

VOLUME 16 ISSUE 3 | SUMMER 2022

# *in*FOCUS

QUARTERLY

Reassessing Our World



**Ilan Berman** on NATO's Future | **Anna Borshchevskaya** on Putin's Russia | **Zvi Magen** and **Sophie Kobzantsev** on the Russia-Ukraine War | **Stephen Bryen** and **Earl Hailston** on Defending Taiwan | **David Wurmser** on Middle East Tribalism | **Alex Plitsas** on Winning the War on Terror | **Lenny Ben-David** on Washington's Middle East Policy | **Michael Oren** on the View from Israel | **Alberto M. Fernandez** on America's Media Influence | **R. Evan Ellis** on Latin America's Left Lurch | **Shoshana Bryen** reviews *The New Rules of War*

Featuring an Interview with Congressman **Michael Waltz** (R-FL)



# LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

Welcome to the Summer 2022 issue of *inFOCUS Quarterly*, “Reassessing our World.” The title may have been overly optimistic – reassessment works best in the breathing space after the crisis, but we seem to go from dilemma to quandary to disaster to catastrophe without respite. Or maybe it is all one hydra-headed predicament, from Russia’s war in Ukraine to geographic tentacles in China, Africa, and the Middle East to commodity ramifications from oil to corn. In any case, a terrific group of authors assess our world mid-imbroglio.

For a broad view of American interests, start with our interview with Rep. Michael Waltz, and read Alex Plitsas on the status of the “War on Terror.” The possibility of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan prompted Stephen Bryen and Earl Hailston to convene a panel of military experts on how prevent the war if possible – and fight it if necessary. In all cases, America’s ability to address our friends and our adversaries is a vital government function. Alberto Fernandez discusses America’s ability to make the case for American policy.



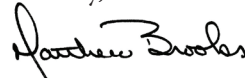
Russia/Ukraine is covered in various aspects by Zvi Magen, Sophie Kobzantsev, and Anna Borshchevskaya, and its impact on NATO by Ilan Berman.

Michael Oren, David Wurmser, and Lenny Ben-David consider U.S.-Israel relations, underlying currents in the region, and Israel’s ability to defend itself by itself. R. Evan Ellis explains how political movement to the left – largely, though not entirely, through democratic elections – will have an impact on South America and U.S. trade and relations with our southern neighbors.

By the end of the issue, it should be clear that chaos is not likely to recede, and war is not likely to disappear. For a look into the future of war, read Shoshana Bryen’s review of *The New Rules of War* by Sean McFate.

If you appreciate what you’ve read, I encourage you to make a contribution to the Jewish Policy Center. As always, you can use our secure site: <http://www.jewishpolicycenter.org/donate>

Sincerely,



Matthew Brooks  
Publisher

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# NATO Gets A New Lease On Life – For Now

by ILAN BERMAN

*An Alliance, If We Can Keep It.*

Since its start in late February, Russia's "special military operation" against Ukraine has reshaped the prevailing security order in Europe. The conflict, and Moscow's glaring military missteps in its early stages, helped puncture the perception of Russian military invincibility that had prevailed in both Europe and the United States since the end of the Cold War. It galvanized international support for Ukraine, which for years had clamored for sustained global attention to – and backing for – its Euro-Atlantic trajectory. And it helped to unite a previously fragmented West behind an unprecedented raft of penalties and punitive measures that cumulatively have set Russia on a course of protracted decline, irrespective of the ultimate outcome of the current conflict.

Perhaps the most profound impact of Russia's new war, however, has been to revitalize the West's oldest and most enduring alliance. Until recently thought by many to be on its deathbed, NATO has found renewed purpose in deterring a revanchist and neo-imperial Russia, and convinced skeptics of the indispensable role it should play in maintaining global security.

## ■ *Hang Together or Hang Separately*

The purpose of NATO, its first Secretary General, Lord Ismay, famously quipped in the bloc's formative years, was to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." That formulation reflected a core ethos

that, by the time the North Atlantic Charter was signed in April of 1949, had come to animate the Alliance. It was underpinned by the understanding that the USSR, despite its tactical wartime partnership with the West, was no friend to liberal democracy, and needed to be prevented from subverting its foundations. At the same time, a defeated Germany had to be contained and engaged in order to prevent a repeat of the same domestic grievances that had given rise to the Third Reich. America, meanwhile, was

the strategic threat posed by the Soviet Union, found itself adrift following the USSR's collapse. It compensated via a series of initiatives, some of which – such as the Partnership for Peace that integrated Eastern European nations into the bloc – were successful. Others, like the bloc's bid to engage countries in the Middle East and North Africa via Mediterranean Association Agreements, proved less so. But all were animated by an organizational quest for continued relevance.

NATO has found renewed purpose in deterring a revanchist and neo-imperial Russia, and convinced skeptics of the indispensable role it should play in maintaining global security.

the indispensable partner whose continued attention needed to be cultivated in the face of isolationist currents powerful enough to have nearly prevented U.S. entry into the Second World War.

In the decades that followed, Ismay's formula helped transform Germany into a crucial ally and successfully deter Soviet aggression. But it more or less fell by the wayside with the collapse of the USSR, replaced by the broad objective of establishing — and subsequently broadening — a zone of peace and stability across the European continent, and eventually beyond.

Though undeniably laudable, that goal reflected an erosion of strategic vision. The bloc, which for close to half a century had oriented itself around

At the same time, a clear vision of the shared challenge posed by Russia receded significantly. To be sure, lip service was still paid in assorted European capitals to the idea of maintaining a united front against Moscow. In practice, however, the objective declined in importance for the Alliance's member states, while the desire to forge a qualitatively new relationship with Russia grew over time.

## ■ *A Bear at the Door Once More*

That changed, albeit temporarily, with Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine. The Russian offensive, carried out in response to Kyiv's "Maidan Revolution," took the form of a "hybrid war" that saw the Kremlin insert anonymous



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin in June 2022. (Photo: NATO )

paramilitary elements into separatist enclaves in Eastern Ukraine, occupy and seize Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, and subsequently annex the territory via a stage-managed referendum. NATO's response included a suspension of cooperation with Russia, stepped-up military training with regional partners, and the provision of defensive military materiel to Kyiv. It did not, however, spark a fundamental rethink of the Alliance's deterrence posture vis-à-vis Moscow.

The consequences were profound. Three years later, in 2017, a simulated wargame carried out by the RAND Corporation found NATO still woefully unprepared to effectively counter a Russian land offensive against the Baltics — and warned that its defenses would collapse within 36 to 60 hours of a Russian invasion. And in the fall of 2019, outgoing Joint Chiefs Chairman General Joseph Dunford told *Newsweek* that “the NATO advantage over a resurgent Russia has eroded.”

Part of the problem was budgetary. As of mid-2019, according to official

NATO estimates, the median defense expenditure among the Alliance's member states was a paltry 1.63 percent of national GDP, and just eight countries — the U.S., Greece, Estonia, the United Kingdom, Romania, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania — were spending more than the recommended two percent of GDP annually on defense. This undercapitalization had corrosive effects on the Alliance's readiness, its deterrence posture, and — perhaps most importantly — on Moscow's perceptions of the Alliance's ability to resolutely respond to its expansionist impulses.

The other part of the problem was conceptual. Over time, at least some European leaders began to express doubts regarding the durability and vitality of the Alliance. In a now-famous 2019 interview with *The Economist*, French President Emmanuel Macron warned that the bloc was becoming “brain dead,” and urged Europe to rethink its approach to Russia. Those sentiments were, naturally, music to the ears of policymakers in Moscow, who

both applauded and amplified them.

These parallel declines in capability and credibility doubtless contributed to Russian President Vladimir Putin's conviction that his plans for the “demilitarization” and “de-Nazification” of Ukraine would not meet with a resolute response from the Alliance. And they may not have, were it not for the spectacular battlefield stumbles of the Russian army in the war's early phases.

Yet if elites in Western Europe had become sanguine in recent years regarding Russia, their counterparts to the east certainly did not. From Poland to Georgia, officials in Moscow's former satellites and territorial holdings were nearly unanimous in their warnings about the persistent danger posed by Russia's imperial vision, and the imperative of guarding against it.

It's a message that other nations have, belatedly, begun to grasp. With the start of the Ukraine war, it has become widely accepted that — 31 years after the Soviet collapse — Russia is animated by a neo-imperial ethos that rejects the



sovereignty and independence of its former subjects. It is a realization that has led vulnerable states on Russia's periphery to gravitate toward the safety provided by collective defense.

One such state is Finland. Though Helsinki had long eschewed the idea of joining NATO, the Ukraine war has helped to catalyze a robust Finnish national consensus in favor of membership. In response, following an April debate in the country's parliament, Finland's ruling Social Democrat Party formally announced its intention to apply for NATO membership.

Sweden has followed suit. In Stockholm, where attitudes toward the Alliance have long been deeply ambivalent, Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a new appreciation of the security imparted by NATO participation. By April, a majority of Swedes had gravitated to the idea that their country should abandon military neutrality and join NATO for protection, a national poll commissioned by the *Aftonbladet* newspaper found. The government of Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson formally applied for Alliance membership the following month.

Predictably, Moscow has railed against these moves, and threatened dire consequences if Helsinki and Stockholm follow through with their plans for NATO accession. Russian officials have warned both countries that they were making "a grave mistake," and held out the possibility of new nuclear deployments in the Baltics in response. These threats, however, appear to have had the opposite of their intended effect, and reinforced to the Nordic states that the surest path to security lies in collective defense, rather than submission to Moscow.

## ■ *A Turkish Fly in the Ointment*

Their hopes have hit an unexpected speed bump, however, because Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has emerged as a vocal opponent of Swedish and Finnish accession to the Alliance.

At least publicly, Turkey's opposition stems from its anger at Sweden and Finland's stances toward its own principal security threat, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK). "We have every right to expect those countries, which will expect NATO's second-largest army to come to their defense under Article 5, to prevent the recruitment, fundraising and propaganda activities of the PKK, which the European Union and America consider a terrorist entity," Erdogan wrote in a May 31st article for *The Economist*. More broadly, experts believe that Erdogan is using the accession debate as an opening to improve his position vis-à-vis the United States, with whom relations have soured in recent years over a range of issues.

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American and European officials have waxed optimistic that Turkey's complaints are transient in nature and will be overcome in short order. Perhaps they can be. But Erdogan's intransigence has also shed light on a deeper problem afflicting the Alliance: that of Turkey's troublesome role in it.

It was not always this way. For decades during the Cold War, Turkey played an indispensable role in NATO, serving as the bloc's southeastern flank and geopolitical outpost in the Middle East. Over the past 15 years, however, Turkey has transformed into a less-than-reliable strategic ally.

The reason has everything to do with domestic politics. Since the early 2000s, under the guidance of President Erdogan and his ruling Justice and

Development Party (AKP), Turkey has trended in a distinctly anti-Western political direction. Once eager for membership in the European Union, the country has tacked east in recent years, expanding its outreach to – and influence over – the greater Middle East. As part of this reorientation, Ankara has taken a series of steps (ranging from the acquisition of advanced Russian air defenses against NATO's urging to adopting a permissive attitude toward regional extremists) that have collectively injected doubts into the notion that Turkey remains a Western ally.

For the time being, at least, NATO officials have glossed over these problems, preferring to paint a rosy picture of Alliance solidarity. In the face of Russia's

current aggression, there is certainly reason to do so. Over the longer term, however, the bloc faces a serious reckoning over its internal contradictions – of which Turkey is undoubtedly one.

Nevertheless, it's clear that, through his latest invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin has managed to do what successive world leaders have not, and convinced NATO's members and the broader world that the Alliance remains an integral element of Western security. As a result, the Alliance now has a new lease on life – and a renewed sense of purpose.

How durable both turn out to be, though, is very much an open question.

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# Vladimir Putin at Home

by ANNA BORSHCHEVSKAYA

When Victoria Nuland, the U.S. State Department undersecretary for Political Affairs testified before a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing in early March, she said the war in Ukraine would end “when Putin realizes that this adventure has put his own leadership standing at risk.” At that point, Putin “will have to change course, or the Russian people take matters into their own hands.”

Nuland’s statement put Russian public opinion into the forefront of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, since the invasion of the country on February 24, questions about Russian public opinion have stood if not at the forefront, then as the backdrop. Vladimir Putin has always worried about public opinion and protests at home, seeing them as threats to retaining his grip on power. Now that the war has entered its fourth month, what do the Russian people think about the war? Have these views changed over time? And what does this situation mean about Putin’s grip on power?

## ■ *Attitudes Prior to the War*

Ironically, prior to the invasion, Putin had little reason to worry about losing control. The Levada Center, a longstanding and independent Russian pollster that the Russian government had labelled a “foreign agent,” has provided much useful data about Russian public opinion. For years, Russia analysts had debated merits of polling results in a country where the public has a long history of acting one way in public and another way in private among a small circle of trustworthy people. And to be sure, polling results have always been far more skewed in the Kremlin’s

favor. But Levada is not pro-Kremlin, and although not without its shortcomings – for example, some say polls measure how the people behave public rather than private – Levada does provide valuable information.

According to Levada, Putin’s approval rating vacillated between 61 percent and 71 percent last year. Since the opposition leader Alexei Navalny was jailed, no other serious political challenger has emerged, and no massive anti-government protests have been taking place. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin portrayed its actions to its domestic audience as fundamentally peaceful and defensive. State-controlled media had for months told Russian audiences that the West was pushing the country toward a confrontation, while Moscow only wanted peace and was acting with the utmost restraint, though it would defend itself if necessary. Indeed, as Denis Volkov, Levada Center’s director wrote in January 2022 it was neces-

a conflict, is prepared for it internally.”

In addition, Levada found, prior to the invasion that the majority of Russians blamed the West for the escalation of the crisis, although it did not translate into greater mobilization of support for the Russian leadership. Such was the overall Russian public opinion landscape prior to the invasion—a certain worldview had already entrenched itself in Russian public consciousness.

## ■ *Invasion, Protest, and Emigration*

When Putin invaded Ukraine, the Kremlin and state controlled media told the public that Russia acted in self-defense because it had no other options in the face of “genocide” committed by a “neo-Nazi,” “Western-controlled” government in Kyiv.

After the invasion, billboards appeared in the Russian city of St. Petersburg with the words: “We were left with no choice to act otherwise.” As *The*

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sary “to look not at the ratings per se, but at the entire picture of Russians’ perceptions of a possible conflict with Ukraine and the West. And, to all appearances, Russian society, although fearful of such

*Guardian* (London) reported, Russian outlets can only use special words to describe the “operation” in Ukraine; it cannot be called a war, invasion or attack—indeed, doing so is an offense punishable





*Russian President Vladimir Putin chairs a meeting with members of the Russian government via teleconference in Moscow on March 10, 2022. (Photo: Kremlin.ru)*

by up to 15 years in jail. And they are only allowed to use government sources for their reports. The government also partially blocked access to Facebook and now has begun systematic efforts to suppress information about military deaths.

Even so, initially, thousands of protesters came out to demonstrate, not only in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but also in far-flung cities, such as Khabarovsk and Novosibirsk. Russian authorities predictably responded with repression, arresting thousands. Still, the protests fell far short of the reported 120,000 that made up the largest protests since the fall of the Soviet Union in response to fraudulent elections a decade ago. And in the following weeks, amid growing repression and fear, protest activity subsided, even as individual acts of protest continue to appear periodically.

To be fair, this time protest activity also moved into different—safer venues. Online petitions against the war proliferated, especially in the beginning of the war; one gathered nearly a million signatures in four days. Furthermore, groups that don't necessarily associate themselves with the Russian opposition have joined the protests, including a group of

Russian scientists and science journalists who signed an open letter against the war. Prominent Russian actors, musicians and novelists publicly denounced the invasion. And in a remarkable step, retired Russian Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov – no liberal and a vocal critic of NATO enlargement – publicly called on Putin to resign in the run-up to the invasion.

Still, these steps fell far short of endangering the Putin regime's grip on power. A blanket of greater repressions and fear spread throughout the country. Russian contacts were afraid to talk to their Western counterparts. What is more telling, Russians who opposed the war also began to leave the country, not simply the wealthy oligarchs but those from middle class, or anyone in general who was able to leave. According to Russia's own official statistics, nearly four million people left the country between January and March 2022, although more recent reports indicate that some are reluctantly beginning to return due to financial difficulties in the countries to which they fled.

For comparison, approximately five million Russian citizens left Russia

during twenty years of Putin's rule, prior to the invasion of Ukraine, according to one study that used official Russian statistics. Although the Russian emigration story post-Ukraine has yet to play itself out, to date it shows that rather than challenge the regime many Russian citizens take the more passive—or perhaps as they would see it—realistic options.

### ■ **Passive Support and Cognitive Dissonance**

Protest aside, according to the Levada Center, many Russians have bought into Putin's narrative. When he invaded Ukraine, Levada found that the number of those who disapproved of the United States, NATO, and Ukraine grew. Sixty percent, for example, considered the U.S. and NATO initiators of the escalation in eastern Ukraine. And approval of Putin and the Russian parliament increased slightly.

Over the following weeks, polling found continued support for the actions of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine, in varying degrees – a slim majority “definitely” supported and smaller minorities showed moderate support.

To be sure, there are caveats to these ratings. As Vokov noted, unlike the Russian public support post-2014 Crimea annexation, current Russian public support has been mixed with anxiety and incoherence. “This time, you do not see this [post-Crimea] euphoria,” Vokov said in one interview, adding that now “people understand that this is serious... But at the same time, many say that they're supporting, and some people even say that they should support, because it's an international conflict and they have to support their government.”

In other words, the public's support is passive, perhaps mixed with a sense of obligation rather than sincere approval. Moreover, Levada found in late May that the Russian public's attention to the so-called “special military operation” is slowly waning even as majority still express “concern about what is happening” and support for actions of the Russian

military remains high.

Even with all these caveats, the fact that many of the Russian people express a certain support for their government's actions in Ukraine is hard to ignore. Indeed, studies such as so-called "list experiments" found that by and large, Russian polls do not show significant bias in Russian polling even on sensitive issues. List experiments aim to provide respondents with additional protection by allowing them to avoid expressing their opinions directly. One example is a recent study by Russian sociologist Philip Chapkovsky, who attempted to shield the respondents from the fear of

when the country was completely closed. Unlike China, Russia could not entirely close off internet access. Prior to the invasion, internet penetration in Russia stood at 85% in January 2021. Nearly 60 million Russian citizens (almost half of the country's 145 million population) had access to social apps such as Instagram.

