



THE  
JERUSALEM  
STRATEGIC  
TRIBUNE



# A NEW WORLD ORDER



RADIO  
ABRAHAM

THE NEW SOUND OF PEACE



# A New World Order

*by Ahmed Charai*

**T**he war in Ukraine is leading to a seismic geopolitical shift, reshaping the global order. At its fulcrum stands Donald Trump, the champion of “America First” who is asserting Washington’s dominance on his own terms. Opposing him, Europe remains trapped in the inertia of its post-Cold War illusions, struggling to adjust to a world where American leadership is no longer benevolent but transactional, no longer collaborative but demanding. China patiently waits out the storm.

From the moment he re-entered the political arena, Trump made one thing clear: this time,

there would be no hesitation. The bureaucratic constraints and internal divisions that diluted his first term are gone. He is now precise, ruthless, and unwavering. His administration is not a team of rivals but a cadre of loyalists, dedicated to executing his vision.

## **UKRAINE: THE ART OF THE DEAL**

On Ukraine, Trump rejects the moral absolutism that defines European rhetoric. While Brussels frames the war as an existential battle between democracy and tyranny, Trump noticed that much of Europe’s Ukraine funding was in the form of loans secured against Ukraine’s assets. Meanwhile, Europe was offsetting its Ukraine funding by increasing its natural gas trade with Russia. If the Europeans were in reality



treating Ukraine not as a cause but as a strategic asset — then so would he. If Washington invests \$24 billion per quarter into Kyiv’s war effort while Europe contributes only \$15 billion, then Ukraine must reciprocate—not with abstract gratitude, but with tangible concessions in terms of resources and industrial deals.

For Trump, foreign policy is not about values; it is about leverage. He is uninterested in endless military entanglements that do not serve American interests. Under his leadership, the era in which Washington shouldered the burden

of European security while Brussels dictated diplomatic terms is over. Trump’s America is not a guardian—it is a broker. And in this new order, Europe finds itself relegated from strategic partner to passive onlooker.

The growing tensions within the G7, the European Union’s paralysis in shaping global trade policy, and Brussels’ inability to steer Washington’s strategic decisions are not mere disruptions. They are the symptoms of a continent losing its geopolitical footing. The real question is not whether Europe will resist



Trump's reordering of the world—it is whether it can adapt before it becomes irrelevant.

### **THE MIDDLE EAST: POWER AND PEACEMAKING**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has long been an intractable puzzle, shaped by decades of war, shifting alliances, and failed diplomacy. Yet, during his first term, Trump executed a masterstroke: the Abraham Accords. By normalizing relations between Israel and several

Arab states, he proved that economic incentives could succeed where traditional peace talks had failed. His vision — spearheaded by Jared Kushner — was one of pragmatic statecraft, in which prosperity replaced ideology as the engine of stability.

Trump's Middle East strategy was not traditional mediation. Rather, it aimed to redefine the dynamics of negotiation, breaking away from the long-standing patterns of unresolved balancing acts. By moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and leveraging transactional diplomacy, his approach signaled a shift — from a US focused on consensus-building to a US reshaping the region's power structure on its own terms.

Trump understands that lasting stability requires more than ceasefires—it requires the dismantling of Hamas and the broader weakening of extremist networks. For him, rebuilding Gaza is not an act of humanitarian goodwill but a strategic maneuver. Reconstruction will come, but only under conditions that ensure that Hamas — and the ideology it represents — can never again wield influence.

Trump's approach extends beyond military confrontation; it is a war against the climate of fear that stifles open discourse, even in the West. The reluctance of some governments to condemn the atrocities of October 7 reflects a paralysis imposed by radical ideologies. Trump's response will not be mere condemnation; it will be executive actions — sanctions on terrorist organizations (some of which have political branches), financial networks, and individuals that materially support terrorism. His goal is not only to free populations from the grip of terror but to liberate governments from the constraints of political cowardice.

### **CHINA: THE CHALLENGER**

After eight years of adapting to Trump's disruptive policies—by fortifying its domestic economy and strengthening alliances in the

Global South—China believes it can weather another turbulent US presidency. But that confidence may be misplaced.

China's economic foundations are increasingly fragile. Its overcapacity problem is forcing a surge in exports, triggering pushback across the world. Growth is slowing, and despite government intervention, a full-scale recovery is far from guaranteed—regardless of Washington's actions. Yet, Beijing remains convinced that, even if its economy stumbles, four years of Trump will not push it into a full-blown crisis.

More importantly, Chinese leaders see Trump's return as an opportunity. If he follows through on his threats — on trade decoupling or territorial disputes — he risks accelerating America's geopolitical decline. Beijing's long-term strategy is not solely about competing with Washington; it is about capitalizing on American missteps. Xi Jinping's vision of China's rise—often described as “changes unseen in a century”—relies on the assumption that US global leadership is eroding from within.

For China, the priority is not direct confrontation but endurance. Its strategy is to wait out the storm, absorb short-term economic pain and position itself for long-term geopolitical gains. In Beijing's calculus, Trump may not be an obstacle to its rise — he may be the unwitting accelerant.

### TRUMP'S WORLD: A TEST OF SURVIVAL

Donald Trump does not merely wield power—he reshapes it, imposes it, and forces the world to adapt. Whether in Europe, Ukraine, the Middle East, or the broader global economy, his methodology remains the same: brute force, pragmatism, and a cold calculation of relative power balances.

If Europe wishes to remain relevant, it must abandon its illusions of multilateral equality and accept its new role in a world where America no longer leads by consensus.

If the Middle East seeks stability, it must embrace economic integration over perpetual conflict. If Ukraine wishes to survive, it must

recognize that American aid will always come at a cost. And if China sees itself as the next superpower, it must prove that it can withstand the economic and strategic pressures of an unpredictable Trump presidency.

Trump does not govern in the traditional sense. The question is no longer whether the world can resist his vision. The question is how each nation will navigate its survival within it. \*

### 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**

**A New World Order**

*by Ahmed Charai*

**ASIA, EUROPE, WESTERN HEMISPHERE**

**8 — From Liberal Wars to Illiberal Peace**

*by Benjamin Miller*

**12 — What Does China Want?**

*by Michael Mandelbaum*

**18 — Rethinking American-Chinese Competition in the Global South**

*by Daniel Runde*

**22 — The Key to Japan's Economic Revival**

*by Naomi Feldman, Ayako Kondo*

**27 — Will Ukraine Survive a Russo-American Deal?**

*by Dov S. Zakheim*

**30 — The Opening Moves of Germany's New Leader**

*by Jacob Heilbrunn*

**34 — The Rise and Fall of Spain's New Left**

*by Richard M. Sanders*

**42 — A Break in the Argentina Murder Case Tied to Iran**

*by Ben Cohen, Toby Dershowitz*

**46 — The Inevitability of Greenland**

*by Paul du Quenoy*

**54 — Is the Pivot to Asia Finally Happening?**

*by Drew Thompson*

**THE MIDDLE EAST**

**58 — A Fateful Debate in Tehran**

*by Ehud Yaari*

**64 — Israel's Strategic Options regarding Iran**

*by Yaakov Lappin*

**70 — Where are America and Israel Going in Syria?**

*by James Jeffrey*

**76 — Assad's Legacy of Chemical Weapons**

*by James Foggo*

**80 — Trump's Gaza Plan: Change of Narrative**

*by Robert Silverman*

**85 — A Cold Peace in Peril?**

*by Ksenia Svetlova*

**89 — Israel's Dilemma in Lebanon**

*by Seth J. Frantzman*

**BOOK REVIEWS**

**92 — The Best American Diplomatic Memoir of the Cold War**

*by Robert Silverman*

**96 — A Vision For Peace and Prosperity in the Middle East**

*by Dov S. Zakheim*



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**

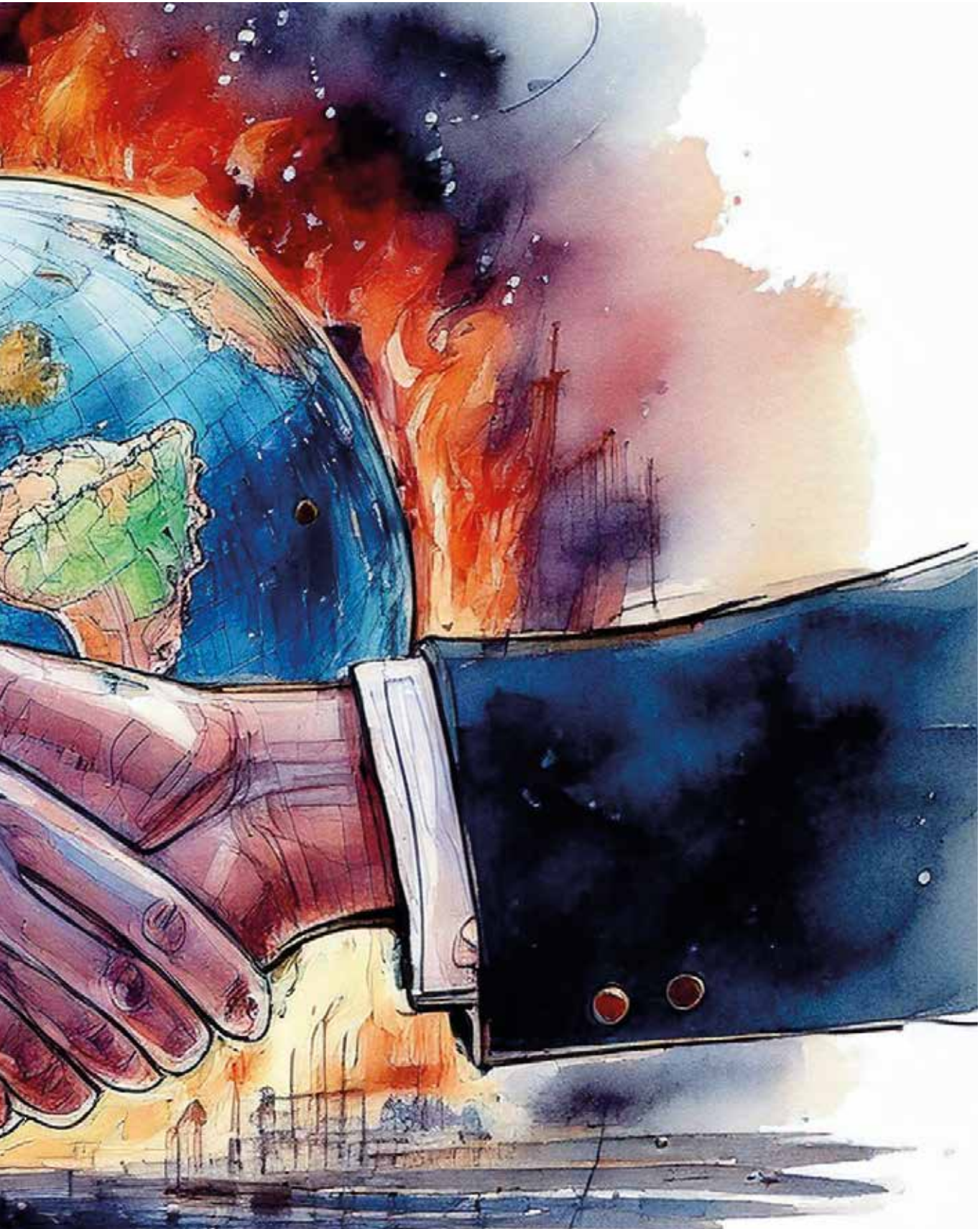
is published by World Herald  
Tribune, Inc.

Washington DC - USA



# FROM LIBERAL WARSTO ILLIBERAL PEACE







*by Benjamin Miller*

**P**resident Trump has emphasized how peaceful the world was during his first administration compared with the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East that characterized Biden's presidency. Trump aspires to end the ongoing wars and restore international peace.

We should also distinguish between two kinds of war and peace – liberal and illiberal. It's possible that the world may move from a period of wars fought for liberal goals to a peace that enshrines illiberal political systems.

### **LIBERAL WARS**

They are fought to promote or defend liberal values. While the liberal impulse has always been relevant to US foreign policy, the period of peak US hegemony from 1990 to about 2010 was especially propitious for promoting liberal values and extending liberalism in the world.

Overall there have been three types of liberal wars fought under US hegemony in the post-Cold War era.

The first type began in the 1990s and focused on limited humanitarian interventions in Somalia (1992-1994) and later in Libya (2011). A second bolder type focused on nation-building for democracy promotion in Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001-2021) and Iraq (2003-2011). The third type is taking place now by supporting fellow liberal states in Ukraine and Israel against their authoritarian opponents.

### **ILLIBERAL PEACE**

An illiberal peace is based on giving priority to war avoidance over national aspirations and individual civil liberties. Two historical examples come to mind.

After the traumatic experience of the Napoleonic wars, the five great European powers – under the Concert of Europe – cooperated in order to prevent the return of a great-power war. While avoiding such a war among themselves, they jointly suppressed national and liberal aspirations.

During the Cold War, the US was compelled to accept a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Thus, the US didn't intervene to support liberal revolutions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

One type of illiberal peace refers to spheres of influence established by great powers, in which the freedom of action and the autonomy of the smaller states is limited. The high costs and the glaring failures of many liberal wars have inadvertently contributed to the rise of nationalist-populist forces that support the advancement of illiberal peace rather than fighting liberal wars.

What should we expect in Trump's second term? Trump may follow through on his election promises to stop wars and establish peace in several regions. First, in Ukraine, a democratic country might be compelled to make painful territorial concessions to a more powerful authoritarian power. This policy might leave other democratic states in Eastern Europe vulnerable to future authoritarian aggression. Such an illiberal peace arrangement might create the conditions for a Russian sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Trump's initial talk about Panama, Canada and Greenland could signal an American sphere in the Western Hemisphere.

In East Asia, an illiberal peace might emerge if Trump is not committed to protecting Taiwan and potentially also the Philippines. These democracies will have then to make painful concessions to China. Somewhat similar to Eastern Europe, a Chinese sphere of influence might emerge then in East Asia.

In sum, peace that results in spheres of influence for authoritarian powers could come at the expense of key liberal and human values. And then the question might be asked: will such peace be stable and last for an extended period or might it generate powerful resistance and strong motivations to challenge it, including by violent means?

Thus, the costs of illiberal peace might in the long-term outweigh its benefits. \*

---

**BENJAMIN MILLER**

Benjamin Miller is a professor of international relations and the head of the Center for National Security Studies at the University of Haifa. His latest book is *Grand Strategy from Truman to Trump* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).



# WHAT DOES CHINA WANT?



International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition, November 2024, in Zhuhai, China.  
Photo credit: VCG via Reuters Connect



by Michael Mandelbaum

What does China want in the world? Surely no question has greater importance for the year — and indeed the decade — ahead. The country’s communist government has used China’s remarkably rapid economic growth over the last four decades to amass increasingly capable armed forces. Where once it fielded only a large but technologically backward army, the People’s Republic now has, in addition to well-armed ground troops, both naval and air forces of great and increasing sophistication. Its military might ranks at least second in the world, and by all accounts is fast gaining on that of the leader, the United States. It is of considerable global interest to know what the Chinese government plans to do with this formidable power. The answer to that question is surprisingly unclear, perhaps even to the Chinese themselves.

Like all countries, China requires military might to defend itself. Indeed, it has reason to take this task more seriously than most other countries, having been the victim of foreign predation in the 100 years or so before the Communist takeover in 1949, a period the ruling Chinese Communist Party calls “the

century of humiliation.” The threat of foreign assault has, however, disappeared. China’s historical tormenters, Great Britain and Japan foremost among them, long ago ceased the kinds attacks they launched against China in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. Moreover, the possession of nuclear weapons is often regarded as a guarantee of sovereign independence, and the People’s Republic tested its first one sixty years ago, in 1964. The armed forces China has built in this century are appropriate to larger aspirations than mere survival. What might those aspirations be?

Analysts of China’s foreign policy sometimes compare it to a rising great power of the past: Wilhelmine Germany before World War I. Like China today, pre-1914 Germany had experienced rapid economic growth, which made it possible for it to become a major military power. As China seems to be doing now, Germany then challenged the international status quo and in particular the country that was its greatest beneficiary, Great Britain. The British presided over the world’s largest empire, and Germany sought overseas colonies for itself. The British had the world’s most powerful navy, and Germany set out to match it. Germany’s foreign policy at the outset of the last century contributed to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 — an ominous precedent for the present.



China's President Xi Jinping. Photo credit: Koki Kataoka / The Yomiuri Shimbun via Reuters Connect

Wilhelmine Germany, however, had a clear, concrete goal: territorial expansion. It did conquer much of the European territory to its east in the course of World War I, before suffering defeat on the war's western front and having to relinquish its gains. In 2025, the quest for old-fashioned territorial conquest is alive and well, unfortunately, in Moscow, but not, as far as can be determined, in Beijing. True, Communist China is the planet's last great multinational empire, subjecting Muslim Uyghurs and Buddhist Tibetans to rule by Han Chinese; but it shows no sign of wishing to incorporate additional countries into China. It claims the East China Sea and some islands off Japan, but not the Japanese archipelago itself. It invaded Vietnam in 1979 but did not stay to govern the territories it occupied. China

apparently does not aspire to follow in the footsteps of the second German Reich.

Nor does it seek to emulate another ambitious, revisionist power with which it has certain similarities: the Soviet Union after 1945. During the Cold War, Soviet leaders sought to expand their control beyond their borders for the sake of imposing their own political and economic systems, which Lenin had founded and Stalin had consolidated. Twenty-first century China, like twentieth-century Soviet Union, is ruled by a Communist Party that arrogates to itself a monopoly of political power.

By Soviet standards, however, present-day China is very far from being an orthodox communist country, harboring, as it does (and as the Soviet Union emphatically did not) a large free-market sector in its economy.

Thus, if the Chinese were inclined to impose their own systems elsewhere, just what systems would they impose? In fact, the Communist leadership in Beijing has demonstrated no desire to embark on such a project. To the contrary (and in response to sometimes-energetic American efforts at democracy promotion in this century), it has insisted that every country is entitled to decide its own form of government without interference by others.

The Chinese apparently use the United States as their measuring-stick in international affairs, raising the possibility that what China wants in the world is to replace America, taking on the roles that the United States currently plays. Leaving aside the feasibility of such an ambition, achieving it would seem to be of dubious worth to China itself. America upholds two major features of the present-day global order: a relatively open international economic system, and a network of alliances centered on the United States. As to the first, China has reaped enormous benefit from it, profiting greatly from investment from abroad and the availability of foreign markets for the products it manufactures.

The Chinese have benefited from the American-sponsored international economic status quo in two additional ways: by violating its rules to their own advantage – conducting a mercantilist trade policy for example – while paying a very small price for their transgressions, at least until recently; and by not having to pay the costs of the system's upkeep, the burden of which has fallen most heavily on the United States. In the global economic system, China has not exactly gotten something for nothing, but it has probably come as close to doing so as is possible in a world of jealous, self-seeking sovereign states. Attempting to overturn it would not seem to qualify as a shrewd policy.

