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Can Iran Find a Place in Regional Integration?

by Ahmed Charai

National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, in February 2021, boldly summarized President Joe Biden’s strategy as a “foreign policy for the middle class,” a concept further articulated in a speech in April 2023.

This is both a departure and a continuation of traditional US strategic thinking. In earlier administrations, foreign policy emerged from the concerns of senior State and Defense Department career officials in consultation with White House political appointees and a supporting cast of professors on loan from Ivy League campuses. In short, a policy shaped by the concerns of various

interlocking American elites. This can be brilliant, as Henry Kissinger and George Schultz showed us.

Sullivan knows, however, that this is not the right way to construct strategy to fit this moment in world history. In our time, restive middle classes are toppling establishment leaders in Europe and North America, often replacing them with populist figures, who are distasteful to established parties. Now is not the time for mandarins, Sullivan knows, but for attention to the concerns of the middle class.

So, at President Joseph R. Biden’s direction, Sullivan reviewed US foreign policy and decided what to keep and what to jettison. He laid out a foreign policy roadmap, matching America’s domestic strengths against its international challenges with the goal of making life better, safer and easier for working families.

The engagement of the United States in the Middle East is strongly linked to this doctrine and rests, as described by Sullivan, on five pillars: partnerships, deterrence, diplomacy and de-escalation, integration and common values.

This strategy has had some success. Thanks to partnerships like I2U2 and the Negev Forum concrete answers have been given to some of the most pressing issues of the utmost concern to ordinary people: water, health, food security, climate change and regional security.

President Biden and other G7 leaders launched the Global Infrastructure and Investment Partnership, known as PGII, to address infrastructure needs in low- and middle-income countries and to address the challenge of protecting and diversifying global supply chains.

Several countries in the Middle East, especially the Gulf countries, have pledged multi-billion-dollar projects to PGII aimed at advancing strategic projects—building seaports and railways, extending power lines, and mining critical minerals—across Africa and Asia and including in the Middle East itself. If these financing pledges materialize (not always a given in the Middle East), the US-led strategy will become more concrete.

The challenges of food security, the environment and raw materials will be met by this web of partnerships. It is urgently needed because China is pursuing an aggressive policy of economic partnerships in the Middle East and elsewhere – as described in several articles of the JST. Alongside these economic efforts, reinforcing allied military capacities and forging new alliances will deter aggression, strengthen diplomacy and reduce conflict.

There, too, convincing results have been seen. The maritime border between Israel and Lebanon was finally fixed by agreement. For the

first time in 50 years, the two countries can fully develop their offshore gas fields.

The Biden administration envisions an interconnected Middle East, which will promote regional peace and prosperity while reducing the call on US military and diplomatic resources.

Amidst this regional integration project, driven by the Abraham Accords, one big unknown remains – Iran.

The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, sponsored by China, could be positive if Iran moves to stop funding proxy wars in Yemen, fomenting uprisings in Gulf states, encouraging terror organizations in Syria and Lebanon, and stops building both nuclear weapons and the long-range missiles to carry them. Is this plausible? Not today.

If anything, Tehran is becoming more belligerent. Iran is supplying drones to Russia, which has deployed them to attack Ukraine. In return, Moscow promised Iran helicopters, new air defense systems and fighter jets. Iranian pilots are already training to fly Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets. The two countries are seeking to put in place mechanisms to circumvent international sanctions through a \$40 billion investment in Iran's oil and gas development (although this commitment remains speculative). *

AHMED CHARAI

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Art Direction & Design

SoGold, Paris, France

Printed by

GMS Print, Casablanca,

Morocco

**The Jerusalem Strategic
Tribune**

is published by World Herald
Tribune, Inc.

Washington DC – USA



US President Joe Biden meets with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 in Bali, November 2022. Photo credit: REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

THE NEW GREAT LEADER



AT GAME FOR SHIP IN ASIA



by Ryan Hass

The strategic complexion of Asia has shifted substantially in recent years. The United States is no longer the predominant military, diplomatic, and economic power across the region, as it was for the last half of the 20th century and the first decade of this century. China actively contests American leadership as it strives to restore what it views as its natural place as the leading power in the region.

CHINA'S REACH FOR LEADERSHIP BASED ON ECONOMIC ASCENT

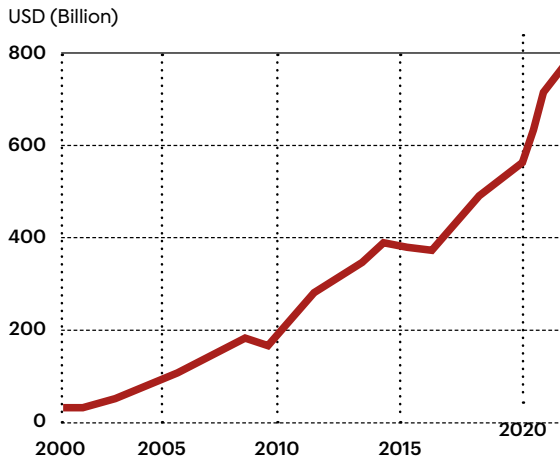
China's pursuit of leadership in Asia has become more visible as US-China relations have deteriorated. Beijing has shown greater tolerance for friction with the United States and other countries across the region in pursuit of its objectives. This has been apparent in China's unabashed militarization of its artificial islands in the South China Sea, its punitive measures against South Korea following Seoul's installation of a Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, Beijing's punishments of Australia following Canberra's calls for an investigation into the origins of

COVID-19, and China's ratcheting up of pressure on Taiwan throughout the presidency of Tsai Ing-wen, just to cite a few examples. Notably, Chinese and Indian forces also clashed at the Sino-Indian border, drawing casualties from both sides for the first time in decades.

At the same time, Beijing has enhanced its offerings to countries throughout the region. Chinese leaders have worked to fill the vacuum created by America's abandonment of its traditional leadership role in promoting regional economic integration. In the years since President Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, China has helped push across the finish line the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, an agreement that covers nearly 30% of the world population and a similar share of global GDP. China also has signaled its desire to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership as well as the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement. Even as China's path to entry into these new groupings is far from assured, Beijing has used its signal of interest to sharpen its contrast with Washington, which has shown disinterest in these regional integration initiatives.

China also has sought to position itself as a solutions-provider to regional challenges. For example, through its sprawling Belt and Road Initiative, China has sought to present itself to

CHINA TOTAL TRADE WITH ASEAN (2000-2022)



Source: UN COMTRADE

the region as invested in reducing poverty and unlocking opportunities for growth.

China similarly has sought to position itself as the region’s indispensable economic partner. China’s overall trade with ASEAN countries by value has grown by a factor of nearly 30 over the past two decades, from \$27.3 billion in 2000 to \$771.7 billion by 2022. China and the 10-country bloc in Southeast Asia, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), now are each other’s top trading partners. Both China and ASEAN trade more with each other than they do with the United States.

President Xi Jinping presents China as a key contributor for the region on infectious disease control and public health. He similarly has touted China’s contributions to the region’s clean energy transformation and climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

In other words, China in the past decade has made clear it is no longer content merely to protect its “core interests” on issues of sovereignty, political stability, and economic development in the region. It also is uninterested in a subordinate role to the United

States in Asia. Instead, China is employing both coercion and inducements to reshape the region to better accommodate Chinese leadership.

There is evidence that China’s efforts have yielded results, most notably in Southeast Asia. As Joshua Kurlantzick of the Council on Foreign Relations recently noted:

The Lowy Institute’s report, titled, “Asia Power Snapshot: China and the United States in Southeast Asia,” used a variety of indicators to rank the two countries’ regional influence across four categories: economic relationships, defense networks, diplomatic influence and cultural influence. It concludes that the U.S. “has lost influence to China in Southeast Asia over the past five years in all four.” Similarly, a recent study by the ISEAS Yusof-Ishak Institute in Singapore found that a majority of respondents in a poll found that China was now the most dominant economic and political-strategic power in Southeast Asia.

Beijing’s efforts appear to be driven by both offensive and defensive goals. Beijing likely judges that if it can dilute American presence and influence, it will have greater capacity to deal with its neighbors from a position of relative



strength, thereby raising the costs and risks to any regional country of challenging Chinese interests.

Beijing also would like to secure greater freedom of movement in and out of the First Island Chain – a series of land features from Japan through Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. America's strong influence across this chain of islands, and its military presence and alliances with Japan and the Philippines, feeds Beijing's fears of encirclement along its maritime periphery.

THE INDIA FACTOR

Beijing's fears of encirclement are exacerbated by America's growing relationship with India, given India's crucial geography. China is the world's largest importer of oil. Roughly half of China's fuel imports are from the Persian Gulf region. Of the world's seven key choke points for oil transportation, three are in areas around the Indian Ocean. Hence, China is vulnerable to being cut off from its key oil suppliers at one of these choke points in the event of conflict or significant escalation of tensions with the United States or its partners. This vulnerability has concentrated Chinese strategic thinking on the need for improved capabilities to mitigate or break American and/or Indian efforts to interdict trade bound for China. Such efforts have driven China's development of new naval capabilities, as well as its efforts to secure access to ports and to improve relationships with countries in the Indian Ocean region.

Notably, however, China's relations with India have deteriorated alongside its efforts to harden itself against risk of having its key sea lines of communication severed. While the decline in relations between Beijing and New Delhi is owed significantly to violence along their shared border, it also has been fueled by deepening mistrust and wariness of each other's strategic intentions.

In response, China has pursued closer relations with all of India's neighbors, and with Russia, in its efforts to gain leverage for dealing with India. New Delhi similarly has become more energetic in support of the Asia Quad (Australia, India, Japan, the United States). Indian Prime Minister Modi also has deepened relations with advanced economies, including through the G-7. Modi also has maintained functional relations with Moscow and has not bowed to pressure from Europeans and Americans for him to shun Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

Despite all these concerns, China has not evinced significant public anxiety about India's moves to fortify its position. From Beijing's vantage, China's economy is five times larger than India's, and China's military spending is more than three times higher than India's levels. Beijing also maintains multiple channels to manage tensions with New Delhi, including through the BRICS grouping, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the annual China-India-Russia meetings format. I hear from Chinese counterparts that they expect India will remain self-interested and will not take on America's fights with China. Rightly or wrongly, they seem to assume that India's relatively weaker position and its material need to benefit from expanding trade with China will militate toward manageable levels of friction over time.

HISTORICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL LIMITATIONS TO CHINA'S REACH

Alongside its growing economy, China clearly is engaging in a massive peacetime military build-up. Even so, there are powerful reasons not to overestimate China's potential to dominate the region at America's expense.

The first is history. As Steven Walt has shown, the record of previous powers who made a bid for regional hegemony is littered with failure. France's efforts were repelled under Louis XIV and Napoleon Bonaparte. Germany suffered



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi Jinping, November 2018. Photo credit: Reuters

defeat in two world wars. Japan's attempt to dominate Asia ended in absolute surrender. As keen observers of history, China's leaders must grapple with the risks that a sprint for regional dominance would represent a cosmic roll of the dice with unpredictable outcomes and historically bad odds.

The second reason is that China faces arguably the most contested strategic geography of any major power in the world today. Beijing is surrounded by highly capable powers. Many of China's neighbors are bolstering efforts

to balance against China's rise, including by increasing their defense budgets and intensifying coordination among themselves. The United States is encouraging such efforts and adding its own capabilities to the enterprise.

The third reason is that no other country in Asia aspires to return to a Sino-centric order. President Xi Jinping's admonition that "it is for the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia" is heard somewhat cynically. Many regional countries' national identities are formed by their differentiation from the Chinese nation

and their unwillingness to accommodate China's regional designs. This includes Beijing's insistence on acceptance of its territorial claims, whether in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Sino-Indian border, or over Taiwan. China does not own a monopoly on nationalism in Asia.

In other words, there likely will be limits to how far China will be able to expand its influence in Asia. This recognition should not invite complacency on the part of the United States and its partners.

Nevertheless, Beijing remains confident in the bet in favor of its long-term ascent. Although China's leaders refer less often publicly to "time and momentum on China's side," China's strategic community continues to posit that their relative position in Asia will strengthen alongside the country's continued economic rise.

Even with declining rates of economic growth, China's leaders still seem to expect China will contribute a large share to the region's economic growth. They also expect China will remain a key source of demand for products and services from the region. Many value chains still run through China, and its growing middle class has become a key swing buyer for goods and services. China's growth model also will drive demand for the region's raw materials, intermediate goods, and services.

WHAT SHOULD WASHINGTON DO?

Washington and its partners will need to strengthen their military deterrent posture and enhance their competitive offering in Asia to ensure they can preserve a favorable balance of power and prevent China from dominating the region at their expense.

America's and its partners' efforts in this regard will be enhanced by a sense of calm confidence and comprehensive attentiveness to the region's greatest challenges. Steady, sustainable efforts will have more impact over time than brief bursts of attentiveness followed by a reversion to neglect, which would trigger latent regional anxieties about America's unreliability.

As the United States and its partners work to up their game, they would be wise to concentrate on investments that boost economic development, hasten the clean energy transition, support climate mitigation and adaptation, improve public health, and widen access to education.

While military power will continue to be important for informing perceptions in the region, the preferences of Asia's young populations will also influence relations between the region and the major powers. The United States and its partners still have a winning hand to play but they need to embrace competition. Whichever country or group of countries delivers the best results and does the most to improve the lives of citizens in the region will enjoy the pull of power in the coming century. *

RYAN HASS

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A new magazine bringing a fresh take on Israel-US relations







SOUTHEAST ASIA BETWEEN MAJOR POWERS: LESSONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

US President Joe Biden with ASEAN leaders during the 2022 ASEAN summit in Cambodia, November 2022. Photo credit: Reuters/Kevin Lamarqu



by Bilahari Kausikan

Once asked a Vietnamese friend what an impending leadership change in Hanoi meant for his country's relations with China. "Every Vietnamese leader," he replied, "must get along with China; every Vietnamese leader must stand up to China; and if you cannot do both at the same time, you don't deserve to be the leader." His answer succinctly describes Southeast Asia's general approach not only to China but also to other major powers and major power competition.

Southeast Asia is an extremely diverse region that has always been a strategic crossroads where the interests of external powers intersect and sometimes collide. Today's competition between China and the US is just another iteration of a centuries-old dynamic that has embedded a diplomatic instinct in the region to simultaneously hedge, balance, and bandwagon.

Successful foreign policies in Southeast Asia have always been polygamous, not monogamous. After independence, no Southeast Asian country – not even formal US allies Thailand and the Philippines – has felt obliged to neatly align all interests across all domains in the direction of any single major power. A country may, for example, balance with the US against China in defense and security, hedge with Japan, Europe or South Korea against American restrictions

on technology exports, while bandwagoning with China for infrastructure development and privileging yet other partners in different economic domains.

Even during the colonial era, Southeast Asia never fell under the sway of any single external power, except for the brief period of Japanese occupation during World War II. The diversity of the region makes attempts to grasp it whole akin to trying to grab a fistful of water. Moreover, a strategic crossroads is naturally multipolar, and more than one or two external powers will almost always be present and competing for influence. In multipolarity and competition there is agency or at least maneuver space.

Whether or not one can take advantage of such opportunities is an entirely different matter. To maximize the opportunities of multipolarity requires judgment, agility and courage. Not every Southeast Asian country has always played this complex game well.

History does not repeat itself, but as Mark Twain once said, it often rhymes. It is not entirely coincidental that the two Southeast Asian countries who are today least successful in maximizing their autonomy amidst US-China competition are Laos and Cambodia. In the 1960s and early 1970s, when the Cold War was hot in Southeast Asia, their desperate efforts to manage the even more dangerous US-Soviet competition by first trying to adopt neutrality as passively defined – laying low and hoping for the best – and then aligning all their interests with one power (the US) led to very tragic

consequences for these countries. Whether by alignment or passivity, they surrendered agency and allowed themselves to be trapped in path dependencies. They may be on the cusp of making parallel mistakes today.

Simultaneously hedging, balancing and bandwagoning as interests dictate is a proactive technique. It demands constant alertness, coldly clinical judgments, continual adjustment, and awareness that situations and hence choices are seldom, if ever, static or only binary. Many observers of Southeast Asia – and indeed of contemporary international relations in general – seem to find this difficult to grasp.

Forty years of US-Soviet Cold War competition has hardwired a strong tendency to view regions in externally defined binary terms, as if the countries that make up regions have no interests or agency of their own or are too obtuse to understand their own interests. This was and is certainly the case in Southeast Asia: if the region is not ‘free’ it will become ‘red’; if democracy is not advancing, it must be in retreat; if the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) does not align with the US, it will be captured by China. This simplistic attitude had led to policy failures, most dramatically, during the Vietnam War.

The US will not abandon the Middle East, nor will the Middle East abandon the US. There is no other viable security provider, and Middle Eastern energy will be important to the world economy for a long time to come.

Fifty years ago, the US corrected the mistake it made in Vietnam by cutting its losses and moving from a strategy of direct intervention to one of acting as the off-shore balancer, relying more on naval and air power than ground forces to maintain equilibrium in East Asia. (East Asia is defined as Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Strategically the two sub-regions can no longer be neatly separated and the new concept of the Indo-Pacific incorporates South Asia as well.)

With the Korean Peninsula – where the US keeps a large troop presence – as an exception, the US has been remarkably consistent and successful as off-shore balancer in East Asia for half a century. The region’s economic prosperity, including China’s rise, rests on this stable foundation.

An analogous shift to an off-shore balancing role is underway in the Middle East as the US rectifies its mistaken direct interventions after 9/11 in Iraq and Afghanistan, which mired it in the longest wars in American history until President Biden cut the Gordian Knot in Afghanistan. This is sometimes misleadingly portrayed as America in retreat. It is highly improbable that the US will ever again intervene on a large scale in the Middle East with ground troops. But the 5th Fleet is still in Bahrain and the US Air Force is still in the UAE, Qatar and Turkey, and even after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US has demonstrated that it can reach out from afar to kill those it considers particularly dangerous.

Dealing with an off-shore balancer is different from dealing with a power prepared to intervene directly. The typical Middle Eastern strategy to ensure security has been to identify the strongest external power and cling to it. Since the Second World War, the US was the choice of most, although some states in the Levant bet on the Soviet Union. Many in the Middle East, including in Israel, have been discombobulated by the realization that the US is now reluctant to play this role. Although Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been particularly quick to adapt to the new situation, Southeast Asia’s



China's President Xi Jinping and Arab leaders during the China-Arab summit in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, December 2022. Photo credit: Saudi Press Agency/Handout via Reuters

half century of experience in dealing with the US as off-shore balancer may still be of interest to the Middle East.

There are three key points.

First, and most crucially, do not overreact. The more-chaotic-than-necessary US withdrawal from Afghanistan evoked images of the US retreat from Vietnam and brought questions about America's reliability again to the fore. An off-shore balancer will always evoke fears of entanglement if too assertive and fears of abandonment if too passive. But the Vietnam analogy is superficial and war in Ukraine has underscored what ought to have always been obvious – the irreplaceable US role in maintaining regional balances. As previously noted, the US has in fact been remarkably consistent over 50 years in maintaining equilibrium in East Asia as an off-shore balancer.

The really important question is therefore not whether the US is reliable but whether or not there is any alternative to the US. Boggled down

in what will be a long, grinding war in Ukraine, Russia has probably reached the limits of its capabilities in the Middle East, and can be seen as dangerously troublesome but no substitute.

China prefers to keep its Middle Eastern engagements primarily economic. It remains to be seen if this is possible, and the restoration of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran announced in Beijing on 10 March signaled a new phase in Chinese policy towards the Middle East. Still, Beijing's desire to simultaneously maintain as good as possible relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel is a delicate balance that sets limits to what China can do. During the recent visit of Mahmoud Abbas to Beijing, Xi Jinping reportedly pushed China as a mediator in the Palestinian issue. If I were Israel or the US, I would welcome this: it's a thankless task that is almost certainly bound to fail!

We should evaluate China's role in the 10th March deal at its true weight. It was Oman that worked quietly behind the scenes for two years to make the deal possible, and if



US President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken at a Quad meeting with Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, May 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Jonathan Ernst/Pool

Riyadh and Tehran had not, each for their own reasons, wanted to stabilize their relationship, there would have been nothing to announce whether in Beijing or any other capital. More importantly, on 9th March the Wall Street Journal reported, from an obvious Saudi leak, that Riyadh was prepared to join the Abraham Accords if the US provided it with security guarantees and allowed it to master the nuclear fuel cycle.

Saudi fears of Iran are clearly undiminished even as Riyadh seeks to stabilize its relationship with Tehran. Nor are these conditions that China can meet without abandoning its 'Strategic Cooperation Agreement' with Iran. This is highly improbable. China has no partner anywhere in the world of any strategic weight that shares its deep distrust of the West other than Iran and Russia. There is only one America

and its indispensability makes the question of reliability moot.

Second, the really important question is therefore how to keep the US anchored in the Middle East over the long-term. This is likely to be a greater challenge for the Middle East than it was for Southeast Asia. The US is no longer reliant on Middle Eastern energy. The focus of both global growth and geopolitical competition has shifted to East Asia. With US-China rivalry set to become a structural condition of 21st century international relations, Southeast Asia located between the Pacific and Indian Oceans compels US attention. In addition, there is no equivalent in the Middle East of the US-Japan alliance – the linchpin of the US alliance system in East Asia.

The US will not abandon the Middle East, nor will the Middle East abandon the US. There is no other viable security provider, and Middle

Eastern energy will be important to the world economy for a long time to come.

But American interests in the Middle East are now of a lower order. After the Cold War, the US faces no existential threat anywhere, as I wrote recently in *Foreign Affairs*, and certainly not in the Middle East. Iran's support for terror groups is undoubtedly dangerous, but does not pose an existential threat to any well-constituted state. A nuclear-armed Iran will certainly pose an existential threat to Israel and the Gulf states. But it is not to be taken for granted that the US will see a nuclear Iran in the same way, and this is perhaps the larger meaning of the Abraham Accords.

Absent any existential threat, an off-shore balancer demands more of its allies, partners and friends to maintain regional order. The Biden administration is as transactional as its predecessor, albeit more polite and consultative. But its consultations are to see what countries are prepared to do with it vis-à-vis its major preoccupation, China. To those who meet expectations, the Biden administration has been prepared to be more generous than any previous recent administration in sharing the tools to meet common strategic objectives. For example, AUKUS (Australia, UK and US) is the first time the US has shared nuclear submarine technology with an ally in more than 60 years.

ASEAN as an organization has not yet fully internalized this new American approach and hence its claim of 'centrality' in East Asia risks becoming more a matter of diplomatic politesse than a strategic reality. Still, at the national level, ASEAN member states are beginning to strengthen bilateral defense ties with the US, including old foe Vietnam and Indonesia which prides itself on its 'free and active' foreign policy. Former Philippines President Duterte was anti-American, but strengthened defense relations with the principal US ally in East Asia, Japan. His successor, President Marcos Jr., has given US forces access to bases in the Philippines that will be crucial in any conflict over Taiwan.

