



THE
JERUSALEM
STRATEGIC
TRIBUNE



TRUMP 2.0 GLOBAL IMPACT

BROADCASTING HOPE
INSPIRING UNDERSTANDING



RADIO
△ BRAHAM



△ BRAHAM
TV

COMING VERY SOON... **STAY TUNED**



Mr. President, Lead the Way Forward

by Ahmed Charai

After four intense years, enduring threats to his life and navigating countless battles, President Donald Trump has achieved what many deemed impossible: he has triumphed once again. The American people have renewed their trust in his leadership, driven by a shared belief in a brighter tomorrow and the enduring promise of the American Dream.

As he once urged America to “Fight, fight,” the country now calls on him to lead. This victory represents more than just a political outcome; it is a testament to the resilience of a leader and the strength of a nation that values its ideals. The journey may have been grueling, but as George Washington wrote, “The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty...is deeply staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people”.

With this election, America renews that experiment. Two of the greatest foreign policy challenges in the coming term will lie in the Middle East and the South China Sea and both require a proactive approach.

EXPANDING ON THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS: A PATH TO PEACE

The Abraham Accords is a groundbreaking initiative of your first term, made possible by the extraordinary dedication and resilience of your team. Jared Kushner, in particular, played a pivotal role, channeling his unwavering commitment and strategic vision to forge historic

peace between Israel and several Arab nations. Together, your leadership and the tenacity of your team achieved a milestone that many thought impossible. The success of these accords proves that diplomacy can yield lasting results. Building on this legacy by expanding the accords could solidify your role as a broker for peace and promote regional stability.

The time is ripe for a new phase: expanding the Accords beyond the Arab states to include Muslim-majority countries in Asia, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia, as well as nations with significant Muslim populations like India and the Philippines. Imagine the impact: Bangladeshi developers working with Israeli tech firms, or Brunei investing in Israeli biotech.

These partnerships could drive economic growth and innovation on both sides. Collaborative projects might focus on technology transfers in agriculture, water management, and healthcare, providing practical solutions to pressing challenges while building lasting bridges of cooperation. Such ties would create fresh opportunities for cultural exchange and understanding, helping to dispel stereotypes and promote mutual respect. By highlighting shared interests, the US can play a pivotal role in fostering peace and prosperity across diverse populations.

Expanding the Accords also strengthens the US position in countering Iran, which continues to advance its nuclear program and support destabilizing forces across the region. Iran’s proxies threaten critical trade routes, and the Iranian regime’s policies pose risks that reach far beyond its borders. Countries like Yemen and Lebanon are severely affected by Iranian influence, adding to

regional instability. By supporting a coalition that encourages Iran to engage rather than destabilize, you could lay a strong foundation for a more peaceful Middle East.

BALANCING INFLUENCE IN ASIA: PARTNERSHIPS OVER DEPENDENCE

In the Far East, offering Muslim-majority nations an alternative to China's influence enhances peace and prosperity for America's allies while countering Chinese dominance. China has aggressively pursued economic partnerships in Southeast Asia, often using debt diplomacy to expand its influence. By promoting partnerships that tie Israel's successes to the needs of Muslim-majority nations, the United States could shift geopolitical dynamics in favor of its allies.

One way to begin is by creating technology hubs in collaboration with Israel that would attract significant Western investment. These hubs could serve as centers of innovation, where countries like Indonesia and Malaysia could develop their tech industries with Israeli expertise. The US could play a vital role in facilitating this process, ensuring that these nations gain economic independence rather than becoming beholden to foreign debt.

A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO RUSSIA

Another complex geopolitical challenge awaits in Eastern Europe, where the war in Ukraine has taken a heavy toll on both nations and the global community. While Ukraine deserves to protect its sovereignty, it's essential to recognize that Russia also has security concerns regarding NATO's eastward expansion. Addressing this sensitive issue will require thoughtful negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, fostering a sustainable peace that acknowledges both parties' needs.

Consider the economic potential of collaboration: Ukraine, as one of the world's largest grain exporters, could help provide food security for Russia and its allies if trade barriers were lifted. The current conflict has disrupted global grain supplies, leading to food shortages worldwide. By establishing cooperative agricultural trade, both nations could see significant economic benefits, stabilizing their economies and contributing to global food security. In turn, Russia could supply Ukraine

with energy, reducing its dependency on more distant sources. Joint economic projects, especially in border regions, could serve as confidence-building measures, replacing confrontation with collaboration.

As you outlined in *The Art of the Deal*, successful negotiation requires respecting both the past and the potential for a collaborative future. Ukraine will need a robust framework of international support to secure its sovereignty while encouraging Russia to engage constructively. The combination of economic incentives and security assurances could lay the groundwork for a new chapter of peace.

LEADING WITH STRENGTH AND VISION

Mr. President, intelligence and creativity can resolve even the world's most persistent problems. When you change incentives, you change outcomes. Now more than ever, the world needs a United States that defends democracy with wisdom and vigor. The challenges ahead are formidable, yet they present opportunities for the US to reassert its leadership on the global stage.

A strategic approach that emphasizes diplomacy and partnership will be crucial. By engaging with allies and fostering meaningful connections, the US can champion the values of democracy and cooperation that have historically defined American foreign policy.

The world is watching, Mr. President. The choices you make in the coming months will resonate far beyond America's borders. Great things happen when leaders rise to meet history with courage and resolve. *

AHMED CHARAI

Publisher

Ahmed Charai is the publisher of the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune and the CEO of a Morocco-based media conglomerate. He is on the board of directors of the Atlantic Council, the International Crisis Group, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, the Center for the National Interest, and the International Advisory Council of United States Institute of Peace.

3 — Letter from the Publisher

Mr. President, Lead the Way Forward

by Ahmed Charai

TRUMP 2.0

6 — Trump II Will Be Different

by John J. Hamre

10 — Trump Returns

by Dov S. Zakheim

MIDDLE EAST

14 — Trump Administration Faces a Suddenly Promising Middle East

by James Jeffrey

20 — Two State Solution: Temporarily Closed for Renovations

by Koby Huberman

24 — Going on Offense, Designating the Muslim Brotherhood

by Robert Silverman

INDO-PACIFIC

30 — The Future of the US–China Relationship

by Drew Thompson

36 — A South Asia Roadmap

by Tunku Varadarajan

40 — Will Bangladesh Turn Islamist?

by Salil Tripathi

EURASIA

44 — Rethinking America’s Ukraine Policy

by Nikolas K. Gvosdev

48 — Germany Heads Toward Elections

by Jacob Heilbrunn

54 — Azerbaijan Between Triumph and Turbulence

by Ksenia Svetlova

58 — The West Should Develop the Trans–Caspian Trade Corridor

by Daniel Runde

AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

62 — Africa in the Second Trump Administration

by J. Peter Pham

67 — Will the Next International Crisis Be in Africa?

by James Foggo

70 — Egypt’s Somalia Gamble

by Michael Rubin

76 — Under Lula, Brazil Aims High But Falls Short

by Richard M. Sanders

ESSAYS AND BOOK REVIEWS

82 — Elon Musk and The Allure of the American Spirit

by Ahmed Charai

86 — The Axis of Expansionists

by Dan Negrea

90 — What the United States Should and Should Not Do in the Middle East

by Michael Mandelbaum

94 — A Case for Annexing the West Bank

by Robert Silverman



WWW.JSTRIBUNE.COM

Publisher

Ahmed Charai,
Chairman & CEO of
World Herald Tribune, Inc.

Editor-in-Chief

Robert Silverman

Editor-at-Large

Jacob Heilbrunn

Board of Directors

Gen. James Jones

Ahmed Charai

Admiral James Foggo III

Board of Advisors

Hon. Dov Zakheim, Chairman

Gen. James Clapper

Hon. John Hamre

Gen. Yaakov Amidror

Ambassador Anne W. Patterson

Ambassador Bilahari Kausikan

Ambassador Eric Edelman

Ambassador Atul Keshap

Gen. Ruth Yaron

Dan Meridor

Jerusalem Forum

Yossi Beilin

Dan Ben-David

Fleur Hassan-Nahoum

Martin Kramer

Ehud Yaari

USA: 2700 Woodley Road NW

Washington DC 20008

ISRAEL: 14 Aminadav Street

Jerusalem 9354914

editor@jstribune.com

Art Direction & Design

SoGold, Paris, France

Printed by

GMS Print, Casablanca,

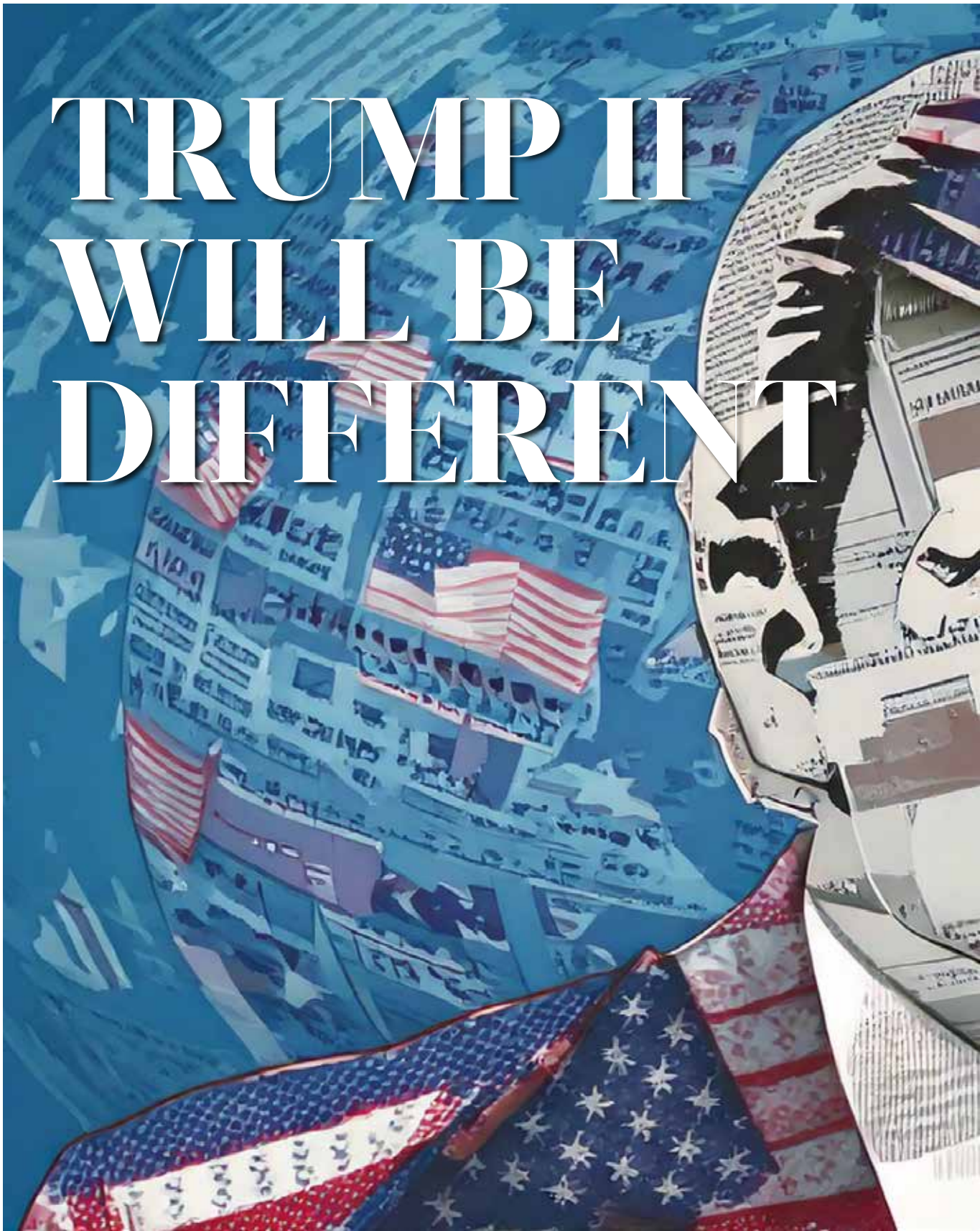
Morocco

**The Jerusalem Strategic
Tribune**

is published by World Herald
Tribune, Inc.

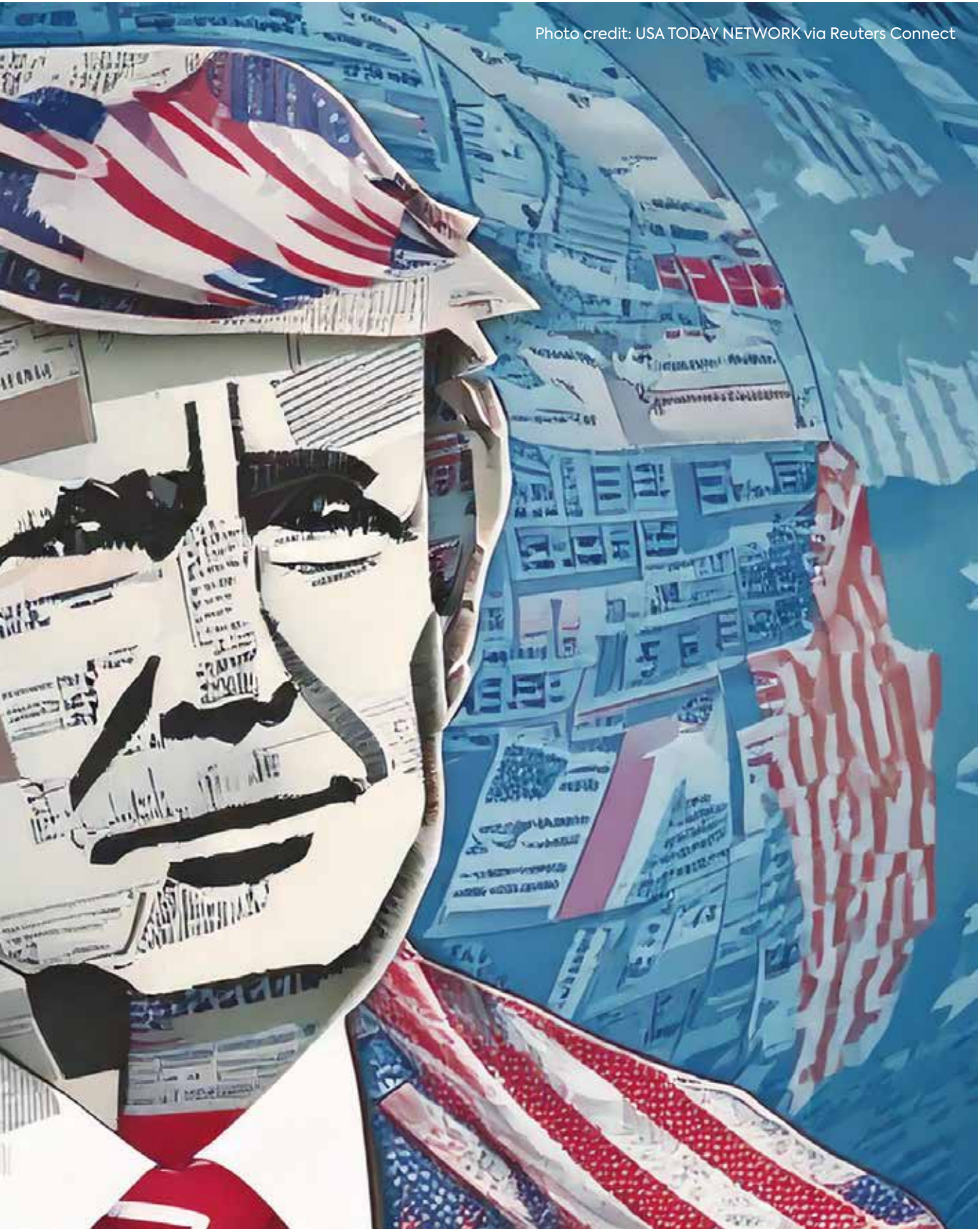
Washington DC – USA

TRUMP II WILL BE DIFFERENT



TRUMP II WILL BE DIFFERENT

Photo credit: USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters Connect





by John J. Hamre

Donald Trump's resounding victory has potentially tectonic implications for allies, friends and the world. People are drawing conclusions by extrapolating from Trump's actions in his first term. I think it could be a bit different this time.

First, despite Trump's campaign style as performance art, there was more structure and substance to his campaign this time. He selected Susie Wiles, a real professional, to be his campaign manager and stayed with her strategy throughout the campaign. And he just appointed her to be his chief of staff. This suggests Trump II could be less chaotic and undisciplined than we saw in his first term.

Second, the Trump team assembled substance matter experts to develop policy positions during the campaign, and this team is now the core of his transition planning. Trump didn't think he would win the first time and never bothered to assemble a real transition team. It is different this time. I am seeing some of the more successful executives from his first term now playing roles in the transition, again

suggesting there will be more structure and discipline.

Third, Republicans likely will control both houses of Congress, though the deep fault lines within the Republican party will continue to confound rapid action. Most likely, the Trump administration will make tax relief the primary focus of his legislative agenda. It is the one thing that generally binds together the disparate voices in the Republican Party. And the Washington influence lobby has been gearing up for months. The rest of his agenda will depend on actions he can take through unilateral executive authority.

What does Trump II mean for allies and partner countries? Here I find some confusion. Clearly, Trump's economic agenda is to drive up the cost of imports to such a degree that companies will move manufacturing back to the US. This clearly has inflationary implications, and I don't think that dynamic has yet been factored in. Trump's campaign rhetoric and campaign documents clearly point toward a very aggressive economic confrontation with China, stating clearly that he intends to revoke China's most-favored-nation trade status. His speeches and documents bristle with aggressive intentions on trade policy, including re-negotiating unfair trade agreements (read

the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement and the US-Mexico-Canada Free Trade Agreement.)

But his references to hard security issues are vaguer. When it comes to NATO and partner countries, the campaign platform just states the US will “strengthen alliances by ensuring that our Allies must meet their obligations to invest in our common defense.” When it comes to East Asia, Taiwan is conspicuously absent from the campaign platform. Instead, it states “we will champion strong, sovereign and independent nations in the Indo-Pacific.”

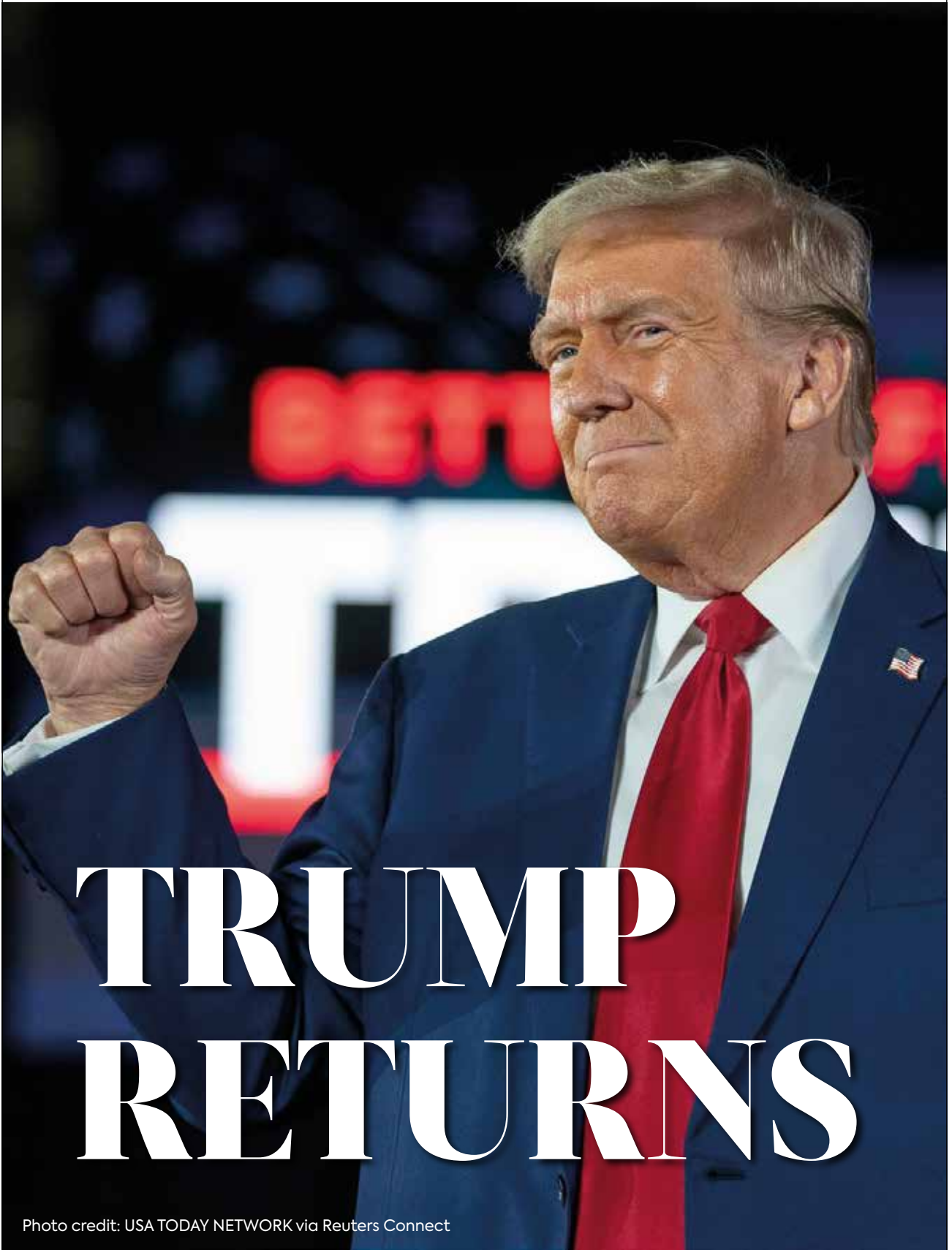
Specific military commitments in the campaign platform focus on using navy forces to inspect inbound ships and interdict drug shipments, and to use the military to round up illegal aliens committing crimes.

There is no question that Trump II will continue his “America First” agenda, but with curious and ambiguous references to how he will conduct foreign and security policy. One should be careful not to read too much into campaign literature. It is designed, after all, to stir sympathetic support without binding the candidate to any specific course of action. But one would also be mistaken to dismiss these statements as just the script of an actor, detached from real intent.

The second Trump administration likely will emphasize a confrontational economic posture with concrete goals, but a somewhat ambiguous security agenda with America in the lead but with details to be worked out as circumstances dictate. These two spheres, however, cannot be treated in isolation, especially in Asia. If Trump II is to have a coherent approach to global matters, one sphere will have to recede to the other. *

JOHN J. HAMRE

Dr. John J. Hamre is a former US deputy secretary of defense, and the president and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He also served as chairman of the Defense Policy Board and as a professional staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.



TRUMP RETURNS

Photo credit: USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters Connect



by *Dov S. Zakheim*

Donald Trump's victory by an unassailable margin has shocked America's bicoastal liberal intelligentsia. A majority of media pundits, whether talking heads or press columnists, could not imagine that the former and now future president could do anything more than eke out a narrow electoral victory. They simply could not comprehend how Americans other than Trump's MAGA base could vote for the man.

A good part of this reaction to Trump's victory is utter disdain for so-called ordinary Americans, especially white males, the majority of whom do not have a college education. Liberal Washington Post columnist Ruth Marcus sums up both the disdain and the arrogance behind it. A graduate of Yale and Harvard Law School, Marcus stated: "it seems to have turned out that the smartest bet that Trump & Co. made was to focus on getting men away from their video games and to the polls." Which males did she have in mind? Not presumably Ivy League-educated men; she seems to think that only Hillary Clinton's "deplorables" play video games.