As for the American alliance system, its Asian members value it in no small part for the protection it affords them against China itself. They hardly wish to substitute China for the United States in their security policies. If

China should drive America out of the Asia-Pacific region, moreover, these allies would likely respond not by submitting to Chinese authority but by finding other ways to defend their sovereignty, the most plausible being the acquisition of their own nuclear weapons. The likely alternative to the American-based security order is not, therefore, one in which China reigns supreme. It is instead a nuclearized East Asia, with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan as nuclear-weapon states.

Chinese foreign policy does have one clear aspiration: control of Taiwan, which it claims as part of China and thus subject to rule from Beijing – although Beijing has not controlled the island for more than a century and the Taiwanese people strongly oppose such control. Much of the Chinese military buildup is aimed at making it possible for the mainland to subdue Taiwan, either by direct assault or through a punishing blockade.

The claim on Taiwan looms large in Chinese public life because it expresses the most powerful political force in China: nationalism. Chinese nationalism predates communist rule, manifesting itself, for example, in the anti-foreigner uprising in Beijing in 1900 known as the Boxer Rebellion and in the student protests against the ceding of German-controlled Chinese coastal territory to Japan in 1919, an episode known as the May the Fourth Movement. Nationalist sentiment has a particular importance for Xi Jinping and the present Chinese Communist rulers as a source of the regime's legitimacy at a time when one of the two other historically important sources – Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology – has lost whatever popular appeal it once had and the other – rapid economic growth – is decreasingly useful as the country's rate of economic growth slows.

It is possible that today's Chinese government has no specific purpose in mind for its armed forces other than the capture of Taiwan. The large scale of its military buildup may stem from the felt need to bring as much



force as possible to bear on the task, combined with the influence of the country's military-industrial complex, which presumably lobbies for generous stipends for defense and finds ways to spend them.

If, however, Beijing should succeed in bringing Taiwan under its control, it would immediately confront the question of what else it might wish to do with the military that it has built. In that case, having exercised its power effectively, having humiliated the United States and perhaps even expelled American forces from the Asia-Pacific region, a victorious China's global horizons would surely expand. Its appetite would grow with the eating. Many exercises of its military power not currently on the Communist Party's agenda would suddenly appear both tempting and feasible. There are several good reasons to oppose, and to resist if necessary, a communist conquest of democratic Taiwan. Not the least of them is to avoid giving the Chinese Communist Party the incentive to devise a new and far more expansive answer to the question "What does China want?" \*

---

**MICHAEL MANDELBAUM**

Michael Mandelbaum is the Christian A. Herter Professor Emeritus of American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and the author of *The Titans of the Twentieth Century: How They Made History and the History They Made* (Oxford University Press, 2024).



Photo: Shutterstock



**RETHINKING  
AMERICAN-  
CHINESE  
COMPETITION  
IN THE GLOBAL  
SOUTH**



by Daniel Runde

Imagine a world where China buys all the mines in Africa, further solidifying its dominance over the production of rare earth minerals. Imagine if the entire Global South's telecommunication networks were controlled by Huawei, subsea fiber-optic cables are nearly exclusively built or repaired by China's HMN Technologies. Imagine the bulk of maritime trade passes through Chinese-built and operated ports, and most of these ports have the ability to house Chinese aircraft carriers and use Chinese tech to know what is coming and going.

Imagine also that China comfortably controls multilateral institutions by extorting a large voting bloc of developing countries that are heavily indebted to it. These same heavily indebted countries are seen as "broken" and "failed" by Western investors who avoid them and leave China to engage in rapacious economic colonialism because these countries have no other economic alternatives.

None of these scenarios are in the US national interest but all are within China's reach right now. The world's supply chains, intellectual property, trade secrets, military movements, and international standards are at risk of being stolen, controlled, influenced, or monitored by China.

None of these challenges can be addressed by US military power. Nor can traditional US foreign aid, with its grants and contracts often administered by large non-profits or consulting firms, respond to these problems. Other forms

of US influence and power are required, in partnership with other countries, the private sector, and private capital.

The United States international economic development strategies, priorities, and financial tools are suboptimal. They fail to gain a competitive advantage over China and address the development aspirations of the Global South. Renewing capabilities in the field of economic development is necessary to build prosperous partnerships, counter China's influence, and advance US security interests.

The new administration should consider utilizing tools other than grants to maximize the impact of foreign assistance.

For example, given the sovereign debt crises, the United States must pursue a seat at the table for the coming debt workouts. China's emergence as the largest official lender to low-income countries with an estimated \$1.5 trillion in debt exposure jeopardizes any chance of healthy and productive debt restructuring initiatives.

By entering the business of issuing sovereign loans, the United States would have an opportunity to ensure any debt restructuring is fair and transparent. Otherwise, development efficacy and the stability of the global financial system will be casualties of China's opaque and predatory lending with the US on the sideline. US development lacks a preferable alternative, enabling China to continue to act as the Global South's lender of last resort.

The Global South is more advanced than even 15 years ago, and its development goals have adjusted accordingly. As nations become wealthier, their interests progress beyond grant funding for basic needs. China and

its Belt and Road Initiative provide a major source of investment in infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, and mineral resources.

Specialized US enterprise funds could serve as a vehicle to crowd private capital in the regions and strategic industries most at risk of being dominated by China. Enterprise funds use US government funding to invest in emerging markets. The enterprise fund model, with its double mandate of making money and “doing development,” consistently experiences measured success ever since USAID’s first wave of enterprise funds in the early 1990s.

Enterprise funds are historically designed to promote the development of the private sector in a particular country or region, but thematically organized funds could channel the expertise and capital necessary to simultaneously achieve national security interests and financial returns. For example, there could be enterprise funds for port infrastructure, undersea cables, and critical minerals.

Loan guarantees could also help further mobilize capital for investments in the industries or countries where there is great potential for returns, but risks exceed market tolerances.

Many reading this might respond: What about the World Bank and the regional development banks such as the Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank? Aren’t they supposed to respond to these challenges? Doesn’t the US, Europe and Japan have a majority of the board seats and influence as to where these organizations devote their people, time and money? The answer is “yes, but.”

Yes, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the regional development banks (collectively known as “International Financial Institutions” or IFIs) have big roles to play in responding to the challenges laid out. But we need both the IFIs and specific bilateral US responses in partnership with our allies, outside the remit of the IFIs, to respond to these challenges. There are competing

interests among IFI shareholders and only so much money to spend. China is a shareholder in these institutions and wields influence in them, especially when we don’t “ride herd” on them. Much of that money has been promised to climate change. Perhaps some of it needs to be repurposed to the problems described above. We will need bilateral US instruments and specific US-led responses in addition to more focused attention by the IFIs on the challenges described in this article.

Leveraging foreign assistance to empower American businesses as key development partners would strengthen the country’s ability to compete with China’s Belt and Road Initiative and earn the United States a more significant role in the Global South.

Cost-effective instruments other than grants and contracts possess the potential to significantly enhance US influence in strategic sectors, address the evolving needs of the Global South, and effectively counter China’s growing economic presence in developing regions. \*

---

#### DANIEL RUNDE

Daniel F. Runde is the author of the book *The American Imperative: Reclaiming Global Leadership Through Soft Power* (Bombardier Books, 2023).

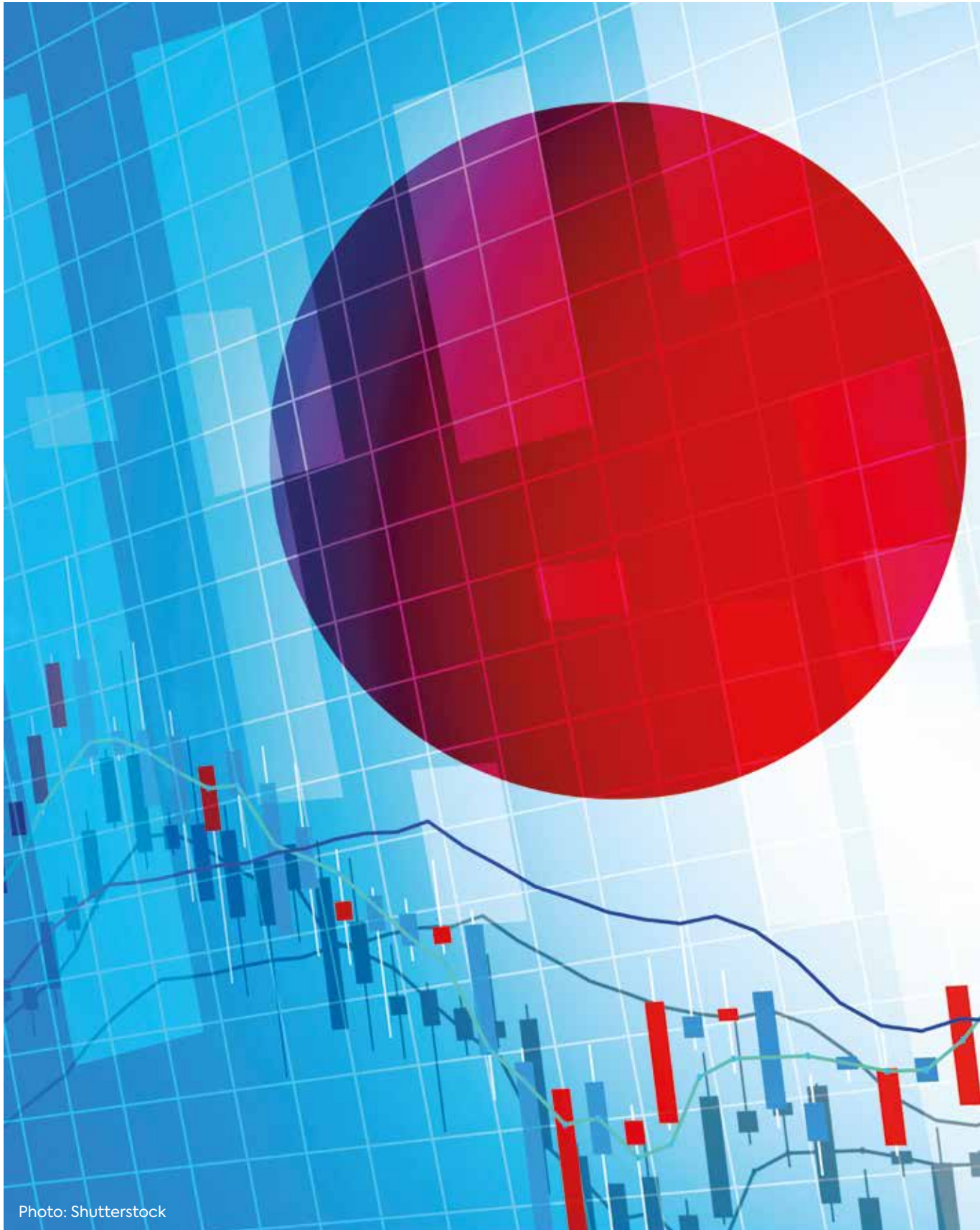
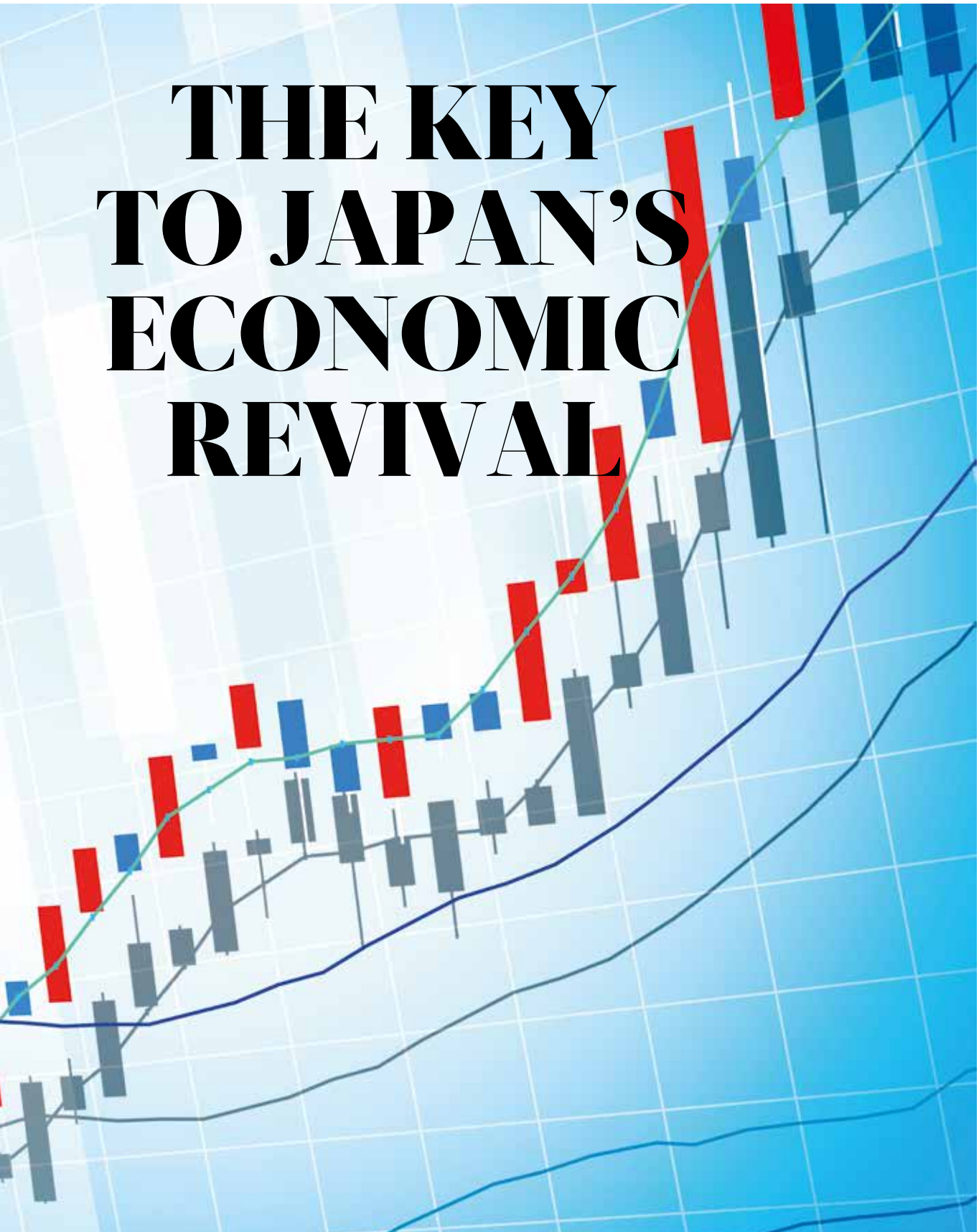


Photo: Shutterstock

# THE KEY TO JAPAN'S ECONOMIC REVIVAL





by Naomi Feldman, Ayako Kondo

In 2010, Japan fell behind China from second to the third place among the largest economies in the world. In 2023, Japan slipped again to fourth place, falling behind Germany. The recent drop has a variety of short and longer-term explanations: the economy contracted for two consecutive quarters in late 2023, the yen has steadily depreciated, wages are stagnant, productivity sluggish.

A core reason for Japan's decline relative to economic peers is this: an aging and shrinking population and limited immigration. As Japan grapples with a diminishing labor force, low domestic consumption, and an overreliance on foreign markets for investment, its approach to addressing labor shortages – beyond automation and a tentative embrace of foreign workers – will be pivotal in shaping its economic trajectory.

To illustrate the labor problem, consider two workers. Hiroshi, 90 years old, retired from a factory at the standard age of 60 and has been enjoying retirement for decades. Meanwhile, Takashi, 15 years his junior, continues to work at a construction company as a supervisor, owing to the shortage of skilled workers in this industry. He says, “If I completely retire now, many projects would collapse.”

This situation reflects broader demographic shifts in Japan. The country faces a shrinking working-age population, which declined from

over 86 million in 2000 to about 74 million in 2023. To maintain a labor force of approximately 65 million, Japan has tapped into two underutilized groups: women and older adults.

Women in particular have made notable strides in workforce participation. Figure 1 below plots female labor force participation with each line representing a cohort of women who were age 25-29 for the year listed on the right side of the line. For example, 64 percent of women aged 25–29 were part of the labor force in 1992. By 2012, that figure rose to 77 percent. As further illustrated below, however, labor force participation dips for women in their 30s owing to marriage and child-rearing responsibilities, only to return later as their children grow older.

The percentage of women staying in their jobs after the birth of their first child has increased significantly—from about 24 percent in the 1980s and 1990s to 54 percent by the late 2010s. This trend towards greater workforce retention among married women certainly helps counterbalance today's declining working-age population. [Women staying in the workforce longer in Japan may have longer-term demographic effects in both directions- on one hand, it reduces today's total fertility rate and thus the size of the future workforce; on the other, it ameliorates economic stagnation and could provide economic incentives for family growth.]