In March, a month after the invasion, use of VPN and other internet tools in Russia reportedly surged in an effort to circumvent growing government censorship. Internet censorship continued to tighten over the following weeks—though it is still not complete—but more to the point, at a time the Russian public

for decades. That Kremlin propaganda helped drive these results is, of course, a major contributing factor, but it cannot account for the full picture.

There is also the issue of cognitive dissonance—disbelief of information that is too contradictory to the worldview the person holds. Cognitive dissonance helps explain why, for instance, some Russians thought images of children killed in Ukraine were fake, and others did not believe their own family members in Ukraine when told not only that Russian soldiers are killing innocent civilians, but that a war was taking place to begin with.

...nearly four million people left the country between January and March 2022, although more recent reports indicate that some are reluctantly beginning to return due to financial difficulties in the countries to which they fled.

responding to a question they did not want to answer by giving them a choice of four options; only one about Ukraine.

Chapkovsky set out to show that Levada polls exaggerated the percentage of support for the war effort, but his own study found that 53 percent support the war. Chapkovsky highlights that direct questions show a much higher figure of support – 68 percent. Still, looking at his findings, it is hard to escape the fact that they still reflect a majority support, even if it is by a slimmer margin.

### ■ **Absence of Information?**

It is always tempting to credit propaganda for public support for an official state narrative, and propaganda is massive and effective in Russia. Yet it is also not the full story. Russian citizens in Putin's Russia have more access to information than during the Soviet era,

already had an entrenched view, access to information was not entirely restricted. And even now, Russians still have access to What's App and other mobile app tools.

The issue rather is not only one of access then, although that is important. But it is also about whether or not Russian citizens will actively seek alternative information and then whether or not they will believe it.

Here the example of Russian public support for Joseph Stalin is illustrative. In spring 2019, Levada polls found that approximately half of Russian citizens approved of Stalin. These findings were part of a growing trend. As Konstantin von Eggert, a prominent Russian journalist and Putin critic said at the time, the majority who approved of Stalin had no excuse, given all the information that had been available about Stalin in Russia

### ■ **Conclusion**

Levada's findings about growing lack of interest within the Russian public toward the war is also important. When it comes to issues that directly affect their lives, such as sanctions, Russian citizens sought out information because it directly impacted their bank accounts and access to consumer goods. But when it comes to more removed and abstract ideas, it is easier to accept the state narrative.

Moreover, many Russians fled Russia only to find they cannot make a living elsewhere with a Russian passport. Their experiences may entrench feelings of bitterness and resentment toward the West, rather than increase active opposition toward the Russian government.

The task for the West, then, is to find a way to genuinely reach the Russian people. To truly open their eyes to reality will require more than the presentation of information; it will require a fundamental reckoning with, and revision of, their core beliefs. Only then may the notion of the Russian people taking matters into their own hands be grounded in more than wishful thinking.

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# The Russia-Ukraine War: Where Do We Go from Here?

by ZVI MAGEN and SOPHIE KOBZANTSEV

*Editor's Note: Nearly four months after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the goal of a short campaign has clearly not been achieved. Russia subsequently sought to achieve gains while suspending negotiations with Kyiv – both to improve its position in advance of future negotiations, and to deliver the message to the West that “you cannot stop us.”*

The Russia-Ukraine War, underway for almost four months, continues in full force. Negotiations between the countries achieved certain agreements. However, Russia announced the second stage of the invasion, which began on April 19. This raised the question of how the campaign would continue and what might influence its end and its results. At that stage it seemed that the end of the war could be determined in the coming weeks in accordance with Russia's military successes or failures. But as well, we must be prepared for the possibility of a war of attrition without a military victory, which could last months more.

## ■ War Against NATO

Russia's war is not only against Ukraine, but rather, as the Russian regime repeatedly declared, against NATO and the West in general. The sequence of events has changed Russia's initial intention not to become entangled in a long military campaign, but rather, through a short operation, to replace the government of Ukraine or at least to distance Ukraine from the West. But in practice, Russia has been drawn into a prolonged conflict – the result of effective

Ukrainian resistance that is supported by NATO, which trained Ukraine's army and helps it with the supply of weapons, intelligence sharing, and technological warfare.

Beyond the direct Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, the war has become a Russian-Western conflict in the territory of Ukraine, and alongside the military campaign. NATO is exerting pressure on Russia in the cognitive, political, and economic realms in an effort to undermine the government's stability, and Russia for its part is waging a cognitive war against the West, including in the post-Soviet context and in its attempt to retain its influence in this

ending the campaign quickly and easing the domestic challenge. Russia had to formulate its next steps: reaching certain understandings as part of the negotiations with Ukraine and stopping the war, or preparing for continued fighting, while defining new realistic objectives.

As part of the negotiations, which Russia initiated during the first week of the war, Moscow expressed its willingness to end the campaign with limited achievements, which would enable it in the domestic arena to portray the result as a victory. The conditions for a settlement were already formulated during the first two weeks of the negotiations, including a Ukrainian willingness not to

Moscow is not deterred by its portrayal as a war criminal. On the contrary, Russia seeks to sow fear and to convey a threatening message..

sphere. But to date, the two sides have failed to achieve their objectives and the war continues, while the Ukrainians have scored significant achievements in the struggle for world public opinion.

With the failure of the planned operation and the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Kyiv region, and in light of internal pressure in Moscow by those opposed to continuation of the war, accompanied by internal power struggles, the Russian leadership was interested in

join NATO. The issues that remained unresolved were the status of the Crimean Peninsula and Donbas.

As long as there was no progress in the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, the prevailing assumption was that NATO was preventing the advancement of the settlement. It seemed that the West was interested in drawing Russia into a prolonged campaign that would be detrimental to it. This is in parallel with a cognitive effort vis-à-vis the



*The village of Novoselivka in northern Ukraine following the Russian invasion. (Photo: Oleksandr Ratushniak / UNDP Ukraine)*

public and the political establishment in Russia itself. This objective was publicly declared by President Biden. It is likely that for this reason NATO worked to encourage Ukraine to continue the war, despite heavy Ukrainian losses. The United States even increased its aid to Ukraine and transferred \$700 million in military aid, including advanced rockets.

### ■ **Containing the Fallout**

Russia seemed to have succeeded in containing the threat to stability in Moscow and overcoming the opposition, based on vigorous internal law enforcement and publicity efforts. Opposition members and tens of thousands of demonstrators against the war were arrested and sent to jail, a curfew was imposed in several cities, and media channels that had been considered free were shut down. Meanwhile, there have been increased appearances of pro-Kremlin

speakers on the traditional Russian media channels.

Despite the serious sanctions imposed by the United States and other Western countries on Russia and on senior figures in the political establishment, Moscow believes that the economic challenge has been contained and that further endurance has been ensured for the government and the military campaign.

Tightened ties with China, Iran, and other countries in Asia and the Middle East region, alongside its preplanned reliance on reserves, have enabled Russia to increase the pressure on Ukraine and in particular to persist in the struggle against the West in the energy sphere. As has become increasingly clear, at this stage Western Europe has no effective alternatives to the Russian oil and gas market.

The Russian energy position has been further strengthened by the fact that gas reserves of countries such as Germany,

Denmark, and the Netherlands shrank, while dependence on Russia grew higher than ever. After considering a ban on Russian imports, in April the European Commission warned companies not to pay in rubles. In May, the EU sent “revised guidelines” to member states. The new regulations permit member countries to buy Russian oil and gas but to pay only in dollars or Euros.

However, quite a few international companies and corporations have thus far agreed to buy gas in rubles from Russia and Gazprom. As long as there are no alternatives to Russian gas, Russia expects Europe to agree to its conditions.

### ■ **Continuing the Fight**

Against this backdrop, it seemed Moscow decided to give up on an effort to end combat through negotiations and instead intended to continue fighting. This stage, the second in the war, according to



Moscow, aimed at expanding its hold in eastern and southern Ukraine, including the coastal strip between the Crimean

negotiations, the Russian population transfer operations in these territories are intended to create a strategic popu-

shape, and it will be influenced mainly by Russia's military successes or failures in Ukraine. To the extent that Moscow achieves significant results in the attack in southern and eastern Ukraine, it is possible that it would resume efforts to take over Kyiv and to replace the government there – an objective that it defined from the outset of its invasion.

However, it is possible that the Ukrainian determination to repel the Russian forces and block their advance in the south will bolster the Russian determination to renew the talks regarding the conditions for stopping the fighting. In this case, the regions that have already been conquered by the Russian army will serve as a bargaining chip in the negotiations.

Nevertheless, as summer approached the Ukrainians remained determined to fend off the Russians and refuse to hold talks. While Russian maneuvering proceeded slowly, there also was the possibility of a long-term attri-

Quite a few international companies and corporations have thus far agreed to buy gas in rubles from Russia and Gazprom. As long as there are no alternatives...  
Russia expects Europe to agree to its conditions

Peninsula and the Donbas – hence the unrelenting effort to achieve control of the port city of Mariupol.

Given this hard-won success, it became possible that Russia would then seek to achieve control of Odessa, in an effort to complete the conquest of the entire coastal strip and to connect with Transnistria in Moldova. Russia would thus succeed in creating an important area of control in order to use it as a future bargaining chip. Control of these regions would also enable Russia to present an achievement in the domestic arena, in accordance with its declared aim in invading Ukraine.

Accordingly, Russia continued its efforts to garner achievements, both in the military campaign in Ukraine and in the broader context of its war – the cognitive effort vis-à-vis NATO and the West, and toward the post-Soviet sphere – through a variety of measures.

### ■ *The Battlefield*

First, the war crimes that Russia is accused of – widespread destruction, mass killing, and many instances of rape in the Ukrainian cities of Bucha, Irpin, Volnovakha, Borodyanka, and Mariupol – aim to signal not only to Ukraine but to all countries in the post-Soviet sphere the scope of damage Russia can inflict on them too if they try to approach or join NATO and the West. Additionally, although certain Russian-occupied territories may be subject to some future

lation problem for Ukraine in the long run. This is also intended to send a signal to countries in the post-Soviet space.

Second, the conquest of Mariupol and the heightened attacks on Odessa and Severodonetsk, indicate that with the continued disclosure of war crimes in additional cities in eastern Ukraine, Russia will continue to boost pressure on Ukraine and to leverage its demands

We must be prepared for the possibility of a war of attrition without a military victory, which could last months.

as part of negotiations in the future.

Third, as part of Russia's cognitive war with the West, the destruction it has wrought, the damage to civilian infrastructure, and its continued westward advance signal to the West that Moscow is not deterred by its portrayal as a war criminal. On the contrary, Russia seeks to sow fear and to convey a threatening message to Western Europe in order to achieve leeway for itself in negotiations.

### ■ *The Future in Ukraine*

In the near- and mid-term, the scenario for ending the war is likely to take

tion war. The international community should prepare itself for this possibility too. It should be remembered, however, that a war of attrition contrasts starkly with Russian interests. For these reasons, Russia will seek to end the war in as short a time as possible, whether through military action or through negotiations.

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# Defending Taiwan: Not a Sideshow

by **STEPHEN BRYEN** and **LTG. EARL HAILSTON, USMC (Ret.)**

*Editor's Note: Dr. Stephen D. Bryen and LTG Earl Hailston, USMC (Ret) chaired a panel for the Center for Security Policy to reconsider Washington's current plans for the defense of Taiwan. The results are presented here.*

While the war in Ukraine has lessened public focus on the growing challenge in the Pacific, the fact is that China today is more powerful than Russia, has a bigger arsenal of precision-guided weapons, and poses a significant security challenge in the region for the United States, its allies, and friends. Because of China's political system, its human rights record, and its antipathy to liberal democracy, China is competing for dominance in east Asia that would replace democratic governments and the rule of law with Chinese centralized authoritarian rule.

Nothing better illustrates what happens than the case of Hong Kong, where despite solemn undertakings by the Chinese government, Hong Kong's democratic institutions and its courts have been systematically undermined and pro-democracy leaders jailed. In equal measure, in the South China Sea, China has illegally occupied and militarized several islands and reefs despite an International Court of Justice arbitration that found that the Chinese had no sovereign claims on these territories. China has disregarded solemn agreements and flouted international claims at will and it is anticipated will continue to do so.

## ■ **China's Territorial Claims**

China promotes several spurious territorial claims. For example,

China claims a large part of Laos and Cambodia, all of Korea, all of Mongolia, and disputes parts of India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Bhutan, and Japan. In addition to the above-mentioned South China Sea islands, China also claims the Macclesfield Bank, Paracel Islands, and the Spratly Islands. Japan's dispute with China involves the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea and Ryukyu islands and Japan's Air Defense Identification Zone and Exclusive Economic Zone in the East China Sea. China also has claims on Okinawa and on parts of Nepal. China has enforced some of these claims in military clashes (e.g., India) and in using its Navy and Coast Guard to try to enforce its sovereignty claims (e.g., Senkaku islands).

China has continually threatened Taiwan since the Kuomintang forces of Chiang Kai-shek withdrew from the mainland to the island, then known as Formosa, starting in August 1949.

China claims a large part of Laos and Cambodia, all of Korea, all of Mongolia, and disputes parts of India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Bhutan, and Japan.

Recently, China increased its military operations focused on Taiwan, sending large formations of fighter aircraft, bombers, and electronic warfare aircraft into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone, requiring Taiwan to scramble its aircraft and keep its air defenses on high alert. Meanwhile China has been

practicing different invasion tactics and methods to attack U.S. aircraft carriers that China believes might be called to help Taiwan if an attack occurs, as happened in May 1996, when Washington ordered two carrier task forces to respond to Chinese threats against Taiwan.

Chinese military power, especially in and around the First Island Chain, has grown significantly and today includes:

- A navy that is larger and more modern than the United States Navy, including three aircraft carriers, nuclear and diesel electric submarines, and air defense systems.
- An air force with fourth and fifth generation fighter aircraft, bombers, surveillance, and electronic warfare (EW) platforms.
- Sophisticated tactical and strategic missiles, cruise missiles and drones; and
- A sizeable amphibious force that is improving its capabilities and also effectively "fusing" civilian maritime transport resources to support a potential invasion across the 110-mile Taiwan Strait separating the island and its 24 million people from continental Asia and China, population 1.4 billion.

## ■ **Intimidating the U.S.**

The goal of China's Communist Party dictatorship is to intimidate the



United States and its allies to the point at which China believes it will have a free hand to pressure democratic Taiwan and, that failing, to carry out an invasion or launch attacks leading up to a full invasion if deemed necessary by Chinese authorities.

Unfortunately, many of the studies, war games, simulations, and statements by experts have created, whether intentionally or not, a defeatist atmosphere in Washington and among allies and friends, including in Taiwan. Such attitudes are strongly encouraged by Beijing.

The goal of China's Communist Party dictatorship is to intimidate the United States and its allies to the point at which China believes it will have a free hand...

In recent years the Pentagon has carried out unclassified and classified war games and simulations to assess U.S. ability to stop a Chinese invasion of Taiwan against an increasingly powerful Chinese threat. Other than one or two of these exercises, the simulations projected significant losses if the United States tried to come to Taiwan's defense in the event of an invasion. The few classified exercises that found the U.S. might be able to hold its own in any conflict made some big assumptions, for example that the U.S. would be fielding sixth generation fighter jets, something that won't happen for at least a decade and probably even further into the future. One article put it this way:

*'The casualties that the Chinese could inflict on us could be staggering,' said Timothy Heath, a senior international defense researcher at Rand and formerly a China analyst at the U.S. Pacific Command headquarters in Hawaii. 'Antiship cruise missiles could knock out U.S. carriers and warships; surface-to-air missiles could destroy our fighters and bombers.'*

## ■ Deterring China

Earlier this year, the Washington-based Center for Security Policy convened a panel of experts, all of whom have extensive experience in the Pacific and with the U.S. Pacific command. The CSP panel believes the U.S. can deter China from attacking Taiwan even without sixth generation fighter jets or future weapons and believes further that if China decides to attack that the U.S. and its allies can come to Taiwan's assistance and under the right conditions, turn back a Chinese invasion.

There are several steps, especially if taken in peacetime, that can better position the U.S., its allies, and friends, to counter any military operations against Taiwan or themselves. A "whole of government" approach is required to deter potential Chinese aggression and not leave U.S. defense forces to act unilaterally. At the political level the U.S. must energetically seek the support of its friends in the region, making it clear to them that their cooperation and military support is essential if they want to maintain their independence in the future. For the armed forces, the China danger requires a joint, combined approach to the growing threat posed by China's military expansion. This means not only that U.S. forces must be better integrated, but also regional military assets need to be part of the response to Chinese threats.

The time has passed that the U.S. can, or for that matter should, be the sole provider of security in Asia.

Other nations need to do their part and support a common effort to maintain regional peace and security. This means greater investments in defense

systems, combined command and control responsibilities, and mutual support in the form of bases, weapons, stockpiles, communications, intelligence, and other steps to assure the successful sharing of responsibility.

Much more must be done to bring Taiwan's military into the United States Pacific Command (PACOM) and help Taiwan improve its tactical capabilities, particularly command and control.

## ■ What Must be Done

Every step taken to improve U.S. and friendly forces; acquire new bases, operating locations, and depots; and coordinate them, is a challenge to China and improves deterrence. It is especially important, given what happened in Afghanistan and the limitations of NATO in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to convince China that the United States and its allies and friends will not yield to the Chinese threat or any attack by China on Taiwan. Above all, there is near certainty China will be testing America's resolve in various ways, ratcheting up the challenge in the months and years ahead.

On the reverse side, if decision-makers in Washington are convinced that counteracting China is a losing proposition, they will pull back from any confrontation or signal to China that the U.S. won't intervene militarily. This is what Washington, London and others signaled as Russia built up its troops near Ukraine preparatory to a land invasion. Therefore, while the panel thinks a combined warfighting capability can deter China, this message must reach decision-makers in the U.S. government in a timely way to have any affect.

A whole of government approach in the United States, and a collaborative defensive posture with allies and friends, together with a common command and control system will revolutionize deterrence in east Asia and help assure Taiwan can be defended if a crisis occurs. Once fully operational, uncommitted actors along the First Island Chain, such as the

Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, will have more confidence and ought to be more willing to participate in this endeavor to maintain regional peace and stability.

This is an entirely new way to assure peace in east Asia and beyond, but well within reach. The Quad Alliance (U.S., Australia, India, Japan) is indicative of how to proceed at the highest political decision-making level. But the Quad needs to be expanded and its work

limited in mission and lacked ground or sea attack capability. It took until 2014, 23 years later, to get the Peace Phoenix Rising 2 program in place upgrading Taiwan's F-16 A/B jets. That upgrade effort is still in progress. Five years later, in 2019 the U.S. agreed to sell Taiwan 66 new F-16V fighters, the first sale of new fourth-generation-plus fighters in 28 years. None of the new F-16V jets has been delivered so far.

