the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. Removed from the public eye, the Palestinian Authority is in a longstanding contest with Jordan, a sovereign state, for proprietary rights over the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Yet a third example are efforts in recent months by Bahrain and other Persian Gulf emirates, not excluding even Saudi Arabia, at a form of balancing known as “hedging.” Prompted by insecurities resulting from ambiguous US policy toward Iran, they have adopted a more conciliatory attitude toward their geographically proximate and ascendant neighbor.

Client states, which one might ordinarily assume to be dependent, are often, to the contrary, perfectly capable of testing and possibly even defying patrons. One can cite the unresolved tension since 2016 between a military superior Ankara and a politically fragile Syria, including periodic border clashes. Still better proof is Egypt’s 2019 decision to contract with Russia for advanced combat aircraft in open defiance of Washington’s threat to impose sanctions.

Treading carefully in such a complicated region leaves the US no room for illusions. Its regional supporters as well as adversaries need proof of America’s earnest intentions, its determination, and staying power. Moreover, the triple cross-cutting levels of accelerated balancing and counterbalancing—which allows for defiance, deception, and defection on the part of spoilers—demands of the US greater sophistication in monitoring the interplay of forces and in connecting the dots in order to avert crises and to seize opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The latest round of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, by way of summary, indicates why

unflinching adherence to the rules of the balance of power becomes of cardinal importance for the US in contending with an unstable Middle East region in which several assertive actors seek center stage. In particular, the role of balancer—at once historical, privileged, and, above all, responsible—needs to be re-established.

Having been drawn anew into the conflict in effort to broker a cease-fire, the US, however warily, remains deeply and permanently involved as chief facilitator in moving beyond to some form of more permanent arrangement. President Biden, as holder of the balance by dint of America’s abiding power, prestige, and influence, will thus be compelled to maneuver within a triangle comprised of local parties, each in the dual capacity of unbowed and defiant dependents: Hamas, the de facto rulers of the Gaza Strip enclave; Israel, at times assertive and other times defensive; and the West Bank’s Palestinian Authority, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in name only.

Coming full circle to where this essay began, therefore, the precondition for selective balancing in the Middle East, as anywhere else in the international arena, mandates nothing short of a quiet revolution in America’s approach to world politics. Based upon performance rather than rhetorical flourishes, the US clearly does not play by a different set of rules. The time has come to restore realist balance-of-power thinking to the center of international relations theory and to give it pride of place in the open-ended great debate over the role of the US as the designated balancer in today’s decentralized multipolar world *



AHARON S. KLIEMAN

(1939–2021)



by Yoel Guzansky

In June we bade farewell to Professor (Emeritus) Aharon S. Klieman, one of Israel's leading diplomatic historians. His contribution to The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune will unfortunately be the last. It is a powerful statement of his realist—and realistic—world view and a clarion call for clarity. I had the privilege of being one of his students at Tel Aviv University. We met when he founded and headed the Abba Eban Graduate Program in Diplomatic Studies at Tel Aviv University. Aharon joined Tel Aviv University in 1969 and was one of the founders of its political science department. He held the Nahum Goldmann Chair in Diplomacy and initiated projects such as the Round Table and International Forum at the university. Among his many activities, he was a senior research associate and a member of the Academic Advisory Board at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (1978–2000). He educated generations of students, many of whom rose to hold key positions in Israel's academic, security, political, and foreign affairs establishments. As the author and editor of 22 books, 36 chapters, and 25

scholarly articles written in his 50-year career, he made an invaluable contribution to the field of international relations and the study of Israel's foreign policy. Aharon received international recognition and was a guest lecturer at Georgetown University, the University of Chicago, University of Denver, University of Michigan, UCLA, Brown University, Trinity College Dublin, and other institutions.

After his retirement from Tel Aviv University, he founded and headed the School of Politics and Government at the Ashkelon Academic College. He chaired the Research Committee on Geopolitics of the International Political Science Association, and from 2010 served as the senior editor of the Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs.

Aharon was a true mensch and an academic ambassador of Israel abroad, who will be fondly remembered for his wisdom, warmth, and kindness in his encounters with professors and students alike. He was my friend and my mentor, and he will be greatly missed. May his memory be a blessing, and may his work continue to inspire *

Barack Obama, President, and James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, presented the National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal to James L. Jones, National Security Advisor, at the Oval Office in Washington, D.C. on October 20, 2010.



THE TWO-ST



THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION IMPERATIVE



by James Jones

The past two centuries have been witness to many seemingly intractable global problems for which solutions seemed out of reach. Yet, time and again, history proved that “impossible” problems were not insoluble after all.

Therein lies the hope for the Middle East, where the long-raging Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains the region’s keystone

issue—one that, if resolved, would unlock solutions to other challenges impeding what could be and should be a bright and prosperous future for the people of the Middle East.

The United States has been at the forefront of this issue since the creation of Israel in 1948. One administration after another has labored, unsuccessfully, in a perpetual “peace process” that has failed to achieve sustainable peace and only sporadically has resembled a functional process. Progress has repeatedly fallen victim to spoilers in both camps, perpetuating a tense and unsustai-

nable status quo that the world has come to regard as an inevitable end state.

The region's history suggests that opportunity to forge a more promising future arises in the wake of significant political change and public crisis. Such are the conditions today. With the recent change in both the US and Israeli governments, and the aftermath of intense violence engulfing the Gaza Strip, perhaps the conditions are ripe for renewed efforts by all stakeholders for a committed and energetic campaign to solve this strategically critical problem.

One thing is certain; if such an opportunity is to be seized and succeed, the US must play a pivotal leadership role in the process. Such an effort must be informed by the acceptance of two realities by all stakeholders. One, any solution will, once agreed, take considerable time and resources to implement. Two, the Israeli and Palestinian authorities will need to show that their leaders are both capable of and willing to engage in the process and see it through. During the Obama years when I served as his national security advisor, the Israeli prime minister was capable but not willing. His Palestinian counterpart was willing but not capable.

Success will take more than American prodding and encouragement to advance

During the Obama years, the Israeli prime minister was capable but not willing. His Palestinian counterpart was willing but not capable.

the peace process. Over the years, no amount of American pressure has resulted in anything other than intermittent periods of relative peace, always terminated by renewed violence, fostered by Iran's proxies bent on fostering regional conflict.

Relying on either of the parties to table a credible plan has been in vain. In the early days of the Obama administration, several weeks before the newly elected Israeli prime minister's first official visit to the US, the then defense minister of Israel and former prime minister Ehud Barak, who had joined Netanyahu's coalition, visited the White House, where I met with him in my role as President Obama's national security advisor. In the privacy of that office, the defense minister, surprisingly, presented a plan for achieving a two-state solution. So impressive was the presentation that the president agreed to hear the briefing on the spur of the moment, in the national security advisor's office. The plan he heard was detailed, balanced, and comprehensive.

The defense minister inferred that the plan would be formally presented by the prime minister during his forthcoming visit to Washington. The prospect of an important breakthrough in the quest for a two-state solution fueled anticipation of the prime minister's visit, which was to occur a few weeks later.

To the US administration's astonishment, the prime minister never mentioned the plan during his visit to Washington. When asked about the peace plan described by the defense minister, Netanyahu denied any knowledge of it. Nevertheless, he adamantly assured the president that he was the one Israeli leader on whose watch a solution could be achieved. Despite his words to the contrary during many years



in power, Prime Minister Netanyahu was never committed to finding a two-state solution. The misrepresentation that such an end state was his strategic objective created the serious strain in US–Israeli relations that lasted the duration of the Obama and Netanyahu administrations. The Trump administration’s four years in

office shored up the bilateral relationship between Israel and the US, but did very little toward achieving a two-state solution that remains the best hope of peace.

Moreover, the long-standing failure to bring the sides together to forge a lasting resolution to the conflict and the efforts that had repeatedly run aground caused—



Barack Obama and Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. Photo credit: REUTERS/Larry Downing

US engagement in the Middle East, with a committed leadership role, remains at the top of the “wish list” for most of the region.

among other things—significant damage to American diplomatic prestige in the broader Middle East.

It is time for an American administration to take a step the US has been too reluctant to take, one which could make the difference both in bringing peace and restoring US influence in this vital region. That step

is to advance an American plan for the establishment of a two-state solution, one that could be and should be supported by the international community as a basis for agreement between the respective Israeli and Palestinian leaderships.

To be clear, the US engagement in the Middle East, with a committed leadership role, remains at the top of the “wish list” for most of the region. Still, back home many do ask why this conflict must be resolved, and why the US must continue its role in finding an acceptable solution to this problem.

The answer is that the status quo leads nowhere positive. Countering bad global actors who will continue to threaten regional peace and stability—in part, by exploiting the Israeli–Palestinian issue—is a geopolitical imperative. The Iranian regime and its proxies feed on the situation, creating instability that spills onto the African continent and elsewhere, threatening global peace and stability in this century.

The humanitarian imperative requires we break the cycle of violence and fear that has, for too long, oppressed both the Israeli and the Palestinian people and remove the issue as an impediment to solving many other grave challenges to regional peace and security—job creation; development; food, energy and water sufficiency; and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to name a few.

Despite efforts to thwart the two-state solution, it remains the only viable goal for achieving peace, security, and prosperity in that part of the world. It will require both parties to break from their competing narratives of victimization and take the risk of recognizing each other’s rights and their own responsibilities. Success will require an approach synchronizing the top down (poli-

tical willingness) and bottom up (building capacity) to create the conditions for irreversible progress. On this basis, the parties, with international support, can solve the pivotal issues and establish equitable and practicable arrangements necessary to end the conflict.

Hope lives at the intersection of resolve and opportunity. The changes in administration, the response to the threat of the coronavirus to the global community, and the aftermath of the latest round of Israeli–Palestinian violence—which showed its fruitlessness—alongside the promise of the Abraham Accords, and the availability of technological developments that can help solve core challenges all should help inspire resolve and create opportunity.

The US can foster and seize both, by tabling a comprehensive plan as a basis of negotiations, and working with all parties in the international community to see the process through to a durable, comprehensive, and fair two-state solution.

Not only can this historical watershed be achieved; for the sake of a peaceful and prosperous future, it must be *

JAMES JONES

General James L. Jones served as national security adviser to President Obama, and in the George W. Bush administration as the State Department’s special envoy for Middle East regional security. A former commander of NATO forces, Jones retired from the US Marine Corps in 2007 after a distinguished 40-year career.

NO, YOU CAN'T: ASSESSING THE PROSPECTS OF JONES'S TWO-STATE SOLUTION



by Dan Schueftan

It is not often that a top-ranking official shares with his readers the strategic assumptions of his time in office with such candor. More than a decade after his service, General James Jones presents the Obama Middle Eastern paradigm that he enthusiastically served. This is particularly helpful for the understanding of the Obama administration's policies in the region in his time, because Jones is not trying, with the benefit of hindsight, to present them in an apologetic light that will explain

why these policies have failed to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Expectedly, Jones still believes a two-state solution can be presently concluded between Israel and the Palestinians, in spite of the successive failures to do so in recent decades. His practical approach dramatically underestimates the elusive, yet critical, significance of the cultural impact of the Palestinian national ethos, that precludes the acceptance of a Jewish state in Palestine alongside the Arab one. Like so many other political leaders, scholars, and observers of all nations, including Israeli peace enthusiasts, he dismisses or is completely unaware of the critical distinction in Arab political culture between transitional acquiescence

with an extremely undesirable reality, on the one hand, and the prohibitive reluctance to concede the permanency of this reality, on the other. This reluctance rises to the level of an insurmountable impediment when it comes to the Palestinians conceding the legitimacy of a Jewish state.

Consequently, the failure to agree on a two-state historic compromise is a structural one, under the circumstances prevailing in the last century and for the foreseeable future. The Palestinian national movement is addicted to the Arab perception of historic justice that rejects any non-Arab sovereignty in the Middle East in general, and cannot abide by a Jewish State in “Arab Palestine” in particular. It is obsessed with the fantasy of turning the historic clock backward to the pre-Nakba era, by means of the right of return, transforming Israel into an Arab state by gradually injecting millions of third and fourth generation descendants of the 1948 Palestinian refugees into the Jewish state.

Were this obsession predominantly an ideological commitment, as it is in most Arab states, it would not preclude a historic compromise with Israel. It is, however, profoundly different when it comes to the Palestinians. President Mahmud Abbas and his late chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, made it their practice to openly and officially insist on this as a critical issue of the negotiations, to the point where it repeatedly precluded an agreed settlement. They made clear that whatever the Palestinians get from Israel, territorially or on other issues, even 100% of their present demands, would not terminate the conflict and constitute an “end of claims.” They specifically say that the right of return into Israel will forever stand in principle for every descendent of every 1948 Palestinian refugee, and that the Palestinians reject Israel as a Jewish state because it compromises this “right.”⁽¹⁾ Prime Minister Olmert’s (ill-advised)



offer of a symbolic gesture of taking in a limited number of Palestinians did not satisfy this categorical condition. It is against this rock, apparently, that Secretary of State John Kerry’s fond hopes foundered in the spring of 2014.

A host of other gaps on important issues, such as the extent of Palestinian sovereignty, border and security considerations, and Jerusalem, impede a permanent settlement. On



Barack Obama in a press conference with Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Jason Reed

the Israeli side, not only ideological commitment to Judea and Samaria (the Biblical names for the southern and northern regions commonly known as the West Bank) and territorial appetite in some quarters, but also the absence of determined leadership stand in the way. The Palestinian insistence on undermining the very existence of the Jewish state is, however, in a category of its own, a priori precluding even

a serious discussion concerning historic compromise, let alone a two-state solution. The belief in the current practicability of the two-state solution can legitimately be described as understandable, if unrealistic. Less so, Jones's 2021 assessment concerning the significance of the Palestinian issue in Middle Eastern affairs and the impact of a prospected Palestinian–Israeli peace on the future of the region. Given

present realities, it is surprising to the point of incomprehensibility. He writes:

Therein is the hope for the Middle East, where the long-raging Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains the region’s keystone issue, one that, if resolved, would unlock solutions to other challenges impeding what could be and should be a bright and prosperous future for the people of the Middle East.

This was indeed a very common misperception of the Middle East when Jones served the Obama administration at the end of the first decade of the century. It is, however, extremely problematic to responsibly persist with it after the dramatic and sobering experience of the Arab Spring and even more difficult after the conclusion of the Abraham Accords.

The cataclysmic upheaval of the Arab Spring devastated not only important Arab countries but also profoundly frightened the regimes that were not directly affected and has sown unprecedented despair in wide circles throughout the Middle East concerning the future. When Arab states are having existential anxieties, the Palestinian issue is not even on their priority list, let alone at its top. There is no radical Arab regional power to force them—under the pressure of their own constituents and elites—to take meaningful action for the Palestinian cause, often not even enough to pretend to do so.

The Palestinian cause was never really “the region’s keystone issue,” as Jones puts it. It used to be an important litmus test in the heyday of pan-Arabism, requiring at least a tangible proof of political solidarity, particularly from “reactionary” pro-Western Arab regimes. This commitment gradually weakened towards the end of the 20th century, lost most of its vigor by the beginning of the 21st, and all but faded away after the Arab Spring. While this solidarity is still alive in

some sectors of the Arab public opinion and among certain elites, its prohibitive effect on decision making is often reduced to a little more than disingenuous pro-Palestinian lip service, that only gullible Western diplomats take seriously as a major regional factor.

