GPF | GEOPOLITICAL FUTURES

PRESENTS

Best Writings of George Friedman

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Thinking Geopolitically

Understanding our Geopolitical Model

December 28, 2015

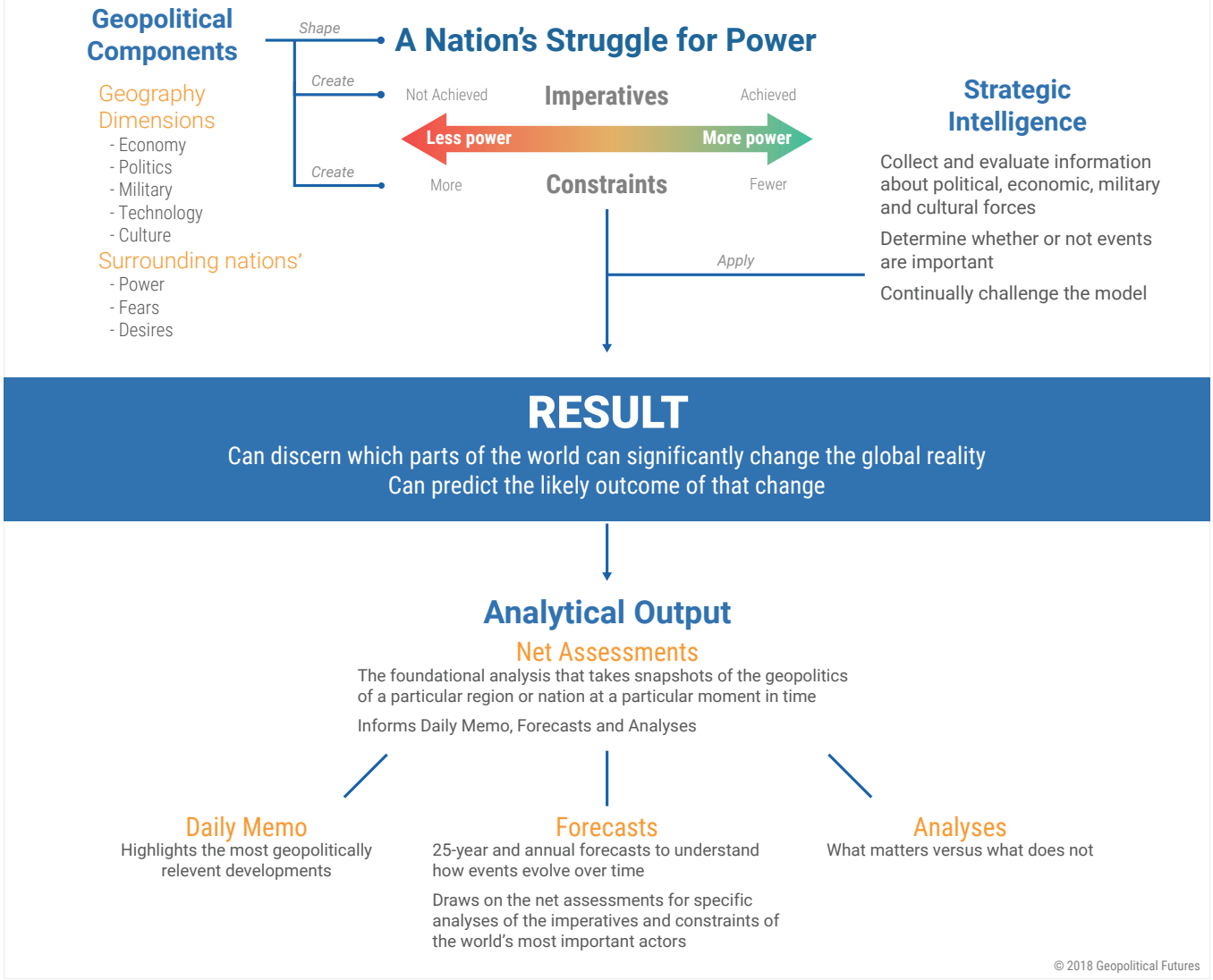
Every single day the media reports many events that do not have geopolitical significance. To help you better understand how we decide whether or not an event is geopolitically significant, we've pulled together this special report.

At Geopolitical Futures, we really have no stand-alone pieces. Everything we write is interconnected as part of a global narrative. Each day our paid readers receive at least one analysis. The purpose of this daily feature is to distinguish things that matter from things that don't. It is not a decision we make lightly. It begins with a unique understanding of geopolitics, one embodied by the forecasts and net assessments that live permanently on our website. We then use strategic intelligence methods of collecting and evaluating information to track and challenge these forecasts and net assessments. Everything we write flows from this methodology. It is what we use to decide whether or not an event is important.

The simplest definition is that broad geopolitical shifts are taking place that, over time, will change the way the world works. The way we understand geopolitics is very different from the ways others interpret it. For most people, it is a term used interchangeably with "international relations." For us, it is an integrated way of looking at the world. It begins with place and the constraints and possibilities of geography. Geography defines the kinds of communities we have, from small independent villages to vast nation-states. An Eskimo lives a different life than a Parisian who lives a different life than a Paraguayan. The Arctic is not a European city, and can't compare to a South American country. Differences in place define much of who we are.

Any place consists of multiple dimensions. The economy is necessary to feed people. Politics are essential for internal organization. The military is needed for war-making and defense, technology for managing nature, and culture for defining everything from community to beauty. All of these are components of geopolitics. Three things shape these components: first, constraints of place; second, the degree to which the various systems interact to create power in all its dimensions; finally, surrounding communities – their power, their fears and their desires.

Our Geopolitical Model



These taken together create imperatives and constraints. Imperatives are things that must be done for a community to survive and prosper. Constraints are things that cannot be done. Imperatives and constraints are rarely aligned. Sometimes things that must be done can't be done. Each nation struggles to align the things that must happen with the things that are impossible, to the extent reality permits.

Thinking of a nation in terms of imperatives and constraints allows you to compare the relative power of nations. This power is always asymmetric. Some nations have greater economic power, others greater military power and so on. In this grand scheme, the individual is profoundly constrained. The fall of a prime minister rarely matters on the scale at which we work. We are interested in what changes the world – and the simple fact is individuals only rarely do so.

This methodology (and this is a limited overview) allows us to predict the interactions between nations and to forecast the likely outcome of these interactions. This allowed us to forecast that the European Union would not sustain itself past its first financial crisis, and that Russia would re-emerge and conflict with the United States in Ukraine. It allowed us to forecast that the U.S. and Iran would reach an understanding about their roles in the region, and that U.S.-Israeli relations would cool. It allowed us to predict that China could not maintain its growth rate, and that the result would be a political and social shift, first to dictatorship and in the future, we think, to fragmentation.

All of these forecasts were contained in what we call "The Model." The Model is the summation of how the imperatives and constraints we have identified confront each other at a global level. The Model tells us two things. The first is what parts of the world can significantly change the global reality. The second is it predicts what the likely outcome of change will be. So, for example, at this moment, the Model is noting that Eurasia is in the process of massive degenerative change. The European Union is failing on multiple levels. Russia is both increasingly aggressive in the short run and fragile in the long run. China is struggling to cope with a massive shift in its economy. The Middle East is redefining itself after the collapse of its European-imposed borders. From this we can also forecast that Central Asia will destabilize, caught between various forces. Finally, North America, unlike Eurasia, are stable in most respects and increasing in power.

We use two analytic tools to reach these conclusions. One is called "Net Assessment," a term taken from the Department of Defense's Office of Net Assessments. It is a difficult term to define, but our Net Assessments serve as snapshots of the geopolitics of a particular region or nation at a particular moment. The second is our Forecasts, both the 25-Year Forecast and the Annual Forecast for the coming year. Both are necessary in order to understand how events evolve over time, and both draw on the Net Assessments for specific analyses of the imperatives and constraints of the world's most important actors.

Intelligence is another oft-used and misunderstood phrase crucial to our work. Strategic intelligence is the way we collect information. Unlike other forms of intelligence, such as operational or tactical, strategic intelligence does not begin by building from the bottom. Strategic intelligence deals not with secrets but with political, economic, military and cultural forces that are visible to the naked eye. The challenge of strategic intelligence is to both see and understand the obvious. Learning to believe what you see – however preposterous it may appear – is far more difficult than it sounds.

The purpose of detailed intelligence is to destroy or change the Model. The Model's danger is that it becomes a totem, worshipped

by all. The purpose of detailed intelligence is to force us to adjust or abandon the Model.

To return to our initial question: What matters ultimately is the condition of the Model. We are continually writing updates to the Model that confirm or falsify it, and in the latter case, we make adjustments and explain why. Having a defined view of the most important processes changing the world, we produce updates (not articles or stories but analysis) that focus on these areas. We also constantly search the rest of the world for areas of potential significance, or for things that we may have missed.

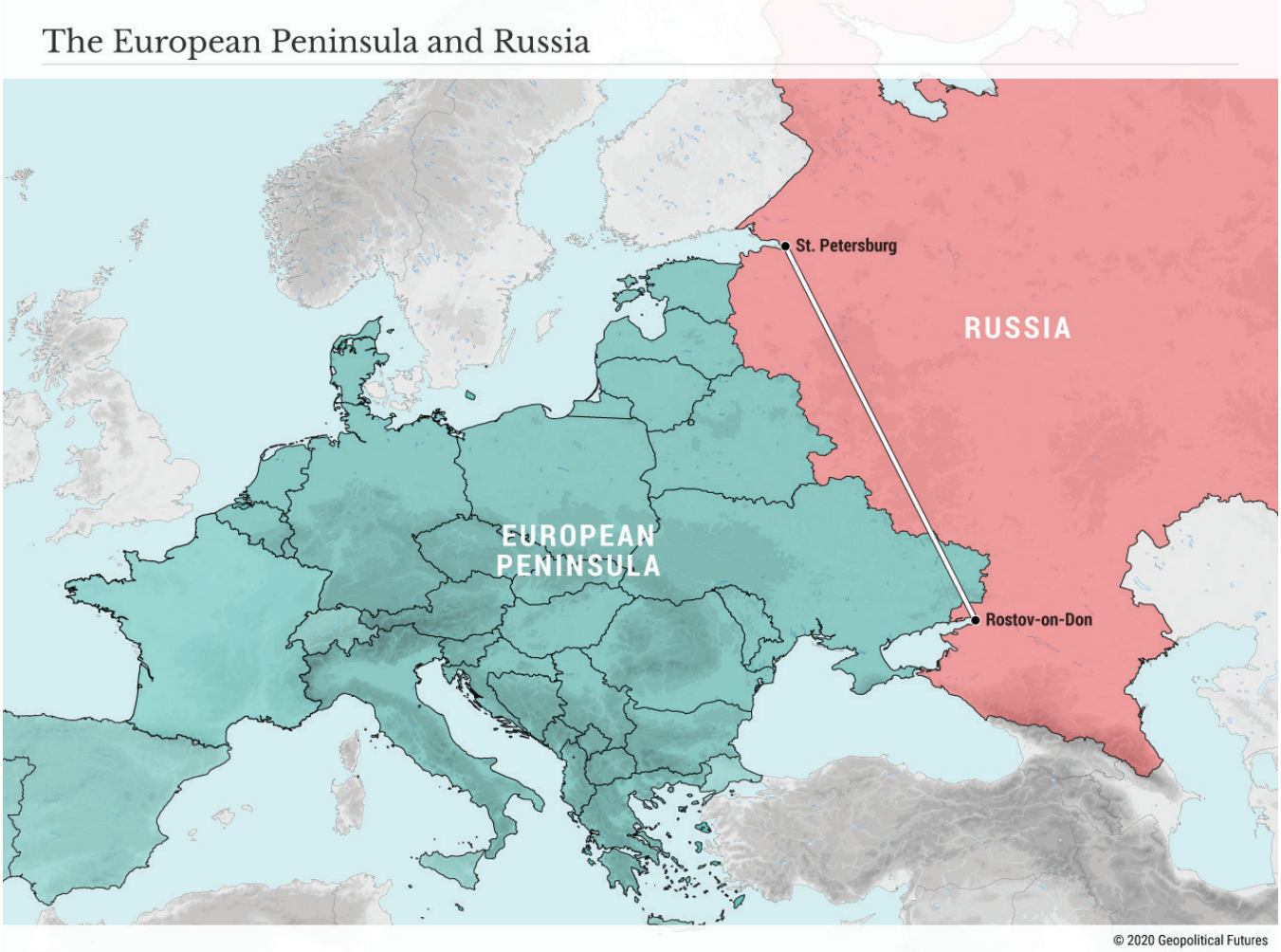
So, if you read our Forecasts and Assessments, you will understand the Model. Then, if you read our Analyses – our updates on the model – you will see them evolve. Most things in the world don't matter and sometimes several days go by without impacting the Model. Those events or processes that affect the world as expressed in the Model are what matter.