Singapore is not a US ally but has closer and deeper defense and security relations

with the US than its formal Southeast Asian allies, Thailand and the Philippines. US forces are regularly rotated through or operate from facilities in Singapore. This was once subject to strong criticism, particularly by Indonesia and Malaysia, but is now regarded as something of a regional public good in so far as it keeps the US anchored in Southeast Asia. In the Middle East, Israel probably plays an analogous role to Singapore, but this needs to be complemented by stable US-Saudi ties.

The US presence in East Asia has also been presented as in decline based on selective economic criteria. See for example Ryan Hass, "The New Great Game for Leadership in Asia," in these pages. Hass focuses on the US decision to abandon the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and its exclusion from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Walking away from the TPP was a blunder but the RCEP is intended to rationalize ASEAN's free trade agreements and, as there is no such US-ASEAN agreement, the US does not qualify. The US remains a vitally important bilateral economic partner to most countries in East Asia and the source of quality investments, even though in volume China is the largest trading partner of most. The stock of US investment in Southeast Asia is larger than that of China, Japan and South Korea combined. Hass cites a survey in Singapore that shows that China is regarded as growing in importance by all ASEAN

The primary function of ASEAN is internal – to stabilize Southeast Asia by managing relations among its members. ASEAN's record in managing external relationships is more patchy.

members, but he fails to mention that the same survey shows China as the least trusted external power by all members.

Third, while the Middle East is diversifying its relationships with major powers, it lacks mechanisms akin to ASEAN's fora, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus, in which all the major powers participate. These fora are often derided as talk-shops. The criticism is not entirely unwarranted but is beside the point.

ASEAN's conception of regional security was once based on the superficially attractive but dangerous idea that the major powers were the main source of Southeast Asia's problems, and if they could somehow be excluded from the region, milk and honey would flow. This foolishly dangerous notion found expression in the idea of Southeast Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality and the treaty establishing a Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone.

While these notions are still on the books, they are neutered. The ASEAN fora instead invite all of the major powers to participate in discussions on regional security. ASEAN has legitimized the major powers' presence, provided alternative fora for their competition (it is better to talk than fight), and most crucially, undercut the dangerous idea that ASEAN should 'exclude' external powers. This idea is dangerous because it excludes the US while two other powers are contiguous to ASEAN – India and China – and the US is needed in order to balance potential Chinese domination.

The ASEAN fora serve, in however slight a manner, to promote balance and enhance the natural multipolarity of Southeast Asia which, as previously noted, maximizes the opportunity for regional countries to exercise agency.

These ASEAN fora must now share space with other forums such as the Asia Quad (India, US, Japan and Australia), AUKUS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, but that does not detract from their essential function. East Asia is a large and messy region and the new concept of the Indo-Pacific is even larger

and messier. It is thus only to be expected that the regional security architecture should consist of multiple overlapping frameworks rather than a single structure.

The primary function of ASEAN is internal – to stabilize Southeast Asia by managing relations among its members. Given the state of Southeast Asia in 1967 when ASEAN was formed – it was not for nothing that the region was then commonly called 'the Balkans of Asia' – in this respect it has been extraordinarily successful.

ASEAN's record in managing external relationships is more patchy. But the primary tools for managing major power competition in Southeast Asia have always been national rather than regional. There will always be differences among ASEAN members in how they calculate their interests vis-à-vis the US, China, Russia and other major powers. This is natural in a diverse region. ASEAN's operating assumption is that there will always be differences that need to be managed – not just on geopolitics, but on a range of issues – hence the need for a regional organization in the first place.

ASEAN and its fora are imperfect but nevertheless useful secondary instruments for managing relations with major powers. In any case, the Middle East lacks anything that comes near them. Neither the Arab League nor the Gulf Cooperation Council includes all states in the Middle East.

In an age when the primary global security provider expects all regions to take more responsibility for themselves, this is a serious lacuna that the countries of the Middle East should address. *

BILAHARI KAUSIKAN

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US President Joe Biden talks with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the opening of the G20 Summit, November 15, 2022. Photo credit: BAY ISMOYO/Pool via Reuters

US – INDIA RELATIONS: GROWING MILITARY COOPERATION, LAGGING ECONOMIC TIES – AND MANAGING THE RUSSIA PROBLEM



by Aparna Pande

India and the United States have overcome the distance and suspicions that arose out of India's refusal to align itself with the US soon after its independence in 1947. Over the last three decades, the world's oldest and largest democracies have built a multi-layered and likely enduring partnership.

Public opinion in both countries favors close relations. According to a 2022 Gallup poll, 77 percent of Americans have a favorable view of India. In a 2021 poll, 79 percent of Indians had a favorable image of the United States. There are few countries in the world where public opinion is so strongly supportive of the United States.

Under both Trump and Biden administrations, US national security strategy documents portray India as a key American partner not only in the Indo-Pacific but also in South and Southeast Asia. India is referred to in both strategy documents as a key partner with whom the US works both in bilateral and multilateral settings and a country that supports "our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific."

India is central to two of America's strategic blocs – the Pacific Quad of Australia, India, Japan, and the US and the West Asia Quad launched in October 2021 and now referred to as I2U2 – comprising India, Israel, United Arab Emirates, and the United States.

The importance of the relationship can be seen also in the US Congress. A Senate amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2023, introduced by Senators Mark Warner, Jack Reed, and Jim Inhofe, echoed a similar House resolution, proposed by Congressman Ro Khanna. It noted that India faced military aggression from China and that the United States should support India's defense needs and also help India "accelerate its transition away from weapons and defense systems manufactured in the Russian Federation."

STRENGTHENING MILITARY AND TECHNOLOGY TIES

India is a Major Defense Partner of the United States and the two countries are more aligned today in the military realm than ever before, as seen in bilateral and multilateral military exercises, liaison officer exchanges, and maritime security cooperation. Homeland security and counter terrorism cooperation between India and the US is only two decades old but the two now work together on screening of terrorists, dealing with cyber threats from terror groups, intelligence and information sharing, aviation security and capacity building.

In January 2023, the US and Indian national security advisors announced the launch of the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET). This strategic technology partnership arises from US concerns about



Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Indian counterpart Subrahmanya Jaishankar meet in Moscow, November 2022. Photo credit: Maxim Shipenkov/Pool via Reuters

China, which India seems to share. A Defense Innovation and Technology Cooperation sub-initiative launched in January 2023 seeks to build a new bilateral Defense Industrial Cooperation Roadmap that will “accelerate technological cooperation” in military technologies.

India wants to build indigenous telecommunications systems. The US appears prepared to share technology and support India’s long-standing desire for indigenization – for “made in India” projects. The Biden administration’s announcement about providing

funding for the Indian tech sector is meant to show how various initiatives could complement each other.

LAGGING TRADE AND INVESTMENT TIES

The commercial and economic pillar of the partnership has yet to achieve its goal of \$500 billion in annual two-way trade by 2020. The United States is India’s largest trading partner and bilateral trade in goods and services currently stands at around \$152 billion. There are several strong points: India is the fourth

largest international market for US crude oil and the fifth largest for US liquified natural gas; in healthcare, India supplies 60 per cent of the generic pharmaceutical requirements of the United States.

A major reason for lagging trade ties is that India's economy has slowed down over the last decade and the country has shown a preference for protectionist policies. In May 2022, India joined the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework showing its support for the US Indo Pacific strategy, but has kept out of the trade pillar.

The Biden administration, as part of its October 2022 National Security Strategy, speaks of out-competing China by asking US companies to relocate their business operations to 'friendly' countries. During her November 2022 visit to India, Secretary Yellen stated that the Biden administration wants to help its friends and partners "diversify away from countries that present geopolitical and security risks to our supply chain." This entails "proactively deepening economic integration with trusted trading partners like India. Our strategy will also create redundancies in our supply chain to mitigate over-concentration risks."

MANAGING THE RUSSIA PROBLEM

India's refusal to stop buying Russian oil and military equipment, and its abstention on UN votes condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have irritated the bilateral relationship and have the potential to limit future cooperation.

In 2018, India signed a \$5 billion deal with Russia for purchase of S-400 surface-to-air missile systems, which are currently due for delivery. India has argued that it does not make sense for the US to stop India from acquiring a critical weapons system that is needed for India's security, especially since the US was slow to offer India a comparable missile system.

In June 2022 the US House of Representatives sought to pave the way for removing a potential irritant in India relations when it called upon the Biden administration

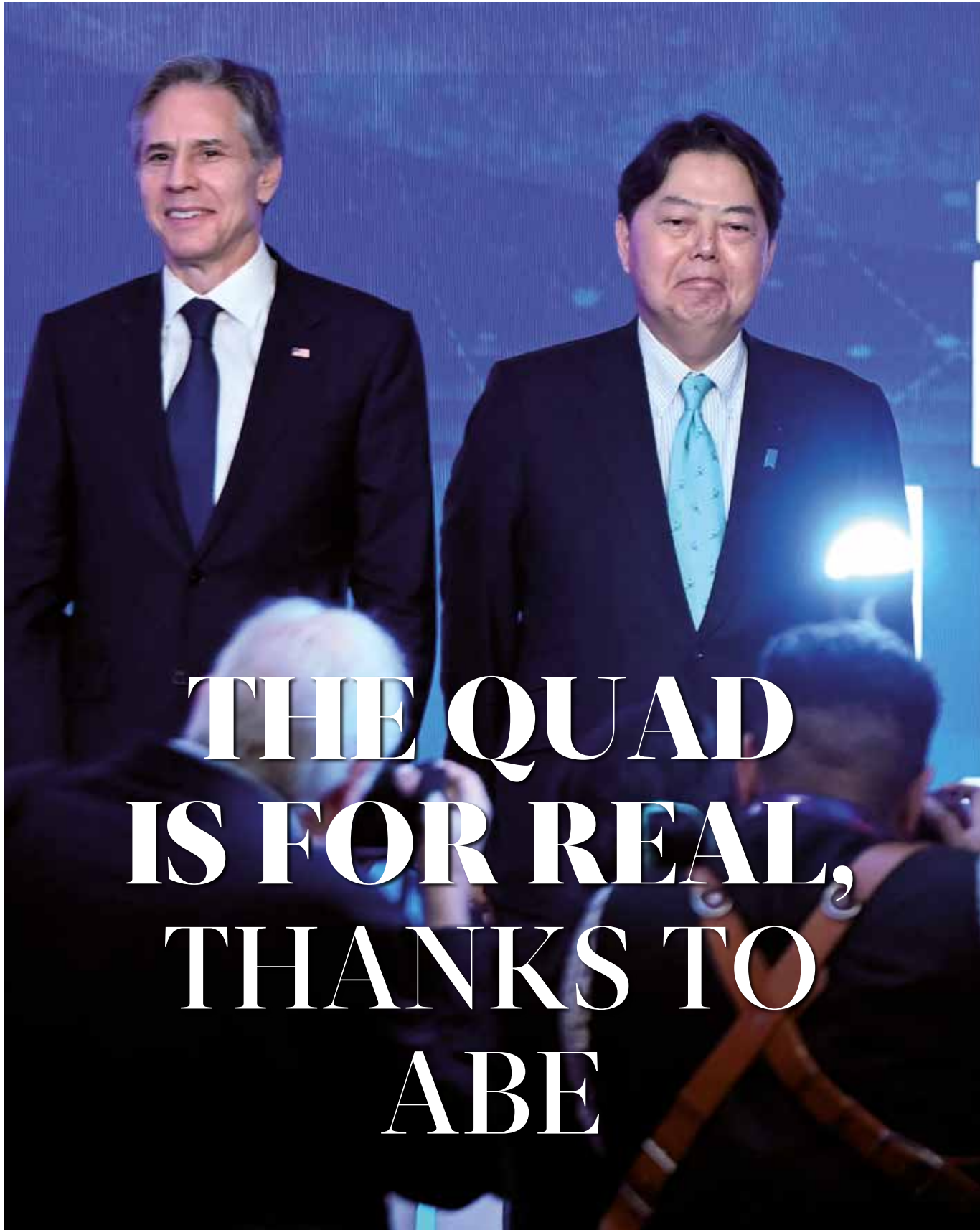
to issue an India-specific waiver under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Secretary of State Blinken can now exempt India from CAATSA sanctions designed to impose restrictions on countries that buy military systems from Russia.

The Ukraine crisis brought to the fore India's dependence on Russian military equipment – a legacy of the Cold War era – and while differences remain, India and the US are seeking to work through these divergences. The United States would like India to purchase more American defense equipment. From a base of nearly zero US arms purchases, India has purchased over \$20 billion in the last decade. The Indian Navy is the second-largest operator of P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft globally and the Indian Air Force operates the second-largest C-17 fleet in the world after the United States.

There remain important outstanding matters on the bilateral agenda for further dialogue, including US concerns with protection of minorities in India. However, the Biden administration has reaffirmed that America's global interests, framed currently by peer competition with China, make India a critical American partner. India too has been happy to signal that, unlike during the Cold War when it rebuffed US overtures, it is now eager to partner with America. *

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THE QUAD
IS FOR REAL,
THANKS TO
ABE



Quad foreign ministers in New Delhi, India, March 3, 2023. Photo credit: via Reuters



by Paul Monk

“Japan is not now and will never be a tier-two power,” declared Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in a speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington in February 2013. He was there to champion the idea of a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Japan, the United States, India, and Australia. He succeeded in his mission.

Abe had three goals with the Quad. The first was strengthening Japan’s own national defense capabilities. The second was seeking to buttress liberal internationalism and free trade in the Indo-Pacific. The third was encouraging the US to dig in for the long haul in East Asia, rather than retrench in the face of Chinese aggression and ambition. The dialogue with India and Australia was intended to draw them into the same threefold commitment. It has worked, to the growing concern and annoyance of Beijing—which for years had dismissed the Quad as a vague notion and the Indo-Pacific as an incoherent one.

Abe had initiated quiet bilateral talks with India, the US, and Australia during his first term as prime minister in 2006–2007. His intention was to align the maritime democracies in support of a world order of liberal trade and human rights, as a hedge against the rising power of China. The idea of the Quad had languished for some years. Now it is up and running.

The main reason the Quad has cohered and has become serious is that China’s rise has become militaristic and expansionist under Xi Jinping, whose rule since 2013 overlapped with that of Abe’s in Japan (Abe served as prime

minister in 2006 to 2007 and again from 2012 to 2020, longer than any other in modern Japanese history). While grounds for some unease existed a decade earlier, which had led to Abe’s moves in the early 2000s, there was no room for doubt by late 2020 when the first full-fledged Quad summit convened in Tokyo.

To understand the significance of the Quad, it is important to grasp two things: the acute danger posed by China to democracy in the Indo-Pacific region and the evolution of Japan’s grand strategy under Abe. Both developments occurred during the first two decades of this century, and both will shape the strategic environment in the coming two decades.¹

China’s military budget has grown tenfold during the years of its economic boom since 1990². It has built a massive and still growing blue water navy, professionalized and hardened its army, modernized and streamlined its air force, developed powerful strategic and anti-ship missile forces, worked strenuously to develop cyber and anti-satellite weapons systems, and is on track to achieve nuclear parity with the US and Russia by 2030. This is the biggest peacetime military buildup in modern times.

All that, combined with China’s militarization—in clear violation of its explicit undertakings to the contrary—of the South China Sea; its increasing threats to Taiwan and harassment of the Japanese occupation of the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands; its minatory stance toward the Philippines and Vietnam; its wolf warrior diplomacy; its economic sanctions against Norway, South Korea, Lithuania, and Australia; its open aggression against India on their common border; its mercantilist trade policies; and Xi Jinping’s avowal that China aims to become the world’s number one power by 2049 have woken up the world’s democracies.



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe makes remarks at a reception in Washington, February 22, 2013.
Photo credit: Reuters

In a recent, trenchant book, Hal Brands and Michael Beckley of the American Enterprise Institute argue that the danger of China initiating a war is becoming acute not because China is now heavily armed or economically ascendant but rather because its leaders are aware that its rise has peaked and that their economic, demographic, and military weight will begin to decline by no later than 2030³. China, therefore, has a closing window of opportunity to stake its claims—not least Taiwan—before its power to do so wanes.

This takes some absorbing, given the decades of hype about China being “destined” to rise to the top. Lee Kuan Yew’s statement of the late 1990s, “China isn’t just another big player. It’s the biggest player in the history of man,” became almost dogma among many pundits for a while. That, in turn, led many observers to insist that China’s rise could not be contained, that it would have to be accommodated, and that the US would have to be urged to cede primacy to China or face humiliation and defeat.

Brands and Beckley’s view of the situation puts such prognostications in a starkly different

light. China’s population is rapidly aging, and its population is now on a trajectory to fall from its current 1.4 billion to 700 million by late this century. Its productivity is stagnant; its debt levels are astronomical (at 335% of GDP); its environment is disastrously degraded due to the reckless charge toward urban industrialization; and the structure of its state-dominated economy obstructs rather than facilitates its future growth and flexibility.

Strategic hedging, which began with concern about China’s rapid rise, must now take cognizance of the anxiety and recklessness that could well attend its impending decay. It was just such anxiety and recklessness, Brands and Beckley argue cogently, that led Imperial Germany to start World War I in 1914 and Japan to plunge into war with the US in late 1941.

It was, they point out, also such anxiety that led Athens, in 431 BCE, to come to the aid of Corcyra against Corinth, an ally of Sparta, and precipitate the Peloponnesian War. Graham Allison had his history wrong when he coined his famous idea of the “Thucydides Trap.” The

“declining hegemon” Sparta did not start the war. Nor did the “rising hegemon” Athens do so out of hubris. Athens challenged Sparta out of concern that it had peaked and faced a serious challenge (with Corinth bidding to become a serious rival in sea power). And Athens, the “rising power,” was defeated in the war.

We could find ourselves at war with China within a few years, they argue, because China—like Athens, Imperial Germany, and Imperial Japan before it—feels hemmed in and pessimistic about the trend of things running against it and not in its long-term favor. Yet the solution is not to appease China. It has to be deterred and that could prove to be a prolonged, hair-raising exercise in brinkmanship.

Hence, the second coming and coalescing of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Foreseeing serious problems with China, Abe shifted Japan’s grand strategy two decades ago from the longstanding Yoshida doctrine that informed Japanese policy since 1945. An advocate of cooperation with the Anglo-American powers before 1935, Yoshida Shigeru became Japan’s preeminent leader, its Konrad Adenauer, after the catastrophic defeat of 1945.⁴

He set in place a doctrine of relying on the US for security, while avoiding involvement in its wars in Asia or elsewhere and concentrating on economic prosperity. That strategy worked brilliantly—until the rapid rise of Chinese power and ambition demanded that it be rethought.

Abe set in place Japan’s first national security architecture since 1945, reached out to India and Australia, began Japanese rearmament, and

Foreseeing serious problems with China, Abe shifted Japan’s grand strategy two decades ago from the longstanding Yoshida doctrine that informed Japanese policy since 1945.

openly spoke of the need to defend the liberal order across the Indo-Pacific—a term he more or less coined—against the hegemonic ambitions of China and its authoritarian and mercantilist regime.

India, under Narendra Modi, equivocated until China used naked force in the Galwan Valley in the summer of 2020. That prompted the Quad summit on October 6, 2020 in Tokyo. Australia, under Prime Minister John Howard (1996–2007), was also equivocal⁵. Under the Rudd government (2007–2010), the Quad was seen as dead and buried. This changed, for both India and Australia, in 2020.

The US, under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, hedged on the Quad as well. That changed to some extent under Trump and signally once Biden took office in January 2021. And when the Labour government in Australia led by Anthony Albanese replaced the conservative Morrison government in late May 2022, both Albanese and Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong headed straight to Tokyo for the Quad summit.

Michael Green, director of the US Studies Center in Sydney, has shown how Japan’s grand strategy has evolved since the late 19th century,⁶ when Japan emerged from self-imposed isolation with the Meiji Restoration (after 1868).

There were three major phases before Abe. The first originated in the 1880s and 1890s, when the architects of the Japanese modernization program, Aritomo Yamagata and Ito Hirobumi, listened to the Austrian scholar Lorenz Von Stein. He spoke to them about a “line of advantage” that Japan would need to define and defend in order to secure its sovereignty and prosperity.

Japan needed to develop a powerful modern navy and to cooperate with the Anglo-Americans to secure trade in the Pacific Ocean. Broadly speaking, this was their policy until the 1930s, when anxiety about the collapse of the world order led them to embark on their conquest in China, followed by war with the Anglo-Americans and attempted conquest of South East Asia. That ended in total defeat. The third phase was the post-World War II Yoshida doctrine of maritime self-defense and economic integration into the American world order.

What Abe and his national security architects, such as Kanehara Nobukatu, have done is react to a second apparent breakdown in world order by making very different choices than their forebears did in the 1930s. They seek to lock the US into a defense of the Western Pacific and the East Asian littoral against Chinese ambitions and to actively buttress democratic order, liberal trade rules, and human rights across the Indo-Pacific.

Japan has been proactive in contesting China's plans. That's what the Quad, or what Kevin Rudd has quite reasonably dubbed the Quad 2.0, is all about.

Rudd, just appointed Australian ambassador to Washington, has authored a recent book urging that a catastrophic conflict between China and the US can be avoided. He is surely correct. The question is how to deter China from initiating such a war. The Quad states clearly do not seek one but are rearming and aligning in reaction to China's militarization and plain ambitions.

Rudd's argument is that the 2020s will be a dangerous decade, but not for the reasons advanced by Brands and Beckley. Rudd does not foresee China's secular decline. He sees an inevitable strategic competition that needs to become a managed strategic competition, like the Cold War, if a catastrophic hot war is to be avoided.⁷

Rudd is rather vague, however, as to how China is to be drawn into the diplomatic

The question is how to deter China from initiating a war. The Quad states clearly do not seek one but are rearming and aligning in reaction to China's militarization and plain ambitions.

and strategic dialogue that this managed competition will require. Nor does he contemplate how China should be constrained given its general unwillingness to play its hand as what Washington has long called "a responsible stakeholder." It is precisely for these reasons that the Quad 2.0 has arisen and that its member states are rearming, with China as the driving concern. Putin's invasion of Ukraine has added to the alarm of the democracies. The prognosis by Brands and Beckley strongly suggests that the Quad now has serious work to do in the 2020s. War has become a distinct near-term possibility. *

1. For the single best summation of how all this emerged and what it means, see Rory Medcalf Contest for the Indo-Pacific: Why China Won't Map the Future (La Trobe University Press, 2020).

2. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Data Base, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>. In 2021, China's official military expenditure grew from \$21.8 billion in 1990 to \$270 billion in 2022.