Presenting this as one of “the region’s keystone issues” is hardly compatible with Prime Minister Netanyahu’s top-level visits to Saudi Arabia and Oman, unprecedented depth of normalization with the UAE and peace with Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, at a time when the Palestinians severed their relations with Israel and even boycotted the US. It is also discordant with the feeble Arab and Muslim response to America’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel. In May 2021, a massive Israeli attack on the Palestinians in Gaza resulted in improvement, not breakdown, of Israel’s relations with some Arab states, notably Egypt.

Furthermore, the “Arab-Israeli conflict,” in the sense that “the Arabs” are actively engaged in violent or political confrontation with Israel, is no longer there. The 1979 the Israeli–Egyptian separate peace treaty was (to use Churchill’s famous phrases) “the end of the beginning” in the passing of this pattern; in recent years we are witnessing its “beginning of the end,” pending its demise.

At this point, anything that could happen between Israel and the Palestinians, from all-out war to eternal heavenly peace, will have negligible, if any, regional impact.

It is being replaced, to a considerable extent, by an Israeli–Arab coalition, against the menaces of the Iranian revolution, Erdoğan’s Turkey, and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Palestinians are no more than a nuisance.

Even more puzzling than the “keystone” theory, not to say mystifying, is Jones’s assertion that a two-state solution, or an end to the Israeli–Palestinian cycle of violence, will have major regional effects. He expects it to remove a significant impediment “to solving so many other grave challenges to regional peace and security—job creation; development; and food, energy, and water sufficiency; and countering the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to name a few.”

At this point, anything that could happen between Israel and the Palestinians, from all-out war to eternal heavenly peace, will have negligible, if any, regional impact. In the real world, it is totally inconsequential and irrelevant to the major problems of the Middle East. To mention but a few: How can it contribute to the economic survivability of Egypt and other non-oil-producing Arab states? How can it help contain the barbaric radicalism of the Iranian revolution or of the Assad regime, or affect their quest for weapons of mass destruction? Why would it have the slightest impact on the civil wars in Syria and Yemen? Can it alleviate the water crisis in Syria and Jordan? Will it relieve the Nile dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt? How can it address Erdoğan’s counterrevolution in Turkey or his aggressive policies in the Eastern Mediterranean? Can it help contain the Muslim Brotherhood?

Jones starts his article with an uplifting statement designed to convince “ye of little faith” of the practicability of his peace vision, in spite of the difficult circumstances: “The past two centuries have been witness to

many seemingly intractable global problems for which solutions seemed out of reach. Yet, time and again, history proved that ‘impossible’ problems were not so insoluble after all.” It is essentially Jones’s version of Obama’s “Yes we can.” With such flawed assumptions about the realities of the region, no wonder they couldn’t *

1. In an interview to the Jordanian daily *Addustour* (June 25, 2009) Erekat explained the rejection of Prime Minister Olmert’s 2008 proposal: “In Camp David they have reached 90%, and today they have reached 100%. If so, why should we hurry after all the wrongs that were inflicted on us?” Erekat also insisted that “the Palestinian decision maker has no right to determine the fate of the refugees, and only the refugee can himself determine his fate...the refugee has the choice to return to the territory of Israel...Not return or compensation, but return and compensation...My estimate is that we are talking about 140 billion dollars.” In a speech to Palestinians from East Jerusalem (January 11, 2014), President Mahmoud Abbas was very clear: “Let me put it simply: The right of return is a personal decision. What does this mean? That neither the PA, nor the state, nor the PLO, nor Abu Mazen [Abbas], nor any Palestinian or Arab leader, has the right to deprive someone of his right to return... The choice is yours. You want to return? You will return. You don’t? You’re free to remain; there is compensation and other details...The right of return is a personal right. Even a father cannot forgo his children’s right.” Abbas frequently repeated this position. In an interview to an Egyptian paper *Akhbar el-Yom* (November 30, 2014) he explained that recognizing Israel as a Jewish state is impossible because Israel “will not allow return of refugees. There are six million refugees wishing to return, incidentally, I am one of them.” Writing for *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs* in November 2017, Abbas insisted that in order to reach end of claims with the Palestinians, “there must be a just solution for the seven million Palestinian refugees, based on the choice of every refugee.”

DAN SCHUEFTAN

Dr. Dan Schueftan is the head of the International Graduate Program in National Security at the University of Haifa, and an adviser to Israeli decision makers. He taught at Georgetown University and at the IDF National Defense College, and published extensively on national security and contemporary Middle Eastern history.



Israel must continue to build up its own strength.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Amir Cohen



ISRAEL'S PLACE IN THE NEW ORDER: A PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE



by Yaakov Amidror

The world Israel lives in is dramatically different from the one in which our elders grew up, amid Cold War tensions and with large Arab armies at Israel's borders. Within the last decade we witnessed the rise of China, America's announced intention to reduce its presence in the Middle East, the aggressiveness of a weakened but assertive Russia, and the consequences of turmoil in the Middle East. We are faced with multiple threats, including a shifting balance of power in Asia and an increasingly lawless global system—scarred by the failure of globalization during the COVID-19 crisis. Amid all this, it is imperative that Israel sustain its own strength, while working hard to restore bipartisan support in the United States and making good use of the new alignments in the Eastern Mediterranean and with like-minded Sunni Arab nations.

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

How different is the world we live in from that which we have been raised to expect? To answer this question we need to define the relevant timeframe discussed in this essay. Clearly this is a world radically dif-

ferent from the one in which I came of age and learned my trade as an intelligence officer—the post-1945 world in which two overly armed nuclear powers, the US and the Soviet Union, faced each other in deadly competition across the globe (with a block of the “non-aligned” trying, not always successfully, to stay on the sidelines); and the post-1948 world in which Israel faced the threat of enemy Arab states surrounding it with a million armed men, thousands of tanks, and hundreds of fighter aircraft.

Since then, the Soviet Union has fallen apart and in our region, no Arab army (other than the Egyptian military) is large or significant enough to constitute a threat. But to better understand the world in which Israel must function, the changes—globally as well as regionally—within the last decade provide the relevant frame of analysis. This has been a decade in which the global distribution of power became much more evident, in light of several developments:

- * Eight years of rule—now set to be extended indefinitely—by Xi Jinping in China, under whose leadership the People's Republic of China pursues a strategy of aggressive growth. It is already America's peer rival, as it seeks a revision of the global order; this, in turn, has set in motion drastic changes in the global alignments and alliances.

- * The return of the Democrats to power in both branches of government in the US



For the first time since the Soviet collapse; the US feels a power breathing down its neck; Chinese Navy members at Iran's port city of Chahbahar; during joint naval drills in the Gulf of Oman. Photo credit: WANA via REUTERS

and the ensuing debate (and internal fissures) on aspects of policy—including the “special relationship” with Israel—amid signs of radical polarization, leading the US away from the traditional role it is expected to play in the region and beyond.

- * The willingness and ability of Russia, despite demographic decline and severe economic limitations, to play an outsized role due to its readiness to use force, led by an assertive president and backed by an impressive and intimidating nuclear arsenal.

- * The dramatic and confusing events of the so-called Arab Spring, which brought about the disintegration of several states. It is now evident that the non-Arab powers—Iran, Turkey, and Israel—are the tone-setters in a

region once viewed as the heartland of Arab nationalism.

Looking toward the future, five key cycles of dynamic changes seem to have a transformative role and need to be addressed by policy makers.

THE CHINESE CHALLENGE

China is fast becoming the dynamic revisionist power in the global order—deliberately and rather aggressively expanding its circle of influence. It does not fear competing with the US; rather, it seeks to pose the Chinese model as an alternative to Western democracy and pushes for structural change in any international organization and forum it is part of, or uses existing organizations to

implement its own interests. It has become more centralized and utilizes modern technology to tighten its grip on its citizens; hence, its overt self-confidence is evident as Xi rewrites the rules that have held for the last 30 years.

Additionally, the People's Republic of China did not recoil from the use of force to impose its will on Hong Kong and integrate it within the Chinese system, in breach of the understanding reached with the United Kingdom as to the rights of the former colony. Nor did it hesitate to threaten Australia, to take over atolls and uninhabited islands within the so-called Nine-Dash Map, build military bases, and revive nationalist claims from the 1930s, and to do so in dangerous proximity to other nations in the South China Sea, which have competing claims over the same locations.

For the first time since the Soviet collapse, the US feels a power breathing down its neck. China is acting out of a profound impulse and a sense of redress after years of exploitation and disdain. Aware of its role, power, and historical and cultural importance, it feels obliged and destined to take center stage and present its worldview as an alternative to that of the West. It is using its rapidly growing and increasingly modern armed forces to dominate nearby areas, such as the South China Sea and Taiwan. It is also using its massive economic clout to establish a hold further afield, such as in Africa. The Communist Party coordinates all these efforts, including the use of nominally "private" enterprises as players in the international economic arena.

Facing the rise of China, a complex system is taking shape: The most significant element therein is "the Quad," which has begun to establish frameworks for coop-

ration among its constituent powers and might prove to have an impressive capacity for containment. It unites the US with India, Japan, and Australia, which share similar concerns regarding Chinese ambitions. This aggressive competition is bound to have a formative impact on the world at large; it may well confront Israel, which has so far managed to avoid choosing and strives to benefit from productive relations with the two colliding powers. At the end of the day, it is clear that if put to the test, Israel would place the special relationship with the US above all other alternatives.

To some extent, this drift toward confrontation has been forecast in Huntington's seminal essay, and later in his book on the clash of civilizations. More specifically, Graham Allison's book, *Destined for War* uses Thucydides' insight as to origins of the Peloponnesian War to examine the clash of a dominant status quo power with a rising power seeking to overturn the global order. Allison's sobering and alarming conclusion is that such competition does not inevitably lead to war—but that this is the most likely outcome.

THE GROWING INTERNATIONAL DISORDER

Another dynamic factor, reshaping the global system for years to come, is the disintegration of international governance as a functional system. Due to this dysfunction, the world lacks a problem-solving instrument, with the United Nations effectively neutralized. The Russian leadership never faced real retribution for the annexation of Crimea, or for taking over parts of Ukraine. When the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in August 2016 in favor of the Philippines in its dispute with China over territorial demarcations in the South

China Sea, Beijing showed no inclination to comply, although it is a signatory of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and nominally subject to the court's authority. Furthermore, China is never going to accept Tibet's independence, regardless of what the international community may think.

In Syria, a civil war has been raging for 10 years, claiming the lives of more than half a million people—mostly civilians—and turning half of the population, about 12 million, into refugees or internally displaced persons—all within a two-hour flying distance from Europe. No international agency has intervened to end this catastrophe and certainly not after Russia began to overtly deploy there, using massive air power.

The COVID-19 pandemic reversed the level of confidence that the global supply chains can actually withstand the present disruption. These chains have become a dominant part of the modern economic system and a distinct aspect of the globalization that engulfed (almost) the entire world within the last generation. The return to the old concept of self-reliance in production (and of import-substitute industries) constitutes a return to nationalism. Moreover, these populist tendencies have been manifested repeatedly across the democratic world in other contexts, particularly in the resistance to immigration.

The often-heard claim—from the left and right alike—is that the alternative model

offered by globalization, mainly in business but also in other fields, failed miserably the test of the pandemic. This is all the more pronounced in Europe, which did not succeed in acting as a unitary body in the face of the challenge of vaccination, and as a result suffered more than many other less advanced nations. It was also evident that Donald Trump's decision—which his successor, President Joe Biden, did not reverse—to make the US less dependent on external supply was an overt vote of no confidence in the future of globalization, writ large.

This involves critical materials for various uses, including the defense industries. As it turns out, the Chinese control their sources of production not only in China but also in other regions (mainly Africa), as well as producing rare earth metals, which the entire US electronics industry cannot function without. The sense in America that others (again, mainly China) have utilized globalization to gain unfair advantages at its expense, in addition to the equally acute frustration in Europe over the poor management of the COVID-19 crisis, has fed grave doubts about the benefits of globalization, as opposed to societies and nations around the world “falling inward.”

The reality of each nation caring only for itself, while vast parts of the world's population, especially in poorer countries, were not even considered amid the grand drama of the vaccination drive, has left its mark. It will greatly reduce the will to restore globalization in general and, more specifically, the international supply chains as if nothing happened. In a world built around the fierce competition between a rising and a well-established power, globalization is not dead, but it has been badly wounded and will take

The world lacks a problem-solving instrument, with the United Nations effectively neutralized.

long to heal. The world has become less connected, and competition overcomes the need for cooperation.

TECHNOLOGICAL ACCELERATION

One of the factors reshaping Israel's environment we have been familiar since the dawn of humanity, but its intensity and impact have grown exponentially in the last generation. Technological changes are driving worldwide transformations—both in our lives and in the realms of society, national economy, and security—and hence their immense importance. They are reflected everywhere and in almost all aspects of life. The virtual world has become real enough; it is an indispensable part of the life of all in the developed countries. (Those who did not understand this beforehand were up for a rude awakening on Zoom...) We are wired to the web at all times and in all places and have come to depend upon this.

Around the corner we shall soon meet the world based on the Internet of Things, in which every product in the world—including our own household items—will be connected to everything else. There will be no choice but to live permanently and deeply within the realm of the cyberworld. Thus, the negative effect of cyber now looms as a real threat—ranging from the ability to undermine our sense of what is “true” (or fake) and what is “reality,” to the capacity to obliterate our privacy by collecting extensive information we have unwittingly and uncontrollably dispensed in various applications. Today, personal secret can be leaked or exposed by a determined pursuer, and this will only grow worse when our homes get “smart” and all products carry a chip.

The integrated technology led to a revolution of knowledge. Experts know more

and more about less and less. Seemingly, we all have the entirety of human knowledge at our fingertips—just ask Professor Google. But there is little to screen us from falsehoods, distortions, and mistakes that flood the web. The purported availability of all knowledge is no guarantee that we would understand reality and the challenges it poses. Moreover, in cyberspace it has become possible to launch an attack against a nation or a business rival at the speed of light and without leaving a fingerprint pointing at the perpetrators. This is already widely used for criminal purposes, as well as for national intelligence operations and the illicit acquisition of intellectual property. The world is fast becoming an exposed and endangered domain.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

This is the harsh and complex global reality that we face—aggressive competition in which might could become right; reduced commitment to cooperation and to agreements between nations; and technology that makes daily chores easier but undermines decision making and makes us vulnerable to harm by invisible, unidentifiable hands.

All this applies to the world at large. But there are also phenomena singular to Israel's own environment—the Middle East. In general, it can be said that the Middle East is no longer the Arabs' domain. Years ago, the head of Egyptian intelligence made the point, when we met, of explaining that there are only four real states in the region: Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Israel. As to the other Arab countries, he dismissed them as “families with flags,” and no more. He may have been right about most Arab countries, and today, even Egypt's future seems uncertain.



Today, even Egypt's future seems uncertain. Anti-government protesters in Cairo, in 2016.

Photo credit: REUTERS/Amr Abdallah Dalsh

The basics have not changed. The Middle East, from the Atlantic Ocean to the gates of India, is largely composed of dictatorships that rule over fragmented tribes, confessional groups, clans, and sects—which often command greater loyalty to them and to the traditions they stand for than any allegiance to the state, perceived as a modern invention.