The U.S. did not offer to sell Taiwan

its military have begun to improve, and the U.S. is more willing to sell some advanced equipment to Taiwan, although sales are still well behind need. The U.S. is also offering more training to Taiwan's military and U.S. trainers are visiting the island for this purpose.

It is of great importance that Taiwan's forces improve their internal communications and command and control, information sharing capabilities, and create links that currently do not exist to U.S., allied and friendly forces. Hardware alone is unlikely to solve Taiwan's defense problems. The government needs to address manpower issues, adequately fund, and provide needed support to the Taiwan Armed Forces, attract recruits, and bolster morale. Reserves and Civil Defense similarly need urgent attention.

Strategic ambiguity has undermined deterrence. Instead of making the area safer, it has encouraged China to systematically increase military pressure on Taiwan. At the same time, aware of U.S. ambivalence, China is also sharpening its training for a Taiwan invasion.

Strategic ambiguity should be removed from the U.S. lexicon for the defense of Taiwan.

## While ... a combined warfighting capability can deter China, this message much reach decision-makers in the U.S...

followed up with operational components including a Common Command Structure for the region, and the parties need to register a clear understanding of their responsibilities and required action in case of a crisis.

### ■ Strategic Ambiguity

In recent years, successive American administrations have taken an approach known as "strategic ambiguity," which traces to the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). The TRA did not try to undo the U.S. decision to no longer recognize Taiwan as the Republic of China but sought to provide reassurance to the island and encourage peaceful negotiations between Taiwan and China. The U.S. sought to provide Taiwan with defensive weapons so the self-governing island alone could deter China. That was, perhaps possible for a time, before China embarked on the modernization and expansion of its conventional and nuclear capabilities.

A good example is the provision of fighter jets. In 1991, after 12 years of deliberation, the U.S. finally decided to sell modern F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan, but the jets that were delivered were

F-35s, the multi-mission stealth fighter, something that should have been considered. Worse still, Washington tended to provide cast-off equipment to Taiwan such as worn-out, thin-skinned naval frigates and obsolete army tanks. For example, Taiwan acquired M-48A3 tanks in 1958 and only now – after 64 years – is retiring most of them. Taiwan also has some old M-60 tanks, but has developed an indigenous tank, the CM "Brave Tiger." They do not have up-to-date guns.

Even more unacceptable, the U.S. – often under pressure from China – or policymakers' own preemptive fear of Chinese criticism, kept Taiwan's military at arm's length or worse; little training was provided; almost no joint training was conducted; communications were limited; U.S. military officers were prohibited from visiting Taiwan as were high-level civilian officials. Cutting off Taiwan in this manner made it difficult for the island to modernize its forces or to be confident the government and military could defend the island, even for a short time until help arrived (if ever).

Recently, relations with Taiwan and

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STEPHEN D. BRYEN, *Ph.D., and LTG EARL HAILSTON, USMC (Ret), Co-Chairs. Panel participants included GEN Robert B. Brown (U.S.A., Ret.), former Commanding General, U.S. Army, Pacific; ADM Scott Swift (USN, Ret.), former Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet; LTG David Deptula (USAF, Ret.) first U.S.A.F. Chief of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; LTG Lewis A. Craparotta (USMC, Ret.) former Commanding General, 1st Marine; Seth Cropsey, Yorktown Institute; COL Daniel S. Roper (U.S.A., Ret.), Director of Strategic Studies at the Association of the U.S. Army; COL Grant Newsham (USMC, Ret.) former reserve head of intelligence for Marine Forces Pacific and Senior Fellow at the Center for Security Policy; and Adam Savit, Center for Security Policy.*

# Cultural Foundations in the Middle East

by DAVID WURMSER

While Americans and Israelis are most unnerved by the weakness and ineffectiveness of the technical terms of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or “Iran deal”), our Arab allies in the region – particularly Saudi Arabia – are far more anxious about the geostrategic impact of the perceived willful abdication by the United States of its regional position implied by Washington’s desperation to reach a deal at almost any cost.

## ■ Cultural Foundations of Regional Politics

To understand how unnerving America’s behavior is to our regional Arab allies, we have to understand how different the foundation of their regional politics is from ours. Americans profoundly believe in the universal nature of our concept of freedom. Thus, we tend to short shrift the influence of culture and civilization on the political mentality of states. In the Middle East, alongside the physical remains of ancient civilizations the remains of their cultures underlie the region’s politics.

The political imagery of many Islamic cultures emanates from their nomadic, tribal, and clan origins, hardly attenuated by the occupation over the last half millennium by the Ottoman Turks since they too originate from a nomadic culture.

In some cases, Islam overlays an older urban culture that still shapes politics. Iran, for example, has to be understood in these terms, with the image of the poplar tree bending in the wind

(what we know as paisley), the tree is the ancient core of Persian civilization, and the wind is the overlay of Islam.

The core of Arabia – the Saudi Peninsula, the Hejaz (coastal Arabian Peninsula), the desert area of Iraq, Syria and Jordan, and southern littoral of the Persian Gulf – however, is deeply tribal in its essence. And its culture has a long history, established well before even Islam.

In ancient times, the most important Arab tribes filled the power spaces between the great urban civilizations rather than function as empires themselves. The period between 100 BCE and 700 CE was marked by regional compe-

Jewish population, especially in the area of Medina. The Lakhmid attempt a century before Muhammad to align with Persia to establish an independent realm in revolt against Rome and Abyssinia is essential to understanding not only the theological ferment, but also the geopolitical influences that shaped early Islamic politics a century later.

The rise of the Umayyad and the Abbasid empires did little to change this tribal essence to Arab culture. True, there were independent Arab empires anchored to the urban centers of Damascus and Baghdad, and they did absorb some traits from the very urban Byzantines

Even in ancient times, the most important Arab tribes filled the power spaces between the great urban civilizations rather than function as empires themselves.

tition among the global superpowers of the day – Rome (Byzantium), Persia, and Abyssinia. The Arabs divided in their allegiance and aligned their interests accordingly. The Ghassanid Arabs, more in the western end of the Arabian areas, aligned with Rome and to some extent Abyssinia, and those in the east and the Persian Gulf littoral, the Lakhmids (the al-Manadhirha or Banu Lakhm), tended to assist the Persian empire. In the lower Hejaz there was a very substantial

and Persians. But these were rather short-lived, ahistorical anomalies. Baghdad fell by 965 to the Persians Buyids.

The tribal soul, rather than the ethos of urban empire and the strategic behavior that soul engenders, are easily visible in current Arab politics. One need look no further than the most important myth cycle of the Byzantine world, *Digenis Akritas* (The Dual-blooded Border Guard), which describes the border world of the



empire during the 5th - 12th centuries in the deserts of today's Syria, Iraq and Jordan. One cannot but be impressed by the deeply rooted tribal and clan nature even of these "Byzantinized" Arab-blooded border guards.

relations among tribes. Specifically, a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge among tribes for a murder ends when a tribe signals it lifts its protective status over one of its members. That means he is fair game and can be murdered with

of Mecca. His ideology/theology made him suspect and detached him from his fellow Meccans and their tribal elites, wherein they essentially decided he was to be eliminated.

And yet, he could live in Mecca safely. This was because his powerful uncle, the leader of the immensely powerful banu Hashem clan of the Quraysh tribe, abu Talib ibn Abd al-Mutalib (whose son, Ali was the fourth caliph – the ouster of whom became the origin of the Sunni-Shiite split), extended his protection over Muhammad from other Qurayshi clans after Muhammad's parents died. The other Qurayshi tribes, becoming more and more irritated with Muhammad's message, tried to persuade abu Talib, and then tried to bribe him, then confront him, and in the end even boycotted him (in trade and marriages) and his family, but as long as abu Talib upheld Muhammad's status as under his protection, these powerful elites could do nothing. However, the moment abu Talib died (619 CE) followed by his wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, a few months later, Muhammad was alone and essentially served a death warrant. Even abu Talib's brother, abu Lahab, refused him an umbrella of protection. Muhammad knew he was fair game and marked for death, so he had to flee to Medina.

Specifically, a cycle of revenge and counter-revenge among tribes for a murder ends when a tribe signals it lifts its protective status over one of its members.

The key lesson is that the great Arab tribes – indeed the Arab world – tended to operate in a distinctly tribal way within the lattices of power between geopolitical empires, at whom they looked in a way akin to being a super-tribe.

When Muhammad wrote his letters to the Persian Emperor Khosrow II, to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, and to the Abyssinian King Negus Armah and a few others (628 AD), the tone was of the tribal leader of one great theological clan to another to convert and align with his. They operated simultaneously with independence, but they ultimately were protected by and also received power from a "superpower" of the day – the ultimate strong horse. Although Islam spread across the region and much of the known world at the time, and though Arabs filled the ruling classes of many lands, the tribal soul and the absolute need to align behind the strong horse great powers of the age for protection and advantage persisted.

impunity, and the cycle is thus broken. So too, any Arab disowned by his tribe, or who believes himself transcending his tribe, or has blurred or mixed origins with no clear tribal pedigree – namely a loner or one detached for whatever reason – is equally imperiled.

This tribal essence is intertwined with early Islamic history and ties directly to the Prophet Muhammad and his personal condition. One cannot dissociate Islam from its historical origins nor its Arab roots. Moreover, tribal traditions and "laws" hold a special valid-

The American retreat has no global force to replace it other than our adversaries, China or Russia

### ■ *The Need for Protection*

The issue of protection is, therefore, the foundation of the tribal core of Islam and its civilizations. To understand what the JPCOA means in regional terms, one must consider the dynamics of hostile

ity in Islam alongside doctrine – making it quite different than for example than Catholicism, in which the validity of doctrine stands above any other consideration. Muhammad's message threatened the powerful tribal aristocracy

### ■ *The U.S. and Israel as Tribes, not Nations*

In this context, the United States is not really understood as a nation in modern, post-Westphalian (1648 CE) European terms, but more as the



Former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif at meeting of the IAEA. (Photo: IAEA)

most powerful clan on earth, the clan of clans – or the modern equivalent of the Byzantine, Persian, and Abyssinian empires. Think of us as being the “banu Amrika,” the “children” or tribe of Americans. We, the banu Amrika, are seen by other, weaker clans as the patron of an allied league. The region’s clans and tribes align with us and pledge their fealty in exchange for enjoying our power and the umbrella of protection that comes with it. Similarly, the Israelis are not seen in Western terms as a parliamentary democracy, but as the “banu Israil,” and Prime Minister Naftali Bennett as tribal leader of the Jews.

In tribal terms, our concessions to Iran, whose open goal is the annihilation of our local allied tribes – the banu Saud (Saudi Arabia), the banu Maktoum (Emirates), banu al-Khalifa (Bahrain) and the “banu Israil” (Israel) – means the very fact that we are negotiating with Tehran and offering concessions implies that we are downgrading, or potentially even altogether lifting our umbrella of protection over them. Their lives are

forfeit, and anyone, internal or external, that wants to kill them is now released to do so without fear of revenge. The Saudis, Bahrainis, Emiratis, and Israelis are now alone and marked with a death warrant issued by their own strong horse. Worse, we have essentially anointed Iran as the new regional power.

The Arabs in the region are reacting uncharacteristically bluntly, sharply, and acerbically not out of pique, but out of survival. They must immediately find a new strong horse, a new patron, or they are dead. Knowing that they cannot really come to terms with Iran, their only hope is to somehow leapfrog Tehran and reach out directly to their “strong horses,” Russia and China, hoping to leverage oil power, financial gravity, and strategic concessions that make them useful for Moscow and Beijing. But until they secure such a protective status from those powers – which is unlikely since they have been so identified with American power in the region – they must first scramble, follow the American precedent, and bend their knees to Tehran as

well despite the knowledge that Tehran will likely not permit their continued survival in their weakness. They have no choice but grovel or die, because to continue to hope for the U.S. is the path of certain death.

### ■ *Israel is Different*

Israel of course is a Western country, and such a construct is not inherent to its understanding of itself. Operating under a Western understanding of its own communities may work internally as a different political framework with its own Arabs, but it cannot work strategically in its position and relations with the region. Indeed, it is dubious that it would even work internally. Mansour Abbas and his Ra’am party did not join the current coalition government in Israel out of a kumbaya-like sense of coming to terms with the legitimacy of Zionism, but because he argued that the Jews are permanent and powerful and thus for the Arab community to secure its interests, they have to accept that the path of gain lies through accepting



*President Joe Biden greets Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in August 2021 at the White House. (Photo: Adam Schultz/White House)*

Israeli protection and acknowledging its power, wealth and assets. It is essentially the choice the Druze leadership have made, as did the Arab tribal leaders of the town of Abu Ghosh in 1948, which has made it a developed and popular tourist village not only for foreigners, but for Israelis.

Israel may have an urban soul and a Western outlook, but it lives in the region and must understand that it too now is seen as a tribe marked for death by its patron.

### ■ **Perception of Israel Wobbling Between Strength and Weakness**

If Israel appears weak and concedes on an issue such as Jerusalem, Jewish history, or Jewish rights, it compromises itself and devalues what it can deliver for Druze and Arab populations – which will lead to their distancing from Israel and even reaching out to Israel's enemies and engaging in violence. This is what happened in the Oslo process and is beginning to happen again as the Biden administration is seen as abandoning Israel, and as Israel convolutes its sense of “largesse” in the context of strength with the Arab's sense of goodwill

gestures as an expression of weakness and retreat. It is in this context that one must interpret the rising tide of Arab violence and disregard for Israeli or Jewish sensitivities not only in Jerusalem, but in the Israeli cities of Lod, Ramleh, Jaffa, Haifa, Beer Sheva and across the Negev desert; Israel is increasingly seen as orphaned by the U.S. and behaving weakly, and thus has become more questionable as a strong horse of protection.

From a regional perspective, Israel is at a crossroads. It has three paths: It can delude itself into believing it still survives under U.S. protection, which practically in the context of regional perceptions means accepting its elimination. Or it can scramble like its Arab kin to grovel in front of Russia and China. Or it can leverage its raw power to emerge as the region's strongest tribe to become a strong horse itself. The second path will fail in violence – Israel's fate is tied to the West inherently – leaving Israel only the choice of the first (accept death via delusion) or third (establish itself as a great regional power).

For the moment, Arab tribes have only the choice of the first or second paths. Which means they face death since, as with Israel, the second path will

eventually fail – with Iran, but also because Russia and China will never truly reconcile with them and become their patrons. But if Israel chooses the third path and emerges as the strong horse, then it opens for the Arabs a path for survival with Israel as their new protective strong horse. But Israel must act to prove it is the strong horse.

### ■ **The Abraham Accords**

In many ways, it was precisely the expectation that Israel will choose this third path that led the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, and possibly soon the Saudis, to make peace with Israel. Moreover, it is precisely the tribal foundations of that peace, rather than Islamic doctrine, that undergird the Abraham Accords. There was no theological revolution that led to Abu Dhabi becoming Zionist; it was the sober politics of survival and the geopolitics of protection.

But it is also a sign of the extreme dangers Israel faced in navigating its amicable relations with the United States and manage its own internal coalitional demands over the last few months.

There were two Arab-Israeli summits in March this year. One in Sharm el-Shaykh, Egypt excluded the United States, but the second, in Sde Boker in the Israeli Negev desert, involved it. The first revolved around Arab-Israeli dynamics that were unimaginable only a few years ago not only in their warmth, but seriousness of common strategic purpose – establishing an independent regional cooperative structure that deals with Iran and global crises in unison (such as the impending grain and raw materials shortages). It was symbolized perfectly by the astonishing and heart-capturing speech by the UAE's foreign minister, His Excellency Shaykh Abdallah bin Zayid, in which he expressed his regret for knowing so little about Israel and his determination to remedy that. That summit marked the American irrelevance resulting from its collapse as the strong horse.



## ■ *The American Position*

The second summit was the U.S.-Israeli-Arab regional meeting, at which America attempted to redefine the agenda and interject itself between Israelis and Arabs and reintroduce the Palestinian issue with the implied framework of Israeli concessions to the Palestinian Authority. In truth, the summit should have been an Israeli-Arab summit only, namely an escalated continuation of the Sharm a-Shaykh summit, with no Americans. Its purpose needed to be strategic planning among regional partners for a period of American absence or even hostility.

Regionally, perhaps Israel can fill the void left by the  
United States and buffer the impending collapse of  
American power ... but while Israel is powerful, it is  
not a global superpower.

Bringing the United States changed the summit's dynamics and transformed that part of the summit into a catastrophe. The Biden team was empowered to reassert its primary goals of:

- Trying to maintain rapidly dissipating American control over regional allies.
- Sabotaging the operational cooperation emerging among regional partners to set an effective strategy of confrontation and even war against Iran.
- Reasserting the primacy of America's obsession with the Palestinian issue. The statement by Secretary of State Antony Blinken at the summit not only captured perfectly that aim, but also humiliated the Israeli host and registered a partisan dig at the previous administration by forwarding the idea that the Abraham Accords were neither significant nor real peace, saying these "agreements are not a substitute for progress between Palestinians and Israelis."
- Throwing Israel on the defensive

by publicly blaming and shaming it in front of its regional partners. The Blinken- Bennett press conference preceding the summit made no mention of Palestinian terror (which had already claimed four elderly Israelis the day before), the PA's refusal to negotiate with the Israelis directly for the previous decade, the constant incitement that led to a dangerous war last year and threatens an internal uprising of Israeli Arabs, and the persistence of the pay-to-slay policy of the PA. The focus, stated bluntly, was "curbing settlement expansion, settler violence and halting evictions of Palestinians from their

homes." U.S. behavior tarnished Israel's image as a strong horse worthy of alliance and reduced it to groveling for American approval.

Even more disturbing was the news that Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz – who embodies the collective Israeli defense establishment and its "concept" – even tried to insert Palestinian Authority leader Muhammad Abbas and King Abdullah of Jordan, who increasingly sets the purpose of Jordanian foreign policy as being the champion Palestinian Arab nationalism. His failed intervention reveals a depth of misunderstanding of regional political and geo-strategic dynamics that would be mind-numbing if it were not so horrifying.

The second summit could have been salvaged, however, had Israel rebuffed the American challenge and signaled to its Arab interlocutors that Israel was choosing to assert itself as a strong horse and regional power even in the absence

of American acquiescence or approval. Had Prime Minister Bennett issued a rebuke of Secretary Blinken in public, it would have demonstrated to the Arabs in attendance that Israel was on the same page as they, and it is so strong an ally and so self-confident that it can stand on its own, even in tension with this American administration.