Voters' concerns with the economy and immigration certainly drove Trump's victory, the Republican return to Senate majority and, at the time of writing, a likely majority of the House of Representatives as well. Democrats insist the voting public simply did not realize that the economy had improved under the Biden Administration's leadership, which indeed it had in a macro sense. It did not, however, result in lower gasoline prices, a major concern for

Americans who drive cars, which is to say, most of them. Nor did it result in lower food prices or in more available housing.

Harris did not inspire any confidence regarding her proposals for alleviating the economic woes of millions of Americans. Indeed, her plan for an industrial policy was panned even by more liberal economists. Industrial policy – government efforts to control sectors of the economy by means such as subsidies, tax incentives and a variety of regulations – have rarely achieved their objectives in other countries, or for that matter, in the United States.

Harris likewise did not convince voters that she had a real solution to the challenge of illegal immigration that continued to plague the country throughout the Biden Administration's tenure. Her own record for dealing with the issue was at best mixed. Biden had assigned her to focus on immigration policy, especially to work with Central American states that were the greatest source of illegal migrants. Yet Harris only visited these countries once, and generally demonstrated almost no aptitude for developing ideas as to how to stem the flow of these migrants. It is noteworthy that Trump appears to have won about 40 percent of the Hispanic vote; it appears that Americans of Hispanic origin are as opposed to illegal immigration as their non-Hispanic neighbors.

Harris's prime campaign issue was that of women's reproductive rights. Indeed, even after it was clear that she had lost the election, she reiterated her support for a liberal abortion policy in her concession speech, which, incidentally, she delayed giving for many hours after the election outcome was undeniable. Yet it is not at all clear that abortion was as important an issue as she and the Democrats thought it



Photo credit: Reuters

was. Harris certainly did not receive anything like the support from women that she had anticipated. On the other hand, Harris' support for transgender rights may well have alienated suburban "soccer moms," who would not want their children to compete in sports activities with transgender children. Among these women, this concern may well have outweighed their support for women's "choice."

Harris' complete silence on the prevalence in industry and especially in academia of Diversity, Equality and Inclusion programs, a favorite of progressives, likewise alienated many Americans who felt that they suffered from the discrimination that these programs engender.

Donald Trump's attitudes on all of the aforementioned issues have stood in sharp contrast to those of Harris. They likewise have differed sharply on international issues. Trump is a strong advocate of tariffs, especially directed at China. Yet it is not clear that whatever economic measures he might take against China will be matched by support for Taiwan's efforts

to deter a Chinese invasion. Similarly, he has little sympathy for Ukraine, and promises to find a solution to the war, which probably involves having Ukraine cede to Russia both its four eastern oblasts and Crimea.

Trump is very unhappy with America's NATO European partners. He wants them to increase their spending on defense until they have reached a level of three per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). NATO's current objective is two per cent and not all of the allies have reached even that level. However frustrated Trump may be with the Europeans—and he also has little love for the European Union—it is unlikely that he can pull America out of the Alliance. The 2024 National Defense Authorization Act prevents a president from withdrawing from NATO without the approval of two-thirds of the Senate, which Trump will not be able to commandeer, even from the soon to be Republican-dominated Senate. Still, Trump has other means to undermine NATO cohesion. These include withdrawing from, or at least

boycotting, the activities of NATO's Integrated Military Command, refusing to name American military leaders to senior NATO military and civilian positions, and cutting back on American financial support for the organization.

On the other hand, Trump can be expected to continue the strong support for Israel that he demonstrated time and again during his first term in office. While he has on occasion had an uneasy relationship with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it has not been nearly as bad as Bibi's relations with Barack Obama or for that matter, Joe Biden. Moreover, Trump and Netanyahu currently seem to be on good terms, and their policies regarding Hamas, Hizbullah and Iran mesh well, though Trump hopes to resolve the Gaza crisis as quickly as he plans to resolve Ukraine.

Trump is likely to pursue the same hard line towards Iran that marked his first administration. That means the return of "Maximum Pressure," and thereby drastically reducing the country's GDP. Moreover, should Iran launch another missile and drone attack against Israel, Trump is likely to provide Jerusalem whatever military support it needs, including weapons, ammunition or operations both from the ground and the air to supplement Israel's own defenses. Indeed, given his hostility to the Ayatollahs, Trump could go even further, allowing American combat operations alongside those of Israel.

Trump was angry during the campaign that he was not winning the support of Jewish Americans. Indeed, 79 percent of Jewish voters appear to have supported Harris, according to one exit poll. Yet the percentages were more than reversed with regard to Orthodox Jews. Trump garnered at least an equal if not higher percentage of voters from that community, who count David Friedman, Trump's ambassador to Israel, as well as Jared and Ivanka, among their number.

Trump sees himself as the father of the Abraham Accords, and given his relationships with Saudi Arabia (as well as those of his so-in-law Jared Kushner) he may well press Riyadh to join the Accords sooner rather than later. Trump also has many other friends in the region. For example, the King of Morocco was among the first to congratulate him on his electoral victory.

Morocco, like Israel, has reasons to thank the president-elect. It was during his first term that the United States finally recognized the Western Sahara as part of Morocco— in exchange for which Rabat joined the Abraham Accords.

Some of America's Arab friends, like the United Arab Emirates, are apprehensive that Trump will show more favor to the Saudis than to anyone else. On the other hand, none of the Emiratis, Saudis or, for that matter, Bahrainis will shed many tears if Trump presses the Qataris to close the Hamas office in Doha, and indeed, to stop funding the terrorists. The Qataris have some leverage over Washington because they host the massive Al-Udeid Air Base. Yet they need to recall that the base is only located in their country because the Saudis wanted US forces out of King Khalid Air Base. Should the Qataris prove uncooperative, Trump could order the Air Force to relocate yet again.

Trump is widely seen as a transactional figure, and he might well alter many of his foreign policy stances. To some extent, his policies will be a function of what his advisors propose. While many names are already being bandied about for the roles of Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense and National Security Advisor in particular, such speculation is entirely worthless. Presidents at times choose top officials about whom those inside the Washington Beltway know very little. And Trump has many business friends and acquaintances very much outside the Beltway. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the one country that probably can count most on Trump's support is Israel. His daughter and son-in-law will see to that, even if neither of them plays an official role in the second Trump administration. *

— DOV S. ZAKHEIM

Dov S. Zakheim is Chair of the Board of Advisors of the JST, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Vice Chair of the Foreign Policy Research Institute. He is a former US under secretary of defense (2001–2004) and deputy under secretary of defense (1985–1987).



**TRUMP
ADMINISTRATION
FACES A
SUDDENLY
PROMISING
MIDDLE EAST**





by James Jeffrey

BACKGROUND

The second Trump administration will face immediate foreign policy dilemmas in all three Eurasian fronts. This paper concentrates on the Middle East, but the competing demands of Europe and East Asia, and the links among all of them, influence decisions everywhere. The dramatic events of the past year open the door to a regional breakthrough on the order of the post-Yom Kippur war of 1973 and post-Kuwait war of 1991.

Predicting any administration's foreign policy priorities beyond the most basic (keep America strong and safe) is a challenge. To be sure, analysts can draw on the first Trump administration for guidance. But even in consecutive eight-year administrations the second term foreign policy agenda is often different (e.g., Obama, Bush). With Trump, term two will see a totally new foreign policy team, and a president with a powerful popular mandate and an even deeper disregard for foreign policy conventions than in the first term.

Most importantly, the world has changed dramatically in the past eight years. First, despite many Americans' despondency with the state of the nation, the US has emerged from fifteen years of domestic, international, financial and epidemic crises in a more powerful position than its competitors and partners. Second, the new administration faces roaring wars in two of the three fronts, and a possible conflagration

(Taiwan, North Korea) in the third. Finally, the "axis of resistance" globally has shifted under the pressure of the Ukraine war.

In 2017, China, as the "pacing military threat" and economic rival of the US, shaped policy thinking. While China remains the strongest rival, its relative strength versus the US, apart from some military capabilities, has diminished. The pacing "geostrategic challenge" now is Russia, dragging North Korea, Iran, and (less successfully) China along in an ever-tighter alliance as a consequence of its war in Ukraine. Given the limited impact China or Russia now have on Middle East security, they are not currently central to Middle East policy-making but need to be considered.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

President Trump will inherit three conflicts, Israel-Hamas, Israel-Hizbullah, and Israel-Iran, at some level of ferocity or relative calm depending on developments in the next weeks. He will have to recognize that Iran is the force behind all three conflicts, that Israel supported by the US has landed major blows to the entire Iranian network, and that the US must quickly drive decisions, or events will drive the administration in directions no one wants. Specifically:

*** Develop a Strategy.** It is tempting to come out swinging on individual crises but, to avoid flailing, the administration needs a

regional strategy. The Biden version has not been adequate. Such a strategy must first answer the question: what national interests does the US want to advance? That's the easy part, as they have changed little over decades: preserve stability, ensure flow of hydrocarbons, facilitate navigation, advance alliance relationships, deter terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and stem destabilizing population displacements. The next step is to understand the primary threat to these interests: Iran over the past twenty years, steadily gaining ground until October 7. What's harder is implementation. This paper does not prescribe specifics, only likely directions. The key element is a comprehensive approach to Iran, including its weapons programs and asymmetric warfare, and its satraps in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Gaza, building on the weakened position in which they now all find themselves.

*** Bring the Gaza and Lebanon Campaigns to a Successful Finish.** If not accomplished by the outgoing administration, this will be the immediate operational priority. Israel has achieved most of its military objectives, and continuing military efforts likely represent diminishing returns on expensive investments, of casualties, money, and diplomatic attrition. Increasingly, the key to lasting victory now is in the "day after" diplomatic arrangements to build on military success. Arrangements that have worked include those following the Yom Kippur, Kuwait and Bosnia wars. Those that failed include Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon after initial American or Israel military victories. Successful arrangements must ensure, as UN Security Council Resolution 1701 in 2006 famously did not, that foes (in this case Hamas and Hizbullah) do not reconstitute. That means oversight of their activities, permanent cut-off of resupply, and authority and willingness to intervene if reconstitution begins. Political and reconstruction initiatives have to reinforce security provisions and encourage shifts in populations' support for terrorism. Finally, the enemy in each case must accept it has

been defeated, agree to proposed diplomatic arrangements, and in the case of Hamas return the hostages.

*** Start Thinking About Israel-Palestinian Relations.** Pushing Israel and the Palestinian Authority for a breakthrough under present conditions would be counterproductive. But the administration needs to think about options, and reach out to both Israelis and Palestinians, as eventual progress on these relations is critical for strategic success.

LONGER-TERM PROGRAM

Once the administration has gained its "sea legs," and helped calm the current conflicts, it can focus on long-term strategy. Likely major elements given enduring interests, past administrations' experience, and statements by President Trump, might include:

*** Strengthen the "By, With, and Through" approach with Israel, Arab states, and Turkey (to the extent its mercurial leader plays a positive regional role).**

Partners are crucial to augment American capabilities and reduce the burden on critical military and diplomatic assets. Arab states, despite recent "hedging" towards Tehran, share a common interest in containing Iran, and building on the Abraham Accords, particularly Saudi-Israeli rapprochement, is the most important step. But this requires Israeli restraint in the West Bank and an outline of a generally acceptable solution to the Palestinian issue. Likewise, the US and Israel must take tough decisions on Saudi Arabia's security, weapons, and civil nuclear demands. American credibility in restraining Iran, recently demonstrated but previously questioned, is central to alliance integrity.

*** Contest Iran Throughout the Region.** Apart from 2018-20, over the past twenty years Washington never effectively pursued this critical element of Iran containment. Detailed approaches will vary by country and situation, but the general, brutal rule of thumb should

be, whatever Iran and proxies seek, the US and partners oppose. Syria is the main success here in freezing Iran's advance, initiated by Trump, and maintained through the Biden administration. Washington should continue its minimal troop presence there and coordinate with Israel, Turkey, Syrian opposition forces, and Arab states to keep Assad neutral. The Houthis, if their attacks continue, must be hit harder. Only an unimaginable ground invasion guarantees their demise, but a more robust American response – even if it does not deter them – will show a resolve that is now questioned. Iraq and Lebanon are more complex. Washington's longstanding policy of supporting reflexively the official governments and non-proxy elements in these countries, on the assumption they are able and willing to counter Tehran's creeping state capture, has not worked. A tough love approach along the lines Secretary of State Pompeo used with Iraq – threatening to withdraw support and inflict pain, absent more spine against Iran – should be implemented.

*** On Iran's Nukes, Emphasize Force, De-emphasize Diplomatic Wrangling.**

October 7 and Iran's 2024 missile attacks demonstrate dramatically that keeping Iran from a nuclear weapon justifies use of force by both the US and Israel. Maintaining credibility that those states will so act is thus the primary restraint on Iran. Nuclear discussions with Teheran can be conducted, but only with two understandings. First, they have never kept Iran more than a year from nuclear breakout, and second, Iran has deliberately doled out minor concessions on its program to counter responses to its pernicious regional actions.

*** Talk with the Iranians.** Washington-Tehran contacts, assuming partners are informed, have real if limited advantages. They can avoid or resolve serious incidents and advance deconfliction, similar to negotiations with the USSR. But such talks usually are not with the real decision-makers (the apparatus around the Supreme Leader and Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps), will not “flip”



Iran's revolutionary mindset, and do not substitute for rigorous containment.

*** Avoid Distraction from other Middle East Issues.** Regional stability rests on more than containing Iran, even though it's the first priority. Russia and China while currently not major regional players can make trouble. But for now both are playing defense. Despite their ties with Tehran, they prioritize, in Russia's case, its foothold in Syria, and in China's, flow of oil and other trade. The US can exploit these interests to further tie Iran down. ISIS and other Sunni terrorist elements need to stay defeated, but that



Abraham Accords Signing Ceremony at the White House, September 2020.
Photo credit: Gripas Yuri/ABACA via Reuters Connect

should increasingly be the mission of regional states and the Europeans. American efforts to eradicate social, political, and religious root causes of instability undoubtedly will continue, but given their sorry track record, they are no substitute for the hard work of containing security threats. *

JAMES JEFFREY

James Jeffrey was deputy national security advisor of the United States from 2007–2008. He also served as US ambassador to Iraq, Turkey and Albania, as Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, and as a US infantry officer in Vietnam. He is currently the chair of the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center.



Photo: Shutterstock

TWO STATE SOLUTION TEMPORARILY CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS



by Koby Huberman

Four months after October 7, 2023 I met an Egyptian acquaintance, and we tried to make sense of the situation. He offered the thought that “the two-state solution was never as relevant as it is now. Everyone understands that the Palestinian issue is back on the global agenda, and it is understood that there is no other solution.”

My impression is different. The two-state solution suffered a severe blow on October 7 and is not about to be realized anytime soon. New temperaments have surfaced in the Middle East – in Israel, among Palestinians, and regionally – that lead me to this conclusion.

The Hamas assault gave Hamas and Iran a shot at eliminating the intermediate step (in their view) of a two-state solution by moving directly to eliminating Israel. And in Israel, the damage done to actual security, and to the subjective sense of security of Israeli citizens, caused Israel as a nation to sober up and to change regarding any future agreement.

Palestinians, Israelis, and regional countries now have an opportunity to “recalculate route” as navigation software tells us, and put together a course of action better suited for achieving a diplomatic outcome and generating stability. So as to bear the burden of a new agreed framework, the wobbly and cracked structure

of a two-state solution needs to be closed for renovations. Temporarily, hopefully.

HAMAS REFRAMED THE CONFLICT BY SEEKING TO UNDO THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

By launching a war, Hamas and its partners have undermined some of the basic assumptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

*** Reframing the conflict as a multi-front regional struggle** – Iran has taken control of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation as part of its effort to build a “ring of fire” around Israel. The war is not just between Israel and Hamas, but rather fought on several synchronized fronts, coordinated by Iran and sustained by terror in the name of Islamist political ideology.

*** Undermining the narrative of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 lines** – Hamas made it clear that it ignores the armistice lines (which held from 1949 until the Six Day War) as a basis for a territorial compromise – and sought to conquer areas beyond them. In other words, the struggle led by Hamas no longer upholds the narrative adopted by the PLO since 1988 and the Oslo Accords, which calls for national self-determination alongside Israel, but rather supplants it with a radical Islamist agenda “from the river to the sea,” terminating the Zionist project and denying Jews their rights. It has thus turned its back on its own policy document of May 2017, which seemed at the time to indicate a willingness to accept a

Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, in the context of an internal Palestinian accord (i.e. between Hamas and Fatah). Indeed, Hamas has now driven Palestinian national aspirations not only back to 1948 but rather a hundred years ago, when the purpose (as in the Hebron massacre of 1929) was to butcher the Jews.

The Hamas assault did put the Palestinian question back on the table. But it undermined the conditions necessary for the realization of the traditional two state solution, based on mutual recognition of the right of self determination of both peoples in the land. Hamas demolished the remnants of trust in the Israeli public for the viability of the Palestinian side as a partner, even among the much reduced “peace camp.”

ISRAEL HAS SOBERED UP

Israelis feel they cannot take the risk of a Palestinian state now, since this state would be dominated by Iranian-backed radicals, and by young hotheads leading a desperate population, incapable of governance and responsible behavior. All this amidst growing Iranian pressure on Jordan so as to create an Islamist continuum, and with the international arena potentially offering legitimacy for further Palestinian violence.

Israel must now meet two simultaneous challenges:

*** A new security concept** demonstrating national resilience and making it clear that no assault will break the spirit of Israeli society; restoring deterrence at the regional level, and ensuring a decisive response in any arena Israel is challenged in – no longer relying on containment; preparing for a prolonged conflict with Iran and its proxies, based on a rebuilt IDF capability; rebuilding an ironclad partnership with the United States; avoiding hasty compromises which would be perceived as a prize for ‘Abbas or a reward for Hamas aggression; strengthening a regional coalition to deal with common threats and advance security and economic cooperation.

*** A brave stance against messianic extremism** – taking into account the need to face vindictive sentiments generated by the horrors of 7 October; the growing friction in the West Bank; the aspirations of some in Israel for a one- state solution, based on inequality or deportation; a renewed push to expand settlements, so as to make a future separation impossible; attempts to overthrow the status quo in the Temple Mount Compound; and incitement in the social media against Israeli Arabs.

Peace and the end of conflict may not be realistic goals at this stage, but work must begin to reduce the level of violence and lay a path for a future settlement. Based on this multiplicity of challenges, Israel needs to define new priorities, working at one and the same time to achieve a decisive outcome in battle and to generate a regionally driven diplomatic initiative based on security and de-radicalization.

HOW TO FIX A BROKEN CONCEPT?

All of the above leads to one conclusion – seeking to establish a Palestinian state right now is frankly dangerous. Instead, three large steps are needed to lead us to a new settlement, which would perhaps have a new name.

*** New leadership:** Both Israel and the Palestinians need new leaders, rather than those who failed in the last 20 years, and missed the many opportunities offered by the prior peace plans advanced. The Palestinians, backed by the pragmatic Arab states, should choose a new leadership that would improve their conditions and work to secure the legitimate aspiration endorsed in 1988.

In Israel, new elections should result in a government of national cohesion, comprising all pragmatic Zionist forces neutralizing the radicals on both sides. It would endorse the revived security concept outlined above, confront extremism, and would seek a diplomatic strategy based on the commonality of interests between Israel and key Arab states,

facing Iran, and strengthening the Negev Forum as a platform for security, economic, climate, and de-radicalization cooperation.

*** New Ideas:** These should reflect lessons learned from past efforts – those that failed with the Palestinians, and those that succeeded with other Arab partners. Such ideas would abandon the failed bilateral model, warped by the asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinians, and instead structure a regional role backed by an American commitment. A coherent road map defining accepted goals – right from the beginning – should avoid the pitfalls of incremental projects such as Oslo Accords or the Quartet Road Map.

A change of governance and a massive reconstruction in Gaza are necessary first steps; and gradual implementation is inevitable given the impossibility of creating new realities overnight.

*** New Options:** Given the failure of past efforts, new options, some of which may shatter existing templates, should be considered, including:

Two asymmetrical states: a Palestinian mini-state lacking some aspects of sovereign power – demilitarized, its borders with Jordan and Egypt under Israeli control, with its capital not in Jerusalem, and with the “right of return” applicable to its territory, not to that of Israel. A change of these parameters would be considered in 25 years time, subject to fulfillment of mutual obligations.

Reviving a “Trump Plan 2.0” – with a longer timetable for implementation and without the provision for enlarging the Gaza Strip at the expense of the Negev; and with a regional dimension properly integrated, and tightly linked to negotiation and implementation progress.

Iran First – all regional (and international) parties acknowledge no solution can be achieved and no Israeli concessions can be expected until the Iranian regime and its regional and nuclear ambitions have been effectively dealt with.

An international mandate – under which regional and international countries form an interim regime to govern the West Bank and Gaza for a defined period, leading to a negotiated two-state solution once security, stability and regional normalization have been established.

Mutually coordinated one-sided separation measures – reducing friction between the populations, supported by a regional role and by security arrangements.

This essay is written with a sense of pain over the missed opportunities and the failures of past efforts – logical as they may have seemed at the time, and especially since 2002. What is suggested here would probably be rejected by those on the Israeli left still wed to the old two-state solution, by those on the Israeli center right, who fear the loss of security control, and hard right, who entertain messianic visions. But the center of gravity in Israel should join hands with sober elements in the Arab world and the international community willing to take an open-eyed look at threats and opportunities and build upon what has already emerged in terms of regional security cooperation. It is time to renovate, and time to innovate. *

Thanks to Eran Lerman for translating this article from Hebrew into English.

KOBY HUBERMAN

Koby Huberman is the co-founder of the Israeli Regional Initiative (an Israeli civil society effort), and the co-author of the Israeli Peace Initiative of 2011. He is a business strategist and a civil society entrepreneur, focusing on Israeli-Regional-Palestinian diplomacy and cooperation.