Perhaps, ironically, it would be America's wish to reduce its presence in the region that would enhance Israel's importance as a key strategic ally.

The gradual departure of the US from the region reflects the reduced need for imported energy, as well as the unwillingness to keep on sacrificing American soldiers in interminable wars that solve nothing, no matter what the price has been over time. This conjunction of the changing needs and the powerful domestic sentiment is redefining the regional balance and even the world order. This continues a transformational chain of events that goes back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the region for precisely 400 years (1517–1917) and sustained a relative peace, even as internal tensions remained unresolved. The colonial powers, Britain and France, redrew the map of the region and kept the order as they expanded their rule from the first footholds in the 1830s



Israel is a stable democracy, in a region where few, if any, can meet this description. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett at the Cyber Week conference at Tel Aviv University\ . REUTERS/Amir Cohen

(Algeria, Aden) to total control by the end of World War II. As their empires faded and collapsed, it was the US (and the Soviet Union in parts, for a while) that came in their stead.

Now, for the first time in hundreds of years, the peoples of the region face each other without an Ottoman sovereign and without an external Western framework, within which they have hitherto found a degree of security and order (albeit imposed from outside). The events of the so-called Arab Spring, and more recently the inadequate response to the COVID-19 challenge, have pointed to dysfunctional government systems and widespread incapacity, of almost all rulers, to fulfill the obligation of a state toward its citizens. The hopes for change have faded away in light of these events and the region's denizens came to

understand that salvation is not at hand, and the lives of the younger generation would not be better. As a distraught Kuwaiti academic told me, the loss of dignity and of the prospects for a better future for their children has left Arab societies in deep despair.

The two Muslim non-Arab countries—Iran and Turkey, central to the history of the region and to the present powers struggle—are now trying to make use of the regional vacuum and advance their national interests and the ideologies to which their leaders adhere. Turkey under Erdoğan promotes the agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood, with an added layer of revived Ottoman pretensions, which had vanished since the aftermath of World War I. Meanwhile, Iran puts forward the proposition that the era of Shiite dominance in Islam could finally be at hand throughout the entire region. Its

actions are steeped in strong Iranian colors, given that the Iranians' hidden dream is to restore Iran's hegemony as in the days of their empire. As for the Arabs, they detest the Ottoman dream—and the Turks—and while they admire the Persians and their ancient culture, they also fear their power and understand that a Shiite era would represent the end of Sunni power, even though they constitute 85% of all Muslims worldwide.

In the face of Iran's efforts to destabilize the region and obtain nuclear weapons and Turkey's attempts to extend its authority from the Caucasus to Libya, the Arabs have no good answers. There is no acceptable Sunni Arab leadership and no Arab state leads the pack. All this comes against the background of a gradual American retreat from the region. When the leaders of the Arab states look around, they see no steady anchor to latch onto.

ISRAEL'S PLACE IN THE REGIONAL EQUATION

In this violent, chaotic space, dotted with local and extensive wars, one local power stands out. With an advanced economy (having a GNP of nearly \$400 billion, more than \$42,800 per capita, in 2019), a modern and capable military, high technology, and a broad range of international connections, the State of Israel—small in territory and with a population of only 9 million—has proven so far that it is a stable democracy, in a region where few, if any, can meet this description. In a world marked, as noted above, by the rising importance of IT and cyber, Israeli start-ups and corporations—in remarkable synergy with military effort—are punching way above the country's weight. Despite Israel's recent and ongoing political turmoil, characterized by recurrent

elections and a highly divided parliamentary system, its achievements are all the more striking when compared with the record of others in the region. Bitter exchanges notwithstanding, at the end of the day, the recent political transition was impressively smooth, once a new government was approved by the Israeli parliament.

The result of this established Israeli position came as a surprise to those who grew accustomed to the notion that the protracted Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the key to change in the Middle East and a solution to the region's problems. A dramatic shift has come about in terms of Israel's standing in the eyes of Arab and Sunni states in the region and beyond. Facing the regional and global situation, many among the Sunni Arab (and some non-Arab) states seek to improve their relations with Israel and are doing so openly, without reference to resolving the Palestinian question. For the first time since the establishment of Jewish independence in 1948, the relations between Israel and Arab states are as important to the latter as they are to Israel, and these states understand that the real problems and solutions in the Middle East are not connected to the Palestinian problem. In this respect, a dramatic change has taken place in the regional dynamics.

Israel's troubles, however, are far from over, despite the change in its regional standing. The two greatest national security challenges that any leader in Israel faces are:

- * The aggressiveness of Iran, which is busy building impressive military capabilities and seeks to surround Israel with a “ring of fire,” and ultimately plans to obtain nuclear weapons. The meaning of this menace derives from the ideological commitment to destroy Israel, which for Iran is

not a mere form of words but an active goal and aspiration. Tehran's efforts are evident in several countries in the region, where the Iranians are putting together independent capabilities, under the control of local militias, for the launching of accurate missiles in numbers that might put Israel at risk. All this is ultimately designed to deter Israel from using force to foil the Iranian nuclear weapon project;

* The erosion of the traditional bipartisan support for Israel, which US Jewry had been able to secure in the wake of World War II and up until the presidency of Barack Obama. This may well be the result of an inevitable historical trajectory, which led to the emergence of two increasingly different and distant perspectives: a Jewish minority community that looks upon itself as an integral part of the liberal world and finds a home in America, and a sovereign state that makes decisions based on the needs of security and survival and in pursuit of national interests, in a manner that often contradicts the liberal sensibilities of the American Jewish community. As the memory of the Holocaust and of the 1948 and 1967 wars fades, and Israel is perceived as a strong state that does not face an existential threat, the solidarity of the Jewish minority with other liberal groups at home is liable to take precedence over Israel's perceived needs, feeding an increasingly bitter debate within the Democratic Party.

A SOBERING BUT NOT HOPELESS PERSPECTIVE

The global outlook described here is hardly optimistic. Still, in the Middle East the landscape is more varied and may offer Israel better options looking toward the future, alongside a daunting list of dangers.

This sobering perspective leads to an unambiguous conclusion: Israel must continue to build up its own strength, militarily, economically, and technologically. It must continue to maintain and expand its networks of cooperation worldwide. The success in creating a Mediterranean bloc or alignment, alongside Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, and the related breakthrough in normalizing relations with Sunni Arab states far from Israel's borders are both object lessons in the utility of this approach in recent years.

It is of immense importance to sustain and shore up the special relationship with the US despite all difficulties. Perhaps, ironically, it would be America's wish to reduce its presence in the region that would enhance Israel's importance as a key strategic ally, which the US—as it pulls away—should strengthen in this conflict-ridden region.

At the end of the day, only a militarily strong Israel, ready to preserve the basic principle of its old and present national defense doctrine—namely, of defending itself by itself against any coalition of enemies—can sustain its regional position and thus retain its attraction as a partner to other significant international players *

YAAKOV AMIDROR

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Drilling rigs in Midland, Texas. Photo credit: REUTERS/Nick Oxford

A photograph of an offshore oil rig at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm orange and yellow glow across the sky and reflecting on the dark water. The rig's silhouette is visible against the bright sky, with various structures and cranes. The overall mood is dramatic and industrial.

NEW ENERGY DYNAMICS:

*The Decline of OPEC, the
Rise of the US and of the
Eastern Mediterranean*



by Victoria Coates

As global commerce re-emerges from the pandemic, new patterns of energy consumption, supply, and sourcing are becoming clear. Some are due to the dramatic depression in energy demand created by the pandemic as well as the potential surge that will come with its end. Much of it, however, has to do with tectonic shifts that were underway before the lockdown and quietly matured during it. Such changes include the increasing irrelevance of OPEC, the emergence of the US as one of the world's great energy producers, and a new dynamic in the Middle East as Israel joins the established regional network of energy exporters from the eastern Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. Ensuring a stable, reliable flow of fossil fuels to support the economic recovery from COVID-19 is bound to remain an issue of great strategic importance for the US, Israel, and their allies, even as they invest in developing alternative and renewable sources.

THE DECLINE OF OPEC

Well before its catastrophic meltdown in April 2020, OPEC had become increasingly antiquated and unworkable. As catalogued

in Daniel Yergin's *The New Map*, tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran had been rising at OPEC meetings in 2019, especially after the Iranian attack on the Aramco infrastructure at Abqaiq. This attack was designed to shut down the world's largest oil processing plant for an extended period and to demonstrate the Islamic Republic's ability to roil global energy markets at will. Still, due to the speed of the Saudi recovery and the increase in supply from other sources, notably the US, Iran's gambit failed and prices stabilized quickly. But the fact remains that one OPEC member had launched a military attack against another member's energy infrastructure, making future cooperation in the organization difficult, to say the least.

Abqaiq was followed by an attempted Saudi rapprochement with the Russian Federation that resulted in OPEC+Russia. The new framework proved equally unproductive, and in early March 2020, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Russia's President Vladimir Putin declared a production war, with two of the world's three biggest energy sources ramping up production to see who could endure the ensuing plummeting prices the longest. Prices crashed much more quickly than anticipated due to the unforeseen depression in demand, resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. As commerce and



A production war. The Aramco oil facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia. Photo credit: REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov

travel shut down from the global to the local level, there was simply no market for the additional barrels the Saudis and Russians were pumping.

At the April 2020 meeting of OPEC+Russia, the parties failed to resolve the production war, only resolving it later at a virtual G20 energy ministerial, chaired by the Saudi energy minister, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud, and with the participation of the US secretary of energy at the time, Dan Brouillette. As the severity of the COVID-19 crisis became clear, cooler heads prevailed—and the production cuts agreed upon at the G20 continued well into 2021 and have stabilized markets sufficiently to ride out the pandemic.

ENTER THE US AS MAJOR OIL EXPORTER

The 2020 Saudi–Russia dispute also clarified the US position in global energy markets, which had been quietly evolving for decades, with more accelerated progress over the last four years. America has returned to its long-forgotten role as one of the world’s largest energy producers and exporters. A generation ago, the US would have been a spectator in a production war between Russia and Saudi Arabia, hoping to benefit economically from the plentiful, cheap energy that would result from it. But now, having shifted from being an energy importer to an exporter, America is vulnerable to the negative impact that oversupply could have on our domestic energy industry. Post-pandemic, a top priority should

be to recognize that energy security is now a vital national security issue both abroad and at home and to develop a coordinated policy to protect and preserve American energy dominance.

America's position as an exporter gives the US administration a new strategic tool that Washington can use in assisting partners and allies to increase their own energy security by diversifying their suppliers. India is a case in point. Over the last three years, the US has gone from making its first shipment to being India's number two source. As the US fosters the growth of "the Quad" (US, Japan, Australia, and India)—a Pacific-based alignment of forces meant to offset the regional clout of China—such commerce increases interoperability among the partners and weans India off undesirable sources such as Iran. In addition, in 2019 when the Trump administration ended the significant reduction exceptions to the Iranian energy-related sanctions, effectively prohibiting Iranian oil exports, the US was able to increase production and effectively partner with allies such as Saudi Arabia to prevent a spike in energy prices. This demonstrated America's reestablished ability as both a reliable energy supplier and a source of stability for global markets.

Domestically, the abundance of US energy sources should make the American economy the envy of the world. While this shift became obvious in November, 2019 when the US formally became a net energy exporter for the first time in many years, it actually dates back to the 1990s when American businessman George Mitchell developed modern hydraulic fracturing that unlocked vast reserves of both shale oil and natural gas. Although the ramifications of the US as a major producer are still not

fully understood, this new ability to exploit energy as a strategic advantage—rather than worry about energy as a strategic vulnerability—is a welcome change that will extend beyond fossil fuels, as both the US public and private sectors lead in alternative and renewable energy sources as well.

Crafting an approach that supports US domestic energy production, while ensuring the continued American technological dominance, is both possible and necessary if the world is to emerge from COVID-19 into a future fueled by the US and its allies. This can, and should, include not only established clean alternatives, such as civil nuclear microreactors, but also emerging technologies such as hydrogen. In this context, America's most prominent global competitors, Russia and China, do not share this advantage: Russia will not have the technological edge in the emerging energies of the future, and China is—and will remain for the foreseeable future—the world's largest energy importer and thus will continue to be acutely energy vulnerable.

A NEW NATURAL GAS POWER IN THE MEDITERRANEAN—ISRAEL

Another changing dynamic that could have significant geopolitical implications will be the integration of Israel as a modest but not insignificant natural gas exporter in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Arabian peninsula, and even potentially Europe. Equally important, will be Israel's becoming a legitimate player in the regional alignment. For decades, energy vulnerability has been a top concern for Israel. It did not have any known reserves and was surrounded by hostile neighbors. It had to rely on imports from sources such as Columbia, Russia, South Africa, and South America.



Vulnerability and security. An Israeli Navy warship cruises near the production platform of Leviathan natural gas field. Photo credit: REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun

After the discovery and development of the Tamar and Leviathan gas fields in the Mediterranean, and more recently, Karish and Tanin, Israel has been able to cut its coal-fired electricity generation from 60% to 30%. It is also on track to end coal use altogether by 2025 as additional sources, primarily solar, become on line. Some estimates put the potential gas reserves in Israel's exclusive economic zone in the Mediterranean at over 70 trillion cubic feet (a fraction of Qatar's 850 Tcf, but still justifies the search for export options). In fact, Israel is now able and willing to export natural gas to neighbors, such as Egypt and Jordan, and may expand additional cooperation with countries that have aspirations

to become hubs for the global natural gas market, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Israel's energy vulnerability has, like that of the US, been replaced by energy security. Israel is now a founding member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, along with Italy, Greece, Jordan, Cyprus, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority. While the immediate purpose of the EMGF is to explore together how to bring gas from the region to Europe and other markets, it has also acquired strategic importance as a UN-recognized international organization and reflects a broader regional alignment.

The US has observer status in the EMGF and can play a significant role guiding its development and expansion if Washington

chooses to engage. France, too, has joined as a member, in line with Paris's perceived role as a check on Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman ambitions in the Mediterranean. The EMGF, almost by definition, poses an alternative to Turkish domination as a regional energy hub. The EU, and apparently the UK, are also angling for a seat at the table. Interestingly, the UAE has been denied the right to join as an observer—due to a veto by the Palestinian Authority (in a fit of pique over the Abraham Accords, which normalized ties between Israel and some Arab states). This may be, however, only a temporary setback. The UAE Air Force has been participating in exercises in Greece alongside their Israeli colleagues. Recently, the foreign ministers of the UAE, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus met at Paphos, establishing their own “forum”—proof that the alignment of the Gulf and an Eastern Mediterranean featuring Israel is progressing whether the Palestinian Authority is happy with it or not.

The question for the Biden administration is whether it wants to exploit the strategic opportunities offered—reflecting the combination of the waning of OPEC, the energy dominance of the US, and the change in the joint Mediterranean (including Israeli) energy posture. Energy policy does not have to be a binary choice between climate and fossil fuels, and a middle ground might garner considerable support in the US Congress. A number of congressional Republicans are sincerely interested in responsible climate measures while a corresponding number of Democrats are sincerely interested in energy policies that do not threaten America's short-term security, positions that indubitably reflect the views of their constituents.