## ■ *Conclusions*

It is tempting to compare the faltering of the United States' regional stature to the collapse of the British and French positions in the late 1950s and 1960s, which was indeed was catastrophic. It exposed the region to Soviet penetration and triggered a new age of indigenously-inspired radical challenges to traditional leaderships (the long-term effects of which we continue to suffer).

And yet, even that cataclysm will pale in comparison to the current collapse of the United States' position, as the British and French retreat six decades ago seamlessly transitioned into the parallel rise of American power, which to a large extent compensated for its negative effects. The American retreat has no global force to replace it other than our adversaries, China or Russia. Regionally, perhaps Israel can fill the void left by the United States and buffer the impending collapse of American power. Perhaps it can help our jilted allies survive, preserve some of our regional interests, check our regional adversaries and prevent our global opponents from seizing full control over the region.

But while Israel is powerful, it is not a global superpower. It cannot replace an American administration that regains its senses and returns to lead and protect.

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# Is the War on Terror Over?

by ALEX PLITSAS

On Aug. 31, 2021, the evacuation operation at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul came to an end. Major General Chris Donahue, former Delta Force Commander and then Commander of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, stepped onto the last aircraft, which took off into the night, signaling the end of America's longest war. For the first time since October 2001 there were no American servicemembers or any other representatives of the United States government on the ground in Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan had ended in a stalemate that could not be won militarily without a significant, long-term commitment of additional U.S. troops and firepower that was infeasible for a host of reasons.

The decision to end the war was made by then-President Donald Trump, who set the initial timetable for U.S. withdrawal. However, President Joe Biden was elected before President Trump's plan could materialize. President Biden and his national security team conducted their own review shortly after assuming office. They concurred with the decision and developed their own plan and timetable. The decision to withdraw enjoyed wide bipartisan support to include most veterans. However, the execution of the withdrawal was a strategic failure and an embarrassment in the face of a stalemate that historians will likely label an American defeat.

## ■ *Mission Creep*

Twenty years ago, in the wake of al Qaeda's Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States began a "Global War on Terror" that spanned five continents and included active combat and theaters of

war in parts of Central and Southeast Asia, the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. However, not long after the operation was announced, the U.S. counterterrorism mission began to morph into counterinsurgency and nation building.

This is what is known as "mission creep" in military parlance.

When the ruling Taliban refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden and his fellow terrorists, the United States embarked on a campaign to degrade and destroy al Qaeda, overthrow the Taliban, and prevent Afghanistan from being used as a terrorist sanctuary to conduct attacks against the U.S. homeland. The U.S. military and intelligence community found that defeating the Taliban in the opening campaign of the war was the easy part. Post-Taliban governance and reconstruction known as "nation building," and fighting the Taliban insurgency were much harder. This is a lesson we would fail to learn and an experience we would repeat in Iraq – and to a lesser extent in Egypt and Libya – during the "Arab Spring."

It wasn't until shortly after the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 that U.S. policy surrounding the War on Terror began to change significantly. At the time, President Barack Obama had appointed then-Vice President Biden to oversee Iraq policy. Biden partnered with then-Central Command Commander General Lloyd Austin, the current secretary of defense, to devise and implement the strategy to bring the war in Iraq to an end. As with Afghanistan, Biden advocated a total withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. The Iraqi government's unwillingness to renew a security agreement that would have shielded U.S.

service members from prosecution under local law provided political cover.

## ■ *The Caliphate*

Prior to the withdrawal, a group of Islamic terrorists in western Iraq determined that al Qaeda was not conservative enough religiously and culturally. They broke away to form the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). The group began to rapidly expand its control of territory in Iraq as the Iraqi Army crumbled, allowing ISI to seize U.S. military hardware and additional territory, including large swaths of land in neighboring Syria. At that point, the group added an additional historic province to its name to account for gains in Syria and became known as the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). For the first time in centuries, a self-proclaimed Islamic Caliphate was in existence and under the control of terrorist leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi.

ISIS's rapid growth and takeover initially caught the Obama administration by surprise; President Obama even referred to the group as "the J.V. [junior varsity] team" compared to al Qaeda, in an attempt to downplay the seriousness of the threat. However, the administration quickly backtracked and committed to a counterterrorism mission aimed at degrading and destroying ISIS. At the same time the U.S. was supporting counterterrorism operations on the ground in Iraq and Syria to defeat ISIS, groups opposed to its Iranian ally and Syrian Alawite dictator Bashar al-Assad began to form and unify into what was known as the "Free Syrian Army."

## ■ *The Free Syrian Army*

So, in the midst of this terrorist insurgency, Syria was also fighting a civil war

with outside parties including the United States, Iraq, and Iran providing support to fight ISIS but also against the U.S. push to support the Free Syrian Army as both Iraq and Iran were governed by Shia Muslims similar to Assad's Alawites. In Assad, Iran had a key ally for control of policy and territory from Tehran through Baghdad and Damascus to southern Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea.

U.S. Army MG Mike Nagata, a veteran Special Forces officer, was given the task of organizing and training the FSA. This effort ended in abysmal failure and finished his career. Just as in Saddam Hussein-era Iraq, Bashar al Assad had prevented the formation of any viable political opposition and didn't allow anyone besides his supporters to hold positions of authority in either government or private industry. It became clear that there was no plausible post-Assad government-in-waiting and that the U.S. and others would be forced to engage in nation building and, potentially, counterinsurgency operations in addition to counterterrorism.

### ■ The "Red Line"

It was at that point that the strategic change in U.S. policy took place, a change that went unsaid and, to a large extent, unnoticed by many. After President Obama issued a public "red line," warning Assad against the use of chemical weapons, the Syrian leader did just that and killed many civilians. U.S. Navy ships in the region began to assemble and form a large strike group to enforce the president's red line. But after taking a walk with his then-Chief of Staff Dennis McDonough, President Obama decided against military strikes in Syria.

The failure to enforce the U.S. warning on chemical weapons use would have strategic consequences that continue to this day.

At that time, President Obama had decided that American support for democratizing states was not absolute. The U.S. would support and conduct counterterrorism operations to prevent

attacks against the U.S. homeland and against American interests, but would no longer commit ground forces to support democratic revolutions especially in the Middle East. Bashar al-Assad was far from a benevolent dictator but the implication of the shift in U.S. policy was that it was better to leave Assad in power than to engage in another war that would require years of nation building and – potentially – counterinsurgency operations in addition to counterterrorism.

President Trump continued and then significantly enhanced the counterterrorism operation on the ground in Iraq and Syria, which ultimately lead to the collapse of the self-proclaimed caliphate.

### ■ The Defeat of the Caliphate

With the defeat of the ISIS caliphate and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, President Biden declared that for the first time in 20 years, the U.S. was no longer at war. But was this really true?

The answer is most definitely no.

The U.S. continues to maintain a military presence in both Iraq and Syria to guard against the resurgence of ISIS as a threat to the U.S. homeland and stability in the Middle East. Both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State have affiliates all over the globe with the Islamic State conducting attacks in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Togo, and Somalia – and claiming responsibility for deadly attacks in just the past few months. The Islamic State is so extreme in its ideology that it finds the Taliban to be heretical and continues to conduct attacks throughout Afghanistan.

The transnational threat to the United States posed by Islamic terrorism has been suppressed in many cases but not eliminated over the past 20 years. Terrorist groups including al Qaeda and the Islamic State, but only those, that have vowed to attack the United States continue to operate with impunity in many parts of the world. As many

military leaders have come to discover, terrorist ideologies cannot be defeated with bombs and bullets and the enemy gets a say in whether or not we go to war, as we learned after 9/11.

### ■ Not the End of The War

Where does that leave U.S. counterterrorism policy?

For now, the Biden Administration seems comfortable trying to manage the growing presence and threat of an al Qaeda resurgence in Afghanistan from afar with a notional "over the horizon" strike force that has thus far failed to materialize. The logic for keeping troops in Iraq and Syria is that they are needed to prevent a resurgence of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda, which is exactly what is now beginning in Afghanistan. If troops are needed in Iraq and Syria, then why not Afghanistan, which may be just as acute a problem in the coming months and years? The answer appears to be more political than grounded in national security strategy and objectives.

Unfortunately, it appears to be only a matter of time before U.S. troops will once again be called upon to combat transnational terrorist threats in far flung places around the globe. The United States may have grown tired and weary of the war on terror, but our adversaries remain resolute in their pledge to attack the U.S. and its interests abroad. The question remains how best to combat this residual threat after 20 years of counterterrorism operations that have failed to do so.

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# “We are All on Team USA”

## An *in*FOCUS interview with Congressman MIKE WALTZ

Congressman Mike Waltz (R-FL) is a Colonel in the National Guard, a combat-decorated Green Beret, former White House and Pentagon policy advisor, a small business owner, an author, and a proud father. He is the first Green Beret to be elected to Congress. His experiences as a soldier and a policy advisor inspired him to write the book, *Warrior Diplomat: A Green Beret's Battles from Washington to Afghanistan*, the proceeds of which continue to benefit the Green Beret and Matthew Pucino Foundations. *in*FOCUS Quarterly editor, Shoshana Bryen, met with him in Washington.

***in*FOCUS:** FOR YEARS, THE U.S. AND NATO GAVE CREDIT TO RUSSIA FOR THE MILITARY CAPABILITY IT CLAIMED TO HAVE. BUT IT SEEMS NOT TO. IF A COUNTRY CAN'T ACCOMPLISH ITS OBJECTIVES WITH CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS AND FORCES, RATHER THAN SCALING BACK ITS AIMS, WOULD IT BE MORE LIKELY TO GO TO NUCLEAR CAPABILITY FASTER?

**Rep. Michael Waltz:** Two points – what did we get right and what did we get wrong when it comes to Ukraine? One thing we got absolutely right, and this is what our intelligence does best, was counting tanks, planes, ships, seeing them move, hearing them communicate. We gave the entire world a heads up, effectively, that this was coming. What our intelligence community missed, and in fairness is much, much harder to assess, are what, in military terms, we call readiness issues: morale, training, logistics, maintenance, operational tactics and techniques, leadership. Those things are where we clearly overestimated Russian capabilities.

And on the Ukrainian side, we vastly underestimated those same things. We just missed it on both. I think we need to take a very wide-eyed look at that, particularly as it applies to other adversaries around the world, and as we continue to apply taxpayer dollars to our intelligence community.

And then to your point on nukes, what the world is seeing, firsthand, is what a country can get away with

conventionally when it has a nuclear umbrella and how it can really rattle that nuclear saber and deter all types of intervention and all types of actions with the threat of nuclear escalation. I can't think of anywhere that applies more directly than the case of Iran. Iran is absolutely seeing what Putin is able to get away with, how he is deterring the United States and NATO every time he rattles his nuclear saber. And I think it's likely only exacerbated their drive towards obtaining an operational nuclear weapon.

***iF:*** WE DO TREAT NUCLEAR COUNTRIES DIFFERENTLY THAN NON-NUCLEAR COUNTRIES. WHICH TO THE IRANIANS MEANS THEY ARE JUSTIFIED IN THEIR QUEST. IS THAT A REASON FOR US TO STOP THE VIENNA TALKS, SINCE THE IRANIANS ARE UNLIKELY TO GIVE UP?

**Rep. Waltz:** We need to find some type of resolution before Iran achieves an operational capability, but the way this administration is going about it is all wrong. They're just making concession after concession and placing our adversaries – Russia and China – in the room as our representatives. I think the Trump administration maximum pressure campaign absolutely should have continued. I do believe if President Trump had gotten a second term, the Iranian regime would have come to the table from a position of weakness. We saw the effects that sanctions had on its currency, on its economy, on the ability

of Iran to export terror to its proxies.

But the hope of those sanctions being lifted really breathed life into the Iranian regime. It emboldened them in the negotiations and sent us down the horrible path that we're on. That's a long way of answering, yes, we should cut off the talks, achieve a position of strength, continue to hurt the regime in areas that it cares about most, which is its wallet and its ability to enrich its elites. It's just really a shame that the same group that put the 2015 JCPOA in place and gave away the leverage that we had finally achieved with true international consensus on sanctions, including China at the time, is doing the same now. It is an absolutely flawed approach.

***iF:*** DO YOU THINK THE UNITED STATES IS ACTUALLY PUSHING ISRAEL CLOSER TO HAVING TO TAKE MILITARY ACTION ON ITS OWN ACCORD?

**Rep. Waltz:** The Iranian regime continues to put out its hateful rhetoric about wiping Israel off the face of the earth. I think every Israeli really believes they would, and they would be emboldened to do so, if they had a nuclear weapon. I hope and pray Israel doesn't have to take matters into its own hands, but I also don't see this administration assisting with the capabilities, particularly tankers, Israel would need to do so. And meanwhile, the Iranian regime continues to harden, disperse, and strengthen its capabilities to withstand such an attack.

The situation is really unclear at this point, and that's the fault of this White House.

They need to make it very clear that we stand with our ally Israel, and they need to make it very clear that we will not – diplomatically, economically, militarily, or otherwise – stand for Iran armed with a nuclear capability. People need to fully appreciate that a nuclear Iran will absolutely mean an arms race in the Middle East. The Saudis will want a nuclear weapon, the Turks. I constantly have to make the case to Floridians – people I represent, who are working hard for that tax dollar that we're spending abroad – how this affects them at home. A nuclear arms race across the Middle East and our ally Israel threatened with being obliterated by this murderous regime, with terrorists who are emboldened and financed by Iran under a nuclear umbrella, should strike fear in the hearts of every American.

**iF: HAVE WE GOTTEN RID OF THE IDEA THAT WE COULD DE-LIST THE IRGC AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION? IT SEEMS AS IF EVEN SOME DEMOCRATS HAVE HOPPED ONTO THE IDEA THAT THIS WOULD BE A REALLY TERRIBLE THING TO DO.**

**Rep. Waltz:** Yes. There is a bipartisan approach here and it's substantive. Democrats that have spoken up. I also think politically in a midterm election year, after we saw the massive concessions and retreat in Afghanistan in the face of the Taliban terrorists, and now with ISIS and Al Qaeda once again on the march to be able to strike our homeland, to give that kind of concession to a terrorist organization that's responsible for 600 dead American soldiers, that has sown mayhem and committed atrocities across the Middle East. I think they've made both a political and a substantive calculation.

I have led a letter that 70 Democrats have signed onto, along with 70 Republicans, saying any future deal has to consider missiles, has to consider terrorism. The fact that Iran is holding



Congressman Mike Waltz

Americans hostages, right now as we speak, much less all the components of a nuclear program, means we have to have real oversight and an investigative regime so we can actually hold Iran to account. I do think you see bipartisan support for all of those things on Capitol Hill and that's caused the administration, I hope to somewhat tap the brakes on heading down this disastrous road.

**iF: DID YOU GET A RESPONSE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE?**

**Rep. Waltz:** We did not. But they can't ignore 140 members of Congress. We don't come together on much, but when you have 70 Republicans and 70 Democrats saying, "This is a bad idea and here's what it needs to include," that can't be ignored.

**iF: YOU MENTIONED OVERSIGHT, AND WITH OVERSIGHT COMES ENFORCEMENT OBLIGATIONS. A LOT OF COUNTRIES SIGN ONTO THINGS, SAYING THEY AGREE TO SOMETHING, BUT LIVE UP TO IT ONLY UNTIL IT FEELS LIKE IT DOESN'T WANT TO. ARE THE ONLY ENFORCEMENT MECHANISMS MILITARY? DO WE NO LONGER HAVE A RULES BASED ORDER WHERE YOUR SIGNATURE MEANS SOMETHING?**

**Rep. Waltz:** Diplomacy and soft power have to be backed up by hard power. That is a fundamental flaw of this administration and this president, frankly, who continues to tell our adversaries what he won't do and continues to take hard power off the table. That essentially neuters our diplomats and diplomatic agreements. Vladimir Putin has stated

his aim to reconstitute the Soviet Union, which would mean invading his neighbors. But you tell him that the military option to stop him is off the table, he's going to continue to push until he meets steel. Fortunately, the Ukrainians far outdistanced the world's and Putin's assessment of their capability and Zelensky far outdistanced everyone's estimation of his leadership.

When you have dictatorships, as in China, in Russia and Iran, Venezuela and others, they're going to push until they're stopped with force, so you have to leave all options on the table when you're engaging diplomatically.

**iF: THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS A LOT OF PEOPLE APPRECIATED PRESIDENT TRUMP TAKING CARE OF SOLEIMANI. WE NOW HAVE A SET OF SANCTIONS ON RUSSIA THAT DON'T SEEM TO BE HAVING THE RIGHT EFFECT. THE EUROPEANS ARE STILL IMPORTING RUSSIAN OIL AND GAS, BUT WE'VE ALSO EMBARGOED RUSSIAN FERTILIZER, WHICH IS A PROBLEM FOR US AND OTHERS. RUSSIA IS MAKING A LOT MORE MONEY RIGHT THIS MINUTE WITH HIGHER PRICES FOR FEWER OIL SALES. WE SEEM TO HAVE SANCTIONED OURSELVES INSTEAD OF RUSSIA.**

[The White House] needs to make it very clear that we stand with our ally Israel, and they need to make it very clear that we will not – diplomatically, economically, militarily, or otherwise – stand for Iran armed with a nuclear capability.

**Rep. Waltz:** Sanctions only work in an incredibly diverse and complicated global economy when the largest economies are unified in those sanctions. We didn't really achieve anything close to unity on Iran until around 2010 led by the Republican Congress. That's what drove Iran to the

table. And on the one hand I do support sanctions in the sense that these dictatorships don't care about their own people. They care about their own enrichment, their wallets, and really enriching their supporters and their elites to help them hold onto power. And if you structure sanctions in a way that hits these dictatorships and these regimes where it hurts, then I think they can have some effect, and they finally did have effect on Iran.

In the case of Russia, the only unity right now is the United States and some European countries. But meanwhile, Russia is doing just as much, if not more business with China, India, South Africa, Brazil, the Middle East, and on and on. Unless you have really unanimous action at least among the largest economies, they have very limited effect. But they often make administrations like this one pat themselves on the back and talk tough and provide virtue signaling. But at the end of the day, they're not effective.