GOING ON OFFENSE, DESIGNATING THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

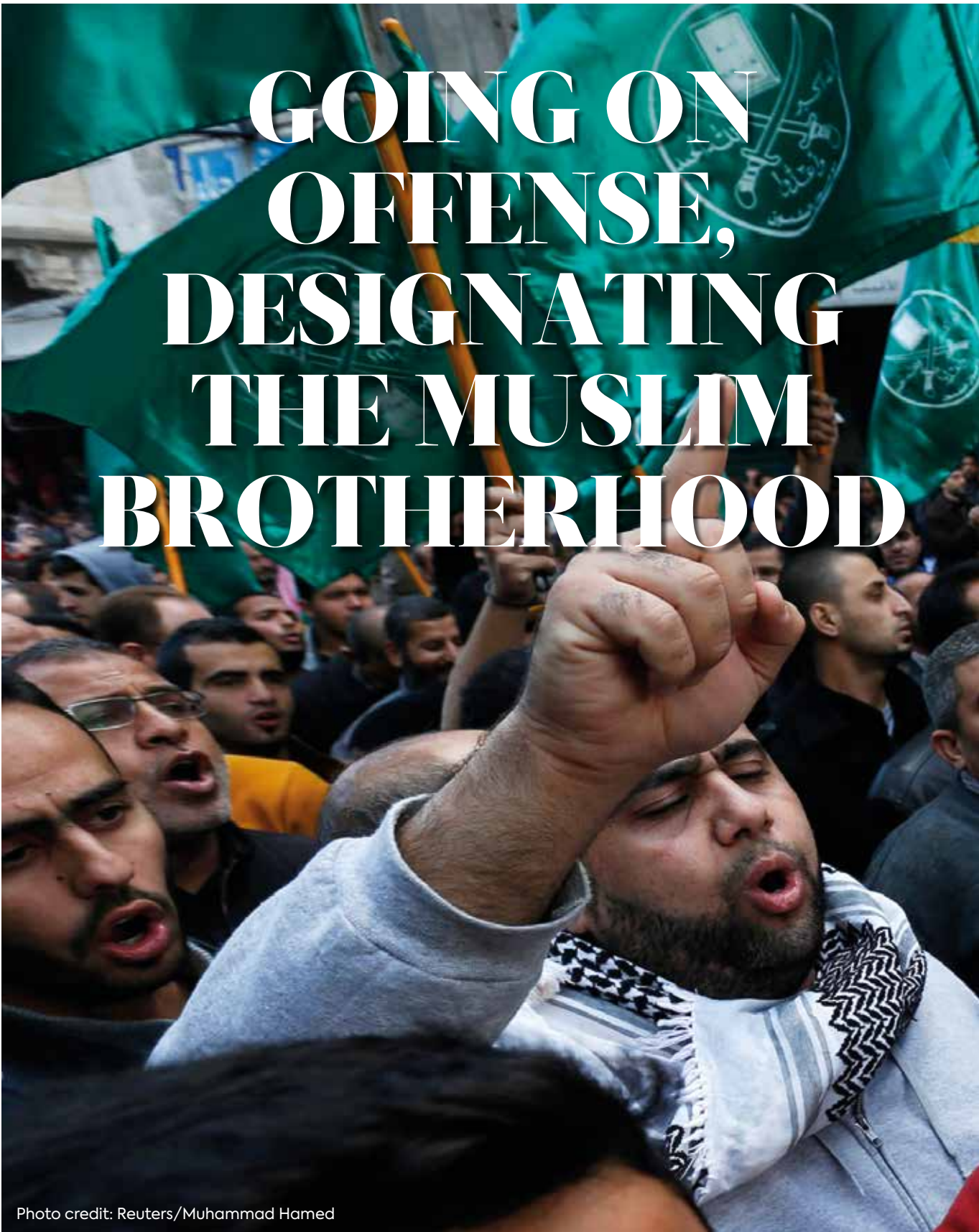


Photo credit: Reuters/Muhammad Hamed

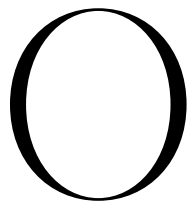




by Robert Silverman

“Dad, open your WhatsApp and see the [photos of] dead Jews. Your son has killed Jews.” “God bless you.” “Dad, I’m calling you from the phone of a Jew! I just killed her and her husband, with my own hands.”

– Intercepted cellphone call, October 7, from Hamas elite unit member



One unanswered question is why Hamas members publicized their brutal murders of women, children, elderly persons and other civilians. The intent wasn’t to terrorize (as Hamas did intend later by publishing pre-execution videos of hostages). The October 7 conversations and videos were shared with other Gazans in celebratory fashion. But why?

For a possible answer, one might return to the Second Intifada of 2000-2004 and the debate surrounding suicide attacks against Israeli civilians. The Islamic law of war is clear that it is impermissible to target non-combatants. But in 2004, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi issued a juridical declaration that all Israelis – men and women, children and elderly – are combatants and legitimate targets. Qaradawi spoke in the name of the Qatar-based Muslim Brotherhood organ he founded, the International Union of Muslim Scholars, and his declaration was promoted all over the Arabic-speaking world on Qatar’s Al Jazeera television.

The International Union of Muslim Scholars in Qatar, among other Muslim Brotherhood organs, immediately supported and promoted the massacres of October 7. In the Muslim Brotherhood worldview, killing Israeli civilians is politically sanctioned. Thus the pride and exultation of Gazans living for decades under Muslim Brotherhood rule.

Hamas, according to article 2 of its Covenant, is a constituent part of the Muslim Brotherhood. But while Hamas is a charter member (1997) of the US terrorism list, the parent organization is not on it.

The Muslim Brotherhood should be on the list. It uses different means in different places and at different times to achieve the political goal of a universal state governed by Islamic law under a single ruler, a caliph. Among its tools to achieve these political ends is violence. As such, the Muslim Brotherhood should be designated as a foreign terrorist organization under US law.

THE LEGAL AND POLICY CASE FOR DESIGNATING THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Under US law, the Secretary of State is authorized to designate a foreign-based entity as a terrorist organization if it practices politically motivated violence against non-combatants and if it threatens US nationals or US national security.

The key issue for designating the Muslim Brotherhood is the use of violence. In its early years in Egypt of the 1930s and 1940s, the Brotherhood openly adopted violence. Its membership oath was (and perhaps still is) administered by placing one’s hand on a gun



A woman in Khartoum, Sudan with the “Rabia” hand signal which originated with Muslim Brotherhood protestors in Egypt’s Rabia al-Adawiya Square in 2013. Photo credit: Reuters

atop a Koran. Its militia fought other groups, its “Secret Agency” assassinated political leaders, and it organized its own army to invade the newly declared State of Israel in 1948.

After its failed assassination attempt on secular nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1954 and subsequent government crack-down, the Brotherhood went underground in Egypt. It avoided violence in its own name inside Egypt, but not always elsewhere. The Brotherhood spread from Egypt to many other countries, while the Egyptian organization, its Supreme Guide and other leaders constituted an international organization that exercised influence on other national Brotherhood branches.

In Sudan, after strongman Colonel Numeiri allied with the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in 1981, its leader Hasan al-Turabi hosted

Islamist terrorist groups like al-Qaida, Hizbullah and others in Khartoum throughout the 1980s, 1990s and into the 2000s. Much of the political violence in the turbulent Sudan of those decades was committed by Muslim Brotherhood Sudanese army officers, pursuing the organization’s Islamist goals.

Likewise in Gaza, the Muslim Brotherhood organization founded and supported the rise of Islamist terrorist organizations in the 1980s, both Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Hamas openly claims to be part of the Brotherhood and receives support from Brotherhood organizations elsewhere.

Most recently, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has returned to violence following the army overthrow of the Brotherhood government led by President Muhammad Morsi in 2013. It conducted attacks on Egyptian

military and police officers and installations, and on the Myanmar Embassy in Cairo using the names *Hasm* (an Arabic acronym for Forearms of Egypt Movement) and *Liwa al-Thawra* (Legion of the Revolution), which analysts believed to be cut-outs for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

It's true that in some countries, notably Tunisia and Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood operates as a political party without a terrorist affiliate. This is one of the reasons the US Government has refrained from designating the Muslim Brotherhood until now. Instead it prefers “whack-a-mole” designations of various Muslim Brotherhood offshoots or cut-outs, e.g., designating *Hasm* and *Liwa al-Thawra*, while not addressing the core terrorism problem presented by the Brotherhood.

US counterterrorism policy has nevertheless shown itself to be as tactically flexible as the terror groups themselves in non-Muslim Brotherhood contexts. For instance, the PKK based in Turkey and northern Iraq is a designated foreign terrorist organization while its Syrian affiliate, the YPG, is a tactical US ally in the anti-ISIS campaign. Likewise, there should be no contradiction between designating the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization, based on its practice of political violence, while engaging in tactical contacts with its more peaceful affiliates in Tunisia, Jordan and perhaps elsewhere.

One note of caution, however, is to avoid politicizing foreign terrorist designations, as the Biden administration did in February 2021 by delisting Ansarallah (known as the Houthis) despite the lack of any evidence that it had moderated. The Muslim Brotherhood designation must be, and indeed can be, based on a solid legal case and supported by counterterrorism policy goals.

RAMIFICATIONS FOR FOREIGN AND IMMIGRATION POLICY

Designating the Muslim Brotherhood would provide the US government with a powerful set of tools to combat the worldwide network of Hamas supporters who use Brotherhood affiliations. New avenues would allow the

US Treasury to seize assets and freeze bank accounts of terrorists.

It would also provide a reason for Qatar to review its relations with both the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. President Biden recognized Qatar as a major non-NATO ally (a status given to 17 other countries), though Secretary of State Blinken in the past year has repeatedly asked Qatar to expel Hamas. Qatar says no, and that apparently is the end of the conversation. But after a terrorist designation of the Brotherhood, the conversation should be restarted – to avoid the prospect that Qatar could be designated a state sponsor of terrorism. Exiling Hamas might then become the low hanging fruit in the US-Qatar strategic dialogue.

For US immigration policy, the symbolic effect may be more important than its effect on numbers of Brotherhood members banned from immigrating. For instance, the great majority of imams at American mosques do not receive their professional training in the US but immigrate to the US under “special religious workers” visas from countries that have seminaries for training imams. After a Muslim

The Muslim Brotherhood uses violence as one method of furthering its political goals, but other methods include religious rhetoric and imagery, often an atavistic appeal to an imagined return to a universal caliphate. The Muslim Brothers claim to represent all true believers in Islam, but of course they don't.

Brotherhood designation, new scrutiny should be placed on those foreign seminaries to ensure new American imams are not educated in an institution affiliated with the Brotherhood.

OFFSETTING DOMESTIC CONCERNS

The Muslim Brotherhood uses violence as one method of furthering its political goals, but other methods include religious rhetoric and imagery, often an atavistic appeal to an imagined return to a universal caliphate. The Muslim Brothers claim to represent all true believers in Islam, but of course they don't.

I recall hearing a Brotherhood figure invited to speak to a Muslim-Jewish ecumenical conclave in upstate New York. He began by noting that one might be excused for thinking that a simple believer would look at all these Muslims congregating with Jews as sinners destined for hell. Some Muslims in the audience flinched. The speaker invoked the pure simple believer (who of course supported the Muslim Brotherhood view of the religion).

The key problem for a Muslim Brotherhood designation is not its foreign policy complications with a few countries like Qatar and Turkey, but rather domestic concerns with its potential for overbroad implementation on American Muslims. It's a valid concern. Of course, the vast majority of mosque-going Americans aren't in the Muslim Brotherhood. Also not every American Muslim fundamentalist is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The free exercise clause of the First Amendment guarantees the right to practice one's faith including believing in the supremacy of one's own faith. The example of some overbroad applications of the Patriot Act indicates that a Muslim Brotherhood designation could hold similar risks as well.

On the other hand, the expansion of Muslim Brotherhood networks supporting Hamas and other terrorists highlights the risks of inaction on the Brotherhood. And the risks of overbroad application can be offset by careful oversight of our law enforcement agencies and good public diplomacy with American Muslims. We need to clearly distinguish between the orthodox Islam found in most American mosques and material

support, like fund-raising and recruitment, for the Muslim Brotherhood and its Hamas affiliate, Hizbullah and ISIS.

CONCLUSION

The war in the Middle East, and its aftershocks on American college campuses and city streets, give daily evidence of the alliance of militant Islamist organizations that Americans must oppose. For instance, on October 4, Israeli soldiers in Gaza found and freed Fawzia Sido, a young woman of the minority Yazidi faith. In 2014, at age 11, she had been enslaved by ISIS in northern Iraq and trafficked to a Hamas member in Gaza. Now ten years and two children later, she has been reunited with her family.

ISIS and Hamas are analytically two separate organizations, but they share not only common political goals but also common terrorist means. So does the Muslim Brotherhood.

American Jews in particular remain in a condition of shock from the surge of antisemitism coming at them from this Islamist alliance. But this war is not only about Jews and antisemitism. It is about all Americans, including American Muslims who don't want the Brotherhood to define their faith to the outside world.

The foreign terrorist organization designation is an effective and legitimate tool. It should be deployed and implemented in a bipartisan whole-of-government approach to this war. *

ROBERT SILVERMAN

A former US diplomat and president of the American Foreign Service Association, Robert Silverman is a lecturer at Shalem College, senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, and president of the Inter Jewish Muslim Alliance.



Photo credit: Shutterstock



THE FUTURE OF THE US-CHINA RELATIONSHIP



by Drew Thompson

The US-China relationship faces certain tension and rising competition over the next four years. While it is impossible in general to predict specific new administration policies, there are likely to be wide swings between efforts to engage China and seek compromise, with efforts to compete, confront, or even contain Beijing. President Trump will be surrounded by officials who in the past were deeply sceptical of, and several who were openly antagonistic to, China. Secretary of State-designate Marco Rubio was sanctioned by Beijing in 2020. The next National Security Advisor Michael Waltz declared that the Communist Party of China “has entered a Cold War with us, seeks to supplant us, and seeks to defeat us.” President Trump’s trade advisor Robert Lighthizer led trade talks in the first Trump administration, establishing a tariff regime when Xi Jinping did not accept market access provisions. Lighthizer is reportedly preparing a new tariff regime for the next administration. The president-elect calls tariffs “the most beautiful word.”

US AND CHINA PREPARE FOR STRATEGIC COMPETITION

The US Department of Defense began seriously shifting its attention to China following the evacuation from Afghanistan

in August 2021. Investments in military modernization and preparation for conflict with a peer competitor range from modernization of nuclear warheads and delivery systems to reorganization of the US Marine Corps to more effectively fight in the littoral rather than the deserts of the Middle East.

A lack of shared perceptions among US allies in the Pacific adds to the tense security situation. Xi Jinping regularly points out that Taiwan sits at the core of the U.S.-China relationship, making it the most likely flashpoint between the two powers. Taiwan is decoupling from the mainland socially and economically and transforming its military with US support. Taiwan’s vulnerability to China’s military coercion is a key concern for Japan and its own security, but that perception is not shared as acutely by South Korea or the Philippines. Australia is seeking to become more relevant in Northeast Asian security dynamics by acquiring strike capabilities, long-range nuclear submarines and strengthening its security relationship with Japan, but it remains torn between economic dependence on China and its objective of deterring violent changes to the regional status quo. More importantly, Canberra lacks a coherent Taiwan strategy, consigning it to the margins of strategic competition in Asia.

On trade relations with the US, Xi Jinping should expect the future to be challenging. The presumptive appointment of trade lawyer Robert Lighthizer to a senior economic policy position presents Xi the opportunity for negotiations to pick up where the 2018 process



Donald Trump and Xi Jinping in Beijing, November 2017. Photo credit: Reuters/Thomas Peter

left off. Lighthizer's effort to seek reciprocal access to China's market for US companies were rejected by Xi, who remains committed to decoupling China's economy from the West to ensure China's resilience and defense against economic coercion. The Trump Administration may introduce rules of origin for local content that target Chinese companies investing in third countries like Vietnam and Mexico to assemble Chinese components offshore to avoid US tariffs. Threats to revoke China's Permanent Normal Trade Relations status present a political as well as an economic threat to China. Other countries, particularly in the Global South, may

follow the US lead and increase protectionist measures to slow the onslaught of cheap Chinese manufactured goods from flooding their markets and putting domestic industries out of business.

Xi Jinping is preparing his country, not just his military, for conflict. The expansion and modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) since 2000 is the largest military buildup since World War II. The PLA and Coast Guard regularly conduct coercion missions against China's neighbors in the Western Pacific, as well as patrols in US exclusive economic zones. Since 2014, China has expanded military cooperation and joint exercises and patrols with Russia

throughout the Pacific. China has expanded its inventory of nuclear warheads and developed new delivery systems over the past 10 years.

China is also modernizing and expanding civilian militia units and instituting compulsory military training for high-school and college students. New national security laws and the Military-Civil-Fusion program subordinate the private sector to the needs of national defense. Stockpiling critical materials, implementing industrial policies such as Made in China 2025 and Dual Circulation, and reviving a Mao Zedong-era program known as the “third front” (moving strategic industries to secure bastions in China’s hinterlands away from vulnerable coasts) reveal the scope of China’s preparations for a total war with the United States. A Trump presidency will not change this trend towards Beijing increasing its military capabilities and preparations for conflict.

The incoming Trump Administration appears committed to transforming the Defense Department to focus on warfighting, but threats to purge generals on ideological grounds and decimate the civil service are likely to diminish morale and readiness, leaving it less prepared to compete with China. A steady narrative of support for embattled allies such as Taiwan would be a constructive contribution to deterrence.

HOW MIGHT CHINA RESPOND?

Xi Jinping and the Chinese government have a range of practical and strategic responses to the Trump administration. The Biden Administration placed great importance on direct interactions between Biden and Xi, as well as the “Sullivan-Wang channel” between Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor, and Wang Yi, Director of the Central Committee of the Communist Party’s Foreign Affairs Commission Office. Recurring dialogues between governmental departments – which numbered more than 50 in the George W. Bush Administration – steadily withered. One early

sign of China’s intent will be whether Xi lifts or ignores the unspecified sanctions on future Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

The lengthy readout of Xi’s meeting with Biden at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Peru on November 16 reveals China’s concerns about ideological competition with the US. Xi and his colleagues were likely relieved that Michael Pompeo and Matt Pottinger appear to have been passed over. Pompeo’s outspoken support for Taiwan independence, and Pottinger’s Chinese-language speeches, intended to bypass China’s propaganda apparatus and reach Chinese people directly, raised concern within the Chinese Communist Party, which is fixated on ideological and political security.

US domestic policies and programs might raise further concerns and trigger a reaction from Beijing. Trump’s pledge to conduct mass deportations of illegal aliens will undoubtedly affect tens of thousands of Chinese citizens which Beijing cannot ignore. US technology or critical materials export restrictions hamper Beijing’s economic development, potentially impacting employment and social stability.

The lack of robust official communications channels and a mutually heightened sense of threat and vulnerability create a recipe for misperception, miscalculation, and potentially outright conflict. Despite the lack of certainty and clear risks, however, there may be upside opportunities for China from the Trump administration.

Despite the lack of certainty and clear risks, however, there may be upside opportunities for China from the Trump administration.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHINA?

Trump admires Xi, creating an opportunity for Xi to build a personal bridge with Trump to pursue Beijing's interests. Trump does not hold emotional attachments to Taiwan and its continued autonomy, though he is not about to trade something for nothing, and Taiwan has more to offer the US than integrated circuits. It is an open question whether Xi can give Trump something of sufficient value to change US policy on Taiwan (I am doubtful), making it likely that Trump enters into futile negotiations and comes away empty-handed just as he did in the 2017-2018 trade negotiations with Xi, (and the 2018-2019 negotiations with Kim Jong-un.)

Trump might fail to persuade US allies to join a competitive approach to hedge against China. Increasing tensions with European allies makes joint economic competition against China a futile effort. Japan, South Korea, the Philippines as well as key European allies are crucial for a competitive strategy to counter China militarily and economically. Demanding allies pay the US for protection, or balance trade in goods is ultimately counter to US interests and plays into Beijing's narratives about the US as an unreliable partner. On the other hand, Beijing will face pushback in Europe over its support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and scepticism in Northeast Asia over its aggressive use of the People's Liberation Army and Coast Guard to coerce neighbors. China's big economy, investment promises and cheap consumer goods are ultimately not sufficient for Northeast Asian states to forsake their security interests for greater economic dependency with China.

Chinese officials and government-linked scholars are unsure about the next Trump Administration. Some hope to find the next Henry Kissinger to establish back-channels to work around China hawks in Congress and the cabinet. Others believe the bilateral relationship will inexorably continue to decline. Some see Trump's perceived disdain for allies as an opportunity for China to continue rising

while America is distracted with its domestic agenda and "America First" policies. Beijing's initial engagements with the new Trump administration will potentially reveal whether Xi is optimistic an accommodation can be reached, or whether confrontation is inevitable.

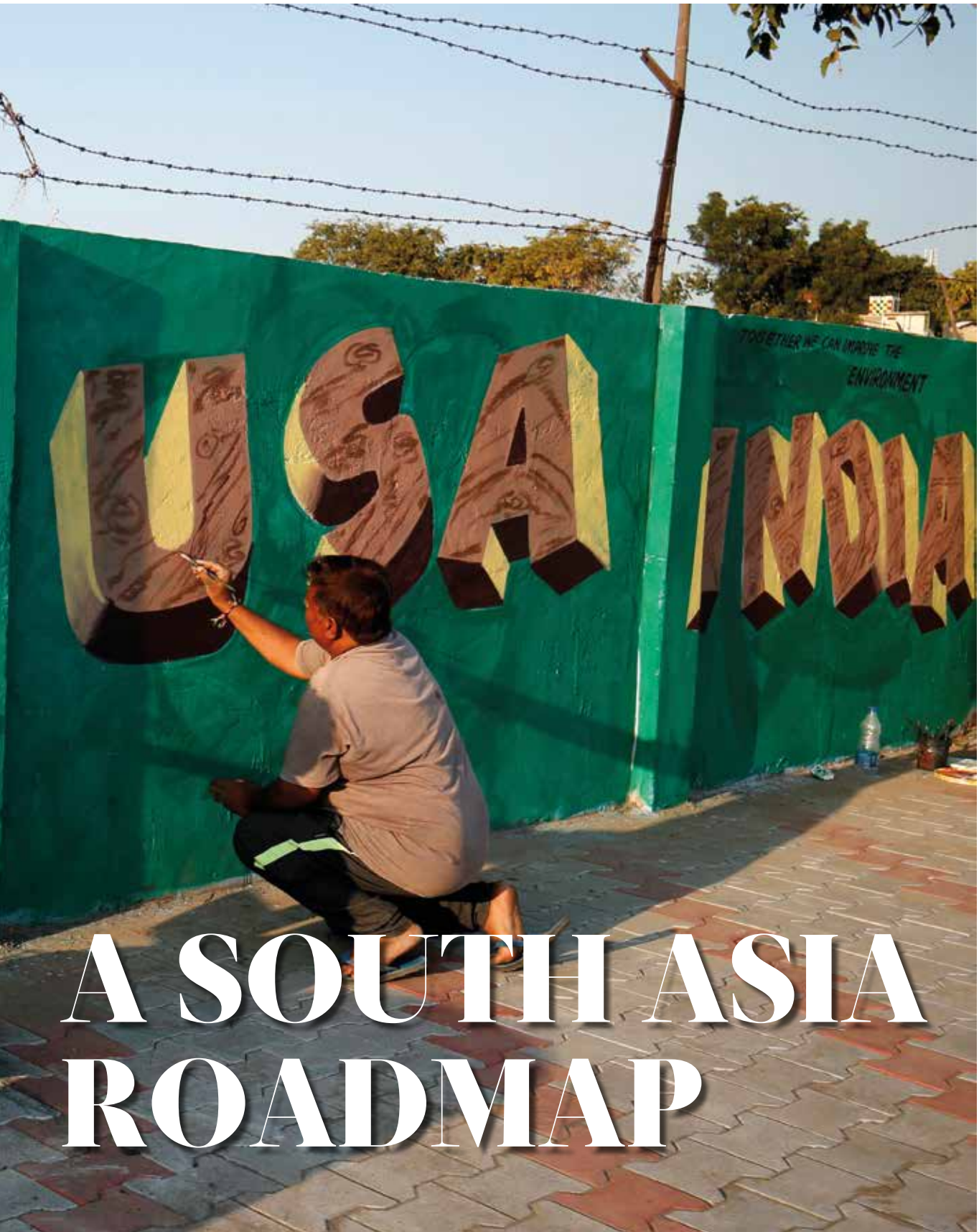
China's internal challenges – a slowing economy, high unemployment, capital flight, private frustration with the Communist Party's domination of society and economy – make many Chinese citizens resigned to difficult times ahead, regardless of the direction of US-China relations. Xi Jinping's recurring admonition to prepare for "rough seas" may be more about China's mounting domestic challenges than a prediction of future US-China relations. *

DREW THOMPSON

Drew Thompson is a Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. He was previously the Director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia in the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the US.



Photo credit: Reuters/Amit Dave



A SOUTH ASIA ROADMAP



by Tunku Varadarajan

As the incoming Trump administration turns its gaze outward, it will find a world that is rudderless in many places, often stagnant and bereft, in no small measure owing to the abdication of any meaningful leadership from the United States that began under Barack Obama. In large parts of the world—Latin America, for instance, and Africa—China has made its presence felt in the vacuum left by Washington. Trump’s instincts are not internationalist, to state the obvious, but his Secretary of State-designate, Marco Rubio, will no doubt feel the need to do his job with the energy and acumen of which many of us know he is capable.