Mapping Russia's Strategy

Feb. 1, 2016

There is an old adage, "A picture is worth a thousand words." In geopolitics, this is especially so, but the pictures in this case are actually maps. Many people think of maps in terms of their basic purpose, showing a country's geography and topography. But maps can speak to all dimensions—political, military, and economic—and are an elemental place to start thinking about a country's strategy… revealing factors that are otherwise not obvious. Sometimes a single map can reveal the most important thing about a country.

One of the keys to understanding Russia's strategy is to look at its position relative to the rest of Europe. The European Peninsula is sur-



rounded on three sides by the Baltic and North Seas, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The easternmost limit of the peninsula extends from the eastern tip of the Baltic Sea south to the Black Sea. In the map above, this division is indicated by the line from St. Petersburg to Rostov-on-Don.

This line also roughly defines the eastern boundaries of the Baltic states—Belarus and Ukraine. These countries are the eastern edge of the European Peninsula. Hardly any part of Europe is more than 400 miles from the sea, and most of Europe is less than 300 miles away. Much of Russia, on the other hand, is effectively landlocked. The Arctic Ocean is far away from Russia's population centers, and the few ports that do exist are mostly unusable in the winter.

Russia's access to the world's oceans, aside from the Arctic, is also limited. What access it does have is blocked by other countries.

European Russia has three potential points from which to access global maritime trade. One is through the Black Sea and the Bosporus, a narrow waterway controlled by Turkey that can easily be closed to Russia. Another is from St. Petersburg, where ships can sail through Danish waters, but this passageway can also be easily blocked. The third is the long Artic Ocean route, starting from Murmansk and then extending through the gaps between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom.

During the Cold War, air bases in Norway, Scotland, and Iceland, coupled with carrier battle groups, worked to deny Russia access to the sea. This demonstrates the vulnerability Russia faces due to its lack of access to oceans and waterways. It also reveals why Russia is, for all intents and purposes, a landlocked country.

A country's access to the sea can greatly influence its economic and political strength. Thucydides distinguished between Athens and Sparta by pointing out that Athens was close to the sea and had an excellent port, Piraeus. Sparta, on the other hand, was not a maritime power. Athens was much wealthier than Sparta. A maritime power can engage in international trade in a way that a landlocked power cannot. Therefore, the Athenian is wealthy, but in that wealth there are two defects. First, wealth creates luxury and luxury corrupts. Second, wider experience in the world creates moral ambiguity. Sparta enjoyed far less wealth than Athens. It was not built through trade but through hard labor. And thus, it did not know the world, but instead had a simple and robust sense of right and wrong.

The struggle between strength from wealth and strength through effort has been a historical one. It can be seen in the distinction between the European Peninsula and Russia. Europe is worldly and derives great power from its wealth, but it is also prone to internecine infighting. Russia, though provincial, is more united than divided and derives power from the strength that comes from overcoming difficul-

Russia's Maritime Chokepoints

ty.

Russia's population clusters along its western border with Europe and its southern border with the Caucasus (the area between the Black Sea and Caspian Sea to the south). Siberia is lightly populated. Rivers and infrastructure flow west.

The heartland of Russian agriculture is to the southwest. Northern Russia's climate cannot sustain extensive agriculture, which makes the Russian frontier with Ukraine and the Russian frontier in the Caucasus and Central Asia vital. As with population, Russia's west and south are its most vital and productive agricultural areas.

The importance of the western and southern regions can also be seen in the country's transportation structure.

Soviet Union Population Density

Rail transportation remains critical to Russia. Observe how it is oriented toward the west and the former Soviet republics. Again, the focus is the west and south—only two rail lines link European Russia to Russia's Pacific maritime region, and most of Siberia is outside the range of transport.

These three maps show a basic internal pattern for Russia. The primary focus and vulnerability of Russia is in the west… with a secondary interest in the Caucasus. Siberia looms large on a map, but most of it is minimally populated and of little value strategically.

The first of the three maps above shows that the current western border of Russia coincides with the base of the European Peninsula. The other maps show that population, agriculture, and transportation are located along the western border (with a secondary cluster in the Caucasus). This area is the Russian core, and all other areas eastward in Asia represent the periphery.

Russia is in a geographically vulnerable position; its core is inherently landlocked, and the choke points that its ships would have to tra-

Russian Agricultural Areas

Source: International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis

Graphic redesign by Geopolitical Futures

verse to gain access to oceans could be easily cut off. Therefore, Russia can't be Athens. It must be Sparta, and that means it must be a land power and assume the cultural character of a Spartan nation. Russia must have tough if not sophisticated troops fighting ground wars. It must also be able to produce enough wealth to sustain its military as well as provide a reasonable standard of living for its people—but Russia will not be able to match Europe in this regard.

So it isn't prosperity that binds the country together, but a shared idealized vision of and loyalty toward Mother Russia. And in this sense, there is a deep chasm between both Europe and the United States (which use prosperity as a justification for loyalty) and Russia (for whom loyalty derives from the power of the state and the inherent definition of being Russian). This support for the Russian nation remains powerful, despite the existence of diverse ethnic groups throughout the country.

As a land power, Russia is inherently vulnerable. It sits on the European plain with few natural barriers to stop an enemy coming from the west. East of the Carpathian Mountains, the

Russian Railroads

plain pivots southward, and the door to Russia opens. In addition, Russia has few rivers, which makes internal transport difficult and further reduces economic efficiency. What agricultural output there is must be transported to markets, and that means the transport system must function well. And with so much of its economic activity located close to the border, and so few natural barriers, Russia is at risk.

It should be no surprise then that Russia's national strategy is to move its frontier as far west as possible. The first tier of countries on the European Peninsula's eastern edge—the Baltics, Belarus, and Ukraine—provide depth from which Russia can protect itself, and also provide additional economic opportunities. Consider Russia's position in 1914, just before World War I began.

Russia had absorbed the first tier completely and some of the second tier countries, such as present-day Poland and Romania. Its control over the bulk of Poland was particularly significant. When Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire attacked Russia in 1914, the depth this buffer gave the Russians allowed them to resist without the fight extending into Russia itself until 1917.

In 1941, when Germany again attacked Russia, its penetration was more extreme. This next

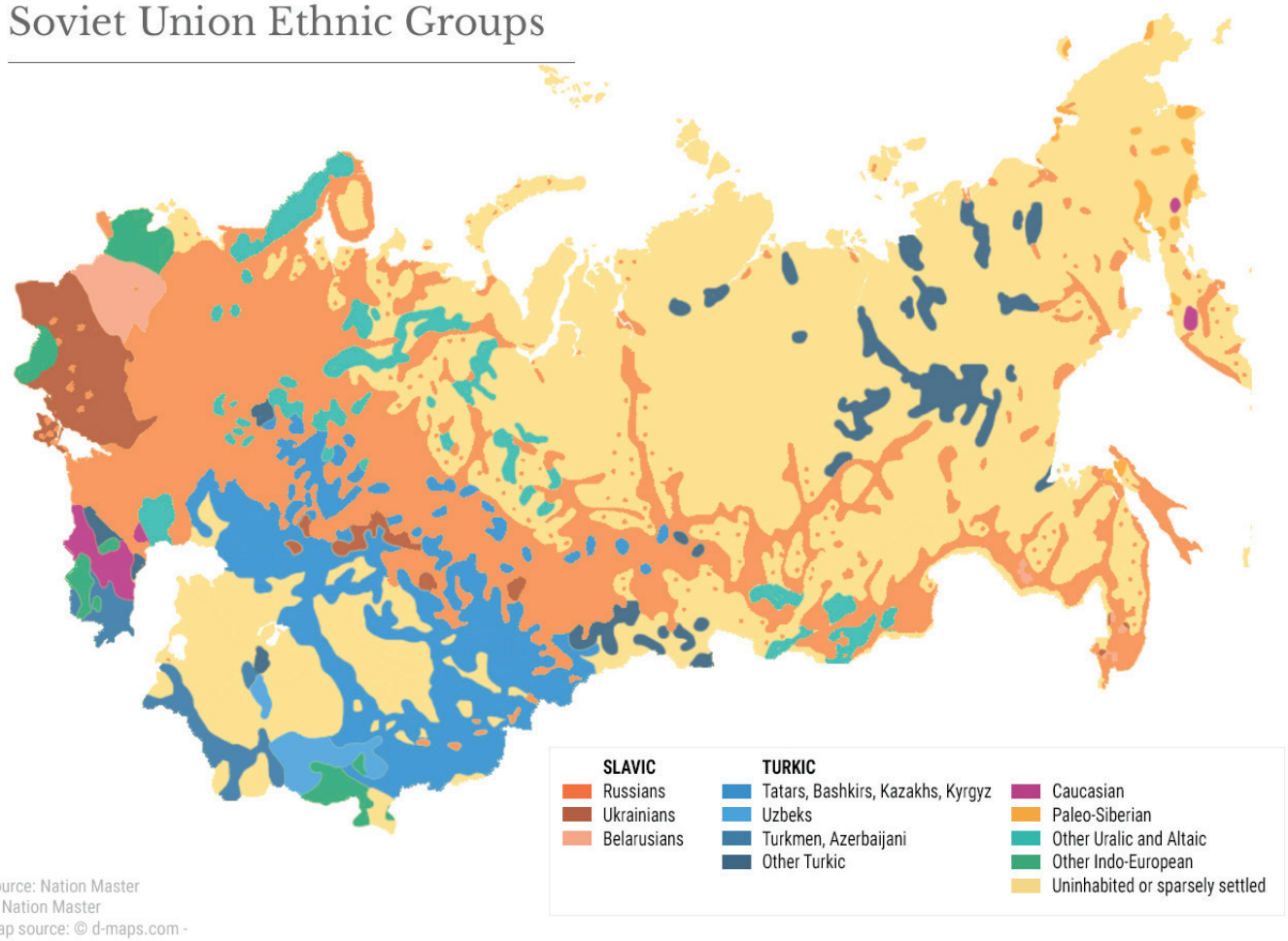
map shows the extent of the advance. Germany held all of this territory at one point but not all at the same time.

The Germans seized almost all of the European Peninsula and, in their final thrust, moved east and south into the Caucasus. Ultimately, Russia defeated Germany through depth and the toughness of its troops. The former exhausted the Germans, and the latter imposed a war of attrition that broke them. If the Russians didn't have that strategic depth, they would have lost the war.

Therefore, the Russian strategy at the close of World War II was to push its frontiers as far west as possible.

This was the furthest Russia extended—and it ultimately broke the Soviet Union. Russia had seized the first tier of countries—the Baltics, Belarus, and Ukraine – and pushed westward seizing the second tier, as well as the eastern half of Germany.