**iF: LET'S SLIDE ACROSS THE WORLD AND LOOK AT CHINA AND TAIWAN. THE PRESIDENT SAID WE WOULD DEFEND TAIWAN. THAT'S NOT IN THE TAIWAN RELATIONS ACT. WHY WOULD IT BE IMPORTANT FOR THE UNITED STATES TO DEFEND TAIWAN AND WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO DO IT?**

**Rep. Waltz:** We've maintained a policy called "strategic ambiguity" since 1979. On the one hand, we didn't want the Taiwanese to lurch toward independence, which according to every Chinese premier, would precipitate some type of conflict. But on the other hand, we do have

obligations in law to provide military assistance to Taiwan if it is attacked. So, we left it ambiguous, but now we need to move toward strategic clarity. The driver for that is actually the Chinese Communist Party and President Xi, who is telling his country to prepare for war, openly talking about replacing the United States as a global leader and talking about dominating the U.S. military within a certain timeframe.

It's time for clarity and deterrence. I supported what President Biden said. What's so disappointing is that then his staff seemed emboldened to walk back what the Commander in Chief said on a global stage. They muddled the waters, and that kind of mixed messaging is incredibly dangerous. Whether it's to Putin when Mr. Biden is throwing out terms like "regime change" and then gets walked back, or when it's as it relates to Taiwan.

In terms of how to defend Taiwan, I think now we've seen the mistakes that this administration made when it comes to deterrence. They're in love with a term called "integrated deterrence," which means a combination of diplomacy, economic measures, cyber space, and other things. I support all of that, but it can't be a substitute for hard power, and it can't be a substitute for real weapon systems that can actually inflict damage on an invading force.

Number one, we have to arm Taiwan before hostilities are initiated. We can't let a city like Taipei be leveled like Mariupol, Kharkiv or others, and then lead a tough response. We have to deter China in the first place, and we failed to deter Russia. We have to arm Taiwan. We have to help them on readiness issues, such as maintenance and training, morale, operational techniques, defense in depth and otherwise, and we have to fully fund our defense budget. Accounting for inflation, the U.S. is facing cuts in the defense budget. The Navy is retiring more ships than it's building. The Chinese are outbuilding our Navy at a rate of five new ships to one. They are launching more into space than us and the rest of the world combined.





*Ships from the U.S. Navy's 3rd Fleet in the Pacific.*

The thing that's so frustrating to me is it's our money that's fueling their military buildup. If you look at Wall Street, Hollywood, the sports industry, NBA owners that have invested billions into the Chinese economy, heck even the military's 401(k) plan is on the verge of investing in the Chinese stock exchange, on which Chinese defense firms are listed and from which they will be capitalized. We need a real wakeup call here in this country as to what's going on. Historians are going to look back and say, "You guys were asleep at the switch. You were in love with cheap goods and greed got the best of you." We've got to decouple. We've got to bring our supply chains back home. And we need to wake up to the fact that made in America isn't just a jobs issue. It's a national security issue.

**iF: LOOKING AT ANOTHER SIDE OF THAT, YOU TALKED TO THE CNO, ADMIRAL MICHAEL GILDAY, ABOUT PLANS TO MODERNIZE THE NAVY. IT SEEMS WE'RE LOOKING AT NEW TECHNOLOGIES AS OPPOSED TO MORE SHIPS AND MORE PLANES. IS THERE A POINT AT WHICH WE SHOULD NOT BE LOOKING TO FUTURISM, BUT ACTUALLY MORE PLATFORMS, AND HAVE WE REACHED THAT POINT?**

**Rep. Waltz:** We're in a negative spiral called "divest to invest." We have to shut down older systems in order to free up the funds to invest in newer technologies, and that creates a real dip in our capabilities. Unfortunately, we will be at the bottom of our dip within about five years, and that's when the Chinese believe they will be at the apex of their build up and their technology. We're in a very dangerous window between 2024 and 2027 for a military invasion of Taiwan, which we may not be able to stop or deter.

Why does that matter to everyday Americans getting their kids off to school or going to work? If China is successful in taking Taiwan, they will control all of the trade and shipping routes into Japan, South Korea, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia. They will control about 50% of global GDP and trade, 90% of computer chips. Again, the fact is we're A) funding it, but B) allowing them to create dependencies in our economy. We no longer produce antibiotics, the Chinese produce 90% of the world's antibiotics, cancer medications, rare earth materials that form the basis of our modern economy. Computer chips, even rail cars that ship our goods from port to stores. They dominate all of it. We've allowed them to do that, and we have to start unraveling that yesterday.

**iF: ARE WE COMING TO THAT REALIZATION?**

**Rep. Waltz:** Yes. That was a silver lining in COVID, that Americans were really hit in the face with the fact that mask, gowns and gloves, as cheap as we want them to be, can become a national security issue tomorrow. With the Chinese openly threatening to shut down supply chains if we don't agree with their view of the world, or if we call them out on things like COVID origin or the genocide that's going on with the Uighurs or the stamping out of freedom in Hong Kong, they'll shut down our supply of medicine.

That was a real wake up call.

It certainly was in our political class. I don't think it has been completely in our investor class and with our major multinational corporations. You have companies like Nike that want to preach social justice here at home, that want to boycott Georgia over voting reform laws, but when it comes to millions of Chinese citizens in concentration camps, literally picking cotton in Western China that is provided to Nike's apparel supply chain at the end of a barrel of a gun, they completely turn a blind eye. I think you're going to see me and others calling out that hypocrisy at every turn.

**iF: LET'S TURN TO AFGHANISTAN BECAUSE YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT IT. HOW DO YOU SEE THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF OUR PULLOUT?**

**Rep. Waltz:** In a number of hearings, the military from General Milley to General McKenzie, who was the head of Central Command (CENTCOM), are crystal clear that they advised the president to leave that force there. I want to be clear, that force was not engaged in direct combat. I understand the weariness with this war, but they were providing the Afghans the air support, the intelligence support, the maintenance, the logistics, all of the things they needed to continue to fight going forward. And we yanked

out all of that support.

It was also a debacle from a human rights standpoint. Now we see the Taliban breaking every promise – I would never trust a promise from a terrorist, but this administration did. Every promise when it comes to human rights, women's rights or a journalist or anything else that we hold dear has been broken.

It was a debacle in terms of our credibility. As we saw, both Russia and Chinese state-owned enterprises blasted

ground in the Kurds to deal with ISIS in Syria. Look at the map: We don't have a single base in Afghanistan. We don't have a single base in any country bordering Afghanistan. Our allies on the ground have been hunted down. I just spoke with the remnants of the resistance two days ago. Unbelievably, they still believe in us and believe in our values and are fighting this terrorist dictatorship. But we have very little with which to help them.

We have to shut down older systems in order to free up the funds to invest in newer technologies, and that creates a real dip in our capabilities. ... and that's when the Chinese believe they will be at the apex of their build up.

out that America can't be relied on, particularly to Taiwan, Ukraine, the Baltics, and others.

And most of all, it's a disaster from a counter-terrorism standpoint. The intelligence community is very clear that Al Qaeda and ISIS fully intend to attack us again. They're developing the capability to do so. There are reports of 10-15,000 foreign fighters migrating away from the Middle East and over to what is now a Taliban caliphate and terrorist super state in Afghanistan. And the thing that so upsets me is that the Obama administration yanked us out of Iraq with no backup plan. Years later, we saw the rise of the ISIS caliphate and untold atrocities they committed in the region, in Europe and around the world. We had to send American soldiers, special operators, and intel officers back to deal with it.

But when we had to go back into the Middle East after that debacle, we had access from the ocean. We had bases in Jordan, in Israel, in Northern Iraq, in Turkey. We had an ally on the

What does that mean? That means, should the West get attacked again, future American soldiers are going to have to fight that much harder through billions of dollars of our own equipment with very little support. And I, for one don't want to wait until another 9/11 or San Bernardino or Pulse Nightclub.

**iF: AS WE COME TO THE CLOSE ... DO YOU HAVE A POSITIVE WORD TO LEAVE US WITH OR ARE WE IN REAL TROUBLE HERE?**

**Rep. Waltz:** I do actually; two things. First, whether it's the Chinese government, the Taliban caliphate, or Putin himself, the thing they fear the most isn't another American stealth bomber or what have you. It's their own people. And I'll add the Iranian regime, Cuba, and Venezuela to this list. Their ideas and their form of government and brutality doesn't work, won't work, will never work.

The United States needs to maintain its role as a leader in a very dangerous

world. The thing that we have that they do not have are friends and allies, but they look to us for leadership. We need to get our own house in order here at home and continue to lead abroad. Alone, that's very tough, but us plus like-minded democracies that believe in this liberal world order that has kept the world free from world wars since 1945 is my second cause for optimism.

Whether we're facing socialism at home or Chinese communism abroad, we have to keep our eye on what has made and kept this country great. That's one of the reasons, after getting shot at around the world for 26 years, I dove into politics – because the world I want my kids and grandkids growing up in is one led by America in line with our values.

**iF: WHICH IS SCARIER? BEING SHOT AT OR BEING IN POLITICS?**

**Rep. Waltz:** Some days I do think Afghanistan was a little simpler, and when you're shot at, you can shoot back.

In all seriousness, as frustrated as we get and as wrong as my colleagues on the other side of the aisle may be, we are all Americans. We all are on team U.S.A. We may have very different views. And this is why I'm a big proponent of national service. National service set a baseline for leadership, teamwork, followership, discipline, but also what that flag means. And for everybody who thinks this is an awful country, I want to send them to really awful countries, and then they'll kiss the ground when they come back and realize we may have our flaws, but it's the best country in the world by far.

So, I'm an optimist and I'll stay focused on the prize.

**iF: THAT'S A GREAT PLACE TO END THIS CONVERSATION. CONGRESSMAN MICHAEL WALTZ, ON BEHALF OF THE MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH POLICY CENTER AND THE READERS OF inFOCUS, THANK YOU FOR AN ENLIGHTENING CONVERSATION.**

# Israel Is Perplexed by American Middle East Policy

by **LENNY BEN-DAVID**

*Too often, U.S. Serves as a Contrarian Indicator.*

**T**he State of Israel appreciates all that the United States does. It considers the United States and the American people Israel's most steadfast friends. The U.S.-Israel relationship has evolved from a patron-client connection to a strategic partnership of shareholders in a significant military joint venture. Israel's inclusion in the workings of the U.S. Central Command [USCENTCOM] and the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet attests to Israel's enhanced status, translating into the Israel Defense Forces' joint exercises with the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines. An Israeli naval attaché sits in the Fifth Fleet's HQ. Intelligence sharing and cyber defense cooperation are extensive, perhaps even unprecedented.

This joint statement released on June 1, 2022, expressed the strategic bonds between the two countries:

*On May 31, 2022, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Israeli National Security Advisor Dr. Eyal Hulata convened a meeting at the White House of the U.S.-Israel Strategic Consultative Group (SCG). They were joined by senior representatives from their respective foreign policy, defense, and intelligence agencies. The officials committed to coordinate on efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon and toward deterring Iran's aggressive regional activities. They also discussed economic and diplomatic steps to achieve these goals and reviewed*

*ongoing cooperation between the U.S. and Israeli militaries. The U.S. and Israeli officials committed that, working toward the same goal, they will remain in close coordination on the full range of issues of mutual interest and to remain united against all threats to their national security.*

The relationship could not be more robust, ideal, or intimate, say the National Security Advisors. But why are many foreign policy professionals – on both sides – skeptical or even disbelieving?

## ■ **Iran**

Alarmingly, the current Biden policy bears little resemblance to the assurances. Look at the administration's tolerant Iran policy dealing with sanctions, the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 nuclear deal), the move to delist Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps from the terrorist list, Tehran's failure to allow nuclear inspections, the gross overproduction of enriched uranium, and the inability to call out the ayatollah's human rights violations loudly. In recent months, Iran's oil exports ballooned to 870,000 barrels a day from an average of 668,000 b/d in 2021, with the bulk going to China. With oil selling at \$120 per barrel, you do the math [\$104 million per day] and understand how Iran can afford its weapons and foreign adventures.

## ■ **Palestinians**

Examine the Biden administration's policy on issues of the West Bank and the Palestinians. Other than a few reprimands to Palestinian Authority

Chairman Mahmoud Abbas about the massive grants to terrorists and their families for killing Israelis, little has been done to enforce the Taylor Force Act to end the "pay to slay" practice.

Today, Washington is probably the most prominent advocate of the "two-state solution" to implant an unstable sovereign Palestinian entity inside of Israel's guts. The Biden White House is a more vigorous advocate than the Palestinians themselves, whose craving is less for their own independence than it is for Israel's degradation and dissolution.

Even Palestinians acknowledge that "there is no there there" to form a state. There is no centralized government; today, rebel chieftains and militias rule fiefdoms in population and refugee centers in Nablus, Hebron, and Jenin. There is nothing resembling a democratic form of government; the Palestinian legislative body has not convened since 2006, and President Abbas is in the 17th year of his four-year term.

Middle East analyst (and no fan of Israel) Omar H. Rahman blasted Mahmoud Abbas and his "crackdown on opposition and dissent" last year in *Foreign Policy*: "Mahmoud Abbas's unelected and illegitimate government is becoming increasingly violent, but Washington's largesse is keeping it in power."

Nevertheless, seeking its long-desired chimera of an independent Palestinian state, Washington wants to provide the Palestinians the trappings of a proto-state entity.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken told ABC's George Stephanopoulos, "Ultimately, it is the only way to ensure



Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state, and of course, the only way to give the Palestinians the state *to which they're entitled* [emphasis added]. It's vitally important," Blinken continued, "that Palestinians feel hope and have opportunity, and can live in security just as it is for Israelis, and there should be equal measures. Ultimately, I think that that hope, that security, that dignity will be found in a Palestinian state."

To reinforce the Biden White House's dream for a two-state solution, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Tom Nides told Americans for Peace Now, "We can't do stupid things that impede a two-state solution." Nides clarified: "We can't have the Israelis doing settlement growth in east Jerusalem or the West Bank. I'm a bit of a nag on this, including the idea of settlement growth – which infuriates me, when they do things – just infuriates the situation, both in east Jerusalem and the West Bank."

## ■ Intelligence

In August 2021, the *New York Times* reported that American HUMINT [human intelligence] operations in Iran collapsed after Iranian counterintelligence exposed a network of informers. *The Times* revealed, "Israel has helped fill the breach, officials say. Its robust operations in Iran are providing the United States with streams of reliable intelligence on Iran's nuclear activities, missile programs, and its support for militias around the region."

The cooperation and intelligence sharing has not always been smooth. The Obama-Biden administration kept Israel in the dark about U.S. negotiations for the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, and Israeli intelligence services discovered it. After the Biden administration entered office and announced its intention to restart negotiations for the Iran deal, Israel reduced the flow of information to the United States about its covert operations. A week after the Vienna talks were resumed, in April 2021, a catastrophic act of sabotage knocked out power to the

heavily-fortified Iranian uranium enrichment plant in Natanz. According to *the Times* report, the Israeli Mossad gave the United States less than two hours' notice, "far too short a time for the United States to assess the operation or ask Israel to call it off."

On May 22, 2022, Col. Sayad Khodayee, a senior member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps was assassinated in his car in Tehran. Khodayee was the commander of the covert Unit 840 assigned to attack or abduct foreigners around the world, including Israelis. The Iranians blamed Israel, but Israel refused to comment, maintaining its standard denial of involvement. Just days

today, it needs to be pointed out that former White House advisors Tommy Vietor and Ben Rhodes, two Democratic Washington elders and influencers—the latter even called "Obama's foreign policy guru"—strongly criticized the assassinations of mega-terrorist Gen. Qasem Soleimani and the head of Iran's nuclear program Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. It is a script Vietor knows well. After a bomb killed Natanz enrichment plant supervisor Ahmadi Roshan in 2012, Vietor, then spokesperson for the White House National Security Council, declared, "I want to categorically deny any United States involvement in any kind of act of violence inside Iran. The United States

The Obama-Biden administration kept Israel in the dark about U.S. negotiations for the Iran nuclear deal in 2015, and Israeli intelligence services discovered it.

later, however a *New York Times* headline revealed, "Israel Tells U.S. It Killed Iranian Officer, Official Says," thus confirming the Iranian accusation.

Why would the United States leak such a secret? Con Coughlin, the *British Telegraph's* veteran defense and foreign affairs editor, charged, "Whether or not this [*Times*] report is true is almost academic. The real crime, one that represents a serious breach of the long-standing intelligence-sharing arrangements between the U.S. and Israel, is that one of President Joe Biden's senior officials has been willing to betray the trust of such a close ally."

What is the Biden administration's interest in giving Iran an excuse to attack Israel? An obvious answer is that with the Iran deal negotiations on life-support, Washington is signaling to the ayatollahs that it had no hand in Khodayee's assassination: "Don't blame me; Israel did it." With many Obama administration veterans serving in Biden's White House, State and Defense departments

had absolutely nothing to do with this."

One former foreign policy advisor in the Obama-Biden administration is Colin H. Kahl, who serves today as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. Having worked as Vice President Biden's National Security advisor, Kahl had been deeply involved in the Iran negotiations. In 2017, he told the Center for Strategic and International Studies that he opposed efforts to impose sanctions on the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps, explaining they "could have the inadvertent effect of triggering a response by the IRGC."

## ■ Abraham Accords

The Abraham Accords between Israel and Arab states including the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco have served as a catalyst to encourage Muslim countries to board the peace train. Saudi and Israeli negotiators have been working on the kingdom's formal joining, but business deals, visits by Israelis to Saudi Arabia and aviation agreements are already taking place.

The Trump administration's diplomatic breakthrough is surpassing all projections, and therein lies the rub. For Biden and his aides, Trump achievements are to be ignored, negated, or cancelled.

At the start of the Biden administration, support for the Accords was described as "tepid" and "missing a key opportunity." Enthusiasm was not forthcoming, some believed, because of Iranian and Palestinian opposition to Israel finding its place in the Middle East constellation.

One *Washington Post* columnist warned, "The Biden Administration Could Derail the Abraham Accords," af-

were deployed again in Saudi Arabia, as if they were never gone. But they were gone while Iran and the Houthis showed Saudi targets with rockets, missiles, and drones. The Saudis remember the U.S. behavior, pique, and threats.

### ■ *A Last Word from Israel*

Israel wants the United States to succeed economically and strategically as the beacon of democracy. Israel, the so-called "light unto the nations," expects the American beacon to shine bright. And that is why watching American fecklessness, disunion, and aimlessness

millions of protesters in Iran to the streets to challenge election results confirming the mullahs' choices: "The ensuing crackdown was merciless and swift... and a significant number were killed. I saw video of a young woman shot in the streets, a web of blood spreading across her face as she began to die, her eyes gazing upward in reproach."