Challenges remain. Many new mothers still leave their jobs before childbirth and return only when their youngest child enters school. These returning workers often take on part-time,



THE KEY TO JAPAN'S ECONOMIC REVIVAL

Figure 1: Female labor force participation rate by age cohort (1992 - 2012)

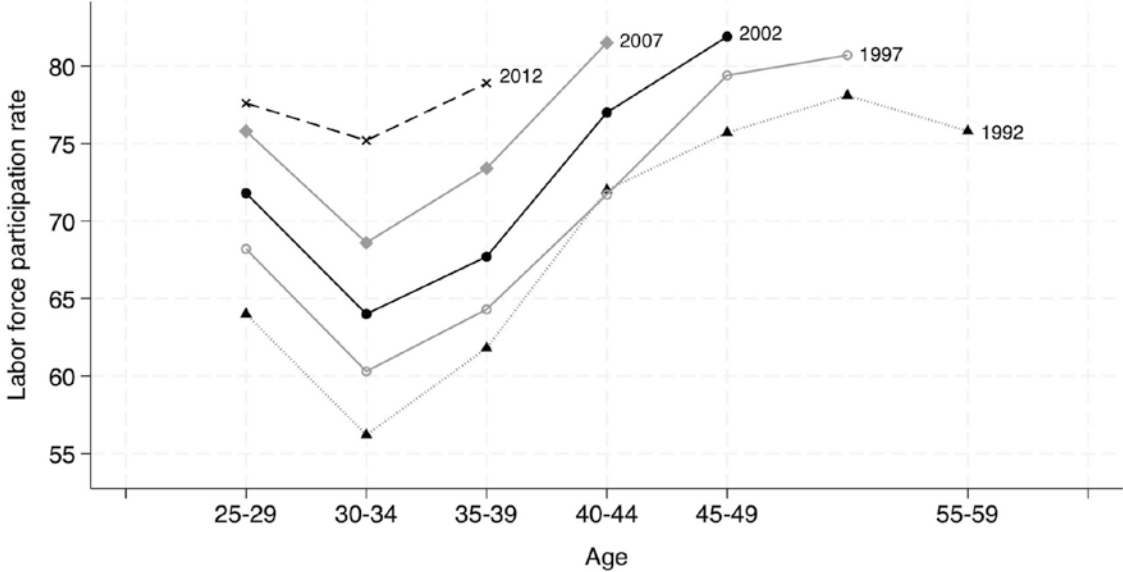
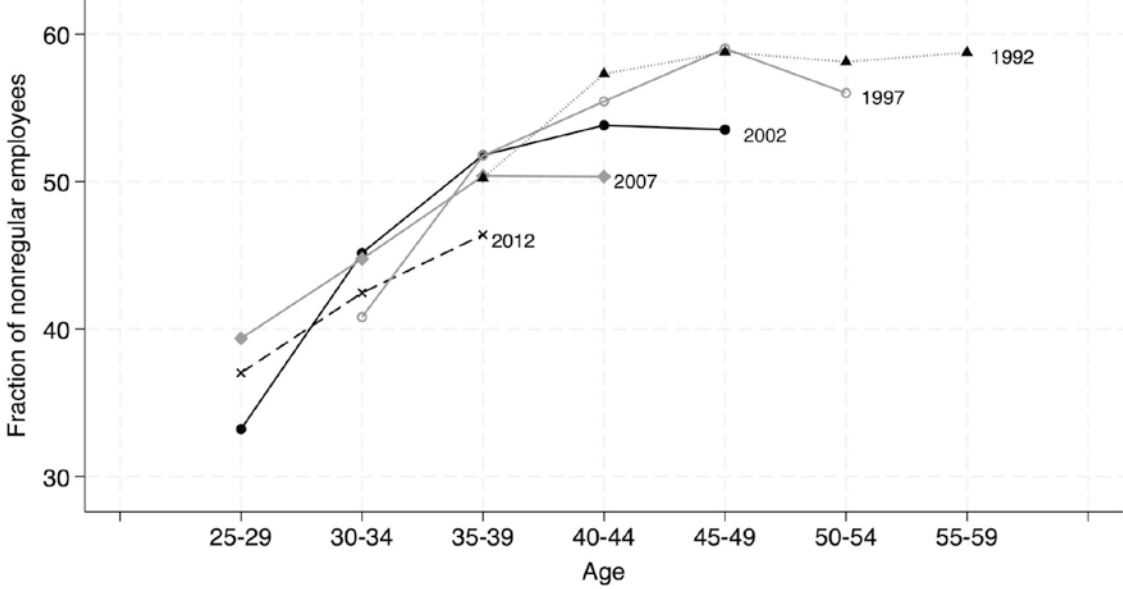


Figure 2: Fraction of female non-regular employees out of total employees (1992 - 2012)



Source: Japan's Labor Force Survey

low-skill roles (typically referred to as “non-regular” employment). Figure 2 above shows the fraction of employed women who work in these non-regular positions. Non-regular employment has been falling over time for a given age but the employment path within an age cohort still shows an increasing fraction shifting to non-regular work over the life cycle. Even in their prime working years (ages 45–54), where about 75 percent of women participate in the labor market, well over 50 percent work in positions that are lower-paying and less stable.

As women have moved more into the labor force, the country has also experienced an expanding role for older workers. Japan’s population aged 65 and older made up over 29 percent of the total population in 2023, compared to just 17 percent in 2000. Despite being eligible for old age pension benefits, more people in this age group stay at work. The labor force participation rate among those aged 65–69 has climbed steadily, from 35 percent in the early 2000s to 53 percent in 2023. Even beyond age 70, 18 percent still work, bringing the total share in the labor force of people aged 65 or older to 13 percent.

This growing participation is driven by policies encouraging continued employment past 60, once the standard retirement age at most Japanese companies. At the same time, demand for older workers has risen, particularly among small businesses facing a dwindling supply of younger employees.

Japan’s income tax and social insurance systems create barriers to both women and older workers from increasing their workforce participation, counteracting efforts to address labor shortages, limiting the potential for greater participation from key demographic groups at a time when their contributions to the workforce are increasingly needed.

For married women, an income cap tied to social insurance eligibility plays a significant role. Women married to salaried men are covered under their husband’s social insurance without additional payments, as long as the

female spouse’s annual earnings remain below \$8,600 (¥1.3 million). This creates a strong financial incentive to keep her income under this threshold to avoid a sharp increase in social insurance payments equal to about 25 percent of her gross earnings.

Similarly, for workers under 70, an earnings test adds another layer of disincentive. If their combined monthly pension benefits and salary exceed a certain threshold, a 50 percent penalty is applied to any additional salary income.

Japan’s ability to adapt labor policies and cultural norms will be key to unlocking the full potential of its workforce. Encouraging greater participation from women and older workers will require not only eliminating structural disincentives, such as income caps and pension penalties, but also creating more opportunities for productive and stable employment across all demographics. \*

---

#### NAOMI FELDMAN

Professor of Economics, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She currently serves as a voting member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of Israel. The views expressed in this article are solely hers and do not necessarily represent those of the Bank of Israel.

---

#### AYAKO KONDO

Professor, Institute of Social Science, University of Tokyo

# WILL UKRAINE SURVIVE A RUSSO- AMERICAN DEAL?



Photo credit: Reuters



*by Dov S. Zakheim*

**F**rom the first day of his return to the White House, Donald Trump has made a point of demonstrating that he intends to carry out his campaign promises. In addition to the flurry of executive orders that he began to issue within hours of his inauguration, Trump has also made waves internationally.

By threatening to impose tariffs on Colombia, he successfully cowed President Gustavo Petro into accepting migrants deported from the United States. His threat to either purchase or militarily seize Greenland led Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen to announce an increase in Danish defense spending for Greenland even before the president-elect took office. Trump's similar threat to occupy the Panama Canal, owing to what he termed its takeover by China, led Panama's initially defiant President Jose Raul Mulino to inform Beijing that it was withdrawing from the Belt and Road Initiative, China's worldwide investment and infrastructure project. And Trump's pronouncement that there would be "hell to pay" if Hamas did not release Israeli hostages certainly spurred that terrorist organization to agree to a three-phase deal that has led to the return of a small number of hostages, though the arrangement's future remains very much uncertain.

Trump, together with his senior Cabinet team, have now turned their attention to Ukraine.

Their messages are not entirely consistent. To begin with, Trump sent Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent to Kyiv to demand that Ukraine give America access to some \$500 billion in rare earth minerals in light of the approximately \$200 billion in total assistance that the United States has provided to Kyiv since 2014.

At roughly the same time as Bessent was departing for Kyiv, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth had a somewhat different message for his approximately fifty counterparts in the Ukraine Defense Contact Group. This group was founded in April 2022 under the chairmanship of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin only two months after the Russians launched their invasion of Ukraine. Its objective has been to provide military equipment to support Ukraine's defense. The group includes all 32 NATO member states as well about two dozen others ranging from Australia and Japan to Israel and Jordan.

Hegseth's message was sharply different from that of his predecessor. He asserted that Ukraine should abandon any hope of retaining all of its pre-2014 territory and instead should prepare itself for a negotiation with Moscow. Moreover, he emphasized that Ukrainian membership of NATO was a non-starter. American troops would not deploy to Ukraine; it would be up to Europe to undertake the major burden of financing Ukraine's operations and to provide any troops that would be needed for a post-war peacekeeping force. He added that there would be no NATO Article 5 protections for such a force, even if it included NATO members.

His meaning was clear: America would not be obliged to rush to aid the forces of its allies in the event they came under Russian attack.

Hegseth did not specify how the negotiations to end the war might be organized or who would actually do the negotiating. But President Trump did. Having held what he described as a “lengthy and highly productive phone call” with Vladimir Putin on the same day that Hegseth was speaking to the contact group, Trump stated on his Truth Social media platform that he and Putin would “work together, very closely, including visiting each other’s nations to achieve a diplomatic solution to the war.” He added that “we have also agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately, and we will begin by calling President Zelensky, of Ukraine, to inform him of the conversation.”

Trump also announced his negotiating team. It would consist of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, CIA Director John Ratcliffe, National Security Advisor Michael Waltz, and Special Envoy Steve Witcoff. Witcoff had until now been heavily involved in negotiating the Israeli ceasefire with Hamas, the return of Israeli hostages and the release of Palestinian terrorists from Israeli prisons. Evidently, he would now be moving on to a possibly greater diplomatic challenge, even as the ceasefire’s future remains very much in doubt.

One name appears to be notably absent from Trump’s announcement of his negotiating team: retired general Keith Kellogg, a one-time acting National Security Advisor in his first administration, whom Trump recently appointed as special envoy to Russia and Ukraine. Kellogg had been working on a peace plan and was consulting NATO allies to seek their reaction to the plan. Perhaps Kellogg will serve as a sherpa, or backup, to the top-level negotiators.

All of the foregoing must leave Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky’s head spinning. He remains adamant that Ukraine must regain all the territory it has lost since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. He still seeks NATO

membership. He is desperate for more American military assistance. Yet it appears that not only will he achieve none of his objectives, he may also find Trump and Putin reaching an agreement without his approval or even participation.

These developments are chilling echoes of the 1938 Munich Agreement, in which British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his French counterpart Eduard Daladier agreed to Hitler’s seizure of the Czech Sudetenland, with Czech president Edvard Benes standing helplessly on the sidelines. Within a year of that agreement Hitler had seized all of Czechoslovakia, on his way to igniting World War II.

Trump avers that “millions of people have died in a War that would not have happened if I were president, but it did happen, so it must end.” Whether it ends with a semblance of security for Ukraine, or instead a rump state with no Black Sea shoreline, such as former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev has outlined in a widely circulated map, remains very much an open question. If indeed all that is left of Ukraine is a shrunken version of its former self, it may only be a matter of time before it too goes the way of pre-war Czechoslovakia, or even worse, leads to a much wider war. \*

#### 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).



# THE OPENING MOVES OF GERMANY'S NEW LEADER

Friedrich Merz. Photo credit: Boris Roessler/dpa via Reuters Connect



by Jacob Heilbrunn

**F**riedrich Merz, the leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union and likely the next chancellor of Germany, did not win a mandate in the federal elections on February 23. Instead, he earned what amounted to a four-year reprieve for the German political establishment. On February 28, he will start exploratory talks with the Social Democratic Party to form a coalition.

Germany is assailed from within and without by economic and political headwinds. Merz has many of the bland attributes of a CEO (he has been in business for several decades and never served at the national level in politics). But his opening moves have been anything but bland, warning his countrymen that to ensure their and Europe's future, Germany must achieve nothing less than "independence" from America.

I recently visited Germany as part of a delegation of American election observers invited by the Hanns Seidel Foundation (which is affiliated with the conservative Bavarian Christian Social Union). It became increasingly clear that Germany is not only in turmoil, but also that Merz wants to create a caesura with its recent past. Germany has been mired for several

decades in its own "time of stagnation" (a term borrowed from the 1970s USSR).

Chancellor Merkel, in power from 2005 to 2021, has come into bad odor for failing to pursue economic reforms, abolishing the nuclear power industry and coddling Russian president Vladimir Putin. Her Social Democratic successor, Olaf Scholz, declared a *Zeitenwende*, an era of change, but it was a declaration of intent that he never fulfilled. Under his leadership, Germany's approach to Russian aggression in Ukraine was timid and halting. The Bundeswehr was never adequately funded. Economic reform did not occur. Once the election took place in February, Scholz led his party to a historic low—a mere 16 percent of the vote.

Merz is intent on forming a coalition government with the Social Democrats and on excluding the far-right Alternative Party for Germany. It surged to become the country's second-largest party with over twenty percent of the vote. In the state of Saxony, in eastern Germany, the Alternative Party for Germany scored almost forty percent of the vote and will determine the state's minister president. At the same time, the far left party, Die Linke, claimed almost 9 percent of the vote on the federal level. Both the left and right managed to attract significant youth votes. The Alternative for Germany attracted 25 percent of those between



18 to 24-years-old; the far left party snagged a robust 20 percent.

But it would be a mistake to assume that these trends are destined to continue. Merz is intent on seizing the opportunity to reverse them. What is to be done?

Merz regards economic reform as key to defanging the threat that the Alternative Party for Germany poses to mainstream conservatives. Germany has been hit by Covid-induced supply chain problems, energy difficulties after the Russia-Ukraine war and waning demand in China for its goods. Merz's program of reform could also be complicated by President Donald Trump's insistence on imposing 25 percent tariffs on the 27-nation bloc of the European Union. Total two-way trade between America and Germany in 2024 was \$262 billion, with roughly two thirds being German exports, making the US the largest export market worldwide for German goods.

A top priority for Merz should be to ease the so-called *Schuldenbremse*, or debt brake, that prevents Germany from deficit spending to ease its current economic recession. He would require a two-thirds majority in the Bundestag to override it, but the left parties are sympathetic to attenuating this onerous economic provision.

Foreign affairs is probably the arena in which Merz will have the most room to maneuver. On February 26, before becoming chancellor, Merz traveled to Paris to meet with French president Emmanuel Macron to help coordinate assistance for Ukraine. Merz has announced that Europe must establish an independent defense capability and is eager to forge closer relations with France as well as Great Britain, both of which are nuclear powers. Poland, which is ramping up defense spending, would serve as a buffer state for Germany's eastern flank. As chancellor, Merz promises to focus on rebuilding the Bundeswehr and aiding Ukraine, though the budgetary allocations to implement these promises are not yet clear.

Like Angela Merkel, the Christian Democrat chancellor who first came in with a narrow

majority in November 2005, Merz is probably underestimated by the press and his political opponents. Few predicted that Merkel would end up governing for four successive four-year terms when she ascended to the chancellorship. Merz is about to become chancellor at a moment of crisis. How he handles it will determine not only his but also Germany's future. \*

#### 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.

# THE RISE AND FALL OF SPAIN'S NEW LEFT

Iñigo Errejón. Photo credit: Europa Press via Reuters Connect





by Richard M. Sanders

In late October Spanish political life was rocked by the resignation of Iñigo Errejón, a member of parliament and key figure in the current governing coalition, following accusations of sexual misconduct. Errejón led efforts to build a new force on the left, most recently as the spokesman for *Sumar* (“Join”), a grouping of national and regional parties.

*Sumar* and its predecessor movement *Podemos* (“We Can”) had hoped to supplant both the center-left social democrats of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and the old-school Communist Party of Spain. Instead *Sumar* ended up joining Sánchez’ governing coalition. But the story of Errejón provides a window into the political and intellectual world of the “post-Marxist” left in Europe and Latin America.

Political parties embracing this post-Marxist approach can be found in countries ranging from Greece and France to Colombia and Chile. They arose from the 2011 protests against the austerity policies implemented in Europe after the 2008 financial crisis and took inspiration from the anti-globalization, Occupy Wall Street,

and Antifa movements in the United States.

Errejón helped translate these protest sentiments into practical politics in Spain. His approach grew from “left populism” practiced by the “pink tide” of governments which came to power in Latin America at the end of the 1990s and from the “identity politics” agenda that includes feminism, LGBTQ and indigenous peoples’ rights, eco-politics, and other issues.

### SEEKING A NEW LEFT POLITICS IN SPAIN

Errejón at 40 years old retains the youthful yet scholarly mien of the graduate student in political science that he once was. His doctoral thesis was entitled “The Struggle for Hegemony during the First Government of MAS in Bolivia, 2006-2009” (MAS, the Movement towards Socialism, is the political party founded by Evo Morales, the leader of coca farmers who became Bolivian president.)

Galvanized by Spain’s protesters of 2011 known as the “indignados” (the outraged ones), Errejón, together with Pablo Iglesias, a fellow political scientist and media personality, founded a think tank, the Center for Political and Social Studies (CEPS), to explore the opportunities for a new kind of leftist politics. In 2014, they launched *Podemos*, with Iglesias, a



Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Yolanda Díaz, leader of Sumar, October 2023.  
Photo credit: LaPresse/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

charismatic speaker, as its leader and Errejón in charge of organization and policy.

*Podemos* became Spain's third largest political force in the 2015 and 2016 elections and joined the Socialist-led government. Although it subsequently lost seats in the 2019 elections, Iglesias served as Deputy Prime Minister. But, never comfortable with coalition politics, he resigned to embark on a failed effort in 2021 to head the Madrid regional government.

Errejón broke with *Podemos*, finding Iglesias' top-down leadership style unpalatable. In 2019, he moved to a new leftist local party called *Mas Madrid* ("More Madrid"), later *Mas Pais* ("More

Country") and became a councilman in Madrid's regional government. This new party in 2023 became part of Sumar, the new grouping of leftist national and regional parties, and Errejón became its spokesman.

Errejón was caught up in a scandal when he was accused of repeatedly sexually harassing an actress and television presenter; other such accusations against him surfaced in the media. He admitted to "mistakes" resulting from a "toxic subjectivity" created by the "patriarchy" and resigned his seat in parliament.

Errejón's departure does not immediately threaten the survival of Sánchez' government.

Sumar remains in the government along with a number of regional parties (including independence-minded Catalan nationalists.) But this scandal further dampens the prospects of the new version of leftist politics that Errejón champions.

### THE POST-MARXIST THEORY

What is this “post-Marxist” thinking that the now discredited Errejón had such a major role in converting into real world politics? His lodestone was the late Ernesto Laclau, an Argentine political theorist considered one of the fathers of post-Marxism.

Laclau’s own thinking derives from that of Antonio Gramsci, a founder of the Italian Communist Party, who challenged the Communist orthodoxy that defined power relations entirely in terms of the competing economic interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, with political ideology merely being merely a “superstructure” dependent on underlying economic fundamentals. Gramsci argued that the ruling classes were able to dominate their societies not merely through economic power but also because of their cultural “hegemony” which must be challenged by those seeking fundamental change.

Laclau took Gramsci’s thinking further. Instead of relying largely on the working class and its traditional political parties, says Laclau, those seeking change could find an alternative in “left populism.” Laclau saw radical possibilities in the career of his fellow Argentine, Juan Perón, who achieved and maintained power through his charismatic personality, resort to nationalist appeals, construction of a massive welfare state, and sponsorship of a powerful, politically beholden union movement. Laclau in his later years approved of Argentine Presidents Nestor and Cristina Kirchner whose free-spending, statist version of Peronism and reliance on politicized community organizations was seen as a return to the movement’s essence after the conservative deviation of Carlos Menem, who



## THE RISE AND FALL OF SPAIN'S NEW LEFT



A demonstration to protest against the ruling government and to demand general elections, Madrid, October 20, 2024. Photo credit: Oscar Gonzalez/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

made efforts at privatization and fiscal restraint.

Laclau's views included favoring sustained internal conflict, with the goal of setting up a dichotomy between "the people" and "the interests." He took some of his thinking from the right-wing (indeed Nazi Party member) German political theorist Carl Schmitt, who spoke of the need to always define political goals in terms of "the other" against whom one takes a position of constant opposition.

Such views were attractive to Errejón (who acknowledged Laclau's influence in his thesis on Bolivian populism) and fellow young Spanish radicals, as the "indignados" took to the streets, protesting austerity and Spain's post-Franco democratic model of competition between the center-left Socialists and the center-right Popular Party.

### THE VENEZUELAN CONNECTION

Errejón also found inspiration in Hugo Chávez, who took office in Venezuela in 1999 and ruled the oil-rich South American state until his death in 2013.

Chávez was probably close to the perfect model of the "left populist" leader that they admired—charismatic, with a unique personal hold on the Venezuelan electorate, fiercely nationalist (and consistently opposed to the United States), eager to appropriate historic national symbols (he termed his movement "Bolivarian"), and determined to squeeze out Venezuela's "squalid" upper and middle classes and use the country's oil wealth to create "twenty-first century socialism."