Additionally, robust American leadership and participation in “post-modern” energy organizations such as the EMGF can help ensure that responsible consumers around the globe have a stable supply of efficient, clean energy, while minimizing disruptions by rogue actors. Many other questions remain, such as what will happen to energy markets if traditional major producers who have been at much-reduced levels even before the pandemic, such as Venezuela, Libya, and Iran, come back on line? Will alternatives to organizations such as OPEC emerge and change the coordinating relationship between the US and its energy-producing partners and allies? While energy has emerged as a critical strategic asset for the US, it is not guaranteed that it will remain so without a creative and forward-looking strategy to preserve—and press—America's advantage, which also serves the broader community of like-minded nations and contributes to international stability *

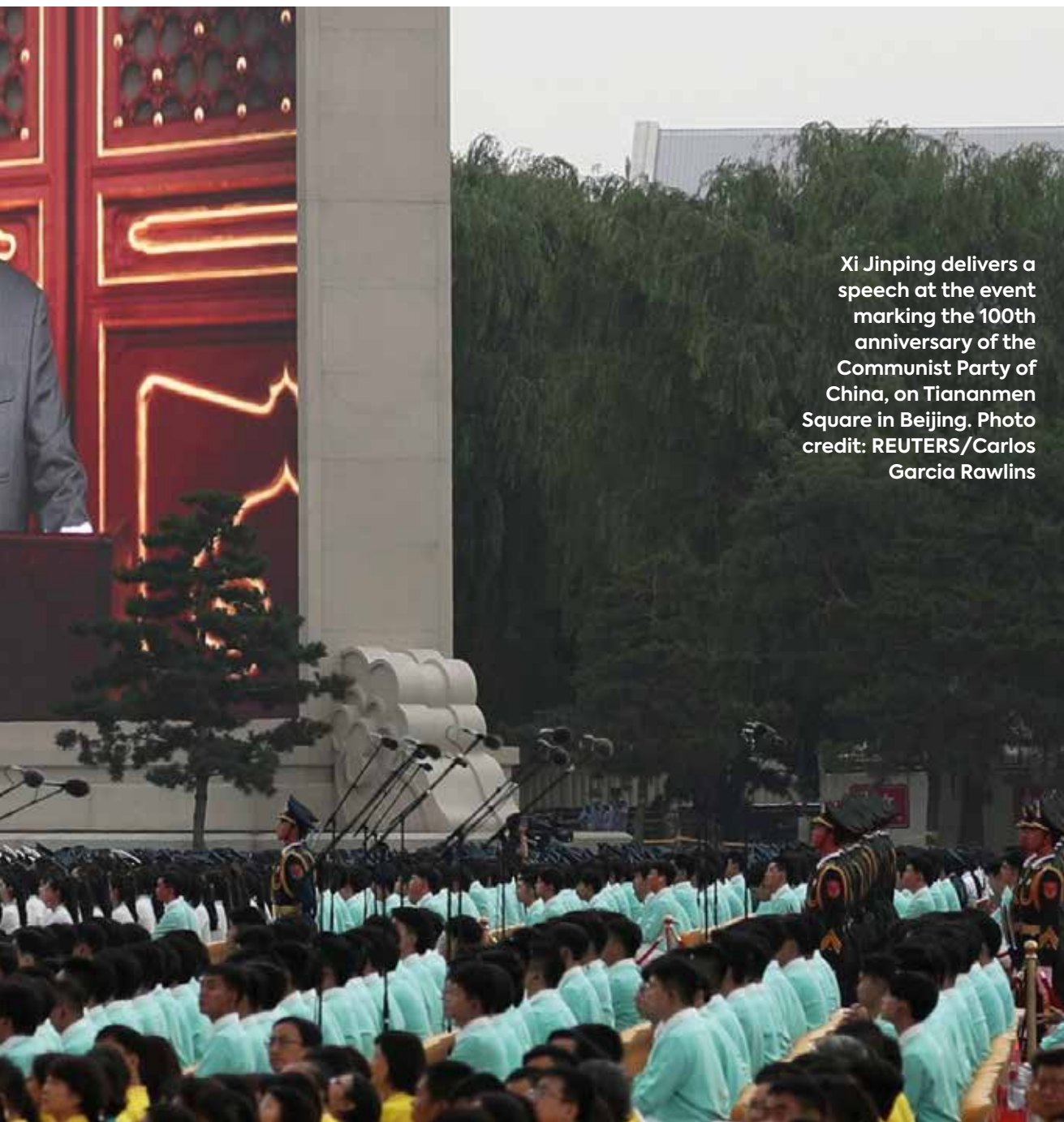
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AMERICA'S SHAR TECHNOLOGY COMP



Xi Jinping delivers a speech at the event marking the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China, on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Photo credit: REUTERS/Carlos Garcia Rawlins

PENING FOCUS ON ETITION WITH CHINA



by Ryan Hass

The Biden administration recognizes that China is America's foremost strategic challenger as well as a potential partner in some fields. It expects US–China competition will be sharpest around technological innovation. Much hinges on Beijing's expectation that time is on China's side. Central to the American response is coordination with allies and partners. Washington views such coordination as a competitive advantage, since Beijing lacks meaningful allies. Given the firm US–Israel bond, and the energy needs of the People's Republic of China, Beijing is likely to look to others in the Middle East—Iran as well as Saudi Arabia.

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In May 2020, Mike Pompeo, then secretary of state, flew to Israel, while under a COVID-19 lockdown, to consult on an urgent matter with Israeli leaders. Pompeo urged Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to deny a Chinese bid to operate the Sorek B desalination plant, a \$1.5 billion project that is expected to be the largest desalination plant in the world. The urgency of Pompeo's appeal to Israel to exercise caution around Chinese involvement in its critical infras-

tructure reflected Washington's growing concerns about China's expanding influence around the world. The Trump administration similarly urged other allies to limit Chinese involvement in critical infrastructure, most visibly in the build-out of 5G telecommunications networks.

These efforts were informed by a view within the Trump administration that the United States and China were locked in a deep ideological and philosophical struggle. They viewed American and Chinese interests, values, and vision as being irreconcilably at odds. President Donald Trump and his staff sought to redress the US–China trade imbalance, including by the imposi-

tion of unilateral tariffs. Beijing reciprocated, launching tit-for-tat measures targeting specific American political constituencies. The COVID-19 outbreak intensified US–China antagonisms; both countries took turns accusing the other of being the source of the virus and of exercising negligence in response to its spread.

The Trump team took it as a given that American partners such as Israel sooner or later would need to pick sides. US concerns with intellectual property theft by China and its potential use of commercial platforms for intelligence collection played a role in this case and in others (such as the contract awarded to China to manage the Haifa harbor).

ENTER THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION AND ‘EXTREME COMPETITION’

The Biden administration has made several subtle shifts in America’s orientation toward China. At a conceptual level, the Biden administration seems to have accepted that the People’s Republic of China is not going away and that the Chinese Communist Party will likely govern it for the foreseeable future. Rather than framing China as a topmost challenge that eclipses other global concerns, the Biden administration has embedded China within a range of global concerns the US must address. While the Biden team views China as the top nation-state competitor the US confronts, it also recognizes that its relationship with China will cut across its ability to address other identified global priorities. China is a potential partner in addressing certain challenges, such as spurring global economic recovery, and a potential problem or challenge in other areas, such as renewing the appeal of democratic institutions and

revitalizing ties with allies and partners.

President Joe Biden has characterized America’s relationship with China as an “extreme competition,” but he has refrained from characterizing China as an adversary or enemy, in contrast to the way he defined Russia publicly. Biden’s advisers previously have described the competition as a condition to be managed, rather than a problem with a near-term solution. They have called for “competition without catastrophe” with China. Other experts who remain in contact with Biden administration officials, such as Harvard University professor Joe Nye, similarly have urged Washington to approach its relationship with China as a “cooperative rivalry.”

The near-term focus of US policy in relation to China is on strengthening America’s relationships with allies and partners who can be arrayed against its rising power. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has explained that the more Washington and others can form a “chorus of voices” to push back against coercive Chinese behavior, the more they will be able to approach competition with China from positions of strength. These efforts have manifested in the first leaders’ meeting of the Quadrilateral Grouping of Australia, India, Japan, and the US; the first visits to the White House coming from leaders of Japan and the Republic of Korea; and the elevated focus of G7 and NATO leaders on China.

SOURCES OF US–CHINA COMPETITION

The crux of US–China competition is over which country’s social, economic, and political system will be capable of outperforming the other. Both Washington and Beijing believe their system holds inherent advantages over the other. Both sides recognize

that prestige will be derived from performance and that the country that best succeeds at unlocking the talents of its people, innovating world-leading technologies, and offering solutions to global challenges will enjoy the pull of power in the international system.

Chinese leaders and media have sought to create a perception of momentum in their favor, with Xi Jinping declaring this January that “time and the situation are in our favor.” Chen Yixin, the powerful secretary general of the body overseeing China’s domestic security, also commented in January that “the rise of China is a major variable [in the world today]...the rise of the East and decline of the West has become a trend; changes of the international landscape are in our favor.”

Such declarations by Chinese leaders have activated an American response. President Biden has framed key domestic policy initiatives such as infrastructure as urgent and necessary to compete with China. A White House fact sheet on Biden’s American Jobs Plan explains that the purpose of the project is to “unify and mobilize the country to meet the great challenges of our time: the climate crisis and the ambitions of an autocratic China.”

In the months since the pronouncements by Chinese leaders about China’s rise and America’s relative decline, the US has administered over 300 million COVID-19 vaccines at home; the unemployment rate has dropped below 6%; the IMF has projected that the US will serve as the leading engine of global growth in 2021; President Biden has declared that the US will serve as the world’s “arsenal of vaccines”; and Washington has begun distributing 80 million vaccines worldwide. The American

national resilience that was demonstrated during this period has frustrated Chinese narratives of American decline.

The conventional wisdom among the Biden administration is that China has grown more aggressive at home and abroad as it has amassed power and that Beijing will continue to quash dissent at home and push boundaries to advance its influence abroad until it runs up against resistance that compels it to alter course. The prescription, therefore, is to find ways to raise the costs of China’s continuing its current course until Beijing determines its interests are better served by recalibrating toward a more moderate and patient pursuit of its ambitions.

IS TIME INDEED ON CHINA’S SIDE?

From Beijing’s perspective, the key variable determining the intensity of US–China rivalry is the narrowing gap in relative power—both economic and military—between both countries. Beijing expects Washington to become more determined to find ways to blunt China’s rise the more the gap in relative national power narrows between the two countries. Since Chinese leaders have declared that trends will flow in China’s favor, they do not expect the level of friction in the relationship with the US to diminish, and they do not believe that their moderation on issues of US concern would lead to reducing bilateral tensions. Consequently, from Beijing’s perspective, the proper policy response is to persist in the face of American pressure until China surpasses the US and causes Washington to accept China’s rise.

Both countries also have powerful domestic political incentives that will limit policy space for significantly ameliorating



“Changes in the international landscape are in our favor.” A light show ahead of the 2021 China International Fair for Trade in Services, in Beijing. Photo credit: Oriental Image via Reuters Connect

tensions in the coming year. President Biden, as well as President Xi, will benefit politically from keeping bilateral tensions elevated, because the bilateral competition provides political tailwind for the types of domestic initiatives both seek to advance. In the US, President Biden will not want to detract focus from his domestic reform agenda by being forced to defend decisions that could be construed as accommodating China. In China, President Xi will want to prevent external interference in Beijing’s

tightly choreographed nationalistic narrative around symbolically significant events, including the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in July 2021, the Beijing Winter Olympics in February 2022, and the 20th Party Congress in fall 2022, where leaders will be selected for the next five-year term to rule China.

In any case, not all indicators point toward China’s uninterrupted rise. Given the so-called “demographic cliff”—the emerging long-term impact of the one-child

policy—China needs to move up the skilled labor scale as their work force grows older and becomes more middle class. At the same time, Chinese officials are struggling to spur productivity gains and advance reforms to an economic model that relies too heavily on investment and generates too much pollution relative to its national goals. This imperative, too, may be driving competition to some extent. In this respect, time is not on China's side: They need to become a Japan-style high value-added production hub to sustain growth with a shrinking workforce.

US VIEWS ON CHINA'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

China's top priorities in the Middle East are to preserve uninterrupted access to energy and markets, to protect Chinese expatriates, and to avoid entanglements. As its Foreign Minister Wang Yi has highlighted, half of China's crude oil imports come from the Middle East. Viewed through this light, China can be expected to prioritize relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other oil-producing regional states, even as it seeks to carry out Thomas Jefferson's foreign policy dictum in the region: "Peace, commerce, and friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none."

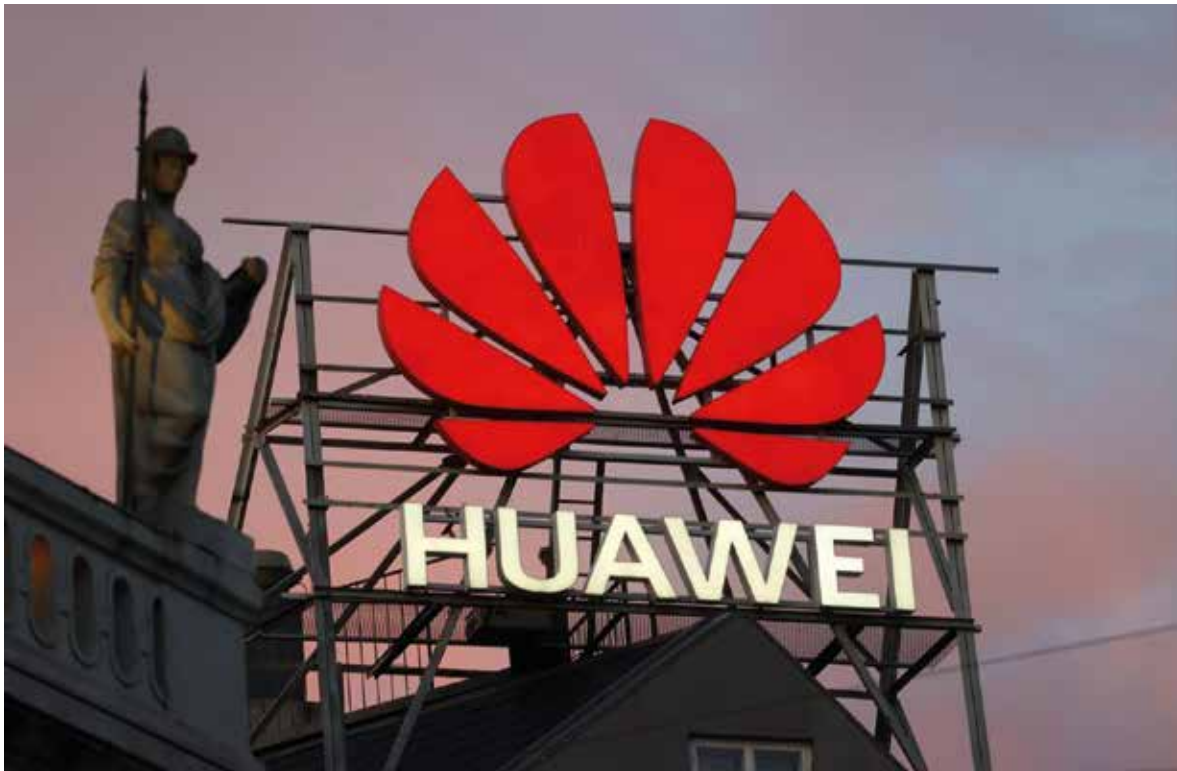
Caution will continue to guide Beijing's overall approach to the Middle East. China will not conciliate between Shiite or Sunni, mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran, act as an intermediary between Turks and Arabs, or offer much beyond symbolic gestures to resolve differences between Israel and Palestinians. While it will seek to draw favorable contrasts between its involvement in the region and America's, much of these efforts will remain limited to the rhetorical and commercial realms.