Her name was Neda Sultan. But Obama admitted that he was constrained from expressing support for the demonstrators by his NSC "Iran experts [who] advised against such a move. According to them, any statement from me would likely backfire... I felt obliged to heed these warning and signed off on a series of bland bureaucratic statements [such as] 'the universal rights to assembly and free speech must be respected.'"

### ■ *Conclusion*

Israel's bottom line has always been the necessity of being able to defend itself by itself. For all the cooperation between the two countries, the United States never had troops stationed in or near Israel to come to Israelis' defense—and that's the way it should be. The course of events from the Obama administration to and through the Biden administration reconfirms the worth of that maxim. As this article was being written, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that Israel has modified its American-built F-35 stealth fighter jets to fly to Iran and back without requiring refueling. After years of American refusal to sell Israel the long-range capability it had requested, Israel has gone and done it by itself.

The perfect metaphor.

ter Washington announced that it would reconsider the sale of F-35s to the United Arab Emirates, the accords' matchmaker. Negotiations with Iran, the *raison d'être* for the Israeli-Arab realignment, were renewed by the United States. The new bosses in Washington canceled the Trump administration's listing of the Houthi militia, Iran's proxy in Yemen, as a terror organization, and "in gratitude," the Houthis unleashed heavy missile, drone, and rocket bombardments against Saudi airports, oil facilities, and cities.

In 2019, the United States deployed Patriot missiles to help protect the Saudis. However, in 2019, candidate Biden promised Saudi Arabia would "pay a price" for the murder of regime critic and *Washington Post* sometimes-contributor Jamal Khashoggi. Riyadh would be treated as a "pariah" if Biden won the presidency, and the candidate declared there would be an end to arms sales to the Saudis. In 2021, the United States removed the advanced THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) and Patriot missile defense systems from the kingdom. In March 2022, the Patriot missiles

leaves Israel chagrined and perplexed. Even fearful.

American aircraft abandoning desperate Afghans, the riot at the Capitol, inner-city self-conflagration are not what Israelis expect. Nor is kowtowing to radical Shiite clerics who threaten genocide against the Jewish State, blow up diplomats and Jewish community centers as in Argentina, or plot to kill an Arab diplomat in Washington—all of which Iranian leaders have done.

Why does the Biden administration fail to support widespread demonstrations in Iran, or protest the hostage-taking of foreign visitors, or attack Iran's human rights record, or denounce the killing of journalists (other than Khashoggi)? Obviously, it is trying to keep its renewed nuclear negotiations afloat—talks that Iran insists be conducted via third parties.

Seen from Israel, such behavior that fits a cowardly and cruel pattern going back to the Obama-Biden administration, as disclosed in Barack Obama's autobiography. He wrote of the June 2009 "Green Movement" that brought

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Israel's bottom line has always been the necessity of being able to defend itself by itself.

# A View from Israel

## An *in*FOCUS interview with MICHAEL OREN

Michael Oren is best-known as the former Ambassador of Israel to the United States. However, American-born Oren is also a historian, author of both fiction and non-fiction, and politician. He served in Israel's Knesset and was a Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. *in*FOCUS Quarterly caught up with him in Washington.

***in*FOCUS: THERE'S BEEN AN EVOLUTION IN ISRAEL'S POSITION ON UKRAINE. IT IS UNRIVALED IN THE PROVISION OF HUMANITARIAN AID, BUT SOME SAY ISRAEL SHOULD "DO MORE," MEANING PROVIDE MILITARY AID. TELL US ABOUT THE EVOLUTION.**

**Ambassador Michael Oren:** At the onset of the conflict, not being in government, I took my own government to task when Israel came out in a neutral position. There were some substantive reasons, compelling reasons, for expressing neutrality, not least of which was the presence of the Russian army on Israel's border and Israel's need to maintain freedom of action to strike against Iran's attempt to transform Syria into a forward base for attacking Israel. There was also a desire to play a mediating role, in part to ensure the continuation of Israel's ability to maintain institutions that serve the half million Jews who remain in the former Soviet Union.

Plus, the fact that between one out of every five Israelis speak Russian, and they have close family connections there that could be impaired by confrontation with [Vladimir] Putin. And the fact that Israel has developed an open relationship with Putin that was the envy of Washington and most European capitals.

So, there were compelling points. I rejected them all.

Diplomatically, strategically, neutrality was a bad idea because our major concern is the Iran nuclear deal and its renewal. In addition, when friends like [Senator] Lindsay Graham [R-SC] condemn us for our neutrality, we can't afford to lose that support. So

strategically, politically, it was not a good idea, but also morally it was not a good idea. It was, in fact, untenable for the Jewish democratic State of Israel to sit by while a fellow democracy was fighting for its freedom against the totalitarian invader. And by the way, an opposition being led by a proud Jew. That was a morally terrible position for the Jewish state. I was very adamant about it. I called for Israel to provide helmets and flak jackets and to join with the sanctions. That was in March.

In April, I published an article in *The Wall Street Journal* saying that Israel is no longer neutral. And Israel is no longer neutral. We've gone from not joining a UN Security Council resolution condemning Russia to supporting a UN General Assembly condemnation to voting for Russia's ouster for the UN Human Rights Council – for which we were excoriated by the Russians. We have sent some of the largest aid packages to Ukraine, including the first and largest, fully-equipped and staffed field hospital that actually entered Ukraine, not sit-

ting on the border. And the Ministry of Defense approved the shipment of helmets and flak jackets.

cyber-attack today and Israel leads the world in cyber defense – 20 percent of all the foreign investment in cyber defense in the world is in the State of Israel. We should be helping more, but I'm personally very satisfied and a little bit vindicated I must say, that Israel is no longer neutral.

There's a tremendous amount of hypocrisy in the criticism.

### ■ *Iran*

***iF: TURN THE TICKER JUST A LITTLE BIT – TO IRAN. ISRAEL'S POLICY OF "DEFEND YOURSELF BY YOURSELF" HAS BECOME EVEN MORE CLEAR WHEN YOU LOOK AT IRAN AND THE UNITED STATES AND DRAW CONCLUSIONS ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT IRAN HAS DONE TO THE U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP?***

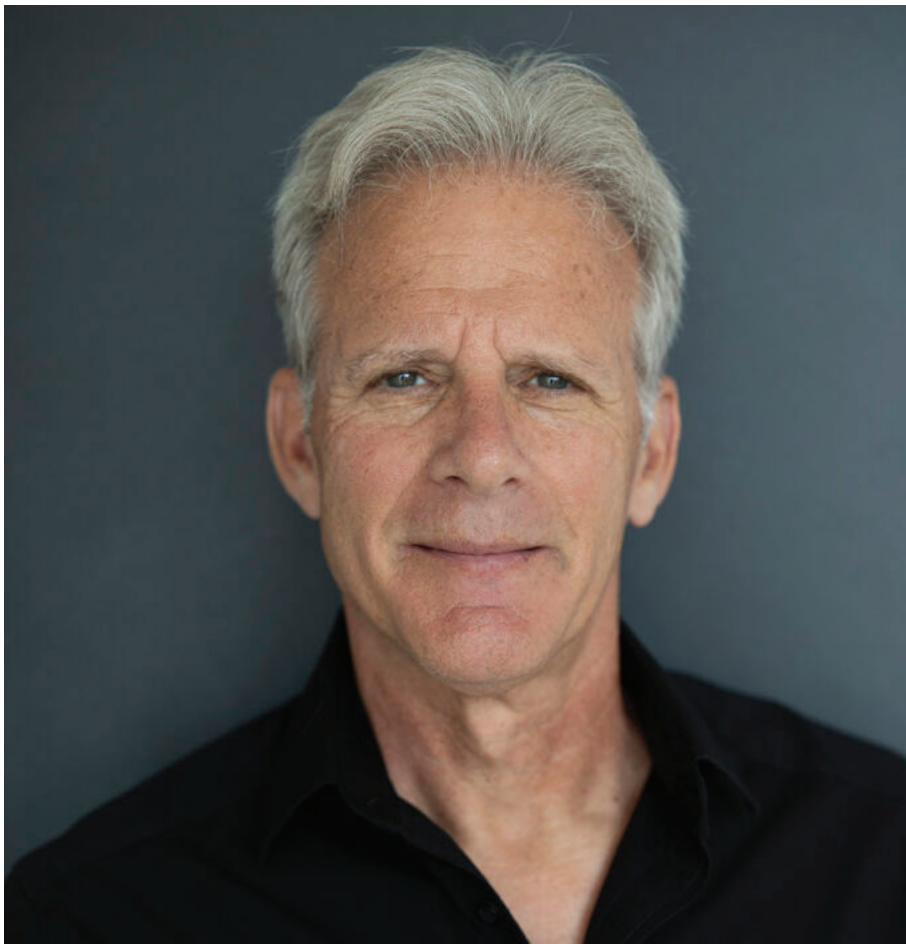
**Amb. Oren:** When I first came to Washington in 2008, just before I became ambassador, there were little dinner parties with State Department people. I

At some point Iran is going to break out. It wants the bomb, needs the bomb. One reason is pride. But the other reason is regime survival.

begin to hear a view that first shocked me. There were people in Washington who had reached the conclusion that America had bet on two wrong horses in the Middle East. They had spent a trillion dollars in Iraq, and they had bet on the Jews who spit in their faces and make trouble. For them, the true allies

Israel does not have legislation that would enable the government to impose sanctions on Russia. We can join several of the sanctions and help Ukraine on cyber defense. It's under massive





Michael Oren

of the United States and Middle East are the people of Iran who are basically pro-Western. Yeah, they've got a little bit of an obnoxious regime. But if you get beyond that, we have natural allies there, the Americans would say.

When I first heard this, I thought it was just absolutely insane.

Later, I realized this was actually policy. What you hear today circulating Washington, and this should shock you, is that not only should the United States not necessarily prevent Iran from getting a bomb, but Iran actually should get a bomb. Because then there'd be a balance of "Mutually Assured Destruction" in the Middle East and the region would actually be more secure.

From an Israeli perspective this is abject insanity. And if anything demonstrates the insanity, but it's the Ukraine situation. Now you have a nuclear power that has gone on nuclear alert. Once it's

on nuclear alert, the ability of the West to pose any conventional counter threat is eliminated by the threat that Mr. Putin is going to push a button – tactical or otherwise. Put that situation in the Middle East. We have a regime in Iran that I'm going to guess is a little bit less rational than that of Vladimir Putin and a little bit more messianic. Do you think if Iran had a nuclear capability, it would not be for a day, but a constant nuclear alert against us?

How would we defend ourselves if we had an Iranian nuclear weapon pressed to our forehead? The fear is not only that they get the thing, but that they have the ability to make the thing. That's what's called the "threshold capacity." Japan has that ability, but the Japanese aren't the Iranians. And once Iran has that capability, our ability to defend ourselves from terror will drop to close to zero. And to my mind, that

is the biggest lesson of Ukraine, biggest lesson for Israel.

## ■ **Iranian Bomb and Regional War**

**iF:** IS THAT SOMETHING ISRAEL HAS DISCUSSED WITH THE UNITED STATES? THE STATE DEPARTMENT APPEARS TO THINK ISRAEL JUST DOESN'T WANT THE U.S. TO HAVE A DEAL WITH IRAN. DO THEY UNDERSTAND WHY?

**Amb. Oren:** Yes. But our government has not been clear. Several months ago, during [National Security Adviser] Jake Sullivan's first visit to Israel, the Foreign Minister [Yair Lapid] said we were past Iran getting threshold capability. That was the last time I had heard that. It was a very important statement. He may have made it several times, but then it disappeared. In recent weeks our government has ceased attacking renewal of the JCPOA and focused exclusively on the listing of the IRGC as a terror organization.

This might have been a clever line of attack if there's an understanding between the United States and Israel that the listing of the IRGC is what prevents the agreement from going through. Because if you listen to the spokesman of the State Department who said, "Yes, we're willing to discuss the listing, but only within the context of discussing all the outstanding non-nuclear issues relating to the U.S., Israel, the Iranian-U.S. relationship. Which include support of terror, the ballistic missiles."

Somebody may have intended to use the delisting as a way of torpedoing the talks, but the Israeli government had to be much more outspoken and unequivocal in its opposition to the renewal of the deal and what it means for Israel. And what it means for Israel is very simply regional war. Not local war, but regional war. A tremendous amount of blood will be left on the hands of anybody who supported this deal.

At some point Iran is going to break

out. It wants the bomb, needs the bomb. One reason is pride. But the other reason is regime survival. They saw what happened to [Libya's Muammar] Qaddafi, to [Iraq's] Saddam Hussein. Anybody who was relieved of his nuclear program died. They see what's happening to [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky right now. They see what's NOT happening to North Korea. They got to have the thing and they're going to move to get it.

One of the great achievements of the Trump administration approach to the Palestinian issue, which has now been discarded, was that it changed decades of American incentives for the Palestinians NOT to negotiate.

I can't answer the question about when Israel responds. We have red lines. But know that when Israel reacts, the Iranians have built up a deterrent of upwards of 150,000 rockets under 200 Lebanese villages. They're in Iraq. They're in Yemen. And they're hands of Hamas. We're going to be hit. The IDF estimate for the next war is between 2,000 and 4,000 rockets a day will be fired at us. No anti-missile capabilities we have can defend against that.

Iran knows this. So, when I talk about regional war, it's a war where Israel not only has to somehow neutralize Iran's ability to create a nuclear weapon, but we're going to have to strike at 200 Lebanese villages in Southern Lebanon. That's what the army is training for. We'll have to hit sites as far away as Yemen and Iraq and will be engaged in another war with Hamas at the same time, a multi-front war. And the responsibility for this will lie solely with the people who promoted this deal.

## ■ The Palestinians

**iF: IS ONE REASON THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT MAY BE BITTING ITS TONGUE THE FACT THAT**

**IT'S ALREADY ON THE OUTS WITH THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION OVER THE PALESTINIANS?**

**Amb. Oren:** That is going nowhere. Why? First of all, the Israeli government is a composite of left/right/up/down/center, with some elements in the government meeting, promoting Palestinian interests, others opposing it. You have an [American] administra-

tion that would like to move very swiftly on the Palestinian issue. But there's no Palestinian leadership. There is no there there. Mahmoud Abbas is 85 years old, a three-pack-a-day cigarette guy in the 17th year of his four-year term. He doesn't have the will, he doesn't have the ability to sign on anything, he doesn't represent anybody. So, they can't do this.

What they can do is move on the "ripple issues." There's talk about renewing or reopening the U.S. consulate in eastern Jerusalem – which was essentially an embassy to the Palestinians. In the past, if you went on the consulate's website, everything was in English and Arabic, not a word of Hebrew, no mention, not only that Jerusalem was Israel's capital, but also no mention that there was a single Jew in the city of Jerusalem. I'm deeply, deeply opposed to the reopening of that consulate. It is in fact, a reversal of the Trump era policy of recognizing Jerusalem as our capital.

It could be pressure, especially if the JCPOA fails to be renewed. How does that connect to the consulate in east Jerusalem? The answer I think lies in domestic politics and has to do with pressure from the progressive part of

the Democratic Party, which has elevated the JCPOA to iconic status, the Holy Grail.

## ■ Changing Incentives

A last point on this. I have been involved in every U.S.-sponsored "peace plan" going back to 1993 when I was an advisor to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. So, I have a certain perspective. And I will tell you that the peace plan put out by the previous administration was the most realistic peace plan ever developed by the United States of America. It was the only peace plan that actually had any chance of success and I hope it will be revived.

One of the great achievements of the Trump administration approach to the Palestinian issue, which has now been discarded, was that it changed decades of American incentives for the Palestinians NOT to negotiate. It was extraordinary. You leave the table; you get a prize. You say no; you get a prize. You leave the table; you get money. You leave the table; you get an embassy in Washington. You get condemnation of Israel. It created a situation in which the Palestinians actually could not negotiate.

We're back to that now. Aid to the Palestinians has been resumed. What has this administration got in return? And we got an answer: buck zero, absolute zero.

## ■ China

**iF: ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES HAVE DISCUSSED CHINA AT GREAT LENGTH LATELY, AND ISRAEL HAS CHANGED ITS WAY OF DOING BUSINESS IN CHINA. HOW MUCH?**

**Amb. Oren:** A lot. China recently surpassed the United States as our largest trading partner. China is building our two ports. China is building the subway system across the street from my house in Jaffa. They say the national bird of Israel is the [construction] crane – and 40 percent of those cranes have big Chinese signs on them.

China is expanding its economic footprint in Israel, very, very rapidly. We have to keep pace with the housing prices. We have to quadruple the size of our ports, because the ports were built by the British in the 1930s for a population of 800,000. Now we've got more than 10 million and we import more than 90 percent of our food. These are strategic interests for the state, just not financial. We need the Chinese; we need them to work. But not just that, the Chinese are moving in strategically at a time in the United States is moving out [of the Middle East] strategically.

Chinese have now built the largest naval port in Africa at Djibouti, at the entrance of the Red Sea. They now patrol the entrance to the Red Sea. They're building two major ports on the Persian Gulf. And if I were a betting man, I think that China's going to rebuild Syria. The UN price tag for rebuilding Syria is about \$300 billion. The Iranians can't do it. The Russians can't. Just watch, we're going to have China on our northern border, too.

I've sat through meetings with three administrations, and for all the differences between Mr. Obama and Mr. Trump and Mr. Biden, they all say exactly the same thing about China and Israel. They don't like our relationship with China.

And Israel has made the same commitment to all three administrations: that we will be very circumspect in our relations with China, particularly in the area of high tech. That was not always the case. A lot of Israeli technology found its way into the hand of the Chinese, and that was bad. But we have to walk a very delicate line. On one hand we cannot ignore our budding and burgeoning economic and strategic interest in China. And on the other hand, preserving our ultimate alliance with the United States of America.

China is no substitute for United States. They don't share our values or our interests and they just signed a \$400 billion agreement with Iran – which has a military dimension.

## ■ The Abraham Accords

**iF: I ALWAYS THINK THE LAST QUESTION SHOULD BE ONE THE ANSWER TO WHICH IS A POSITIVE STATEMENT. SO, I'M GOING TO ASK YOU ABOUT THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS. HOW ARE WE DOING?**

**Amb. Oren:** The Abraham Accords overturned entirely every assumption about peace-making that have been considered doctrine by the “peace establishment,” which is huge in the United States and Europe. The governments, the universities, the think tanks, the media, everyone said you had to withdraw to the 1967 borders, uproot several hundred thousand Israeli settlers, redivide Jerusalem, create a Palestinian state, etc. It was like a pinball machine, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, everything was wrong.