The connection between Errejón's movement in Spain and the Chávez government was more than ideological. CEPS, the new left Spanish think tank, was paid 3.7 million euros over ten years in consulting fees by the Venezuelan government. As Venezuela slid further into authoritarian governance, Errejón continued to defend the regime, praising its "immense advances in transformations towards socialism."

### A MATTER OF IDENTITY

If charismatic populism was seen as the path to power, another movement with some roots in neo- or post-Marxism provided much of Spanish new left political agenda – "identity politics" and the use of grievances of specific groups within society as a vehicle for the "people" to oppose the established "interests." Latin American leftwing movements adopted this agenda, partly influenced by Spanish counterparts.

In Colombia, former guerrilla Gustavo Petro gained the presidency with a platform of gender equality, indigenous rights and above all environmentalism (to the point of banning further exploration for oil, the country's top export).

Perhaps the Latin American country with the strongest connections to Spanish counterparts, from far right to far left, is Chile. In 2019 it underwent a prolonged series of protests (marked by considerable violence) known as the "social explosion," which in many way paralleled the earlier protests of the "indignados" in Spain, leading to the election of Gabriel Boric, a young member of parliament who had been a radical student leader.

Boric's political base had close ties with Spain's Podemos (as Boric had personally with Errejón). Boric vigorously supported a constitutional convention, which was dominated by left-oriented civil society activists, and which produced a draft document of the identity agenda, including seats in Congress reserved for the indigenous, strict environmental protections, and recognition of animal rights. Ultimately the Chilean public roundly rejected the draft, as public concerns turned to issues of crime, illegal immigration, and the economy.

### WHAT'S LEFT OF THE NEW LEFT?

So where does this leave the post-Marxist left in Spain and elsewhere? Errejón himself has resigned his seat in parliament and left politics, at least for now. Sumar remains part of the



government but, having done poorly in the last European election, its future is uncertain.

In Latin America, the left populist “pink wave” presidents have proven to be disappointments. Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution has provoked an economic and social collapse. In Bolivia, Evo Morales, now out of power, is locked in internecine struggles within his own party. And the Kirchners’ variant of Peronism was rejected by Argentines in favor of the libertarian views of economist Javier Milei.

Milei embodies a rightwing populism. While his main concern is Argentina’s economy, he is also prepared to challenge the leftist identity agenda, for example by abolishing the country’s Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity. And in Spain itself, the new hard right party Vox has carved out space advocating tougher immigration policies and resistance to the claims of Basque and Catalan minorities, while promoting a conservative Catholic stance on sexual mores.

Both in Spain and elsewhere in the West, the devotees of post-Marxist politics seem to embody a vision that the public is not buying. They may recover and regain support. Perhaps a new strategy would involve giving up their fantasies of a populist leader or a coalition of aggrieved minorities sweeping them to power, and concentrate on issues with broader resonance.

Such a drift has already been seen in other European leftist parties such as Greece’s Syriza and Germany’s Greens. But, of course, should they embark on such a course, Spain’s post-Marxists might then find that they are little different from the old-school social democrats whom they have sought to supplant. \*

---

**RICHARD M. SANDERS**

Richard M. Sanders is Senior Fellow, Western Hemisphere at the Center for the National Interest. He is also a Global Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. A former member of the Senior Foreign Service of the US Department of State, he served as Argentina desk officer, 1997-99 and as Director of the Office of Brazilian and Southern Cone Affairs, 2010-13.



# A BREAK IN THE ARGENTINA MURDER CASE TIED TO IRAN



A sign at a protest in Argentina, with photo of Alberto Nisman, that reads “The truth cannot be killed,” October 2023.

Photo credit: Cristobal Basaure Araya / SOPA Images/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect



by Ben Cohen, Toby Dershowitz

**T**en years ago, on January 18, 2015, an Argentinian prosecutor, Alberto Nisman, was murdered for investigating the 1994 terrorist bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires. That 1994 attack killed 85 and wounded some 300, the largest single mass murder of Jews between the Holocaust of World War Two and October 7, 2023. Nisman was its 86th victim.

On January 10, 2025, an Argentinian federal court's investigation affirmed that Nisman's death, which some had sought to depict as a suicide, was in fact a murder. The report concluded that Nisman was murdered because of his work investigating the role of Iran in the bombing and that of Argentinian president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in a cover-up during her time in office.

Nisman began investigating the AMIA bombing in 2004, a decade after the first, deeply flawed probe, pursuing a trail of evidence that led to Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran.

In 2005, Nisman identified a Lebanese citizen, Ibrahim Hussein Berro, as the suicide bomber who drove the explosives-laden truck into the AMIA building. In 2007, acting on Nisman's revelations, INTERPOL issued red notices – alerts for internationally-wanted fugitives – for six Iranian officials, among them

Ahmad Vahidi, who then served as commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and is now Minister of Interior. In April 2024, the government of Argentinian president Javier Milei formally requested Vahidi's arrest as he traveled outside of Iran.

Nisman showed how Iran used diplomatic cover to carry out intelligence operations. His investigation uncovered Iran's use of cultural and religious institutions to radicalize and recruit Argentinian citizens for terrorist activities. Nisman's granular investigation into Iranian terrorism throughout the Western Hemisphere served as a roadmap for law enforcement around the world.

He became increasingly suspicious of Argentina's policy toward Iran under President Kirchner. In 2013, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding, ostensibly to exchange Argentinian grain for Iranian oil (and possibly nuclear technology), but it also provided impunity for the accused. Nisman denounced the memorandum as unconstitutional. It was later annulled by an Argentinian court.

Iran had previously issued a fatwa calling for Nisman's murder. He started to receive death threats. "Jew son of a thousand bitches," one message declared. "Long live Iran. Long live Hezbollah, long live Islam. Death to usurping Zionism."

In February 2013, a judge ordered extra security for Nisman and his family. Nisman meanwhile persevered with his investigation,

filing a formal complaint three days before he was murdered. In it, he accused Argentina's highest authorities – based on some 30,000 legally obtained wiretaps – of hatching a plan to spare the perpetrators of the AMIA attack from prosecution. "I could come out of this dead," Nisman said in an interview on the same day. "But the evidence is there."

His prediction tragically came true on the night of January 18, 2015, a day before Nisman was to unveil his case against Kirchner to Argentina's Congress.

Ten years on, Judge Eduardo Taiano, leading the investigation in Nisman's death, revealed a litany of suspicious activities. The day before he was found dead, thousands of electronic files related to the AMIA bombing were destroyed in a fire in the presidential offices. Nisman's guards abandoned their posts for twelve hours prior to his body being found. Nisman's computer consultant with suspicious connections, Diego Lagomarsino, owned the pistol used to kill Nisman. "Federal prosecutor Natalio Alberto Nisman was the victim of a homicide, and his death was motivated by his work in the UFI-AMIA [unit] and, specifically, by his actions related to the Memorandum of Understanding with the Republic of Iran," Taiano's report stated.

Taiano stressed that the initial investigation into Nisman's death had been deliberately bungled, "given that the event to be investigated consisted of the violent death of a federal prosecutor in charge of the investigation of the most serious attack in Argentine history, and that four days earlier he had denounced the highest authorities of the National Executive Branch in the framework of his professional responsibilities." Taiano also confirmed that Nisman's assailants, whose identity Taiano committed to pursuing, shot him in the bathroom of his apartment using Lagomarsino's gun and then placed his body in a position to "simulate a suicide."

Ten years after Nisman's murder, and thirty-one years after the AMIA bombing, no one

has been convicted of either crime. Nisman's investigation and Taiano's report point to the roles of senior Iranian and Argentinian officials. As the truth emerges, so must the wheels of justice now turn. \*

---

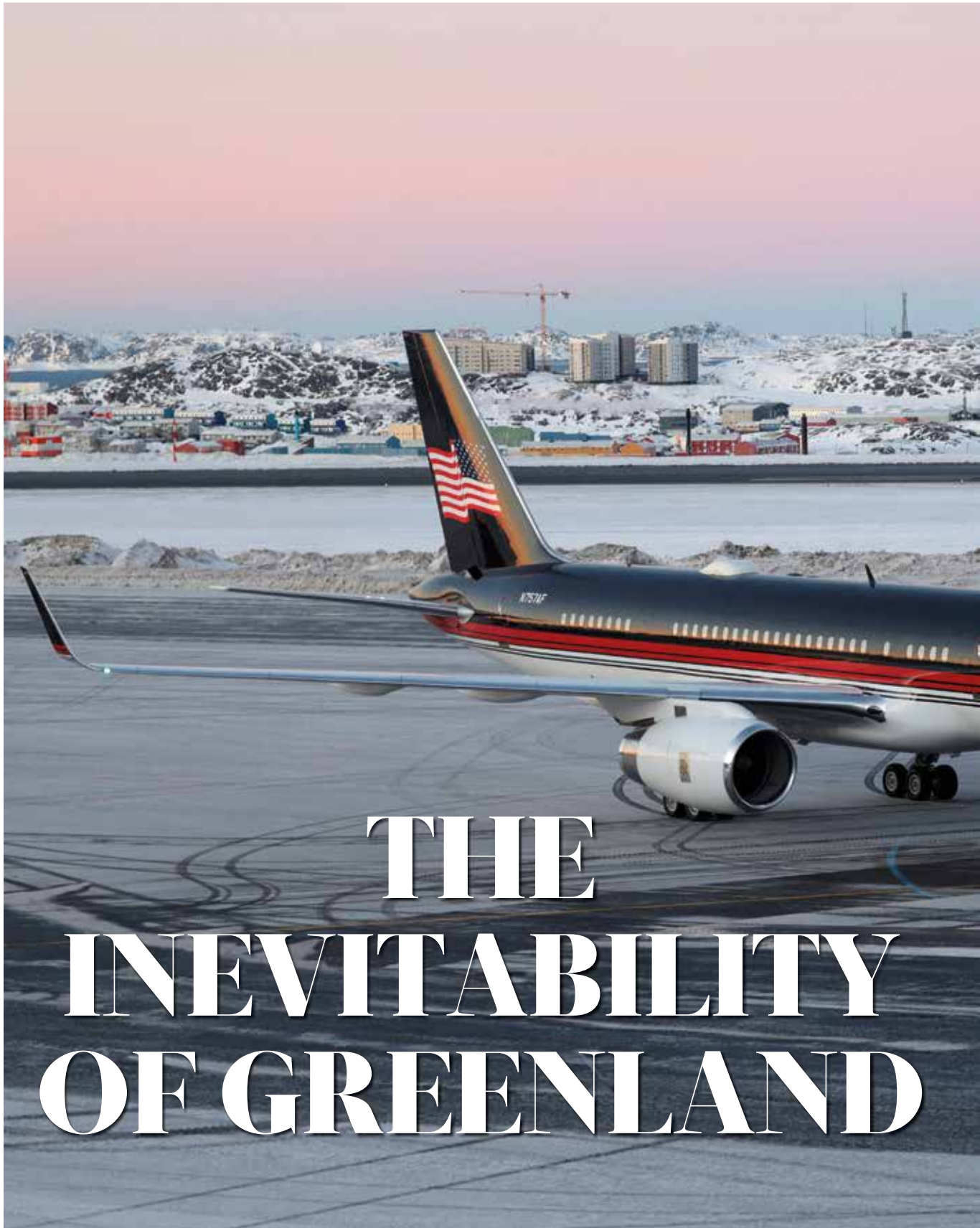
#### **BEN COHEN**

Ben Cohen is a senior analyst with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and the director of its Rapid Response program.

---

#### **TOBY DERSHOWITZ**

Toby Dershowitz is managing director of FDD Action, a non-partisan national security advocacy organization.



# THE INEVITABILITY OF GREENLAND



Donald Trump Jr. visits Nuuk, Greenland, January 2025.  
Photo credit: Emil Stach/Ritzau Scanpix/via Reuters



by Paul du Quenoy

“Ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity,” posted President Donald Trump in announcing tech executive Ken Howery as his nominee for ambassador to Denmark, which counts the world’s largest island as one of its two “autonomous territories.”

Feverish international reactions followed. The governments of both Denmark and Greenland repeatedly declared the island is “not for sale.” Denmark’s king changed the national coat-of-arms for the first time since 1972 to feature more prominently the heraldic symbols of Greenland and his realm’s other remaining “autonomous territory,” the Faroe Islands. Trump has not relented, however, treating these refusals as little more than the opening of a successful real estate deal driven by an acute and well-informed appreciation of the US’s evolving national security interests. Donald Trump Jr. visited Greenland in a high-profile mission that was covered by the media. United Airlines is scheduled to open direct service from Newark, New Jersey, to Nuuk, Greenland’s capital, in June 2025.

Greenland has long been important in US strategic calculations. The second Trump

administration’s deliberations about purchasing the island are in fact the sixth time Washington has entertained the issue. As long ago as 1867 – not coincidentally the year in which the United States purchased Alaska from Russia – acquiring Greenland was considered alongside the potential acquisition of the Danish West Indies. The US Senate rejected the sale offer, which Denmark’s government had approved, citing extreme weather concerns. Nevertheless, in the 1880s American explorers carried out the first complete scientific charting of Greenland’s western and northern coasts and established long-term American territorial claims. Washington only relinquished those claims in 1916, when the US once again considered purchasing the Danish West Indies, which became the US Virgin Islands the following year. Greenland was left out of the deal, but a subsequent US-Danish protocol signed in 1920 echoed the principles of the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, by establishing that no third country would be permitted to acquire the island. Denmark’s full ownership remained unrecognized until 1933, however, when the post-World War I World Court arbitrated rival Norwegian claims.

Under William McKinley, whom Trump praised in his second inaugural, the US acquired Spain’s remaining colonial possessions in both the Caribbean, where Germany was active, and in the Pacific, where Japan had designs on





The Danish military vessel Lauge Koch moored in the Nuuk port, February 2025.  
Photo credit: Reuters/Sarah Meyssonier

the Philippines. The need to defend American commercial and strategic interests against great power rivals became acute. As the brief Spanish-American War of 1898 demonstrated, Spain was incapable of defending its possessions, some of which were in open rebellion. In the Caribbean, they were already economically dominated by American interests. McKinley also added Hawaii, which had become a weak republic run by American settlers, where Japan also had ambitions. McKinley further laid the diplomatic groundwork for the construction of the Panama Canal, a waterway conceived in significant part to

facilitate faster movement of American warships from the Atlantic to face off against Japan.

Acquiring the Danish West Indies lay in the future, but the prospect of their acquisition by Germany during World War I reinforced American possession as a strategic imperative even though Denmark was neutral in that conflict.

Greenland's geopolitical importance never really left American consideration. In World War II, after Denmark collapsed in just 12 hours of fighting on April 9, 1940, its ambassador in Washington acted on his own initiative and, in consultation with Greenland's local authorities,

conceded American defensive rights. US coast guard vessels arrived within six weeks, with a fuller military presence established in 1941.

US military presence has continued in some form to the present day. Although Denmark refused a \$100 million purchase offer from Harry Truman in 1946, a broad agreement signed in 1951, which remains in effect, conceded nearly unlimited US rights to defend Greenland. During the Cold War, the island hosted dozens of US installations, offered open transit rights for US personnel and vessels, and accompanied long-term agreements on mining rights in vital minerals. Facilities in Greenland were integrated into ballistic missile early warning systems, the US Strategic Air Command, and the NORAD defense network. The American air base at Thule, 750 miles north of the Arctic Circle, opened in 1953 and at times hosted thousands of American servicemen. In 2020 it was renamed Pituffik and is now a US Space Force installation.

Continued American defense of Greenland remains vital. Denmark's defense budget languishes at just \$5 billion per annum, compared to over \$800 billion for the US. The Danish armed forces have fewer personnel than New York City's police department. Its defensive force for Greenland consists of one observation plane, four customs inspection vessels, and several dogsled teams. After Trump mentioned possibly acquiring Greenland, the Danes pledged an additional inspection vessel and more dogs. Denmark's annual subsidy for Greenland, which suffers from relative underdevelopment, is about \$600 million, or roughly the same amount as the municipal budget of Providence, Rhode Island. In other words, Greenland is every bit as exposed to hostile foreign powers as the decrepit Spanish Empire's possessions were in 1898, as the Danish West Indies were in 1916, and, indeed, as Greenland itself was from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Greenland's vulnerability has become more acute over the past decade. Regardless of the cause, the Arctic is warming at a fast pace, opening its sea lanes to shipping and exposing its resources for easier development. The Arctic Sea may be on track for historic ice-





Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Greenlandic Prime Minister Mute B. Egede.  
Photo credit: Reuters/Tom Little

free seasons in the near future. Since 1996, an intergovernmental Arctic Council comprised of regionally important countries – the US, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, and Russia – has attempted with limited success to regulate the region’s affairs (Russia has been ostracized since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine), and most analysts agree that it is a major zone of geopolitical competition.

Since about 2012, China has also become an interested party, working heavily with Russia, its “unlimited ally” since 2022, to develop that country’s Arctic ports, which supply Siberian raw materials to China and form part of an abbreviated shipping route – some 40 percent shorter than the conventional passage around South Asia and through the Suez Canal – to carry Chinese goods to markets in the Western Hemisphere. China and Russia conduct joint military operations in the Arctic, where China is also developing a tourism industry. In 2017, Beijing preposterously proclaimed China a “near-Arctic state” and branded its Arctic projects the “Polar Silk Road” as part of its global “Belt and Road Initiative” to create an integrated world market. Chinese investments in the Arctic are believed to total over \$90 billion.

Beijing has directed a significant amount of its wealth and attention toward Greenland, a natural initiative given the island’s relative underdevelopment and Denmark’s military and economic weakness. Some mining operations have been successfully undertaken, though Greenland’s government has prevented Chinese exploitation in some spheres, citing environmental concerns. It is also concerned about China’s “debt trap” strategy in other developing countries, where China exercises significant political control in exchange for investment. Denmark’s government has, with US encouragement, also resisted Chinese offers to develop transportation facilities and infrastructure.

More importantly, Greenland has emerged as a global superpower in vitally important rare earth elements, a group of 17 minerals that are essential for high-tech production, particularly in electronics, renewable energy,

and defense. The island is the world’s eighth largest repository of these minerals, with an estimated 1.5 million metric tons under its surface, in addition to many other important mineral and energy resources. The entire United States, by comparison, has only slightly larger rare earth mineral deposits, with 1.8 million tons, while China has over eight million tons and aggressively guards its near monopoly by both protecting its domestic deposits and taking control of deposits in numerous other countries. Currently, China supplies the United States – its greatest strategic rival – with some 72 percent of its total supply of rare earth minerals. In other categories, such as processed graphite, which is used in the battery anodes that power electric vehicles, China produces 100 percent of the current global supply, while Greenland is known to have large graphite deposits.