Bilateral competition provides political tailwind for both leaders.

Sino-U.S. trade negotiations in Beijing, in 2019. Photo credit: Mark Schiefelbein/Pool via REUTERS



Setting the rules. Huawei logo on top of a building in Copenhagen. Photo credit: REUTERS/Wolfgang Rattay

Washington does not, as yet, see China as an active peer rival in the Middle East. Notwithstanding its one overseas military base in Djibouti, the focal point of China's force posture is still much closer to the Chinese homeland. Moreover, the confidence of American officials in the strength of US-Israel bonds, even amid Israel's growing economic relationship with China, will remain strong; China cannot offer an alternative to what America provides. China's primary interests in the Middle East lie with parties other than Israel, and China's top objectives in the region do not naturally align with Israel's preferences.

RIISING SCRUTINY AROUND TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

As the US-China relationship settles into a new phase of hardening, long-term competition, the two countries will likely increase their focus on technology issues as the core of bilateral competition. The US and China both recognize that technological innovation provides windfall benefits, not just economically, but also in terms of rule-setting around emerging technologies and the prestige that derives from being the pace-setter. Leaders in both countries also see significant national security implications for whichever country outpaces the other in

machine learning, quantum computing, life sciences, development of 5G and 6G telecommunications technologies, and military applications of artificial intelligence, among other examples.

For these reasons, the Americans are likely to increase their scrutiny of Chinese efforts to secure cooperation from Israeli entities for accelerating its own technological development. Washington could push for greater Israeli government oversight of private sector technology-related trade and investment decisions with China, in addition to continuing to express its residual concerns about the implications of Chinese management of port facilities in Haifa. Specifically, the US could register sensitivity around any sales of tools or technology that could improve Huawei's competitiveness, enhance China's capacity to repress its people, or aid in China's military development.

A recent Executive Order, "Addressing the Threat from Securities Investments that Finance Certain Companies of the People's Republic of China," established that the US will halt American capital flowing into Chinese companies that "develop or use Chinese surveillance technology to facilitate repression or serious human rights abuses" inside and outside of China. President Biden has framed one of the priorities of his diplomatic agenda to ensure democratic values govern the use and development of AI-driven surveillance tools and "not the interests of autocrats." There likely will be greater scrutiny of Chinese companies that produce such technologies and external partners that exchange with them.

CONCLUSION

Tensions between Washington and Beijing are unlikely to mellow in the near

term. Both America and China's national narratives are invested in the notion that they need to mobilize to outpace the other in long-term competition. The narratives of both also hold that the other side bears principal responsibility for the deterioration in bilateral relations. Policymakers in both countries appear more focused at this time on strengthening their own competitive position against the other than on resolving specific irritants in their relationship.

Washington likely will continue to assess that China is the champion only of its own interests in the Middle East, which will constrain China's capacity to displace American influence in the region. At the same time, the American focus likely will become more tightly concentrated around technological issues, which increasingly are the core of US-China competition. Countries or companies that become perceived as aiding China's advances in 5G build-out, military applications, or tools of repression likely will feel American pressure to reconsider the long-term costs and benefits of carrying such efforts forward *

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A View Fro



The Shining City on a Hill has always cast dark shadows. Trump supporters rally in Washington, in December. Photo credit: John Lamparski/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

CA REGAIN ADERSHIP?

m Singapore



by Bilahari Kausikan

Can America regain global leadership? The question reflects the shock and dismay with which foreign policy establishments in North America and Europe greeted and viewed Donald Trump's election as the 45th president of the United States. They came to regard what Trump said and did in office between 2017 and 2021 as a repudiation of common Western values and the retreat of the US from leadership. In this narrative, the Biden administration is now heroically struggling to restore American global leadership.

It is a nice story. But this emotional and ideological narrative is premised on a particular—largely mythical—notion of American leadership. In reality, mistrust of multilateralism, ambivalence toward free trade, insistence on fairness, a preference for bilateralism, transactionalism in relationships, and a penchant for unilateral action—all characteristics of Trump's foreign policy—were not his personal inventions. The Shining City on a Hill has always cast dark shadows, and these traits have always been present in American foreign policy, at least to some

degree. The overall contrast between Trump and his predecessor obscured this reality to those already shell-shocked by his election.

Asia's response to Trump was less emotional and more pragmatic. America's allies and partners in Asia understood better than Europeans or North Americans that "leadership" is what the leader does, irrespective of whether or not you approve of their actions. The really crucial question is not whether America can "regain" leadership, but whether or not you have a choice—a choice of whom to accept as leader and for what purposes.

Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand, and the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were not happy with every Trump policy. His repudiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership was a serious blow. But faced with an assertive China and a nuclear North Korea, they understood that regional balance of power and deterrence was impossible without the US, and that in this respect, the Obama administration was not some prelapsarian paradise.

America's relations in Asia have been based on shared interests far more than on common values. Although values are not inconsequential to the American relationships in Asia, common values arise



America's friends and adversaries alike took note.

Trump and senior US officials meet Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires, 2018. Photo credit: REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

from shared interests and reinforce them; however, they are not a substitute for shared interests. Rather, shared interests must fundamentally rest on calculations about the utility of American power.

This is important because—except for a short and historically exceptional period between 1989, when the Berlin Wall came down, and circa 2008, when the global financial crisis broke out—American leadership has always been contested, both

globally and internally in specific countries. Even during the Cold War, American allies did not accept all aspects of American leadership and often questioned it, although not on core issues.

The global financial crisis led to disillusionment with US-led globalization in many countries, including America itself. It was a major factor leading to China's premature abandonment of Deng Xiaoping's sage approach of "hiding light and biding time" in the belief that America was in irrevocable decline, reinforced by Obama's perceived lack of stomach for the harsh realities of competition and his reluctance to use power.

China made a strategic mistake. Assertive Chinese behavior catalyzed concerns that

Biden is determined not to be Obama 2.0, at least not in Asia.

had been brewing for some time in many countries, igniting a new competitive dynamic between the US and China. But China, and in particular Xi Jinping, cannot retreat without looking weak. This would be domestically disastrous for the Chinese Communist Party, and it will press on. Equally, no US president wants to be regarded as weak. In both the US and China, domestic politics drive strategic competition.

We have now returned to a more historically normal period of contested American leadership. It is all the more important, therefore, that we are clear-eyed about our interests. Perhaps instinctively and however clumsily, Trump understood the use of hard power far better than Obama. When Obama drew a red line in Syria but failed to enforce it, the credibility of American power everywhere was degraded. When Trump bombed Syria while at dinner with President Xi, America's friends and adversaries alike sat up and took note. Biden is clearly determined not to be Obama 2.0, at least not in Asia. Among his administration's first actions was to pointedly exercise hard power in the South and East China Seas and the Taiwan Straits.

Still, after 40 years of Cold War and seemingly interminable post-9/11 wars in the Middle East, it has been clear for a decade or so that ordinary Americans are no longer willing to bear any burden or pay any price to uphold global order. Despite their obvious differences, Trump and Obama were manifestations of this new political mood. Neither came from the traditional American political establishment; they were the first truly post-Cold War presidents. When Obama was elected on the slogan of "Change We Can Believe In," American voters did not understand this as change

abroad but rather as change at home. In other words, it was time to put America first.

This was less the retreat from leadership as some portrayed it than a demand that American allies and friends should bear more of the burdens of upholding order. Former Japanese prime minister Abe Shinzo was perhaps the first world leader to recognize this. During his second term that spanned both Obama and Trump's presidencies, working quietly through administrative changes and without formally revising Japan's pacifist constitution, Abe transformed the US-Japan Alliance into a more equal partnership and expanded the range and scope of missions that the Japan Self-Defense Forces could undertake in the common defense.

By contrast, Angela Merkel returned from her first meeting with Trump to tell EU leaders, with an air of great surprise—as if she had been struck by an epiphany in the White House—that Europe would henceforth have to rely more on itself. But that was only a much belated realization of what every American president since Bill Clinton had been telling the Europeans—perhaps too gently to make an impact—to take more responsibility for your own security and the burdens of the common defense.

Post-Soviet Russia is not an existential threat to America, but Europe without

Instead of contributing to the common defense, Europe prefers to talk of common values.



Not a 'new Cold War.' Biden at a NATO summit in Brussels, in June.

Photo credit: Francisco Seco/Pool via REUTERS

America is incapable of dealing with Russia, and NATO without the US is hollow. Europe has been a free-rider on the US for far too long, and it has yet to find the political will to substantially increase defense budgets, as it requires the politically dangerous shrinking of an overly generous social model that is unsustainable as a matter of actuarial certainty. Instead of contributing to the common defense, Europe prefers to talk of common values.

Biden clearly takes the idea of common values more seriously than Trump.

He described his June trip to Europe as America's rallying of the world's democracies. He has demonstrated by word and deed that he intends to take a more consultative approach toward allies and partners. This is all for the good. But America's allies and partners everywhere should understand that the corollary to a more consultative approach is a higher expectation of cooperation—a politer form of transactionalism. If you expect to be consulted, be prepared to do more on issues that America considers important, because consultation and

emphasis of common values are not ends in themselves.

Not very much separates Biden's "Build Back Better" from Trump's "America First." Even less space divides Trump's approach toward China and Biden's China policy, which is, in essence, Trump's approach, implemented and communicated in a more orderly manner without unnecessary histrionics. China is now America's core issue, the only issue on which there is a strong bipartisan consensus.

The Biden administration's first contacts were with its Asian allies and partners because Asia is the epicenter of US-China competition. Although the Middle East can never be ignored nor will Israel ever be abandoned, the Middle East is not among the first order of American interests any longer. The broader meaning of the Abraham Accords is "rely more on yourselves." Iran will increasingly be considered only as a function of Tehran's relationship with Beijing. The extent to which the Middle East can rely on American leadership will depend on the roles the countries in the region can or are prepared to play in the US-China strategic contest.

To position ourselves in this new situation requires us to accurately understand the nature of US-China competition. It is not a "new Cold War"; that is an intellectually lazy and overused trope that fundamentally misrepresents the nature of US-China competition.

The US and the Soviet Union led two separate systems connected only at their margins. Their Cold War competition was to determine which system would prevail. By contrast, the US and China are both vital and irreplaceable components of a single global economic system. Their competi-

tion is to determine who will dominate this single system. Competition within a system is fundamentally different from competition between different systems.

There are important political differences between the authoritarian communist Chinese system and the liberal-democratic American system. But we should not lose sight of the fact that the US and China are both mixed economies, their differences being in the balance between the planned or regulated elements and the free-market elements. These are differences of degree, not of kind, which in the 21st century may prove as decisive, if not more so, than political differences.

This possibility is perhaps more obvious to a small country like mine that is neither authoritarian in the Chinese mode nor liberal-democratic in the American mode, and which has had occasion to call a plague on both houses.

The single global system is defined by a web of supply chains of a scope, density, and complexity that is historically unprece-

Asia has lived with the complexities of the competition between the US and China for much longer than the Middle East. But navigating the new complexities is not easy for anyone and requires great agility of mind and policy.

dented; nothing quite like it has ever existed before in the global economy. It enmeshes the US and China with each other and with other economies in interdependence of a qualitatively new type that simultaneously drives, shapes, and complicates a new kind of geopolitical competition in which economics play a more crucial and direct role than during the US–Soviet Cold War when economic considerations were secondary or only instrumental. The Soviet Union was never a significant economic player, except in the oil and natural gas markets.

The complex and dense web of supply chains makes it extremely improbable that, whatever their intentions, the US and China will ever decouple or bifurcate into two entirely separate systems. Bifurcation of a great degree has already occurred in some specific domains—for example, the internet has largely separated—and bifurcation of some degree will probably occur in other domains, but across-the-board bifurcation encompassing all domains is well-nigh impossible at any acceptable cost.

The consequence is ambivalence. This is the characteristic attitude of this new phase of international relations. The US and China eye each other with wary ambivalence; they are profoundly interdependent but deeply distrustful of each other, precisely because they are so interdependent. Confronted with the twin realities of a more assertive China and a more transactional America, ambivalence also infuses the way third countries regard the two. No one wants to make an enemy of either China or the US; no one can do without having a relationship with both; and everyone has some concerns about the two.

The result is a greater fluidity in international relationships, which imparts a new

meaning to the idea of global leadership. For third countries, the imperative is to maximize strategic autonomy. No country is likely to neatly align interests across all domains with either the US or China to the exclusion of the other. Sometimes we will need to lean one way, sometimes the other way, and sometimes we will have to go our own way, while trying not to go so far as to irretrievably damage relations with either Washington or Beijing.

This requires an entirely new set of strategic instincts. Asia has lived with the complexities of the competition between the US and China for much longer than the Middle East. But navigating the new complexities is not easy for anyone and requires great agility of mind and policy. Still, bear in mind that the new complexities offer, at least in principle, greater agency than the narrow and essentially binary Cold War system—if only we have the wit to recognize it and the courage to use it *

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WHEN AMERICA CREATES A VACUUM, OTHERS FILL IT

BY DOV S. ZAKHEIM

Joe Biden and Donald Trump have little in common, with at least one major exception. Like his predecessor, the current president wishes to reduce American presence in the Middle East; yet unlike the 45th president, Biden seems determined to do so. Certainly, his announced withdrawal

of American forces from Afghanistan, with an almost blind disregard of the second and third order consequences of such a move, indicates that he will press ahead with his Middle East plans as well.

Regional actors are already beginning to act upon the presumption of a reduced American presence. On March 27, after months of internal debate, Iran finally inked a long term security and economic agreement with China. The 25-year deal adds another link to China's



Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping at a BRICS summit in Brasilia, 2019.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Ueslei Marcelino

multibillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative, which ultimately is meant to connect China to Europe via the ancient Silk Road. While details of the agreement have not been made public, it reportedly calls for \$400 billion of Chinese investments in Iranian infrastructure, banking, and information technology, over the next 25 years. Iran would, in turn, provide China with a regular supply of oil, presumably at a discounted price: It is already a targeted market for cheap Chinese products, to the dismay of

local industries. The agreement not only gives China unprecedented access to Iran and its economy, but it also enables China to create a significant military presence in the region. The agreement reportedly calls for an expansion of joint military exercises that the two countries have conducted for the past several years, as well as joint research, weapons development, and intelligence sharing. Most significantly, if the reported infrastructure arrangements prove to be accurate, China will obtain special access to



Regional actors are already beginning to act upon the presumption of a reduced American presence. Afghan soldiers outside the Bagram air base, on the day the last of American troops vacated it in July. Photo credit: REUTERS/Mohammad Ismail

Iranian ports on the Gulf. It would then only be a matter of time before Chinese warships took advantage of the facilities available to them. That, indeed, is the lesson of Beijing's investment in Djibouti. Initially, China undertook to build a railway, water pipeline, and a new seaport in the small state on the Horn of Africa. In 2016, just three years after signing the port development agreement, China announced that it would now build a naval base adjacent to the new port. Beijing may follow a similar timetable

as it deepens its economic penetration of Iran. All in all, China stands to become a major regional actor, even as Washington's national security establishment has adjusted its focus to Europe and East Asia—and the result may weaken the American position in both.