The Accords also reversed the paradigm. With Jordan and Egypt, Israel got peace but didn't get normalization. We had peace of a sort of with their govern-

The Abraham Accords overturned entirely every assumption about peace-making that have been considered doctrine by the “peace establishment,” which is huge in the United States and Europe.

ments, probably more with Egypt now than with Jordan, but we didn't know peace with their people at all. With the Abraham Accords, particularly in the Gulf, we have peace with people. We have dozens of flights every week. We have business deals, people to people. It's extraordinary and any future peace arrangement in the Middle East will conform to the paradigm of the Abraham Accords, not to the paradigm of the Egypt and Jordan peace agreements.

I have concerns about what will happen if the JCPOA is renewed and

already we see some of the [Abraham Accords] signatories hedging their bets and talking with the Iranians. They're afraid, and it can't shock you. But for the Abraham Accords, again, along with the officials of the Trump administration that made those Accords happen, we owe a debt to Barack Obama. Because Barack Obama set out to bring Jews and Arabs closer. He succeeded – just not through peace. He succeeded through our common opposition to his policies.

We owe Obama, a debt of gratitude because he kicked us out the nest. He forced us to diversify our policy portfolio. He forced us to go to China, to Africa. Before, it was enough just to have the U.S. relationship, and we didn't really care about the rest of the world. But there was common regional opposition to U.S. policies, particularly toward Iran—but not only – it is also a front against the Muslim Brotherhood backed by Turkey. And Israel was the only coun-

try in the Middle East that was standing up to both of these. The United States at the time was courting both.

I think countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and others will see the economic benefits, the security benefits, the openness that the Accords bring for innovation in the Middle East, and that Israel is not only not an enemy but also that it is an ally and that other countries will join as well.

**iF: MICHAEL OREN, THANK YOU FOR AN ENLIGHTENING CONVERSATION.**



# Reassessing U.S. International Broadcasting

by **ALBERTO M. FERNANDEZ**

**W**e live in an age of information overload. It is not so much that accurate information is lacking, but rather that it is subsumed in a crowded, cacophonous environment. The internet, cellphones, and social media platforms have revolutionized the way information is consumed and this trend will only accelerate with future waves of technology.

While many legacy private news media companies are struggling to survive in this new environment, there is no dearth of state-funded or supported media enterprises. America's adversaries have understood the adage, written in a letter by al-Qaeda leader Aymen al-Zawahiri to an Iraqi subordinate, that "more than half of the battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media." Russia, China, Iran, and Islamist terrorist groups are aggressive in the media space. The states mentioned not only use social media but broadcast media as well in addition to trying to disrupt the messaging of their adversaries.

In the United States, government foreign broadcasting was – correctly – initially connected to conflict and an ideological struggle. The beginning of U.S. government broadcasting in foreign languages is intimately connected to the Second World War and the need to counter Axis propaganda in Latin America and on the warfront. Voice of America (VOA) was first, followed by Radio Free Europe (broadcasting to the captive countries of Eastern Europe) in 1949 and Radio Liberty (broadcasting to the Soviet Union) in 1953. Those two outlets would eventually merge in 1976 as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). VOA's

own broadcasting in Russian began in 1947, even before RFE/RL.

From the beginning, there was an effort to differentiate between two models of broadcasting. VOA was the official, state media outlet representing accurate news and the views of the U.S. government. RFE/RL (and other networks to follow) were meant to be surrogate media, representing news and views impossible to hear in countries under the Communist yoke. It is no surprise that RFE/RL was funded by the Central Intelligence Agency for decades (until 1972) through a cutout anti-Communist exile organization. The CIA supposedly exercised very light oversight over these broadcasters to the extent that the radios sometimes presented views of opposition political trends – nationalists,

## ■ *Freedom's Megaphone Expands*

These broadcasters would be joined in 1985 by U.S. government broadcasting to Cuba, Radio and TV Marti and then by Radio Free Asia (RFA) in 1996, focusing on East Asia, particularly China. Finally Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), broadcasting in Arabic, began in 2002 with Radio Sawa and then al-Hurra Television (note: I was president of MBN from 2017 to 2020). RFA had its genesis as a response to the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown in China while MBN was very much a response to what was seen as a failure to communicate following the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

VOA and Radio/TV Marti are government agencies, while RFE/RL, RFA

There is still no 24/7 U.S. government television broadcasting to China in Mandarin and Cantonese.

monarchists, rightists, liberals, whatever was banned in the motherland – as much as an American agenda. It was RFE that directly encouraged Hungarian freedom fighters during the 1956 revolt in that country. RFE/RL was such a thorn in the side of the Communists that it was subject to a terrorist attack in 1981 by Carlos the Jackal bankrolled by the Romanian Securitate and Soviet KGB.

and MBN are technically private corporations – "grantees" – fully funded by the U.S. government. All five broadcasters are overseen by the Agency for Global Media (USAGM), formerly the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), an independent government agency often derided in employee polling as the worst agency to work for in the federal government.



It is both ironic and unsurprising that the absolute nadir of American international broadcasting came with the fall of the Soviet Union. The period of 1999 to 2015 was one in which there seemed to be no one in charge at BBG. I was still in government at the time and the open derision expressed by senior State Department and White House officials for BBG operations was painful to hear.

Despite the seeming drift of those years, criticism of lack of direction and absence of solid measurements, those years did see the establishment of Farsi-language Radio Farda in 2002 as a joint VOA/RFE/RL initiative, the launching of Arabic language MBN in 2002-2004, and most importantly, the launch in 2014 of a modest Russian language television news program *Current Time* (*Nastoyashchee Vremya*) by RFE/RL in conjunction with VOA. The idea was that this would provide a “reality check” alternative to Russian regime propaganda. By 2017, *Current Time* had expanded to be a 24/7 operation in broadcast and digital formats.

Despite this ostensible progress on the American side, these same years saw a great expansion in Russian, Chinese and Iranian media propaganda networks. These were also the years that saw the rise of Qatari-funded al-Jazeera television to prominence after its launch

in 1996 and, from 2013, the innovative use of social media by the terrorist group known as the Islamic State or ISIS.

In relative terms, American broadcasting improved with better management after media executive John Lansing was hired in 2015 as CEO (a position he held from 2015 to 2019). A small but significant launch during those years was the Russian language fact-checking site *factograph.info* (*Polygraph.info* in English), started in 2017, to counter Moscow’s disinformation. This was later expanded to counter Chinese disinformation. The Lansing era rightly saw the Russian, Chinese, and Iranian media spaces identified as priorities to be addressed immediately and in the future. The Biden administration requested \$840 million in fiscal 2023 for the USAGM agencies.

### ■ *Challenges from Russia, China, and Iran*

Despite some successes and a correct focus on the most important issues, major challenges confront American international broadcasting. Given the nature of the threat, USAGM has still “underinvested” in confronting China. Radio Free Asia seems underfunded given China’s oversized and nefarious role in the world. There is still no 24/7 U.S. government television broadcasting to China in

Mandarin and Cantonese. RFA is much smaller than RFE/RL because Russia was regarded as the bigger threat than China, but the reverse seems to be true now.

RFE/RL’s Radio Farda and VOA’s Persian Service both seek to reach the Farsi speaking population in Iran. Both services have been the subject of repeated and credible complaints by Iranian diaspora communities claiming pro-regime bias, especially at VOA. A logical change would be to combine the services and make a refurbished Radio/TV Farda a true surrogate network offering the oppressed Iranian people encouragement and inspiration – and hard, verified news – as they struggle under regime oppression.

The ambivalent position that the last two Democratic administrations have had toward the Iranian regime have made it more difficult for American broadcasting in Farsi to find its own voice and tone in its outreach to the people of Iran. U.S. broadcasting to Iran is also in the wrong agency; instead of being in Radio Free Europe, it should be part of an expanded Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), creating obvious synergies and harmonizing content and regional focus.

While there has been underinvestment on China and division and confusion on Iran, the focus on Russia has been relatively clear, at least over the past five years. USAGM – working through RFE/RL and VOA – plan to “surround” Russia with enhanced media sites seems technically sound and eminently logical.

### ■ *The Question of Ideology*

The bigger problem facing American broadcasting to China, Russia and Iran is not so much a technical nor a financial one but an ideological one. There is, as President George H.W. Bush called it, “the vision thing.” All U.S.-funded broadcasters must adhere to ethical and professional news media standards, but beyond that the question remains: what kind of broadcasters are they to be? The “VOA model” is that of a government-funded media outlet very much along the lines of typical liberal American legacy

media. It is no surprise that VOA is the “wakest” of these government media outlets and indeed was headed from 2016 to 2020 by veteran journalist Amanda Bennett, liberal media royalty. Bennett was nominated by the Biden admin-

cultural elite – themselves see America not just as deeply flawed but racist and rotten from its origin to this day? Such an image of the United States was, of course, propagated by Soviet propaganda and it is alive and well today in the messaging of

the biggest risk and something I had to watch closely – ensuring that the Lebanese-origin journalist was not soft on Hezbollah or that the Syrian-born editor was not easy on Bashar al Assad. This is also the complaint about broadcasting to Iran, that U.S. Government outlets could be weak toward the regime. Similarly, some criticism of VOA broadcasting to China that it was occasionally relatively accommodating to Beijing’s Communist Party regime.

How to maneuver in such turbulent waters? The task is to find and cleave to a golden mean of messaging which is both deeply rooted in ethical and professional journalism but also has an engaged and expansive vision of a humane, democratic and pluralistic Russia, China, or Iran that is not just a knockoff of whatever conventional wisdom is in fashion along the Acela Corridor.

This is easier said than done. But it has the virtue of truly speaking to the aspirations of these peoples, all of them heirs to ancient empires and civilizations, in a way that is more convincing

The ambivalent position that the last two Democratic administrations have had toward the Iranian regime have made it more difficult for American broadcasting in Farsi to find its own voice and tone in its outreach to the people of Iran.

istration in 2021 to be the next CEO of USAGM, overseeing all of U.S. international broadcasting, not just VOA.

### ■ *Challenges in the Studio*

A recent Heritage Foundation study by Max Primorac and James Roberts outlined how American foreign aid has all too often become an extension of one party, the Democratic Party, “seeking to advance its radical global agenda of ideological indoctrination,” weaponizing foreign aid programs to inflict the latest Washington Beltway progressive causes on an unsuspecting world. The same risk exists in international broadcasting; political and ideological diversity can be lacking, in which case the default editorial position can reflect whatever the *Washington Post* or *New York Times* deems significant. The brief, chaotic tenure of Trump appointee Michael Pack as CEO at USAGM (June 2020-January 2021) ironically only entrenched that default progressive ideology often found in federal bureaucracy.

The challenge today is even deeper, perhaps, given America’s ideological turmoil and partisan divide the past few years. How do you promote a positive, engaging and uplifting American vision of the world when significant elements of the American elite – certainly the media and

Russia, China, and Iran. All of them, and Islamists too, have learned how to manipulate and implement the very language of American evil exceptionalism found on many American university campuses or in progressive newsrooms.

In contrast to the VOA model, we have the surrogate broadcasting model

How do you promote a positive, engaging and uplifting American vision of the world when significant elements of the American elite ... see America not just as deeply flawed but racist...

pioneered by RFE/RL in its CIA days. The risk in this model is that, left to their own devices, such broadcasters can fall into the trap of promoting their own agenda or even that of their target country regime, instead of providing a truthful news alternative to the state propaganda to which their listeners are subjected. Instead of being too official and safe, U.S. government foreign media can become too biased and reckless.

When I was at MBN that was

than just saying that they need to be like Americans because the West knows best. The most vital element in a rejuvenated and empowered American outreach to the world is not just a nuanced understanding of the world and our adversaries but an understanding of ourselves.

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# The Struggle for the Soul of the Latin American Left

by R. EVAN ELLIS

*Editor's Note: An earlier version of this article appeared in the Transregional Threats Journal of the Center for a Secure Free Society (SFS); a national security think tank based in Washington, D.C.*

On April 7, 2022, the United Nations General Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council for its egregious human rights violations during the brutal invasion of Ukraine. Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, were not among the 93 countries that voted against Russia, highlighting Latin America as a problem for U.S. multilateral engagement.

The vote also illustrated how the changing political composition of Latin America and the decline of democracy in the region impairs multilateral engagement that is critical to regional and global security.

It is largely a fait accompli that a majority of Latin America will be governed by leftist leaders, in what appears to be a shift away from the “conservative wave” that dominated the region in the second decade of the 21st century. Some, but not all these leftist governments have increasingly anti-democratic strains that have opened the door to global authoritarian actors, namely China, Russia, and Iran. The question, however, is whether the Latin American left will go in the direction of authoritarianism, much like Venezuela and Nicaragua, or seek to maintain the democratic institutions that afford the losing side the opportunity to regain political power?

The current state of affairs in Latin America offers both opportunities and risks for U.S. policymakers, as those committed to democracy on the Latin American left are in an internal struggle with the more authoritarian strains within its political current.

## ■ An Inflection Point

In the past five years, accelerated by the economic, fiscal, and sociopolitical stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic, leftist political parties have taken or regained power in a number of Latin American countries. These include Mexico, Honduras, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, and Guyana. In others, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, they have consolidated autocratic control, often with ties to transnational organized crime.

In the former group, the orientation and composition of these leftist governments is mixed, or its recent arrival makes

Inside the Washington Beltway, some U.S. policymakers and regional experts downplay concerns with Latin America's left by emphasizing the democratic component of the new progressive governments in the region and the legitimate grievances that brought them to power. These experts often remind us about the American military interventions and other foreign policy blunders in Latin America in the past.

For the White House, the Biden administration arguably finds common cause with the region's new leftist governments and its own economic and social policy agenda, hoping for opportunities to work with the new governments on issues like climate change, human rights, anti-corruption, and social justice.

Not all are so sanguine. Less optimistic policymakers and regional specialists, drawing insights from the recent record of leftist regimes in Latin America, see profound risks stemming

...those committed to democracy on the Latin American left are in an internal struggle with the more authoritarian strains...

it too early to discern its final trajectory. In the latest cases of Honduras, Peru, and Chile, the United States is figuring out how to engage these new governments.

from the potentially destructive policies of the new governments and their potential to generate crises that will pave the way for undesirable political change.

## LATIN AMERICA'S LEFT: SHIFTING TOWARD AUTHORITARIANISM

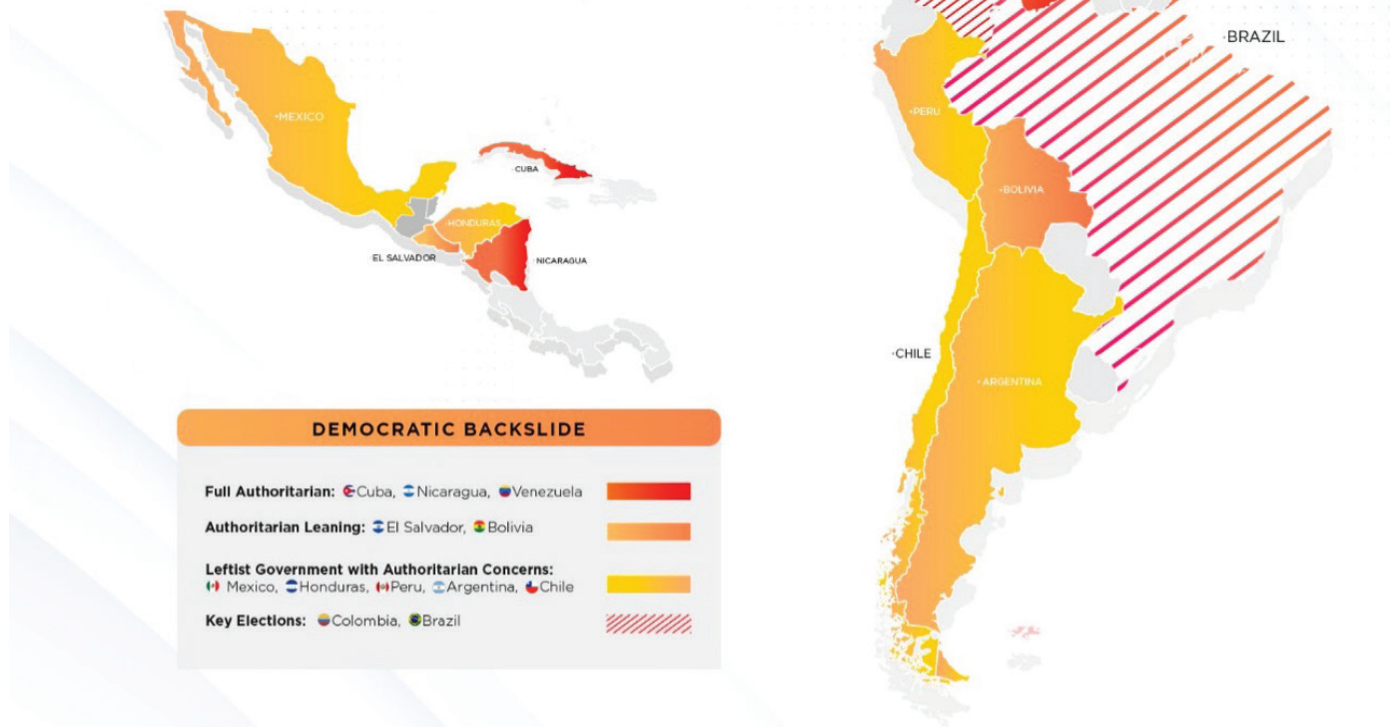


Image: Center for a Secure Free Society

This is compounded by a dangerous, anti-democratic minority within these new governments, inspired by Venezuela's late authoritarian leader Hugo Chávez, and the intellectual and intelligence support of Cuba.

The concern is that this anti-democratic minority could hijack the new leftist governments in Latin America for their own political or criminal ends.

Both perspectives are partially correct. With a preponderance of Latin American countries currently controlled by the left, the dynamic between the more authoritarian-aligned actors and their potentially disastrous policies, and the more democratic counterparts in each country, will define the trajectory of the region for years to come. To understand these political changes and their implications for the United States, it's useful to review recent actions by Latin America's leftist governments. They present challenges and opportunities.

### ■ *Latin America's Left: A Survey*

With the exception of the authoritarian regimes in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua, the common element of left-oriented governments in Latin America, and those that may come to power in 2022, is the mixture within them of democratic actors versus autocrats whose policies would polarize society and radicalize its base.

This includes some with authoritarian tendencies who seek to deliberately hijack democratic institutions for malevolent ends. With this context, it is useful to survey the current political landscape of the Latin American left.

### ■ *Mexico*

In Mexico, political expression and competition by traditional parties such as the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), PAN (National Action Party) and PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) continue to be viable.