Estimates hold that Greenland, if properly developed, could supply as much as 25 percent of the world’s rare earth mineral market by 2030. Denying the US that large alternative source in Greenland is thus a major strategic imperative for Beijing, while acquiring it is vital for US interests. This is particularly true under the second Trump administration, which seeks to restore US energy independence, break dependency on foreign supply chains in vital industries, and solidify its leadership in high-tech development. While controlling Greenland would likely be decisive in achieving those goals, not controlling will almost certainly frustrate them to the benefit of the Chinese.

Chinese hegemony could also potentially threaten an older US strategic imperative – the security of the Atlantic sea lanes, which remain vital for trade with Europe. As was the case in the 1940s, a rival power’s control of North Atlantic ground territory could lead to military challenges or other undesirable obstacles.

Politically, securing Greenland presents some obstacles, but none that cannot be overcome through prudent diplomacy. Purchasing sovereign territory is less common in the modern world but not unheard of. As

recently as 2017, Saudi Arabia purchased from Egypt two strategically important islands in the Straits of Tiran.

Even if Denmark remains steadfast in its refusal to sell Greenland, its hold on the island is weak. A 2009 protocol established that Greenland's population can declare independence by majority vote in a referendum. The island's current governing party adopted achieving independence as a major goal in February 2024 and has reiterated it in relation to the recent headlines, while nevertheless disclaiming any immediate willingness to join the United States. In the event of a conflict with China, however, America could expand its existing military presence to a preventative occupation, as it did without any pre-existing military presence in World War II, and in invocation of the Monroe Doctrine. Notably, President Trump stated that he would not rule out acquiring Greenland by military means.

Washington could offer an independent Greenland a free association compact, such as those it concluded with Micronesia and the Marshall Islands in 1986, and with Palau in 1994. Those Pacific nations remain independent, but voluntarily ceded control of military, security, and some economic matters to the United States. US investment would certainly benefit Greenland's population, which currently depends on Denmark's small subsidy, and recall the Cold War, when Greenlanders were pleased with the economic benefits of US military investment. In those circumstances, it is not inconceivable that Greenland's population could consider closer union.

In any case, Greenland appears to be destined for a larger American role. In January 2025, a congressional resolution was introduced to empower Trump to seek its acquisition. A subsequent resolution proposed in February raises the possibility of renaming it "Red, White, and Blueland." Who knows if that is a step too far? \*

**PAUL DU QUENY**

Paul du Queny is President of the Palm Beach Freedom Institute.



# IS THE PIVOT TO ASIA FINALLY HAPPENING?



Archive photo: US Destroyer Sails Through the South China Sea, March 2023. Photo credit: ABACA via Reuters Connect.



by Drew Thompson

**T**ump has stunned Europe by following through on his pledge to force an end to the fighting in Ukraine, and making European allies take more responsibility for their own security. The Pentagon has reportedly been instructed to prepare to withdraw US forces deployed in Syria. Is the Trump administration in the early stages of actually pivoting to Asia?

The pivot to Asia was first articulated around 2010 during the Obama administration, with Kurt Campbell, then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, one of its most passionate advocates. Campbell's book, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* was published in 2016. The Obama administration was uncomfortable with the label, feeling that "pivot" implied withdrawing from Europe and the Middle East. The semantic compromise was to call it a rebalance, which undermined the premise of prioritization and failed to acknowledge that scarcity of resources necessitated hard choices. In the Biden administration, Kurt Campbell returned as a senior National Security Council official and then as Deputy Secretary of State, sparking speculation that the pivot would actually happen. But Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine dragged Washington back to the business of defending Europe.

On the campaign trail, Trump derided America's endless wars and promised to end the wars in Gaza and Ukraine. Many of his foreign policy supporters argued that America's real threat is its near-peer competitor in Asia, China, and that US attention should focus on support for Asian allies building their capabilities to defend themselves.

Once in office, Trump has invested considerable political capital and attention on ending the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts. But is the administration actually pivoting to Asia, or will America retreat from Asia as well? The jury is still out. Trump has not committed, leaving his appointees to jockey for position and make their respective cases.

### RISE OF THE ASIANISTS?

Trump appointees are a mix of right-wing libertarians, Wall Street capitalists, and Asianists, each with competing foreign policy ideologies. (Some refer to the libertarians as "isolationists," "restrainers" or "realists," while the Asianists have also been described as "prioritizers.") The libertarians and Asianists have the strongest influence on foreign policy and the contest between the two will shape whether or not the US successfully pivots to Asia.

The libertarians oppose foreign development assistance and seek to avoid wars, counselling restraint. Some argue that China and Russia are nuclear powers that deserve a degree of deference, and that it is not in the national interest to go to war with big powers over minor American interests on their peripheries. Essentially, Taiwan and Ukraine are not worth fighting China or Russia over. They ultimately support the reduction of spending on defense concurrent with the decoupling of security commitments around the world.

The Asianists agree with reducing European and Middle Eastern security commitments, but diverge from the libertarians in prioritizing national security policy resources on China as the primary threat to the United States, with Taiwan as the battleground for conflict. They believe that US alliances in the region should support that priority, and that Taiwan and Japan should bear a greater part of the burden in defending themselves.



If the Asianists prevail, the pivot could become reality. For the first time, the Deputies Committee – the key forum where national security issues are brought for senior-level discussion and initial decision – will be led for the first time by three Asianists. They are Deputy National Security Advisor Alex Wong, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy-nominee Bridge Colby, and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs-nominee Alison Hooker. These Asia experts will put critical choices before the President for decision. This does not assure that the administration ultimately doubles down on the defense of Taiwan and whole-hearted competition with China. But personnel is policy, and we have experienced Asia hands running defense and foreign policy at the key agencies.

President Trump has not backed either school of thought, however. He is not ideologically driven. He keeps his own counsel, keeps his cards close to his chest, and revels in his own unpredictability and the leverage it gives him when negotiating with foreign counterparts, and perhaps his own advisors as well. This makes for uncertainty, as well as a lack of clarity, and perhaps even our awareness of whether a pivot is actually happening. Barring a clear speech or Truth Social post, observers may struggle to perceive that a pivot is underway.

### CONTOURS OF A TRUMP PIVOT

If America does finally pivot, what might it look like? Certainly, decoupling from European security would be sustained. The administration would need to succeed in extracting troops from Syria and avoid putting boots on the ground in the Eastern Mediterranean or Yemen. There will be sustained bilateral engagement with capable allies in the Pacific, and enhancement of security cooperation with select partners. There are indications that is already occurring. Taiwan and Philippines foreign military assistance was approved just days after a declared freeze on all military aid. Prime Minister Ishiba's visit to the White House in February exceeded expectations and resulted in a joint statement that reflected Tokyo's security concerns, not just Washington's.

A Trump pivot to Asia would likely not manifest itself as an embrace of Asian multilateral networks, or a comprehensive

strengthening of bilateral relationships. Trump believes multilateral architectures dilute US power. He finds multilateral engagements socially awkward and is more comfortable engaging counterparts bilaterally, where he can choose to either dominate a counterpart, as Zelensky discovered, or bestow goodwill, as Ishiba received.

ASEAN is unlikely to feature prominently in a Trump pivot, but there are opportunities for strengthened bilateral relations in both North and Southeast Asia. The Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the US) may feature in a pivot, but that would likely reflect Trump's personal preference for the individual leaders in that group. Bilaterally, economic competition and Trump's insistence on economic reciprocity and reindustrialization of America will still be a feature of US relations in Asia, even with concurrent strengthening security relationships.

Singapore, Australia, and Mongolia are the only countries in Asia that have a trade deficit with the US (Hong Kong, the Special Administrative Region of China, also has a deficit), leaving the rest of the region to accept Washington's economic coercion as a part of the pivot.

### CONCLUSION

The volatility of an administration fuelled by Trump's outlook and leadership style, coupled with competing schools of thought amongst his advisors, makes it impossible to conclude with certainty what the future holds for American foreign policy. Contradictions and unpredictability will undoubtedly define US foreign relations, much as Trump imposes tariffs on friend and foe alike. There are nevertheless indications of a shift in US focus towards Asia, as the competing foreign policy visions are debated within the Administration. \*

### DREW THOMPSON

Drew Thompson is a Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. Previously he served as the director for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia in the Office of the Secretary of Defense of the US.

# A FATEFUL DEBATE IN TEHRAN



Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, visits the IRGC Aerospace Force exhibition in Tehran.  
Photo credit: via Reuters

A FATEFUL DEBATE IN TEHRAN





by Ehud Yaari

**T**here are growing indications – not yet certainties – that the top echelons of the Iranian regime are locked in a fierce debate over a comprehensive reassessment of their regional policies. The Farsi media and public statements by politicians allow only a glimpse of the intensity of the controversy. Still, the ongoing heated discussions have already led the generals of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), usually quite fond of bombastic rhetoric, to take a step back and reduce public appearances.

The issue at stake is whether Iran should invest billions more dollars to reconstruct the armed proxies established in recent decades by Qassem Suleimani, the late commander of the IRGC's Qods Force. These funds are desperately needed at home where the local currency has sunk to a record low. The main dilemma, of course, relates to the future of Hizbullah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad as well as the wide array of Iranian-sponsored militias in Syria with their Afghani and Pakistani recruits.

Many political elites of Tehran have concluded that throwing good funds after bad (funds lost during the current war) is no longer viable. The sums involved would be huge and the resupply of proxies made difficult by the loss of land corridors in Syria, with the emergence of an anti-Iranian authority there.

### PROBLEMS WITH THE PROXIES

One should pay attention to – and not dismiss as sheer pretense – Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's statement that the Islamic Revolution “doesn't employ proxies” and that the different factions of the Axis of Resistance stand on their own feet and chart their course of action independently. In my opinion, this was a loaded signal to Iran's clients in the Middle East that they should not expect Tehran to rush to their rescue. Iran was content to let Arabs fight and die for its cause but is not willing to sacrifice its own soldiers and interests in order to bolster severely weakened junior allies. The performance of Hizbullah, Hamas and the other factions in Gaza, as well as the Syrian Army and its auxiliary units, have all bitterly disappointed their Iranian mentors.

Indeed, Iran has avoided coming to the rescue of its single most important proxy, Lebanon's Hizbullah. This once formidable military organization saw its leadership almost entirely decapitated and most of its vast arsenal of rockets destroyed. The successors of Hasan Nasrallah had to accept a ceasefire with Israel, abandoning their commitment to a “Unity of the Fronts” between Lebanon and Gaza.

Since then, Iran has been slow and hesitant in providing Hizbullah with financial assistance. Iran has promised to compensate the Lebanese Shi'ite community for the tens of thousands of displaced persons, thousands of damaged houses, thousands of families of new “martyrs” and thousands of injured. This is causing

widespread resentment amongst the popular base of the “Party of God.” Furthermore, the Iranians are turning a deaf ear to Hizbullah’s pleas to help find out what happened to no less than one thousand Lebanese fighters still missing. When the Lebanese regular army moved recently to close military bases of Palestinian of armed groups in the country, especially the Popular Front, there was not one word of reprimand from Tehran.

Reconstituting Hizbullah’s military strength, if possible, will require many years. Therefore, Iran concentrates on arresting the decline of its political influence within Lebanon and defections of former partners. The Druze as well as some Christian and Sunni factions have started distancing themselves from the “Camp of Resistance.” It’s quite clear now that Hizbullah’s candidate, Suliman Franjeh, cannot be elected as the next president of Lebanon.

The Iranians also came quickly, if grudgingly, to terms with the loss of their most important Arab ally, the Assad regime, hurriedly evacuating all Iranians from the country. Despite widespread rumors to the contrary, there appears to be no attempt to organize armed opposition to the takeover of Damascus, as proposed by some senior officers of the Assad regime who fled to Iraq. Instead, Iran is publicly begging Ahmed al-Shara’a to allow reopening its embassy in the capital. Criticism of the vehemently anti-Iranian Sunni Islamist leader has been muted.

Closer to home in Iraq, the IRGC instructed the multitude of Shi’ite armed militias not to cross the border into Syria and to stop launching rockets and drones against Israel. The Iranians refrain from openly confronting important Iraqi Shi’ite leaders – Grand Ayatullah Ali Sistani, Prime Minister Mohammad Sudani and popular leader Muqtada al-Sadr – who have raised their voices against the Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization militias. Each of them in his own way says now that weapons should be in the hands of the Iraqi state, which alone is authorized to start hostilities.

The Iranians have only limited control over their Houthi partners in Yemen. They have supplied them for years with advanced weapon systems and provided training and support in establishing local production facilities. But

Tehran is aware that it cannot instruct the Sana’a regime how to conduct military operations or when to lift the blockade on the Red Sea.

In the Palestinian arena, Iran is losing ground to Turkey. Hamas leaders prefer Istanbul over Tehran as their headquarters. The Palestinian Authority views Turkey as its potential partner and the Turks are trying to push their way into Gaza once the current war ends.

## COMPETITION WITH TURKEY

A major part of the reassessment in Iran is linked to the deterioration in relations with Turkey. The two non-Arab former empires of the Middle East have maintained a mixture of competition and cooperation over the past 200 years. Yet, the transformed geopolitical landscape, brought about by Israel’s military campaigns in Lebanon and Gaza, presents new opportunities for Turkey which President Erdoğan is losing no time in exploiting. Turkey seeks to replace Iran as the dominant power in Syria and the rest of the Fertile Crescent. Top Iranian politicians and pundits are attacking Turkish policies and aspirations daily, accusing Erdoğan of neo-Ottoman ambitions. The inauguration of a Farsi station by Turkey’s national broadcaster was described in Tehran as a “declaration of war.” Iran’s designs clash with Turkish dynamism not only by turning Syria into a Turkish zone of influence and striving to crush Kurdish autonomy, but also in Lebanon where Turkey keeps busy reviving Sunni political activism, and in Iraq where Turkey is challenging Iran’s supremacy. The rivalry has spread to other regions from the Caucasus to the Horn of Africa.

Clearly, Turkey has many advantages in this competition. Though the two countries have similar size populations, Turkey’s economy is three times larger. Turkey’s modern army is much bigger and far better equipped than Iran’s. Turkey is member of NATO whereas Iran is subject to heavy international sanctions. Arab states feel more comfortable doing business with Turkey than with the Islamic Republic. Furthermore, although hostile to Israel, Turkey can easily switch to rapprochement, as it had done in the past.



Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan meets with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, December 2024.  
Photo credit: via Reuters



## CONCLUSION

Iran appears to be retreating from – or at least revisiting – the doctrine of forward defense: establishing a chain of well-equipped militias far from its own borders as a protective barrier for its own territory. Israel’s military successes, following its colossal failure on October 7th, 2023, have demonstrated to Tehran that the vision of positioning a “Ring of Fire” around Israel has not paid the expected dividends.

The debate in Tehran is far from over. Reformers led by President Pezeshqian advocate reconciliation with the US and EU through a new nuclear deal, while many hardliners demand that Iran make a dash for a nuclear weapon, especially after its air defense systems were knocked out by the Israeli air force. Reformers prioritize overcoming severe economic hardships, while hardliners emphasize regime survival. Reformers criticize the failed adventurous exploits in the Levant, while hardliners mourn that Iran did not prove proactive enough and instead pursued “strategic patience.” For the time being, the regime appears to adopt a slogan of “nuclear deterrence” – get close to an arsenal but refrain from assembling. On the question of the proxies, they seem to prefer a wait-and-see approach.

We have reached a point when the US together with key European and Arab states may be able to influence the direction of the contest within Iran. A sober combination of carrots and sticks can go a long way. \*

---

### EHUD YAARI

Ehud Yaari is the chief Middle East commentator of Israel television Channel 12 and the Lafer International Fellow of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

# ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC OPTIONS REGARDING IRAN



Photo: Shutterstock







by Yaakov Lappin

**I**srael's strategic options regarding Iran are at a critical juncture. The diminishing threat from proxies and the impairment of Iran's air defense capabilities have shifted the focus squarely onto Iran's nuclear program in the immediate time frame. Iran's threatening public declarations and technical advancements are a red warning light.

For over a year, Israel has been defending itself on seven fronts in a war launched by Iran and its proxies. This effort has led to Iran losing on three fronts that it constructed around Israel – Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria. From four other fronts – Yemen, Iraq, the West Bank and Iran itself – Iranian attacks are ongoing.

During this time, the Israel Defense Forces severely damaged two of Iran's primary proxy terror armies, Hamas and Hezbollah, which were designed to help surround Israel with a ring of firepower. In recent months, Israel traded blows directly with Iran twice, leaving it essentially without air defenses, and its missile production program significantly damaged.

As a direct domino effect from the damage Israel caused to the Iranian-led axis, and especially to Iran's flagship proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, Sunni rebels in Syria identified a chance to launch a surprise offensive, resulting in the collapse of the Assad regime. Neither Iran

nor Hezbollah were able to come to Assad's aid, and the Syrian regime, a key pillar of the Iranian proxy program, fell apart in eleven days. Iran has seen its ring of fire around Israel collapse, and its vision for regional hegemony crumble.

### FOCUS ON THE NUCLEAR THREAT

Going forward, Israel now faces critical decisions regarding three main components of Iran's hostile strategy: Its nuclear program, its plans to resurrect the proxy network, and its missile program.

Despite setbacks, Iran has not given up on its desire to rebuild its terror armies in Gaza and in Lebanon, break through to nuclear weapons and extend a nuclear umbrella over rebuilt proxies, and to directly threaten Israel with missiles and drones. The end goal, as the Iranian regime openly declares, is to lead to Israel's collapse by the year 2040.

Yet the past year has only seen Iran's strategy go backwards when it comes to its proxies and missile threats. The one exception to this trend has been the Iranian nuclear program, which continues to move forward at an alarming rate.

According to a November 21 report of the Institute for Science and International Security, Iran can produce more weapons-grade uranium since the last report of the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in August 2024. This is due to increased stocks of enriched uranium and an enlarged advanced centrifuge capacity.

“Iran’s stocks of enriched uranium and its centrifuge capacity combined are sufficient to make enough weapons-grade uranium, taken as 25 kilograms per weapon, for almost ten nuclear weapons in one month, 13 in two months, 14 in three months, 15 in four months, and 16 in five months,” the report, co-written by weapons expert David Albright, stated. The figures speak for themselves regarding just how advanced the Iranian nuclear program is at this time.

The report also noted that “with Iran’s growing enrichment experience and using only a portion of its stock of 60 percent highly enriched uranium and only four advanced centrifuge cascades, Iran could produce its first quantity of 25 kilograms of weapons-grade uranium in one week or less. This breakout could be difficult for the IAEA to detect promptly, if Iran delayed inspectors’ access.”

The Iranian nuclear program therefore represents the first and most urgent decision point for Israel’s security cabinet. The decision is whether and when to take advantage of the fact that Iran’s air defenses are largely down and to strike key Iranian nuclear sites. The arrival of the second Trump administration could influence this decision significantly, with Israel likely to receive diplomatic support and, possibly, military assistance as well in this scenario.

The Iranian proxy threat, though now diminished, remains present through the activities of Iranian-backed Shi’ite militias in the region, and Iranian plans to rebuild its proxies in Gaza and Lebanon. These designs by no means threaten Israel only. The Iranian-orchestrated attacks on international Red Sea shipping – an affront to the entire world order – by the Houthis are ongoing.