The ideal position of Russia posed an existential threat to the rest of Europe. The Europeans and the US had two advantages. They had a



Source: Nation Master
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Map source: © d-maps.com - http://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4262&lang=en

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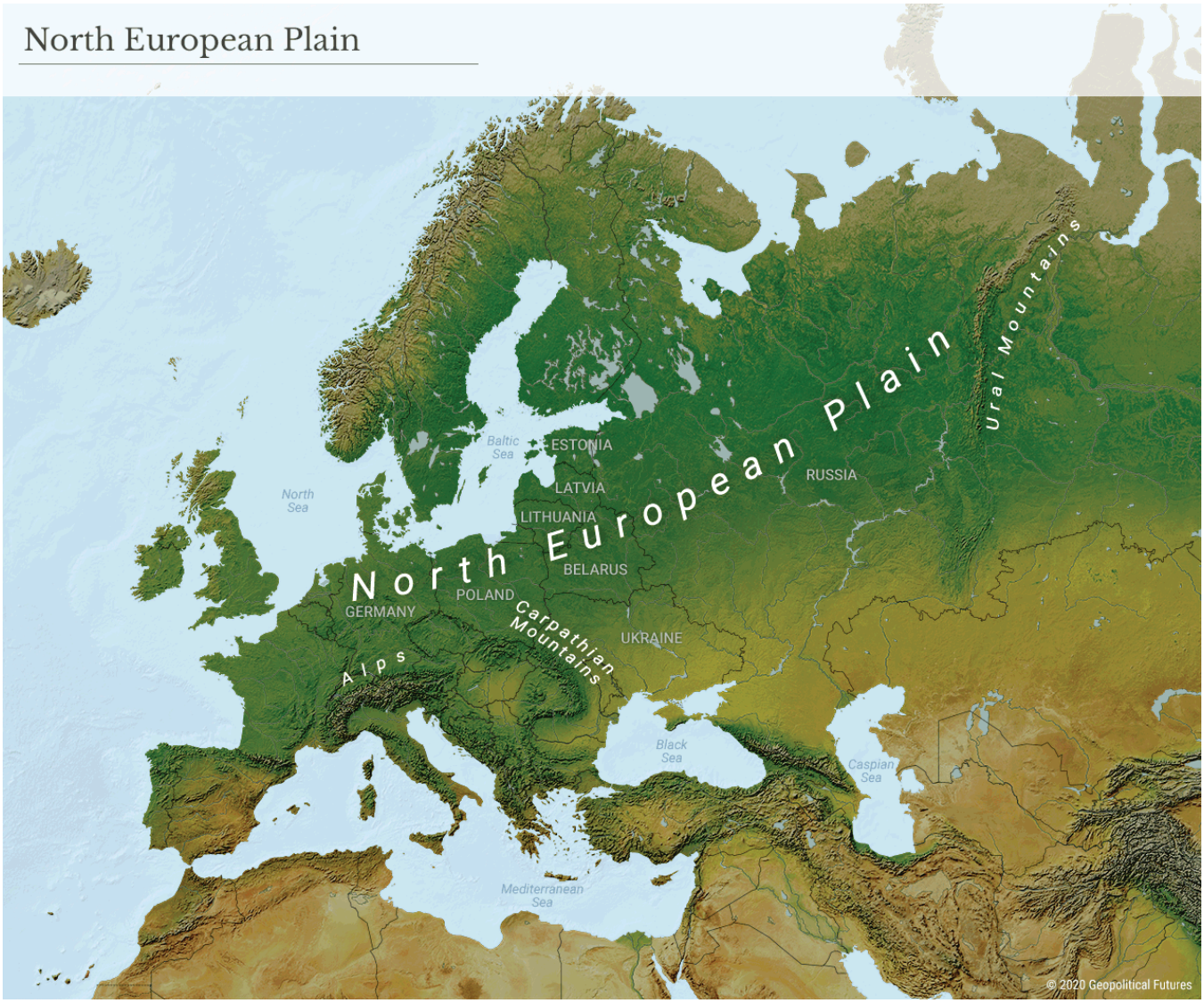


broad encirclement of Russia and could close its access to the sea when they wished. But more important, they created a maritime trading block that generated massive wealth compared to the Soviet alliance (dragged down as it was by landlocked Russia). The arms race that resulted was a minor strain on the West but created an insurmountable cost to Russia. When oil prices fell in the 1980s, the Russians could not sustain the decline of revenue. This crippled the Soviet Union.

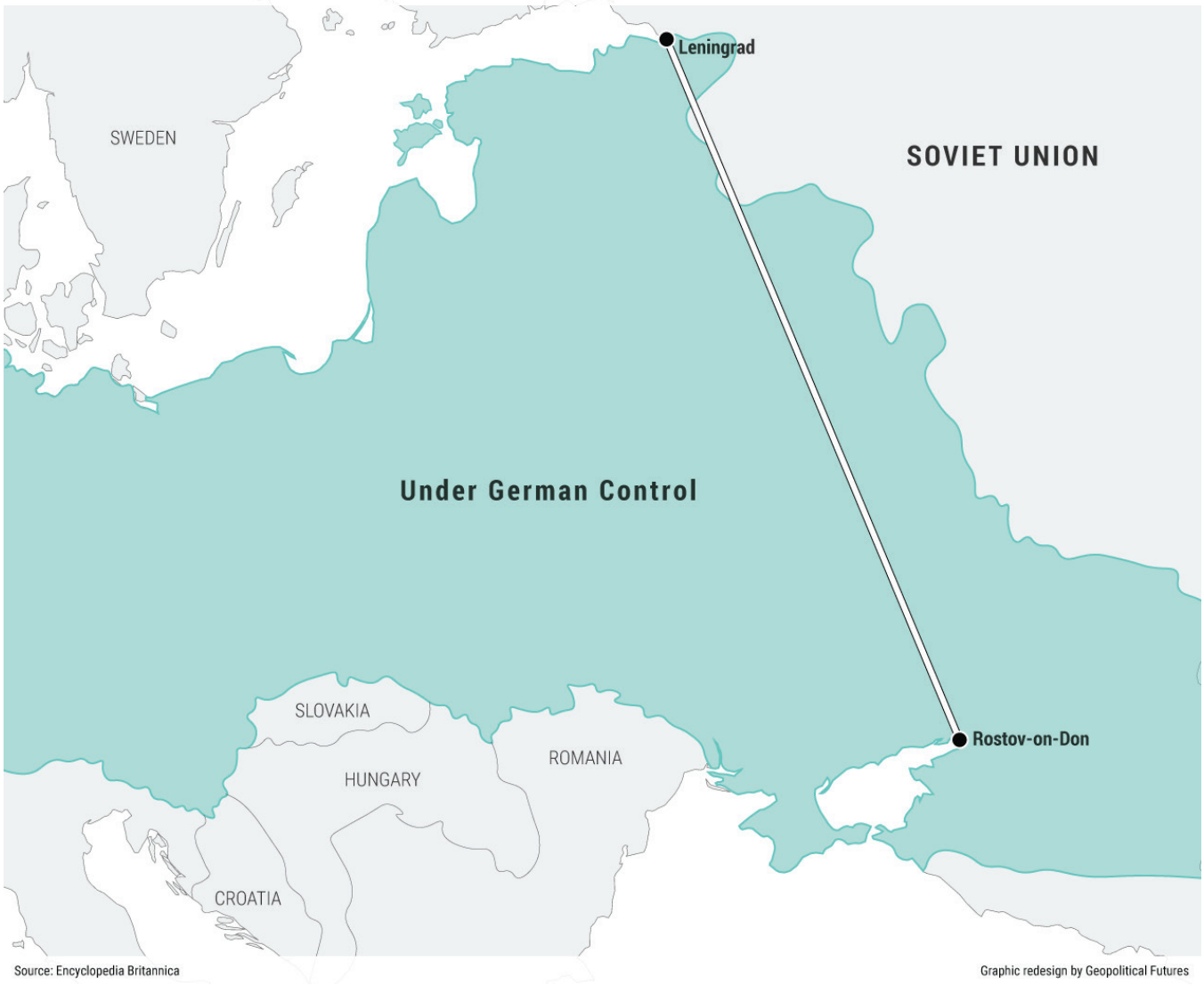
Returning to the first map, the retreat of Russian forces back to the line separating the country from the European Peninsula was unprecedented. Since the 18th century, Russia controlled the first tier of the peninsula. After 1991, it lost control of both tiers. Russia's border had not been that close to Moscow in a very long time. The West absorbed the Baltics into NATO, bringing St. Petersburg within a hundred miles of a NATO country. There was nothing that the Russians could do about that. Instead, they concentrated on stabilizing the situation—

from their point of view, this involved fighting Chechen insurgents on their side of the frontier, intervening in Georgia, sending troops to Armenia, and so on.

But as you can tell from these maps, the key country for Russia after 1991 was Ukraine. The Baltics were beyond reach for now, and Belarus had a pro-Russian government. But either way, Ukraine was the key, because the Ukrainian border went through the agricultural heartland of Russia, as well as large population centers and transportation networks. This was one of the reasons the Germans in World War II pushed to, and beyond, the Ukrainian border to reach Russia.

With regard to the current battle over Ukraine, the Russians have to assume that the Euro-American interest in creating a pro-Western regime has a purpose beyond Ukraine. From the Russian point of view, not only have they lost a critical buffer zone, but Ukrainian forces hostile to Russia have moved toward the Rus-

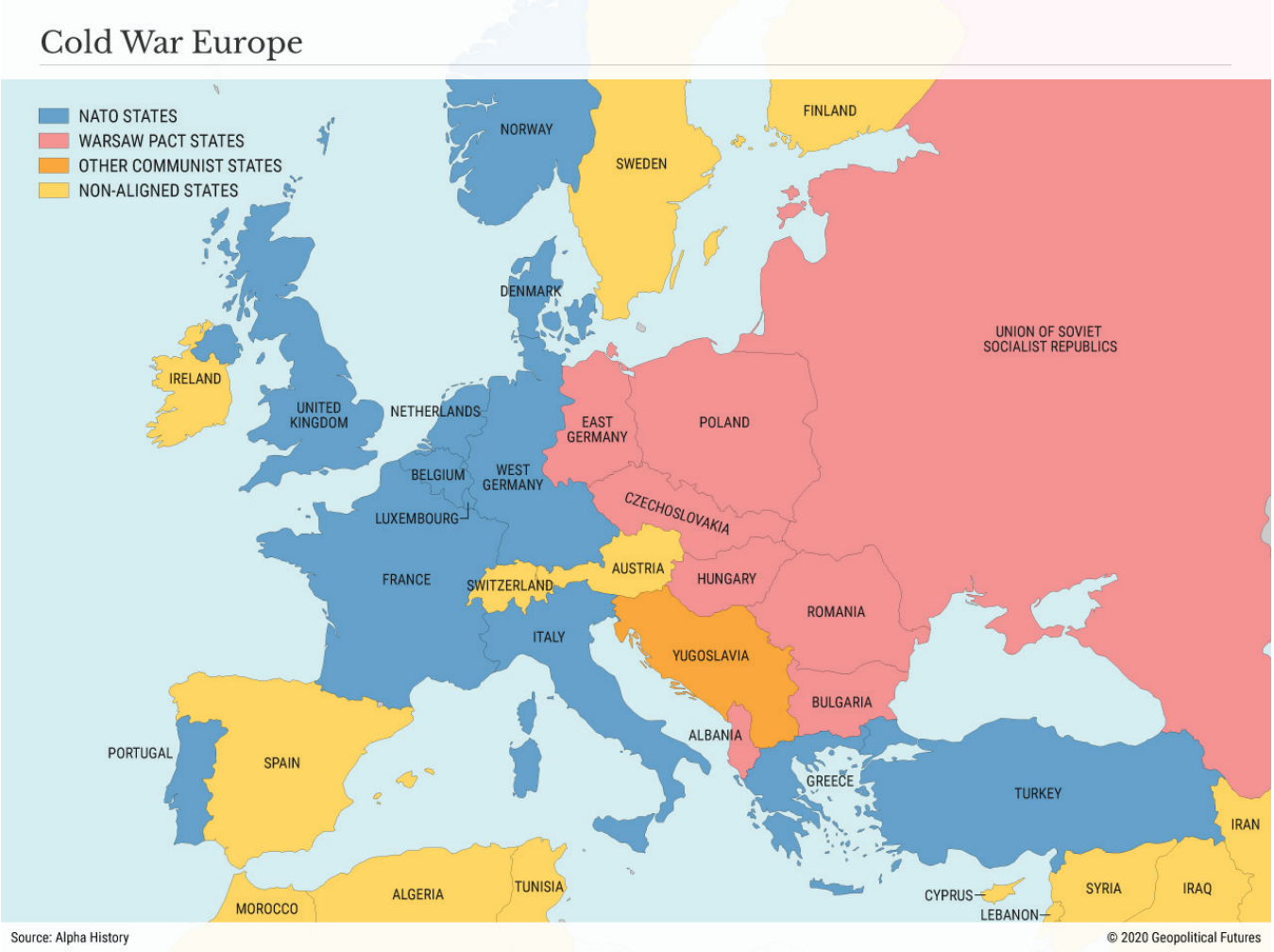
Farthest German Advance, 1942



sian border. It should be noted that the area that the Russians defend most heavily is the area just west of the Russian border, buying as much space as they can.