3. Hal Brands and Michael Beckley Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict With China (W. W. Norton and Co., 2022) especially chapters 2, 3, and 4 titled "Peak China," "The Closing Ring," and "Danger: Falling Powers."

4. John W. Dower Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954 (Harvard University Press, 1988) is the classic account, especially chapters 10, 11, and 12.

5. One of the most trenchant critiques of the Quad was by Geoff Raby, former Australian ambassador to China, in China's Grand Strategy and Australia's Future in the New Global Order (Melbourne University Press, 2020) pp. 137-153. His misfortune as an analyst is that his book went to press just as the Quad was cohering under Chinese pressure, in late 2020.

6. Michael J. Green Line of Advantage: Japan's Grand Strategy in the Era of Abe Shinzo (Columbia University Press, 2022).

7. Kevin Rudd The Avoidable War: The Dangers of a Catastrophic Conflict Between the US and Xi Jinping's China (Hachette, 2022). See especially pp. 202-219 and 397-400.

— PAUL MONK

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Supporters of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Istanbul, Turkey, May 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Hannah McKay

A photograph showing a crowd of people celebrating. In the foreground, the hood and headlights of a dark car are visible. Behind it, a group of people is gathered, many holding large Turkish flags (red with a white crescent and star). A woman in a green headscarf and a striped dress is prominent in the center. To her right, a man in a grey jacket is looking at his phone. The background shows more people and greenery, suggesting an outdoor public gathering.

TURKEY: THE MOOD AFTER THE ELECTIONS AND HOW THE US MIGHT RESPOND



by Hugh Pope, W. Robert Pearson, Daniel Fried, James Jeffrey

The *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune* asked four seasoned observers of Turkey, three being former practitioners of US foreign policy and one a celebrated writer with several books on Turkey, for their views of the country in the immediate aftermath of its May elections.

The Mood in Turkey

Stable, but Existing Fractures are Widening

by Hugh Pope

Turkey's presidential and parliamentary elections in May produced much light and noise but ultimately shook nothing much in the country. Given that proportions of the vote went largely to the same places they went five years ago, Turks voted for the status quo they know.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan proved once again what an extraordinary, tough political winner he is. But his victory over his rivals was marred by measures he took. He reduced his potential or actual opponents' visibility – by a factor of 2,000:1 on the main state TV channel

TRT1 – scattered legal, institutional and financial obstacles in their path and in some cases they simply ended up in jail.

The alliance against him, led by the main opposition Republican Peoples' Party, was a major novelty of the elections. It fought honorably and hard. But when it failed to obtain a hoped-for first-round victory on May 14, it somehow deflated and lost its fighting spirit in the second round.

The country remains basically stable, but the existing fractures have widened: between the half that voted for Erdoğan and the half that didn't, between pro-Islamists and pro-secularists; between Turkish and Kurdish nationalists; between those who want to be closer to Europeans and Americans and those who prefer Russia and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, two decades of uninterrupted power has left the ruling party looking more than ever like a vehicle for one-man rule. Partly because of the strain it was put under ahead of the elections, the treasury is empty of foreign currency. Inflation is set to roar ahead. One commentator suggested that President Erdoğan now has landed the toughest job in the country.

Ordinary people will – as usual – shoulder the burden for the unchanging political gridlock. Annual income per capita has been stuck in a band around \$10,000 for the past fifteen years; it now looks set to continue trending down from the \$12,500 peak it reached way back in 2013 as the Turkish lira has started to plumb new lows.

Democracy Persists

by *W. Robert Pearson*

On May 28, 25 million Turks voted to remove President Erdoğan from power. Democracy remains alive in Turkey because of the courage of those voters. The government ignored the constitution and the law to suppress any true referendum on power. Opposition political leaders in prison, academics serving long sentences for opposing government policy, and government control over the media, judiciary and prosecutors do not add up to a free and fair election.

Yet democracy in Turkey persists. Reform in Turkey has a long history and a large constituency, beginning in the Ottoman Empire in the early 1800's. Pushed back each time, the reformers nevertheless persisted and founded constitutional government and the institutions of democracy. The Atatürk revolution was the most recent.

We can expect a more aggressive Turkish domestic and foreign policy. Turkey's de-facto non-aligned status puts it in the spotlight for questions regarding NATO, Russia and China. The right-wing partners of the AK Party have new strength and new demands, given their election gains. The opposition, with its record of failures, needs thoroughgoing reexamination. The opportunity remains; can Turkey's democratic political culture spur progress?

How the US Might Respond

Try Some Transactional Politics

by *Daniel Fried*

Twenty years ago, the US reached out to Erdoğan and his AK Party team, who in the early years promised to be effective economic

stewards and more democratically-minded than previous Turkish governments. Those hopes have long passed. Many of Erdoğan's initial team of pro-European "Muslim Democrats" broke with him and are now part of the opposition coalition that demonstrated a strong, but minority, base in Turkey's big cities, Kurdish east and western coastal regions. For now, Erdoğan is a strongman on top.

US frustration is palpable, but rather than a rupture, the Biden administration might try some transactional politics. Turkey serves as a major point of Russia sanctions evasion? The US can warn Turkey that sanctions await that can hurt its beleaguered economy, with Russia in no position to compensate for the loss. Turkey squeezes Sweden on NATO membership? The US could slow down arms supplies (again, Russia is in no place to compete).

Turkey has long been a complicated ally. For now, the US can try to limit the damage without illusions, awaiting better days and better leaders in Turkey's future.

Try High-Level Engagement on Russia Policy

by *James Jeffrey*

The key area of US-Turkey cooperation and conflict will be Russia (though there are others, including the Kurdish-led force in Syria.) The most urgent issue is Turkish support for Swedish NATO membership. That hinges less on Russia (Putin was unable to stop Erdoğan's decision to green-light Finland, an even more important asset to NATO) than on a compromise over Sweden's commitments to act against the PKK. Chances are good but not absolute that when Sweden completes steps now underway Erdoğan will support its NATO accession, but



Turkish President Erdoğan. Photo credit: Reuters/Umit Bektas

there is always a chance he will demand ever more, or listen to bad advice, too often the problem with him.

Turkey has a nuanced policy towards Russia—opposition to Russian expansion in Ukraine and elsewhere but relatively warm relations with Moscow for reasons both strategic (Turkey is sandwiched between Russian forces in the Caucasus, Black Sea and Syria, and fears Russian support to the PKK), and economic (including natural gas purchases, almost 50% of Turkey's consumption).

Washington has found a path forward with Israel and India, both critical security partners who are reluctant to diminish relations with Moscow for security (both) and economic (India) reasons.

In principle, Washington could extend that same forbearance to Turkey. But Erdoğan, unlike Modi or Netanyahu, uses strong anti-Western and at times pro-Russian rhetoric. It is usually not followed up with actions but it is profoundly irritating. Moreover, there are diverse lobbies in Washington opposed in principle to relations with Ankara and thus unwilling to cut Turkey any slack. Thus managing the high-wire act with Turkey requires high-level engagement, including by the US president, and that in turn is difficult because Erdoğan is at best difficult and at times unpredictable. *

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“THE KISS OF FOREIGN IN ERDOĞAN’S

Photo credit: EYEPRESS via Reuters Connect

A close-up photograph of Joe Biden smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white shirt, and a blue patterned tie. An American flag pin is visible on his lapel. The background is dark and out of focus, showing other people in suits.

BIDEN” AND POLICY RE-ELECTION



by Michael Doran

Pity Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. The Turkish opposition candidate faced an impossible challenge: running for president with American lipstick on his cheek.

Call it the kiss of Biden. In 2020, when Joe Biden was a candidate for president, he told the editorial board of the *New York Times* that he favored working with “elements of the Turkish leadership” to “embolden them...to take on and defeat [President Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan.”

If there is one thing Erdoğan knows, it’s how to use the hostility of foreigners for political gain. By appealing to the profound patriotism of the Turkish electorate, he turned the kiss that voters perceived President Biden to be giving to Kılıçdaroğlu into a kiss of death. “Biden gave the order to topple [me],” Erdoğan said last Saturday, the day before the election. “The ballots tomorrow will also give an answer to Biden,” he continued.

A series of blunders by Kılıçdaroğlu helped Erdoğan further build the case that his opponent was Biden’s beloved. First among these was the tacit alliance that Kılıçdaroğlu made with the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), a Kurdish party which mainstream Turkish nationalists regard as a bastion of thinly veiled support for the banned Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the terrorist organization that seeks to crack up

Turkey and turn its eastern provinces into an independent Kurdish state. The number of voters whom Kılıçdaroğlu attracted by courting the HDP failed to offset the number of Turkish nationalists who recoiled from the courtship.

Patriotic Turks abhor not just the PKK but also the relationship that the United States has developed with the terrorist organization, through its Syrian wing, the People’s Protection Units, also known as the YPG. Erdoğan cast Kılıçdaroğlu’s alignment with the HDP and his eagerness to ingratiate himself with the Biden administration as the twin elements of an anti-nationalist agenda. Kılıçdaroğlu, Erdoğan explained, knew nothing of statesmanship. The only way to counter America’s pro-PKK orientation was by balancing between Washington and Moscow, a task that required experience, judgement, and grit—qualities, Erdoğan implied, that the opposition leader was lacking.

In answer to this argument, Kılıçdaroğlu proposed an alternative balancing act: between Washington and Beijing. To this end, he announced a major initiative, his “Turkic Silk Road,” an economic and transport corridor between Turkey and China that would strengthen the ties between Ankara and the Central Asian Turkic states. “Neither West nor East, this is the way of the Turk,” he said in a video presentation.

Kılıçdaroğlu was obviously trying to counter the perception that he was America’s stooge. The idea, presumably, was to showcase himself simultaneously as a real alternative and yet

every bit Erdoğan’s equal as a champion of an independent and self-reliant Turkey. But the effort backfired. Once again, Kılıçdaroğlu managed only to alienate potential supporters. This time his blunder was to bypass Azerbaijan. His planned corridor would have linked up with China through Iran instead.

Turks feel closer to Azerbaijanis than to any other foreign people. Moreover, since the Second Karabakh War in 2020, the alliance with Azerbaijan (which is also a strategic ally of Israel) has become a key pillar of Turkish national security policy. Among regular voters and national security professionals alike, therefore, Kılıçdaroğlu’s big idea of a Silk Road was a dud. It merely confirmed Erdoğan’s insinuation that he was a foreign policy lightweight who was not up to the job.

In addition to exhibiting a pro-China inclination, the Silk Road initiative also revealed a pronounced yet unacknowledged pro-Iran bias. These aspects of Kılıçdaroğlu’s campaign, if implemented, would have harmed the interests of the United States and Israel. Observers in Washington and Jerusalem, however, glossed over them, preferring to conceive of Kılıçdaroğlu merely as “not-Erdoğan,” as the antidote to what they erroneously claim is the Turkish president’s abiding flaw, namely, his Islamism.

While turning a blind eye to Kılıçdaroğlu’s obvious inadequacies, this line of analysis also downplayed the fact that Erdoğan normalized relations last year with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Israel. These states are staunch enemies of Islamism, and Erdoğan’s bad relations with them were the result, we were once told, of his supposedly deep and abiding commitment to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Bye, bye, Turkish Islamism. We have entered a new era. In this election, nationalism and national security predominated. The recent achievements of Turkey’s defense industrial base, not headscarves and religious schooling, were at the epicenter of Erdoğan’s winning campaign.

After evaluating the entirety of his track record, it’s clear that Erdoğan rightfully belongs

to a group of leaders that includes India’s Modi, Hungary’s Orban, and yes, Israel’s Netanyahu. The Western press habitually describes these men as “authoritarian” and “extremist,” but hostility to democracy is hardly their defining attribute. They are more adept at mobilizing votes than almost any of their contemporaries. They do so by defending national traditions and values, which, in the eyes of their supporters, are under attack from internationalist elites. In Turkey, as in Hungary, India, and Israel, the line between “conservative” and “religious” is fuzzy. These leaders represent, in short, a popular conservative nationalism.

Although “nationalist” is a more accurate label than “Islamist,” it, too, is overly simplistic. Turkey is bigger than Erdoğan. He has managed to tower over Turkish politics for more than two decades, not because he has imposed a uniform ideology on this large and diverse country, but because he has convinced his core political supporters that he remains loyal to them while simultaneously showing himself to be pragmatic, transactional, and capable of breathtaking feats of compartmentalization.

Erdoğan is both a committed nationalist and a master of Realpolitik. Instead of lamenting his victory, Washington and Jerusalem should focus on the opportunities that having a talented and experienced leader in charge of such a powerful country can offer. By shunning him, the United States and Israel ignore Turkey itself — and they do so at their peril. *

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Photo credit:
Reuters/Umit
Bektas, Freepik



**TURKEY—
ISRAEL
RELATIONS
ON THE
UPSWING**



by Amos Yadlin, Pazit Ravina, Nimrod Goren

The *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune* asked three prominent Israeli foreign affairs commentators about Turkey-Israel relations after the Turkish elections.

Act with Caution

by Amos Yadlin

Warming up to Israel and reviving bilateral relations have been part of Erdoğan's broader détente policy in the region. The Turkish economy's dependence on Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with the channels now reopened between Jerusalem and Ankara, provides an opportunity to expand cooperation with Erdoğan on curbing Iran's ambitions and to restrain Hamas activities on Turkish soil.

Israel should act with strategic caution in dealing with Erdoğan, bearing in mind that he can change course overnight once again. Improved ties with Turkey should certainly not come at the expense of Israel's partnerships in the eastern Mediterranean with Greece and Cyprus.

A word about democratic governments. Elections are but one aspect of democracy. Erdoğan eroded all of the other aspects – checks and balances between the branches of government, academic and press freedoms, human rights. Israel, frankly, was never overly

worried about the fact that the Arab countries with which it sought to normalize relations were not democracies. On the contrary, it occasionally feared that accelerated democratization would bring to power radical Islamist movements, as happened in Egypt in 2012. Given this background, Erdoğan's anti-democratic steps should not in themselves be a barrier to strategic cooperation based on common interests.

Israel's government needs to be on guard against adopting parts of Erdoğan's playbook – changing the rules for choosing the judiciary, muzzling the media and making fake news and false claims a tool of political survival.

Shared Interests in Azerbaijan

by Pazit Ravina

Signs point to Turkey and Israel continuing normalization. Erdoğan refrained from inflaming his voters during the riots in April on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and the bombing of Gaza. Days before elections, Turkish intelligence announced that it had busted a ring of Mossad agents operating against Iran on Turkish soil. Israel refrained from any official comments, and President Herzog and Prime Minister Netanyahu were among the first foreign leaders to congratulate Erdoğan after the elections.

One positive aspect of bilateral Turkey-Israel relations stems from the prospering of economic

and security ties between Israel and Azerbaijan, Turkey's "sibling" nation. Links that create a triangle of power might strengthen Turkey's regional standing vis-à-vis Iran both in the Middle East and the Caucasus.

On "whither Turkey" more generally, two upcoming events will provide clues. Turkey's decision on Sweden's NATO membership will be a focus of the NATO summit in Vilnius, July 11-12. On October 29, Turkey will celebrate the 100-year anniversary of its declaration of the republic. Erdoğan has been planning the anniversary for years. How the celebrations characterize Turkey's founding secularism and its Ottoman past will be interesting as Erdoğan begins to build his legacy. They may also provide an opportunity to further the détente in the region.

Moving Beyond More-of-the- Same

by Nimrod Goren

Turkey-Israel relations have known numerous ups and downs during the past 21 years of Erdoğan in power. The one constant has been steady growth in two-way trade.

As Erdoğan enters a new term, political relations are on an upward trend. Under the prior Bennett-Lapid government, full diplomatic ties were restored. The normalization process has proven durable under the current Netanyahu government, even after tensions around the holy places in Jerusalem during Ramadan, a round of warfare in Gaza, and a tight electoral race in Turkey. In previous times, such developments led to a deterioration in ties.

As with Israel's other regional ties, developments on the Palestinian front will affect the future of its relations with Turkey.

The rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt opens opportunities for tripartite Turkey-Israel-Egypt cooperation, which was not possible for years, and which could enable initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean.

An emphasis should be put on enhancing Turkey-Israel civil society cooperation, which is lagging compared to governmental and business engagement. There are societal efforts in both Israel and Turkey to safeguard democracy and potential benefit in sharing best practices and lessons learned. *

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HOW ISRAEL LOST THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi meets with Syria's President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, May 2023.
Photo credit: IMAGO/APAimages via Reuters Connect







by Ehud Yaari

Apart from the Syrian people themselves, Israel comes out of the 12 years of civil war in Syria as the biggest loser. The survival of the Assad regime, closely allied with Iran, amounts to nothing short of an Israeli strategic failure.

Assad's survival turns Iran into Israel's next-door neighbor, exercising growing influence on the rebuilding of Syria's armed forces. It allows for land corridors through Iraq and (via direct flights from Iran) an air bridge that equip Lebanese Hezbollah's heavy missiles with precision guidance kits, making them far more accurate. It enables Shi'ite militias sponsored by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps to mount large-scale campaigns to smuggle weapons (and drugs) into Jordan intended to supply Palestinian groups in the West Bank.

In brief, the threat to Israel is increasing and the military challenges faced by the Israel Defense Forces are becoming more complex.

Syria is rarely part of the political debate in Israel nor did it receive much attention during the five parliamentary elections over the past four years. Israel's security and intelligence establishments believe that the hundreds of air raids against the IRGC in Syria since 2016 have succeeded in foiling the Iranian plan to establish offensive capabilities on Syrian territory. A former Israeli prime minister went so far as to express in private his "hope" that Teheran would

send more military into Syria where the IDF enjoys both air and intelligence superiority, thus enabling the IDF to inflict more pain on them.

Israel's short-term tactical calculations ignore the longer-term risks. Iran is determined to accept substantial losses in order to persist in its primary objective: deploying long and medium-range missiles in Syria, complete with air defense systems. So far, Iran has shied away from sending significant numbers of its own troops to Syria, preferring instead to send teams of IRGC "advisors" to command mostly Shiite militiamen and local recruits. In the future, under a new Supreme Leader and following modernization of its air force, Teheran may be prepared to raise the stakes.

QASSEM SULEIMANI'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Obtaining missile bases in Syria would signal a dramatic progress in Iran's plan to encircle Israel with a ring of missile arsenals, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Yarmouk River in the north and east, in addition to the Gaza Strip in the southwest. IRGC operatives are also trying to help Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad organize their followers in the West Bank to begin assembling home-made improvised rockets targeting Israeli main population centers.

The late commander of al-Qods Corps of the IRGC, General Qassem Suleimani, conceived a plan to set up an Iranian-sponsored war machine on Syria's territory including thousands of missile pads, fleets of UAVs, anti-aircraft batteries and a chain of fortified positions

HOW ISRAEL LOST THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR



The Suleimani plan: missile-armed Iranian proxies in Lebanon, Syria and Gaza.
Map source: Wikimedia commons / Map Bukmop B

along the Israeli border backed by a variety of intelligence-gathering installations. He was the first Middle Eastern leader with a detailed strategy of gradually strangling Israel. He did not follow President Nasser's plan of a collective offensive of Arab armies to crush Israel. Rather he would deploy irregular forces, an array of strong militias equipped with enormous quantities of rockets and missiles and guided by Iran to pose an existential threat to Israel. His plan was slow attrition not a surprise attack.

ISRAEL'S INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

After the outbreak of the uprising against Assad in March 2011, Israel chose a policy of non-interference and refrained from taking significant covert actions to help the rebels topple his regime.

There were two main reasons for this decision. First, Israel wanted to avoid chaos and wanted a government to its north that would continue the ceasefire established in 1974. Second, Israel had a grave concern that jihadist militias – including Islamic State and al-Qaeda disciples – may overcome the secular and more moderate factions in the struggle to replace Assad. Some Syrian army's forward outposts close to the Israeli border in the Golan were overrun by the Jabhat al-Nusra affiliate of al-Qaeda and later by Islamic State supporters.

Israel was also watching how its US ally was responding to the Syrian civil war. The US was mainly interested in preventing a clear-cut victory by Assad, his Russian patrons and Iranian partners, via a policy aimed at “freezing” a situation in which Assad controls less than 70% of Syria's territory. This goal was achieved by helping the Kurds maintain an autonomous

entity east of the Euphrates River, establishing a US -managed enclave around Tanf in the south and tacitly supporting Turkey's capture of three regions in the north and Turkey's deterrence of a Syrian assault on the rebel-held province of Idlib.

The implications of Assad's survival on Iran's long-term plans vis-à-vis Israel were not fully grasped by Israeli intelligence. In 2018, for example, Jerusalem was happy to accept President Putin's "guarantee" that his (mostly Russian Muslim) military police battalions would make sure IRGC elements did not deploy closer than 70-80 kilometers from the Golan border. The IDF was also late in realizing that the Iraqi Shi'ite militia (called Popular Mobilization Forces) would move formations into Syria and become a conduit to large transfers of arms into Syria.

Reluctance to play politics in a neighboring Arab state was a lesson learned from Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which aimed at installing a friendly Christian as president, Bashir Gemayel. This had ended in fiasco, and Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon had lasted until 2000, paving the way for the rise of Hizbullah. The "Lebanon Syndrome" has ever since led Israeli leaders across the political spectrum to avoid temptations to try to shape the lay of the land on the other side of their borders.

LOST OPPORTUNITIES TO TAKE OUT ASSAD

Up to September 2015, Israel had several opportunities to deal Assad a fatal blow, either by a direct hit from the air or by a clandestine special forces raid. That month the Russian air force appeared in Syria, a move initiated by the late IRGC Qods Force commander Qassem Suleimani during a meeting with Putin in the Kremlin.

The Syrian president was contemplating an escape, his army partly disintegrating with massive defections from service. Some of his

most trusted allies had been assassinated, his brother – in charge of the division responsible for the security of the palace – lost a leg. Israeli intelligence learnt that Assad was "packing suitcases." Israel had a proven track record of operations inside Damascus and Israel's air force sometimes flew low over the presidential compound.

However, no move was undertaken to speed up his departure. Circumstances changed, of course, with the arrival of the Russians providing Assad with a security umbrella.