### **IRAN’S MESSAGING TO ISRAEL AND THE IAEA**

Iranian officials have recently conveyed mixed messages regarding the prospect of further escalating direct military confrontations with Israel. On the other hand, they have issued stern, categorical warnings about their nuclear

program, which should be taken seriously.

On November 19, Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi threatened retaliation against Israel for its October 26 strikes targeting military installations in Iran. Araghchi stated that Iran would implement the “True Promise 3” plan against Israel at a time of their choosing, signaling a vague threat that leaves Iran plenty of room to delay its actions.

Iran’s nuclear chief, Mohammad Eslami, warned on November 14 of an “immediate reciprocal response” if the IAEA passes a censure resolution against Iran over its lack of cooperation. Eslami emphasized that Iran’s nuclear path is irreversible.

On November 22, a censure motion against Iran was brought by the US and the E3 (Britain, France, Germany) and passed at the IAEA’s 35-nation board, with 19 countries voting in favor. Iran said it would launch a series of “new and advanced” centrifuges in response. There is every reason to take this statement seriously.

### **ISRAEL’S TWO MAIN OPTIONS**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a speech to the Knesset on November 18, highlighted the progress that Israel had made against Iran’s three main threats. He confirmed that the Israeli Air Force had destroyed Russian-made air defense batteries around Tehran in the two waves of attacks on Iran, on April 19 and October 26 (both were in response to Iran’s firing of 300 missiles and drones in April and 200 missiles in October – two of the largest ballistic missile attacks in history).

“The test is on us – the Israeli government, the State of Israel, our friend, the United States... because if we do not deal with the nuclear program, then all of the other problems will bounce back, and resurface at the axis [a reference to the Iranian axis of proxy forces],” said Netanyahu.

Israel’s policy options boil down to whether Israel should take preemptive action to halt Iran’s nuclear advancements, potentially with

diplomatic and military backing from the second Trump administration, or respond reactively to Iranian maneuvers (for instance, wait to detect Iranian nuclear breakout activity).

The assertive statements from Iranian officials signal an emboldened stance on continuing nuclear activities. Without proactive measures, Israel may face a nuclear-armed Iran in the near future, fundamentally altering the regional power dynamics and posing an existential threat. The threat to global security would be major.

The degradation of Iran's air defense capabilities and proxy networks provides Israel with a strategic window to avoid this alarming scenario and argues for the preemptive strike option.

At the same time, Israel must maintain a long-term commitment to preventing Iran from rebuilding jihadist forces in Gaza and southern Lebanon.

American diplomatic and military support for all of these efforts will be essential for Israel's success, and will play a key role in re-establishing regional stability. \*

#### — YAAKOV LAPPIN

Yaakov Lappin is an analyst at the MirYam Institute, a research fellow at the Alma Center and a media analyst specializing in Israel's defense establishment.





IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi with Head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Mohammad Eslami in Tehran, November 14, 2024. Photo credit: Majid Asgaripour/WANA (West Asia press Agency) via Reuters

# WHERE ARE AMERICA AND ISRAEL GOING IN SYRIA?



Turkish President Erdoğan and Syrian President al-Shara'a in Ankara, February 4, 2025.  
Photo credit: EYEPRESS via Reuters Connect





by James Jeffrey

**T**he United States and Israel face fateful decisions on Syria. Israel appears to be moving towards some level of confrontation with the Damascus regime, which is seen as allied with Erdoğan's Turkey and identified increasingly in Israel as a threat. The US position remains unclear. But if history is any guide (and the unfortunate analogy is Lebanon in the 1980's), Washington may be tempted to join with Israel. This likely would portend a split with Europe and the Arab world, currently warming to the new Damascus regime, generate tension with Turkey, cause a failed Syrian state, and, most seriously, see Tehran's exploiting Syrian turmoil to reestablish its "Shi'a Crescent." Washington and Jerusalem thus should take a deep breath before diving deeper into the Syria morass.

#### **SYRIA POST-DECEMBER 2024**

The collapse of the Assad regime, while directly due to opposition forces and Turkey, was also the final chapter in the demolition of the Iranian proxy network. The victorious Israeli campaign against Hizbullah forced it to withdraw its ground troops—the heart of Assad's forces—from Syria, while Israeli and American operations against Iran and its Iraqi proxies limited their ability to intervene. Given the centrality of Syria to Iran's regional proxy

empire, including sway over Syrian neighbors Lebanon and Iraq, Syria's fall was not just the final but most decisive development of this regional war.

Regime collapse in the region usually generates new problems and international indecision on how to respond. But the story in Syria so far, compared to Iraq in 2003 or to the Arab Spring, has been positive. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader al-Shara'a, after seizing effective control, has largely said and done the right things with the Syrian population, avoiding overt oppression of those ethnic and religious communities over which the new government holds sway, and negotiating with others beyond its immediate control (the PKK-led Kurds and the Druze).

Al-Shara'a has been reaching out to the international community with messages of cooperation. His main ally Turkey initially pushed back the Kurds in northeast Syria (known since 2015 as the Syrian Democratic Forces) during the brief anti-Assad campaign. But since then, rather than continuing attacks, Turkey is urging the Kurds to negotiate with al-Shara'a on their incorporation into a unified state. The international community meanwhile has responded in an unusually united way, with Arab countries swallowing their distaste for Islamist upstarts like al Shara'a (and to a lesser degree Turkey's Erdoğan) to largely embrace the new state; likewise the Europeans and the UN.

The Biden administration followed suit, lifting the \$10 million bounty on al-Shara'a, waiving some of the crushing American





Protest Against Erdoğan In Tehran, December 2024. Photo credit: Morteza Nikoubazi via Reuters Connect

sanctions on Syria to allow humanitarian and early recovery projects, and dispatching a senior official to Damascus. Israel, understandably given its history and particularly October 7, has been more cautious, bombing the Assad's regime's heavy military equipment and naval fleet, and pushing forward its troops some kilometers beyond the Golan Heights.

### ISRAELI INTENTIONS

Israeli concerns about Syria and its Turkish patron are growing while most other countries seek to stabilize the state. In early January, the Nagel Commission report on the future of the Israel Defense Forces was leaked to the Israeli

press, warning inter alia of a growing threat from Turkey in Syria. In recent days, Prime Minister Netanyahu has announced a demilitarized zone (at least for the new Syrian army) south of Damascus, without clarity on who would secure it. More dramatically, talk in Israel at think tank conferences, media reports and other indications signal a much more aggressive Israeli policy. Reuters reported February 28 that the Prime Minister urged the US not to reach out to the al-Shara'a government, arguing it should be kept weak and divided. Even more ambitious alleged Israeli plans are appearing in the media, including support for the Kurds in their northeast bastion and other steps to keep Syria divided and prostrate.

To the extent these reports are correct, Jerusalem and Washington will have to think through the many implications. First of all, what is to be accomplished? Human undertakings, including war and diplomacy, require prioritization, in this case against threats. For most of the world, the threats emanating from Syria now center on government failure and state collapse, leading to internal conflict, new destabilizing refugee flows, resurgence of terrorist groups, and Iran reestablishing itself in Syria. For Israel, there are also threats from Turkey aligned with the regime in Damascus.

Prioritizing responses to these various threats requires analysis of how Turkey and Iran might each threaten the interests of Israel, the US and regional stability.

## TURKEY OR IRAN

Israeli concerns about Turkey under Erdoğan exploded with his ferocious response to the 2009 Gaza fighting, followed by the “Mavi Marmara” incident in 2010 when ten Turks were killed by Israeli troops when attempting to run the Israeli Gaza blockade. Despite a rapprochement in 2023, including an Erdoğan-Netanyahu meeting, the relationship deteriorated dramatically following October 7, 2023. Erdoğan and much of the Turkish population unabashedly took the side of the Gazans and to some degree Hamas.

Erdoğan, enjoying in recent years improved relations with conservative Gulf states, did not rekindle his Arab Spring regional Muslim Brothers campaign, but he went further than in earlier disputes with Israel. He cut flourishing Israel-Turkey trade relations (though not including, importantly, oil through Turkey from Azerbaijan covering almost two-thirds of Israeli consumption.) Turkish public anger at Israel’s Gaza operation arguably has been no greater than that in Arab states. But they are not functioning democracies while Turkey is, and Erdoğan’s party base includes much of Turkey’s more Islamic citizens.

On the other hand, Turkey like Israel is a status quo country. Its population generally is not inclined towards foreign military adventures, and in many ways is more oriented toward Europe. (Turks see themselves geographically, and to some degree politically and even ethnically, European, with millions of Turks well integrated in European states.) Despite twenty-two years of Erdoğan, much of the system and many Turks retain Atatürk’s secularist outlook, and apart from the truly devout there is little interest in the Arab world. In many respects it is a modern European state, a G-20 economy with industrial and service sectors and per capita income approaching that of some EU states, with 41 percent of its goods exports going to the EU.

That all said, reasons beyond Gaza and Erdoğan’s occasional megalomania can spark conflict. Israel, Turkey and Iran are undoubtedly the three strongest military states in the region. But Iran is now temporarily out, and geopolitics has long experienced the phenomenon of two “last men standing” states eyeing each other warily. Furthermore, while both Israel and Turkey are status quo states, they have long defended their security aggressively, particularly in their “near abroad,” as both have suffered decades of attacks from across their borders. With the fall of Assad, they are now sharing the same unstable Syrian “near abroad,” with little recent experience dealing diplomatically with each other. Finally, as this writer can attest, both President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Netanyahu share deep distrust of the other.

With Iran the situation is different. The entire system is organized around an expansionist, partially religious, partially historical drive for hegemony within the Middle East, with a leitmotiv of destruction of Israel as the means to win allegiance of the non-Persian Muslim masses. The population, as we have seen over the past two decades, however disenchanted with mullah rule, is routinely put down violently when opposing regime policies.

Moreover, the Iranian regime’s hegemonic designs are shared well beyond the many

millions of fervent supporters of the religious state by more secular Iranians such as sometime dissident Seyed Hossein Mousavian, as he lays out in the introduction to his 2012 book, *Iranian Nuclear Crisis, A Memoir*. With the exception of weapons deals with Russia and hydrocarbons trade with China, the regime, economy, and popular mindset are all focused on the Middle East, and the role of Persians, Shi'a, and Muslims within it. Finally it has developed an integrated military-political-ideological force structure led by the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, from missiles and nuclear development to terrorism and proxy armies, to advance its infiltrate-Arab-states, destroy-Israel, eject-America strategy.

## WHAT NEXT

Israel's intervention so far in Syria is too limited to have a major impact on that state's future, but US actions (or inaction) can be decisive. Given the poor state of Israeli-Turkish diplomatic contacts (likely to continue as long as Israeli troops remain in Gaza), the US would probably have to mediate were the other states interested in reconciling their Syria-related goals. And were Israel, as the above reporting indicates, interested truly in weakening and dividing Syria, the US is best placed to do so.

Trump administration policy towards Syria remains unclear, despite strong engagement elsewhere in the region, on the Gaza and Lebanon conflicts, with Gulf states, and with the maximum pressure campaign against Iran. The outreach to al-Shara'a from the Biden administration has not been continued. For the moment, US troops continue operating with the Syrian Democratic Forces, de facto shielding it from Turkish or Damascus action, and Washington maintains its unilateral actions on Syria under the Caesar Act with their debilitating impact on US and international economic engagement. In effect, by continuing long-standing policies aimed at the Asad regime and ISIS, the administration may be automatically keeping Damascus weak and Syria divided.

What is the rationale for such inaction? Inertia, given the many more pressing issues facing the White House, is one explanation. In addition, the powerful Washington anti-terrorism lobby favors continued action against ISIS, and looks askance at al-Shara'a and HTS. Erodgan is not popular in this administration beyond perhaps President Trump, and some officials might be persuaded by the alleged Israeli pitch.

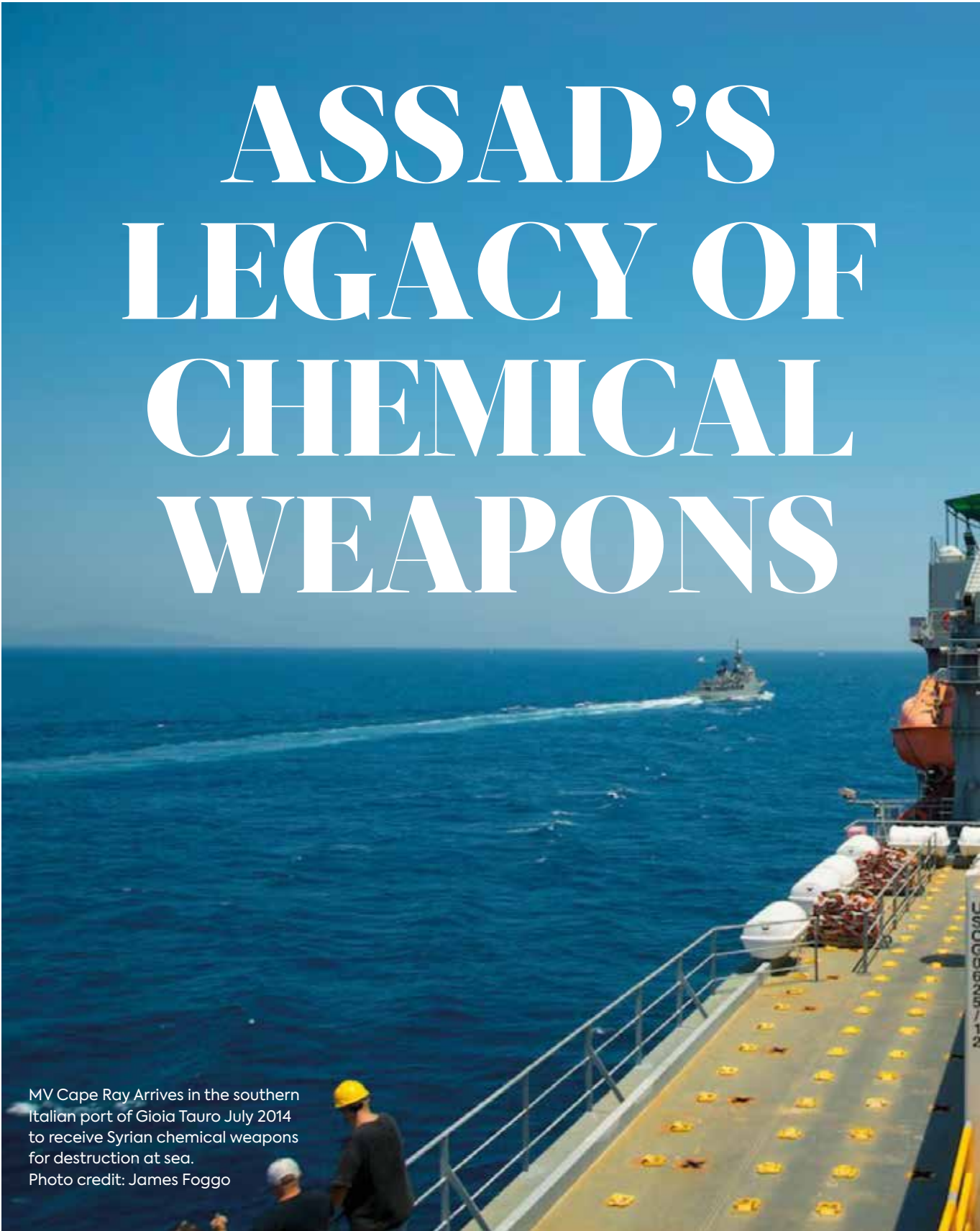
The problem for Washington and Jerusalem, however, is sustaining a long-term policy of weakening and dividing the Syrian state. It would run afoul of European and Arab outreach with Damascus, collide with Ankara which is important to Washington on many accounts, and enable reconstitution of terrorist groups and Quds Force return. Twenty years ago, Washington might have intervened to build a Syria in America's image, but that instinct is now dead, in particular among President Trump's voters.

In the end, if faced with the alternatives of Afghanistan-style massive intervention in Syria, indefinite passive weakening of the state, or engagement along with the rest of the international community, this US administration (or a following one) might well choose the third, leaving Israel isolated. Thus, before locking its Syria policy into concrete, Jerusalem and Washington should consider General David Petraeus's famous 2003 question regarding Iraq: "Tell me how this ends." \*

## — 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.

# ASSAD'S LEGACY OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS



MV Cape Ray Arrives in the southern Italian port of Gioia Tauro July 2014 to receive Syrian chemical weapons for destruction at sea.  
Photo credit: James Foggo

ASSAD'S LEGACY OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS





by James Foggo

The events that unfolded in Syria over the last weeks surprised not only the United States, but also Russia, Iran, and the Syrian people themselves. As Bashar al-Assad fled Damascus for asylum in Russia, his security forces shed their uniforms and their weapons and disappeared into the countryside. One of the most concerning things still at large is the status of the Syrian chemical weapons that Assad periodically used against his own people. These weapons stockpiles must be located and neutralized as soon as possible. The West can ill afford Syrian chemical stockpiles to fall into the wrong hands.

The West has several times tried to contain or eliminate chemical weapons in the Middle East. After the Libyan campaign in 2011, there were stockpiles of Qaddafi's once extensive chemical weapons throughout the country and the Obama administration sought with various actors in Libya to remove them. Two years after the Libya campaign, when called upon to make good on his promise that the use of chemical weapons on civilians in Syria by the Assad regime constituted a "Red Line," President Obama backed down for fear of involving the United States in a conflict in yet another Arab country.

Enter Russian President Vladimir Putin, who proceeded to take advantage of American reluctance to embrace decisive action. Leveraging his relationship with Bashar al-Assad, Putin proposed a compromise deal in which the Syrians would surrender their

stockpiles of chemical weapons to a third party, who would in turn remove them from Syria for destruction under controlled circumstances and Western supervision. Accordingly, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 2118 in September 2013 calling for an international effort to take custody of and then destroy stockpiles of Syrian chemical weapons.

At the time, I was serving in the Pentagon as the Deputy Director of Plans, Policy and Strategy on the Navy staff. I had been nominated by the Secretary of the Navy as the next commander of the US Sixth Fleet, based in the Mediterranean. A friend, Admiral Mark Ferguson, had been nominated for the position of Commander of US Naval Forces Europe/Africa and Commander of NATO forces in Naples, Italy. One day, Admiral Ferguson asked me if I would like to accompany him to Norfolk to walk the waterfront and inspect a couple of ships that were on the short list to become a floating chemical weapons disposal platform. I was fascinated with the idea and accepted right away.

Upon arrival at the Norfolk Naval Air Station, within a few minutes we were standing on the pier looking at the stern of the Motor Vessel (M/V) *Cape Ray*. The ship, owned by the Maritime Administration of the Department of Transportation, had largely been used to transport heavy equipment or vehicles to war zones in defense of our interests overseas. Of all the ships on the short list, *Cape Ray* was in excellent material condition and after a tour of the spaces, it was determined that she would be the afloat chemical weapons destruction ship. Admiral Ferguson and I met with engineers and operators whose tradecraft involved the safety and storage of chemical munitions.