While President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) may be a popular president, he has sought to eliminate democratic obstacles to his policies.

In addition, AMLO has pursued economic policies that would marginalize Mexico's deeply rooted private sector, including favoring statist approaches to the critical petroleum, electricity, and lithium sectors, among others, risking an economic crisis and increased polarization.

### ■ *Honduras*

The new government of President Xiomara Castro appears to be in an internal struggle between democratically oriented figures in her cabinet, such as Vice President Salvador Nasrallah, versus more radical actors, including her own husband and former President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya.

It's worth remembering that Mel Zelaya was accused of receiving illicit funding from Hugo Chavez in Venezuela back in 2010. Similarly, it is believed that

some of these radical elements within the new Castro government led the president to switch diplomatic recognition from the *de jure* interim government of Juan Guaido to the illegitimate regime of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela.

## ■ Peru

President Pedro Castillo, the politically inexperienced teacher from Cajamarca has arguably found himself in over his head with respect to the complex politics of Peru. To some degree, Castillo has tried to distance himself from Venezuela's Chavista regime calling it "not the path to follow." And he has tried to maintain his own voice against subversive influences within his political party, Peru Libre, such as Cuban-trained

allegedly pressured several changes to cabinet ministers in September 2021.

Alberto Fernandez' controversial public overture to Russia's Vladimir Putin during his state visit to Moscow and Beijing in February 2022 raised questions about the Argentine president's judgement and moderation.

## ■ Chile

The most recent addition to Latin America's left is the youthful Chilean President Gabriel Boric. The key partner within his Apruebo Dignidad coalition that helped achieve electoral success is the Chilean Communist Party and its influential leader Guillermo Tellier del Vale. Early in office, Boric had appointed far-left figures to key cabinet posi-

## ■ Two Key Elections

Last year's presidential elections in Latin America saw a clean sweep by the region's leftist political movements. The outcomes were also defined by an anti-incumbent vote that is a worldwide phenomenon prompted by the pandemic. This takes us to arguably the two most important elections in 2022, that of Colombia and Brazil, where the current right-leaning leaders run the risk of losing power to the Latin American left.

In Colombia, the ruling political party, Centro Democrático, lost a significant 21 seats in the March 2022 legislative elections. While in Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro trails in the polls behind the former leftist president Lula da Silva.

## ■ Colombia

Recent revelations that Russian criminal and intelligence operations in Colombia possibly contributed to last year's violent street protests raises the stakes of this year's presidential elections. The second round was set to take place on June 19 between Senator Gustavo Petro, a former M-19 guerilla leader, and businessman Rodolfo Hernandez. Petro has a sympathetic posture toward the dissidents of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army).

Senator Petro's stated intention to end Colombia's "carbon economy" including oil and coal, which account for a significant portion of the country's exports, would likely exacerbate an already grave economic and fiscal situation and provide fodder for more social unrest throughout the country.

While some polls initially put Hernandez ahead for Round 2, Petro received more than 50 percent of the vote, beating Hernandez by 3 percentage points, and leading Hernandez to publicly accept the results, reducing the prospects for significant election-related violence. While Petro will almost certainly bring significant change in Colombia's internal policies and external engagement, the President-elect was

Recent revelations that Russian criminal and intelligence operations in Colombia possibly contributed to last year's violent street protests raises the stakes of this year's presidential elections.

doctor Vladimir Ceron, pushing back against Ceron's preferred cabinet picks.

The result has been political paralysis with a consistent stream of cabinet reshuffling, replacing a minister on average every nine days within his first nine months in office.

## ■ Argentina

President Alberto Fernandez initially presented himself to voters as a moderate within Peronism by contrast to his predecessor and now Vice President Christina Fernández de Kirchner, but after a couple years in power there are indications that the VP is increasingly calling the shots. Steadily increasing her influence within the government, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner

tions, although he has also reached out to moderates, and taken public positions against both Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and anti-democratic regimes in Latin America.

While the Chilean Congress, currently dominated by the right and center-left, can challenge potential harmful policies of the new Boric government, this may tempt the millennial leader to leverage the ongoing process of changing the constitution to overcome that resistance.

The Constitutional Convention has already demonstrated a radical posture even beyond President Boric's governing coalition, with policy proposals such as abolishing all existing Chilean government structures and replacing them with a "plurinational assembly."



initially conciliatory, saying that “Peace means a Colombian society with opportunities. Peace means that someone like me can become president or some-

and current global events, none more pressing than the war between Russia and Ukraine. Russia has been encroaching on Latin America for several de-

Yet, it’s important for the administration to develop a regional strategy based on balance while carefully thinking through U.S. strategic interests in Latin America vis-à-vis our near-peer adversaries, Russia, and China.

Two key considerations should shape those tradeoffs: First, The Biden administration must not confuse respect for the sovereignty of its partners in Latin America, or its sympathy with their political agenda, with turning a blind eye to the dangerous autocratic minority within each leftist Latin American government that would polarize, paralyze, or hijack the region’s democratic institutions for their own often malevolent ends.

And the Biden administration must think strategically with respect to how it pressures its partners, particularly when such interference politically undercuts friends of the United States, who, however imperfect, are critical to regional peace and stability. The risks of bringing to power those in the region more dis-

Russia has been encroaching on Latin America for several decades, shoring up allies throughout the region. It has turned to these allies as the conflict intensified in Ukraine.

one like Francia can be vice president. Peace means that we must stop killing one another.”

## ■ Brazil

The time that former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva spent in prison due to his (subsequently suspended) corruption conviction means that his possible victory in Brazil’s October 2022 presidential election could make him far more disposed to adopt a radical left posture than during his 2003-2010 prior period in office, although his victory is not guaranteed.

Some believe he would pursue a moderate course similar to that of his previous term. On the other hand, like Michelle Bachelet in Chile during her second period in office, Lula’s age (currently 76) means that this would likely be his last tenure as president, tempting him to pursue an agenda more consistent with his posture in the 1980s and 1990s when he was a proud socialist calling on Brazil to default on its foreign debt.

Indeed, Lula’s public statements about prioritizing the need to reduce poverty over fiscal responsibility already suggest Lula’s public intention to depart from his prior pragmatism.

## ■ Implications for the United States

The political panorama in Latin America is all the more important when considering the geopolitical scenario

cadec, shoring up allies throughout the region. It has turned to these allies as the conflict intensified in Ukraine.

On February 25, the Organization of American States (OAS) issued a declaration condemning the Russian attack on Ukraine and calling on Russia to cease its hostilities. Notably missing from support of the OAS resolution were Bolivia, Brazil, El Salvador,

...it’s important for the administration to develop a regional strategy based on balance while carefully thinking through U.S. strategic interests in Latin America vis-à-vis our near-peer adversaries, Russia, and China.

Honduras, St. Vincent and Grenadines, and Nicaragua, highlighting how the changing political composition of Latin America and the decline of democratic governments has impaired multilateral and multidimensional security.

Less than a week later, some of these same countries abstained from an important vote in the United Nations to condemn Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The Biden administration’s focus with Latin America on the issues of human rights, anti-corruption, climate change, sustainable development, and social justice is not inherently wrong.

posed to pursue policies that move away from democracy and cooperation with the United States and open the door to malign types of cooperation with extra-hemispheric American rivals, is greater than specific differences with any particular government in Latin America.

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# Durable Disorder

review by SHOSHANA BRYEN

There are two books inside *The New Rules of War* by Sean McFate. One explains the failure of the United States to win a single war since 1945. That book is intriguing and worth pondering. The second one makes suggestions for the re-organization of the U.S. military to fight the wars of the present and future. That book will make you nauseous. And yet, it too is intriguing and worth pondering.

McFate is a professor of strategy at the National Defense University and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. He has serious credentials. A former paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne and a private contractor in various countries, McFate has been in and around a variety of American military commitments over the past few decades.

In Book One, he defines the American military's problem first through the lens of our fight against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). "Aspects of JSOC [Joint Strategic Operations Command] which had previously made us so unrivaled – our structure, equipment, doctrine and culture – were the very things constraining us. We were trapped in a cage of our own making: we believed ourselves to be tactically flexible, so much so that we stopped questioning whether our actions, or the nation's broader strategy were correct."

## ■ *An Absence of Strategy*

Strategy is the theme. Are we fighting to "win" or to negotiate an end to fighting? If we end the fighting, will it come back again? Can you trust your negotiating partner? How do you know?

And if you're wrong about your partner, what will the U.S. gain or lose? These are, in fact, the key questions of the 21st Century – coupled with the knowledge that more defense spending won't solve the lack of strategy problem.

McFate tends to use examples of small armies, militias, and other non-state actor group cheating; there is a lot of Africa and Afghanistan here and a very interesting bit on Acapulco.

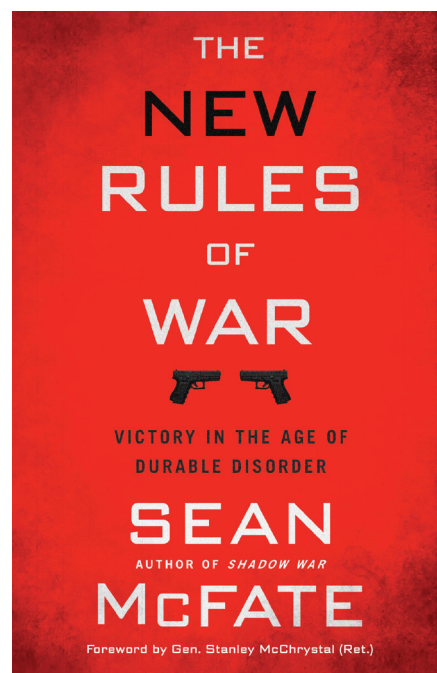
But there is a larger picture: Iran has cheated on its agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – and Russia cheated on the Budapest Memorandum, the INF Treaty, and the Open Skies Treaty among others – and North Korea cheated on its nuclear agreement with President Bill Clinton – and China simply declined to follow the ruling of the International Court on the Pacific islands. For Israel, the Palestinians cheated on Oslo and everything else.

Hugely opposed to building more, bigger, shinier, higher-tech weapons, McFate points to the ability of low-tech militias to hold Western armies at bay – or defeat them. "France was defeated in Algeria and Indochina, Great Britain in Palestine and Cyprus, the U.S.S.R in Afghanistan, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan."

Each of these was a militia/terrorist organization facing a conventional army. He believes we're finished facing conventional armies.

Oh, yeah?

Side Trip Number One: *The New Rules of War* was published in 2019 – and in fact was, rightly, a *Wall Street Journal*





Top 10 book that year. Perhaps Vladimir Putin should have read it before he used the most conventional of weapons to attack Ukraine in 2022. We've gotten a window on a) Russian strategic thinking – they believed their conventional forces could hook up with their “little green men” and take Kyiv in a few days – and b) how much less capable they were than the U.S. and NATO had given them credit for. And as regards China, we're now considering the possibility of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

### ■ **There is No Answer**

International law and international institutions are no answer. “The United Nations did nothing to stop the genocides in Rwanda and Darfur. Nor did it challenge Russia's theft of Crimea or curtail decades of slaughter in the Middle East...The Law of Armed Conflict... exists in name only. No one can legislate combat or regulate it and it is hubris to try. Kindhearted solutions to war just get more people killed.”

Futurism – the bane of McFate's analysis – isn't the answer. Faulting *Star Wars* (the movie, not the BMD system) for encouraging planners to think in ever-more esoteric terms, he points to an overheard conversation in which

one analyst said, “The problem is that the military can never fully anticipate tomorrow's threats. However, it can future-proof itself through technology.” The other replied, “That's why DoD needs more money. The military is woefully underfunded.”

McFate's conclusion is that “conventional war is dead.” It was replaced by:

*Networks, caliphates, narco-states, warlord kingdoms, corporatocracies, and wastelands... in 2017, 70 percent of the world's countries were “fragile.” And that the condition of*

*information, our economy, our entertainment capabilities, backed by unquestioned military might. China is challenging every single one of those – including our belief in democracy and personal freedom.*

Pay special attention to Chapter 6 on mercenaries. “Countries, organizations, oligarchs, companies all have enough money to hire the military muscle they need, particularly when they're charging them with low-tech warfare.” This is where things start to get hairy. “There is actually an organization called the International Code of Conduct Association in Geneva that mercenaries can belong to – “They swear to a code of conduct so they can be hired by state or non-state actors.”

How many of the world's mercenaries can we assume a) join and b) live up to their signatures – particularly after McFate has explained that signatures on a treaty or peace plan are only useful as long as the signatory wants it to be?

### ■ **The Second Book**

Here's where we get into the second book. McFate's interest in and apparent belief in the utility of mercenary armies leads him, in fact, to a logical conclusion. For him. The United States should use them.

Side Trip Number Two: You may re-

Hugely opposed to building more, bigger, shinier, higher-tech weapons, McFate points to the ability of low-tech militias to hold Western armies at bay – or defeat them...

*“no war, no peace” is endemic – U.S. Grand Strategy in the face of this is failing – if our goal was to uphold the rules based order, including using international organizations,*

call that actress Mia Farrow was a strong voice on behalf of the people of Darfur during the Janjaweed-committed genocide. But did you know she tried to hire a mercenary army to fight the militia?



Which is interesting at two levels – first, that she is smart enough to know that crying over the people of Darfur wasn't enough; that military action is sometimes necessary. But second, if an actress can hire a militia to kill the people SHE wants killed, what stops another actress or ath-

Don't Matter.”

Hearts & Minds Don't Matter (Rule 4), is useful, and he covers it with various examples of countries/leaders killing their way to their goals. He hits the obvious killers – Mao, Stalin – but also includes a really interesting review of the

McFate is right at the strategic level – and the strategic level is where he wants to be. Warfare has changed. The enemies have changed.

lete or artist or gourmet chef from hiring an army to kill who THEY want killed?

This applies to the armed forces of some actual countries (although McFate thinks countries are overrated and the real action is in subnational space). I wrote in 2019:

*American security assistance generally is predicated on the principle that a smaller or poorer country that has U.S. equipment and training will be better able to defend common interests than one that doesn't. Sometimes it works that way. But sometimes it puts the U.S. in bed with people who want our weapons and training but do not share our bottom line — their enemy is not ours; their rules of engagement are not ours; their government, in fact, is not a friend of ours, but maybe if we reward it thoroughly enough it won't actively oppose our interests.*

And some of them – see the entire story of U.S. (CIA) participation in the Syrian civil war – morph into terrorists.

The chapter headings now should begin to worry you: “New Types of World Powers Will Rule,” “There will be Wars Without States,” “Shadow Wars will Dominate,” and “Hearts and Minds

Jewish defenders of Jerusalem and the culmination of their stand at Masada. The Romans were never going to win hearts and minds. They lost the battle but won the war – until 1948.

After the deconstruction of modern mercenary/militia warfare, McFate concludes:

*The lesson here is not that shadow wars don't work – they do – but that secrets and democracy are not compatible. This means democracies will be disadvantaged in an era of shadow warfare, a fact Putin already exploits. Democracy thrives in the light of information and transparency... The West needs to learn how to fight in the shadows without losing its soul, or it will continue to get sucker punched by autocracies.*

### ■ Can We? Should We?

If you can't beat them, join them. “Shadow wars harm the soul of a democracy. But kneeling before dictators is not an option... The West “must develop its own version of shadow war.” This would include:

- **Kinetic warfare:** Maximum plausible deniability. Nonattributable forces; plausible deniability; false flags, foreign legions, little green men, mercenaries.

- **Weaponized information;** Trolls and bots; mock them; whisper campaign; “support regime changes like Ukraine's Orange Revolution” (Didn't he say regime change was bad?) “Waging war in the television age depends as much on propaganda as it does on success in the field. This is especially true when fighting democracies because their citizens can hire or fire policy makers.” “Too often, the West is the chump. It must overcome its aversion to knowledge manipulation...” “Undermine autocracies.”

- **Sponsor organized crime:** “Organized crime can become the enemy within the enemy's state... demand it stop trafficking human beings and end all sex trade activities as a condition of sponsorship”

- **Use your businesses to get in**

- **Talk to the terrorists:** diplomacy must include “multinational corporations, terrorist groups, and criminal organizations who exert influence... is engaging with such actors any different from dealing with distasteful regimes?”

Nauseous yet?

### ■ Conclusion

In the end, McFate is right at the strategic level – and the strategic level is where he wants to be. Warfare has changed. The enemies have changed. There is, as he says, “durable disorder” in the world. Whether the U.S. can cope, and how it copes, will decide who we will become. Great Britain ruled for centuries and now it's just a little island with a very checkered past. Is that our future?

“Don't weep for Westphalia,” he cautions. We have to look forward. OK, fine. But at some point, we will look back on this generation's future wars and we can only hope that we do it without thinking that we have, in fact, sacrificed our morality, our standards, our decency for military victory. Whatever that means four hundred years from now.

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## ■ *A Final Thought ...*

# Guaranteeing Security

For centuries, Great Britain was the guarantor of freedom of the seas and security in the Middle East. After World War II and into the mid-1950s, as Britain divested itself of its colonies and responsibilities, the United States took over. It was a major realignment that had both promise and problems.

The Eisenhower administration's priority was to keep the Arabs on "our side" of the Cold War. They created the theoretical "Northern Tier" of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan on Russia's borders, and planned to bring Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt in as players. Egypt declined — so the U.S. sought to bribe Nasser by helping to push the British out of the Suez Canal Zone and "solving" the Arab-Israel crisis by leaning on Israel. "What we had in mind was (a) slightly smaller Israel," said one American diplomat. During the 1956 Suez war, Eisenhower went further. When Nasser cut off Britain's oil supply, Eisenhower refused to provide North American oil, telling aides, "Those who began this operation should be left to work out their own oil problems — to boil in their own oil, so to speak."

Missing from the American construct was the

understanding that Egypt's priority was not to involve itself in the Cold War and not to join any of the regional compacts, but to be the leader of the Sunni Arab world.

In 2022, the Biden administration, like its earlier counterpart, appears to have priorities and goals in the Middle East. And like its earlier counterpart, they appear detached from the priorities of some of America's traditional allies in the region. A new alignment of countries is emerging — not only without the United States but irritated and frightened by the United States.

The Abraham Accords are the realization by certain of the Gulf States that their security, their economies, and their people would be enhanced by a relationship with Israel. They — and others — have adjusted broad priorities to meet current conditions. The new Arab-Israeli regional architecture recognizes Iran, not the Palestinians, as the agenda item central to their future security, and Israel as an essential partner in meeting the Iranian threat.

The United States government must recognize and act on that recognition as well.