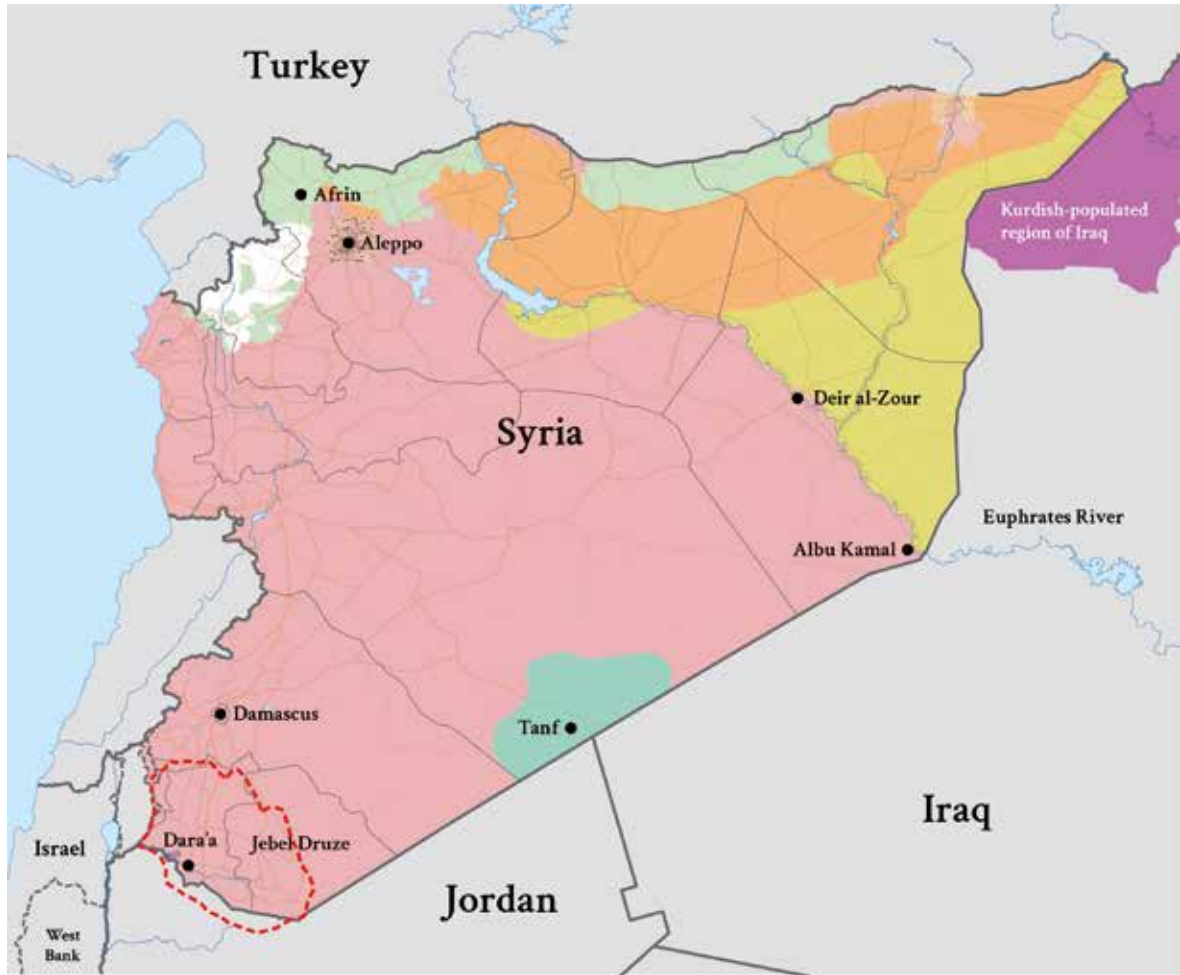
In addition to a direct attack – with high or low "signature" – by Israel, there was another option to accelerate Assad's downfall: bolstering the rebels' offensive capabilities.

By 2014, an array of rebel armed groups, split among Islamists and secular militants of all shades, had barricaded themselves in parts of Damascus, on the eastern side of Syria's main commercial hub of Aleppo, and in vast areas of the countryside. In the south, near the border with Israel, rebels had defeated most units of the Syrian Army 1st Corps, captured two thirds of the region, reaching a distance of 15-20 km from the gates of the capital. The battles could be easily watched by Israelis from the hilltops of the Golan to the west.

The Israelis secretly maintained contacts with some of the more prominent rebel leaders in the southern Syrian provinces of Dara'a and Quneitra. Meetings were held in different locations along the border and in the nearby Israeli city of Tiberias. Thus, attacks by rebels against Israel were averted and some aid was extended to them.

Israeli officers were also quietly involved with the Military Operations Center (MOC) set up by the CIA late in 2013 in Amman, alongside Gulf and European representatives. The MOC was tasked with coordinating funding and weapons deliveries to rebels inside Syria. Unfortunately, in the three years of its existence, the MOC failed in its mission because different countries had different favorites among the rebels. The formation in early 2014 of the

HOW ISRAEL LOST THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR



Syrian civil war map, as of 9 September 2021.

- Controlled by the Syrian Arab Republic and allies
- Controlled by the Syrian Salvation Government and allies
- Controlled by the Syrian Interim Government and Turkish Armed Forces
- Controlled by the Rojava (Syrian Defense Forces)
- Controlled by the Revolutionary Commando Army and United States Armed Forces
- Joint control between Syrian Arab Republic & Syrian Defense Forces
- Hauran region

Source: Wikimedia Commons / Ermanarich

“Southern Front,” a loose alliance of more than fifty rebel “battalions” and “brigades,” didn’t improve coordination.

The Israelis concluded that the rebel factions represented collectively as the Free Syrian Army were incapable of launching a unified offensive capable of winning the war. Furthermore, numerous meetings in Europe with the competing leaders of the opposition in exile – including high ranking former officers of the Syrian army – convinced Israeli interlocutors that the “Syria Interim Government (SIG)” and other bodies established in exile lacked real following on the ground.

The opportunities to topple Assad involved risks. The US and its Western allies refused to take action although they all recognized that he was responsible for butchering his own people, displacing half of Syria’s population, and impoverishing the nation. If Israel wished to see Assad go, it would have to forsake the pretense of semi-neutrality and take independent military action. The most promising course was air strikes against Kiswa, Qatana and Kanaker, the chain of bases guarding the southern entrances to Damascus, in order to facilitate rebel infiltration into the capital. A few second-tier officers supported a proactive approach, but Prime Minister Netanyahu and the General Staff dismissed this option.

Israeli leaders feared that in his despair, Assad would retaliate by firing Scud missiles with chemical warheads into Israel. Since 2012, the Syrian army has resorted to using chemical bombs, dropped from the air, and less frequently launched from the ground, against rebellious Syrian neighborhoods. When President Obama’s “Red Line” was brutally crossed by Assad in the August 2013 chemical attack on the Ghouta area east of Damascus, US officials and some Gulf states secretly urged Israel to mount punitive strikes against Syria. The Obama administration wanted to stay out of the “quagmire” as he described the situation in Syria.

The Israelis decided not to act on their own, preferring the deal that was reached a

month later – with Russian involvement – for the destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal. Assad, as was to be expected, retained some of his chemical arsenal even after he had surrendered it “in full” to the inspectors of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

There is no point in speculating in hindsight whether or not an Israeli attack would have changed the course of the Syrian civil war. There were risks: embroiling Israel in a protracted confrontation, assisting a takeover by jihadists, triggering an early Russian dash to the rescue of Assad, and splintering Syria. We shall never know if Israel erred out of caution or missed a unique opportunity to change the equation in its favor.

TALKS WITH KURDS AND DRUZE

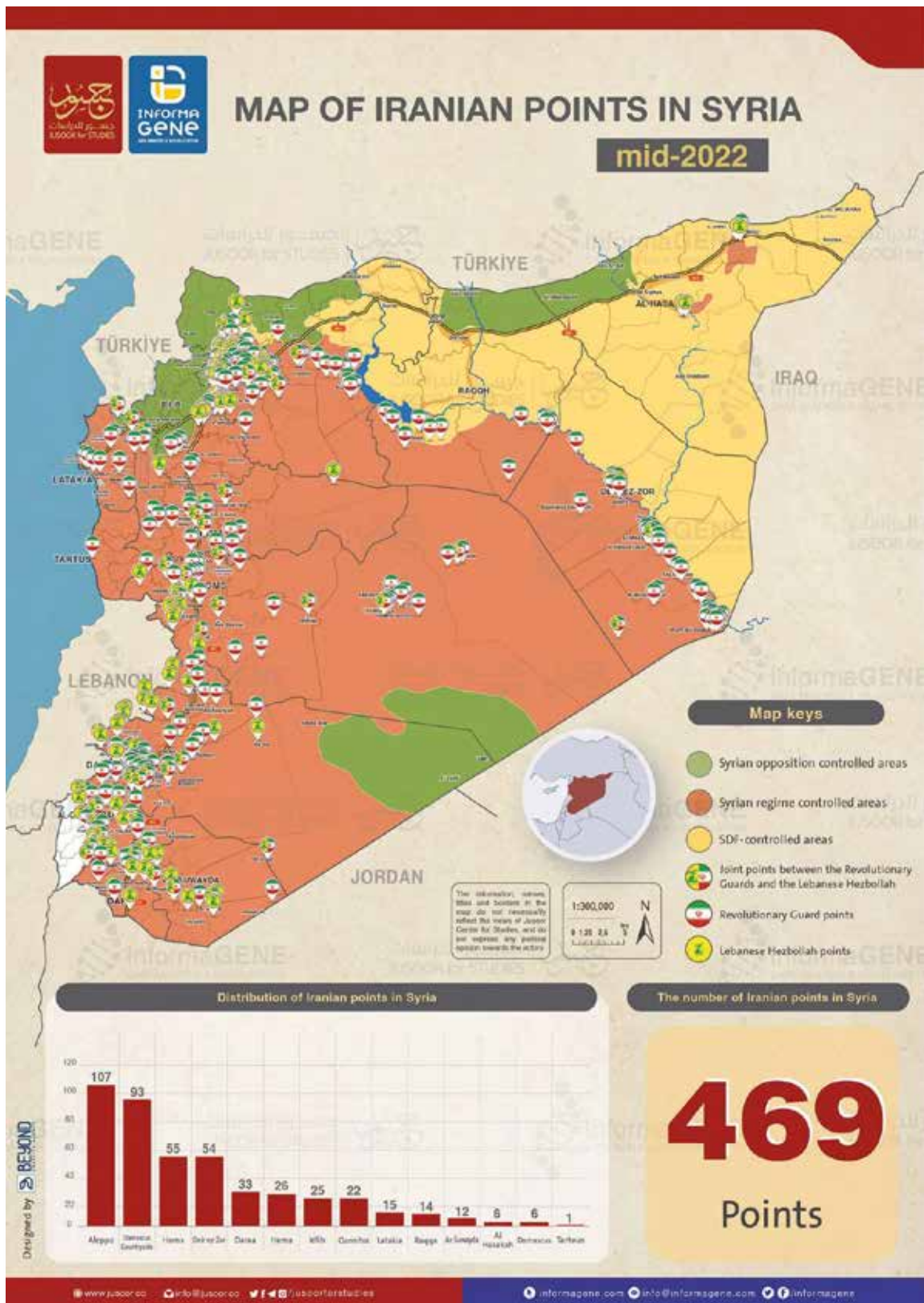
Israeli defense officials also explored a couple of initiatives with two Syrian minorities: Druze and Kurds.

In the area known as Jebel Druze (Druze Mountain, one hundred kilometers east of the Golan in southern Syria), leaders of newly formed armed groups began in 2012 asking their Israeli Druze brethren, including former IDF generals, for Israeli assistance. Assad had reduced his forces there and Druze youth were evading Syrian military draft summons; demonstrations against the regime were breaking out. Some leaders wanted Israeli help to expel the regime from their region, though Druze religious leaders called on their flock not to take sides in the civil war.

In the past, Israeli strategists – notably Yigal Allon, a hero of the 1948 Israeli War of Independence and later foreign minister – had toyed with the idea of helping to create a Druze state as a buffer between Israel and Syria.

After intensive discussions with Druze dignitaries, including “The Men of Dignity,” an anti-Assad group, the Israelis concluded that the Druze were not prepared to completely sever ties with the Assad regime. They were hoping to

HOW ISRAEL LOST THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR



Map source: jusoor.co

acquire arms and financial aid from Israel but not to start a full insurgency.

One reason for this conclusion was the traditional tension between the Druze and the Hauranis of Dara'a, southern Syrian Sunnis who formed the backbone of the rebel movement. A Druze request to secure a safe path to Jordan through the Hauran was a high-risk adventure with slim chance of sustained success.

The Kurds of northeast Syria, led by General Mazloum Abdi who commands the Syrian Defense Forces, a largely Kurdish militia, enjoy American support for maintaining an autonomous enclave in Syria east of the Euphrates River. They kept contacts with Israel throughout the civil war.

One idea discussed in 2016 was to encourage Abdi's units to link up the Syrian city of Afrin on the Turkish border to the Mediterranean coast, so that oil from fields under Syrian Kurdish control could be exported without going through Turkey. In addition, territorial contiguity with the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq, so some hoped, would heal the rift between the Syrian Kurds and Iraqi Kurds led by the Barazanis in Erbil, who maintained close cooperation with Turkey. But these overambitious suggestions were doomed by intra-Kurdish rivalries and President Erdoğan's opposition to a Kurdish entity along Turkey's border.

UP TO THE PRESENT DAY: ISRAEL'S CAMPAIGN, IRAN'S PERSISTENCE

By summer 2018, the combination of Russian planes, Iranian-sponsored militias, and the remaining Syrian army forces together with local irregular auxiliaries allowed Assad to stay in power. He regained varying degrees of control over roughly two thirds of the country's territory after earlier reaching a low point of 50 percent control.

Rebel forces in the Syrian heartland have been thoroughly defeated. In the south, Israel had to stop its well-publicized "Good Neighbor" operation that since June 2016 provided

humanitarian aid to the civilian population (and with no publicity, modest salaries to 7,000 rebel fighters). Some of the rebel commanders left Syria via Israel to seek new refuge.

Arab states that supported efforts to topple the president in the past are gradually moving these days at varying speeds towards rapprochement and normalization of relations, such as resuming Syria's membership of the Arab League. Turkey is signaling possible reconciliation with Assad. The Kurds recognize publicly that they may have to opt at one point for a dialogue with Assad. The UAE has even tried quietly to broker a groundbreaking deal between Israel and Assad over the occupied Shebaa Farms, claimed by both by Syria and Hizbullah.

For now, Israel continues to avoid targeting the Assad regime and his army, unless his air defense batteries lock radar on Israeli planes attacking Iranian shipments of military hardware. The major exception was the repeated destruction of Syrian military industry's main plants in Masyaf and Safira. Under the management of the "Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Center" advanced missiles were assembled in these "institutes" by joint teams of Syrians and Iranian experts.

For its part, Iran keeps adjusting its military penetration into Syria under the pressure of Israeli air force bombings, often on a weekly basis, of its facilities and convoys. Suleimani's original plan is for now on hold.

Yet, by deploying militias in different parts of the country Iran has secured control of key areas in the mid-Euphrates valley, especially around Deir al-Zor and Albu Kamal, the Syrian desert around Tadmor, suburbs of Damascus and around Aleppo, and the south facing the Golan.

Hizbullah has effectively taken over the eastern slopes of the Qalamun range along the border with Lebanon and the slopes of Mt. Hermon, constantly rotating its units with other locations inside Syria. Hizbullah's arsenal of precision-guided missiles has grown from a few dozen to hundreds. According to Jusoor, an

Istanbul-based Syrian opposition think tank, IRGC and Hizbullah have together a military presence of no fewer than 469 locations around the country.

Meanwhile, the Iranian navy operates cargo ships, based out of Syrian ports, as floating platforms for drones and missile launchers. Shiite militias have taken control of the Iraqi side of the border with Syria in the southeast around the main highway connecting the two countries and are busy entrenching themselves in the northern Iraqi province of Sinjar, in order to gain a second, northern land corridor.

CONCLUSION

Israeli intelligence believes that 80-90 percent of the Iranian military presence in Syria has been destroyed. Whether or not this assessment is accurate, all indications point to a conclusion that the IRGC is prepared to pay a steep price in order to continue an incremental consolidation of its military deployment in Syria.

Iran's incremental effort will accelerate if and when the US ends its modest, yet very important, military presence of 900 servicemen embedded with the Syrian Democratic Forces led by the Kurds, located along the east bank of the Euphrates, and also in the Tanf enclave at the meeting point of Syria's, Iraq's and Jordan's borders. The current US military deployment prevents the IRGC from expanding deliveries into Syria.

The bottom line is clear. As long as Assad remains in power, Iran's military build-up will gradually expand, acquiring over time more potential. Hopes that the West or the Arab states would offer Assad attractive incentives to break away from Iran's embrace are wishful thinking. The close alliance between the two dates back to the 1970's and by now Iran has become a permanent feature of post-war Syria.

Was there ever an opportunity to avoid the present danger? If so, it was missed.

Israel now has no choice other than to vigorously thwart the Iranian effort to

implement Qassem Suleimani's strategic prescription of how to overpower Israel. This will entail taking risks. The late mastermind of the first-ever comprehensive plan to slowly choke the Jewish state was killed by the US in January 2020, but his blueprint is still very much alive. *

EHUD YAARI

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ASSESSING ISRAEL'S ONGOING CAMPAIGN AGAINST IRAN IN SYRIA





Photo credit: Morteza Nikoubazi via Reuters Connect



by Eran Lerman

Since 2013 – and more intensely since 2017 – Israel has been conducting an active military and intelligence campaign against Iran’s presence in Syria, in addition to the ongoing operations against Iran’s nuclear effort. Doubts have been raised as to the long-term ability of this strategy to prevent Iran from sustaining and extending its grip on Syria (as Ehud Yaari argues on these pages). The Israeli defense establishment assesses, on the other hand, that its pressure on Iran’s presence in Syria is effective. In addition, Israel believes the combination of sabotage, sanctions, international economic pressure, deterrence, and (as some Israelis reluctantly or tacitly admit) American diplomacy has kept the Iranian nuclear project at bay for decades.

Still, Israel’s strategy may soon face a decisive moment because Iran’s uranium enrichment project has now put the regime in Tehran (according to official US military assessments, as presented in Congressional hearings) within weeks of stockpiling enough weapon grade fissile material for a nuclear device.

In Syria, Israeli military leaders began warning in May 2023 that Iran’s efforts – and a possible miscalculation by Hizbullah – could lead to escalation. Given Iran’s overt commitment to Israel’s destruction, the ongoing attacks on Iranian targets – in both Syria and Iran – are regarded by most Israelis as self-defense against an active enemy, and continue to be supported by the key opposition parties as well as by the government.

Israel’s campaign includes airstrikes in Syrian territory and occasionally in northern Iraq, cyber attacks on Iranian infrastructure, low-intensity naval warfare – including operations by Israeli special forces against Iranian ships carrying oil or weapons to Lebanon and Syria, and the covert attacks by drones and Mossad agents in Iran itself (including assassinations of Iranian scientists and administrators involved in the military nuclear project and allegedly a recent drone-manufacturing facility in Isfahan.)

The purposes of the Syrian campaign are to destroy Iran’s efforts to build up a significant military presence in Syria and disrupt the line of supply to Hizbullah in Lebanon.

Israel has a history of acting beyond its borders, based on detailed intelligence, using its special forces, and relying upon the capacity

of the air force to fly long-range missions. The Entebbe raid in 1976 provided a template. So did the strikes against nuclear facilities in Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007). Ships such as the “Karine-A” (2002) and “KLOS C” (2014) were apprehended on the high seas; Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad activists were assassinated in Malta, the UAE, and elsewhere; Iranian weapon depots were destroyed in Sudan. The initial concept of harassing Iran and its proxies was discussed and supported by Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi back in 2008 -when it became clear that Hezbollah was tightening its grip on Lebanon.

In January 2013, a truck convoy carrying surface-to-air missiles for Hezbollah was destroyed in Syria – and the present pattern of persistent air strikes, complemented by other means such as cyber attacks, began to take shape.

The Israeli air force could act almost without losses against targets in Syrian territory, as long as it secures deconfliction arrangements with foreign air forces operating there – Russia after September 2015, and the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State. In Lebanon, given

Hizbullah’s capabilities and Iran’s presence in Syria need to be degraded as much as possible. The concept reflects both the need to defeat Iran’s designs and a growing confidence in Israel’s ability to operate in Syria.

the lessons of the 2006 Israeli invasion, neither Israel nor Hizbullah was willing to risk the consequences of attacking targets in each other’s territory, except for very rare occasions (just five verified incidents with Hizbullah throughout the last ten years).

In September 2015, a new challenge emerged. Russia intervened to secure Assad’s survival and deployed fighter aircraft in Syria. To secure the continued “right of passage” over Syrian airspace, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu met with President Vladimir Putin and arranged for a deconfliction mechanism.

A direct and secure line was established between the Russian air base at Hmeimim in northern Syria and the Israeli Air Force headquarters in Tel Aviv. No direct clashes have occurred then or since. There was one serious indirect incident in September 2018, a Russian reconnaissance Ilyushin-20 was destroyed with 14 crewmen on board by Syrian air defenses, which mistook it for the Israeli F-16s which had conducted an earlier raid in northern Syria. The Russians initially blamed Israel for deliberately “hiding” behind their aircraft, but explanations were provided to Moscow and the incident did not disrupt the deconfliction channel.

By 2017, Israel’s attacks had accelerated and were given an official name – “The Campaign Between the Wars.” The term assumes that the Second Lebanon War in 2006, fought against Iran’s proxies, produced deterrence on both sides, but this effect will not last forever: sooner or later, another massive round will come. Meanwhile, Hizbullah’s capabilities and Iran’s presence in Syria need to be degraded as much as possible. The concept (formally incorporated in the IDF doctrine) reflects both the need to defeat Iran’s designs and a growing confidence in Israel’s ability to operate in Syria.

The campaign was translated into action in Syria on a much more intensive scale and wider scope. In 2018, IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot publicly spoke of more than a thousand such air raids carried out on his watch. The interception of one F-16 by a Syrian surface-to-air missile in

February 2018 – the only one so far, with no loss of life – did not deter Israel from intensifying the operational pattern.

When Iran tried to retaliate in May 2018, by firing off 34 rockets into the Israeli Golan Heights, the Israeli air force responded by a massive, coordinated attack on nearly 100 Iranian targets all over Syria. This was one of the few cases in which Israel openly acknowledged an attack in Syria, because it came in response to an Iranian one. Otherwise, while vaguely speaking of the “Campaign between the Wars” in general terms (and even mentioning aggregate statistics), Israeli leaders refuse to comment on any specific action, leaving Assad room for denial. Otherwise, he may feel compelled to retaliate (similar Israeli silence after the raid on Syria’s nuclear plant in 2007 proved to be an effective policy).

The cost to Syria of hosting Iran’s presence and facilitating supplies to Hizbullah kept mounting: the airports of Damascus and Aleppo were disabled again and again by Israeli airstrikes. So were smaller airfields such as Dab’ah near Homs. More than 600 people were killed on Syrian soil – Syrians, Iranians and militiamen from elsewhere – and many wounded. Since 2014, Syria had lost only two fighter aircraft in the air (to Israeli air defense, not in dogfights), but had nearly 40 surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries destroyed.