The fact that this scenario leaves Russia in a precarious position means that the Russians are unlikely to leave the Ukrainian question where it is. Russia does not have the option of assuming that the West's interest in the region comes from good intentions. At the same time, the West cannot assume that Russia—if it reclaims Ukraine—will stop there. Therefore, we are in the classic case where two forces assume the worst about each other. But Russia occupies the weaker position, having lost the first tier of the European Peninsula. It is struggling to maintain the physical integrity of the Motherland.

Russia does not have the ability to project significant force because its naval force is bot-



tled up and because you cannot support major forces from the air alone. Although it became involved in the Syrian conflict to demonstrate its military capabilities and gain leverage with the West, this operation is peripheral to Russia's main interests. The primary issue is the western frontier and Ukraine. In the south, the focus is on the Caucasus.

It is clear that Russia's economy, based as it is on energy exports, is in serious trouble given the plummeting price of oil in the past year and a half. But Russia has always been in serious economic trouble. Its economy was catastrophic prior to World War II, but it won the war anyway… at a cost that few other countries could bear. Russia may be a landlocked and poor country, but it can nonetheless raise an army of loyal Spartans. Europe is wealthy and sophisticated, but its soldiers have complex souls. As for the Americans, they are far away and may choose not to get involved. This gives the Russians an opportunity. However bad their economy is at the moment, the simplicity of their geographic position in all respects gives them capabilities that can surprise their opponents and perhaps even make the Russians more dangerous.

In Canada, Deep Divisions Brilliantly Managed

September 13, 2017

I spent the past two weeks in Canada, north of a town called Nelson in British Columbia. One evening, while nearing sleep, I heard a rumbling that sounded like a train. In the morning, I woke and people were talking about an enormous fireball that had passed overhead. The rumbling had been the result a meteor crashing to Earth.

A bit later, I headed out for a hike. The country north of Nelson was beautiful and very lightly inhabited. That morning it was covered with what seemed like a thick and eerie mist. It was in fact the result of massive forest fires that had ravaged British Columbia.

Where I was, I had a sense of both extremes that nature presents in Canada and also its loneliness. A meteor could fall and not disturb anyone. I had been to Canada many times before, but always in the south. Here I got a sense of loneliness that I had never quite experienced in the United States. The roads were sparse, as were the people. It was that loneliness amid beauty that riveted me. I have, of course, visited most major Canadian cities and they are simply cities, as inviting and confining as most. Obviously, every country has the paradox between the rural and urban, but the first thing you notice about Canada is the profound division between human life and the absolute solitude of most of the country.

A Country Is Its People

Canada is the second largest country in the world, larger than China and the United States. But as has been frequently said, a country is its people. If Canada were reduced only to its populated areas, it would be a much smaller country. It would be a narrow strip bordering the United States, stretching unevenly from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The widest point of Canada would be 420 miles in Alberta. The narrowest point would run only a few miles from the border. Most important, the country would be divided into its eastern and western parts, separated by 400 miles of sparsely populated land.

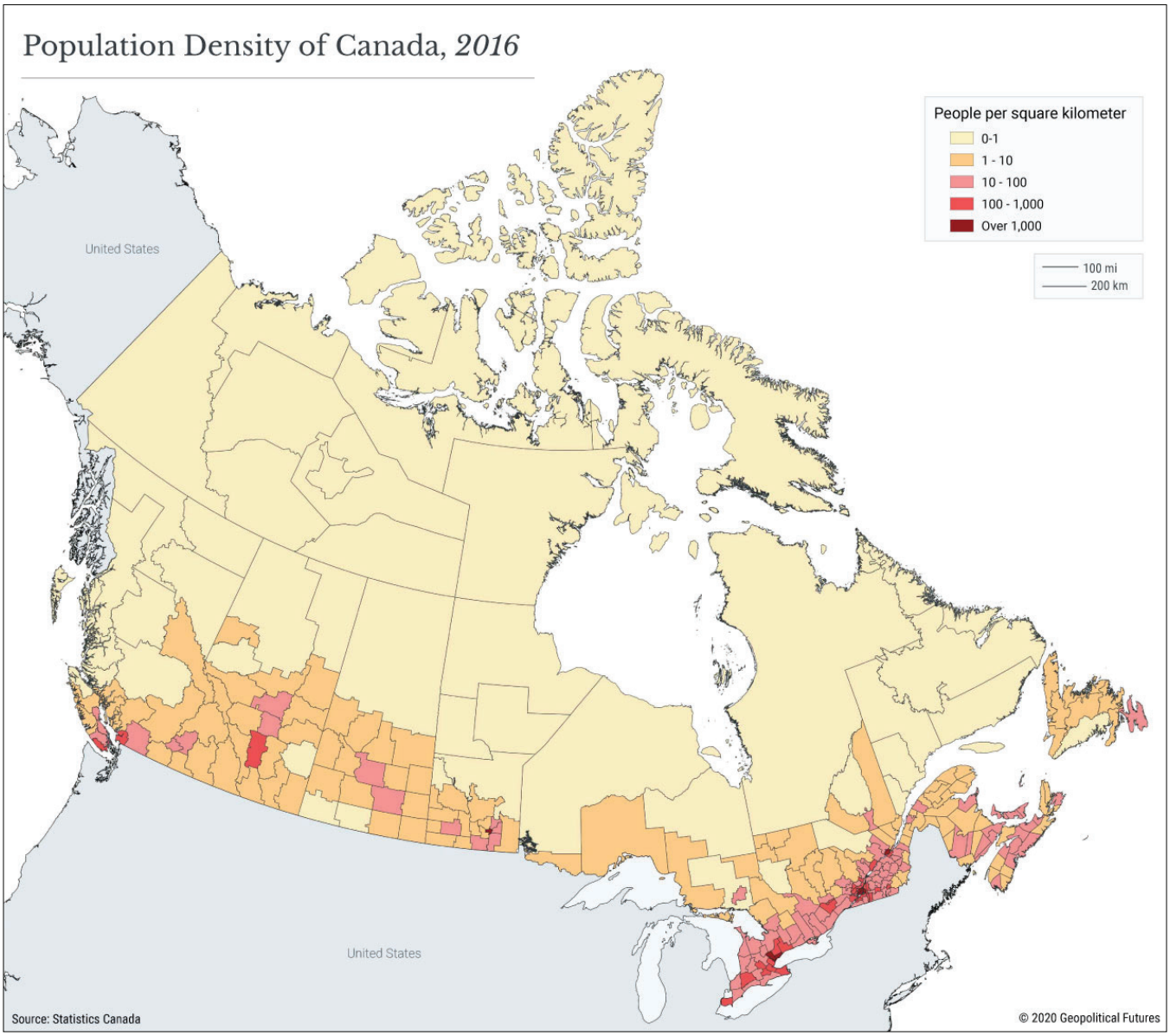
From this perspective, there are two Canadas. Eastern Canada runs from the base of southern Ontario northeast along the U.S. border and St. Lawrence River. It extends into Nova Scotia and as for north as Newfoundland. This is the most densely populated area in the country, with the population concentrated in cities like

Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax.

The second Canada runs through Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and into British Columbia. Its northern border extends in a diagonal line westward until the structure collapses west of Edmonton. The population here is also concentrated along the U.S. border but also runs north in a narrow line toward western and central British Columbia, finding an anchor in Vancouver.

The eastern segment of Canada was the area first settled and fought over by the English and French. It has vast areas of farmland, with a social structure similar to the American upper Midwest.

The western segment was settled later. It also has extensive farmland, but extractive industries are a key part of the economy here. The



area on the map that shows a major surge in population toward Edmonton is where energy resources are pulled from the earth. This region has long prospered drilling and mining. So, for example, the pattern of population distribution in British Columbia is a remnant of similar activity.

Culturally and economically, some of these western regions have more in common with parts of the U.S. than they do with other parts of Canada. Vancouver is far more in tune with Seattle than it is with Alberta; Alberta has more in common with Texas than it has with Manitoba and Saskatchewan; and Manitoba and Saskatchewan have more in common with their southern neighbors than they do with Ottawa. Culture and economy are determined by the ground a society rests on, and the land in Western Canada links it to the United States more than to other Canadian provinces.

The eastern population bloc also has internal variations in culture and economy, but it's less culturally linked to the United States. There are three parts of the bloc: the Maritime region, Quebec and Ontario. Quebec is differentiated from the other two regions by language and culture. It has historically been the least comfortable in Canada, and Canada with it. The two English-speaking areas are also wildly different from each other. The maritime region is the poorest in Canada, its economy still rooted heavily in traditional and declining activities like fishing. Ontario, built around Toronto and Ottawa, has the most modern and self-sustained culture of the group.

These profound differences between the provinces have resulted in division within Canadian society. In Quebec, there was a serious movement for secession just two decades ago. Today, when I visit Alberta, I hear occasional talk, mostly wistful, about secession and joining the United States. In British Columbia, the differences with Calgary's culture are openly discussed and the disdain for its Texas-style culture is clear. There is a general disdain for the Maritime provinces, seen as poor and backward in the eyes of many.

A 'Nice' Approach to Foreign Policy

Such diverging economic interests and cultural perspectives have torn other countries apart. Reconciling the interests of places as diverse as Calgary, Quebec and Nova Scotia is difficult to imagine. They are too different in every sense to feel part of a single country. Canada's founders understood this. In a country this diverse, any unity beyond confederation is impossible.

Canada manages this tension in an interesting way. Calling Canadians "nice" is commonplace, but it's also symbolic of Canada's approach to coping with this divide. Canada cannot afford to confront its diversity. Different parts of the country look at the world in very different ways, and attempts to delegitimize these interests and values would have explosive effects if pressed to the extreme. There is an unspoken

agreement not to understate the differences, and to avoid confronting the tension underlying the country.

We see this in foreign policy as well. Given its proximity to the U.S., the heart of any Canadian foreign policy must pivot around the United States. There are issues with this but the relative weight of the two countries make accommodation difficult to avoid. As to its broader foreign policy, if consensus can't be reached, no region can be pushed to an impossible point. An aggressive foreign policy would be risky. Canada must therefore establish a nonassertive foreign policy. I do not mean this ironically, but this is a "nice" foreign policy. It is not that Canada is weak. Others are weaker. It is that creating internal stress in Canada would be dangerous.