I was struck by the enormity of the task. We were going to convert a “roll-on/roll-off” car ferry ship into a platform outfitted with Field Deployable Hydrolysis Systems, that would in turn would transload tons of lethal chemical weapons in order to transport them to a safe location offshore, far from civilian populace, for ultimate neutralization. Only Americans would take on such an audacious and risky task. Amazingly, within two months, the conversion was complete and the ship embarked a team of civilians from the US Army Chemical Corps setting sail for the Eastern Mediterranean in June 2013.

This operation was conducted by a coalition of the willing and a flotilla of ships that included Russian, Chinese, Danish and US flagged vessels. Russian and Chinese warships escorted the Danish ship *M/V Ark Futura* into Syrian ports to load stockpiles of Syrian chemical weapons for transport to a western European port for temporary storage. The Russian warship was senior, but in this schema of collaboration, the Russian commander did not use the traditional title of “Officer in Charge” rather he was referred to as the “Officer in Coordination.” In January 2014, *M/V Cape Ray* loaded 530 tons of Syrian chemical weapons from the port of Gioia Toro, Italy, and put out to sea to conduct destruction and neutralization operations. All in all, over 700 tons of Syrian chemical weapons were neutralized and not one untoward incident was recorded.

After Senate confirmation, I took command of the Sixth Fleet in December 2014. *M/V Cape Ray* returned to the United States with the assurance from the Russian side that it would continue to monitor for a resurgence of chemical weapons production in Syria. But the Russian assurances were a ruse. We suspected the Syrians were hiding additional stockpiles of chemical weapons, but without a robust inspection team on the ground or Syrian permission for unfettered access to chemical weapons storage facilities, we could not prove it.

The world eventually found out that Assad had retained supplies of chemical weapons with an attack on Syrian civilians in the town of Khan Shaykun in April 2017. The response of President Donald Trump was swift and decisive. He ordered an immediate strike on the Shayrat air base from which Syrian aircraft orchestrated

the attack on Khan Shaykun. Dozens of Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles rained down on aircraft and chemical weapons storage facilities on the base. Despite this warning message, Assad attacked the city of Douma in April 2018, almost a year to the day of his attack on Khan Shaykun, with chlorine gas, killing 43 civilians and maiming dozens more.

By this time, I was back in Europe as the Commander of Naval Forces Europe and Africa. Incensed, President Trump ordered the Pentagon to strike Assad’s chemical weapons facilities again and this time to make it hurt. We formed a coalition of the willing in Europe with our French and British allies and conducted strikes on three chemical weapons facilities in Syria including two large storage facilities and the Barzah Research Center. The strikes were surgical and effective. It was the first instance of a *Virginia*-class submarine launching Tomahawk missiles in a combat operation. This time, both Assad and Putin received the message.

Now the Assad regime has collapsed. I do not believe we have an accurate accounting of existing stockpiles of Syrian chemical weapons. There is an immediate need for outreach to the transitional government in Syria. In return for Western assistance to help the new Syria join the community of nations, both they and we have a responsibility to rid Syria of chemical weapons so that they may never again be used. It is time for action by the United Nations or a coalition of willing allies and partners. \*

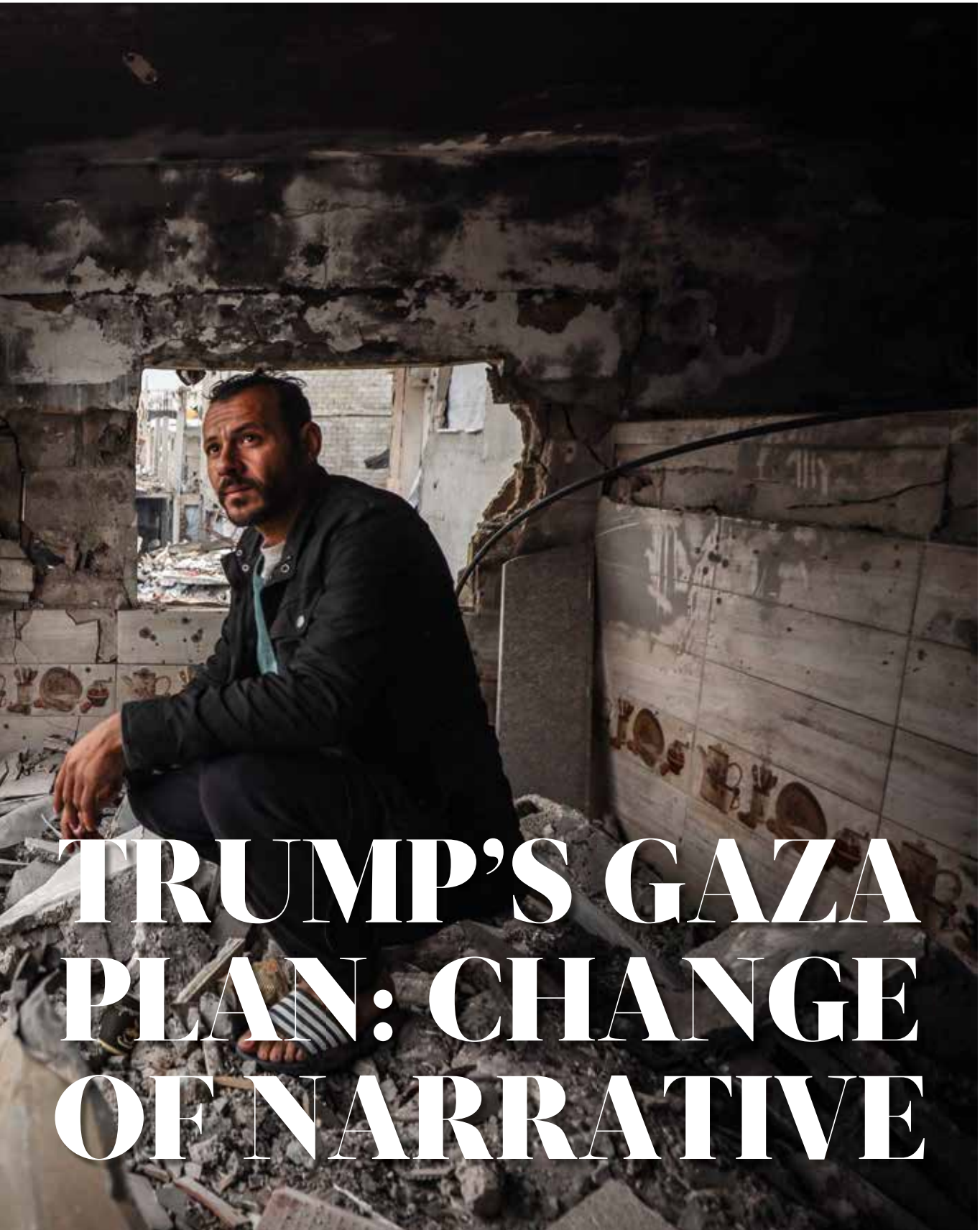
### — JAMES FOGGO

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.



Gaza City, February 2025. Photo credit: Majdi Fathi via Reuters Connect





# TRUMP'S GAZA PLAN: CHANGE OF NARRATIVE



by Robert Silverman

Washington's Middle East experts were gathered for dinner in the ballroom of the Ritz Carlton Georgetown, hosted by a prominent think tank. It was May 19, 2019, and they had come to hear Jared Kushner talk about the forthcoming Trump peace plan. Mr. Kushner described both an economic vision for the Middle East and a framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace. In the audience, experts were skeptical. A few whispers were heard ("what makes him think it's a good time for this?") and, after 45 minutes, hands were clapped, politely.

But little more than a year later, Kushner and team produced the Abraham Accords between Israel and three Arab countries: Morocco, the second most populous Arab country; the UAE, the second largest Arab economy; and Bahrain, the home of the US Fifth Fleet. It was the largest expansion of Middle East peace since the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. Kushner had promised a shaking up of the status quo. And a major part of the region responded in a surprising, positive way.

Now, in the first month of his new term of office, President Trump has outlined a plan for postwar Gaza that dramatically changes the

narrative of this conflict. His plan would turn this 25 miles of coastline, with its deep water port and thin strip of agricultural hinterland, into a real estate development, in effect seeking to return Gaza to what it had been for nearly two millennia of antiquity, a cosmopolitan port on a strategic land-sea crossroads of the Eastern Mediterranean. Most of the roughly 2.2 million Gazans would be relocated, at least while this development is being constructed, which will take about 20 years.

I recommend checking the skepticism this time. Let's see how the region ultimately responds and what emerges from negotiations. In the meantime, here are three initial thoughts.

### NO MORE DO-OVERS

If the Trump plan does no more than put a stop to the old narrative of this conflict, in which the international community acts to restore a status quo ante every time the Palestinians attack Israel, allowing them to reconstitute and attack Israel again – then it will have provided a valuable service.

The depravity of October 7 should have shocked the civilized world into realizing and supporting the fact that Israel will not permit another Palestinian do-over. For me, one video posted on October 7 led to that realization – Gazan civilians (not Hamas in this case, we later found out) holding down a Thai worker in a

kibbutz and beheading him with a garden hoe. I knew then a Rubicon had been crossed.

If there was shock around the world after October 7, it soon dissipated. Not even the public celebration in Gaza of murdered Israeli babies could shift the debate. We needed a US president to disabuse those who would, wittingly or otherwise, normalize Hamas and its many supporters.

Normalization of Hamas? That may not be the intention, but that is certainly what would result from a “reformed” Palestinian Authority put in charge of Gaza. This “reformed” Palestinian Authority is featured in think tank reports and the Biden administration’s last-minute (January 14, 2025) postwar Gaza plan.

Problem: no one elaborates how this “reform” would occur and over what period, and then how the reformed Authority would replace Hamas and restore governance in Gaza. Most importantly, no one identifies the Palestinian political movement that would critically support this reformation.

The only intellectually honest take on this “reform” was that of former Palestinian Authority prime minister Salam Fayyad. He wrote that the only reforms that could allow the Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza would involve bringing Hamas and Islamic Jihad into the Authority. In other words, the only Palestinian political movement that can control the Gaza street is Hamas and its jihadist allies.

There are also pro-Hamas elements in the West who gaslight the public. For example, the director of Carnegie Endowment’s Middle East Center, Maha Yahya, wrote recently in Foreign Affairs that the Hamas attack of October 7 was a response to settlement construction on the West Bank and other Israeli “side stepping” to avoid a two-state solution. Sadly for her, Hamas itself undercuts this message: its leaders have consistently explained the October 7 attack, in the Arabic media and elsewhere, as a first step in the liberation of all of Palestine, leading in turn to other conquests that will ultimately create a global caliphate.

The Trump vision changes the narrative and ignores the delusions and gaslighting that have sustained a decades-long series of wars ending with the current devastation.

## WHAT ABOUT THE GAZANS?

A second benefit of the Trump vision is that it focuses on the practical needs of the Gazan people. The Israeli counter-offensive after October 7 turned built-up urban areas into rubble. Any postwar reconstruction will require years of rubble removal, tunnel demolitions, and new infrastructure and housing. Presidential envoy Steve Witkoff estimates this will take 20 years. In the meantime, the Gazan population should be relocated out of this construction zone, with their consent.

What do Gazans want? One credible poll taken one month before the October 7 attack, by Khalil Shikaki’s Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, shows about one third of Gazans wanted then to emigrate. Perhaps that number has increased as a result of the war. Thousands of those with the means to travel and pay the \$7,000 Egyptian transit visas have moved elsewhere; thousands more have simply moved to Egypt.

The US media regularly features interviews with individuals who say Gaza is their home and they want to stay. But follow-up questions are needed: the majority of Gazans are descendants of refugees from the 1948 war, not originally from Gaza. The last time they had a chance to vote, in 2006, a strong plurality voted for Hamas, the party that promised a return to their pre-1948 homes now inside Israel. If they mean Gaza is their home as a launching pad for another do-over, then they should know that that option is no longer available.

Whether or not Gazans decide to relocate, either permanently or temporarily, is up to the Gazans themselves. But the story shouldn’t end there – if they want to stay, there should be conditions on any international help in rebuilding Gaza. They will have to develop peaceful political alternatives to Hamas. As one

Palestinian leader, Samer Sinijlawi, has stated, it is up to the Palestinians after October 7 to convince Israelis that they have decided to live in peace alongside the state of Israel.

And where would the Gazans relocate to? In 1991, after siding with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the 450,000 Palestinian residents of Kuwait were summarily expelled; most resettled in Jordan. But Jordan is firmly opposed to massively adding to its existing demographic tensions between Palestinians and East Bankers. A more likely place of resettlement would be Egypt, the former occupying power of Gaza from 1948-1967, provided there are sufficient financial incentives.

### GLIMMERS OF A DEAL

National Security Advisor Michael Waltz, when asked about the negative Arab reactions to Trump's plan, said "I think it is going to cause the entire region to come [up] with their own solutions."

The Egyptian government has responded, drafting a plan calling for a five-year, \$53 billion reconstruction of Gaza, which the Arab League adopted on March 4. It is an opening bid, flawed in many ways including one-sided condemnations of Israel, and it may be overcome by events – if as many expect Israel resumes its counter-offensive and re-occupies Gaza in order to further diminish Hamas.

But the Egyptian plan does offer a glimmer of a future possible deal. It departs ever so slightly from the Washington consensus belief in a "reformed" Palestinian Authority overseeing Gaza; instead it calls for a transitional "technocratic" government of Gaza "under the umbrella" of the Palestinian Authority. It also foresees roles for an International Contact Group to support reconstruction and for international peacekeepers (albeit under the UN, which has a bad history in both Lebanon and Gaza and is unacceptable to Israel).

A possible way forward hinted at in the Egyptian plan would be a non-UN multi-national mission to deploy to Gaza, following

a full Israeli dismantling of Hamas's military, to provide security, restore public services and replace the Hamas civilian government. Over time, such a mission would oversee economic reconstruction contingent on and linked to Palestinian governance progress. A group of American former officials (disclosure: including me) produced just such a plan for Gaza, based on successful international missions in Bosnia and Kosovo. That plan is consistent with a UAE proposal; it addresses Israel's focus on reforming Gaza's educational system and de-radicalizing the population; and it meets American concerns with not putting US troops on the ground (rather they provide organizational leadership, logistical and intelligence support).

A multi-national mission could also be consistent with elements of President Trump's vision – it would be temporary but of sufficiently long duration to allow for a full reconstruction contingent on governance progress; it could allow for American financial smarts and entrepreneurial ingenuity. Special Envoy Witkoff spoke of 20 years; the international mission in Bosnia is still there 30 years later, though reduced in size.

Gaza was once a jewel of the Mediterranean. Byzantine jurists educated in Gaza participated in the drafting of the Justinian Code, the basis for much of Western law. The word "Gaza" means treasure house in medieval Arabic (and in ancient Egyptian). If we discard the old narrative, and encourage Israelis and Arabs to respond to the alternative Trump vision, we could be on the path to another peace breakthrough in the Middle East. \*

### 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.



Egyptian tanks at the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.  
Photo credit: Gehad Hamdy/dpa via Reuters Connect

# A COLD PEACE IN PERIL?



by Ksenia Svetlova

**I**srael-Egypt peace was carefully constructed in the 1979 treaty and has weathered numerous regional storms: the 1982 Lebanon War, two Palestinian intifadas, the upheaval of the 2011 Arab Spring, and even sixteen months of conflict in Gaza. Throughout, Israel and Egypt have sustained generally productive military and economic cooperation (despite persistent anti-Israeli sentiment in the Egyptian public and antagonistic media coverage in the Egyptian press.)

Today, however, the prospect of resettling Gaza's Palestinians in Egypt, part of President Trump's vision for Gaza, has created new tensions between Israel and Egypt that even raise the specter of military confrontation for the first time in decades.

### THE SPECTER OF CONFLICT RETURNS

Recent weeks have witnessed growing anxiety in both nations regarding the possibility of military confrontation, the first in half a century of relative calm. In Israel, an often jittery media has stoked concerns with Egypt, for

instance, showing Egyptian military movements in Sinai, accompanied by a statement from Egypt's president suggesting that Egypt could repeat its past military success against Israel. As it turned out, the "Sinai" footage was later identified as a compilation of Egyptian military operations from various locations—not exclusively Sinai—and the presidential statement was not recent. But Israeli television, radio, and print continued questioning whether Cairo was preparing for conflict.

The situation intensified when Israel's new ambassador to the United States, Yechiel Leiter, claimed that Egypt was "in serious violation of the Camp David Accords" and stated that Israel "will take care of that later." The IDF ultimately issued a statement suggesting that a foreign entity might be deliberately attempting to undermine Israeli-Egyptian relations.

Concurrently, Egyptian anxieties were inflamed when an Israeli website published an AI-generated scenario depicting an attack that destroyed Egypt's Aswan Dam. In apparent retaliation, an Egyptian content creator released another AI-generated video showing the destruction of what was characterized as Israel's nuclear installations. Beyond media speculation and simulated conflicts in virtual reality, these incidents raise questions about underlying factors driving these provocations.

## A HISTORY OF PRAGMATIC COOPERATION

For decades, Israel and Egypt have maintained a functional security relationship. When Egypt needed to deploy additional military personnel and equipment to the Sinai Peninsula, beyond the limits prescribed by the 1979 peace treaty, in order to combat Islamic extremists, weapons traffickers, and narcotics dealers, successive Israeli governments approved these deployments, recognizing shared security objectives. In 2018, the Israeli air force participated in airstrikes against ISIS targets in Sinai. When reports emerged in 2019 that Prime Minister Netanyahu had approved Germany's sale of a third submarine to Egypt without consulting or notifying top defense officials, Israeli media outrage centered on allegations of Israeli government corruption rather than security concerns with Egyptian military capabilities.

Bilateral relations have never warmed to true normalization. But there has been a tacit understanding that Egypt has no interest in renewed hostilities. Egypt's 1973 surprise attack was fundamentally about reclaiming sovereignty over the Sinai Peninsula—an objective long since achieved.

Recently, Major General Ahmad Mahmoud Safi al-Din, a prominent Egyptian military commander, told Saudi news channel Al-Hadath that Egypt's military expenditures and modernization efforts were intended to "preserve peace and stability in the region." Given Egypt's economic challenges and ongoing instability along its borders with Sudan and Libya, initiating military conflict with Israel would appear to be counterproductive to Cairo's interests.

## ASSESSING THE RISK OF ESCALATION

Could this status quo be destabilized by the repercussions of the Gaza conflict and President Trump's Gaza plan?

President Sisi abruptly postponed his scheduled visit to the United States following Trump's announcement of the Gaza plan. The proposal envisions permanently resettling Gaza's Palestinians in Egypt and Jordan while transforming Gaza into a luxury tourist destination. This concept of relocating Palestinians to Sinai has particular resonance in Egyptian domestic politics, as the Muslim Brotherhood has for years weaponized such scenarios in propaganda campaigns designed to undermine the government's legitimacy and sovereignty. Regime supporters often accused the Muslim Brotherhood of promoting a similar plan.