The Israelis assumed that at some point the Iranians and the Syrians would no longer be able to accept the situation. Some Israeli planners and observers feared back in 2019 that the Iranians would begin to retaliate against each raid. Still, there was no response from the regime beyond the rhetoric that described the rebel forces as Zionist stooges (so that the regime’s “revenge” would come in the form of further attacks on the remaining Syrian opposition strongholds.)

The IRGC continues to seek alternative methods of retaliation against Israel. A few drone attacks (some of them routed over Jordanian territory) were launched and foiled.

Iranian agents or people in their pay plotted attacks on Israeli citizens in Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Turkey and Greece. All were averted by the local authorities, apparently with the help of Israeli intelligence tip-offs.

What is the balance sheet to date of the Israeli campaign against Iran specifically inside Syria? As noted earlier, Israel’s military and intelligence service assess them to be effective, but is that assessment self-serving? The Iranians do have a significant presence and a number of training bases in Syria and may yet seek to expand their presence.

On the other hand, an Iranian stronghold in Syria had not materialized to date as envisioned. Specifically, the “precision project” as Israelis call it – Iran’s effort to supply Hizbullah with terminal guidance systems for their large arsenal of medium-range missiles aimed at Israel – was disrupted and delayed again and again. A senior IRGC commander, Milad Heydari, identified by Israel as a coordinator of this project, was killed along several others on 31 March 2023.

Moreover, Israel is not the only country killing IRGC recruits in Syria. Occasionally so are US and Turkish military forces in Syria.

Iran continues its efforts in Syria directly and through proxies. The IRGC has tried to build its own air defense system on Syrian soil (given that the Syrians cannot, and the Russians would not, hamper the Israeli air force ability to strike within Syria). In response, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant asserted in April 2023 that the IDF has doubled its rate of attacks in Syria in the first quarter of 2023.

Meanwhile, Hizbullah for the first time since 2006 sent an operative on a mission deep inside Israel, who placed a powerful roadside device near a highway junction south of Haifa. The bomb badly wounded and blinded a young Israel Arab driving his car. After a bizarre chase involving a hijacked taxi the terrorist was shot and killed: but it was obvious even beforehand that this was a departure from the patterns of terror attacks Israel had to contend with in the past.



Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. Photo credit: Menahem Kahana/Pool via Reuters

My assessment is an interim one – to date Israel is preventing Iran from building a base for itself in Syria. But as both sides escalate their military responses, there is the danger of triggering the confrontation that both Israel and Lebanese Hizbullah have been careful to avoid for seventeen years. Threats were hurled at each other in late May 2023. Given Israel's explicit position that a credible military threat must be part of any attempt to curb Iran's ambitions, the line between rhetoric and action may be wearing very thin. *

ERAN LERMAN

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DID ISRAEL LOSE THE SYRIAN WAR? NOT YET

DID ISRAEL LOSE THE SYRIAN WAR? NOT YET

Fighters of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Photo credit: Reuters/Muhammad Hamed





by James Jeffrey

Ehud Yaari's "How Israel Lost the Syrian War" in *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune* provides unequalled insight into Israel's and other states' actions during the Syrian civil war. He describes Israel's tactical successes, noting that IRGC Leader Suleimani's "original plan [to set up a major new rocket and missile front aimed at Israel] for now is on hold," and that Israeli intelligence believes that Israel has taken down 80-90% of Iran's military presence threatening Israel in Syria. Yet, he goes on, Assad's survival, "closely allied with Iran, amounts to nothing short of an Israeli strategic failure."

This is where Mr. Yaari and I part ways. Those of us working on Syria did not perceive Israel to be seeking to end Assad's reign, nor could it alone have succeeded. Rather, what we in the US have seen is Israeli tactical success against Iranian rockets and missiles and a contribution to what we have today: a frozen conflict rather than an Assad victory.

The surprise is not that Assad has escaped disaster but that, even after the last two plus

years of indifferent American Syria policy, he has not won. That situation, owing in part to Israeli actions, still provides an opportunity for the US, Israel, and other actors to together shape a final Syria outcome to advance regional security. In short, the Syria conflict isn't over yet.

On the issue of direct or covert Israeli intervention to topple the Assad regime, Ehud Yaari does a fine job describing the arguments for Israel remaining largely on the sidelines: fear of a failed state to the north controlled by Islamic militants, and confused, contradictory policies by those attempting to overthrow or contain the Assad regime, including the United States.

Furthermore, the tools Ehud suggests for a more active Israeli engagement against the Assad regime were flawed. Direct engagement by the Israeli air force to punch a path forward to Damascus for rebel groups was extraordinarily risky, impossible after Russia intervened militarily in 2015, and likely to spark such an intervention if done before. Assassinating Assad would not have overthrown the regime. Bashar, who showed restraint towards Israel during the 2006 Lebanon incursion and the 2007 al-Kibar bombing, would almost certainly have been replaced by his reckless, notably pro-Iranian brother Maher.



Arab League Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, May 19, 2023. Photo credit: via Reuters

To be sure, as Ehud notes, Israel kept its options open by maintaining ties particularly early on with various Syrian opposition and quasi-opposition forces. Senior Israeli officials also had an inkling of the ‘burrowing in’ actions of Iranian IRGC and surrogate elements across Syria. But we in the US perceived that Israel’s top priority remained to suppress IRGC long-range systems deployments in, or through, Syria, a goal which is being achieved. Given that, and absent an obvious ‘solution’ in such a convoluted situation, Israel’s decision not to seek a strategic outcome by acting alone appears prudent.

Israel’s air operations, supported by the US beginning in 2018, and coordinated informally with other military pressure on the Assad regime, have helped freeze the conflict. That year the Trump administration also

significantly increased its military footprint in Syria, continuing pressure on the Islamic State after taking down its capital Raqqa in late 2017, annihilating a Wagner Group incursion, and launching air strikes against Assad’s chemical weapons use. The US also underlined to Russia that it would remain at the Tanf enclave along the Syrian-Jordanian-Iraqi border, while that September a major Assad-Iranian-Russian attack on Idlib was forestalled by Turkish military moves and strong diplomatic support from the US.

These developments, most of them responses to specific threats, finally gave American diplomacy the ‘military pillar’ in Syria which former Secretary Kerry had pressed for in vain. This tool imposed a freeze on territorial expansion by the Assad alliance and opened

the door to a negotiated solution. The goal was not to overthrow Assad but to promote reconciliation between the Syrian government and opposition, including a new constitution and eventually elections, formalized in the December 2015 UN Security Council Resolution 2254. That resolution called for:

(1) a ceasefire followed by political reconciliation, a new constitution and accountability, (2) defeat of the Islamic State, (3) return of refugees and internally displaced persons (roughly half of Syria's 24 million population).

The US view, shared in various degrees by Israeli, Turkish, Arab, European, Syrian opposition, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), UN, and humanitarian NGO partners, was that in order to succeed UNSCR 2254 must be supplemented by three other efforts:

(4) removing permanently Iran's long-range systems targeted by Israel, (5) assuring Turkish security from a variety of threats on its southern border, and (6) integrating back into a reformed Syrian state the more than 30% of Syria that had a US or Turkish presence, along with the hundreds of thousands of opposition, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, and Kurdish-led SDF fighters.

These six issues became the core points of discussion in American negotiations with the Russians between 2018 and 2021. The idea was a step by step approach, whereby Assad, the Russians, and Iranians would accommodate the international community on these issues, in return for the US and its many partners moderating actions against the Assad regime: lifting or waiving sanctions, diplomatic recognition, eventually ending outside military presence, aiding reconstruction.

If not, the US with partner support was prepared to maintain a frozen conflict, putting pressure on Assad and providing leverage with the Russians. But the US also recognized that, absent real compromise on these issues by the other side, reducing military presence would

not only reward Assad but give Russia and Iran a regional strategic victory.

After showing initial interest in negotiations, all the way to a Putin-Pompeo meeting in 2019, the Russians backed off, presumably to see if a new US administration would change policy.

Initially that Russian bet paid off. The Biden administration ratcheted back the priority placed on the Syria issue, and defined Syria policy as little more than humanitarian relief and fighting Islamic State. Nevertheless, the US, Israeli, and Turkish military presence has remained, along with international community sanctions, largely due to inaction on those six issues. The Biden administration, as witnessed in Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony in June 2022, returned at least rhetorically to the Trump administration's position, with action against Assad's captagon drug smuggling added, within the framework of UNSCR 2254. And it has repeatedly committed of late to maintain sanctions, keep troops in-country, and make no rapprochement with Assad until international demands are met.

Thus Syria remains a failed state in a frozen conflict and not one, according to this writer's sources, that Moscow finds satisfactory.

Arab states, beginning with the UAE and Jordan, sought a bigger role in resolving the conflict, and, sensing Washington's relative indifference, launched their own efforts beginning with King Abdullah's 2021 Syria plan pitched to Putin. This has now resulted in Syria's return to the Arab League.

There is less than meets the eye in Abdullah's Syria plan. It incorporates many of the elements of the Trump administration step-by-step approach. Furthermore, the Arab states alone cannot fix Syria. Their one carrot, Syria's return to the Arab League, has already been given, for seemingly little in return from Assad. The Arabs cannot lift American and European sanctions, remove Turkish, US, and Israeli forces from Syria, lure six million Syrian refugees back, compel the broader international community to embrace Assad or abandon 2254, and erase

the chemical weapons and human rights charges against the regime, nor themselves rebuild the country. All that would require a general international community response to concessions by Assad and his partners.

Strategic success for the US, Israel and their allies is still possible by making progress on the six issues, including Iranian long-range system deployments, thus denying a geostrategic win to Moscow and Teheran. This will require more consistency and higher-level attention from Washington, but Jerusalem has a chance to sway the Biden administration.

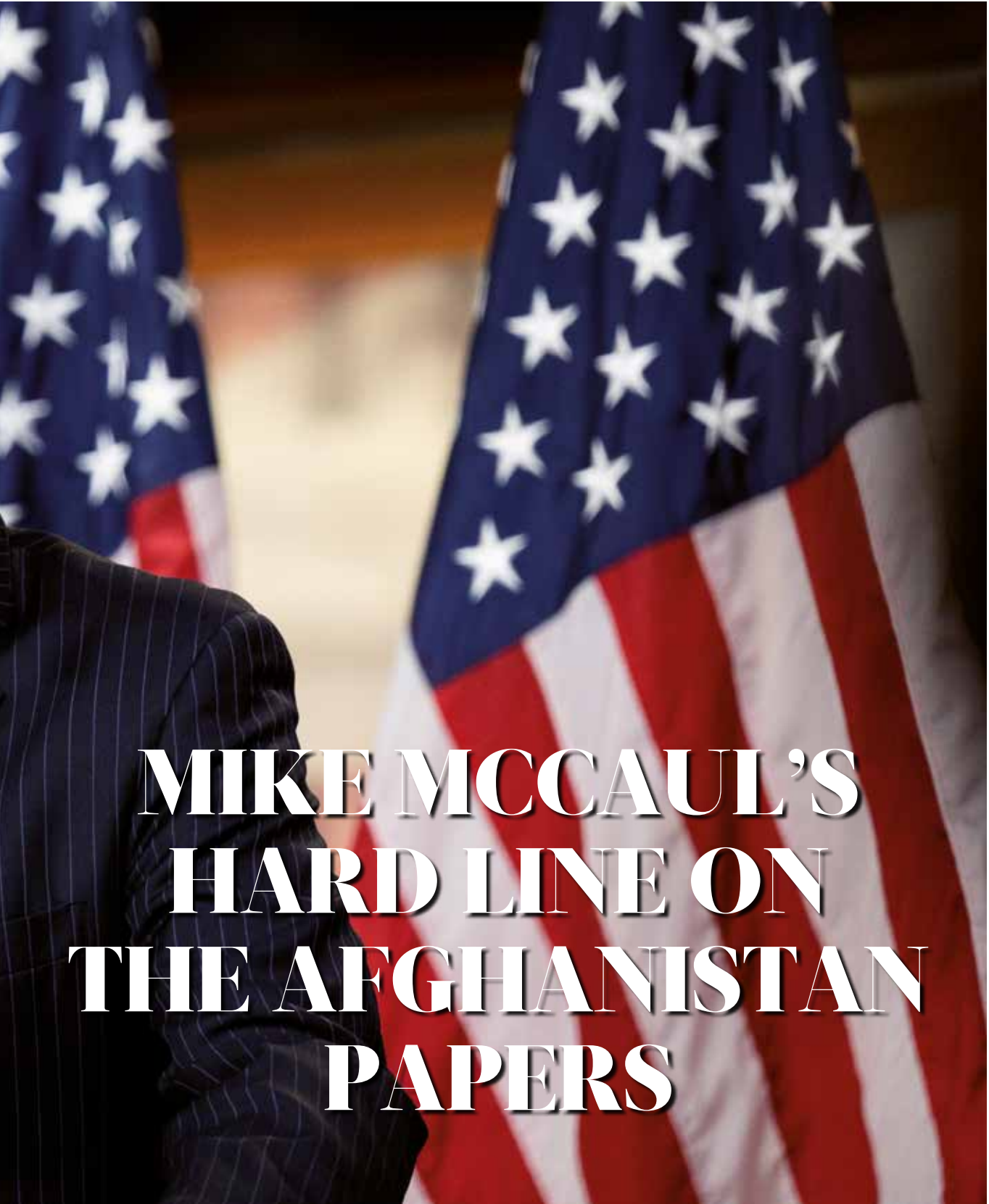
Syria demonstrates that, in a major regional conflict involving numerous players including two nuclear superpowers, a regional power such as Israel, however strong, cannot achieve a strategic outcome solely on its own. The Syria experiences of two other regional powers, Iran and Turkey, reinforce this conclusion, given Iran's plea for Russian intervention in 2015, and Turkey's limited success against the Kurdish-led SDF in the face of its US support. But what a savvy regional power can do, as Israel has shown, is achieve tactical results and, with the help of others, shape a possible strategic success. *

JAMES JEFFREY

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House Foreign Affairs
Chairman Mike McCaul.
Photo credit: Michael
Brochstein/Sipa USA via
Reuters Connect





**MIKE MCCAUL'S
HARD LINE ON
THE AFGHANISTAN
PAPERS**

BY DOV S. ZAKHEIM

Everyone recognizes that America's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 was a chaotic mess. Even the Biden administration, in a National Security Council document released on April 6, acknowledges the civilian evacuation from Kabul should have been carried out sooner.

House Foreign Affairs Chairman Mike McCaul (Republican of Texas) has been adamant that the administration come clean and adopt a deeper lessons-learned approach to the Afghanistan fiasco. Here is his opening statement at the initial hearing.

"In the spring of 2021 – against the advice of his top generals and the intelligence community – President Biden announced he would unconditionally withdraw all American troops from Afghanistan...I, and many on this committee, received multiple briefings – from the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Intelligence Community, and the difference in their assessments was stark. Both DOD's and the IC's outlooks were very grim. While the State Department...consistently painted a rosy picture, ignoring the realities on the ground...Multiple people in the Biden Administration said they'd plan for every contingency. They did not. Instead, they spent the next four months ignoring the realities."

McCaul is no isolationist. For instance, he supports American assistance to Ukraine, as I saw first-hand when he spoke at the Halifax International Security Forum in November 2022. McCaul has urged the Biden Administration to accelerate its provision of materiel to Ukraine; he has been vocally impatient with its hesitation to provide more lethal weapons to the embattled state. Most recently, and to that end, he and three Republican colleagues wrote to President Biden urging him to release highly lethal cluster munitions to the Ukrainians.

McCaul also strongly supports Israel. He pressed for transferring the American Embassy to Jerusalem. He has consistently voted for funding Israel's missile defense programs, notably the Iron Dome system. And he has taken a leading role in bipartisan opposition to proposed legislation that would condition aid to Israel because Washington disagrees with some of its policies, notably settlement expansion on the West Bank.

McCaul is not motivated by a partisan desire to bash the Biden Administration. After all, it was the President himself who asserted that "There is going to be no circumstances where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy like in Vietnam." And while it is true that no one was lifted off the embassy in Kabul, the evacuation at Hamid Karzai airport was equally as frenzied.

McCaul heard testimony from a number of eyewitnesses to the evacuation. He also asked



The last American soldier to leave Afghanistan, Aug 30, 2021, Photo credit: US Army/Cover-Images.com via Reuters Connect

the State Department for documentation that he felt underscored his assertions that State had failed to plan adequately for an orderly American departure. McCaul requested some 30 State Department documents. These included a Dissent Channel cable reportedly sent on July 13, 2021, by 23 State Department officials who warned that Kabul was likely to fall to the Taliban as American troops withdrew from Afghanistan. In addition, McCaul also sought the Department's response to the cable. Finally, the chairman asked for the After-Action Report prepared under Ambassador Daniel Smith, the

US Embassy Kabul's Emergency Action Plan as of January 1, 2021, and the plan's final revision before the embassy closed.

Perhaps the most important of these three documents was the Dissent Channel cable. This channel enables diplomats to argue a case contrary to the current policy direction of the administration. In their July 2021 cable, the 23 officials issued a grave warning of the disastrous consequences of the Biden administration's approach to the withdrawal. The State Department response presumably shrugged off their concern. McCaul was certain that the

Dissent Cable would demonstrate conclusively that the administration could not claim it was unaware of the consequences of its hasty withdrawal.

McCaul had initially requested these and other documents in August 2021, when he was still the ranking minority member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. After the Republicans retook the House of Representatives in the November 2022 elections and he became chairman, McCaul, with the unanimous bipartisan support of the committee, renewed his request the following January 12. While it no longer stonewalled McCaul as it had in August 2021, the State Department did not comply with the specifics of the committee's request, instead providing material that, in some cases, was already in the public domain.

At the March 21 hearing, after sending two more letters requesting these documents of the State Department to no avail, McCaul made it clear to the lead witness, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, that he had run out of patience.

McCaul pointed out that in the August 2021 request, the then chairman of the committee Greg Meeks (Democrat of New York) had joined him; this was not a partisan issue. McCaul focused on the events surrounding the suicide bombing attack at the Karzai airport that killed 13 Americans and 60 Afghans. That attack had been the prime motivator of his letters to State. In demanding answers from State, McCaul also pointed out that at a hearing two weeks prior to Blinken's appearance before the Committee, "we heard testimony, that I was quite frankly unaware of, that we had [the suicide bomber] in our sights. The sniper had him and he could have been taken out, and the threat could have been eliminated and lives could have been saved."

McCaul also rejected the Department's assertion, based on its refusal in 1975 to produce a cable on Cyprus to Congress, that to release the Dissent Cable would therefore violate long-standing precedent. Instead, he cited the contrary view of former Ambassador Thomas Boyatt, the author of the 1975 cable, that

underscored the importance of congressional oversight.

In response, Blinken pointed that the Department had turned over more than one thousand pages of documentation, but that the Department was withholding the Dissent Cable and the response to that cable because releasing it "could have a chilling effect on the willingness of others to come forward in the future, to express dissenting views on the policies that are being pursued."

When it became clear that Secretary Blinken was unprepared to budge on release of the requested documents, McCaul issued his first subpoena as chairman and, by mid-May, he began the process of recommending that the House of Representatives hold Blinken in contempt of Congress. State responded by offering to show the key dissent cable and the other documents that McCaul had requested to both McCaul and ranking member Greg Meeks.

That was hardly the end of the matter, however. What State eventually passed to Chairman McCaul was a redacted version of the dissent channel cable. McCaul was not happy. On June 8, he sent yet another letter to the State Department insisting that State comply with all of the document requests and giving Blinken one week to comply, which State finally did for the dissent channel cable.

Perhaps the Secretary wished to put the issue behind him as he was about to depart for his crucial trip to China. Moreover, as a former long-time congressional staff aide, Blinken fully appreciated the gravity of McCaul's threat. It is not clear, however, whether McCaul received the other documents he requested. The tug-of-war between the Chairman and the Secretary thus may not be completely over.

There are two primary reasons why the administration, and the State Department in particular, objected to McCaul's request. First, there is long-standing institutional tension between any administration and the Congress over the extent and scope of congressional oversight. Even when a matter is not partisan,



Secretary of State Antony Blinken testifies during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. September 14, 2021. Photo credit: Jabin Botsford/Pool via Reuters

the executive branch seeks to shield its internal deliberations. This general concern is magnified in the case of the State Department dissent channel since it was created to allow diplomats to express contrary views without repercussions to their careers. Such cables are kept out of the public to protect both the drafters and their arguments. Second, with respect to Afghanistan, the White House wanted the entire episode put behind it, to be treated as “yesterday’s news” in the hopes that the public would quickly forget.

McCaul is not ready to forget. He wants to force the administration to confront its mistakes and absorb the lessons to be learned from what took place. The Biden Administration has essentially repeated mistakes made in the American departure from Saigon in April 1975 as the city was falling to North Vietnamese forces. McCaul does not want this or any future administration to allow for a similar chaotic departure should in future Americans once again find that they must evacuate a combat zone.

One can only draw lessons from history if one knows the history. It is for that reason McCaul, together with his Republican and Democratic colleagues, are committed to seeking the documentation from which those lessons can be derived. America failed to absorb the lessons of Saigon; McCaul is determined to ensure that the lessons of Kabul do not meet the same fate. *

DOV S. ZAKHEIM

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**HOW WOULD
REPUBLICANS
CONDUCT
AMERICAN FOREIGN
POLICY TODAY?**

Governor Ron DeSantis gets ready to speak during a rally for President Donald Trump in Florida, October 2018. Photo credit: Reuters



BY LESTER MUNSON

The global order is changing rapidly. China is brokering normalization between Iran and Saudi Arabia while the United States brokers normalization between Arab states and Israel. Turkey and Russia are both antagonists and collaborators in multiple hot spots. Ukraine's military is proving stronger than Russia's. Alliances and friendships in the Indo-Pacific are coalescing against Chinese belligerence. Many African economies are growing quickly while some African nation-states appear to be collapsing. Latin American politics are rolling left after years of rolling right.

In the US, the 2024 contest for the American presidency has already begun, adding another variable to the geostrategic calculus. How will American politics, particularly in the Republican Party, affect US foreign policy during this time of great change? Will the US engage as a global leader as it has since the end of World War II, or will it turn inward and focus on its own domestic problems?

There are reasons to be concerned that the Republican Party is embracing isolationism and supporting the withdrawal of American leadership from the world. Some of the news from Congress is not encouraging. Before becoming speaker of the House earlier this

year, Representative Kevin McCarthy said that Republicans would not support a "blank check" for Ukraine's defense. A resolution offered on the House floor in March to withdraw American forces from Syria—where they are leading the fight against ISIS and other terrorist groups—won almost twice as many Republican votes as a similar vote last year, although the resolution ultimately failed. Some Republican budget proposals for fiscal year 2024 would cut spending on international affairs—that's the State Department and the US Agency for International Development—by more than half.