Canada has built a brilliant strategy recognizing, even respecting, regional differences. And so it is that Canada pursues an imperative it has no choice but to pursue. Underneath the comity of Canada, there is a frailty that would not withstand excessive pressure. This is therefore a nation that will survive by brilliantly balancing forces that would ruin other countries.

Differences can be managed; they can't be controlled. We see this caution particularly in Canada's foreign policy. There is a perpetual tension that is managed by asking less of regions than other countries might. Its modest foreign policy therefore is seen by Canadians as a virtue. It is in fact a virtuous necessity.

The Geopolitics of Britain

March 14, 2018

The fundamental problem for Britain has always been continental Europe. The danger to Britain was that a single, powerful entity would arise that could do two things. First, it could ally with the Scottish elite to wage war against England on land. Second, it could build a naval force that could defeat the British navy and land an invading force along the English shore of the Channel. The Romans did this, as did the Normans.

Successive powers arose in Europe that saw an opportunity to defeat England and later Britain. The Spaniards attempted an invasion in the 16th century; the French in the 19th century; the Germans in the 20th century. Each was defeated by treacherous waters and the Royal Navy. Many other potential invasions were never launched because the navies didn't exist. They didn't exist because of the British grand strategy, the core of which was that the nearest landmass, continental Europe, would always place Britain at a demographic disadvantage in a war. The population of Europe was the base of armies vastly larger than that which Britain could field. Therefore, the central strategy was to prevent such a force from landing in Britain.

Building a naval force able to challenge the British was enormously expensive. Only a very wealthy country could afford it, but very wealthy countries lacked the appetite. Other countries, seeking to increase their wealth, competed with other aspiring countries, diverting resources to land-based forces and making it impossible to build navies. The fact that the continent was fragmented first between kings and emperors, and later between nation-states, was Britain's primary line of defense. The wealthiest nations were constantly fending off attacks from neighbors, while the poorer countries plotted strategies for enhancing their position through war. As a result, there were a succession of great continental powers: Spain, the Netherlands, France and Germany. None was strong enough for long enough to divert resources to taking Britain.

The Grand Strategy

British grand strategy, therefore, is to maintain a large naval force, but beyond that, to do what it can on the European continent to discourage hegemony on the mainland by preventing coalitions from forming, or by fomenting rivalries. In other words, the British grand strategy was constant involvement on the European continent, with the primary goal of diverting any

nation focusing on naval development. These actions could involve trade policy, supporting various dynasties or nations, using the ability to blockade, or inserting limited ground forces to support a coalition of forces. British strategy was an endless kaleidoscope of tactics, constantly shifting relationships and actions designed to secure the homeland by maintaining insecurity on the continent. Britain didn't create insecurity. That was built into the continental geopolitical system. Britain was successful at taking advantage of and nurturing the insecurity that was already there. Britain was always part of Europe, as for example its participation in the Napoleonic wars and the Congress of Vienna. At the same time, it stood

apart from Europe because its geography gave Britain another base on which to stand.

The British Empire came into being as a byproduct of this grand strategy. The various imperial naval powers that came into existence were undermined not by naval force but by land conflicts. Spain, the Netherlands and France all developed navies able to carve out empires. But diversions on the continent limited their ability to expand those empires, and drained their ability to exploit them effectively. The British, united after the early 18th century and impervious to European manipulation, were able to sustain an imperial enterprise that constantly expanded and enriched Britain.

The reality of Europe also facilitated British leadership in the Industrial Revolution. Continental manpower, resources and inventiveness were no less than those of the British. But the British had far greater security for their enterprises, less diversion to military production, and a dynamic and growing empire to support industrialization. As a result, Britain developed another powerful tool for managing the continent: exports of manufactured goods and technologies.

What ultimately undermined the British grand strategy was the unification of Germany and the rise of the United States. German unification created an industrial force that could rival Britain commercially and dominate the continent militarily. In World War I, Britain followed a strategy that flowed from its grand strategy, intervening with ground forces to block Germany from imposing a continental hegemony. The cost to Britain far outweighed expectations. The grand strategy failed Britain by forcing it into a vast land war on the continent, taking away the option of selective involvement and manipulation. Britain had to use main force, which negated its geographic advantage.

Also weakening Britain was the emergence of the United States as a power that could field a million men in Europe and create a naval force that was second only to Britain's. The truce that ended World War I did not end Britain's problems; it merely delayed them. Within two decades, a re-emergent Germany once again challenged for European hegemony, and Britain's survival become dependent on the intervention of the United States. In exchange for U.S. support in World War II, Britain all but gave up its empire when it was forced to abandon almost all of its naval bases in the Western Hemisphere in exchange for lend-lease. Having been trapped twice in the one thing she could not do — a European land war — Britain emerged hostage to the United States, now a junior member of its anti-Soviet coalition.

Crafting a New Strategy

The United States then took on the British role on a global basis. Britain was no longer the chess master, but a piece on the board — an important piece, but one that had lost its room for maneuver. Britain had to craft a new grand strategy out of the wreckage of the old. There

was, however, a core that remained in place, which was the doctrine of the balance of power. Now, instead of being the major balancing power among other nations, Britain sought to balance its own power between two more powerful entities: the United States and the Soviet Union.

Because of its new position, Britain did not have the option of isolation. Its economic system required access to markets and products, and its strategic position required leverage on the European continent. So in 1973, Britain joined the European Economic Community, and in 1991 agreed to join the European Union. Britain always resisted full integration into the EU, however. In the era after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were two poles for British strategy: Europe and the United States. Total dependence on either one could lead to disaster. Europe was led by its old nemesis Germany. The United States was a nemesis as well. Only by having relations with both could Britain hope to retain room for its own maneuver. The two wanted different things. The EU wanted a defined economic relationship with elements of a political one. The United States was open to economic relationship but particularly wanted British participation in its wars. Britain could satisfy both, cling to both poles and thereby find its own space.

The British Dilemma

The problem that Britain faces now is a European Union that doesn't resemble what the founders imagined, or what existed 10 years ago. Where it had been seen as becoming a pillar of the international system along with the United States, it has morphed into political discord and uncertainty. The United States also has internal problems that were unexpected, but not of the consequence of Europe's.

Britain's problem now is being drawn too deeply into dependency on the United States. Such dependency on any country is rarely in a nation's interest. What Brexit represents is Britain's distrust of the viability of the European system and a desire to operate independently of it. That is difficult for Britain to do, so the United States is the pole that attracts, if total independence of all coalitions is not an option — which it is not.

This is the British dilemma. The German geopolitical imperative for expansion and the American need to dominate the North Atlantic have taken the old geopolitical reality and radically shifted its grand strategy. Europe is moving toward its historic disunity and class hostility. But Britain is not in a position to manipulate that for its own security. The North Atlantic is no longer Britain's path to an empire. Depending on Europe is difficult. Relying on the United States is possible, but the U.S. is likely to once again exact a price. What that price is, however, is unclear. The only other alternative is for Britain to try to lead an alternative economic bloc out of the train wreck of Europe. As Europe's second-largest economy, this is not an impossibility.

But in the end, Britain is an island, and Scotland is restless. The Germans are united and not altogether predictable. The U.S. is both friendly and avaricious, and its tastes are fickle. Finding a balance between Europe, however fragmented, and the United States might seem to be best option, but geopolitics tends to force unexpected choices on countries. Who in 1900 would have thought that Britain would be facing the choice it is facing today? Only those who understood what Germany was and what the United States was going to become.

Germany and Russia: The Long Distance

August 22, 2018

Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel met last weekend at Meseberg, the guesthouse of the German federal government. Expectations for the meeting, on both sides, were rightfully low. But the meeting comes at a time when both the Germans and Russians are redefining their place in the international system, which for them also means redefining their own relationship. In the 20th century, shifts in the Russo-German relationship tended to have profound consequences for Europe. It's worth considering what it could mean this time.

Contemporary Europe originates in the early 1990s when the Soviet Union collapsed and the Maastricht Treaty creating the European Union went into effect. For the Germans, these two events meant that their primary interest was no longer the defense of Germany against the Soviet Union, and therefore their primary partner in said defense, the United States, was no longer central. Instead, Germany's immediate problem was the reintegration of the former German Democratic Republic. Longer term, the focus was on turning the European Economic Community into more than a free trade zone and using the new tools of solidarity to ensure German economic interests. Given the paucity of strategic threats, Germany did not require a coherent security strategy beyond maintaining the EU, and its military capabilities, substantial during the Cold War, atrophied.

Germany's relationship with Russia was primarily about access to Russian energy supplies. Since its founding, Germany has needed an industrial plant that was much larger than domestic consumption could support. Its industry allowed the German economy to surge and preserved social stability. Imperial Germany competed with the British Empire, selling to Russia, Austria-Hungary and southern Europe and buying natural resources from them. Nazi Germany attempted to create a similar structure, imposed by military force. Contemporary Germany remains dependent on imports of resources and exports of goods. The European Union is one leg of its strategy, and Russia has been another.

In the first decade after the Soviet collapse, Russia did not have a coherent strategy. It was, as a nation, in a state of shock, having freed itself from Soviet structures but having not yet built a new edifice. On the one hand, it needed economic relations with the rest of Europe.

On the other hand, it needed to secure itself against foreign threats. The Russians, like the Soviets, pursued a strategy of strategic depth. They sought a neutral or pro-Russia buffer to the west – consisting of the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine – and to the south in the North Caucasus.

The encroachment of NATO into Russia's western buffer and the South Caucasus created a strategic crisis for Russia. The development of a pro-Western government in Ukraine in 2014 was particularly alarming. To make matters worse, oil prices plummeted later in the year – a devastating development for Russia's economy, which still relies on exports of raw materials. Russia's strategic and economic position seemed to be unraveling.

The foundation of German national strategy has not quite unraveled, but it's no longer as secure as it was. The EU is fragmenting along national and class lines. It remains Germany's primary market for exports, but confidence that this will be permanent has been shaken. Now it is at odds with the United States, which is demanding more defense expenditure from Germany, along with the unstated demand that Germany take more risk alongside the United States. But the Germans have no interest in joining the U.S. in the Middle East, the South China Sea or North Korea.

Germany and Russia, then, both have problems with the global hegemon. These problems precede the Donald Trump administration and go deeper than politics and diplomacy. For Germany, the U.S. constantly wants to divert it from its primary interest (the EU) and creates regional friction – with Russia, for example. And for Russia, the Americans are extending their sphere of influence, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, with no visible motive except to threaten Russia's security.

At the same time, Germany and Russia see potential benefits from cooperation. Germany's economic and regional interests require oil and gas, which Russia has. Russia's economic development requires foreign investment and technology, which Germany has. This is familiar ground. Germany and Russia explored cooperation between 1871 and 1914. Between the two world wars, Russia provided Germany with military assistance, allowing it to evade the Treaty of Versailles. From 1939 to 1941, they were bound by treaty and jointly participated in the invasion of Poland. Of course, both periods ended disastrously. In World War I, Imperial Germany devastated Imperial Russia. Similarly, despite the military assistance (the Treaty of Rapallo) and the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, Germany invaded Russia and brutalized it again during World War II. American power in West Germany helped avert similar bloodshed during the Cold War.

In short, the history of Russo-German relations since Germany's unification in 1871 has consisted of tentative attempts at cooperation followed by catastrophic wars and near-wars. Neither country has forgotten that, but

the temptation to try again, on the assumption that this time is different, is powerful. If history is consistent, then the U.S. is indispensable. It was U.S. lend-lease and the invasion on the western front that enabled the Soviets to defeat Germany in World War II. It was the U.S. that guaranteed West Germany's security in the Cold War. Each has been, in a real sense, saved from the other by the Americans.