Egypt presented its own reconstruction plan for Gaza — a proposal that maintained Palestinian presence while addressing Israeli security concerns — only to have the White House dismiss it. This dismissive approach seems to Egyptians to depart from decades of US policy that positioned Egypt as America's indispensable Arab partner. Where previous administrations carefully balanced Israeli and Egyptian interests, the current administration's approach risks pushing Cairo away from Washington's sphere of influence and potentially toward Moscow and Beijing, both eagerly awaiting opportunities to expand their regional footprint. For Egypt, already navigating complex economic and security challenges, American support for what it views as an intolerable threat may necessitate a fundamental reconsideration of its strategic alignments.

## A POTENTIAL REGIONAL ALIGNMENT

These developments signal a significant realignment: the United States and Israel positioning themselves on one side, with Egypt, Jordan, and other Arab nations increasingly unified in opposition. The probability of military conflict remains low — owing both to Egypt's internal calculations and the likely reluctance of its Arab allies in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Morocco, and elsewhere to support such action. But mounting tensions should not be dismissed.

Egypt has concerns with the resumption of Israeli military operations in Gaza and the potential implementation of a transfer plan for Palestinians. Cairo believes that such developments would destabilize an already fragile domestic situation and potentially reignite unrest in Sinai, where Egyptian security forces have only recently gained the upper hand against ISIS-affiliated militants. And it will probably also increase the popularity of Hamas and its Muslim Brotherhood affiliates in Egypt. These scenarios pose direct threats to Egypt's national security and, by extension, to the peaceful border Israel has enjoyed with its southern neighbor for more than four decades.

### A PATH FORWARD

De-escalation requires a comprehensive approach to Gaza's future, one that assigns Egypt a leadership role commensurate with its control of Gaza's only international border crossing. Renewed military-to-military dialogue between Israeli and Egyptian forces, coupled with enhanced monitoring mechanisms for developments in the Sinai Peninsula, would help prevent misunderstandings and violations of existing agreements.

The peace between Israel and Egypt has never been warm, but it has proven durable through numerous regional crises. At least two generations of Israelis cannot envisage any other scenario, the wars of the past being a distant memory. Preserving this critical pillar of regional stability will require careful diplomacy, mutual respect for core security interests, and a focus on long-term security for all parties involved. \*

### 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.



# ISRAEL'S DILEMMA IN LEBANON



Photo credit: Ilia Yefimovich/dpa via Reuters Connect



by Seth J. Frantzman

The 60-day ceasefire in Lebanon will end on January 26, six days after President Trump takes office. While Hizbullah suffered heavy losses during the two months of fighting from late September to late November, it has been slowly, stealthily rebuilding in the Shi'ite villages of southern Lebanon. Meanwhile, Lebanon's government has new leadership with friends in the West and the Sunni Arab countries. With the ceasefire ticking down, Israel faces the following dilemma: continue withdrawal of forces in southern Lebanon, with the risk of ceding ground to a rebuilding terror organization that doesn't honor ceasefires; or stay and renew its offensive against that terror organization, with the risk of alienating Israel's allies in the West.

The 2024 Lebanon ground campaign of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) began on October 1. It focused on uprooting terrorist infrastructure in several dozen villages near the border. These villages are mostly on the tops of several lines of hills that extend north of the border several miles into Lebanon. In contrast, the IDF dashed north to the Litani River in 1976 and to Beirut in 1982. In 2006, 34 days of fighting saw the IDF struggle to grasp the best way to deal with

Hizbullah in southern Lebanon. The 2024 campaign lacked previous campaigns' rapid ground maneuvers.

The 2024 campaign did involve a large number of airstrikes on Hizbullah weapons. It may have prevented Hizbullah from carrying out a simultaneous firing of thousands of rockets, potentially overwhelming Israel's air defenses. However, Hizbullah's ability to simultaneously fire so many rockets may have been overestimated, in the same way the IDF military intelligence had underestimated Hamas' capabilities in Gaza.

What is clear is that Hizbullah continues to threaten Israel. On January 12, the IDF carried out a number of airstrikes on Hizbullah terror targets in Lebanon – a rocket launcher site, a military site, and routes along the Syria-Lebanon border used to smuggle weapons to Hizbullah, the IDF said.

These aren't the only threats from Lebanon that the IDF identified in mid-January. It also identified threats to Mount Dov (also known as the Sheba'a Farms) and photographed several terrorists loading a truck with weapons. On the ground in southern Lebanon, the IDF continues to uproot Hizbullah weapons, including "multi-barrel rocket launchers, hundreds of mortar shells, explosive devices, and RPG rifles inside a structure. Anti-tank fire positions and hidden weapons were located nearby," the IDF said on January 10.

The incoming Lebanese government has a new president and a new prime minister who could prod Lebanon in the right direction. Neither one is a fan of Israel. However, they may be inclined to try to show countries in the region and the West that the Lebanese government is willing to fulfil some of its international obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1701, in southern Lebanon. That would mean deploying the Lebanese army and keeping Hizbullah away from the Israeli border. However, President Joseph Aoun didn't do any of these things when he served as commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces. Will he feel empowered to wield the army in a confrontational way with Hizbullah now?

Nawaf Salam is the newly designated Lebanese prime minister. He previously served as Beirut's envoy to the UN and most recently as head of the International Court of Justice. He has been harshly critical of Israel. While he and Aoun are both being portrayed as opponents of Hizbullah, their track records do not provide evidence of them being willing to stand up to the terrorist group, quite the opposite. They served in key positions in Lebanon as Hizbullah slowly took over more and more of the country over the last two decades.

This is the dilemma Israel now faces in Lebanon. Hizbullah has been quiet since the 60-day ceasefire came into effect on November 27. It has refrained from large displays that might provoke Israel. It has also seen its supply route to Iran severed in Syria when Bashar al-Assad fell from power on December 8. In fact the fall of Assad seems to have coincided with the ceasefire in Lebanon, because Hayat Tahrir al-Sham launched its surprise attack on Aleppo as the ceasefire began, taking Aleppo from Assad in late November and setting up the fall of the Syrian regime.

Nevertheless, Hizbullah retains an arsenal and networks of fighters. It has not disappeared. It knows how to melt away into the Shi'ite villages of southern Lebanon. It knows how to disguise itself as civilians and not openly carry arms. It

has successfully navigated the UN mandate that was supposed to see it leave southern Lebanon after 2006 and it has avoided confrontation with UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the past. It continues to raise money in international drug smuggling networks and other criminal activities. In short, Hizbullah has not spent forty years slowly taking over Lebanon, only to see itself dismantled overnight.

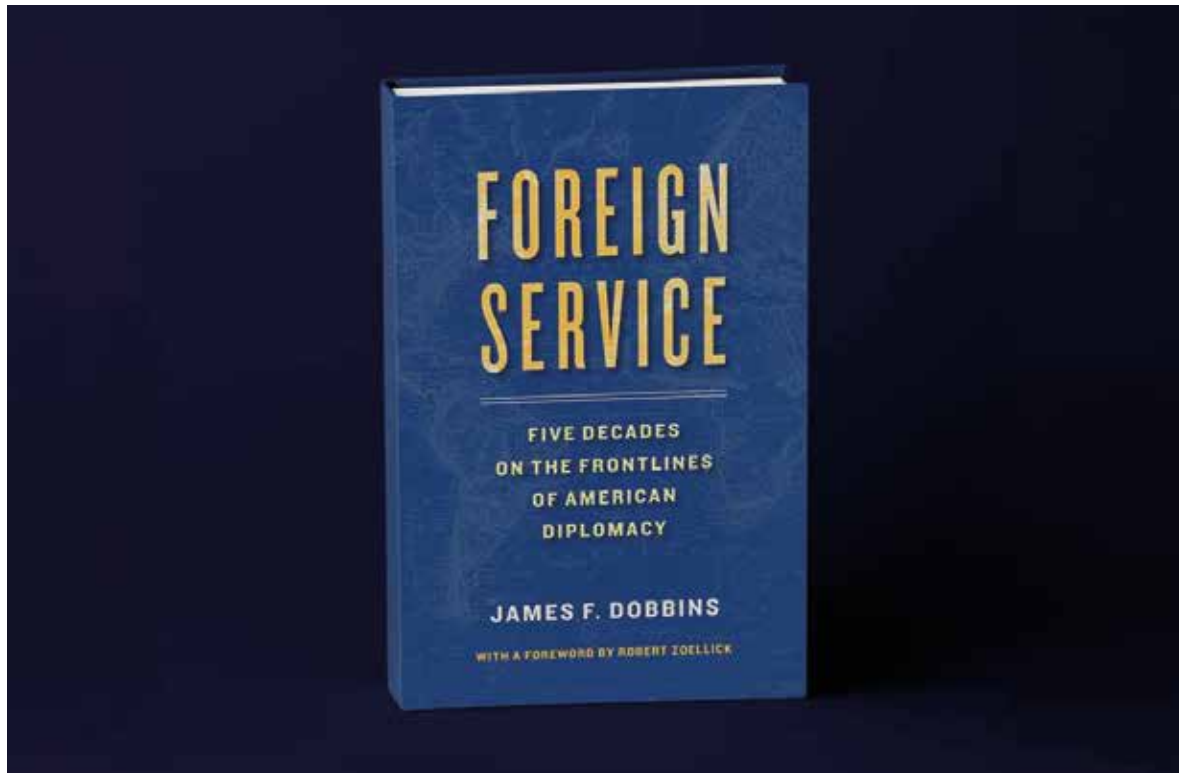
Furthermore, Iran knows how to slowly invest in proxies over a period of years and weather setbacks. In 2005, when Hizbullah killed former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, it suffered a momentary setback because the Syrian regime withdrew from Lebanon. However, the next year Lebanon attacked Israel. At the time Hizbullah had only around 13,000 rockets. Even if Hizbullah lost 80 percent of its rockets in the recent campaign, it began the war with 150,000 rockets. Therefore it likely still has a similar arsenal to what it had in 2006.

The new Lebanese government has friends in the West. France and other countries will be keen to trust the new Aoun government and want to give it time to carry out its duties. Israel's dilemma stems from its need to retain freedom of action in Lebanon in order to prevent Hizbullah's stealthy recovery. This could lead to disagreements with countries in the West, including the incoming Trump administration, who may want to see stability in Lebanon, rather than more Israeli airstrikes. \*

---

#### SETH J. FRANTZMAN

Seth J. Frantzman is an Adjunct Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and the senior Middle East correspondent for The Jerusalem Post. He is the author of *The October 7 War: Israel's Battle for Security in Gaza* (2024).



# THE BEST AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC MEMOIR OF THE COLD WAR

*Foreign Service, Five Decades on the Frontlines of American Diplomacy*

by James F. Dobbins, RAND Corporation, 2017

BY ROBERT SILVERMAN

---

**M**emoirs written by American diplomats can be slow-going. Narratives lurch from meeting to meeting in self-serving, bureaucratic prose (“And then I told the first deputy prime minister of Montenegro...”) But there are exceptions in the genre, and the late Jim Dobbins penned a sparkling one.

Dobbins was a gruff Brooklyn kid of uncommon intelligence and strong work ethic. He participated in most of the major and many of the minor American diplomatic achievements of the late Cold War and the early postwar, from junior officer attached to the Paris Peace Accords that ended the Vietnam War in 1973 through leader of the NATO mission that established peace in Kosovo in 1998.

A leading Europeanist for most of his career, he got into a dispute with a powerful member of Congress, became unconfirmable by the Senate and thus was assigned to lead a diversity of missions, including Somalia, Haiti, and Afghanistan, that didn’t require Senate approval. He transformed himself into the US government’s leading exponent of nation-building. The book ends with him paradoxically thanking the Senate for blocking his career path to further comfortable postings in favor of some of the toughest, most critical and ultimately most rewarding jobs that the Service had to offer.

What sets Dobbins’s memoir apart from those of his peers are two things. First, he describes the times and places of his service with the exquisite detail of a novelist. While at the Paris Peace talks, he witnessed the May 1968 riots and recalls a specific illuminating conversation with a French student. His memoir isn’t reliant on declassified records of conversations but rather on his and others memories (he mentions interviewing Henry Kissinger for whom he worked in 1975). Second, he delicately weaves in the policy debates of the day in a very human, direct fashion that makes one wonder how he ever got his memos cleared through the bureaucracy.

Perhaps the single best chapter of the book is “Missile Diplomacy.” Dobbins elucidates the US-USSR arms control talks of the Reagan presidency while regaling us with tales of bureaucratic battles with his Pentagon rival, Richard Perle, the “Prince of Darkness” (battles which Dobbins concedes that Perle often won, and in retrospect sometimes for the right reasons).

Then there is Dobbins the happy warrior recalling intra-State Department turf wars like the never-ending one between the bureau of European Affairs (EUR) and Political-Military Affairs (PM).

“We in PM had been the insurgents in the hills who would occasionally swoop down to raid the peaceful EUR farmers and ride away with one or two of their issues. Now we had come to stay. What rapine and slaughter would ensue?”

Dobbins was old school. In my Foreign Service entry class in 1989, we were told of the landmark class action suit brought by Virginia Palmer and other female officers that led to needed reforms in the way women were treated, including abolishing the requirement that female spouses' hosting abilities were a part of the male spouses' annual fitness reports. Dobbins reports dissenting views among some Foreign Service wives at the time. They didn't like the change and in fact appreciated mandatory recognition of their organizational skills. But Dobbins surely knew that there were other and better ways of recognizing important volunteer work. His contrarian temperament does peer out of the narrative from time to time.

Dobbins is at his best in describing the people and places of our European allies in the Cold War during the first two thirds of his career. In the last part, especially Afghanistan, he remains a master of joint civilian-military operations but loses his feel for the place. Partly this is because he is now leading hundreds of people who themselves do much of the contact work while he meets mostly the handful of Westernized elites.

It is also a fact that he knew a lot less about these nation-building places than he did about France or Germany. For instance, he mentions the anti-Taliban "Persian-speaking Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara" fighters – but the Uzbeks speak a Turkic language. He speaks glowingly of Iranian diplomat Javad Zarif, who assured him that Iran shared our opposition to al-Qa'ida. But he neglects to mention what we already knew at the time – that Tehran was hosting then (and continues to host) some of the leadership of al-Qa'ida.

After retiring from State in 2002, Dobbins went to work for the RAND Corporation, which has the Pentagon as its anchor client. "My experiences with Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan turned out to be far more relevant than my deeper exposure to issues of transatlantic and East-West relations," he writes. During eleven years with RAND, Dobbins

wrote and edited a series of books analyzing the US experience with nation-building. Though today that mission is out of favor with both political parties and the American public, Dobbins was certainly right that the US will face such challenges again. His books will remain a source of collective practical judgments on what works and what doesn't.

I had only one chance to talk with Ambassador Dobbins, shortly before he died. In spring 2023, I published an article on nation building, and a former colleague contacted me to say Jim had liked it. She suggested a Zoom call with him. He was a spirited interlocutor and when we got around to discussing the need for institutional reforms in Ukraine to precede its economic reconstruction, he took issue with my skepticism of the European Union. They will do it he assured me.

Dobbins' memoirs of the last years of the Cold War belong on a bookshelf alongside George Kennan's memoirs of the early years. As a record of what American diplomacy was and has become, seen through the eyes of a young officer who becomes a policymaker, Dobbins is more relevant than Kennan. Let's hope it serves as a model for future Foreign Service officers and not just as a reminder of what once was. \*

---

**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**

**AHMED  
CHARAI**

**SHAPING THE FUTURE  
AND PROSPERITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST  
A VISION FOR PEACE**

**SHAPING  
THE FUTURE**

**A VISION  
FOR PEACE  
AND  
PROSPERITY  
IN THE  
MIDDLE  
EAST**

**AHMED CHARAI**



BY DOV S. ZAKHEIM

---

I met Ahmed Charai two decades ago. We were introduced by an acquaintance, an Israeli of Moroccan origin. Ahmed immediately impressed me as a serious individual, a man of deep faith, committed to his family, his king and his country. He also impressed me in another sense: he was a man of vision.

Actually, Ahmed nurtured two visions. The first was to create a media empire, which over the years he succeeded in doing. His publications can be found throughout not only Morocco, but also much of sub-Saharan Africa. He also has working relationships with leading international papers such as *Le Monde*.

But it was his second vision that was more breathtaking, especially for the time. He sought nothing less than to bring about a real understanding between Israel and the Arab world. For years his dream appeared to be just that; Israel had formal diplomatic relations with but two countries, Jordan and Egypt and unofficial ones with few others, among them Morocco.

The signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020, initially between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, followed by Morocco in December of that year and Sudan

a month later, and brokered by the United States, opened up a new vista for Ahmed to realize his dream. When we met in Washington early in 2021, he outlined his idea for a new journal that would build upon the Accords, with a special focus on US-Israeli relations. Indeed, he could see the journal ultimately addressing a host of strategic, economic and security issues, both regional, and worldwide.

Ahmed recruited an impressive board of directors, chaired by former National Security Advisor General Jim Jones, USMC (ret.) and including James Foggo, who served as commander United States Naval Forces Europe-Africa and commander of Allied Joint Force Command Naples. Ahmed asked me to chair the journal's advisory board, which includes such luminaries as former Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre and former Ambassadors Eric Edleman and Anne Patterson, and I gladly agreed to do so.

The journal has proved to be a remarkable success. As the *Jerusalem Post* reported a few months after the journal appeared:

The *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, has gained a place in the highly competitive world of strategy and policy magazines...it has been able to draw some of the most impressive scholars and practitioners on both sides of the water – in Israel and in the United States – including the former National Security Advisers of both countries, and an impressive list of officers and

ambassadors – as well as prominent writers from other nations, scholars and practitioners, such as the former director general of the foreign ministry of Singapore.

And indeed the journal has gone from strength to strength. Ahmed hired a strong editorial team to structure the journal and buttress the work of its contributors. He also initiated a series of Washington breakfasts with prominent Washingtonians, including members of Congress, as guest speakers. These breakfasts have been well attended, primarily by the city's leading Middle East experts.

But Ahmed has not rested on his well-deserved laurels. He has launched a new Radio Abraham, designed as the radio's trailer puts it, "to unite the sons of all faiths." As with the journal, Ahmed has hired a top-notch staff, and has already set a timetable for interviews with key policy-makers, movers and shakers.

At a time when Israel is fighting wars on multiple fronts, when vicious autocracies threaten international stability, Ahmed Charai is a voice for peace, tolerance and understanding. He is an ardent supporter of Western values in general, and of the United States in particular.

As Ahmed writes in the publisher's note that appears at the front of each issue of the *Jerusalem Strategic Tribune*, he continues to believe in a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinians. He continues to hope for an expansion of the Abraham Accords to an ever-increasing number of Arab states. He continues to value American leadership and all that America stands for. He is, in short, not only a man vision, but a man of action who has worked to realize that vision.

Ahmed is also a man of great courage. He has been the subject of attacks by those who would wield religion as a weapon of intolerance. Yet he remains undeterred. Having fulfilled his business vision and passed on his successful media empire to the next generation, he is now laser-focused on realizing his second, Abrahamic, vision to its fullest.

I am proud to call Ahmed my friend. May he continue to go from strength to strength. \*

---

**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).



**Atlantic Council**

SHAPING THE GLOBAL  
FUTURE TOGETHER

[www.atlanticcouncil.org](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org)



INSPIRING PEACE,  
EMPOWERING PROSPERITY

Launching April 2nd