One area to which Rubio must pay attention is South Asia (as the Indian subcontinent is now called). Here is a brief primer on each country in that region, a roadmap, in effect, guided solely by what this writer believes is best for the United States.

INDIA

The regional giant, India has emerged as one of the most promising and essential security partners for Washington in the 21st century. A natural counterweight to China, India needs no persuasion to grasp the threat posed to the American-led world order by an assertive, mercantilist and, above all, revanchist China.

Trump should focus, as he did in his first administration, on trade and India’s tariffs—with an additional national security priority on India as a pillar of the US partnership in Asia. Democracy and human rights are not Trump’s forte, and while the erosion of both in India is cause for concern, there is no profit in making these an issue in bilateral relations. Instead, he should continue pressing for fairer US access to India’s markets, while continuing to strengthen defense ties to support a strong Indian security presence in the Indo-Pacific. To this end, the conclusion of a Reciprocal Defense Procurement Agreement between the two countries is vital. For India to be an effective strategic partner against China, it must build up its military capability fast. It has been much too slow and lumbering in its military modernization. This would have the added benefit of taking India off the Russian teat, a development whose advantages should be obvious.

Furthermore, any differences with India should be discussed and resolved in private, the way Washington does with the UK or France. There is no point in publicly embarrassing and confronting the proud and prickly Indians in the way the irresponsible Justin Trudeau has done recently. Useless virtue-signaling does nothing to help the US deal with the acrid realities of a complex world.

BANGLADESH

America’s top priority should be stability and a clear timeline for national elections. Bangladesh has been a bright spot in South

Asia but the ugly tumult of this summer raises awkward questions about its path ahead. We need a stable, secular, economically successful Bangladesh in South Asia, one that is aligned with Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy. The failure to sign onto that strategy was one of the many mistakes made by the ousted prime minister, Sheikh Hasina. Here, as elsewhere in the world, Washington must be aware that China is making deep inroads, and must act effectively to counteract Beijing.

Rubio should call on the interim rulers to hold elections without delay. Bangladesh is an instinctively democratic country and a rare Muslim-majority state with the potential to be a thriving secular democracy. Its elections should be inclusive, and there cannot be a ban on the party that led the country to independence. Pressure must be exerted to ensure that Islamists are kept out of government: any further erosion of the country's fragile secularism could lead to widespread violence against the country's substantial Hindu minority. (Bangladesh has the fourth-highest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia, Pakistan, and India.) Whichever government emerges after the election must be encouraged strongly not to adopt an anti-India stance.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan needs to be managed, as it is an almost insoluble problem. The benighted country no longer has a frontline priority in US policy, but the Trump administration should seek to maintain some level of US influence in the backdrop of Pakistan's "all-weather friendship" with China, which has greater control over policy here than in any other major country.

Again, to avoid pointless virtue-signaling, the US should ease up on rhetoric about democracy in Pakistan, a form of governance that doesn't come naturally to the country and its people. The US must resign itself to the fact that Pakistan is more likely to have unfair elections

than fair ones, and even if elections were fair, their outcome is unlikely to empower those seeking to bring Pakistan closer to the US rather than China, to end terrorism, and to normalize ties with India. What does the US gain from elections that bring to power an anti-American, anti-Indian, pro-Taliban demagogue?

SRI LANKA, THE MALDIVES, AND NEPAL

These countries are relatively peripheral, but as with Latin America and Africa, countries ignored by the US fall all too readily into China's lap.

US interests here, too, lie in preventing these countries getting too close to China. China has started to play a deeper political role in Nepal through close ties with the Nepalese Maoists. Nepal has taken several loans from China under the neo-colonial Belt and Road Initiative and that should be a concern for both India and the US. Similarly, Washington must work with India to ensure that the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota does not become a Chinese naval base. Tiny Maldives is prostrate from Chinese loans that it cannot pay back. China is encroaching brazenly on India's turf. India does not have sufficient economic muscle to push back alone, but the US and India must work together to oust China from this strategic Indian Ocean archipelago. *

TUNKU VARADARAJAN

Tunku Varadarajan is a contributing writer with the Wall Street Journal, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and a fellow at New York University Law School's Classical Liberal Institute.

WILL BANGLADESH TURN ISLAMIST?

Student Rally In Bangladesh, September 5, 2024.
Photo credit: Rehman Asad via Reuters Connect



by Salil Tripathi

This summer country-wide student protests led to an uprising that toppled the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed and her secular nationalist Awami League political party. Militant Islamist groups have taken advantage of the turmoil to target minority Hindus (and Christians) in Bangladesh. But apocalyptic predictions are uncalled for. A better understanding of the country is required in order to gauge the relative strength of the Islamists and other groups.

Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 after a bloody civil war in which hundreds of thousands died. Bangladesh puts the number at three million and calls it a genocide. After a nine-month war, with significant support from India, Bangladesh became free. Mujibur Rahman, who had won provincial elections before the war in December 1970 as leader of the Awami League but then was jailed by the Pakistani government, was released and became Bangladesh's prime minister.

THE FOUNDING GENERATION

Mujibur Rahman was regarded as Bangladesh's founding father, but by 1974, his unpopularity had grown. Massive food scarcities, inflation, and flooding had caused

disenchantment, and Mujib responded by turning the parliamentary democracy into a presidential one and made Bangladesh a one-party state.

In August 1975, junior officers assassinated him and most of his family, except two daughters who were abroad at that time. Hasina returned to Bangladesh a few years later – she received a warm welcome, and she played a leading role in restoring democracy. She held office for one term, lost the elections that followed, and was back in power in 2008 after a caretaker government oversaw free and fair elections. By most accounts, those were the last free and fair elections in Bangladesh; while she won three more terms, the opposition boycotted elections twice, and disputed the outcome the third time, withdrawing candidates because of widespread allegations of rigging.

The generation that fought for independence has grown old. Nobody questions their sacrifices, but the immediate cause of this summer's uprising was continued extension of job quotas for them and their progeny – 30 percent of government jobs in a country with massive youth unemployment. This is what brought university students into the streets in protest.

STUDENT PROTESTS, ISLAMIST VIOLENCE, INTERIM GOVERNMENT

Instead of negotiating with the students, Hasina doubled down. She responded with brute force; her police forces shot peaceful demonstrators, and hundreds died. Frustration



Protest against the atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh, Lucknow, India, August 22, 2024.
Photo credit: Naeem Ansari via Reuters Connect

mounted. While Hasina's closest ally, India's Narendra Modi, gave her full backing, she also convinced the West that she alone stood firm against Islamic fundamentalism. If she went, so would secular democracy in Bangladesh—that was her message.

But her rule proved to be increasingly unpopular. The paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion had unleashed a reign of terror, and many dissidents simply disappeared. (Some are appearing from secret prisons telling stories of torture and ill-treatment.) There were extra-judicial killings. Internet censorship increased, and critical newspapers were sued. Islamic fundamentalists attacked secular

bloggers, killing nearly a dozen, and sending several rationalist writers and artists into exile. Corruption proliferated, and nepotism thrived. That simmering discontent bubbled over, and in mid-July, Hasina left the country ignominiously.

In the immediate aftermath of Hasina's departure, violent acts of reprisal occurred. Mobs toppled Mujibur Rahman's statues and torched his home, now a museum. Islamist groups targeted Awami League politicians and members of the minority Hindu community, many of whom had supported the Awami League. Hindu temples and private property were attacked. The new Bangladeshi government has said these claims were

exaggerated. There were also instances of young Bangladeshi volunteers forming human chains to protect Hindu homes and temples.

The new government is unelected. But it includes civilians known for integrity, with Dr Mohammed Yunus, who won the Nobel prize for making credit accessible to the poorest through micro-credit, acting as the chief adviser to the government.

Others in the advisory group include civil society activists and student leaders. Traditional politicians are conspicuously absent. They are marking their time and will flex muscles when elections will be announced. To earn the trust and maintain goodwill of the people, the interim administration should focus on holding free and fair elections soon, rather than attempt to address Bangladesh's myriad challenges.

REACTION IN INDIA

India's media has painted a picture of a neighbor in turmoil, where no Hindu is safe, and where the military or Islamic fundamentalists, or an alliance of both, are about to take power. One news anchor imaginatively asserted that the American Central Intelligence Agency had masterminded the uprising, with the US tech industry cheering it on, because Bangladesh was unwilling to offer a base for the US Navy in St Martin's Island. Some in the Indian media have called Dr Mohammed Yunus, the Nobel laureate who is the adviser to the interim government in Bangladesh, 'a stooge' of Hillary Clinton.

This media campaign has only strengthened the resolve among Bangladeshis to strenuously oppose India. Graffiti calling for boycotting Indian products has emerged in Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital, and reports suggest Bangladesh may renegotiate a rail and road transport corridor which gives India access to Bangladeshi roads in order to reach parts of India's northeast. Likewise, a power project in Bangladesh which relies on electricity generated by the well-connected Adani group of India, may also get renegotiated.

For Modi, the fall of Hasina represents a major challenge. He is friendless in South Asia now. Relations with Pakistan are at a historic low; ties with China are fraught; and with Nepal and Sri Lanka, too, India has had widely-diverging views. India unnecessarily picked a fight with the Maldives. Hasina, and therefore Bangladesh, was its one reliable ally and India has now lost leverage.

At the same time, Bangladesh is surrounded by India on all sides, except a sliver where it borders Myanmar. It is in Bangladesh's interests too, to have good ties with India. India can help by toning down its alarmist predictions of an Islamic takeover in Bangladesh. Islamist parties have rarely won more than 12 percent of the popular vote (only once; usually they get 7-8 percent of the vote).

Bangladesh is a country of Muslims who speak Bengali, not of Islamic fundamentalists. (It also has Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and others, some of whom speak different languages.) Failure to make that distinction has been a strategic miscalculation of many Indians, but it plays well domestically. The Indian government will ultimately have to decide if it is running its foreign policy for better ties abroad or to please its domestic base. *

SALIL TRIPATHI

Salil Tripathi is a writer based in New York. Born in India, he is the author of *The Colonel Who Would Not Repent: The Bangladesh War and its Unquiet Legacy* (Yale, 2016) and has written extensively on South Asia. His next book, *The Gujaratis: A Portrait of the Community* will be published in late 2024.



RETHINKING AMERICA'S UKRAINE POLICY



by Nikolas K. Gvosdev

Kicking the can down the road has characterized America's Ukraine policy for the last two decades. The can is about to stop at the doorstep of incoming President Donald Trump. The assumptions that have guided US policy, crafted under far different geopolitical and geoeconomic circumstances, are simply no longer valid. The new Trump national security team has the opportunity to undertake a comprehensive policy review, reassess conditions and redesign a US approach to Ukraine that corresponds to American interests and the changed ground realities.

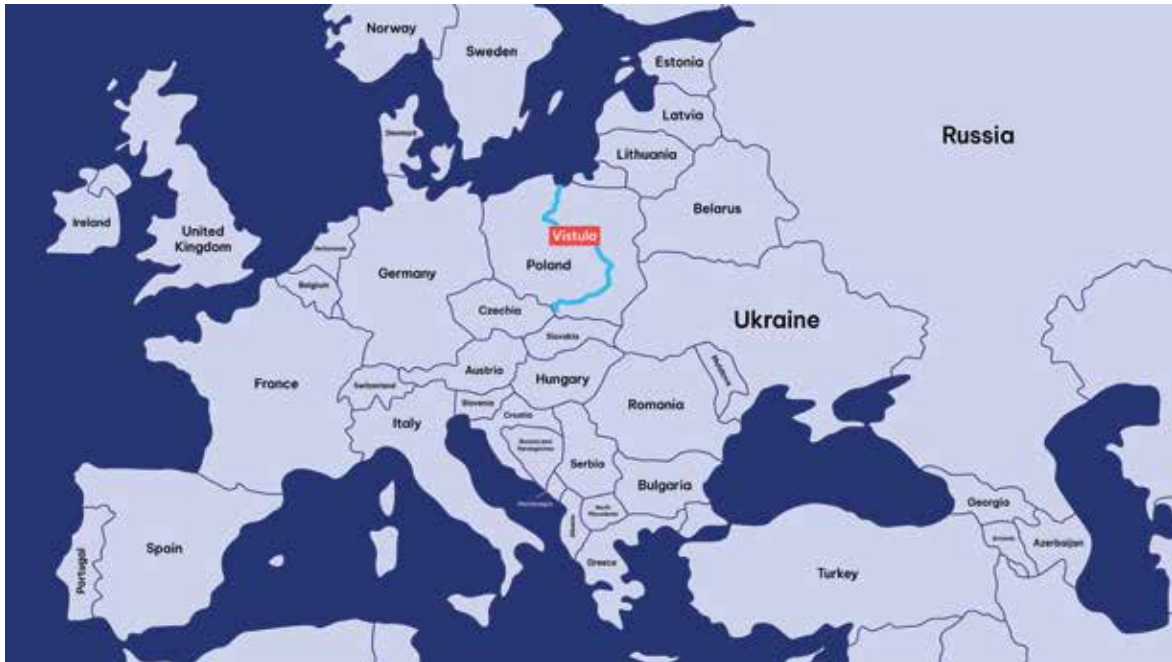
President Bill Clinton was famous for his insistence that one never had to choose between two different policy options but should seek to incorporate both. When it came to post-Soviet Russia and Ukraine, a confidential assessment prepared for his Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1993 predicted that both countries would become members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by 2005—predicated in part on a belief that after the collapse of the USSR, there would never be any cause for disputes between Kyiv, Moscow and Washington.

This hope animated the security guarantees offered to Ukraine in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. The United States, along with the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation, pledged to “respect the independence and sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine”

and to “refrain from the threat or use of force” in return for Ukraine eliminating the Soviet nuclear weapons infrastructure on its territory and transferring the warheads back to Russia. These assurances could be easily offered (and never submitted as a binding treaty for Senate ratification) because the United States, at that time, could not conceive of any possible instance where Russia might violate those commitments. After all, both were on track to become fully integrated members of the Euro-Atlantic community.

In his first term of office, Russian president Boris Yeltsin and his team sought Russia's full integration into the Western bloc of nations, albeit with the hope that Russia might end up as a deputy chairman of the Euro-Atlantic board of directors. As those expectations fizzled, Yeltsin became less sanguine about the prospects for substantive partnership with the West. His handpicked successor as president, Vladimir Putin, attempted to negotiate a co-equal partnership between Russia and the West, but his insistence that the former Soviet space represented a zone of privileged Russian interests ran up against an American rejection of the very concept of spheres of influence, a point emphatically made by then Vice-President Joe Biden in his 2009 remarks at the Munich Security Conference.

Putin accepted that he could not prevent earlier waves of Euro-Atlantic enlargement, but sought European and American acquiescence that Europe's eastern border should be at the Vistula. His own definition of Russian interests—and efforts to define a post-Soviet Russian nationality— included a degree of



social, economic and political integration between Russia and her neighbors, especially Ukraine. In Putin's view, smaller powers have to resign themselves to accommodating the preferences of larger states. For the sake of a larger partnership between Russia and the West, Ukraine's sovereign choices would therefore have to be constrained. Not surprisingly, Ukrainian leaders sought to solidify alliances and partnerships that would enable them to resist Russian blandishments. Moreover, US presidents since George W. Bush have consistently rejected Russian demands.

Yet the Bush, Obama, Trump and even the Biden administrations held out the possibility of improved US-Russia relations. They assessed that Russian objections to Western enlargement would diminish over time, as Russia either realized the importance of reforming its own political and economic models to better conform to Western preferences, or saw its power eroding away. At some point, Russia would no longer

object, or be in a position to object, to Ukraine fulfilling its Western destiny. At the same time, Ukraine would be advised to bide its time and wait for more opportune circumstances. This culminated in the famous declaration of the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members of NATO"—but with no timeline or crucially, any sort of interim security arrangements. As Andrew Gray concluded, it ended up being "the worst of both worlds: it served notice to Moscow that the two countries ... would join NATO but brought them no closer to the protection that comes with membership."

For the last sixteen years, the Bucharest conundrum has guided American policy. Ukraine's full integration with the West is treated as an article of faith, to occur at some undisclosed point in the future. But the United States and its European partners are only prepared to support those aspirations so far.

For Ukraine, those efforts have fallen woefully short. But for Russia, even those limited efforts were producing in Ukraine a de facto NATO ally, a country which is, according to NATO summit communiqué in 2023, “increasingly interoperable and politically integrated with the Alliance.” The West hesitates to follow its own stated intentions to their logical end. Instead, Ukraine is promised full integration but only, in the words of the 2024 NATO summit communiqué, “when Allies agree and conditions are met.” The Western approach remains based on the hope that some sort of internal crisis inside of Russia — the financial crisis of 2008-09, the “White Ribbon” protest movements of 2011-12, or the collapse in energy prices in 2014 — might degrade Russia’s ability to object without the West having to risk their own political and economic security.

After Russia reinvaded Ukraine in 2022 — continuing the effort started in 2014 — the US strategy of aiding Ukraine rested on a series of assumptions: that US-led sanctions would cripple the Russian economy and thus Moscow’s war-making capabilities; that, after an initial US surge of military aid, European partners would increasingly take up support and free up the US to resume its pivot to the longer-term challenge of China; that the Middle East would continue to remain quiet; and Ukraine’s 2023 counteroffensive would break the Russian military and inflict a strategic defeat on the Kremlin.

None of these assumptions have panned out. Europe’s economic model, predicated on access to large quantities of Russian commodities at reasonable prices, struggles to adapt. Russia’s partnership with other US competitors has solidified, while the autocratic entente of China, Iran and North Korea, and their proxies, benefit from Russia “distracting” the United States.

Ukraine wants to completely recover all its territory and integrate as a full member into Western institutions. While this remains the US preference, whether or not the US can afford to underwrite this aspiration for an indefinite

period of time, given pressing challenges elsewhere, is what a Trump policy review must ascertain.

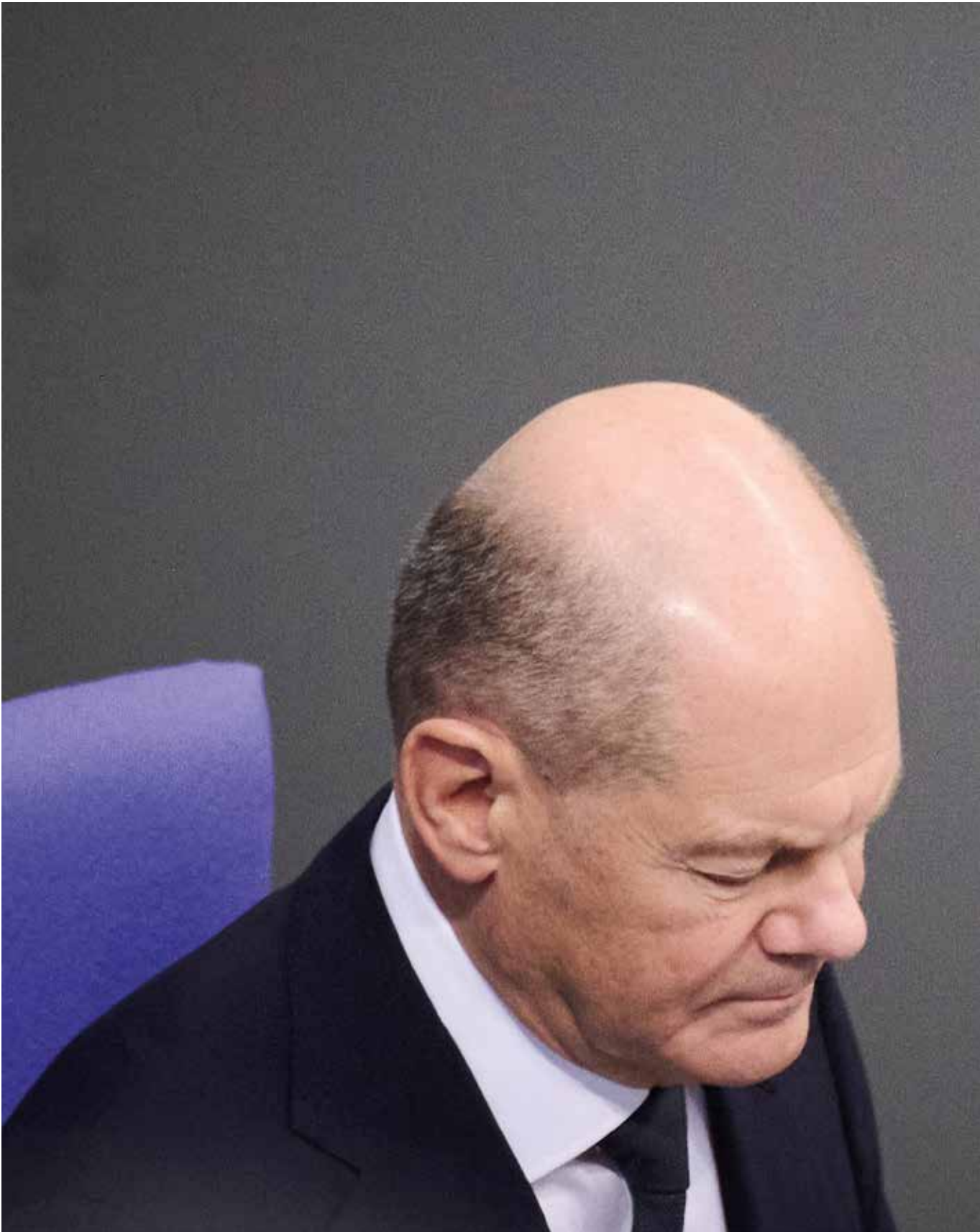
This requires determining whether the primary US interest — to prevent Russia from being able to project power and influence into the heart of the Euro-Atlantic region — can be achieved by results short of full Ukrainian integration with the West. Any review will require jettisoning binary thinking: that either Ukraine gains full NATO membership or that the West turns the country over to Putin.

Does the South Korean experience provide a model for Ukraine — ceasefire and armistice line coupled with economic and military modernization? Might Azerbaijan’s strategy of transactional yet armed neutrality be appropriate for Ukraine?

The national security team for the new administration seems to be coalescing around a judgment that China must be the primary focus of US attention and that too much of a focus on Ukraine is a distraction—and that some sort of truce in Ukraine today is acceptable if it strengthens America’s position vis-a-vis Beijing tomorrow. After all, if China ultimately recedes as a peer challenger to the United States, Moscow’s ability to sustain its position in Ukraine over the long run will also attenuate. The Bucharest promise may yet be redeemed. But for now, it seems that the US will shift to a defensive balancing in Europe to concentrate more effort and initiative on securing the real prize—the Indo-Pacific. *

NIKOLAS K. GVOSDEV

Nikolas K. Gvosdev is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and a professor at the US Naval War College.



GERMANY HEADS TOWARD ELECTIONS

Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Photo credit: IMAGO/Christian Spicker via Reuters Connect



by Jacob Heilbrunn

Germany is facing unexpected headwinds. As Ukraine struggles to fend off Russia, the Middle East erupts, and China menaces Taiwan, it is struggling to meet a welter of domestic and foreign challenges. The recent collapse of Social Democratic chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-party coalition has coincided with the election of Donald Trump, creating a sense of instability, if not crisis, in Germany that presages an increasingly turbulent transatlantic relationship. Germany now plans to hold snap elections on February 23.

This bout of Teutonic turmoil should not come as a surprise. Anyone who succeeded the widely popular and long-serving Christian Democratic chancellor Angela Merkel—who exited office before Russia invaded Ukraine and the German economy went south—was probably bound to have a rough time of it. For one thing, the far-right Alternative Party for Germany has battered on mounting disgruntlement in eastern Germany with immigration, economic difficulties and support for Ukraine. This nationalist party stands at close to 20 percent in opinion polls, rendering it Germany's second strongest political party.