Of course, if this time really is different, then forming an understanding and pushing the U.S. out of the equation makes sense. But if it remains the case, as it was during the 20th century, that Russia needs buffers to its west, and Germany needs markets and resources under its control, then neither side really has a solid basis for cooperation. In that case, this looks like 1939, when the two sides signed a pact that they knew the other would betray, with the expectation that they would betray first, when the time was right. An alliance of those thinking themselves more clever than the other doesn't usually end well.

But perhaps this time is different.

Geopolitics and Necessity

February 28, 2019

I began this series with thoughts on Athens and Jerusalem not only because they were the roots of Christianity and Western civilization but because they both encountered Persia, in different ways and toward different ends. This leads me to the question: What determines the fates of nations and cities? In part, it is the question of why two proximate cities, which both uncover the principle of moral absolutes, approach those absolutes in such different ways. It also raises the fundamental question of geopolitics – that is, what makes various political entities so different, and what leads them to act as they do? These questions are extremely difficult to answer, but it is the last question that is central to geopolitics.

In all human things, there is a distinction between free will and determinism. Free will assumes that our lives are the result of our choices. Determinism assumes that, to an overwhelming degree, life is determined by forces beyond our control. Any theory of political life – or of our own lives for that matter – pivots on this distinction. There are certain things that we choose, but many of those choices are determined by the places where we are born and live. Consider an Eskimo living in the Arctic circle. Consider an Egyptian peasant born in a poor village of the Nile Delta. Consider someone born in Austin, Texas, and attending a fine private school. Each of them has limits imposed on them and opportunities given to them by place. The Austinite may reasonably dream of many things, but he may neither want nor have access to the lives of the other two. The life of the Eskimo excludes many of the Austinite's options and places those options outside his awareness. But there are other things he may dream of that others can't conceive. The Egyptian may visit Cairo and imagine many things, but his circumstances likely preclude them.

Free will exists within the framework and limits of the place you inhabit. This is not an absolute; individuals may somehow carve their way out of their matrix. But they are the outliers. When we consider the general condition of humans, their lives are constrained by the place in which they are born. Free will exists, but the menu from which we choose is determined, and, for most of us, there is no ordering outside of the menu.

The notion of free will often assumes we are free of constraints. But the reality is that our

lives are lived within constraints, limiting the options we have to make the most of what is possible. Our lives are shaped by necessity, and it is this necessity, the choices it imposes on us and the vast number of choices it precludes, that determines our lives. It is the concept of necessity that I am driving at and that I am applying to communities even more than to individuals.

I'm using the term "community" here to describe the wide array of political arrangements in which human beings organize themselves. There are tribes, cities, nations, empires – and within this array of groups, innumerable ways to organize them. But they all have a single characteristic: They have leaders. How leaders are selected, what power they have and how they can use it varies enormously, but in the end, all communities have leaders. The question of our personal free will and necessity leads to the question at the core of geopolitics. To what extent does the nature and will of the leader matter? Put differently, is the leader trapped in the necessity in which the nation finds itself?

Aristotle leads us to the broader point: If humans are political animals, and if, as I argued, humans do not fully rule themselves, then how can political leaders rule their communities? Are leaders simply agents of a necessity imposed on them by the circumstances of their communities, or are they free to take their communities where their wisdom leads? Do political leaders matter, and is the political process of a nation so shaped by circumstance that it can do nothing other than what it is doing? To what extent did Solomon craft Israel's policy, and to what extent did he simply execute a policy imposed on him by the circumstance in which Israel found itself?

Geopolitics is founded on two assumptions. The first is that a community's location defines the community. Second, the political system, particularly the leader, is trapped within that reality, and the leader's decisions are shaped by that reality. To state it bluntly, on the most basic level, political leaders don't count.

Neither Sparta nor Athens could survive under Persian rule. The Spartans' mode of fighting, imposed by their rugged, landlocked environment, was built on infantry, and the infantry was the heart of the state. The Persians were attacking Sparta through hills and chokepoints. Spartan infantry had to resist the Persians at a chokepoint to buy time. Athens was a maritime city and, as such, a naval power. Persia was attacking by land but supplying and reinforcing its army by sea. Therefore, Athens had to engage and defeat the Persians at sea. Sparta's moral code was based on its strategic necessity: an infantry force honed from birth. Athens' moral code was far subtler and more nuanced, as befits a great port city. And its navy, manned by men of complex values, was a superb instrument of war.

Success was not guaranteed. But the strategy was built into the geography – as were the ca-

pabilities of each city and a culture that aligned with their strategy. Leadership may have been needed because political rhetoric takes a community to a necessary war. But there were no strategic decisions to be made. No one who would have chosen a different course could have risen to the leadership of either city. Victory was not certain, but the strategy arose from necessity.

Consider Israel's national strategy, which has been the same since antiquity and is comprised of four pillars. First, maintain the unity of Israel. Second, defend the Jordan River line against Babylon or Persia. Third, block Egypt by controlling the coastal road and engaging in the Negev Desert when needed. Finally, hold the Sea of Galilee to prevent the forces of Phoenician cities from heading south. Israel was only occasionally robust enough to pursue all these imperatives. And given the multiple enemies it had has and its long defensive lines, the more ambitious the state, the more widely its forces were dispersed. But for a nation situated where Israel is, this was the strategy it had to pursue. And Israeli culture stemmed from it: It encouraged maximum wealth while maintaining a substantial military reserve. Leaders would have little alternative.

Of course, I am focusing here on military matters, rather than more complex economic and political issues. But when we eliminate those we call "decision-makers," we find that the choices are few, and the decisions dictated. The obsession with the personality of leaders is natural. Leaders are the totems that comfort or frighten a nation. But rulers are forged through a national culture born of necessity; by the time they lead, they have been trained to understand the necessity, and they are constrained by reality.

This is a radical argument, and it touches on Karl Marx's argument that the course of history was set, and ideology and leaders were mere "superstructures." (He derived that idea from Georg Hegel, upon whom I also depend.) But Marx argued that class was the fundamental division in human history. I am arguing that it is the nation that matters today. In the wars of the 20th century, the proletariat and bourgeoisie remained committed to their nations. Marx understood necessity, but not, in my opinion, the nature of community.

And that requires thought on the nature of the nation – a fragment from the heart of geopolitics and political philosophy as well. Is it possible to think of a human being outside the context of a political community?

From the Intermarium to the Three Seas

July 7, 2017

The Intermarium is a concept – really, an eventuality – that I have spoken about for nearly a decade. I predicted it would rise after Russia inevitably re-emerged as a major regional power. Which makes sense, considering it would comprise the former Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe: the Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and possibly Bulgaria. Its purpose would be to contain any potential Russian move to the west. The United States would support it. The rest of Europe would agonize over it. What was once inevitable may soon be here.

Challenges, Intentional or Otherwise

The two foundations of the Intermarium (now

Intermarium Countries

frequently referred to as such in the region) are Poland and Romania, which have developed close military ties. The Baltics are already involved. The major holdout, unsurprisingly, has been Hungary, which has had to court Russia and the United States at the same time. But there are strong signals that Hungary is prepared to join. The government recently announced that it would join a Black Sea military exercise with Romania and Bulgaria – an annual exercise in which Hungary has never before participated. If this happens, then an eastern flank of the European Peninsula will have a cohesive group, backed by the global power, forming a line of demarcation between Russia and the rest of Europe.

Some are understandably worried about its formation. Few in Europe want to revert to Cold War politics; most Europeans believe they can accommodate Russian interests without creating a new containment line. U.S. sponsorship, moreover, directly challenges one of Europe's most defining institutions, NATO. The Intermarium is not formally outside of NATO, but functionally it is, since NATO can't really provide military assistance without U.S. help. In a military alliance, those with militaries tend to carry more weight than those without.

It also challenges the European Union, albeit unintentionally. Most the Intermarium's members are outside the eurozone but constitute the most economically dynamic part of Europe. Eastern Europe's economies are growing, and they boast extremely well educated, highly skilled and relatively cheap laborers. The region challenges the economic status quo, represented by the hegemony of the 1950s-style corporations that dominate European economics. As NATO showed, military alliances employ the logic of economic cooperation. The Intermarium sets the stage, in my view, of a more integrated economic drive. It will be in the EU, but it will behave differently from the EU – more entrepreneurial, more closely resembling the United States. This will create stress in the EU, which does not need any more stress.

It will also necessitate political evolutions outside the EU's ideology. The governments in Poland and Hungary are anathema to the multilateral, collectivistic framework of the EU, and Brussels has criticized them accordingly. But neither Warsaw nor Budapest has given in to EU demands. The Intermarium therefore is more than a military alliance.

Map vs. Geopolitics

That the Intermarium has only recently begun to coalesce hasn't stopped it from conceptually expanding. The bloc runs from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, but its logical extension goes southwest to the Adriatic Sea. The so-called Three Seas model would add Austria, Slovenia and Croatia to the Intermarium's ranks. (And the Three Seas summit is taking place in Poland at the same time as a visit by Donald Trump. He has not rejected the idea of the Intermarium.)

The extension is explained in part by the growth of Turkey. There is no question that Turkey will become a major regional power. When it has been powerful in the past, its influence has reached the Balkans and, in more extreme cases, to Budapest and Vienna. The countries of Eastern Europe are particularly concerned with immigration, an issue that Turkey naturally abuts. But Turkish power is a deeper concern, and if Ankara realizes its potential, the Intermarium will have to block not just Russia but Turkey too.

The extension is also explained by nostalgia for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a significant multinational success that united small countries and largely gave them a degree of autonomy. Many believe the EU, which proved incapable of managing Europe after the 2008 crisis, encroaches on national self-determination just as much as the empire did. By expanding to Austria, Croatia and Slovenia, the old empire is recreated, if only in a geographic sense.

The Intermarium is just an idea, a vehicle for regional cooperation. It is not an alliance, at least not right now. But as conceived it is meant to evolve, and its evolution creates some problems. Multinational institutions are difficult to create. They require time, money and political will, and rarely do members have the same of any of these as the others.

Another problem is timing. Russia is a threat now, albeit a mild one, considering the state of the Russian economy. Turkey, meanwhile, is not a threat at all. Once it becomes a regional power it will project its power into the Balkans, but that's a long way off. Sequence is important, and the Three Seas expansion is a little premature.

Last, the inclusion of Balkan countries changes the Intermarium's complexion. Adding Slovenia and Croatia will alarm the Balkan Peninsula's largest power, Serbia, historically a dangerous thing to do. (Croatia and Serbia have fought many wars over the years, most recently in the 1990s.) Drawing the members of the Intermarium into Balkan conflicts creates a drain on resources and a potential loss of popular support. The bloc may separate Turkey from the rest of Europe, but it also encourages Serbia, already close to Russia, to pull closer to Turkey. The geopolitics and the map work against each other. If this expansion is to take place, and in due course it likely will, then Serbia must be brought into the fold. Otherwise, the danger of Turkey is enhanced, not mitigated. Even then, we should remember that Serbia did not get along with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and if the Intermarium bears its likeness, it could create problems down the road. (It's also worth noting that Austria's comparative affluence changes the dynamics too.)

One of the failures of the EU was its casual expansion without careful consideration of how new countries could work with older members in times of economic duress. The impulse to expand has been one of the EU's greatest mistakes. Expansion is fine, but history shows that

it has to be systematic and thoughtful. Disciplining intentions is the hardest of things.

Belarus Holds the Line

December 18, 2017

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on Dec. 15 praised his country's intelligence and security service, the KGB, during a ceremony marking the 100th year of the state security bodies. Lukashenko, who has led Belarus since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has kept the country as close to a Soviet-style republic as possible. (He even let the state security service keep its Soviet name.) And despite most expectations, Belarus' only post-Soviet president has kept the country stable.