These developments come on the heels of the disruptive, one-term administration of President Donald Trump. On multiple occasions, Trump threatened to withdraw the US from NATO in response to European members failing to spend 2% of their gross domestic product on defense. His budget plans had their own proposed massive cuts in State Department funding. President Trump canceled military training exercises with key ally South Korea and imposed tariffs on Canada. US friends and allies, accustomed to more predictable and supportive statements from Trump's predecessors, grew concerned that American leadership was no longer a given.

The very nature of the Republican Party has changed over the past decade. It is no longer the party of big business and free trade. Voters without college degrees are more likely to vote Republican, as are blue collar workers. The



The very nature of the Republican Party has changed over the past decade. It is no longer the party of big business and free trade. Former US Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley is hugged by a supporter as she announces her run for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination in Charleston, South Carolina, February 2023. Photo credit: Reuters

Democratic Party has also changed, picking up more moderates, suburban voters, and voters with college degrees. Effectively, both parties are “purer” and less likely to have diverse views inside their respective tents. On abortion, for example, all House Republicans are pro-life and nearly all House Democrats are pro-choice. In years past, both parties had more than a few members who disagreed with the majority in their party on that issue. These more ideologically coherent constituencies give a bigger voice to extremist views on both left and right and limit the ability of party leadership

to reach across the aisle and find bipartisan compromise on key issues, particularly budget questions.

On foreign policy questions, this relatively new arrangement has awkward consequences. The House vote on the question of pulling US forces out of Syria (where there are about 900 American troops, mostly in a training role) brought together Progressive Caucus Democrats on the left and Freedom Caucus Republicans on the right. Progressive Democrats have also voiced concerns about American support for Ukraine’s fight against Russia, writing to

President Biden last year and urging immediate negotiations, although the letter was later withdrawn.

Of course, these politicians are responding to the ultimate power in America—voters. Many American voters are exhausted from more than two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 demonstrated what many no doubt saw as the futility of the US engagement in hostile environments. The intervention in Iraq, while showing better longer-term implications than Afghanistan, remains wildly unpopular across the American political spectrum. It is not illogical that politicians will seek to manifest this mood in their positions and votes, but what will be the ultimate impact on American foreign policy? Perhaps not what the headlines would have us believe.

Members of the House of Representatives, who run for reelection every two years, are the federal officials most closely tied to the immediate mood of voters. In the Senate, where members enjoy six-year terms, the policy positions are quite different. Senator Mitch McConnell, leader of Republicans in the upper chamber, told the Munich Security Conference in February that the GOP remained a strong supporter of American global leadership: “My party’s leaders overwhelmingly support a strong, involved America and a robust transatlantic alliance. Don’t look at Twitter, look at people in power.”

There are other indicators that the isolationist trend is not what it appears. Bipartisan concern over the rise of an authoritarian China and the need to respond decisively has been led by Republicans—including even the aforementioned disruptor, former President Trump. House Republicans have established a special committee to look into competition with China. Even with the current American mood of intense partisanship, Democrats are embracing the committee’s agenda, and the prospect of genuine collaboration is bright.

Below the political wrangling, a genuine foreign policy debate is happening, particularly among Republicans. Some policymakers, with intellectual leadership from former Trump defense official Elbridge Colby, believe that the US must elevate competition with China over all other concerns and make tough decisions about how much the US can provide support for other priorities, including Ukraine. Others articulate a view that the US must lead globally and cannot avoid being involved in major crises in Europe and the Middle East without highly negative consequences for American values and interests. The Hudson Institute’s Walter Russell Mead provides the counterpoint to Colby, regularly arguing that it is the US-led global order that is being challenged by China, and therefore the US must work—with friends and allies—wherever that order is threatened, particularly in Ukraine.

How will this debate connect with the presidential campaign and other political processes in Washington? The not-yet-declared presidential campaign of Governor Ron DeSantis may be the leading indicator. DeSantis criticized President Biden for visiting Kyiv in February, saying, “While he’s over there, I think I and many Americans are thinking to ourselves: Okay, he’s very concerned about those borders halfway around the world. He’s not done anything to secure our own border here at home.” This slap at the president is more than just a partisan hit—it’s a signal that as president, DeSantis might deprioritize support for Ukrainians. In other remarks, he has echoed McCarthy’s call for no “blank check” and has called for a strategy for the end game in Ukraine, something President Biden has not articulated.

DeSantis spoke in March at the Reagan Library in California. Like Reagan, he is showing that he will make no bones about appealing to what Mead calls “Jacksonian” voters in the upcoming primary fight for the Republican nomination. These American voters are skeptical of foreign engagements and don’t think the international order is always worth shedding American blood over. In the 1980 GOP primary

battle, Reagan railed against the Panama Canal treaties and diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China and deplored President Carter's "weak" foreign policy. Once in office, however, Reagan pivoted to supporting America's more nuanced leadership responsibilities to great effect, winning the Cold War against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.

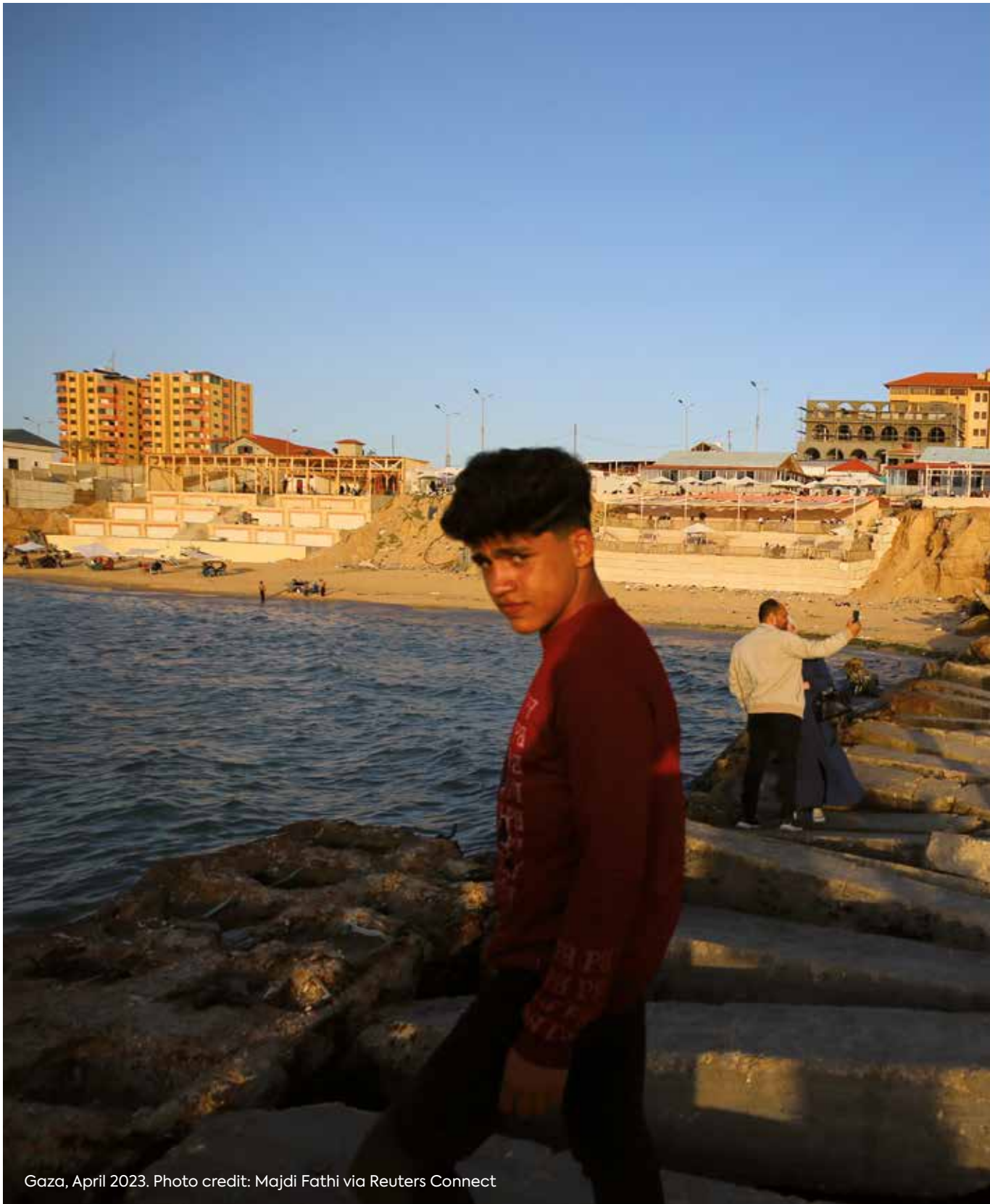
Would a President DeSantis make a similar pivot and embrace American global leadership? His symbolic trip to the Reagan Library might be a hint.

Over the past several decades, successful American presidential candidates in both parties have leaned isolationist while campaigning. Bill Clinton's mantra, "it's the economy, stupid," was a version of this. George W. Bush campaigned against UN nation-building. Barack Obama opposed doing "stupid sh**"—profane code for American interventions in the Middle East and Afghanistan. In office, however, American presidents largely have embraced American global leadership, including Trump who, despite some unwise threats, didn't shirk NATO responsibilities or even humanitarian assistance programs.

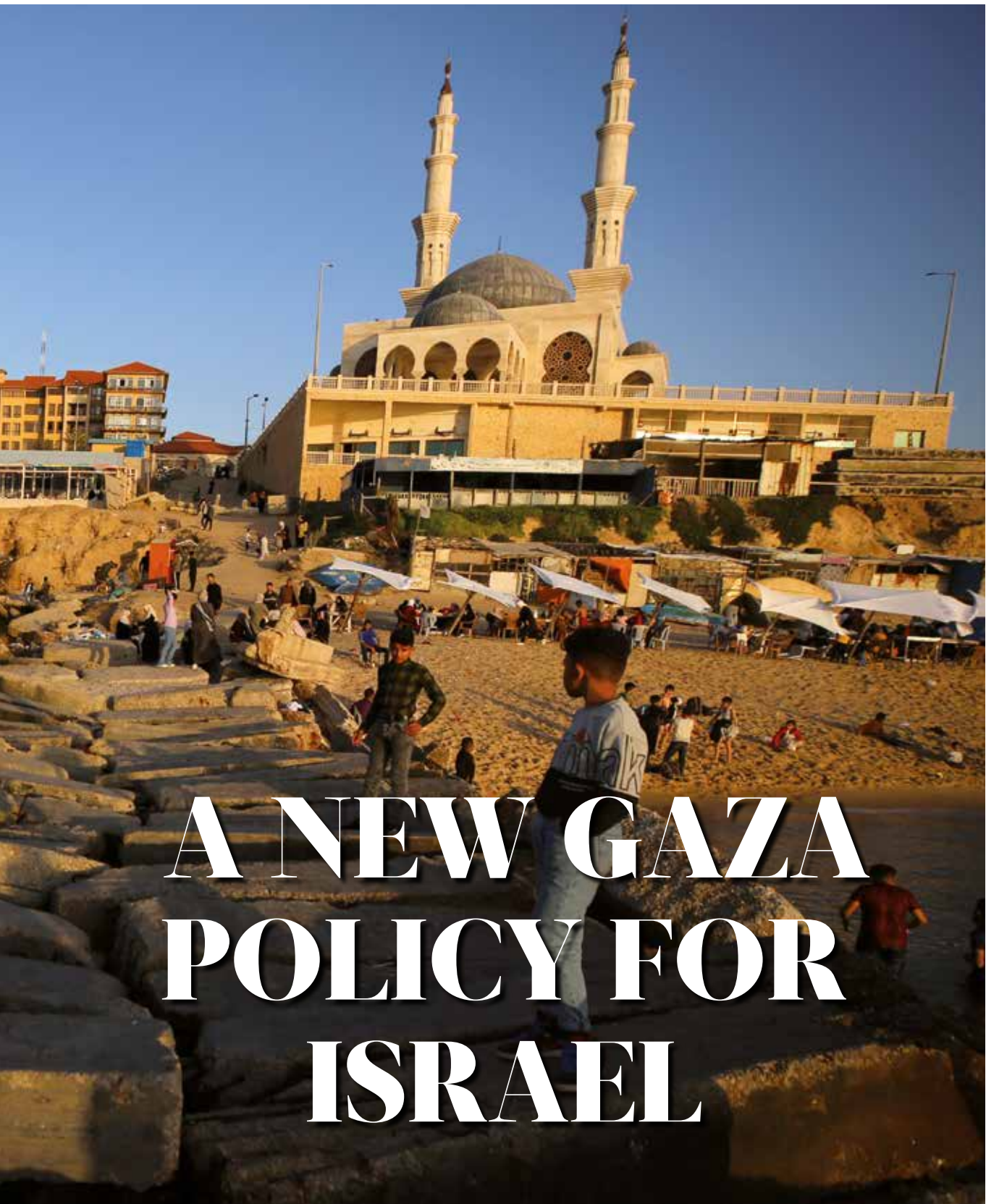
American politics can be entertaining and even a bit alarming lately, but the bedrock commitment of the United States to global leadership is highly likely to remain in place no matter which party prevails in the coming presidential election. *

LESTER MUNSON

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Gaza, April 2023. Photo credit: Majdi Fathi via Reuters Connect



A NEW GAZA POLICY FOR ISRAEL

BY GIORA EILAND

Israel's current policy towards Gaza is based on deterrence, reinforced with periodic military operations. But the military capabilities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad are growing. Israel should actively consider alternatives to its current strategy as I outline here.

BACKGROUND

The Gaza Strip, known as Gaza, is 365 square kilometers with a population of slightly over 2 million. It was captured by Israel (along with the Sinai Peninsula) from Egypt during the 1967 Six-Day War.

In 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty which called for Israel to return the entire Sinai Peninsula to Egypt while Gaza and the West Bank would be retained by Israel pending the outcome of future autonomy talks. Many Israelis (including me) believe Israel at the time should have insisted that Egypt take back Gaza just like the other territories taken by Israel from Egypt in 1967. Egypt rather than Israel could have retained Gaza, pending the outcome of autonomy talks.

Gaza's people are mainly descendants of Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war. After 1967, Israel started establishing settlements in

Gaza which by 2005 had some 8,600 Israelis living on about 20 percent of Gaza's overall territory. These Israeli settlers' security was heavily dependent on a massive Israeli military presence in Gaza, which grew as a result of the two Palestinian uprisings of 1988-1993 and 2000-2005.

THE DISENGAGEMENT FROM GAZA

In 2004, the Israeli government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided to unilaterally evacuate the entire Jewish population along with all of the IDF forces from Gaza in what Israelis call the Disengagement Plan. As the National Security Advisor, I was instructed by Sharon to create the operational plan for the evacuation, which I carried out despite harboring some doubts.

I believed that getting out of there was inevitable. However, I thought that the unilateral way in which the Israeli government chose to do so was not the best course of action.

The wiser policy in my opinion would have been to approach the international community first and present the Disengagement Plan as a potential concession that Israel would be willing to make. The full handover of Gaza to the Palestinians would be a part of a more comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which would also include a vision for the future of the West Bank. The handover to Gaza would be a first step.



Israeli forces evacuate settlers from a synagogue in the Kfar Darom settlement in the southern Gaza Strip. August 18, 2005. Photo credit: Reuters / Paul Hanna PH

This, I believe, would have given Israel enough leverage in the negotiations to achieve its interests regarding a partial retreat from the West Bank that did not meet the Palestinian demands (which had been the reason for the failure of previous attempts to reach an agreement). Moreover, I thought Egypt could cede to Gaza some adjacent territory on its side of the border (which was scarcely inhabited anyway) in return for some other benefits. It would make Gaza a more viable place to live.

What happened instead is that Israel gave up Gaza “for free” without gaining anything in return.

My view on the matter hasn’t changed. I remain convinced that we missed a big opportunity (maybe the last opportunity) to resolve the conflict and achieve the two-state solution that has been favored by the entire international community.

GAZA AFTER THE DISENGAGEMENT

Israel implemented the Disengagement Plan in 2005, forcibly evacuating the Israeli settlers. In 2006, parliamentary elections took place in Gaza. Hamas, the radical Islamist movement,



Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system intercepts rockets launched from the Gaza Strip, as seen from the city of Ashkelon, Israel, May 11, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Amir Cohen



defeated Abu Mazen’s Fatah movement. In July 2007, Hamas violently overthrew the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and has been ruling there since then.

As opposed to what many people think, Hamas isn’t an external terrorist organization that managed to take over Gaza and rule it only through force. Hamas is rather an authentic movement that grew within the people of Gaza and was elected by them.

Hamas through the years has invested in efforts to arm itself and actively resist Israel – along with the Islamic Jihad movement which somehow remained independent. Mostly they fire rockets at Israeli towns and agricultural communes in the immediate vicinity of Gaza. Israel in return maintains tight border controls and strictly supervises the flow of people and goods into and out of Gaza, in coordination with Egypt. Israel also supplies Gaza its electricity, water, gasoline, and other essentials since Gaza doesn’t have the means to survive on its own.

When tensions periodically escalate, Israel conducts military operations against Gaza, including air strikes and sometimes ground invasions, as happened in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, 2021, and most recently in May 2023 aimed strictly at Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

In my view, Gaza is a de facto independent state. It possesses the four major characteristics that define a geographical region as a national state: well-defined borders, effective central government, an independent foreign policy and an army.

Therefore, Israel should refer to Hamas as the government of Gaza and not treat it as a “terrorist organization,” despite the fact that Hamas applies terrorist tactics.



Masked members of the Hamas during a rally in solidarity with Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque, in Jabalia, in the northern Gaza Strip. Photo credit: Mahmoud Issa / SOPA Images / Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

ISRAEL'S POLICY OPTIONS

Currently, Israel has four different options regarding Gaza:

The status quo

In this strategy, Israel seeks to deter the military threat from both Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Most of the time the situation will be calm since Hamas has strong incentives to keep the ceasefire. But every few years or even once per year there will be a round of violence that lasts days and sometimes even weeks. In these confrontations, Gazans will launch hundreds of rockets against Israeli civilians but the damage

will be minor, especially in terms of casualties, mainly due to Israel's anti-rocket systems. Israel will attack hundreds of military targets in Gaza and target Gazan military leaders.

A comprehensive military operation in Gaza

The goal of this strategy is more ambitious than deterrence. It is to destroy most of the weapons systems, the facilities where weapons are produced and the command-and-control systems of both Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Israel would have to deploy extensive ground forces simultaneously.

These forces would not necessarily have to conquer every part of the Gaza Strip but would

need to reach the heart of the most populated and armed neighborhoods. This operation, including the phase of purging terror cells, might last a few weeks and would probably cause many casualties on both sides, including non-combatants in Gaza. After the operation, Israel would withdraw its forces from Gaza. Israel conducted a similar operation in the West Bank in April 2002.

Reoccupation of the Gaza Strip

From the military point of view the initial phase of this strategy might look like the previous one, but the political goal would be different. The goal is to occupy all parts of Gaza and to remain there at least until the signing of a reasonable political arrangement which would ensure that Gaza will cease to be a base for heavily armed terrorist groups.

Reaching a long-term ceasefire with Hamas

Hamas must balance two conflicting interests. On the one hand, it is the government of the de-facto state of Gaza, and must rebuild the infrastructure of the state, offer employment to people and supply better living conditions to a growing population. On the other hand, Hamas is a jihadist organization seeking to replace the Palestinian Authority as the leader of all Palestinians, including in the West Bank, and bring about the destruction of Israel some day.

Israel, in order to support the primacy of the first interest, could offer to assist Hamas to improve Gaza's economy by allowing tens of thousands of people to work in Israel, by building more civilian infrastructure, by creating a seaport in Gaza and by allowing Gaza to produce natural gas from its offshore field. However, if rockets were to be launched (or any other terrorist act) from Gaza, Israel would shut down all of these supportive activities, attack and destroy Gaza's national assets and stop the supply of water, gasoline and other essential goods.

SUMMARY

Gaza remains a continuous nuisance for Israel as a result of Israel's agreement in 1979 to return the Sinai peninsula to Egypt but to keep Gaza awaiting Palestinian autonomy talks.

Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza should have been leveraged to conduct a comprehensive and improved deal with Palestinians. The unilateral withdrawal was a mistake.

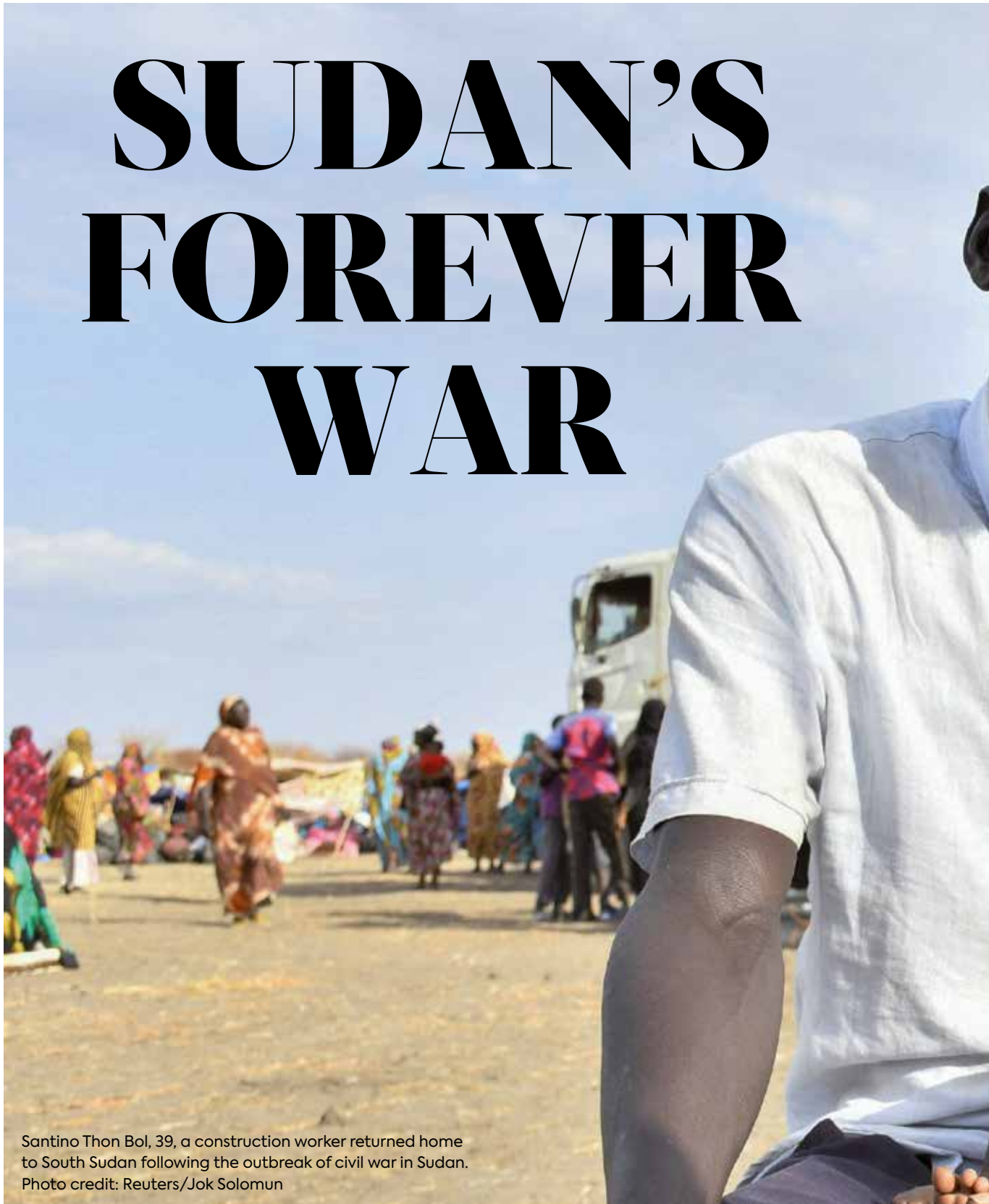
Gaza should be treated as a de facto independent state.