Then there is the ascent of the left-wing firebrand Sahra Wagenknecht. In September 2023, Wagenknecht, who was born in the eastern state of Thuringia, founded her own eponymous political party called “The Alliance of Sahra Wagenknecht.” It scored 15 percent in Saxony and 20 percent in Thuringia in recent state elections. She, too, denounces German subventions to Ukraine and espouses close ties with Putin. If her party scores well enough in February, she could become a potential coalition kingmaker.

Scholz's woes have been compounded by the fact that his own party has been riven by the Ukraine war. One faction is demanding that Germany confront Putin and the other clings to a version of Ostpolitik, or détente with the East. The latter dreams of placating Putin, much in the spirit of the former Social Democratic chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who celebrated his 70th birthday in St. Petersburg with the Russian dictator and publicly supported Trump's 2024 run for the presidency. The Social Democrats are toying with the notion of running defense minister Boris Pistorius (a Ukraine hawk) as their chancellor candidate but they may be too divided to settle on him, thereby ensuring that Scholz gets the nod.

By any measure Scholz has been a disappointment. Far from proving an effective chancellor, Scholz has been a study in passivity



Chairman of the Christian Democrats Friedrich Merz, Photo credit: IMAGO/dts Nachrichtenagentur via Reuters Connect.

on everything from aiding war-torn Ukraine to reviving the faltering German economy. The *Zeitenwende*, or time of change, that he promised in February 2022 in a speech to the Bundestag has proved to be none at all. Whether the upcoming federal elections in February will allow Germany to overcome its woes, however, is an open question.

The immediate cause of the upheaval is squabbling over the new proposed federal budget for 2025. Last week, Scholz fired the rebellious finance minister Christian Lindner whose Free Democratic Party has been sinking

in the polls. The Free Democrats, in turn, exited the coalition. Unless they win at least 5 percent of the vote in the upcoming federal election, the Free Democrats will be ousted from the Bundestag, a fate that they first experienced in 2013 and have no desire to duplicate. Lindner, who was responsible for the revival of the Free Democrats after that harrowing 2013 defeat, saw the writing on the wall and helped manufacture a crisis over the budget to raise the profile of his party. The Free Democrats—in marked contrast to their coalition partners, the Social Democrats and Greens—are a pro-business party that

espouses low taxes and minimal regulation.

Scholz had been relying on 29 so-called “special funds,” which totaled 869 billion Euros, to circumvent the country’s official debt brake. The federal constitutional court ruled in November 2023 that this maneuver was illegal. Its ruling set off a scramble to revise the budget that has never ended.

The feuding over the budget, though, is a symptom, not the origin, of Germany’s current difficulties, which can be traced back to the chancellorship of Angela Merkel. The Economist observed this past October that the Merkel era was in essence a time of stagnation: “16 years of no reforms are taking a toll on Germany and Europe.” Her complacency meant that Germany not only failed to undertake structural economic reforms but also allowed the Bundeswehr to disintegrate as an effective fighting force.

Merkel managed to ride out the first Trump presidency, but now Germany will have to reassess how it approaches Washington. As Jackson Janes, a resident senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund, told me, “The challenge for German-American relations will be resetting relevance. What will the Trump administration value in relations with Germany in accomplishing the President’s domestic goals as well as his global objectives? What will Germany get from Washington but what will it also need to sustain its interests in Europe and in the global game? The questions about how, when, where and why the two countries need each other are changing.”

They are indeed. A truculent Trump will pressure Berlin to live up to its promises to increase spending on the Bundeswehr and threaten it with punitive economic tariffs. Germany is now spending the NATO minimum of 2 percent of GDP, but has remained mum about how it will do so after 2027. Scholz has also refused to sanction the delivery of Taurus missiles to Ukraine. In addressing the Bundestag on November 13, he reiterated that “I am against the fact that the weapons supplied by us can be fired far into Russian territory and will not

change my position regarding the delivery of a cruise missile from Germany.” His stance has been denounced by the conservative Christian Democratic Party.

What Trump will himself propose to secure peace in Ukraine remains unclear. Senator Marco Rubio, whom Trump has nominated to become Secretary of State, is a foreign policy hawk and a staunch supporter of NATO. But Trump will be the Decider when it comes to the nature and depth of America’s commitment to NATO. Curt Mills, the executive editor of the American Conservative, avers that “the era of carefree largesse afforded to Europe from Truman to Biden is over. It will be something different. And America and the continent will be better for it.”

Will they? Almost four decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there is no plausible evidence that Germany seeks, let alone desires, to once more become a Grossmacht, or great power, that can impose order in central Europe. In this regard, the contrast with the bad, old days of the German past could hardly be starker. In January 1849, as German liberals tried to forge a united nation in Frankfurt, the great historian F. C. Dahlman declared that “the road of power is the only one that will satisfy and appease our yearning for freedom....Germany as such must finally step forward into the ranks of the great political powers of the world.” After the Bismarckian Reich collapsed into the horrors of Nazism, postwar Germany took what amounted to a vow of abstinence from world affairs. Almost four decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the striking thing is that in tone and substance Germany’s hesitant approach to foreign affairs has not fundamentally changed. Liana Fix, a Europe fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, recently noted that rather than “step up as a leader of Europe and the West, the coalition abdicated leadership in Europe, avoided pressing strategic decisions, and pursued narrow national interests first.”

For some in the German establishment, the candidacy of Friedrich Merz, the chairman of

the Christian Democrats, is seen as a viable path both toward fulfilling Germany's international promise and improving relations with Trump.

Merz has decried the hesitation of Scholz, for example, to assist Ukraine more expansively, including supplying it with long-range missiles that could target Russia proper. He would likely head a grand coalition that would seek to fence out the Alternative for Germany, which is bristling at its exclusion from cooperation with the Christian Democrats. For Trump, Merz would be a more congenial figure than Scholz.

Christoph von Marschall, who is currently a Wilson Center scholar, believes that Germany is currently swerving between “wishes and reality” in coming to terms with a new Trump presidency. It dreams of claiming moral superiority over America. But if Merz is elected, he suggests, reality will set in. “Given the German lack of hard power,” Marschall observes, “Germany cannot afford a confrontation with Trump. It will pursue a policy of embracing him, much as Emmanuel Macron, Mark Rutte and Donald Tusk are attempting.”

A more dire assessment comes from Malte Lehming, a columnist for the Berlin daily *Der Tagesspiegel*. In his view, “Trump hates Germany. It incarnates everything that he rejects—multilateralism, an emphasis on international law, climate protection, politics based on morality.” He surmises that Trump will try to stick Germany with the tab to rebuild Ukraine: “the costs to accomplish that are unbelievably high. It seems probable that this will badly strain German-American ties.” Those ties have served as the basis of the Western alliance since the founding of NATO in 1949. As Trump returns to the presidency, the next German chancellor will have to work overtime to refurbish the relationship between Washington and Berlin. *

JACOB HEILBRUNN

Jacob Heilbrunn is a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center, editor of *The National Interest* and editor-at-large of *The Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*. His book, *America Last: The Right's Century-Long Romance with Foreign Dictators*, was published in 2024.

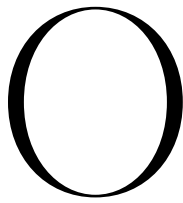


A poster of President Ilham Aliyev on a shopping mall in the Baku suburbs. Photo credit: Shutterstock

AZERBAIJAN BETWEEN TRIUMPH AND TURBULENCE



by Ksenia Svetlova



ver the course of 33 years since the fall of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has transformed into an independent regional player. Its neighbors in Armenia fear that Azerbaijan's ambitions will eventually lead to another war. Average Azerbaijanis, meanwhile, wonder when the military achievements will translate into economic prosperity.

REGAINING TERRITORY THROUGH WAR

It's impossible to miss the portraits of fallen Azeri soldiers when strolling through the wide avenues of Baku or the narrow streets of provincial towns and villages. The dead soldiers, whose images look down from the walls of buildings, all perished during the 44-day war with Armenia in September 2020.

The 30-year conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia centers on the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. In Soviet times, this was a mountainous region of the Azerbaijani republic with a majority Armenian ethnic population. The war that broke out in 2020 ended in Azerbaijani victory, owing to its use of modern military technologies, particularly drones, with Turkey's military support. Three years later In September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a brief military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh, swiftly taking control of the region. Armenia had taken it following a war in 1991-1992. Today, most of the area's ethnic Armenian population, about 100,000, have evacuated to Armenia just as 30 years ago, the area's Azeri ethnic population fled to Azerbaijan.

Military success alone is insufficient to resolve all the challenges facing this post-Soviet nation. Azerbaijan still grapples with establishing its position on the global stage, highlighting the complexity of translating military triumph into long-term geopolitical and economic success.

Thirty-three years after the USSR collapsed, this ex-Soviet republic is still grappling with complex internal and external challenges.

YAWNING SOCIO-ECONOMIC GAPS AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE

The statues of Heydar Aliyev, ruler of post-Soviet Azerbaijan from 1993-2003, and portraits of his son, Ilham Aliyev, are an inseparable part of the cityscape in Azerbaijan. The country has a strong presidential system and a submissive legislature. The democracy watchdog group Freedom House, in its 2023 Freedom Report, ranked Azerbaijan's political system as "not free", and the persecution of critics is becoming more severe. Unlike Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova, Azerbaijan has not experienced any form of "Maidan" or popular pro-democracy movement. The ruling Aliyev family's grip on power remains strong. The victory over Armenia in 2020 certainly boosted the president's popularity to unprecedented levels.

The Aliyev regime likes to host major international events. A huge construction site is visible just in front of the main train station in Baku where, in mid-November, the city hosts UN COP-29. Tens of thousands come each year for Formula 1's Baku Grand Prix. Baku's Olympic Stadium has hosted the Eurovision contest, the 2015 European Games, and the 2019 Europa League football final. Azerbaijan also enjoys



The ruins of a house bombed by the Azerbaijani army in Shoushi in Nagorno-Karabakh.
Photo credit: Antoni Lallican / Hans Lucas via Reuters Connect

a thriving tourism industry attracting mainly Russians, Iranians, Gulf Arabs and Israelis. There are several fully packed daily flights between Tel Aviv and Baku.

For the older generation that grew up in the Soviet Union, all this is still something of a wonder. Just 30 years ago, there was little tourism infrastructure, as foreign tourists were blocked off by Soviet borders, and the state never cared to invest in domestic tourism. Memories of standard Soviet hotels with dysfunctional facilities and unpleasant odors still give shivers to those unfortunate enough to have visited them.

Azerbaijan has certainly taken a big leap since then. Modern roads are now being built between Baku and remote cities, such as Gabala, while A-shaped chalets available for rent on internet sites are scattered across the

picturesque mountains. The older generation can manage with Russian, but it seems that for younger Azerbaijanis, this is no longer a prioritized language. In fact, in the bazaars of ancient Sheki, once home to powerful khans who dominated the region, you see more signs in Arabic, catering to Gulf tourists, than in Russian.

Like other countries in this area, there is a stark difference between the capital city and the periphery. The average annual income per person in the country is \$4,000, while in Baku it is more than \$10,000. In 2022, almost twice as many businesses were registered in Baku and its surroundings than in the rest of the country, and their number grew in the capital significantly faster than in the regions.

Thirty-seven percent of the working-age population is employed in agriculture, yet they generate only 5 percent of the country's

gross domestic product. The average salary in the country is \$430, while those employed in agriculture earn significantly less. The difference between the poor villages and the oil-rich elites in the center is striking. Many young and educated Azerbaijanis are leaving the country due to inequality and corruption. In 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index results, Azerbaijan's score of 23 indicated that it is perceived to be more corrupt than its neighbors, Georgia (53), Armenia (47), Russia (26), and Iran (24).

Just recently, Azerbaijan held parliamentary elections. Results showed the ruling New Azerbaijan Party securing a narrow majority of 68 of the 125 seats in the National Assembly. Forty-four seats were won by independents, while the remaining seats were won by smaller parties. The opposition party, liberal centrist Musavat party, refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new parliament, describing the election as “accompanied by widespread violations, including multiple voting by the same individuals and groups, ballot stuffing, and pressure on observers.”

FRIEND OF ISRAEL, NEIGHBOR OF IRAN, ENEMY OF ARMENIA, ALLY OF TURKEY

Like the fading portraits of the fallen soldiers, the sense of excitement about the military victory is also changing. Azerbaijanis had expected that this move to be a game-changer, bringing the long-promised prosperity and peace. They still await the restoration of the Karabakh area and the return of its Azerbaijani residents. Many areas in Karabakh remain in ruins almost four years after the war. Authorities estimate that the restoration will cost over \$100 billion, money that will have to come from foreign loans and investment. But the West seems reluctant to finance the restoration of Karabakh due to the expulsion of over 100,000 Armenian refugees in the brief war of September 2023.

At that time, France took the lead on demands to sanction Baku while Azerbaijan began criticizing Paris for its “neo-colonial” policies, particularly regarding continued French sovereignty over overseas territories,

primarily New Caledonia. While ties with the EU and partly with the US were overshadowed by the outcome of the 2020 war, Ilham Aliyev seems to skillfully navigate his relations with Turkey, Russia, Iran, Israel, and the Gulf states.

Turkey emerged as Baku's main supporter during the war, though Azerbaijan also heavily relied on Israeli weapons both during the war in 2020 and during the takeover of Karabakh in 2023. It managed to maintain an independent policy toward Israel, even as Israel's relations with Ankara significantly deteriorated during the war in Gaza.

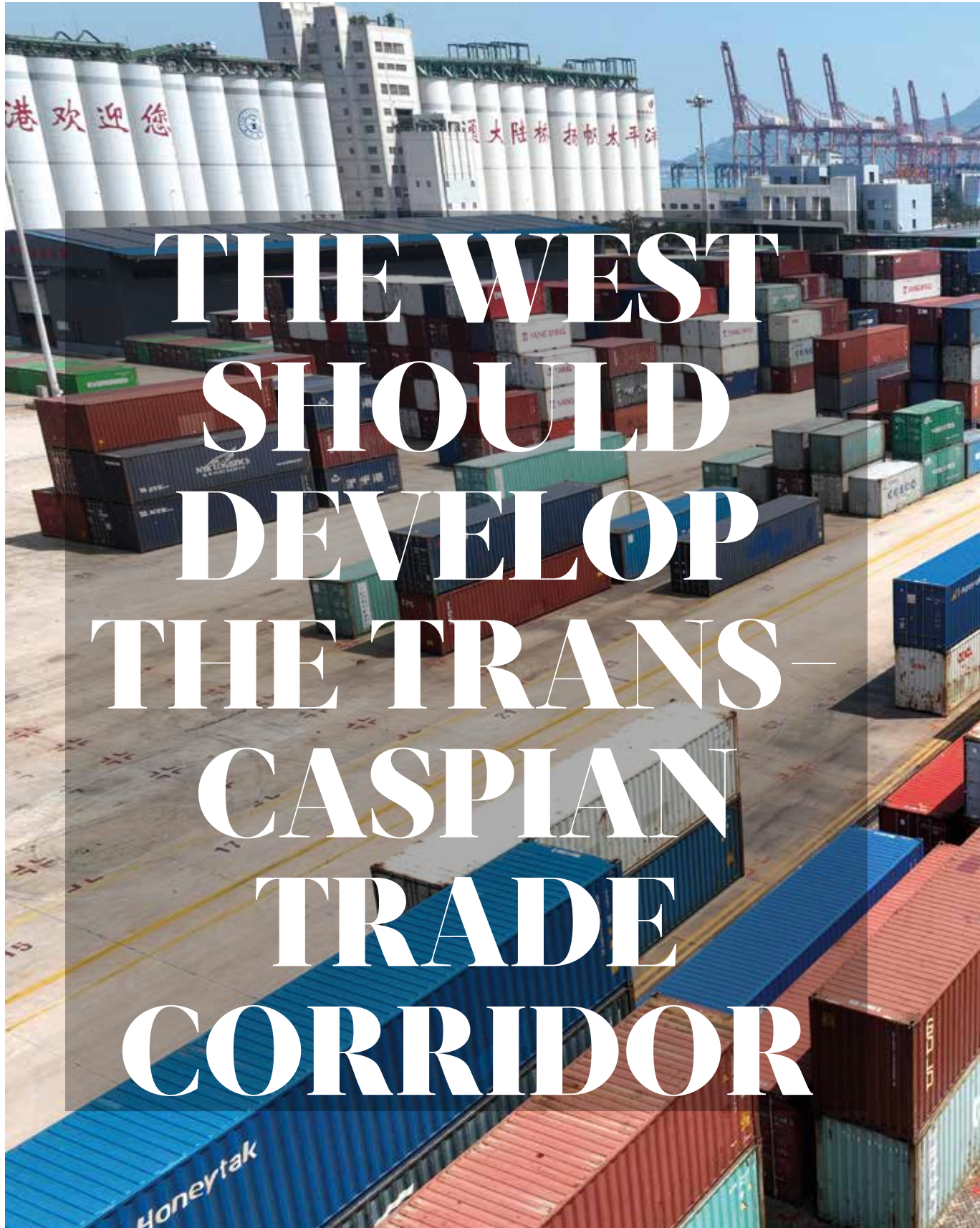
While the ice between Baku and Tehran remains thick, there is an undeniable rapprochement that includes the reopening of diplomatic missions in both countries. Relations had been suspended following a violent attack on Azerbaijan's embassy in Tehran in 2023.

President Ilham Aliyev, after 20 years in power, seems focused on improving the local economy. With turbulence in relations with the EU and the US over issues of human rights and the situation in Karabakh, Baku aims to develop its relations with others – from the UAE and Israel to Russia and Iran (Russian President Putin paid a visit to Azerbaijan this August).

One thing is clear: 62-year-old Ilham Aliyev will continue to determine his country's future. His portraits in government buildings, banks, and shops are not about to fade. *

KSENIA SVETLOVA

Ksenia Svetlova is the Executive Director of ROPES (The Regional Organization for Peace, Economics & Security) and a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Middle East Programs. She is a former member of the Knesset.



THE WEST SHOULD DEVELOP THE TRANS- CASPIAN TRADE CORRIDOR

THE WEST SHOULD DEVELOP THE TRANS-CASPIAN TRADE CORRIDOR

Freight train at the China-Kazakhstan Logistics Cooperation base in Lianyungang, China
Photo credit: CFOTO/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect





by Daniel Runde

Development of the Trans-Caspian corridor would shift trade and energy routes between Europe and Asia to favor Western commercial and strategic interests.

Over the past decade, global trade infrastructure has been transformed by China's economic rise and its strategic investments in trade routes. Central Asia, the "belt buckle" on China's Belt and Road Initiative, is having to rethink where and how it connects with the rest of the world and how it serves as a transit point for the giant Eurasian landmass.

The ongoing war in Ukraine has disrupted trade and energy routes that transit Russia. The so-called "Northern Corridor," which was once a critical artery for trade between Europe and Asia, is now fraught with uncertainty owing to sanctions on Russia and instability in the region.

China and not just the West is a source of funding for infrastructure development. China is the primary trading partner for 120 countries, a dramatic shift from just 25 years ago when the United States held that position for a majority of the world. China invests surplus dollars in hard assets including infrastructure. These investments are not just about immediate economic gains but also about securing long-term strategic assets. By moving its wealth away from dollar-denominated assets into more tangible, infrastructure-based investments such as pipelines, ports, and airports, China seeks to position itself as the central hub of the 21st-century global economy.

Central Asia is in a rough neighborhood with four major alternative options to the Northern Corridor.

The first option is more trade through Iran, a country with significant geographic advantages.

However, Iran's potential as a trade hub is hampered by the heavy sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies. Iran sanctions are not going away anytime soon. And there is slim hope that Central Asia could get a "sanctions waiver" from the West. The 2018 waiver granted by the US for the use of an Indian Ocean port in Iran for humanitarian purposes was a rare exception and not indicative of a broader policy shift. Thus, relying on Iran as a major trade conduit remains a risky, unlikely option.

A second option involves routes through Afghanistan and onwards to Pakistan. One such project is a rail link estimated to cost \$4.8 billion; its construction would take several years (at least), and Afghanistan's security situation poses a serious risk. With up to 23 major terrorist groups are operating in the country, infrastructure projects like this could become prime targets. There is also the issue of when the West might recognize the Taliban. If the Taliban were recognized, funding from the Asian Development Bank or the World Bank might become available. If the Taliban were not recognized, perhaps Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, China or Russia might fund this project.

Another Afghanistan project is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) oil and gas pipeline, a project that has been on the drawing board for nearly three decades. While this pipeline has the potential to become a significant energy corridor, its realization has been thwarted by a range of issues, including security concerns in Afghanistan, financing difficulties, and regional political rivalries.

A third option involves building additional rail links between Central Asia and Western China, namely Xinjiang Province. There are agreements on Uzbek investments, Kyrgyz loans, and Chinese funding; this rail link could be financed solely by China. However, there are political sensitivities in the West related to Xinjiang (read "where the Uighurs have

THE WEST SHOULD DEVELOP THE TRANS-CASPIAN TRADE CORRIDOR



Map of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. Credit: Wikimedia/Tanvir Anjum Adib

traditionally lived”) that might or might not hamper support by the international financial institutions. An infrastructure project in Xinjiang would face international scrutiny.

Given the challenges associated with the three options above, the “Trans-Caspian Corridor” (also known as the “Middle Corridor”) emerges as attractive and feasible. This route, which spans the Kazakh and Turkmen coasts along the Caspian Sea, and onward to the Caucasus, Turkey and Europe, offers a viable pathway for trade. Key ports along the route, including Aktau, Kuryk, and potentially Turkmenbashi, are critical nodes as well as the ports on the other side of the Caspian in Azerbaijan. Looking at the map, increasing connectivity through the Trans-Caspian implies that the West will have to deepen its ties to Azerbaijan, the linchpin in the route.

The Trans-Caspian Corridor’s strategic value is magnified by the current geopolitical climate. As long as Russia remains isolated due to sanctions and geopolitical tensions, this route will continue to attract increased attention. Countries like Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, stand to benefit enormously from enhanced infrastructure development along this route.