Russia's Buffer

What Belarus does or doesn't do is mostly of little importance, but it's stability matters a great deal for relations between Russia and the West. From the time of the czars to today, Russia has counted on several states to its west to serve as a buffer between it and other European powers. This buffer has consisted of the three Baltic states, Ukraine, and between them, Belarus. The buffer dramatically increased the distances that invaders had to travel to take Moscow or the agricultural, industrial and military resources to the south. It enabled the Russians to fend off invasions by organizationally and technically superior enemies. Recent history is rife with such invasions. In the 18th century, Sweden and Russia fought multiple wars. In the 19th century, the French invaded. In the 20th century, Germany invaded – twice. The threat of invasion is not theoretical to the Russians; it happens frequently enough that preparing for it is the centerpiece of Russian national strategy. The buffer is where the Russians absorb, exhaust and ultimately defeat their attackers.

In 2004, after the Cold War had ended, part of the buffer dissolved when the Baltics were admitted into NATO. The distance from NATO forces to St. Petersburg shrank from nearly a thousand miles to less than a hundred miles. Late that year, Ukrainians rose against their pro-Russian government in the Orange Revolution – something Moscow saw as a Western attempt to integrate Ukraine into NATO. It was, for all intents and purposes, a 21st-century invasion. Russia's response was an extended covert struggle for control of Ukraine, culminating in 2014 in the Euromaidan protests and civil war.

Today, Ukraine is mostly a frozen conflict. In strategic terms, the buffer has held. Ukraine has not joined NATO, nor has it strengthened

Russia's European Buffer Zone

militarily to the point of posing a danger to Russia. The Russians continue to hold Crimea, but the pro-Russian rising in eastern Ukraine has had limited success. Ukraine is far too large for Western, and particularly American, forces to threaten Russia, and from the West's point of view, the same is true of Russia. A strategically stable situation has emerged.

Tipping the Scales

Belarus can upset the entire balance. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Belarus has been generally hostile to the West and cautious toward Russia. Lukashenko has presided over an extremely repressive regime that crushed all would-be destabilizing forces, and thus has served a crucial geopolitical function. While the Baltics were siding with NATO and Ukraine's future was uncertain, he held the buffer, blocking what has historically been the main line of attack from the West toward Moscow.

This has always been a tenuous comfort to the Russians. Lukashenko personified the regime, and the health of one man is not the best hook to hang a national strategy on. In addition, from Russia's point of view, the West has probed the

possibility of overthrowing Lukashenko and replacing his regime with one that is pro-Western. Though Lukashenko has blocked these attempts, Russia remains uneasy. This year, it carried out a major military exercise in Belarus that sought to demonstrate Russia's ability to invade and take control of the country at a moment's notice.

In the West, the idea of a NATO invasion of Russia is absurd. It has neither the intent nor the ability to do that. Russia, however, knows how quickly such things can change. In 1932, Germany was the Weimar Republic, weak and incapable of posing a threat. By 1938, it was Nazi Germany, with the most capable and aggressive military in Europe. It invaded Russia three years later.

If, in an extreme scenario, Belarus were to become part of NATO, Moscow would be just 200 miles from the forward concentration of hostile troops. Smolensk, which had been in the heartland of the Soviet Union, would effectively become a border town. The entire geopolitical structure of Russia, already weakened by NATO's absorption of the Baltics and by the instability in Ukraine, would basically collapse. The buffer would be lost.

Russia can live with a neutral Ukraine, a neutral Belarus and a pro-Western Baltics. It can even live with a Western-leaning Ukraine that is not too well-armed by the West. But if Belarus tipped, it would trigger a Russian response – first a political one, then a military one. Whether Russian troops, which are already stretched thin, can carry out a complex operation in Belarus – and do so with the right amount of force – is unclear, but they would have to try. Belarus is the tipping point. Lukashenko's praise of the KGB's work represents an assurance to the Russians that he has the situation under control and a warning to the West not to intrude.

War

The World That World War II Built

May 24, 2017

On June 4-7, it will be 75 years since the Battle of Midway, the battle in which the United States won the war in the Pacific and prevented the defeat of Britain and Russia. Guadalcanal, El Alamein and Stalingrad followed, all mostly fought in the second half of 1942. Over two years of horror would remain – neither Japan nor Germany was prepared to concede the point – but the war was won by the beginning of 1943.

These were extraordinary battles in an extraordinary war. I want to devote some time this year to considering the battles on their anniversaries and, I want to try to explain how these battles were an interlocking whole – really a single, rolling, global battle that collectively decided the war. By the end of the year, my goal is to show that a single global battle, beginning at Midway and ending at Stalingrad, defined the fate of humanity.

Systemic Wars

This is not simply antiquarian interest, although surely June 1942 to February 1943 must rank with Salamis, where the Greeks stopped the Persian surge into Europe; Teutoburg, where the Germans halted the Roman advance; or Lepanto, where Christian Europe halted Muslim Ottoman expansion. These battles defined the future of a civilization; June 1942 to February 1943 defined the future of the entire world.

World War II defined the global civilization in which we now live. It ended Europe's imperial project, opened the door to American global power, created what was called the Third World and set the stage for the emergence of the Asian mainland as a significant global player. The war also bred a distrust of nationalism, gave rise to multinational institutions and turned an interest in technology into an obsession with its redemptive powers. We live in the shadow of World War II and are now in a global revolt against the world it created.

All of this must be discussed, but to understand a war, we must understand it on its own terms, its own grammar. Many talk of wars without wanting to understand their logic, from the details of an artillery barrage to the tonnage of supplies that must flow to the battlefield. War, as all things, is a matter of detail, and the detail must be framed by both the logic of a war and its purpose. World War II had a unique logic. Many Americans long for the days when Amer-

icans were united in war. They mistake World War II as the way in which Americans once fought wars, with shared values. That was never the case. The American Revolution, the Mexican-American War, of course the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War were all fought with a vocal and angry faction opposing the war while it was underway. The dissent of Vietnam or Iraq was the norm of American warfighting, and World War II (and to a lesser extent World War I) was unique in its unity. That's because it was a unique war.

I divide wars into two types: political wars, of which there are many, and systemic wars, of which there are only a handful. Political wars are those intended to achieve limited ends. The ends may be important but not existential. The loss of the war does not mean disaster for the nation. Most wars are like this, and many have idiosyncratic or diffuse ends. The Korean War was intended to demonstrate the will of the United States in resisting communism. The Vietnam War sought to shore up the U.S. position in Southeast Asia – a significant but not decisive goal – and to maintain the credibility of the U.S. commitment to the alliance system it depended on. Throughout the history of all powerful nations, political wars abound. They are frequently not intended to be won in a conventional sense but to signal resolve or achieve limited political goals. A defeat is manageable. Such wars appear frivolous and unnecessary to segments of the population and therefore breed dissent – which is tolerated, since the wars are not worth the price of silencing dissenters.

Systemic wars differ in two ways. First, avoiding them is usually not an option. Second, losing them can be catastrophic. They aren't rooted in transitory political interests but in tectonic shifts in the global system. The shifts are not driven by the intent of a nation but by the inevitable rise and decline of nations, the imbalances this creates, and the inevitable rebalancing, which frequently leads to wars. These wars are rare because tectonic shifts take a long time to occur, longer to mature, and longer still to lead to changes in power that are both widespread enough and consequential enough to end in war.

The Napoleonic Wars in Europe in the 19th century were systemic, as was the Seven Years' War in the 18th century. Mongol invasions, European imperialism and the like all were systemic events containing decisive wars. World War II was a systemic war. Some argue that it was a continuation of World War I, and in Europe this was true. But World War II was different from World War I in an important way: The Pacific war between the Japanese and Americans added a new dimension.

Rebalancing the System

Yet both world wars flowed from the rise and fall of powers. In the 19th century, three new powers began to emerge: Germany, Japan and the United States. Germany destabilized Europe. Japan destabilized East Asia. The United

States destabilized the world. The unification of Germany in 1871 created a power of enormous economic dynamism, but one extremely vulnerable to simultaneous military attack from Russia and France and to blockade by Britain. Japan was also an economic dynamo but, bereft of natural resources, was unable to maintain its industrial base without imports of oil and other industrial minerals. Its access to these minerals depended on the willingness of suppliers to sell and ability to deliver them through waters controlled by the British and American navies. The newly emergent economic powers were both militarily insecure. This compelled them to seek a rectification of the balance of power against older and frequently weaker powers.

The rise of the United States was the most radical shift. The U.S. had become the leading economic power in the world in a startlingly short time. The United States' only vulnerability was from the sea, and the major naval powers were the British and Japanese. The United States constructed a massive navy in response, which unsettle the Japanese in the extreme and made the British uneasy. But behind this was a fundamental reality. The European empires, and particularly the British, were built on a balance of power that was no longer in place. The existing system didn't make room for the Germans and Japanese, but it also had no place for the Americans. The Americans did not seek formal empire, but they rejected the idea that they should be excluded from economic activities in the British and French empires. A system that marginalized the United States, Japan and Germany was unsustainable.

Systemic wars are complex. Alliances shift, and the motives of allies diverge. The Japanese fear of a U.S. blockade triggered the attack on Pearl Harbor. U.S. lend-lease to Britain was contingent on the British surrendering their naval bases in the Western Hemisphere to the United States. The British fought to preserve the empire. The U.S. was content to see it collapse. The Soviet Union was intent on fomenting uprising in Britain and the United States, but both supported Soviet military operations against the Germans. I make no attempt here to write the story of World War II but rather to point out that systemic wars involve many nations, tend to be global and are complicated. Their outcome also determines the fate of nations and, for a while, of the world.

One measure of a systemic war is the degree to which the geopolitical systems change. The first change resulting from World War II was the collapse of all European empires in the 20 years following the war's end. The second was the rise of the United States, not only as a major economic power but also as the dominant military power. Both Japan and Germany, the nations that rose along with the United States, collapsed after the war and then re-emerged as primarily economic powers, and as such, were limited forces in the world. The defeat of Japan opened the door for a communist regime in China that was succeeded by a more complex system that allowed China to emerge

as a major economic power.

The next phase of history consisted of the global confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. That confrontation involved both a strategic cordon around the Soviet Union and a major contest between the United States and the Soviet Union for the domination of the remnants of Europe's empire. It also consisted of a confrontation of nuclear forces, a weapon that emerged from World War II.

The Forces of Chance and Will

Powers rise and fall, but the process doesn't happen quickly. It's driven by shifts deep within the structures of societies. It takes generations or even centuries – too long to be decided by individual leaders or elections.

What is decisive in the story are wars. War, particularly modern wars, are driven by necessity. Modern wars are wars of industrial production, and the size and creativity of the industrial plant shape the outcomes of wars, as does the ability to destroy the enemy's industrial capability. At the same time, there appear to be moments in the systemic war that don't seem tied to the underlying structure of war-making but much more to the durability of a social order, the commitment of warriors and the chances of war.

Geopolitics is, as I have argued and tried to show, predictable. If you consider the deep structure and the imperatives and constraints of the nation-states, and ignore personalities and the public opinion of the moment, you can discern the process that is underway and see where it might be going. You can predict who will be in a war and who is likely to win it. But it is in war that the eccentric forces of will and chance coalesce to create outcomes that, if not violating expectations, give it unexpected dimensions.

It was from June 1942 to February 1943 that those eccentric possibilities showed themselves. They allow us to be surprised, certainly by how the war turned out, but also by how close it came to not turning out as we might have expected. Seventy-five years after Midway, Guadalcanal, El Alamein and Stalingrad, there are few who fought in those battles who are still alive. That is a good point for us to consider during these months. We now have to gain perspective over what was, in retrospect, a little more than eight months that redefined the world.

It is one thing to see the deep structure of a thing. But in systemic wars, you must also master the battles, in the grammar of war itself. So, in contrast to history, which moves slowly from a human standpoint, battles are measured in seconds, minutes, hours and days. The long wars we speak about today are political wars. Systemic wars rip apart the world and redesign it in a matter of years, with the heart of the matter determined frequently in minutes. In two weeks, we will begin with what I regard

as the single-most decisive battle of World War II for all combatant powers: Midway, where the allies could have lost but didn't, all because of events that transpired in mere minutes.