Of Israel's four possible policy options, I believe it should explore the fourth one – the possibility of entering into a deal with Hamas to dramatically support its economic development in exchange for a long-term ceasefire. This allows Israel to increase its leverage over Hamas, offering economic incentives while maintaining military deterrence. *

GIORA EILAND

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SUDAN'S FOREVER WAR



Santino Thon Bol, 39, a construction worker returned home to South Sudan following the outbreak of civil war in Sudan. Photo credit: Reuters/Jok Solomun



BY ALBERTO M. FERNANDEZ

The Republic of Sudan was born in war when it became independent in 1956. Since April of this year, the country is once again engulfed in a war that has ethnic, regional and institutional dimensions and that can once again result in a regime that exports instability and harbors terrorism.

Sudan has been here before. Even before achieving independence in 1956, Sudan's largely Christian and animist south had revolted against the authorities in Khartoum, in what would be the initial phases of the First Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972). This would be succeeded by the even bloodier and more brutal Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005) whose logical conclusion would be the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Both wars had ethnic (African vs. Arab) and religious (Christian vs. Muslim) dimensions.

But Sudan's violent reality has been not only about tensions among religious and ethnic communities but also about conflict between the center and peripheries, particularly the disparities in wealth and power between Khartoum and the Nile Valley and the marginalized regions like Darfur in the west. The war in Darfur began exactly twenty years ago as non-Arab tribal groups fought Khartoum government forces and their local proxies in a conflict involving politics, squabbles over land and water, and ethnic grievances. As with the war of the north against the south, the human

cost of the Darfur conflict was high in deaths, displacement and destruction.

Sudan's latest war began on April 15, 2023 and continues. It is being waged inside the capital city of Khartoum, population of around 6 million. Though brief conflict reaching Khartoum had occurred between rebels and regime in 1976 and 2008, this inner city fighting is unprecedented. According to the International Organization for Migration, 1.3 million Sudanese have been displaced in the first 40 days of the war. The country already faced poverty and food scarcity before the conflict. Now instead of a third of the population needing emergency assistance, the number is about half of the country's 47 million people.

Even if the war ended today, the cost to rebuild or replace what was lost will be in the billions of dollars. Although the conflict in Khartoum draws the most attention, bitter fighting has destroyed the center of several of Darfur's cities. The capitals of the states of West Darfur and Central Darfur, El Geneina and Zalingei, have been devastated with 80,000 people, mostly women and children, fleeing into Chad. In both Darfur and Khartoum, warehouses, markets and factories have been looted or burned to the ground. Khartoum, center of most of the country's production, saw the destruction of Sudan's largest manufacturer of baby food. Hospitals have also been hard hit. If not looted or bombed, some doctors have been reduced to operating by the light of their cellphones with whatever materials or medicines are at hand. The fighting is between two government factions, two armies backed

by ethnic groups and driven by personal and institutional ambition. The Sudanese Armed Forces or SAF is the country's regular armed forces, from whose ranks the country's dictators have emerged, primarily northern Arabs. Sudan's longtime Islamist dictator Omar al-Bashir (overthrown in 2019) began as a SAF General. He distrusted it, repeatedly purging it of unreliable elements, but allowed it great economic privileges that survived his fall.

Opposing SAF are the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), paramilitary shock troops led by Darfuri Arabs which are the outgrowth of Khartoum's and SAF's counterinsurgency policies fighting wars in the south and Darfur. Since at least the 1980s, Khartoum has used tribal militias, in conjunction with SAF and other formations, to fight their enemies in the far-flung region. The government armed certain loyal tribes to kill, rape and loot their traditional enemies. In Darfur, the recruits came from camel-herding Arab tribes turned raiders, the notorious Janjaweed.

RSF was merely the latest iteration of that decades-long strategy. Khartoum created dozens of forces and armed different contending tribal

To date, American pressure on Sudan's neighbors seems to have prevented escalation in the form of foreign forces overtly joining the fight. But both sides need more men and more of everything else – ammunition, weapons and money – to continue the fight.

and ethnic militias. In 2014, RSF had only 5-6,000 men fighting in Darfur but would evolve over time into a much larger force to be used as a praetorian guard and counterweight to SAF. Before the fighting began, RSF even paid higher salaries than SAF. By 2019, both RSF and SAF had become roughly equivalent in size, numbering in the tens of thousands, although SAF maintained a monopoly on airpower and heavy armor. Both forces posture as tribunes of the people who seek to bring about a transition to democracy. But those are just mere words. Both seek to maneuver and gain advantage on the ground and in the eyes of the international community. Both will use anything that could give them an edge on the battlefield.

RSF tried and failed on day one of the conflict to eliminate the leadership of SAF, specifically the army's ostensible leader, General Abdul Fattah al-Burhan. SAF for its part would dearly love to capture or kill RSF's leaders, the brothers General Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo (nicknamed "Hemedti") and his deputy General Abdul Rahman Hamdan Dagalo, hoping to destroy an organization based on clan, tribal and familial ties by decapitating its leadership.

Each side has its traditional tactics. SAF practices indiscriminate bombing and shelling of civilian areas as it did for decades in Darfur, South Sudan and regions like the Nuba Mountains. RSF practices advanced levels of thievery and looting. There are several confirmed cases of rapes by RSF in the capital; both looting and rape were allowed behavior in the past when practiced on behalf of Khartoum against rebellious populations in the regions.

Some things have surprised observers. Although SAF controls most of the country and has fighter jets, helicopter gunships and tanks, it has not yet been able to dislodge RSF from most of its positions in the greater Khartoum area. RSF has been able to "live off the land" in Khartoum – one of the explanations for the looting – using the city and its hard-pressed inhabitants as unwilling sources of food and fuel. This undoubtedly makes RSF feared and

hated in the city, and slowly destroys the fabric of a sprawling urban area, but allows them to maintain a viable force in the field.

While SAF can resupply relatively easily from Egypt, overland or by sea from Port Sudan, RSF has a very long, uncertain and unstable supply line stretching towards Darfur. A more efficient armed force than SAF would have already trapped them in the city, cut off RSF's fuel supply, and prevented them from having any escape route. That hasn't happened yet.

To date, American pressure on Sudan's neighbors seems to have prevented escalation in the form of foreign forces overtly joining the fight. But both sides need more men and more of everything else – ammunition, weapons and money – to continue the fight. Some countries interested in Sudan – notably Israel and Saudi Arabia – maintain neutrality while others like Egypt, UAE and Libya have their favorites. Sudan's Islamists, remnants of the former Bashir regime, are betting on a SAF win.

One of SAF's strategies, incredible considering the disastrous patterns of the past, seems to be to try to empower their own Janjaweed to fight the Janjaweed of RSF. Before Hemedti rose to prominence, Khartoum's man among these forces was the notorious Musa Hilal, also from a camel-herding Darfur Arab tribe. Hemedti rose to power because he was seen by Khartoum as a more reliable alternative to the mercurial Hilal. Now SAF seeks to arm Hilal and set him against an old rival.

During the war twenty years ago in Darfur, the Arab tribes in the region were unleashed by Khartoum against rebels drawn from the African Masalit, Fur and Zaghawa tribes. In the most recent fighting in West Darfur, Masalit fought on the side of SAF against the RSF Janjaweed. SAF would clearly like to see former rebel forces actively join the fight against Hemedti, something most have resisted doing so far.

This dangerous ethnicization of the conflict in Sudan is not entirely limited to the SAF side. RSF also desperately looks for reinforcements. Their ranks had long ago expanded beyond the

limited pool of Darfuri Arab tribesmen as they recruited among other tribes and ethnic groups in Sudan, including non-Arab marginalized people from Darfur and Kordofan. Some of their troops in Khartoum seem to be child soldiers.

But RSF also looks beyond Sudan to Arabs from the Sahel, including from Chad and Niger. The longer the war continues, the more both sides will try to draw in cannon fodder from across Africa and the Middle East. Just as fighters were drawn into Libya's civil war from across the Sahel, and beyond, the same can happen in Sudan.

Few expect that Hemedti's rough hewn RSF can win, much less govern, despite their skill in holding on. They seem to be fighting just to survive at this point and a stalemate would be a great victory for them.

If SAF wins, which still seems likely despite their underperforming on the battlefield, we should expect a military dictatorship along the lines of Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, SAF's great patron. But whoever emerges as the winner, Sudan will be even more destitute and destroyed than it was before the conflict. Many of its best and brightest who could flee are gone and unlikely to return.

A SAF-backed military dictator will face instant problems. First, a cash-strapped Egypt cannot afford to pay for a SAF regime in Sudan. It will need help from the international community and especially from the Gulf States.

Second, Sudan's army lacks the traditional popular support as the premier national institution that, for instance, Egypt's army enjoys. So a return to repression of Sudanese civilians seeking to rein in military rule should be expected. Still Sudan has a vibrant civil society that deserves Western support and some protection against the eventual military victor.

Almost as bad as the current chaos would be the destitute, radical Sudan of decades past, under al-Bashir, which sold itself to whoever would pay. Almost thirty years ago the regime promoted Islamic revolution in Africa and plotted to kill Egypt's President Mubarak when



Fleeing Sudanese seek refuge in Chad, May 9, 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Zohra Bensemra

he visited next door in Ethiopia. The Bashir regime later harbored al-Qaida and helped Iran smuggle missiles to Hamas. And less than a decade ago, the Sudanese regime sent troops (both RSF and SAF) to fight in Yemen.

Given Sudan's renewed potential to export instability and harbor terrorism, the international community is likely to acquiesce in a military dictatorship that makes vague promises of democratization. Unfortunately for the country's long-term interests, the Sudanese people's desire for democracy may place a distant second behind the short-term priority of stability and central government control. *

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Russian President Vladimir Putin is seen on a screen broadcasting Russian TV news programs in Mariupol. Photo credit: Reuters/Alexander Ermochenko



RUSSIA-UKRAINE INF AND THE CHALLENGE FOR



FORMATION WARFARE LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

BY DANIEL RAKOV, PNINA SHUKER

On November 15, 2022, NATO and Russia had a tense moment that might have escalated into a military confrontation. A missile hit a Polish village near the Polish-Ukrainian border, killing two civilians. Associated Press cited unnamed Western officials that it was a Russian missile. It might have been the basis for Poland invoking Article 5, the collective defense clause of the NATO charter. However, Western political leadership and security agencies refused to name the perpetrator.

A swift investigation established that the missile was an errant Ukrainian S-300 launched to intercept a Russian projectile. Yet, Ukraine insisted for over two days that it was a Russian missile, despite growing evidence of the opposite. Russia put forward the right explanation but politicized it through official speakers and disinformation channels.

In this example of information warfare, the Western camp succeeded in controlling an explosive situation and preventing an escalation. The Zelenskyy government suffered reputational loss. Russia’s long disinformation efforts deprived it of the trust and credibility badly needed in a dangerous situation.

Information warfare has been defined as “the use and management of information to pursue a competitive advantage, including offensive and defensive efforts”. The Kremlin is certainly waging an information war through influence

campaigns and disinformation flows targeting Ukrainian and Western audiences. But so do Western countries and the Ukrainians, even though they are described in the media as more innocently engaged in “strategic communications.” Yet definitions aside, this war exemplifies more vividly than previous conflicts that “information confrontation,” a Russian idiom, has become an integral part of warfare for all parties.

The Russo-Ukraine War provides three models of managing information operations (Russian, NATO, and Ukrainian), each having distinct characteristics .

Russia – Information operations are intended to legitimize the invasion of Ukraine, destabilize the Ukrainian government and army, put the blame for the war on the Western capitals while deterring them from increasing military assistance

Much effort is invested in the West in unearthing fake Russian narratives. It is an essential basis for confronting Russian disinformation but insufficient to neutralize the disinformation’s effectiveness.

to Kyiv, mobilize Russian public opinion to support the Kremlin and limit the influence of external information flows into Russia.

These operations can be executed without any constraint on the credibility of their claims, including on the part of Russian political leadership. For example, Putin together with his ministers and uniformed officers falsely claim that Ukraine, in cooperation with the US Department of Defense, developed offensive biological weapons aimed at Russia.

Information operations are integrated into Russian thinking on the war; they are run by an elaborate mechanism that includes security services, state media, and grey-zone actors, such as the infamous Internet Research Agency (IRA), an unofficial “troll factory” controlled by shady financier Yevgeny Prigozhin, who also owns the Wagner mercenary force. An extensive network of thousands of dedicated channels of disinformation (internet media, social networks, and TV channels such as RT) echoes Russian narratives at home and abroad in many languages, supplemented by the activity of Russian MFA and local influencers. These operations have been especially effective in the Global South and with the Russian public.

A particular emphasis is assigned to the Ukrainian public. Russian influence efforts aimed at that target audience were often coordinated with cyberattacks on Ukrainian critical infrastructure. In these cases, the aim of the Russian influence efforts which followed the cyberattacks was to shift responsibility to the Ukrainian government for the consequences – mainly power outages – harming Ukrainian state authorities, local governments, or large Ukrainian businesses, and by that, weakening the popularity of the Ukrainian government. Additionally, Ukrainian government websites have been constantly hacked.

NATO – Whereas the Russians at the official level don’t admit publicly that their political leadership’s proclamations are part of an information campaign, the NATO concept of

“Strategic Communications” looks at public diplomacy and information operations and psychological warfare as all parts of the same domain. NATO officials care greatly about sustaining their credibility and do not publish officially unsubstantiated claims. Furthermore, before the war in Ukraine, the US and other Western countries declassified a lot of sensitive intelligence information, despite the threat to endanger the sources of information.

Much effort is invested in the West in unearthing fake Russian narratives. It is an essential basis for confronting Russian disinformation but insufficient to neutralize the disinformation’s effectiveness.

NATO’s information operations intend to shape the information environment of their rivals and amplify NATO narratives. For example, in December 2022 the UK Ministry of Defense published rumors attributed to Russian military bloggers that the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, might have been sacked. Gerasimov wasn’t sacked and even got publicly reappointed several weeks afterward as the head of the Russian forces in Ukraine. The UK briefing’s purpose was not only to inform the public but also to emphasize the perception of the internal struggle inside the Russian high military echelon.

Ukraine must balance the demands of countering disinformation effectively, which sometimes requires operational concealment, with maintaining transparency and freedom of the press.

Ukraine – The Ukrainian model merges the Russian concepts of “information confrontation” (given that the background of Ukraine’s security apparatus is Soviet) with the Western “Strategic Communications” concept, which its officials embrace as a part of reforming the Ukrainian military forces according to the NATO standards.

Ukraine has been the main target of Russian influence campaigns for two decades and has served, since 2004, as a laboratory for Russia to test its disinformation tactics. During the eight years (2014-2022) of Russian occupation in the Donbas region, the Ukrainians had the opportunity to study Russian techniques, educate the Ukrainian public, and establish government-controlled and grass-root mechanisms initiatives of civil society, so as to resist the Russian information operations.

During the war, the Ukrainian government has strengthened its control over the media, furthered information-security awareness among the Ukrainian public, and encouraged resistance and internal cohesion against Russian aggression. The Zelenskyy government uses Strategic Communications to help secure a positive image in the West and pressure Western governments for military, economic, and political aid.

Ukraine’s success in mobilizing Western support owes in large part to its being the victim of this war, and to its democratic image and pro-Western orientation. In addition, the Ukrainians recognize the significant Russian investment in influence operations and attribute great importance to the struggle for hearts and minds. President Zelenskyy is fully aware of the scope and significance of the information sphere and often shares videos that contain daily updates on the war, motivational speeches, pictures of Russian-caused destruction, and appeals to the international community. These videos are directed at the Ukrainian population and spread to his millions of followers on social media. Additionally, the Ukrainian army recruits artists, graphic artists, marketing people,

photographers, and more, who volunteered to help create content and deliver messages to various audiences.

The Ukrainians also aim is to sow discord among the Russian people and to convince Russian soldiers to surrender. Therefore, Ukraine constantly publishes Russian death tolls and spreads videos and ads suggesting to Russian soldiers how to surrender. Ukraine also runs thousands of facial recognition searches on dead or captured Russians, using the scans to find the soldiers’ social media profiles – and send photos of their corpses to their families back home.

Nevertheless, Ukraine has been unsuccessful to date in its attempts to awaken the Russian public against the Kremlin and has failed to convince the Global South to isolate Russia politically and economically, while making some errors in this space. While generally aware of the need to maintain credibility, its security officials often put forward worst-case scenario threat assessments that, in hindsight, proved wrong but at the time helped Kyiv secure further tranches of Western aid. An attempt by Amnesty International to accuse the Ukrainian side of violations of the Geneva Convention turned the human rights activists into a target of an information attack, entirely suppressing the critical voices in the West on this subject.

THE CHALLENGE FACING LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

As Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine continues, Ukraine must balance the demands of countering disinformation effectively, which sometimes requires operational concealment, with maintaining transparency and freedom of the press. Ukraine is still fighting for its survival, easily perceived as an “end that justifies the means.” Even though it is forced to counter an opponent who is not subject to democratic constraints, Ukraine should strive to maintain a balance between fighting back against the Russian propaganda machine and protecting

democratic values, in order to maintain its positive image, its reliability, the Ukrainian people's trust, and all-important Western support.

The case of the war in Ukraine demonstrates the hurdles facing liberal democracies in their struggle against information operations. There's a growing necessity to distinguish between authentic discourse and viewpoints planted by foreign entities. Since the domestic public is the target of information operations, the principal tool in countering disinformation should be focused on a whole-of-society approach to strengthening information ecosystems.

That should include closer collaboration between the state and the press, encouraging media outlets to take voluntary defensive measures. It could also involve the establishment of designated civilian agencies, which work closely with the country's intelligence agencies in debunking disinformation campaigns, including removing content from social networks, blocking their distribution sources where possible, and even taking offensive actions against those behind such operations. In addition, intelligence agencies should strive to declassify intelligence information in order to refute disinformation. And last, civil society organizations can take action within a state framework to raise public awareness regarding disinformation, guiding the public on how to evaluate media sources as reliable and increase digital orientation, critical thinking, and controlled consumption of content.

Recently, a civilian NGO, FakeReporter.net, quickly debunked an attempt by a Russian-affiliated network to infiltrate the public debate in Israel over judicial reforms, intending to connect opposition to the reforms with support for the Russian cause in the war in Ukraine. This attempt was clumsy and easily identifiable (bad Hebrew) and Twitter promptly shut it down. But further attempts might bring more sophistication both in technique and substance. This episode epitomizes the need for

vigilance, as the populist discourse weakens the institutions of liberal democracies.

Looking ahead, the war in Ukraine illustrates the importance of the information dimension in warfare, at the same time that the increasing sophistication of artificial intelligence and deep fake technologies will make it harder to defend against the abuse of such tools. Therefore, governments must implement policies and use technology to address this threat. Countries that lag will expose their publics to future risks. *

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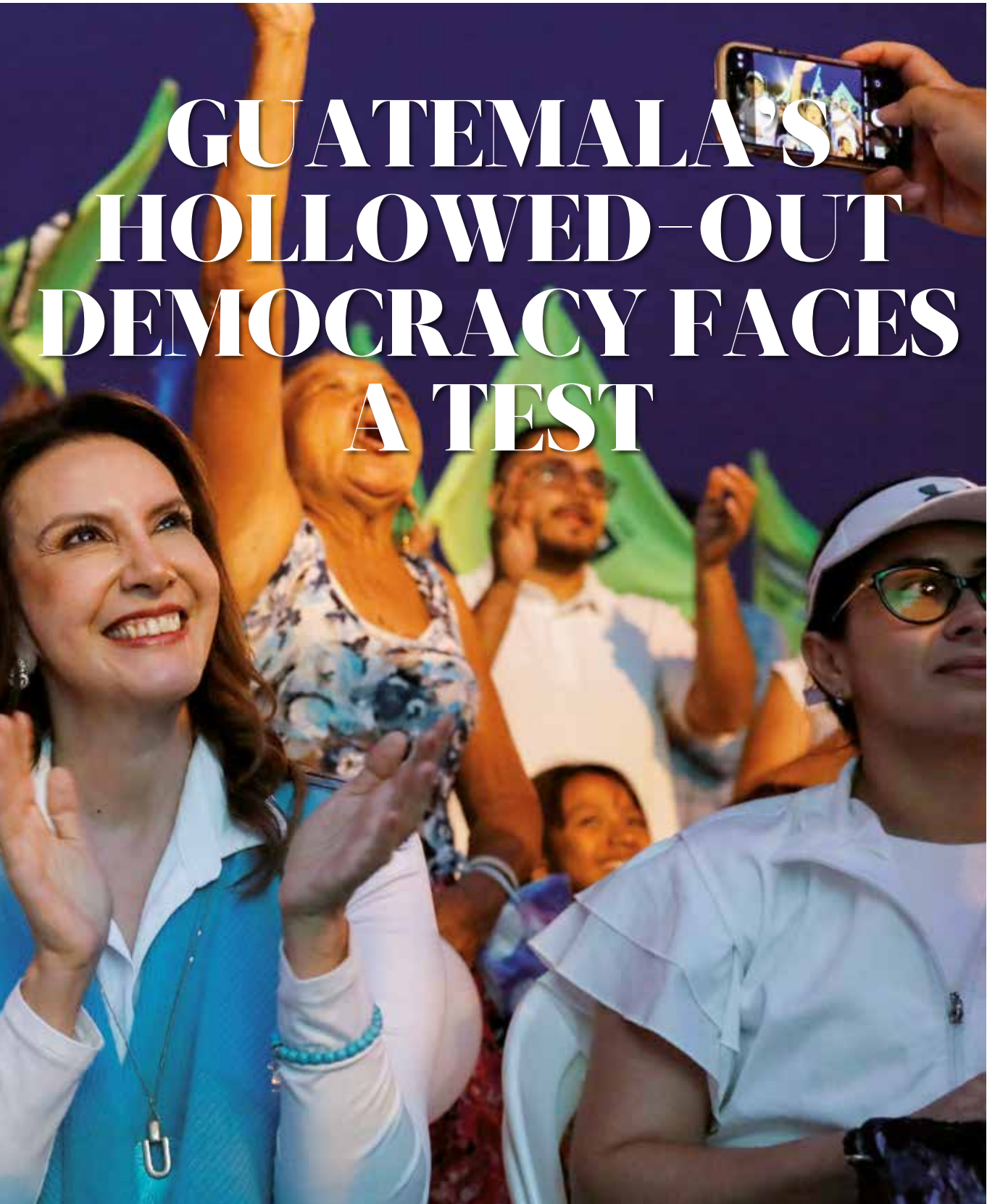
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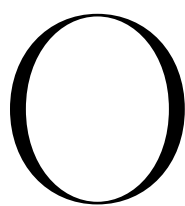


Guatemalan presidential candidate Zury Rios and vice presidential candidate Hector Cifuentes attend a campaign rally in Guatemala City, Guatemala, April 16 2023. Photo credit: Reuters/Luis Echeverria

GUATEMALA'S HOLLOWED-OUT DEMOCRACY FACES A TEST



BY ERIC L. OLSON



On June 25, just over 9 million Guatemalans went to the polls to elect a president, vice president, members of congress, and municipal authorities. The results of the June 25 presidential elections were inconclusive and a runoff is due in August. While Guatemalans have participated in elections since the end of military dictatorship in 1986, and one could assume that their democracy is becoming well established, the story behind Guatemala's elections is complicated.