The Trans-Caspian Corridor has been operational for many years and has seen a massive spike in traffic over the last two years. Increasing

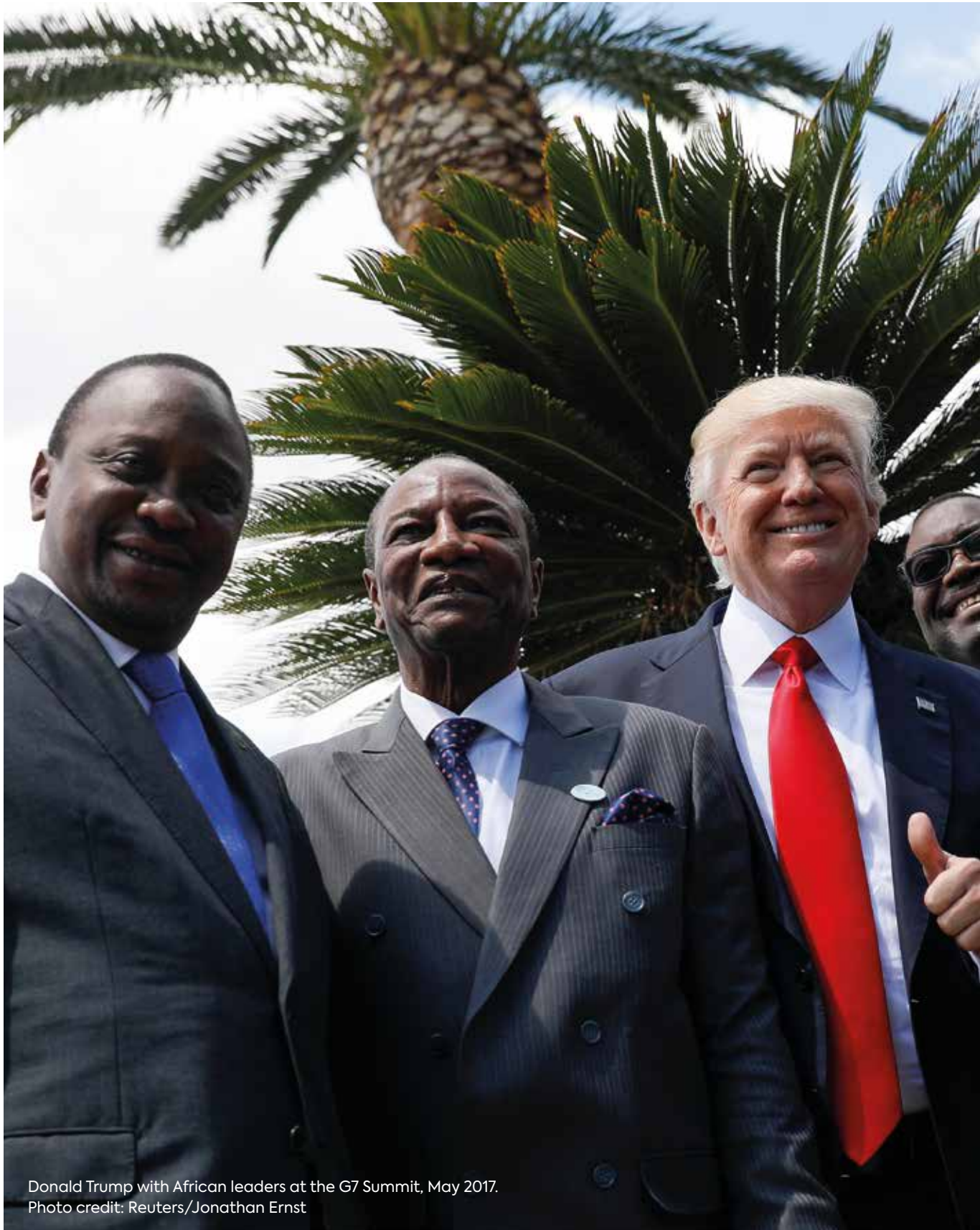
investment in it would allow the US and its allies to facilitate alternative trade routes that circumvent more problematic areas, while also countering China’s growing influence in global trade infrastructure. The real opportunity for Western investment lies in making this route more competitive – faster, cheaper, and more efficient.

The West should also take a proactive role in supporting the development of ports along the Caspian Sea. This is not just about building infrastructure; it’s about shaping the future of global trade in a way that aligns with US interests and values.

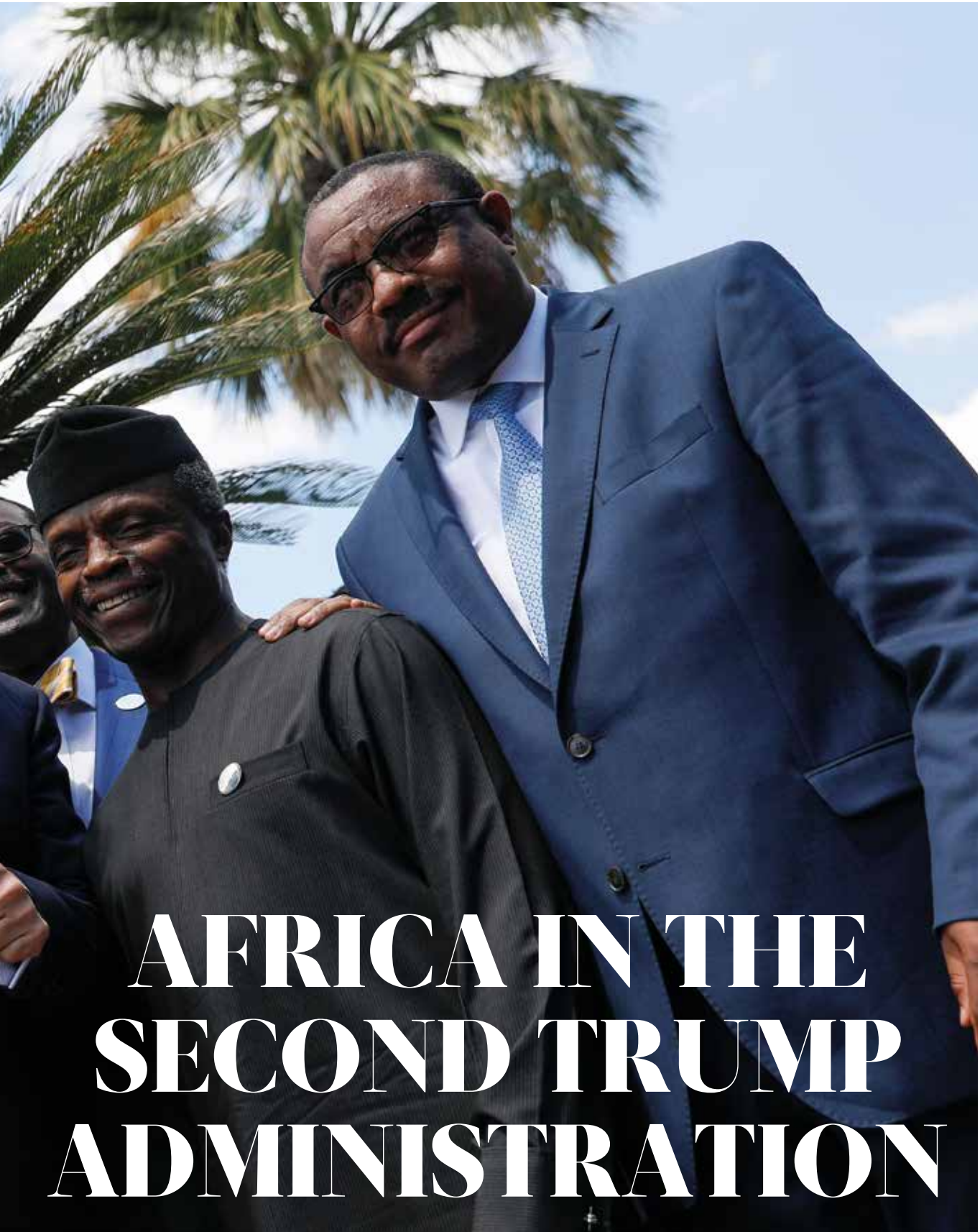
This is not a mutually exclusive endeavor; all routes through Central Asia will likely be developed and used to some degree. The ideal outcome for Central Asia is a multiplicity of viable and effective trade routes, a goal that the West should support by strengthening the routes that avoid Iran, Afghanistan and Russia. *

DANIEL RUNDE

Daniel F. Runde is a senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC. He is also the author of *The American Imperative: Reclaiming Global Leadership Through Soft Power* (Bombardier Books, 2023).



Donald Trump with African leaders at the G7 Summit, May 2017.
Photo credit: Reuters/Jonathan Ernst



AFRICA IN THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION



by J. Peter Pham

The Republican Party's 2024 Platform did not mention Africa. Yet this does not mean that a coherent and potentially transformative American approach towards the "continent of tomorrow" cannot be found in the foreign policy vision articulated by President Trump and in the record of his first term. Here are three general guiding principles:

*** First, America First does not mean America alone.** President Trump in his 2019 address to the UN General Assembly said: "Like my beloved country, each nation represented in this hall has a cherished history, culture, and heritage that is worth defending and celebrating, and which gives us our singular potential and strength... If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first." I heard then (as the US special envoy to the Sahel) that those words resonated with many Africans, some of whom had made great sacrifices for national liberation and independence. These are proud patriots who want partnerships with America, not lectures on America's latest social causes.

*** Second, America's partners should be capable.** America's preferred partners in Africa (and elsewhere) will be those nation-states that

bring something to the table. During the first Trump administration, talks were well advanced for a free-trade agreement with Kenya, a country with considerable economic achievements as a regional hub for technology and innovation (the "Silicon Savannah"). Kenya is also an important partner in America's diplomatic and security efforts, including in fighting Islamist terrorism spilling out of its failed-state neighbor, Somalia. The Biden administration dropped the free trade agreements with Kenya in favor of a series of talks about non-tariff issues and a showy state visit for Kenya's President William Ruto.

*** Third, reciprocity is key to sustainable relations.** President Trump expects trade to be fair and reciprocal, but reciprocity goes beyond equalized schedules of taxes on imports. It extends to political and security interests. One of the three criteria for eligibility in the African Growth and Opportunity Act trade preference scheme, up for renewal in 2025, is that the would-be beneficiaries do "not engage in activities that undermine United States national security or foreign policy interests." The Biden administration has overlooked that criterion with South Africa, the biggest beneficiary of these trade preferences (and several other American programs), notwithstanding the country's closeness to Russia, China and Iran, and its role in leading the "genocide" case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. All three members of the national security team nominated by President Trump – Senator Marco Rubio and Representatives Michael Waltz and Elise Stefanik – are on

the record raising concerns about Pretoria's positioning itself in the orbit of Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran as well as its antisemitic antics.

What might one expect from the incoming administration in terms of US policy towards Africa, within President Trump's overall agenda?

*** Trade and Investment.** Africa can play a significant role in helping achieve America's economic priorities. The Energy Act of 2020, signed by President Trump, defined a mineral as "critical" if it was essential to the economic or national security of the US and has a supply chain vulnerable to disruption. The US Geological Survey currently lists more than fifty minerals in this category, ranging from relatively common nickel and zinc to the more esoteric "rare-earth elements" – many sourced to African countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which produces three-fourths of the world's cobalt, for example. Investments in integrated corridors like the Lobito Corridor linking Angola, the DRC, and Zambia help African countries not just mine, but also process, add value, and export to global markets. Their natural resources are key to securing supply chains for US defense needs as well as the demand of America's renewed domestic industries. This—rather than exporting raw materials to China, where supply chains can be weaponized—is how to achieve a "win-win" outcome for both Africans and Americans.

*** Official aid.** For decades, through administrations of both parties, the United States has been by far the most generous donor of bilateral aid to Africa, both humanitarian and development. Sub-Saharan Africa received approximately \$7 billion in aid in fiscal year 2024. However, what has not been asked enough is whether those resources have gone where they could do the most good, much less what return American taxpayers have received for the billions of dollars thus committed. In an era of not only constrained budgets, but also great-power competition, enlightened self-interest demands that the stewards of the public purse be both intentional and strategic with these limited

resources. The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act, signed into law by President Trump in 2018, created a new US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) with a mandate to catalyze market-based, private-sector development, spur economic growth in less-developed countries (many in Africa) and advance America's foreign policy interests. Assessing how well the DFC has carried out that mission in the years since, and what might be done to get a potentially powerful diplomatic and economic tool back on track, ought to be a priority in the new administration.

*** Commercial Diplomacy.** While the US government has a role in ensuring access and a level playing field, it is American entrepreneurs and businesses whose investments will promote development, create jobs, and generate wealth on both sides of the Atlantic. With youthful populations and their growing purchasing power in addition to its abundant natural resources, African countries ought to be prime candidates for the attention of the American private sector. Indeed, while US companies, ranging from tech start-ups to Walmart, have done well with their investments across Africa, more robust and better coordinated commercial diplomacy could increase their ranks significantly, both quantitatively and qualitatively. US embassies and their chiefs of mission ought to be strictly accountable for what they do (or fail to do) to promote for American companies and other economic interests.

*** Security concerns.** The civil war in Sudan has forced more people from their homes than any other current conflict in the world, with more than 8 million internally displaced and about 3 million refugees in neighboring countries. Moreover, as the 2024 Global Terrorism Index Report underscored, the epicenter of terrorism has shifted from the Middle East and North Africa to Sub-Saharan Africa, concentrated in the Sahel region, which now accounts for almost half of deaths from terrorism around the world. Tackling these challenges in a way that is consonant with US

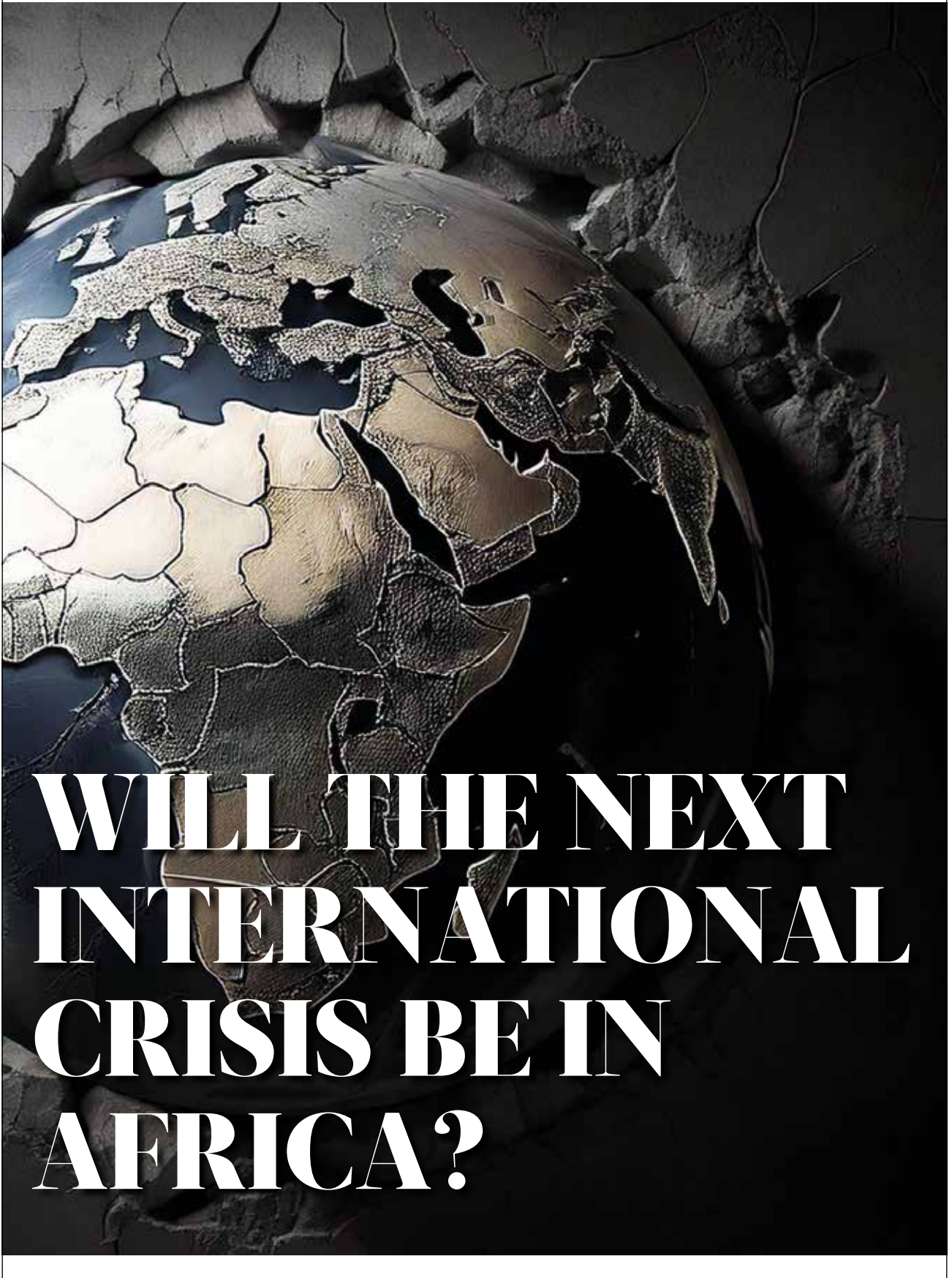
interests is not at cross purposes with President Trump's determination to avoid new wars and open-ended commitments to counterinsurgency operations or nation-building exercises. In his first term, President Trump correctly assessed that there was neither a capable local partner in the Mogadishu regime nor any US national interests that warranted risking American lives or treasure on the ground in Somalia. He ordered US military personnel pulled out. Any threats posed by al-Shabaab, the Qaeda-aligned Islamist movement, or the Islamic State's local affiliate could be dealt with from offshore or bases in nearby countries. The Biden administration reversed this Trump order, which will need to be revisited after the inauguration.

Meanwhile, amidst the global context of increasing competition with revisionist powers like China, Russia, Iran – all three of which have ramped up African entanglements over the last four years – and a host of other malign actors, state and non-state, African regimes nowadays have multiple options to choose from. To respond effectively, the new US administration will need to be nimble and pragmatic: where it makes strategic sense to engage, it must be prepared to offer a better a value proposition than America's rivals.

Africa is more important than ever to the national interests of the United States and its geopolitical and geoeconomic significance will only increase in the years ahead. President Trump has repeatedly shown a willingness to question and, where necessary, break with conventional wisdom. Working together with willing and capable partners on the African continent, the promise spoken by President Trump at the UN in 2019 can be fulfilled: "When our nations are greater, the future will be brighter, our people will be happier, and our partnerships will be stronger." *

J. PETER PHAM

Ambassador J. Peter Pham, currently a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council, served as US Special Envoy for the Sahel Region (2020–2021) and US Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa (2018–2020).



WILL THE NEXT INTERNATIONAL CRISIS BE IN AFRICA?



by James Foggo

The United States is focused on three big global challenges. In the Middle East, it struggles to prevent a full regional war while supporting its ally Israel; in Europe, it supplies Ukraine with arms to blunt the Russians; and in the Western Pacific it strengthens a network of alliances to contain Chinese expansionism.

Meanwhile, the United States funds an intelligence community composed of 18 different agencies, which monitor the globe for prospective hot spots but are often surprised, as in the case of Hamas' attack on Israel last October. While the three big challenges above remain today's focus, one might ask: Where will the next crisis occur?

A recent Italian film, *Io Capitano* ("I am the Captain"), draws attention to the dangers posed by the evolving crisis in the Sahel, largely ignored in Western capitals. It's a fictional account (based on documented real-world experiences) of two boys who leave home in Dakar, Senegal for a better life in Italy. Seydou and Moussa spend all their earnings to obtain false passports and hire smugglers to get them from Senegal to Niger and then to Libya on foot through the Sahara Desert. Along the way they are deprived of food and water, robbed, tortured and imprisoned. The two boys are separated but eventually reunite in Libya for the harrowing transit across the Mediterranean. Lacking adequate funds, the smugglers offer Seydou a chance to earn his and Moussa's ticket by agreeing to captain the ship

that will transport the migrants. At 16 years of age, he is unlikely to be prosecuted by authorities upon arrival in Italy. I recommend the film and won't spoil the outcome.

Io Capitano resonated with me, having been involved in the US Navy's Africa Partnership Station off and on for almost a decade while stationed in Naples, Italy. Starting in 2008 the Africa Partnership Station trained and worked with African navies and coast guards. When I first arrived in Naples in 2010, it was apparent to me that coastal African nations suffered from "sea blindness" – they failed to see the threat posed by piracy on the high seas. So we went to work with the goal of training and equipping African navies and coast guards so they could protect their own sovereign interests at sea. The main tool to accomplish this goal was a series of US-organized exercises with our African partners—Cutlass Express in East Africa; Phoenix Express in North Africa; and Obangame Express in the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa.

In order to establish the rule of law on the high seas, we enacted the African Maritime Law Enforcement Program and established cooperative links among navies, law

The future of the African continent has taken a back seat to preventing the spread of conflict in Europe and the Middle East.

enforcement agencies and the court systems of coastal countries on the African continent, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea. After the formulation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct in 2013, the coastal nations of the Gulf of Guinea set up a maritime system to address problems with piracy; illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; illegal trafficking; and terrorism.

The US relationship with African navies grew stronger every year. In February 2016, the Africans demonstrated the ability to police their own waters with the spectacular take-down and arrest of pirates on Motor Vessel Maximus, a gasoline tanker, which was pirated in the Gulf of Guinea with the crew and cargo held for ransom. The take-down of these pirates, enabled by the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, and facilitated by the navies of Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, was a turning point in the organic defense of the African coast.

By 2017, Europe began to take notice. NATO established a Strategic Direction Hub for the Middle East/North Africa at Joint Forces Command in Naples and I took the Hub to full operational capability in 2018. We manned a liaison office to the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa and assisted it in finding African solutions to African problems. Then COVID hit, Ethiopia and Eritrea entered into yet another conflict and Western assistance was put on hold.

The United States and China remain in competition for influence in Africa. As George Ward indicated in an article in 2021, the United States was ahead at the time in countries where it had more established relationships, such as the naval cooperation cited above. Ward also warns, however, against complacency. The Chinese have been continuously upgrading their bilateral relationships with a large number of African countries while American and other Western influence has waned.

The future of the African continent has taken a back seat to preventing the spread of conflict in Europe and the Middle East. Western ambivalence has led to chaos in Africa. Since 2020, there have been eight successful coups d'état in West and Central Africa to include

Gabon, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Chad (and one failed attempt—Sierra Leone). Despite a \$100 million investment in a US base in Niamey Niger, the ruling junta demanded that the United States withdraw its military presence from the country, only to be replaced by Russian forces days later. Sudan is mired in a civil war, exacerbated by drought and famine.

Lawlessness and ungoverned spaces in the Sahel enable a nexus between illegal traffickers and terrorists. What happens in Africa today will affect Europe and the United States tomorrow. As chronicled in *Io Capitano*, the flow of migrants has already created a crisis in some Western nations.

It is time for the US to restore a strong focus to Africa in general and the Sahel in particular. Western nations must revisit their policies and priorities on the African continent before it is too late. The rule of law must be reestablished in the Sahel region and that requires a multinational strategy, cooperation, and resources. Doing anything less will create an opportunity for exploitation by Russia, China, Iran, and other nefarious actors.

We should remember that 30 years ago al-Qaeda roamed the globe looking for the right place to establish “the base” where it could rule with impunity and prepare the series of attacks leading to 9/11. Sudan was one such place. In the immortal words of Yogi Berra, this could be “déjà vu all over again...”

JAMES FOGGO

Admiral James G. Foggo, US Navy (ret.) is the Dean of the Center for Maritime Strategy and a member of the board of directors of the JST. He is the former commander of US Naval Forces Europe and Africa, and Allied Joint Force Command, Naples. He commanded NATO joint exercises (Baltic Operations) in 2015 and 2016 as well as Exercise Trident Juncture in 2018.



The port of Mogadishu after an Egyptian warship delivered weaponry on September 23, 2024. Photo credit: Reuters/Feisal Omar.

EGYPT'S SOMALIA GAMBLE





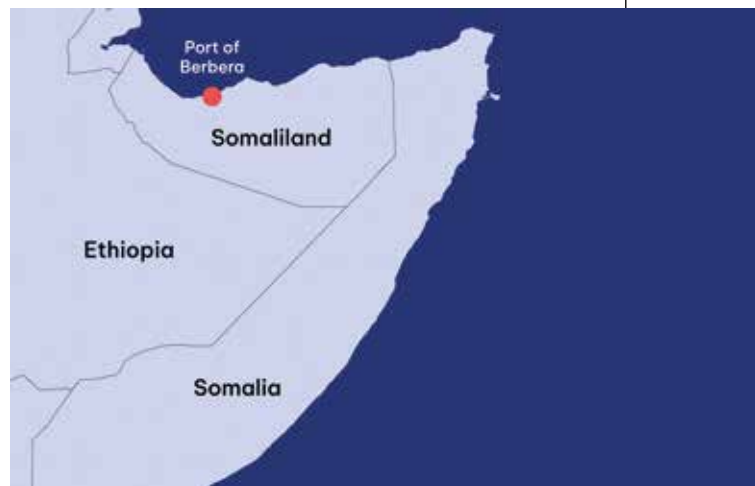
by Michael Rubin

In late September, an Egyptian naval vessel docked in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, to offload a shipment of weaponry including anti-aircraft guns and artillery, many of them outdated and some even World War II-vintage. It was Egypt's second major delivery. A month before, two Egyptian C-130s landed at Mogadishu's international airport to deliver a similar shipment of weapons.