Whereas the prospect of a major Chinese Middle Eastern presence is still some years into the future, Russia has been playing an outsized role in the region for some time. Along with the military presence of Iran

and its proxies, Russia's support has been critical to the survival of the Assad regime in Syria. Over the course of the civil war that continues to rage on after a decade with no clear end in sight, Russia has been able to close a number of agreements to enable it to maintain a long-term presence in the country. These include a 99-year lease on the naval bases at Tartus and a long-term lease on the Russian built airbase in Khmeimim, near the port of Latakia in northwestern Syria.

Russia is expanding one of the Khmeimim runways by 1,000 feet, which would enable it to support heavier aircraft, including bombers, and thereby extend Moscow's operational reach throughout the entire region. It is therefore ironic that while the United States seeks to shift its security and especially military focus to what it terms a "great power competition" with China and Russia, those selfsame great powers are moving decisively to establish a long-term political and military presence in the Middle East.

America's adversaries are not the only ones to respond to Washington's changing regional priorities. Its friends and allies have begun to hedge their political and military bets.

America's adversaries are not the only ones to respond to Washington's changing regional priorities. Given Donald Trump's expressed desire to have American troops leave the region, Washington's friends and allies have begun to hedge their political and military bets. Indeed, the emphasis that Joe Biden's administration is placing on human rights has further energized many regional states to develop strategies to offset what is certain to be an increasingly abrasive relationship with the US.

In particular, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia all find themselves in the crosshairs of the Democratic Party's left wing. So does Israel. The Democratic left despises the Turkish and Arab authoritarian leaders who have long been viewed as "moderates." And the left has no more love for Israel. Indeed, Betty McCollum, the new chair of the powerful House of Representatives Foreign Operations subcommittee that allocates funds for foreign assistance, has introduced legislation that would withhold military assistance funding if it is determined that Palestinian rights have been violated. Called the "Defending the Human Rights of Palestinian Children and Families Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act," the legislation, in the words of a statement issued by McCollum's office, "prohibits Israel from using US taxpayer dollars in the Occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem for: the military detention, abuse, or ill-treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention; to support the seizure and destruction of Palestinian property and homes in violation of international

humanitarian law; or, to extend any assistance or support for Israel's unilateral annexation of Palestinian territory in violation of international humanitarian law."

The legislation has received strong support from an array of organizations who also constitute the Democratic Party's so-called "progressive" base. While the likelihood of passage is minimal, the legislation signals a willingness on the part of many Democrats to pressure Israel and, indeed, the Biden administration in the name of human rights.

The targets of the American left's wrath are hedging their bets in different ways. Israel has maintained a robust technical and military dialogue with Russia, so as to ensure that there will be no interference with the ongoing "campaign between the wars" in Syria. It is notable that Jerusalem has not publicly voiced concerns about the Russian bases in Syria. Moreover, it has worked out a deconfliction strategy with Moscow that has enabled it to hit Iranian targets with negligible Russian protestations. Indeed, Israel may well prefer that Russia remain in Syria so as to offset Iran's growing economic and military influence in that country.

Israel also has long maintained an important economic relationship with China, although all military exports (which would have greatly strengthened Israeli industries) are strictly off-limits in order not to antagonize the US—a situation which might change if the future of American aid is put in question. It is perhaps the reason that Jerusalem has been noticeably silent

about the Chinese–Iranian deal, even as then prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu continued to vent over the prospect of a new, or more accurately, renewed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, better known as the Iran nuclear deal. Indeed, Jerusalem is concerned that the Biden administration seems overly eager to consummate the deal; it appears willing to remove economic sanctions on Iran, notably with respect to oil sales and finance, even before an agreement is reached. Moreover, while Washington promises to follow up a renewed nuclear deal with an agreement to limit Iran's disruptive behavior in the region, the Tehran leadership has made it clear that it has no real interest in such an agreement. No wonder the Israelis worry whether Washington will remain as committed an ally as it has been for the past several decades.

Unlike Israel, whose relations with the Trump administration were quite warm and now is receiving a lukewarm shoulder from Washington, Turkey's interactions with America have been more problematic and, as with Israel, could well worsen. It is true that Ankara has made some gestures toward both Israel and Egypt, with whom it has been at odds for years. Similarly, Turkey seems to be moving away from the "Eurasia" policy that underscored Turkey's independence from the West, even as it remained a member of NATO.

Nevertheless, the underlying causes of Washington's strained relations with Ankara have persisted even as Presidents Trump and Erdoğan maintained cordial, even warm personal relations. The friction



Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at the Khmeimim air base. Photo credit: Sputnik/Mikhail Klimentyev/Sputnik via REUTERS

between Washington and Ankara over Turkey's acquisition of Russian S-400 air defense systems has not abated. Turkey was expelled from the F-35 program, and in December 2020, the Trump administration imposed a ban on all US export licenses and authorizations to the country's military procurement agency, the Ministry of Defense Industries, as well as an asset freeze and visa restrictions on its chief executive officer. These sanctions still remain in force.

Yet another cause for American concern is Erdoğan's musing about either

withdrawing from the 1936 Montreux Convention, which regulates cargo ships in the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles and limits the access of military vessels; or alternatively, making the planned Istanbul Canal exempt from the treaty. The Russian navy would benefit the most if Turkey abandoned the treaty. It is noteworthy that when a group of retired admirals signed a letter protesting Erdoğan's reported plan, the government promptly arrested ten of them. More than any other factor, however, it is Turkey's abysmal human rights record



NATO's Jens Stoltenberg and President Erdoğan during the 2021 NATO summit in Brussels. Photo credit: Kenzo Tribouillard/Pool via REUTERS

that has aggravated the relations between Washington and Ankara. Human rights activists continue to lobby for additional sanctions on Turkey due to the Turkish government's ongoing mistreatment of its Kurdish population and its arrest of hundreds of journalists and civil servants, as well as of military officers who now languish in Turkish jails. The ascendance of human rights activists in the Biden administration, as well as Biden's April 24 recognition of the Armenian Genocide—which upended

years of previous administrations' reluctance to do so—render the prospect for an American–Turkish rapprochement exceedingly dim. At the same time, Ankara's strong ties to Moscow have remained resilient despite Turkey's support both for Azerbaijan in the latest flare-up with Russian-supported Armenia and for Kiev in the face of Moscow's massive buildup on Ukraine's eastern border.

Human rights issues are also complicating America's relations with

long-time allies Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt. American legislators have bitterly criticized Saudi and Emirati operations in their war against the Yemeni Houthis. They hold both countries accountable for Yemen's ongoing humanitarian disaster. In 2019 it took a veto from President Trump to block Senate resolutions that would have prevented the sale of precision-guided munitions to both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

While some legislators have sought to block the sale of F-35 fighters to the UAE, as a result of its record in Yemen, the preponderance of congressional anger has been leveled at Riyadh because of the brutal murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which is almost universally believed to have been instigated by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

On April 21 the House of Representatives, normally bitterly divided between the razor-thin majority Democrats and the Republican minority but still agitated over the Khashoggi murder,

The combination of America's strategic shift away from the Middle East and its renewed concern for human rights is affecting the calculus of many of its long-standing allies.

overwhelmingly passed "The Protection of Saudi Dissidents Act of 2021" with a bipartisan majority of 350–71. The legislation would put a four-month freeze on arms and defense-related sales to the Kingdom. The freeze would remain in force unless the president were to certify that Saudi Arabia "has not conducted forced repatriation, silencing, or killing of dissidents in other countries; unjust imprisonment in Saudi Arabia of US citizens or lawful aliens; or torture of detainees in custody of the government of Saudi Arabia." In addition, the president must certify that no Saudi diplomatic officials are using their credentials to track or harass Saudi nationals in the US. Absent that determination, the president "shall close at least one Saudi diplomatic or consular facility in the United States until the certification is made."

Other pieces of anti-Saudi legislation are wending their way through the House. One, sponsored by Rep. Tom Malinowski, who served as assistant secretary for democracy and human rights in the Obama administration, would bar Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed and some other senior Saudi officials from entering the US. It is not clear whether the House will act upon Malinowski's proposal, or any other pieces of legislation apart from the one it has already approved, but it is evident that human rights advocates both within and outside the Biden team have numerous allies on Capitol Hill.

For its part, Riyadh has begun to receive some military systems from Russia, and the two countries are reportedly establishing a

joint manufacturing facility for Kalashnikov assault rifles. Most significantly, the Kingdom is supposedly negotiating the purchase of S-400 air defense systems and Su-35 jets with Russia, three years after the two countries signed a military cooperation agreement. Should that purchase be finalized, Riyadh would also be subject to US sanctions, further widening the divide with this traditional American ally. Indeed, yet another example of the Kingdom's effort to hedge against further troubles in Washington is the report that the Iraqi government has facilitated Saudi diplomatic contact with Iran, even though Riyadh still portrays Tehran as a security threat.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi is also in the bad books of human rights activists. They are finding it more difficult to impose economic or other penalties on Egypt because of long-standing commitments that were key to the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian treaty, and which still underpin Israeli-Egyptian peace. Nevertheless, human rights concerns led even the Trump administration to cut aid to Egypt in 2017 by \$100 million and to put an additional \$195 million on hold until Egypt improved its human rights record; those funds were restored a year later. Nevertheless, human rights advocates have continued to criticize Egypt, and the Biden administration has thus far shown little warmth toward Cairo. It is noteworthy that well into April President Biden had yet to phone his Egyptian counterpart.

Uncertainty about Washington's intentions toward the region in general and Egypt in particular has led Cairo also to

consider hedging its American bets. Already in 2019, Egypt purchased 40 Russian Ka-52 attack helicopters and signed an agreement to acquire 24 Russian Su-35 aircraft, despite US objections. The first five of those planes were delivered in July 2020. In February 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned his Egyptian counterpart that proceeding with the purchase would trigger sanctions under the "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act," the same law that triggered sanctions against Turkey for purchasing the S-400 system. Nevertheless, Egyptian leaders have refused to back down in the face of American pressure.

Clearly, the combination of America's strategic shift away from the Middle East and its renewed concern for human rights is affecting the calculus of many of its long-standing allies. Both China and Russia appear ready and willing to fill the vacuum, which America is apparently leaving behind despite its denials to the contrary. Whether Washington can truly avoid becoming once again enmeshed in Middle Eastern instability is an entirely different matter. To paraphrase what Dennis Ross told James Baker, then secretary of state, the US might wish to leave the Middle East, but the Middle East may not leave the US. Were that to happen, Washington might come to regret that it chose to hold at arm's length those allies that it now would sorely need on its side *



Skyscrapers in Egypt's New Administrative Capital, east of Cairo, built by China State Construction Engineering Corp. Photo credit: REUTERS/Mohamed Abd El Ghany

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THE HIGHER THE COST?

Ideology, Asymmetric Warfare, and Deterrence

BY ERAN LERMAN

The recent round of fighting between Israel and Hamas (with Iran's proxy, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, added to the mix) brought into focus the elusive nature of the concept of deterrence. As the Israel Defense Forces' Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi readily conceded, this will always remain subject to the cruel and retroactive judgment of history. It

is a slippery psychological and political construct in the mind of an adversary and not a mathematical proposition, although it is commonly spoken of in terms of a "deterrence equation." It is rendered even more elusive when the adversary is driven by a profound ideological commitment—wrapped up, as happens to be the case, in aspects of religious identity.

At the core of all so-called deterrence "equations" lies the familiar notion of cost/benefit analysis: namely, the idea that rational decision makers would seek to avoid actions that are going to cost them



Hamas recruits at a police academy in Gaza City. Photo credit: REUTERS/Mohammed Salem

dearly but will produce meager benefits. It is this notion of exacting a high price that makes deterrence such an abhorrent concept to many around the globe: A happy country is one that does not need to think about deterring its enemies. Yet it should not be forgotten by well-meaning Europeans, for example, that for almost two generations their liberty and prosperity were guaranteed and secured by the willingness and intent of the United States to kill many millions of Russians in the first few hours of World War III.

At the end of the day, Mutually Assured

Destruction (MAD) did work. And mad it was: At the height of the US–USSR arms race, both had amassed a yield sufficient to obliterate all life on Earth several times over. Despite this “overkill,” we are still alive—although the number of close calls well exceeds those made famous by films such as *13 Days*. The cost side of the equation was simply too heavy to be balanced by anything.

But what happens on a somewhat lower rung of potential destruction, when identity politics—questions of “being” rather than “doing”—warp the cost side? To use a trite

but pertinent image, the reasons that determine the choice when a hiker buys a backpack (best, most durable product for the lowest price) are quite different from those that drive a socialite's pick of a Hermes handbag (a status symbol). In the latter case, the higher the cost, the more powerful the statement. The same goes, one assumes, for pickup trucks vs. Lamborghinis.

Transferred into the realm of politics, the willingness of individuals, movements, and governments driven by ideological fervor to make immense sacrifices can be explained in similar terms: "Being" what they seek to represent becomes all the more ennobled the higher the price paid for it. The most extreme example, perhaps, is that of the suicide bomber, willing to pay the ultimate price with utter certainty of physical destruction so as to win posthumous promotion to the rank of martyr. The religious comfort of the hereafter helps, but such self-sacrifice for a cause has not been rare even for non-religious ideologies. This is not simply the equivalent of a soldier risking their life in the battlefield to help their comrades and bring victory or save their side from defeat. The logic here has to do with the cost of sustaining an identity, not just with the recognition that some results cannot be achieved without sacrifice. The higher the cost, the stronger the claim to be the true representatives of values worth dying for.

This raises doubts about the utility of the deterrent model in the case of groups and organizations seeking to gain control of the societies in which they live—from the Tamil

Tigers to ISIS to Hezbollah and Hamas—by demonstrating an ever-greater willingness to pay the price. To this can be added the "side benefit" of civilian casualties, which tarnish the image of the other side—as Pnina Shuker explains in her column. In this respect, those who recently set the front page of the New York Times with pictures of the children who died in the Gaza conflict should be held accountable for bringing ever greater harm upon the suffering Palestinian population—about whom they presume to care. They have made this kind of public outcome highly desirable for the leadership of organizations such as Hamas.

Clearly, deterrence under these conditions becomes a far more complex challenge. It needs to involve, down the road, a viable threat not to the individual lives of members and leaders but rather to the survival of the organization or

For groups seeking to control the societies they live in by demonstrating an ever-greater willingness to pay the price—from the Tamil Tigers to ISIS to Hezbollah and Hamas—the higher the cost, the stronger the claim to be the true representatives of values worth dying for.

movement as such. The demonstrated ability to do them harm must encompass the capacity to go over to other methods, which would put their very existence at risk (and as we saw in the drama that unfolded in Germany in 1945, even that might not be enough).