The June elections are likely to represent a further step in the country's march toward illiberal democracy and even authoritarian rule. Guatemala's elections may serve as a warning sign to other countries where corruption and politicized institutions erode democratic practices.

A SMALL STATE IN A CRUCIAL NEIGHBORHOOD

Guatemala has the largest population and economy in Central America, located on the Mesoamerican land bridge between South and North America. Each year, hundreds of thousands of migrants must travel through the country, on Mexico's southern border, en route to the United States. It is an important pathway not only for economic goods and services, but also for criminal networks and illicit economies

such as narcotics, firearms, human smuggling and money laundering.

Guatemala is also the most diverse country in the region with 24 ethnic groups and 6.5 million people belonging to 22 Mayan groups (representing 44 percent of the population). Twenty-two Mayan languages are spoken as well as Xinca, Garifuna, and Spanish.

Inequality is deeply rooted in Guatemalan society with poverty, hunger, lower educational attainment and poor health indicators heavily concentrated among indigenous people. According to the World Bank, "Guatemala's poverty and inequality rates are among the highest in the Latin American and Caribbean region, driven by the existence of a large and underserved population, mostly rural and Indigenous and employed in the informal sector." The World Food Program estimates that 79% of Guatemala's Indigenous peoples live in poverty (compared to a 54% poverty rate overall) and 40% of those in poverty live in extreme poverty. Fifty percent of children under the age of five are malnourished, with the rate reaching a staggering 80% in the majority Mayan highlands of western Guatemala, according to UNICEF.

A CAPTURED DEMOCRACY

The end of military rule in 1986 ushered in a period of fragile civilian governments still dominated by former military officers linked to organized crime, which compromised the desire of most Guatemalans to consolidate democratic gains. In Guatemala, there are no historic parties of the left or right but rather competing



Guatemala's President Alejandro Giammattei. Photo credit: Reuters/Luis Echeverria

economic and political elites who negotiate and reach agreements that guarantee their grip on power. By 2004 the power of these groups had grown so much that the country agreed to invite the United Nations to establish an independent body to work with the justice system and bring criminal cases against corrupt actors in and out of government.

Beginning in 2005, the UN mechanism, known as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, was established and began strengthening the capacities of Guatemalan prosecutors and judges to successfully investigate and prosecute corrupt actors. The International Commission gradually empowered Guatemala's judicial system to the point that a joint investigation led, in 2015, to the downfall of Guatemala's then-president and vice-president, who were both eventually convicted of corruption. Tens of thousands of

Guatemalans from all walks of life took to the streets to celebrate these accomplishments.

Sadly, these advances faltered when the International Commission turned its attention to the use of illicit campaign contributions to support the next president, Jimmy Morales, elected in 2016. Some of those cases involved the most powerful families in Guatemala. Morales eventually decided not to renew the Commission's mandate and declared the Commissioner in charge *persona non grata*, leading to the shuttering of its offices in September 2019.

Court testimony exists linking President Alejandro Giammattei to bribes made by construction companies seeking "no bid" contracts from the government. But the judge and anti-corruption prosecutor overseeing the case have been unable to complete their investigation because they were forced into

exile after Giammattei fired and replaced the Attorney General.

Several former politicians and authorities have been prosecuted in the United States including former presidential candidate Mario Estrada, sentenced to 15 years in the United States, and Manuel Baldizón, another former presidential candidate sentenced to 50 months in the US for money laundering. According to the US Attorney, “Baldizón Mendez accepted campaign contributions knowing they were being made by narcotics traffickers and were the proceeds of narcotics trafficking.”

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal is charged with safeguarding the election process and has generally functioned as a technical body not a political player. Yet it has been increasingly questioned by civic groups and the international community for questionable decisions regarding candidate eligibility certification, a notoriously fraught process but exceptionally so in 2023.

Several important presidential candidates have been disqualified for relatively minor infractions of electoral rules, while others have been certified despite serious allegations of corruption and ties to drug trafficking. The current front-runner, Zury Rios, was certified for the 2023 process even though she was disallowed in previous elections because she is the daughter of General Efraín Ríos Montt, the former Guatemalan de facto head-of-state who was convicted of genocide for his role in a “scorched earth” campaign against the Mayan community in the early 1980s. The Guatemalan constitution makes clear that no family member of a former head of state can run for president. She is running for president despite the constitutional prohibition.

Other questionable candidates have been certified. One recent poll suggested that Carlos Pineda has shot into the lead for the June 25 election. Pineda was Mario Estrada’s vice-

presidential running mate in 2015. Pineda has reemerged as the presidential candidate of a new party, Citizen Prosperity, backed by Baldizón’s sons. Pineda himself is suspected of links to corrupt politicians and criminal interests.

Conversely, two previous presidential candidates have been disqualified for this election based on seemingly minor infractions. Telma Cabrera, with deep support within the Mayan community and the 4th place finisher in 2019, was disqualified when her running mate, Jordan Rodas, was found to have two unresolved complaints before the Comptroller General’s office stemming from his time as the country’s former human rights ombudsman. These alleged infractions have not been investigated.

In this context, the Organization of American States’ Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy expressed “concern about the process of registering candidates in Guatemala.” They noted, “... that hundreds of people have been excluded from the elections, some of them very high-profile and aspiring to the highest positions of popular election.”

THE ROT IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Four factors drive the weakness of Guatemala’s democracy: weak campaign finance controls; politicized election institutions; a co-opted justice system; and lack of space for independent voices such as journalists and civil society organizations. Together, these deficiencies have made it easier for corrupt and criminal interests to maintain control of the country while appearing to abide by basic democratic norms.

Guatemala’s justice system has been hollowed out by successive administrations bent on ensuring political loyalty rather than unbiased adherence to the law. The US Department of State has sanctioned numerous senior justice officials for ties to corruption and undemocratic activities including the current Attorney General, Consuelo Porras, and the lead

prosecutor in her anti-corruption unit, Jose Curruchiche.

Guatemalan investigators and prosecutors have initiated numerous cases involving alleged illicit campaign finance but most of these have been interrupted by attacks against the judges and prosecutors overseeing the cases. Together, they have threatened dozens of high-ranking Guatemalan judges, prosecutors, and investigators overseeing cases of alleged high-level corruption and/or human rights abuses. Hundreds of administrative and criminal accusations made by allies of the country's economic elite have been filed, and the AG's office has used these to "criminalize" justice officials resulting in their involuntary exile or incarceration. One particular case involves Virgina Laparra, a former prosecutor in the AG's anti-corruption unit. She has been incarcerated for 14 months, and Amnesty International declared Laparra a Prisoner of Conscience for peacefully carrying out her legitimate responsibilities.

Finally, institutional weaknesses are exacerbated when independent voices in the press and civil society are silenced. Like justice sector officials, dozens of independent journalists, anti-corruption activists, and human rights defenders have been threatened and attacked by political leaders and their allies in society. These threats are often anonymous, sometimes coming from unidentified online trolls with links to political actors.

One case involves the publisher of the daily El Periodico, José Rubén Zamora, a well respected and independent voice in Guatemala for years. Zamora has been incarcerated for nine months in a tiny windowless cell and allowed only 1 hour of fresh air and sunlight a day, and permitted two visits two times a week. He is currently incarcerated on alleged obstruction of justice and money-laundering charges. His lawyers and others in the anti-corruption movement that have collaborated with El Periodico have also been targeted in connection with Zamora and three of his lawyers

are now incarcerated, and dozens of allies forced into exile. Meanwhile, El Periodico has been shuttered completely as of May 15.

A DANGEROUS TREND FOR THE REGION

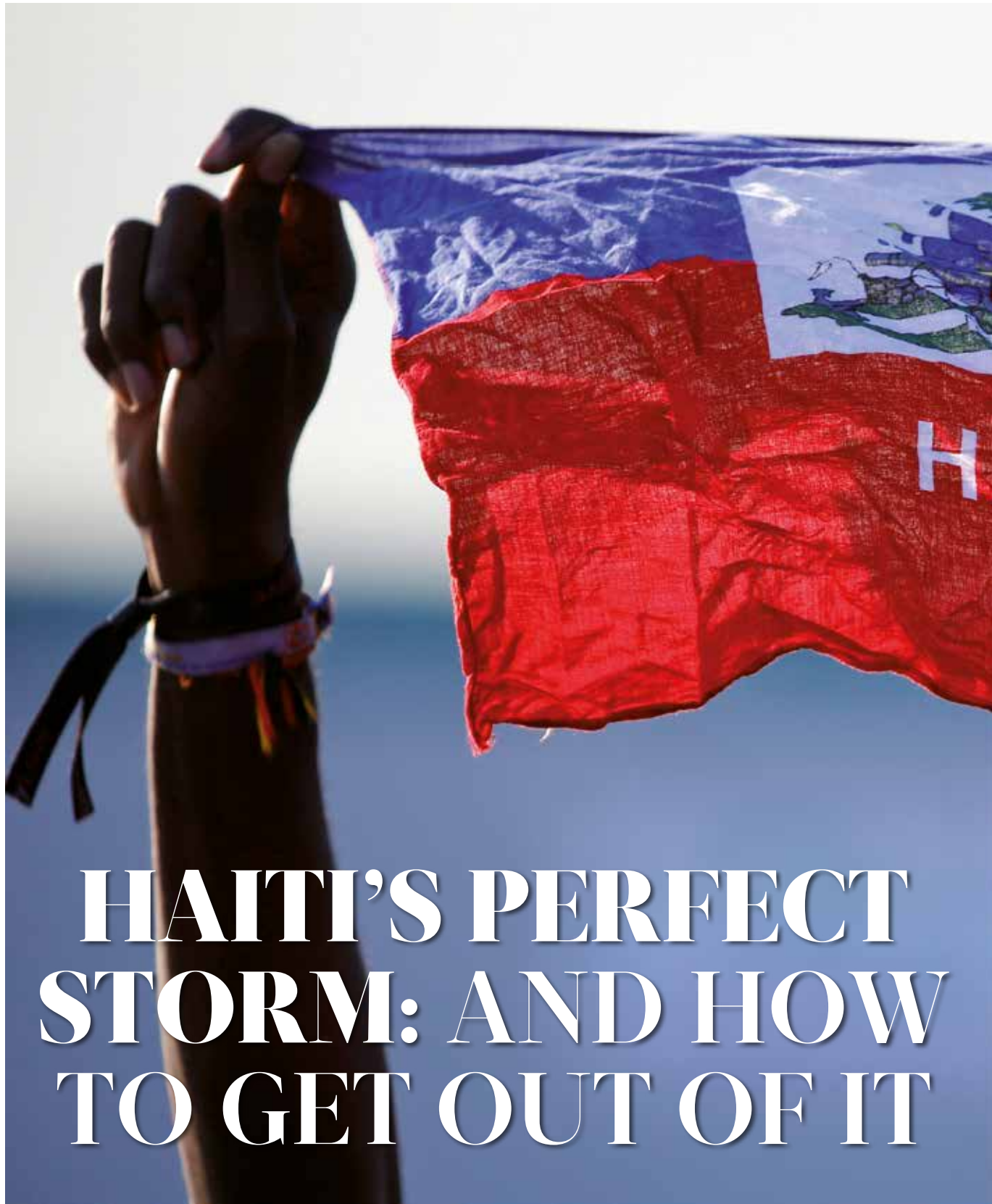
To judge Guatemala's 2023 elections solely on the basis of the integrity of the voting process is to miss the bigger picture of democratic decline. The context is a skewed electoral process where candidates are ruled in or out without regard to international and domestic standards and where powerful elites attack independent press and civil society.

Guatemala's march towards illiberal democracy and authoritarianism reflects broader trends in Central America. Weak democratic institutions, ineffective and corrupt governments, and widespread violence are common throughout the region.

The United States has largely been silent on Guatemala despite clear warning signs of the growing risks of democratic decline and potential criminal cooptation of the state, perhaps out of fear that it will be accused of intervention. Thus it will be up to the citizens and civic organizations of Guatemala, many now in exile, to dig themselves out of this hole. The international community should also play a role; democracy requires the efforts of all that continue to believe in its promise. *

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HAITI'S PERFECT STORM: AND HOW TO GET OUT OF IT

Photo credit: Reuters/Stefano Rellandini



BY KEITH MINES

Haiti has for decades been in a perfect storm of internal challenges – earthquakes, floods, poor governance and now a capital nearly overrun by gangs. The international response has often brought its own storms – including a cholera epidemic and sexual predation by UN peacekeepers.

Haitians are becoming increasingly desperate, while the international community is frozen with fear of involvement and lacks an architecture for dealing with fragility and state failure on this scale. The defining international approach to fragile states at present is non-involvement.

But can a country of 11 million, suffering from increasing malnutrition, with citizens mounting anything that will float in an effort to leave, and now with gangs fast becoming warlords, really simply be left to find a “Haitian solution”?

Amid international drift, a coalition of Haitian actors from civil society, the business community, and political factions put forward a creative governing accord in December 2022 as a way to help the country reset. It may have the right mix of “Haitian-led solutions” and international involvement. But to succeed it will require a new generation of leadership in Haiti, and a more steadfast approach by a reticent international community.

THE LONG ROAD TO POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION

Accounts of Haiti traditionally stress its position as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with the lowest per capita income.

More recently observers have considered an early history of isolation and a crushing debt burden demanded by its colonizer.

Haiti’s recent history revolves around intense personal leadership, from the crushing authoritarianism of the Duvaliers 1957 to 1986, to the erratic leadership of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, in and out of power 1991 to 2004. Missing throughout was a strong civil society, a capable state, and an organizing principle the country could rally around.

A series of post-Aristide leaders were inept at governing (apart from René Préval) allowing the country’s elites to barter for scraps of revenue in a country whose economic potential was barely touched.

In July 2022, the bottom of Haiti’s tenuous political arrangement fell out. President Jovenel Moïse, who had arbitrarily extended his mandate because of challenges in mounting an election, was assassinated by foreign mercenaries. The country went from a low functioning democracy to one where democratic institutions have disappeared. Haiti now is being governed by an unelected de facto president, Ariel Henry, with extremely limited popular support.

INTERNATIONAL TOOLS FOR MANAGING STATE FRAGILITY

The international community has been a player in Haiti throughout, generally intervening in the face of crisis, with a desire to depart as soon as possible. A case like Haiti, that combines a need for governance, humanitarian assistance, and security, is what UN peacekeeping was created for. Though an imperfect tool, subject to short-term mandates, UN peacekeeping helped hold the country together as the slow process of political consolidation and institutional development continued.



The wake of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, who was assassinated. Photo credit: Reuters, Ricardo Arduengo

Drastic cuts to US funding for UN peacekeeping in 2017 reduced the mission in Haiti to a level that hollowed out the extensive police advising and political guardrails the country required, leaving it to flounder. The architecture for progress, imperfect as it was, disappeared.

The US approach to managing state fragility, commonly defined as deficiency in governing authority, capacity, and legitimacy, has evolved. There was growing resentment on both sides of the political spectrum about the resources the US had poured into Iraq and Afghanistan. Intervention reached a low point in Libya, where a brutal but functional state that had given up its nuclear weapons program was deliberately collapsed, leading to a decade of civil war and adding to the refugee crisis that has destabilized Europe.

But the sentiment in the US to ignore state fragility was not shared by all. Key members of the Congress recognized that many issues – refugee flows, hunger, transnational crime, and terrorism – were the result of state fragility, and a world of higher functioning states would provide a more effective architecture for managing these challenges than waiting for problems to accumulate and responding with drone strikes.

In 2019 Congress passed the Global Fragility Act. It calls for two major shifts in the US approach to fragility – first, the US must follow the lead of host country citizens, and second, it will develop long-term plans for harnessing all the tools of the US government in diplomacy, development, and the security sector, as it helps “build resilience, strengthen the roots of stability, and prevent conflict.”

HAITI AS TEST CASE FOR A NEW ARCHITECTURE

Haiti is one of the “pilot countries” for the Global Fragility Act, along with Libya, Mozambique and several others. There may be a narrow window for Haiti and its international partners to solve Haiti’s short-term crisis, and then undertake the longer-term recovery to finally escape the fragility trap.

This opportunity began on December 21, 2022 when a coalition of business, civil society and political actors quietly signed an accord with Haiti’s prime minister, Ariel Henry, that outlined a transitional arrangement leading to elections.

The accord calls for a three-member High Council of Transition (HCT) to be selected from civil society, political leaders, and the private sector. The current HCT was installed on February 7 and could be expanded as needed. It will advise the prime minister based on the results of extensive roundtables, a kind of national dialogue that channels Haitians’ opinions and mobilizes expertise. These roundtables will require a tremendous amount of support to function. But their success could shift the country’s power structure in an entirely new, citizen-led direction. The HCT will also be responsible for ensuring electoral integrity, and making provisions for an interim legislature to oversee governments budgets, management, and transparency.

Four things are required for this arrangement to work.

First, an urgent infusion of security is required to prevent gangs from becoming omnipotent warlords.

As part of the December 21 accord, the first roundtable will be on security, identifying the requirements for restoring essential safety to the country. Until now, security was handled either by the international community singlehandedly, or Haiti was left to manage on its own. December 21 takes a hybrid approach, in which Haitian experts and civil society, in conjunction with

outside technical experts, develop a security plan that will be supported by international partners.

Security assistance could include any of the following: training thousands of Haitian recruits and leaders offshore, building intelligence capacity with use of drones and other technical capabilities, engaging gangs to better understand their price for involvement in the national project (and avoiding intense urban combat), and organizing a system of community justice and security dialogues that ensures the involvement of Haitians.

Second, as I have written elsewhere, failed and fragile states require a political compact that unites citizens. Absent a galvanizing sense of belonging that transcends tribe, region, or personal interest, citizens will not offer their vital support to the project of building their nation.

As professor Heather Salma Gregg puts it, our recent efforts in helping fragile states have missed a “critical, necessary component of a viable state: the emotional attachment citizens feel towards one another and to their state.” States, she writes, “are not just structural, rational, utilitarian entities; they also provide a sense of identity, purpose and destiny among their own people.”

This is not an easy or rapid process, and the role of foreigners in facilitating it is fraught with pitfalls, but skillful outsiders have helped assist such a process in other countries. Through its roundtables, the December 21 accord could provide, for the first time, a means for Haitians to develop this sense of national unity.

Third, state institutions need to be strengthened in order to improve the lives of Haitians. The late Dr. Paul Farmer, who was involved in public health in Haiti for decades, frequently lamented the fact that the public sector is traditionally ignored in Haiti as government and private sector donors flock to help. He noted that after the 2010 earthquake only one percent of US assistance was channeled through state institutions. Policymakers undoubtedly were fearful of corruption and were always in a hurry to deliver, and some came with a private sector bias. But in the end, it has left



Haiti's Prime Minister Ariel Henry speaks at the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles, California, US, June 2022. Photo credit: Reuters/Mike Blake

Haiti without functional state institutions.

Fourth, the effort will need to be long-term. The US stuck with Colombia through decades of struggle to bring its internal conflict to a successful conclusion, a project that remains unfinished, and a similar long-term approach should be taken with Haiti. It has been subject to a series of six-month UN mandates since the fall of the Duvalier regime in 1986. It now needs fulfillment of the Global Fragility Act's promise of a ten-year plan, not ten one-year plans. And amidst this effort, the temptation to take over or lose interest must be avoided. There is an element of empathy and patience that goes along with the best peacebuilders and stabilizers. It is a rare quality, but those who come to Haiti will need both in rich supply.

With the December 21 accords, and the Global Fragility Act of the Congress, the international community may have the right

architecture for Haiti. But it will require security assistance and diplomatic and political support over an extended period of time to make it work.

One could have picked an easier case than Haiti to test this new architecture for assisting fragile states, but here we are. We should not let the opportunity slip away. *

KEITH MINES

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JST HOSTS
ISRAEL'S
NATIONAL
SECURITY
ADVISOR
TZAHI
HANEGBI





Photo credit: Young-Mi Silverman

On June 12, Israel's National Security Advisor Tzahi Hanegbi addressed the Jerusalem Forum, a new group launched by the JST. The Jerusalem Forum brings together Israeli leaders from across the political spectrum – left, right and center – for off-the-record policy discussions, aiming for creative, fruitful dialogues.

The forum engaged in a lively and constructive debate on the issues that Israel faces today. Hanegbi began by reviewing the growing role of the National Security Council staff in the policy process in Israel. Founded in 1999 by Prime Minister Netanyahu in his first term and for years marginal to policy decisions, Israel's NSC staff is now at the center of the foreign policy and security concerns of Prime Minister Netanyahu's cabinet.

The Cabinet remains focused on two overarching challenges: deterring Iran and broadening the scope of the Abraham Accords. He also spoke to the need to manage wisely the interactions with Palestinian leaders, which he is intensively engaged in.

With a relaxed openness to debate, a refined sense of humor and an impressive ability to mimic the speech and mannerisms of Israel's past leaders, Hanegbi initiated this new format of free exchange of views. The Jerusalem Forum is off to a good start.



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