Why is Egypt arming Somalia? The answer lies in the tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia over a dam on the Nile, and also in the tensions between Somalia and Somaliland in the Horn of Africa.

Ninety-five percent of Egypt's population lives in the Nile River river valley and Nile delta, and the country's ability to feed itself depends on the Nile. Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a project four times larger than the Hoover Dam, directly threatens Egypt. Cairo concedes Ethiopia's turn to hydroelectric power is legal; it just demands Addis Ababa do so in accordance with the principles of customary international law and coordinate water management. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed could have resolved the dispute with Egypt diplomatically. But, as he did earlier with Kenya and Somalia, he sought a fait accompli.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi believes he has leverage over Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa. On January 1, 2024, Ethiopia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland: Somaliland would give Ethiopia a long-term lease for a new port that Ethiopia would build near Berbera and, in exchange, Ethiopia would recognize Somaliland's independence from Somalia. Somalia, which rejects Somaliland's autonomy, reacted with outrage. Egypt sides with Somalia.



Somaliland was once independent. It became a British protectorate almost 150 years ago. In 1960, as decolonization swept Africa, the United Kingdom granted Somaliland independence, a move recognized by 30 states including all permanent members of the UN Security

Council. Five days later, though, Somaliland agreed to join with the former Italian Somaliland to form Somalia.

Somalis hoped for democracy; what they got was another tin pot dictatorship. Cold War-era dictator Siad Barre ran Somalia into the ground. While he promised modernization, he promoted his own clan's interests. As a Darood, he reserved special opprobrium for the rival Isaaq clan predominant in Somaliland. His genocidal campaign killed upwards of 100,000 civilians.

Somaliland leaders have argued that since they entered into Somalia voluntarily they could then exit it the same way. As Somalia crumbled, Somaliland leaders re-declared independence. Somaliland has operated as an independent country since 1991, with its own government, currency, and education system, avoiding the anarchy and even famines that characterized Somalia. Somaliland is the most vibrant democracy in the Horn of Africa; they will again hold elections—their eighth—on November 13, 2024. While the international community has spent billions of dollars trying to sponsor but failing to achieve fair elections in Somalia, Somaliland not only largely self-financed its own polls, but it also became the first country in the world to secure voter registration with biometric iris scans.

Even absent international recognition, Somaliland outperforms Somalia. It hosts multibillion-dollar telecom and financial firms, one of Africa's largest Coca Cola bottling plants, and a deep-water port that the World Bank ranks as the top one in sub-Saharan Africa, above Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Lagos, and on par with Piraeus and Oslo in Europe.

Many countries now recognize Somaliland's potential. Several African and European states have offices if not consulates in the country. On October 10, 2024, the House of Lords in the British Parliament debated outright recognition of Somaliland. In the United States, many in the Pentagon and intelligence community are also sympathetic, seeing value in an oasis of democracy and security in a tumultuous region.

The US State Department once treated

Somaliland akin to Taiwan – as an autonomous entity, but in recent years, it has grown cold, if not outright hostile to Somaliland. During the Obama administration, the narrative was on Somalia emerging from anarchy. Both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and successor John Kerry focused on Somalia's recovery, not Somaliland's independence. In Congress, Ilhan Omar, a Minnesota congresswoman born in Somalia (and reportedly daughter of a military officer involved in the anti-Isaaq genocide), has also sought to undermine US-Somaliland ties. This leads ironically to a situation in which the State Department sides with Somalia, a pro-Chinese and terror-ridden kleptocracy over Somaliland, a pro-American, pro-Western democracy with ties to Taiwan.

Egypt has no beef with Somaliland and no real interest in Somalia itself, but sees opportunity in the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute. As the adage goes, the enemy of my enemy is my friend. By arming Somalia, Egypt likely figures it can annoy Ethiopia and perhaps even stop its drive to the sea.

Egyptians know little about Somalia where clan politics can confuse even Somalis themselves. For Ethiopia, however, Somalia (and Somaliland) is their backyard where they have meddled for decades. Somalis are the third largest ethnic group in Ethiopia; the country has many agents who speak Somali. Egypt will essentially operate blind.

One of the dynamics Egypt overlooks is Somalia's double-dealing with al-Shabaab, a terrorist group that swears allegiance to al-Qa'ida. But the Egyptians are not alone. Both US Navy SEALs and Turkish Special Forces train and equip Somali units to tackle terror. Western countries donate arms. Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud wins Western respect with diplomatic talk but prioritizes his own political survival over al-Shabaab's defeat, often allowing weapons to leak to the terrorists in order to weaken regional or political competitors.

By providing the Somali government with weapons absent any controls, the Egyptian

government essentially opens the floodgates. I have interviewed captured insurgents in both northern Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo; each talked of Somalia's al-Shabaab running weapons smuggling routes.

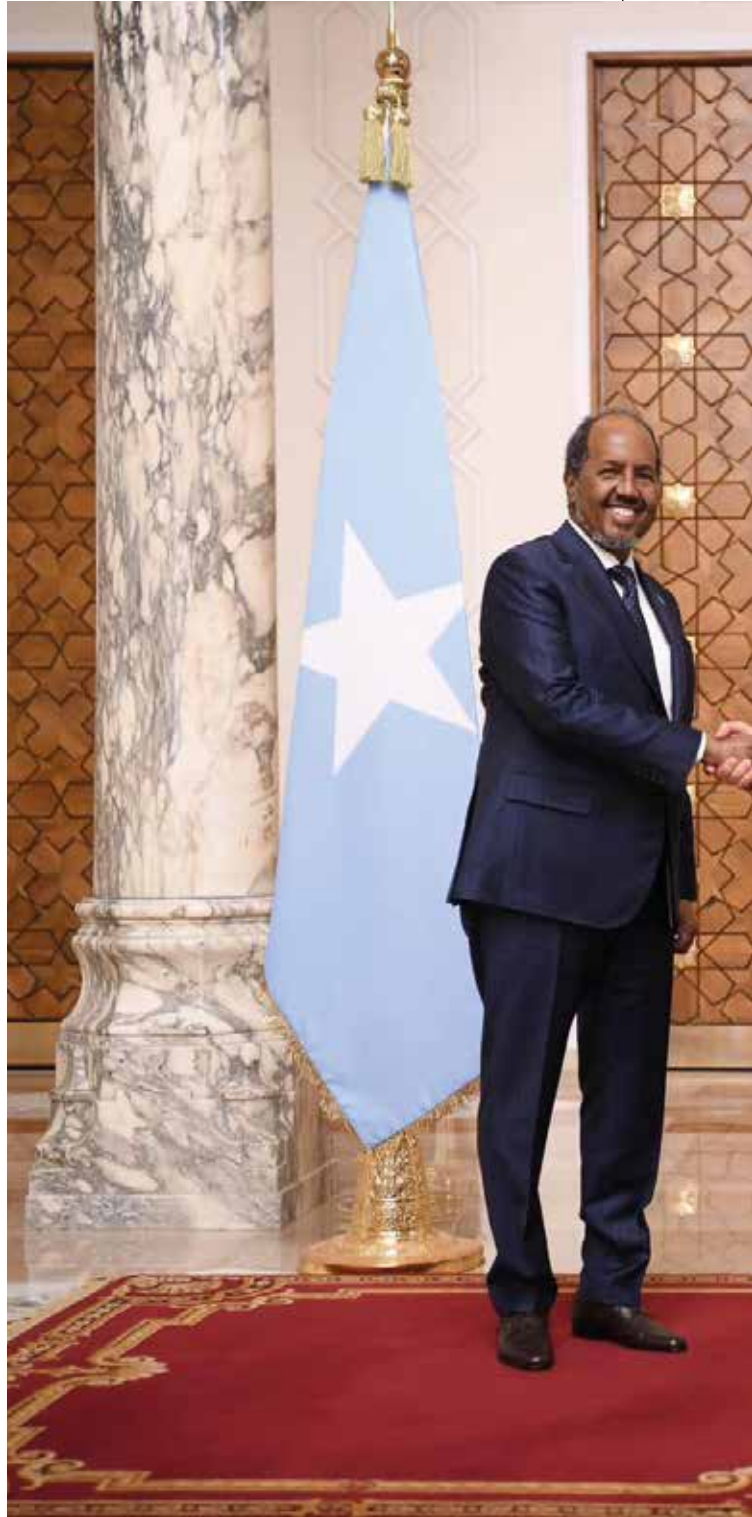
Meanwhile, the world's bloodiest conflict today is not in Ukraine or Gaza, but rather Sudan where the Somali government can make millions by reselling its arms. Given poor Somali controls and the country's corruption, Egyptian weaponry might also end up on dhows, heading up the Red Sea to deliver arms to Egypt's own Islamic State insurgents.

Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qadhafi's fall in 2011 also flooded the region with weaponry that insurgents and terrorists still use to attack, extort, and overthrow regional governments. Egypt's cynical move risks making the same mistake.

Rather than betting on Somalia's dysfunctional government, a better strategy for Egypt (and the pro-Western alliance) might be to invest in Somaliland, recognize it and out compete Ethiopia for local influence, while helping a country in the Horn of Africa where Islamist terrorism withers, not grows. *

MICHAEL RUBIN

Michael Rubin, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and director of policy analysis at the Middle East Forum, is a frequent visitor to Somaliland and Somalia.





Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and his Somali counterpart Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in Cairo, August 2024.
Photo credit: Arab World Press via Reuters Connect.

UNDER LULA, BRAZIL AIMS HIGH BUT FALLS SHORT

President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva during the signing ceremony of a "Fuel of the Future" law in Brasília, October 8, 2024. Photo credit: REUTERS/Adriano Machado.





by Richard M. Sanders

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva returned to Brazil's presidency in 2023, it was clear that he wished to restore the high international profile which Brazil had enjoyed during his first two terms, 2003-2010.

International expectations were high given that his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro, had been largely uninterested in foreign policy. However, Lula has faced significant obstacles and it appears that while Brazil may be ready to enter the world stage, the world is less ready for Brazil than Lula may have hoped.

BRING BACK THE GOOD OLD DAYS

During his first two terms, Brazil's economy was humming as its agricultural and mineral products found ready markets, especially in China. Brazilian banks and construction firms started to look outward, especially within Latin America. Brazil's state development bank provided financial muscle for exporters and investors.

Politically it appeared that the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) was consolidating into a bloc that could negotiate with global counterparts such as the European Union. Under Lula, Brazil midwived the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a regional political entity which Brazil looked to lead by sheer weight of population, geographic size and economy.

On the broader international stage, Brazil opened embassies throughout Africa and the Caribbean, with the evident goal of gaining support for Brazil's effort to obtain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Many observers found his combination attractive: leftist politics and willingness to confront the developed West together with his impeccable democratic credentials.

During his thirteen years out of office, Lula battled corruption charges which led to his imprisonment. (His conviction was ultimately reversed on procedural grounds.) And the good times over which he had presided vanished, as commodity prices tumbled and the country struggled with fiscal imbalances built up during the boom years of his administration. The failures of his successors, most recently the erratic right-wing Jair Bolsonaro, however, gave him another chance at power and with it, international prominence.

A FAILED EFFORT WITH VENEZUELA

Within the Western Hemisphere, Lula's most notable, although thus far unsuccessful, initiative has been his effort, together with Colombia's Gustavo Petro and (initially at least) Mexico's Andres Manuel López Obrador, to address the crisis in Venezuela.

In Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro remains in power despite convincing evidence that he in fact lost the presidential election held on July 28. Lula had maintained a warm relationship with his predecessor Hugo Chávez. Brazil shares a common border with Venezuela and has a strong interest in limiting further refugee flows. And the Biden administration was prepared to support his diplomacy, since it wanted to avoid or postpone tough decisions regarding the re-imposition of sanctions on Venezuela it had earlier lifted in an effort to encourage free elections. Also, Brazil had played a role earlier in urging Maduro to back off from his threats against neighboring Guyana over the two countries' border dispute.



Meeting of South American presidents in Brazil, May 2023. Photo credit: Bolívar Parra/Pool / Latin America News Agency via Reuters Connect.

Lula sent Celso Amorim, former Brazilian foreign and defense minister, now a presidential adviser, to Caracas to broker a deal. He raised suspicions among Venezuela's opposition and its supporters when he floated the idea of holding a second election at a later date as somehow being the solution. In any event Maduro's unyielding insistence on the validity of his election and his arrests of opposition figures condemned this initiative to irrelevance. In a particular slight, the regime harassed opposition figures for whom Brazil had agreed to assume responsibility.

It appears that Lula thought his personal prestige and history with Venezuela would be enough to persuade Maduro to accept a democratic outcome and leave power. As a result, Lula's pretensions of hemispheric leadership have taken a hit. The subject was embarrassingly missing from his speech at the UN General Assembly which painfully contrasted with that of Chile's Gabriel Boric, another left-leaning Latin leader, who called out Maduro's actions in no uncertain terms.

If Lula was incautiously bold in Venezuela, he took the opposite tack regarding Haiti, where he declined to support the creation of a multinational force to restore order. Brazil had been active in earlier UN-authorized peacekeeping missions, even providing a

Brazilian general as leader. But Brazil is hardly alone in not wanting to return, especially as the earlier mission was marked by ugly accusations of sexual abuse of Haitian women by peacekeepers. His reluctance to undertake an admittedly hard, unrewarding effort does make claims of regional leadership ring somewhat hollow.

TRYING TO REANIMATE A REGIONAL BLOC

Lula's broader efforts to recover Brazil's position in Latin America have also fallen a bit flat. Shortly after returning to office he sought to revive the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), a grouping created at a time when left-of-center governments seemed on the rise. But there is little enthusiasm today, with the ideological complexion of the region more varied. Chile's Boric provided the coup de grâce, suggesting that ideologically based groupings such as UNASUR were unnecessary.

We have yet to see new dynamism in the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) under Lula's leadership. The bloc's 25 year-long effort to conclude a free trade agreement with the European Union is always on the verge of a breakthrough which never actually happens. The parties are reportedly close to agreement on a

text which addresses the issue of environmental commitments, always a sensitive subject for Brazil, but France reportedly is trying to create a blocking minority within the EU. While success cannot be ruled out, the outlook remains uncertain.

Centrifugal forces within MERCOSUR are hard for Brazil to manage. Uruguay has started discussing a bilateral free trade agreement with China, though Brazil has always insisted that such negotiations be organized as a bloc. Brazil's relations with Argentina, the cornerstone of MERCOSUR, have become complicated with the election of Argentina's libertarian president, Javier Milei. Both Lula and Milei have traded barbs at each other, and relations reached a low point when Milei chose not to attend a recent semi-annual MERCOSUR summit, though he did make an unofficial visit to Brazil for a conference of regional conservative activists.

GLOBAL AMBITIONS—UKRAINE, BRICS AND UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Lula's ambitions go beyond Latin America. Perhaps drawing on his experience as a labor leader, he often views international issues as ripe for negotiation, with Brazil placed to act as a mediator. This is not new. In 2010 he had sought to engage in nuclear diplomacy between the United States and Iran, pushing a disarmament plan which the US found to be inadequate.

Lula has sought a role in the Russo-Ukraine War, while following his predecessor's position of condemning Russia's invasion itself but not imposing any sanctions against Russia. He has repeatedly called for a negotiated solution, urging Ukraine to give up its claim to Crimea in the name of global "tranquility." Brazil and China have made a joint proposal which includes an immediate ceasefire in place, though neither Ukraine nor Russia have accepted it.

Regarding the Gaza war, Lula has been quick to denounce Israel's response to the October 7 attack by Hamas, going so far as to term it "genocide" comparable to "when Hitler decided to kill the Jews." He also recalled his ambassador in Tel Aviv. However, Brazil's response following Iran's missile attack on Israel was limited to a terse statement issued by the Foreign Ministry expressing "concern."

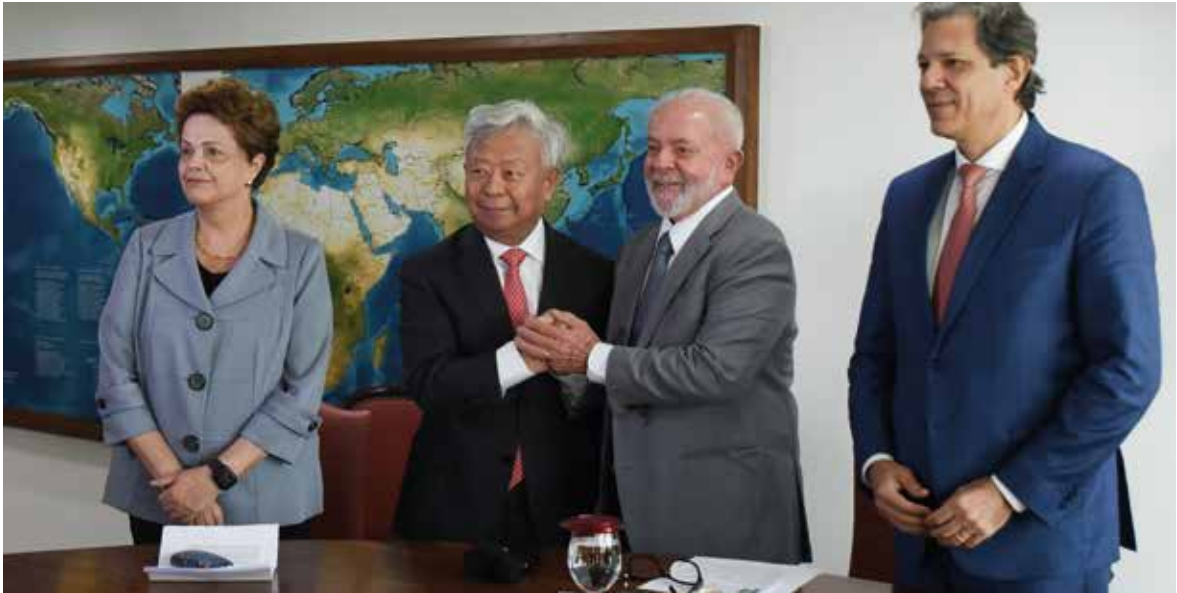
An important part of Brazil's quest for an international role is its participation in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China with South Africa joining later) a grouping which Russia initiated in a meeting in Yekaterinburg in 2009. While some effort has been made to institutionalize the BRICS as a forum for policy coordination and economic integration, beyond summit communiqués which have a limited shelf life, the principal achievement has been the creation of the New Development Bank based in Shanghai, also known as the BRICS bank.

Lula can claim one victory in the naming of Dilma Rousseff, his hapless successor as Brazil's president, to be the Bank's president. But in many ways Brazil is an outsider among the BRICS. Of the four founding members, it has the smallest gross domestic product. Geographically it is distant from Eurasia where Russia, China and India are located. Its military power is dwarfed by that of the other founding states. Other than its occasional and so far unsuccessful diplomatic forays, it is not consistently engaged outside of the Americas.

BRICS appears to be widening rather than deepening, with Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Iran and Ethiopia having already joined. Saudi Arabia is considering an invitation, while Turkey has applied to join. Brazil had sponsored Argentina's entry, but after the election of Javier Milei, who sees Argentina's future lying with the West, it has declined.

BRICS may evolve into a new version of the moribund Non-Aligned Movement with its 120 members. Brazil may be able to point to progress in gaining more power for the Global South vis-a-vis the US and Western Europe, but it runs the risk of becoming just one member state among many. All in all, the BRICS have been a net plus for Brazil, but its role should not be exaggerated.

The other pillar of Lula's effort to carve out a major international role is his promotion of Brazil's effort to obtain a permanent seat on the United Nation Security Council. He can take some satisfaction from the results of the recent meeting of the General Assembly which approved the "Pact for the Future" which called for increased representation for African, Latin American and Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific states.



Lula da Silva with Jin Liqun, President of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Finance Minister Fernando Haddad and Dilma Rousseff, president of the BRICS bank, March 2024. Photo credit: Ton Molina via Reuters Connect

Welcome as this may have been in Brasilia, this does not mean that it is likely to happen soon. Any Brazilian claim based on its alleged leading role in Latin America would be challenged by other states in the region. Also, Brazil's limited engagement in UN peacekeeping operations (although it has participated in some) and the lack of success from its occasional efforts as a mediator may also weigh against its candidacy.

FOR NOW, BRAZIL'S REACH EXCEEDS ITS GRASP

It is not news that Lula thinks big. In 2008 he said: "Brazil has finally found its destiny and intends to transform itself into a great nation." Internationally at least, its time has not yet come. Its military is relatively small given its size and lacks capacity to project itself beyond its borders. It is yet to find a major international crisis where it can successfully act as a mediator. (Venezuela would have been a natural opportunity but Brazil's hopes have collapsed in the face of Maduro's stonewalling.) Its efforts to put itself at the center of regional groupings or the over-hyped BRICS have had unimpressive results.

At the same time Brazil is more than just another country—its size, resources, and

population are impressive. It is a true giant in agriculture, and is approaching that status in oil production. It manufactures aircraft and has a launch center allowing it to partner with other countries with space programs. It has a dynamic culture with many achievements in music and film/television. There are areas, such as the intersection of energy, environment and economics, where Brazil already has a large enough presence that it can now speak internationally with authority.


But Brazil's efforts to use diplomacy to bootstrap itself into the top rank of global leadership seem likely to meet with frustration for the foreseeable future. *

RICHARD M. SANDERS

Richard M. Sanders is Senior Fellow, Western Hemisphere at the Center for the National Interest and a Global Fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. A former member of the Senior Foreign Service of the State Department, he served as Director of the Office of Brazilian and Southern Cone Affairs, 2010-13.



Photo credit: Reuters/Rachel Wisniewski

The background of the page is a close-up, slightly wrinkled American flag, showing the red and white stripes. The text is centered over this background.

ELON MUSK AND THE ALLURE OF THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

BY AHMED CHARAI

In a world ensnared by armed conflicts and rising tensions, youth today — especially in regions like the Middle East and Africa — face a crisis of purpose. They grapple with feelings of isolation, disillusionment, or the lure of extremism. They need more than just political solutions or economic reforms. We must rekindle a dream—one that inspires, transcends limitations, and lifts people from despair into a realm of possibility.

For years, the American Dream has appeared to be fading. Economic inequality, political strife, and growing disillusionment clouded the promise that anyone could forge his or her own path in America. Yet Musk, through sheer determination and relentless ambition, has reignited that dream for millions, offering a bold vision that transcends borders and cultures.

Few Americans embody this transformative power of dreaming as profoundly as Elon Musk. His success isn't solely about technological advancement or financial gain; it's about inspiration.

Most importantly, Musk offers a way out of the cynicism and despair that ensnare youth. He ignites the imagination of young people, not just in the US but globally, demonstrating that anything is achievable when we dare to believe in something greater than ourselves.

Born in Pretoria, South Africa in 1971, Musk faced childhood struggles that shaped his resolve, despite a comfortable upbringing. He found solace in books, devouring knowledge from science fiction to technology. At just 12, he

taught himself programming and created a video game called Blaster. In 1989, Musk left South Africa for the U.S., driven by a belief that this was the land where dreams could flourish—and he was right.

By the age of 31, Musk was already a multimillionaire. Success for him has never been merely about wealth; it was also about pushing the boundaries of what's possible.