Meanwhile, when faced with this type of challenge, it is equally important to alter the “benefit” side of the equation. Historically, Israeli leaders such as David Ben-Gurion were extremely averse to defensive measures. Their concept of deterrence rested upon the proven ability to destroy regular enemy forces in maneuver warfare. But in the face of asymmetrical challenges, a new need arises as part of the concept of deterrence. In order to dissuade an organization such as Hezbollah or Hamas from using their arsenal, it is necessary to deny the enemy the physical and symbolic outcomes that their rocket barrage are designed to cause. Hence, there is a growing importance of defensive action at all levels: the erection of physical barriers, above and under the ground, reliance upon the Iron Dome and other missile defense systems, the provision of good shelter for Israel’s civilian population, and an alert system combined with clear instructions for safe conduct under attack. When 4,500 rockets result in just 10 lives lost (not counting a soldier killed by anti-tank fire and two citizens killed during urban riots), legitimate questions may be raised as to the actual utility of the rocket effort.

Equally important is the need to deny political effect. When Spain abandoned the US-led coalition against Saddam Hussein

soon after the Madrid train station bombing in 2004, the overall global deterrence against terror was badly eroded. In Israel’s case, the decision to annul the Flag March in Jerusalem, when the city came under rocket fire on May 10, came to be seen as a powerful reward for Hamas; hence, the country’s new cabinet decided to let this march go forward again, this time on June 15, despite the risk of another flare-up. The fiery threats failed to materialize in the event, indicating that some measure of deterrence was, indeed, at work.

But beyond all such symbols and significant actions, what ultimately decides the legitimacy and utility of such asymmetrical campaigns is the sheer resilience of target societies—the United States after 9/11, Israel in the face of terror, the 2014 round with Hamas, and the recent fighting. Denying the adversary the pleasure of disrupting normal life is, at times, more effective as a deterrent than any punishment brought to bear upon its personnel or materiel. It is the task of leadership, worldwide, to instill this insight among their constituents *

ERAN LERMAN

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THE SURFACING SUBMARINE SUBMERGING (AGAIN)

BY AMIR OREN

Some phrases have a history behind them. In early June 1974, 52-year-old Yitzhak Rabin, who as chief of staff led the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the Six-Day War and then spent five years in Washington as his country's ambassador,

found himself in the top spot of prime minister. Having been barely five months in politics, he had to weigh his words carefully. Rabin succeeded Golda Meir, a full generation his senior; he wanted to signal a new chapter for Israel, much needed after the bitter disillusionment of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Still, he was wary of breaking with his political power base in Meir's old guard of the Labor Party. The formula he used, therefore, to placate all audiences



Yossi Cohen during a reception held at the Israeli Foreign Ministry, in 2018.
Photo credit: REUTERS/Amir Cohen

was “continuity and change.” The phrase still has value. Early this June, a change of command ceremony took place at the Mossad headquarters, on the northernmost line of Tel Aviv’s jurisdiction. David Barnea, totally unknown to the public until his name was released the week before, stepped forward to take the helm of Israel’s foreign intelligence and special missions agency, relieving Yossi Cohen, who presided over this veritable brand of Jewish ingenuity and

James Bondish capers since January 2016. Barnea’s charge, inevitably, is that tricky dyad, change and continuity: looking ahead to a fresh start and a timely response to new challenges, without totally repudiating the immediate past, with its notable achievements—and question marks.

The Mossad (Hebrew for “institution”; hence a number of jokes about people who need to be institutionalized) is unique for several reasons. It does not have a specific

law governing its actions. Legislation efforts reached draft levels but were aborted when Justice Ministry officials concluded that most of what the Mossad does abroad is illegal under the unsuspecting host's laws. Without a legal provision for the appointment of the Mossad chief, it is left to the prime minister's sole discretion, requiring only a notice to other ministers; theoretically, a phone call or email would suffice. Once in office, the Mossad chief runs a very tight ship; in some sense, it is the prime minister's "private army." It is run in a highly centralized fashion, and although it is a civilian agency, it is stricter than the all-too-Israeli informal and relaxed style of the military.

Cohen and Barnea both came through the ranks in the agency's human intelligence (HUMINT) division, popularly known by its legacy name, Tzomet (Hebrew for "junction"), then serving as deputy chief before being promoted. It speaks to the centrality of HUMINT in the Mossad's operations; at least in theory, it is the agency's most important mission, yet not too much should be read into it. Cohen and his second number two, turned successor, are almost polar opposites, personality-wise: the former, an extrovert relishing in the limelight and the latter, a cool and modest introvert not likely to be found in gossip columns.

The Mossad used to be a stealthy submarine, best operating without anyone noticing its movements, leaving its adversaries—and usually advocates, too—in the dark. But under Cohen, perhaps because of his personal ambition and to some

extent because of the close attention of his political superior, Benjamin Netanyahu, the submarine surfaced too often. It basked in the sunny glory of dramatic achievements but dangerously courted the vulnerability of a destroyer or missile boat. Barnea will surely order it to submerge again.

Israel's system of government rules out a straightforward comparison of the Mossad to the American CIA or the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). David Ben-Gurion, who went on to conduct the political-military orchestra of Israel's establishment in most challenging circumstances, lived in London for a while during the Nazi blitz of World War II and was deeply impressed by Churchill's *modus operandi*—creating a defense ministry out of separate services and adding the defense portfolio to his premiership. Applying this lesson in the pre-1948 years and then as prime minister, Ben-Gurion fought against

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various militias and branches who wished to keep their semi-independence, whether for political reasons or professional ones. Because he was minister of defense, as well as prime minister, all the important intelligence and security services reported to him under either role.

Ben-Gurion controlled the civilian services, the domestic intelligence agency, the General Security Service (Shin Bet, or Shabak, by its Hebrew acronym), and its foreign activity counterpart, the Mossad, as well as the uniformed Military Intelligence Directorate. The latter has always been most crucial to the survival of a nation perpetually alert between rounds of conflict and anxiously listening to the ticking of a doomsday clock. But until the early 1960s, its chief, also subordinate to the IDF chain of command, was not a leading officer on the General Staff—a chief of staff prospect.

Through other ministers, Mapai, Ben-Gurion's ruling party and Labor's predecessor, supervised the lesser intelligence elements of the Foreign Ministry (a small research department, after a so-called spy revolt led to the disbanding of the thinly veiled Political Department), and the national police, whose special branch emulated the British system. They were, however, secondary to the security services, a reference to both Shin Bet and Mossad, because as long as Ben-Gurion was in power, and Isser Harel was the highest authority of both, lines were blurred, and officers—and sometimes even whole units or squads—were loaned to the sister service.

Up until the 1960 abduction of Adolf Eichmann in Argentina, the Mossad was



relatively obscure and the Shin Bet had gained a reputation for spy-catching, especially of Soviet bloc agents or case officers running Israeli assets. Twins they may have been, but they were rather like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito. The Mossad's contribution to Israel's security was quite marginal; Nazi hunting in Latin America and finding an Orthodox Jewish boy spirited out of the country were perhaps good for morale and governance but did little to prepare Israel for the existential test of war.

It was only in mid-1963, after 15 years of the Ben-Gurion era, that the Israeli intelligence community took a more modern and effective shape whose basic outline is still being followed today. Successive commissions recommended the appointment of a director of national intelligence in one form or another (as “coordinator,” or “prime minister’s advisor”



'The captain.' Benjamin Netanyahu and Meir Dagan. Photo credit: REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun

for intelligence affairs). This, however, did not bring about a change in the patterns of power. The Military Intelligence–Mossad–Shin Bet triangle has not been transformed: What did change is the emergence of a unique competitive and collaborative collegium of co-equals, with no single source of authority below the prime minister in person.

As its role grew, the Mossad successfully defended its turf against at least three

other organizations that had some claim of being part of the intelligence community: the Foreign Ministry's Center for Political Research, established following the 1973 assessment failure by the Military Intelligence Directorate; the Israel Police's Intelligence Department (within the Investigations Division), and the Office of Security for the Defense Ministry (and defense industries). They never received the privileges accorded to the Big Three (and

except for police officers, whose hierarchy is pegged to the military, they were denied the same generous salary and benefits). Their heads were not invited to the main table of the service heads' committee, whose fourth ex-officio participant is the army brigadier—or major—general serving as the prime minister's military secretary.

There are two main bureaucratic reasons for this setup. One is the chain of command. Military Intelligence answers to the security cabinet headed by the prime minister, but its director, a serving major general, is appointed by the chief of staff with the approval of the defense minister. The prime minister's consent is not needed and is usually not sought, as defense ministers jealously guard their territory. Of course, one way around it is the Ben-Gurion model, but it has rarely been used since the mid-1990s. The Defense Ministry came to be considered a plum job for the prime minister to give to a party baron or a key coalition partner. Through the 1982 Lebanon war and with a couple of notable exceptions, the directorship of Military

The Rabin murder, partly due to security lapses, removed the veils from the faces of officials heretofore known only by their initials. Public accountability became a prime parameter.

Intelligence was considered the graveyard of military careers, as commissions of inquiry tended to channel responsibility for intelligence blunders to its occupant.

For professional Military Intelligence officers who came up through the ranks in this branch, the directorship of Military Intelligence was still the most coveted job, much like fighter pilots dreaming of heading the Air Force; however, for combat arms generals with aspirations of becoming chief of staff, it was anathema. They did their best to stay away from it, or if prevailed upon by their superiors to become the director of Military Intelligence, they would spend as little time there as decently possible and move on, before the inevitable cruel failure.

In one memorable anecdote, Defense Minister Ezer Weizmann wanted a seasoned ground forces general officer—a consumer of intelligence who knows what to ask for, rather than an intelligence pro, versed in generating the product to consumers—as head of Military Intelligence. He turned to the commanding general of the Central Command, Moshe Levi, who evaded and resisted until Weizmann was tired of it. Levi admitted that he wanted to stay on a path to the top and his bet that the vindictive Weizmann would not be there much longer proved correct: Five years later he fulfilled his ambition, becoming the tallest officer (literally: his nickname was “Moshe and a half”) ever to command the IDF.

After Levi's term as chief of staff, the pendulum swung, and three of the five succeeding IDF chiefs had actually served as head of Military Intelligence, as did the current chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Aviv

Kochavi, as well as his heir presumptive, Maj. Gen. Herzi Halevi. Making the shift not just possible but almost necessary was the rising importance of real-time intelligence not only in early warnings for war, terror, or technological threats but also in the actual conduct of operations—the so-called “sensor to shooter” concept that has transformed the battlefield. In a sense, a profound understanding of this aspect became a prerequisite for high command.

Meanwhile, the Mossad and Shin Bet heads enjoyed—or suffered from—anonymity until just after Rabin’s assassination in 1995. An air of mystery surrounded them and their services, adding to their aura as omniscient and omnipresent. The rationale given to the censor’s strictly enforced edict was that these chiefs were sometimes personally leading operations abroad. If their identities were known, their pictures would be distributed by rival security services. Operations would be botched and local agents exposed. “Former Mossad chief” is still a very respected title in Israel, but several retired chiefs and deputy chiefs from either service entered politics and warmed Knesset benches, leaving an impression of mediocrity rather than brilliance. One outspoken Arab parliamentary colleague even quipped that being acquainted with them had destroyed for him the myth of the Mossad (and Shin Bet) masterminds.

The Rabin murder, partly due to security lapses, removed the veils from the faces of officials heretofore known only by the initials of their names. Public accountability became a prime parameter. The electorate

was finally given an indirect de facto role in prior scrutiny of candidates for these sensitive positions, although there is no mechanism such as a Senate hearing in the Israeli system of government.

The first two Mossad chiefs who assumed the position fully identified, Danny Yatom (Rabin’s military secretary, among other IDF positions) and Efraim Halevy (also a former deputy Mossad chief and Israel’s ambassador to the EU), were low key. But Halevy’s successor, retired Maj. Gen. Meir Dagan, relished his public persona and the political patronage bestowed on him by an old army mentor, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Dagan also adopted some of Sharon’s pet tastes and distastes. Sharon had taken an aversion to Netanyahu, whom he belittled as “the captain,” (Netanyahu’s reserve rank), and Dagan, on some issues, did not hesitate to stand up to Netanyahu after his return to office.

Another Meir, Maj. Gen. Meir Amit, was the creator of the modern Mossad

A flashy submarine captain has disembarked. His former executive officer, now the ship’s master, will order it submerged, sneaking up on targets to take their measures or torpedo them, without the fanfare.

in the 1960s, post-Isser Harel. Amit, the operational planner of the successful 1956 Sinai campaign, agreed to take a lateral and even downward move to Military Intelligence in order to boost the demoralized corps. He was then asked to bring his talents to the Mossad, as Harel had a falling out with Ben-Gurion. Amit was wartime oriented. He saw his paramount duty as helping the government and his General Staff colleagues to avert war, opening secret channels to enemies such as Egypt's Nasser, and preparing for war should it be waged. Amit, outgoing and in particular a close friend of his successor at the Military Intelligence Directorate, Aharon Yariv, was instrumental in laying the ground for the swift Israeli victory of 1967. Like Amit (and Yariv), Dagan felt that he had to answer to no authority but only that of the truth and of his duty as he saw it.

Several former Military Intelligence chiefs, resenting the reverence granted to the Mossad in public lore, have taken to compare Military Intelligence to an aircraft carrier, slow but robust with a powerful punch, while the Mossad was more of a speedboat darting around, able to sting but not to land (or withstand) a crushing blow. It would be nice to have in a support role, but not the difference between national life or death. (Some of these same detractors would also wish, upon retirement from the IDF, to captain that small vessel).

The Military Intelligence's claim to fame, or to the part they were allowed to gain despite the secrecy, has to do with its multi-dimensional universe. It supplies strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence to the

prime minister, to soldiers in the field, and to all echelons in between, and supervises units and agencies that are independent in other nations. The most salient case in point is Unit 8200, Israel's opposite number to the United States' National Security Agency (whose chief is dual-hatted in charge of Cyber Command) and the United Kingdom's GCHQ. The one-star Israeli officer commanding this powerhouse of signal intelligence and cyber warfare has an American three-star and occasionally four-star counterpart, who reports to the secretary of defense, while the Israeli Military Intelligence brigadier general is far below in the hierarchy.

There is also Unit 9900 for visual intelligence (VISINT), combining the functions of the American National Reconnaissance Office and National Geospatial Agency, under a mere colonel: The IDF is evidently short at least one rank in its organizational chart but cannot fix it, because all other services will follow it with severe budgetary implications. Be it as it may, the Military Intelligence's forte is, first of all, its input into operational planning and targeting, as well as its intimate involvement in timely pinpointing and shepherding strikes during campaigns such as the most recent one in Gaza. Its responsibilities as the leading intelligence agency, in charge of the national intelligence assessment, has to do with collection through various technical means, exploitation of these resources, and the distilling of this product to credible analysis and early warnings of both imminent crises and potential opportunities.

An estimated 90% of actionable intelligence is acquired, produced, and

disseminated by the Military Intelligence's high-tech facilities, a veritable melting pot of all-source items, innovatively helped by artificial intelligence. The unprecedented ability to see through the underground cover of Hamas's movements was one of the latest crowning achievements.

Yet Military Intelligence—soon to be handed over from Maj. Gen. Tamir Heyman to his friend and colleague in the field, Aharon Haliva, until recently the General Staff's operations chief—does not enjoy the international esteem usually accorded the brand-name Mossad. And the officers who commanded armor and paratrooper brigades and divisions are not glorified in the media the way the publicity-savvy, sleek charmer, journalist-cultivator Yossi Cohen has been in his years in office.

Cohen owed his rise up the ladder to his skill in recruiting and running assets, but his final ascent in a competition with other talents had to do with turning his HUMINT qualities on the most worthwhile targets of all, those who could help his promotion. He was recommended by one of Netanyahu's benefactors, who is at the center of Netanyahu's corruption trial. When Netanyahu decided to appoint Dagan's successor and settled on Tamir Pardo, a former Dagan deputy, he conditioned it on Pardo's accepting Cohen as his own deputy. It was a package deal Pardo could not turn down; no Mossad officer would have, given the chance to fulfill a lifetime ambition.

Before Netanyahu changed his mind and retracted his offer to Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin to move over to the Mossad, he reconsidered the implications of a Diskin

appointment. Dagan—close to Sharon and his successor Ehud Olmert, also a rival of Netanyahu—together with Diskin, Chief of General Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, and President Shimon Peres were all party to blocking Netanyahu's plan to preemptively attack the Iranian nuclear enterprise. Netanyahu wanted a yes-man, one so grateful for the favor as to obediently do the prime minister's bidding, even against his own best judgement. Diskin was too independent, too dissenting from Netanyahu's Iran policy, to serve this purpose.

"How can I know that you will be personally loyal to me?" lobbed Netanyahu a direct question at Pardo. One does not become a Mossad chief by being a saint, and Pardo—the communications officer at the side of Netanyahu's brother Yoni during the fateful last moments of his life—found a way to answer by a question of his own: "Do you think there was any doubt when I ran with Yoni under fire at Entebbe?"

The Mossad used to be a stealthy submarine, best operating without anyone noticing its movements, leaving its adversaries—and usually advocates, too—in the dark. Under its new chief, it will revert to being a silent service.

Pardo got the five-year term, extendable by mutual agreement, and Cohen started working on a plan to succeed him. When his deputyship was over, he got himself seconded to Netanyahu's bureau as national security advisor heading the National Security Council. He was a cautious performer there, but managed to get closer to his boss, and no less importantly, to Netanyahu's wife Sara, with her reputation of being able to kill the candidacies of contenders who ran afoul of her.

Once in, Cohen presided over a period of expansion and construction at the Mossad headquarters. Although still highly compartmented and closed to most outsiders, it is no longer an intimate club. Many of its officers, and even more so its veterans, resent Cohen's style and his transparent ties with Netanyahu: The latter went so far as to ruminate about him as a potential successor once, or if ever, the Likud party leadership becomes vacant.

The criticism had to do with the credit openly claimed by Netanyahu, and implicitly by Cohen, for operations that used to be shrouded with secrecy, such as spiriting the Iranian nuclear archive out of Tehran (actually in collaboration with Military Intelligence) or provoking the Iranians by all but announcing that Israel, via the Mossad, pulled the trigger in assassinations of key nuclear experts.

The Mossad has adapted with the times, meeting the needs and openings of the digital age with a major technological effort going back to Dagan and Pardo's terms, but has above all remained a man-in-the-loop agency. In HUMINT operations, of course,

agents are still necessary to penetrate and enable SIGINT and cyber in liaison with foreign services and government officials and to gain access to the inner circles of hostile—or friendly—rulers, whose intentions are difficult to decipher.

David Barnea, who until late last month could have roamed with impunity city streets from Tel Aviv to Tehran, does not have to fill Cohen's shoes. He has his own in what seems like the exact right size, minus the bravado. Continuity in substance will be coupled with change in style: correct and not close to the several prime ministers expected to serve during Barnea's tenure. He will be the un-Cohen, not his clone. Under Barnea, the Mossad will revert to being a silent service. A flashy submarine captain has disembarked, ready for new personal, perhaps political, pursuits. His former executive officer, now the ship's master, will order it submerged, sneaking up on targets to take their measures or torpedo them, without the fanfare *

AMIR OREN

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VLADIMIR PUTIN, A TSAR WITHOUT AN EMPIRE

BY KSENIA SVETLOVA

Back in 2018, Time magazine chose to morph Vladimir Putin's image with that of Donald Trump on its front page. In response, a seven-foot-tall portrait of Putin, titled "The Face of War," made entirely of bullets, was put on display in New York. Its Ukrainian creators wanted to convey an anti-war message, as the shell casings were all from Ukraine's 2014 Maidan uprising.

Putin did not react publicly to this daring work of art, but one should not rule out the possibility that he might have actually liked it. The bullet portrait projected boldness and power, qualities deeply appreciated and nurtured by the Russian president, who likes to pose with tigers and bears.

"I'd love for Putin to come here and show our leaders how it's done," an Israeli driver told me back in 2014, when Hamas had targeted central Israeli cities with its rockets. I have heard similar expressions many times across the Middle East, from Morocco to Lebanon. Russia's many public



Credit: Host photo agency/Sergey Guneev via REUTERS



displays of power—from annexing Crimea and making an incursion into Syria, to dealing with its critics and opposition—had contributed to shaping the image that Putin had desired for himself and his regime: strong and relentless. The implications of this imagery, and of the grudging or even outright approval it has gained in places around the world, run deep and extend well beyond the actual scope of Russian policies.

However, after 21 years of reign, President Putin is now dealing with multiple challenges—both political and economic. Donald Trump is no longer in

office, and the combination of crippling Western sanctions, instability in the oil markets, and the coronavirus pandemic puts a heavy burden on the Russian state. Also, Russia's advances in the Middle East and Africa are now encountering multiple challenges, as Western powers apparently have decided to fight back in Sudan, Iraq, the Central African Republic, and other points of contention. Vladimir Putin, who secured his hold on the presidency through 2036, is again discovering the limits of power.

BACK IN THE USSR

When Vladimir Putin, a young prime minister and ex-KGB officer, became president back in 1999, Russia was a failed state. Its population was poor and often hungry. Its streets were crawling with criminals. Its diplomats abroad had no funds. Its army was weak and outdated, humiliated by defeats in the Chechen war. Its immediate neighbors, ex-Soviet republics, were eager to depart from the Soviet past and to integrate with the West and NATO. The latter, seen in Moscow as the eternal nemesis of the USSR and its successor state, the Russian Federation, was steadily expanding.

President Putin, who in 1999 was still talking about the "importance of transition to democracy," had a plan. He had stabilized the economy and improved people's living conditions, gaining substantial popularity. By 2003–2004, he turned to consolidating power, crushing many of his political opponents, as well as the almighty oligarchs.

Although in 1999 he said that he "cannot imagine my own country in isolation from

Europe and what we often call the civilized world," Putin was deeply wary of NATO's expansion. His main concern was that the policies adopted by Clinton (in breach, one might say, of the promises Bush and Baker had given to Gorbachev and Yeltsin) would ultimately encompass Russia's key strategic neighbors to the south. The leaders of Georgia and Ukraine were getting too close to the West to suit his taste.

Putin once said that the collapse of the USSR "was a genuine tragedy." He knew full well that the Soviet empire was lost for good. True, many of his compatriots felt nostalgic for Soviet times. From a distance, they were perceived as better and simpler, as the past often is. But the Russian president felt sharply the significant difference between the once mighty USSR and modern Russia, a country with a medium-size economy and shrinking population. In this sense, Putin was more offended by President

Putin had a clear goal ahead of him: to prevent NATO from growing and to weaken the EU as much as possible, in order to provide Russia with freedom of action in its near abroad and to regain maximum influence in world affairs.

Obama's dismissive comment during the 2012 presidential election campaign that Russia was just a regional power that lashed out at its neighbors due to weakness than by the comment of Republican presidential challenger, Mitt Romney, who had described Russia as the "number one geopolitical foe" of the United States.

A MAN WITH A PLAN

This combination of imperial ambitions, a sense of humiliation, and fear of NATO's expansion resulted in a multilayered international strategy. Putin had a clear goal ahead of him: to prevent NATO from growing and to weaken the EU as much as possible, in order to provide Russia with freedom of action in its near abroad and to regain maximum influence in world affairs.

To secure these goals, Putin used hard power by initiating wars (with Georgia and Ukraine) and planting multiple "rusty nails" (in North Ossetia, Abkhazia, Lugansk, and Donetsk—self proclaimed republics that enjoy strong Russian backing).

Putin also provided military assistance and weapons to foreign allies to ensure their stay in power and promote Russian interests in the respective regions—in Syria, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Libya. This strategy gained Russia access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean (a dream of Tsar Peter the Great, Putin's hero and the founder of his hometown, St. Petersburg). It also led to profitable military contracts and control over natural assets, such as oil and gas. These military campaigns were precise, deadly, and not nearly as costly as the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, let alone the

American entanglement in Iraq.

At the same time, Putin's Russia developed effective soft power methods and sophisticated diplomacy. It became (almost) everybody's friend—of Israel and Hamas, of Iran, Hezbollah, and the Gulf states, and of the Turks and the Kurds. Moreover, Putin found ways to sell Russian state-of-the-art weapon systems to Turkey, a NATO member, and to Egypt, a long-time American ally.

In Europe, Russia was quietly and effectively supporting ultra right-wing parties while building close ties with some Eastern European countries. It was blamed for interference in election campaigns in the United States and EU states, as well as some countries in Africa and the Middle East. Russia was no longer tied to any particular ideology; instead, it became a free rider.

THE LIMITS OF POWER

To understand Putin's foreign policy, it is important to remember how badly he was shaken by events in Berlin in 1989, when the wall was torn down and the demonstrators approached the KGB office where he was serving. According to his biographers, he had called his superiors, but they declined to send any help. A boy who grew up in a poor family, he turned to martial arts to empower himself; a servant of a mighty empire that ceased to exist, he ultimately turned into a Russian president who clearly believes that the blunt use of force is the only means to achieve his own goals and those of the country.

He sent soldiers to prevent neighboring countries from joining Western political and defense structures—and it worked.



Force can get people into submission, but it rarely builds trust. Photo credit: REUTERS/Sergei Karpukhin

His “electronic army” acted as an agent of chaos, planting smear campaigns and increasing polarity—and up to a point, this strategy seemed to work as well. Yet at the end of the day, Putin’s Russia was successful mostly when the West was absent or uninterested. The Middle East became less of a priority for the US, and Russia was quick to land some gains there. The French had lost ground in African countries, and the Russians—much like the Chinese—became active there too.

However, now that President Biden seeks to reshape the “pro-democracy” camp and to restructure and empower NATO, Vladimir Putin might find himself fighting against a much more organized and consolidated adversary. The economic limits are easily recognized both at home

and in the Middle East, an area where Russia had achieved substantial progress during the last few years. The military battle for Syria might be over, but without economic revival, it will never be complete; Russia is neither able to save Syria or Lebanon from economic collapse, nor will it be able to offer Sudan the generous aid package promised to it by the US or provide military aid to Egypt.

The limits of Vladimir Putin’s power are now visible in his backyard as well. Although Russia was one of the first countries to produce its own COVID-19 vaccine, its own population is not in a hurry to get that vaccine. Force can get people into submission, but it rarely builds trust.

Will Putin find answers to these complicated challenges that require not just power but solidarity, diplomacy, cooperation, and trust? For now, Putin is taking his country in the opposite direction—toward increased authoritarianism and international isolation *

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WITH TWITTER AND EMAIL, DO WE STILL NEED CABLES?

BY ROBERT SILVERMAN

I remember when and where al-Qaida declared war on the United States. Sunday evening, February 22, 1998, was chilly and sooty in Cairo where I was a junior diplomat at the US embassy. A lawyer named Montasser al-Zayyat, an embassy contact who represented Islamists, summoned me to his office. He pulled a document off his fax machine and handed it to me. Written in

Arabic and titled “Declaration of the World Islamic Front,” it called for jihad against the Crusaders and Jews and was signed by Sheikh Osama bin Laden and others acting under the umbrella of a new organization called al-Qaida. After a short conversation with al-Zayyat, I rushed back to the embassy and translated the declaration. The next morning we cabled it back to Washington; later that week the declaration was all over the international Arabic press. Six months later al-Qaida attacked two US embassies in East Africa and the US tomahawked al-Qaida targets in Khartoum in response. The war



The US embassy in Madrid, in 2010. Photo credit: REUTERS/Susana Vera



There is enduring value to the long-form analysis of a cable written by a foreign diplomat who has spent years studying the language, politics, economics, and society of the host country.

had started. Twenty-three years later, here is how Hamas announced its intention to attack Israel. In the mid-afternoon of May 10, Hamas spokesperson Dr. Sami Abu Zuhri posted two videos to his Twitter account warning that Israeli actions at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem would induce “unprecedented repercussions.” Several hours later Hamas launched rockets at Jerusalem; Israel responded with air strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza; and the war had started.

Time flies and technology advances. It’s not only terrorists who have graduated from fax machines and in-person meetings to communicate key developments; diplomats also appreciate the speed and ease of new media. The question is whether communication advances over the past 20 years have rendered obsolete the official diplomatic report or cable sent from an embassy to headquarters via secure channels. It has been decades since Washington relied on cables for fast-breaking news from overseas. Even reports of sensitive meetings with foreign leaders often do not wait for the full cable version that is reviewed by section chiefs at the embassy and then approved by the

ambassador. Often headquarters wants the headline “take-aways” sent via secure email right after the meeting ends.

I am of the generation of diplomats who has worked on both sides of the digital divide and appreciates aspects of both. Good riddance to typing telegrams on an IBM Selectric using cumbersome paper forms backed by carbon copies. I chuckle now to recall an American ambassador who, in the late 1990s, tried to ban the use of email by his officers since he needed to pre-clear all messages emanating from his post.

But there is enduring value to the long-form analysis of a cable written by a foreign diplomat who has spent years studying the language, politics, economics, and society of the host country. Using the cable format signifies that this is “record traffic” which can be easily disseminated and retrieved, thereby causing the drafter to take more care than with an email message. It provides an assurance that the views represented are those of the embassy, not just the individual drafter. (To the delight of historians, the British National Archives have kept the often-humorous handwritten chains of thought and debate that preceded the writing of cables or reflected the responses in London to their content. This is rarely the case with their US counterparts.)

The classic example of impactful cable analysis is George Kennan’s dispatch from Moscow at the start of the Cold War, which Kennan later repackaged in a Foreign Affairs magazine essay titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” and published anonymously as “Mr. X.” Kennan wrote the cable in 1946, at the end of his second tour in Moscow and

after spending close to 20 years studying Russian and working on Soviet affairs. In it he described the internal contradictions between Russian society and the Soviet regime. The wisest course for US policy, he suggests in the cable, is to contain the spread of communist influence, maintain “the health and vigor of our society,” and wait for the inevitable demise of the Soviet model. Generations of American diplomats after Kennan have tried to equal the impact and fame of his long telegram. Today, with the greater diversification of inputs into foreign policy-making, Kennan’s kind of policy impact is as likely to originate in a magazine article as in a diplomatic cable. Nevertheless, the depth of practical experience gained over years of intensive work that a diplomat can bring to bear on a foreign country remains irreplaceable.

So the value added by a diplomat in the discursive format of a cable remains a vital source of information at the policymaker’s fingertips. Neither the ad hoc nature of email discussions nor the haiku-like concision of Twitter replaces the carefully drafted diplomatic dispatch. This column aims to provide some examples of such insight in future issues *

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