In 2002, he founded SpaceX with the ambition of making space travel affordable and eventually colonizing Mars. The space industry had long been a government domain, but Musk envisioned it as the next frontier for private-sector exploration. Today, SpaceX has developed reusable rockets and dramatically reduced the cost of space travel. Its achievement of sending astronauts to the International Space Station marked a new era of spaceflight.

Musk's vision of making humanity a multi-planetary species is no longer a distant fantasy; it's becoming a reality.

Musk's Starlink satellite internet project could be transformative for regions with limited technological access. By providing reliable internet to remote areas, Starlink gives people unprecedented access to education and global markets, empowering them to innovate and thrive. This support is particularly crucial for the Iranians who aspire to a better future though today live under the oppressive mullahs' dictatorship.

This imperative extends beyond Iran, as similar efforts in Palestine and Lebanon can foster hope and drive for a brighter future.

Simultaneously, Musk revolutionized the automobile industry. In 2004, he joined Tesla, an electric car company that many considered doomed to fail. At that time, electric vehicles

were seen as impractical, but Musk believed they were the future. The development of affordable electric vehicles, alongside Musk's commitment to solar energy and energy storage, offers hope for countries heavily impacted by climate change.

Imagine the potential for Middle East and African nations, rich in sunlight yet struggling with energy infrastructure. With clean energy solutions, entire regions could be powered by solar energy, liberating them from the economic and environmental burdens of oil dependency. For youth, this translates into green jobs and leadership in the emerging global economy. Today, Tesla is a symbol of the clean energy revolution, driving a global shift toward sustainability. Musk has forced the world to reconsider its relationship with energy, proving that profitability and responsibility can coexist.

Musk's story isn't just an American tale; it resonates globally. His success inspires young people everywhere to believe in the power of dreaming big. His willingness to risk everything, to fail, and to persevere strikes a chord in an era when many feel constrained by societal expectations and conformity.

This message is especially powerful for Arab and African youth, who often grow up in environments where opportunities seem scarce and societal norms stifle innovation.

In regions where economic challenges can limit aspirations, Musk's journey illustrates that the future belongs to the bold. In a world that often feels fractured, Musk's journey is a testament to what's possible when one refuses to be defined by failure. His resilience, innovation, and boundless imagination reflect the very qualities that built America, reigniting the flame of the American Dream in the hearts of dreamers worldwide.

As President John F. Kennedy declared, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

Elon Musk's story is a powerful reminder that the American Dream transcends wealth

and success—it's about pushing the limits of possibility, believing in a better future, and having the courage to pursue it against all odds. In a time of widespread disillusionment, Musk offers a vision of hope.

His journey proves that relentless ambition and an unyielding spirit can turn dreams into reality. For today's generation—and for those to come—Elon Musk stands as a living embodiment of the American Dream, a beacon of what can be achieved when we dare to dream. *

AHMED CHARAI

Publisher

Ahmed Charai is the publisher of the Jerusalem Strategic Tribune and the CEO of a Morocco-based media conglomerate. He is on the board of directors of the Atlantic Council, the International Crisis Group, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Foreign Policy Research Institute, the Center for the National Interest, and the International Advisory Council of United States Institute of Peace.



Photo credit: Shutterstock

THE AXIS OF EXPANSIONISTS



BY DAN NEGREA

Military aggressions and provocations by China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea have created one of the most dangerous security environments in decades. Making matters worse, these powers are supporting each other in their malign actions. How should we refer to this emerging bloc?

Russia is waging war to make Ukraine its colony again. Iran has attacked Israel both directly and through its terrorist proxies Hamas, Hizbullah, and the Houthis. China wants to occupy independent Taiwan by force and is keeping up constant military pressure on the island. North Korea wants to coerce South Korea into agreeing to unification under Pyongyang's control. In each case, the aggressor is a brutal dictatorship with a less successful economy and a less free society than the target of its attacks.

The aggressors support each other. Russia receives from Iran and North Korea military supplies, and from China machine tools and semiconductors that it uses in its military industry. In return, Russia is supplying advanced military technology and equipment. Ninety percent of Iranian oil exports go to China.

North Korea is rumored to have sent a military contingent to fight alongside Russia in Ukraine. China, Russia, and Iran have held military exercises together. All these countries also help each other diplomatically in international fora.

The emergence of a bloc of nuclear or near-nuclear countries that openly support each other in changing international borders by force is a very dangerous development. It brings to mind the 1930s when the Axis Powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan caused conflicts in different parts of the world that later converged into one global conflagration.

What should we call this group of countries that, though not formal treaty allies, act in an increasingly coordinated manner?

Former National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien refers to a "new Beijing-Moscow-Tehran axis" and the need for determined action to "thwart and deter" it. Some talk of a China-Russia axis of revisionists. There are mentions of an alliance of autocracies, a quartet of chaos, an axis of aggressors, and a new axis of evil.

Each of these terms sheds light on a defining characteristic of this bloc. "Axis" is helpful in creating an association with the dictatorial powers that plunged the world into the Second World War. Calling them "autocracies" is factual – none of these countries is a democracy. "Aggression" describes their actions and

“revisionism” their mindset. “Chaos” is an apt adjective for their effect on international relations. “Evil” becomes a good summary of these regimes’ brutal actions at home and unprovoked aggression abroad.

“Axis of expansionists” summarizes the insights above and adds additional helpful perspectives. It allows us to set aside the terms “revisionist” and “autocratic” without losing their insights: The problem with these powers is not that they espouse revisionist theories, but that they act on them by attacking other countries.

Similarly, many autocratic regimes are not a threat to world peace and may actually contribute to maintaining it. “Chaos” and “evil” are accurate but do not tell us exactly how they are causing the chaos or why the evil of these regimes is a threat to other countries.

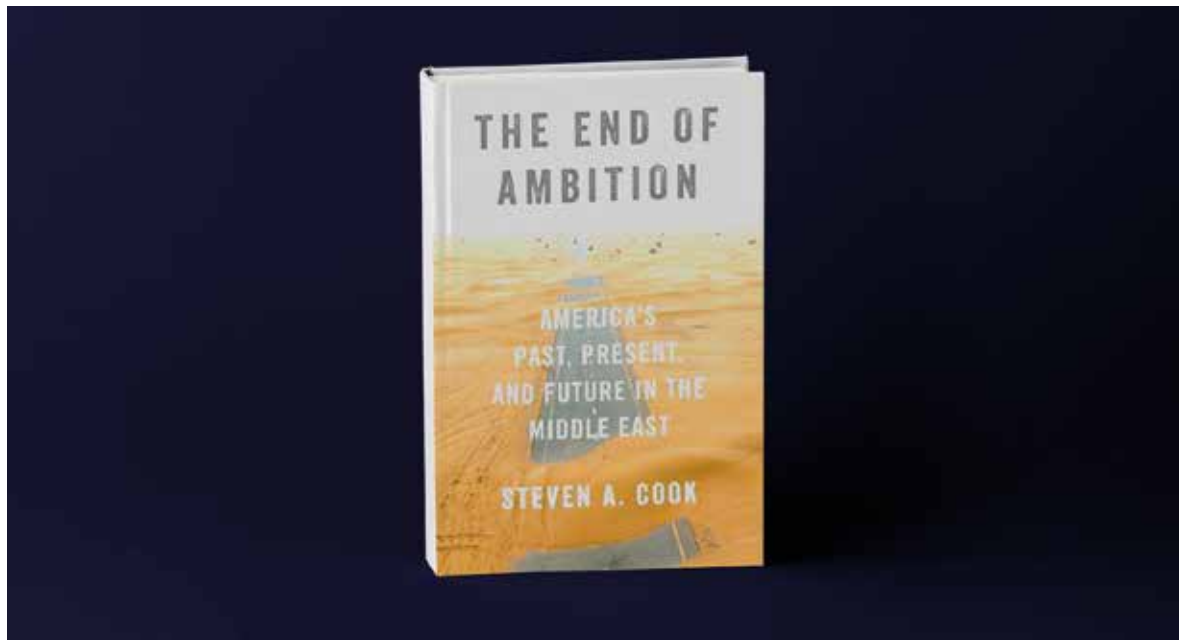
“Aggression” conveys to us that they are acting on their evil intentions. It is also broad enough to refer to more than just military aggression. For example, China is responsible for many kinds of economic malign acts that could be viewed as economic aggression. And all of them are engaged in gray zone activities to hurt America and other free world countries.

“Expansionist” subsumes all the above insights and adds one more: The aggressions of these powers aim to permanently change borders and alter international relations to their advantage.

The Axis of Expansionists of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are a grave threat to the peace, freedom, and prosperity of America and the free world. The growing collaboration between them magnifies, diversifies, and expands the reach of the danger that each of them represents by itself. The freedom-loving countries of the world need to recognize that countering this axis will require concerted and sustained action by them over many decades. *

DAN NEGREA

Dan Negrea is a distinguished fellow of the Atlantic Council’s Freedom and Prosperity Center. He served in the U.S. Department of State as a Senior Advisor in the Secretary’s Policy Planning Staff and as the Special Representative for Commercial and Business Affairs. His is the co-author of *We Win, They Lose: Republican Foreign Policy and the New Cold War*.



WHAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD AND SHOULD NOT DO IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The End of Ambition: America's Past, Present and Future in the Middle East

by Steven Cook, Oxford University Press, 2024

BY MICHAEL MANDELBAUM

In the third of the three *Godfather* movies, Al Pacino, playing Michael Corleone, laments his inability to make a complete break with the family's criminal past: "Just when I thought I was out," he exclaims bitterly, "they pull me back in."

Americans can be forgiven for feeling the same way about the Middle East. In response to the costly failures throughout the wider region – the war in Afghanistan (not geographically part of the Middle East but close to it and similar in cultural and political terms), the war in Iraq, and the unsuccessful campaign to spread democracy to the undemocratically-governed countries there – the last three American presidents have attempted to reduce US involvement. Yet none of them succeeded. The unexpected capture of territory by Islamic fundamentalists, the sudden rise of oil prices in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the attacks on Israel by terrorist organizations to its north and south beginning on October 7, 2023 have pulled America back into the turmoil of the region's affairs.

Can the United States steer a middle course between these two patterns – between costly over-engagement and dangerous aloofness? In *The End of Ambition: America's Past, Present, and Future in the Middle East*, Steven A. Cook, the Eni Enrico Mattei Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, makes the case that it can. The better approach, he says, is one that the United States has followed, with good results, in the past.

In the quarter-century after Great Britain left the Middle East in the late 1960s and the United States became enmeshed in the politics of the region, American policy sought to ward off threats to its principal interests there. Then, beginning in the 1990s, it invested blood and treasure in attempts to transform Middle Eastern governments in accordance with American political values. The first approach succeeded; the second failed.

The United States, Cook argues persuasively, should therefore return to the approach of the first period. Then, the United States had three goals: ensuring the free flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world; preventing a single hostile power – be it the Soviet Union, Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser, or Iraq under Saddam Hussein – from dominating the region

(and therefore its oil); and ensuring the survival of the state of Israel. It achieved all three.

One example, among several that could be cited, was the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. To keep the rabidly anti-Western theocratic regime to which the 1979 Iranian Revolution had given rise from scoring a decisive victory and thus placing itself in a position to exercise hegemony in the Middle East, the United States provided assistance to Iraq. In order to ensure the continuing flow of oil, it gave American protection to tankers carrying petroleum from Kuwait and struck Iranian military assets.

These measures thwarted Iran and assured supplies of oil to the West, but at the cost of compromising American political values by siding with the murderous Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. In the first period, the United States subordinated its values to its interests. In the second, the principal purpose of American Middle East policy became the promotion of precisely those values. In this second era, beginning in the mid-1990s, the efforts to install decent, competent, democratic governments in Afghanistan and Iraq, Afghanistan and Iraq, as well outside the Middle East in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti and Kosovo, claimed the attention and the resources of the foreign policy of the United States. (This is the theme of my 2016 book *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era*.) These efforts failed because all of the societies involved lacked the social, political, economic and cultural foundations on which the kind of government the United States sought to foster must rest: they lacked, that is, the appropriate experiences, institutions, skills, and values.

Two lessons for American Middle East policy emerge from this history: blocking dangers to American interests is desirable and feasible; installing institutions that embody American values, while no doubt desirable, is seldom if ever feasible – at least not at a price the American public is willing to pay.

To put it succinctly: prevention, yes; transformation, no.

How should these lessons be applied going forward? The country that now threatens American interests is the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is conducting an active campaign to achieve dominance in the region by unseating governments friendly to the United States and evicting American forces from the Middle East. That campaign has met with considerable success. Iran now exercises substantial, indeed sometimes dominant, influence in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

Still, the most important Arab countries remain friendly to the United States and Israel's armed forces have, since October 7, 2023, seriously weakened two Iranian clients – Hamas in Gaza and Hizbullah in Lebanon.

If, however, the Islamic Republic should acquire nuclear weapons, as it is actively seeking to do, its capacity to harm America's friends and American interests would expand dramatically. The most important task for American Middle East policy is, therefore, to prevent that from happening. This is especially the case insofar as the American government actively discouraged Israel from hitting Iran's nuclear installations in its recent retaliatory air strikes on Iran. Blocking an Iranian bomb will require, at the least, mounting a credible threat to use force if Iran takes the final steps in building working nuclear weapons, and attacking the Islamic Republic's nuclear facilities if that threat does not achieve its aim. Crippling the Iranian nuclear weapons program would not require repeating the unhappy experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq because American ground troops would not be needed; naval and air power would suffice.

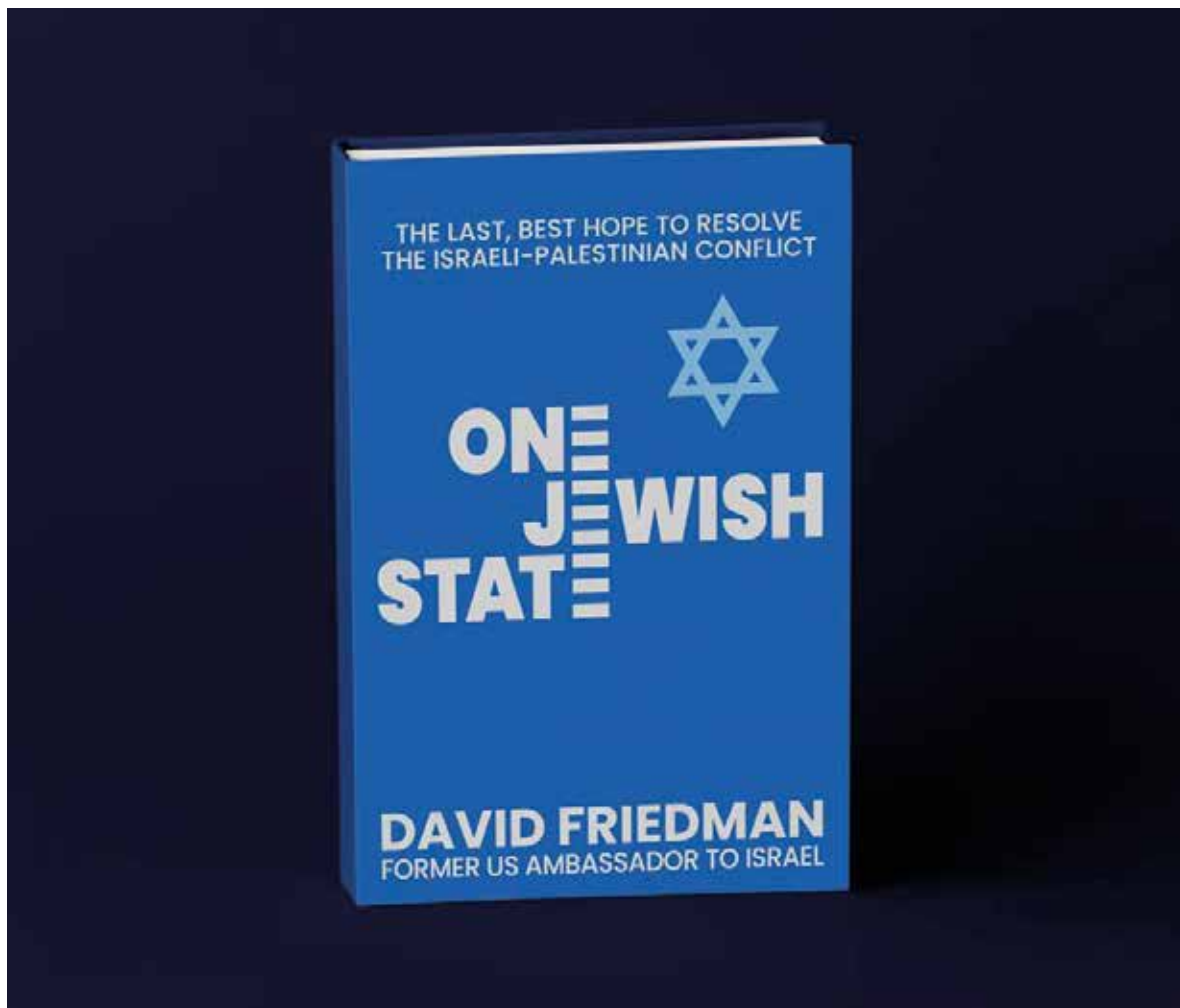
Past American Middle Eastern policy has another implication for the future. For decades, successive American administrations pursued a political settlement between Israel and the Palestinians living in Gaza and on the West Bank of the Jordan River. These efforts all failed, and for the same reasons that American democracy-promotion efforts in the Middle East came to nothing: the political, cultural, and institutional bases for a Palestinian state willing to live

peacefully beside Israel have never existed, and the United States cannot create them.

If, in the wake of the wars in Gaza and Lebanon, the relevant Palestinians somehow undergo a political transformation that makes a durable settlement possible (and leaving aside the question of how the Israelis can be assured that such a transformation has in fact taken place), the United States could profitably lend its assistance, along with other countries, to bringing about such a settlement. Absent, however, the Palestinians becoming what they have thus far never been – a genuine partner for peace – the American government should waste no more time on what has come, over the years, to be called the peace process. The United States has more urgent Middle Eastern business, business that can, and must, be successfully concluded, with Iran. *

MICHAEL MANDELBAUM

Michael Mandelbaum is the Christian A. Herter Professor Emeritus of American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and the author, most recently, of *The Titans of the Twentieth Century: How They Made History and the History They Made*, a study of Woodrow Wilson, Lenin, Hitler, Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gandhi, Ben-Gurion, and Mao, published by Oxford University Press.



A CASE FOR ANNEXING THE WEST BANK

One Jewish State, The Last, Best Hope to Resolve the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,
by David Friedman. Humanix Books, 2024

BY ROBERT SILVERMAN

In late October of 1948, the young state of Israel launched an offensive against the seven Arab armies that had invaded it five months earlier. The Israelis attacked the Egyptian army (including Sudanese, Saudi and Muslim Brotherhood battalions) encamped in the northern Negev desert and on the hills stretching from southern Jerusalem to Hebron. They swept through the Egyptians and their allies, moving up the slopes to the outskirts of Beit Jala overlooking Bethlehem, able with one more push in the morning to take the entire area known today as the southern West Bank (historical Judah). On the night of October 19-20, Prime Minister Ben Gurion called a cabinet meeting. Over the pleading of brigade commander Moshe Dayan, he called a halt to the operation. Instead, Jordan moved its army into the area and occupied it for the next 19 years. Ben Gurion adhered to a vision of partition between Israel and Jordan he had outlined well before the war.

Now, on the brink of another multi-front Israeli military victory, David Friedman suggests a re-do. It's time, he writes in *One Jewish State*, for Israel to extend sovereignty over the entire West Bank, the Biblical heartland, and fix its eastern border on the Jordan River.

"This is not the type of book ordinarily written by a diplomat," writes Friedman. Indeed

this is not the ordinary diplomatic memoir that recounts in detail the author's career exploits. Instead Friedman, President Trump's ambassador to Israel, focuses on one key issue – the case for Israel's annexation of the West Bank (and eventually Gaza) – and uses episodes from his ambassadorial stint to help build the case.

I especially liked the episode of the US government's internal deliberations leading to the decision to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018. "I was the strongest advocate in the Trump administration for the move, and an explosion of violence would have cost me my job," he admits, citing the warnings of unnamed "pundits." Friedman turned out to be right, the embassy move didn't precipitate a wave of violence (though there was a border provocation by Hamas in Gaza).

For the time being, however, the "pundits" are having the last laugh. The Biden administration has slow-walked the embassy move announced in 2018. More than six years later, most embassy staff remain in greater Tel Aviv, leaving the American ambassador nearly alone in Jerusalem in a small compound built to process visa applicants. There has been no progress in building a new chancery in Jerusalem needed for this large embassy. The State Department knows how to build a large chancery quickly in response to policy priorities. For instance, the one in Baghdad was completed in two years during an active insurgency. This is intentional.

In another enjoyable part of the book, Friedman describes Biblical sites he visited



Vision for Peace Conceptual Map published by the Trump Administration on January 28, 2020.

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



on the West Bank, from Rachel's tomb near Bethlehem to Joshua's altar on Mt. Ebal. Indeed the Biblical injunctions about the land of Israel (centered in today's West Bank) and its Biblical history are at the heart of his argument.

And yet, any plan to annex the West Bank must deal with its Palestinian residents. Granting Israeli citizenship rights to 2.5 million West Bankers (and eventually another 2.2 million Gazans) would change the nature of the Jewish state. Israel's Declaration of Independence promises "complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."

Friedman has a creative solution to this conundrum: the Puerto Rico model. Puerto Ricans enjoy the full panoply of US citizen rights, except they don't vote in national elections (although they do participate in the presidential primaries of US political parties) and aren't represented in Congress. In exchange, they don't pay the same federal taxes as other US citizens.

There are two problems with the Puerto Rico model for the West Bank. First, the majority of Puerto Ricans agree on their status in the US, most recently in a 2020 referendum on statehood. Friedman doesn't mention offering West Bankers a similar referendum on becoming part of Israel. We know what the result would be. The Puerto Rico model resembles the Palestinian autonomy plan called for in the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty, which had no Palestinian takers then or now. They want an independent state (though haven't made much progress on building the institutions of said state). Second, there is no consensus inside Israel on annexing the West Bank.

Instead, Friedman might consider reviving the Trump Peace Plan of 2020. It does allow Israel to annex the strategically important Jordan Valley and adjacent desert (roughly 30 percent of the West Bank) under certain conditions. Whether or not it is formally annexed to Israel, the Jordan Valley will undoubtedly remain Israel's eastern security

border. That is an Israeli consensus only strengthened by the recent Iranian-led attacks. It is thinly populated with Israeli kibbutzim and moshavim (mostly established by Labor governments after 1967) and a few Palestinian villages. No Israeli leader (including Prime Minister Rabin who vowed in his last Knesset speech to retain it) would consider withdrawing from the Jordan Valley. Nor would the King of Jordan, in private, want Israel to withdraw from it.

David Friedman's well-reasoned arguments resonate with me. He has proven right about a lot of things. But I am also listening to another student of the Bible, David Ben Gurion. He was presented the opportunity 75 years ago to take historical Judah in a defensive war and decided against absorbing this populated hill country into the Jewish state. I suspect the majority of Israelis still agree with Ben-Gurion. *

ROBERT SILVERMAN

A former US diplomat and president of the American Foreign Service Association, Robert Silverman is a lecturer at Shalem College, senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, and president of the Inter Jewish Muslim Alliance.



Subscribe to The Evening newsletter – a daily brief covering the news, events, and people shaping the world of international affairs and delivered to your inbox Monday-Thursday.

The Evening is compiled by the Center for Strategic and International Studies | CSIS, a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization dedicated to advancing practical ideas to address the world's greatest challenges.

CSIS

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**



Atlantic Council

SHAPING THE GLOBAL
FUTURE TOGETHER

www.atlanticcouncil.org