Midway: The Battle That Almost Lost the War

June 7, 2017

Today marks the 75th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Midway. The books and movies about this battle have been legion. They focus on the long odds facing the Americans, the luck and breathtaking courage, and the brilliance of American codebreakers that led to victory. They assert that the American victory sealed Japan's fate in World War II. But they rarely consider in detail the consequences if America had lost the battle, which it might easily have done. The Japanese were also extraordinarily courageous. Had they been luckier, and had they changed the Japanese code well before the battle as they should have, Midway could have ended in the destruction of three American carriers, with the Japanese navy intact. On this anniversary, I want to consider the war had the battle gone Japan's way.

The Pacific

The immediate consequence of a defeat at Midway would, of course, have been in the Pacific. The Japanese plan appears to have been to follow Midway with an assault on strategic islands in the South Pacific. They would have faced light forces on the islands and no naval threat. They would have taken islands, built airfields and constructed overlapping areas of air power that would have prevented merchant shipping from entering. The flow of U.S. troops and materiel to Australia would have slowed to a trickle or dried up altogether. This would have meant that the U.S. would not have taken Guadalcanal and New Guinea until much later. It also would have given Japan much more time to consolidate a line, for example, from Samoa to Midway to the Aleutians, which was also part of Japan's Midway strategy.

The United States, lacking a sufficient carrier force, would not have been able to launch a Pacific offensive until mid-1943, and that offensive would have had to be focused on the South Pacific rather than the Gilberts, Marianas and Marshalls. The cost in time, men and materiel of bringing Japan into range of American bombers would have been substantial. Submarines would have had to launch from Pearl Harbor rather than Midway, which is 1,300 miles (2,100 kilometers) longer, and much of the time would have been spent on submarine operations to interdict supplies instead of attacking Japanese warships. Japan would have had time and materiel to increase its strength.

The Americans' problem in the Pacific would have been securing Hawaii as a forward base and maintaining the line of supply from the West Coast. The Japanese were unlikely to invade Hawaii, given that all operations there would take place within the range of U.S. air power. But the Japanese could have used submarines based in Midway to interdict supplies from the West Coast. If Hawaii ceased to be an effective base, then the Japanese would dominate the Western Pacific. They would have had options to strike the West Coast, and certainly to take Dutch Harbor in Alaska or even Anchorage. They already held the islands of Attu and Kiska. The Americans would have had to answer.

In 1942, the Battle of the Atlantic was at its peak, and that summer and fall, an extraordinarily high 10 percent of all Allied shipping in the Atlantic was being sunk. It is at this point that the United States would have had to decide whether to risk the isolation of Hawaii or reduce the number of destroyers based in the Atlantic. It couldn't do both – U.S. production of naval vessels wouldn't really be able to surge until mid-1943.

The shipping of supplies to Britain was meant to support Britain and the Soviet Union, an excellent long-term strategy for pursuing American interests. But this was a political problem. The immediate threat to the American homeland would likely trump long-term strategy.

Given the stakes in the Pacific, the odds against U-boats in the Atlantic and the delay in increased production of naval vessels, the U.S. would have had little choice but to transfer destroyers to the Pacific. But that wouldn't be enough. It would also greatly increase land-based aircraft on the West Coast. The aircraft production program was beginning to gain steam in 1942, but most of that at the time was being assigned to the Royal Air Force, the U.S. Air Force buildup in Britain or the Soviet Union. That would have changed.

An Unthinkable Treaty

We must consider the impact of all this on Allied powers. Australia would have depended on its own resources. The Japanese were unlikely to invade, but the Australians couldn't be sure of that. For things to change, the U.S. would have to launch a new Navy, fight its way through the South Pacific and then launch operations northward to push the Japanese away from Australia. To that point, neither the British nor the Americans appeared very effective allies. At the very best, the U.S. was a year away from offensive operations, and opening the line of supply to Australia might not happen until 1944, if ever.

Immediately upon the U.S. defeat at Midway, Australia would have had to demand that the last Australian forces in North Africa return home while the Suez Canal was still open. The battle of El Alamein was being fought from summer 1942 until the British victory in October. A British defeat would have enabled

the Germans to take the Suez Canal and likely control the Mediterranean. Australian troops had been critical to this victory, and though the Australians had withdrawn many troops after Pearl Harbor, the 7th Division remained. The 7th Division proved to be the critical force in the final, victorious phase of El Alamein. Had the Australians withdrawn the 7th in summer 1942, which they would have had Midway been an American defeat, it is altogether possible that the British still would have won at El Alamein, but it would have been substantially less likely than with the Australians there.

But the homeland would have to take precedent. The Australians wanted to be certain that Australia was not occupied by the Japanese, but they had no military way to prevent it and no reliable allies. Their national strategy was hoping the Japanese had other plans. The Japanese had no real interest in Australia except for making sure it didn't become a base for the Americans. The Japanese also wanted Australia's raw materials. A peace agreement was possible. Australia, isolated and with no options, would have done what was unthinkable before Midway: signed a friendship pact with Japan guaranteeing neutrality, with a mutually beneficial trade agreement included.

Soviet Vulnerability

At about the same time of Midway, the Germans launched an offensive in the south that would evolve into the Battle of Stalingrad. The offensive surprised the Soviets, who were expecting the assault to come on Moscow. The Soviets had also underestimated Germany's strength. At the same time, the Soviets would have seen the American defeat at the Battle of Midway and understood that it would mean a decrease in lend-lease, if not its complete disruption. The British, who also depended on lend-lease, would be in no position to replace it, and Soviet industrial production was not yet capable of providing for a powerful defense at Stalingrad by itself.

And the Soviets had a second problem. Prior to Pearl Harbor, the Soviets had feared, and the Japanese had considered, an alternative strike into Siberia. Russia's maritime region had oil, and Japan needed oil. The Japanese attacked south toward the Dutch holdings instead, but the interest in Siberia was still there. With a victory at Midway, the Japanese could have halted operations in the Pacific and focused on building defenses on Pacific islands that would bog down the American counterattack in mid-1943 in island-to-island fighting, with a vast Japanese fleet to challenge the landing party.

But Siberia was open. Right after Pearl Harbor, the Soviets shifted to Moscow the force that had been protecting Siberia from Japan. It was this force under Gen. Georgy Zhukov that stopped the Germans. A Japanese victory at Midway would have reopened the possibility of a Japanese invasion. But the Soviets would not have been able to send Zhukov back. Until the defeat of the German southern thrust,

which would happen in early 1943, everything had to go there.

The Soviet Union faced two problems. One was that it didn't know that it could win at Stalingrad with the absence of lend-lease shipments. The other was that critical Soviet lands were at serious risk. If the Soviets couldn't contain the Germans' southern thrust, the best they could do was retain a rump state in the north. If they won but Japan attacked Siberia, they would still have lost the east, and the Japanese would control the Western Pacific, China and Siberia.

In 1943 and 1944, there were discussions between Germany and the Soviets on a peace agreement that never worked out. I don't know that either side took these talks seriously. The Germans certainly wouldn't have considered talks had Japan won at Midway, forcing the U.S. to shift its grand strategy away from the Atlantic, putting lend-lease in jeopardy and exposing the eastern Soviet Union to Japanese attack. I think without the assistance of the Americans in 1942, the Soviets would have lost the war. In our alternate history, the Americans probably would have thought the Soviets were going to lose anyway, but history proved them wrong.

Freak Outcomes

It is true that in the years after Midway, American productivity would grow to be enormous, but the enemy doesn't wait for production to rise. Adm. Isoroku Yamamoto's intention was to destroy the U.S. naval force in the Pacific and to create an impregnable belt of islands to block American advances. That was the purpose of Midway, and had it worked, I think there would have been a different outcome in the global war. This is because the United States was the industrial foundation of the Allies, but in 1942, that production had not really gotten underway. A defeat at Midway would have forced a reallocation of industrial production and warships. This would have left key allies, Australia and the Soviet Union, in an impossible position.

The U.S. would have had towering production by 1943 or 1944. But the Soviets would not be there anymore. Nor, I suspect, would Australia. Britain would have made it so long as it won at El Alamein without Australia's help. The problem was that massive production without Allied forces and forward bases would have left the U.S. fighting alone. And given the distances and multiple enemies, that wasn't possible.

This all raises a serious question for me. My work is in finding the order and predictability in history. There was nothing predictable at Midway. The Japanese should have won even with the U.S. breaking their code. The numbers were so lopsided in their favor that their defeat was a freak. And that freak created the world we live in. The Japanese were as brave and

as smart, their weapons as good if not better, and they had far greater numbers. They should have won, and the things I have described should have happened, and the history of the world should have been quite different.

Command of the Sea

July 10, 2019

Command of the sea is the foundation of American national security. Adm. Alfred Thayer Mahan, the greatest strategist in American history, identified it as the core American interest (though he wrote before the war on terrorism began and before the development of nuclear weapons). The United States, he argued, can be threatened only by an enemy naval force that could both invade its territory and curb its access to the oceans. Therefore, the foundation of America's national security, as with Britain's, had to be the command of the sea.

Indispensable Sea Lanes

Command of the sea guarantees security and trade. Ancient Rome certainly understood as much, focused as they were on controlling Mare Nostrum (or Our Sea, referring to the Mediterranean), which forced North African threats like Carthage to attack Rome on its flanks and ensured access to Egyptian crops. The land routes around the Mediterranean were powerful but slow. The naval routes were rapid but lighter, and commercially, they were indispensable.

China and Iran are now trying to secure their sea lanes, or at least deny others access to them. For China, now a massive trading power, access to the world's seas is an economic necessity. Its fear is that the United States could try to blockade China and, in doing so, strangle the Chinese economy (and keep in mind, the worst-case scenario is historically not the least likely one). Iran, which is hobbled by U.S. sanctions, does not have the political or naval power to break the blockade, but it does have the wherewithal to launch a counter-blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. The vast amounts of oil flowing through the strait are essential to many U.S. allies, and successfully blocking the strait would cause an economic crisis followed by a crisis in the alliance. Sanctioning Iran, therefore, might prove too costly for the United States. So long as trade is carried out on the seas, control of the seas is essential.

Historically, command of the sea depended on surface vessels, powered by oars, sails, coal, oil and so forth. The operational principle of national power was the possession of a sufficient fleet to overwhelm the enemy primarily in size and weaponry. The high point of this ancient concept of naval warfare was the battleship, a massive and expensive vessel, carrying a handful of guns able to fire large

munitions at long range. Surface warfare had reached its peak with the battleship. Its cost would cripple a mid-sized country's economy. It could defeat any ship it encountered, save another battleship. The race was in size, armor and munitions, and whichever country had the most could protect its maritime interests.

The foundation of naval tactics was therefore the surface vessel against the surface vessel. This was replaced not by any advancement in the power of battleships but by the introduction of a new concept in naval warfare: air power. Whereas battleships fought by firing salvos of large shells at enemies, aircraft could fire small explosive shells that impacted the surface and torpedoes that hit battleships below the waterline. Another threat came from submarines.

Starting with the British attack on the Italian fleet at Taranto, and culminating with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, vessels designed to carry torpedoes and bombs devastated battleships in harbors. Very rapidly, the center of gravity of naval warfare shifted to the aircraft carrier and was supplemented by the submarine, which was designed to break the supply chain in the North Atlantic and Western Pacific.

This combination of aircraft carriers and submarines had been at the heart of naval warfare for nearly a century, but new munitions eventually challenged their primacy. Specifically, the introduction of precision-guided munitions increased the vulnerability of the carrier. These are not ballistic missiles; once fired, their direction could be corrected, making them much more accurate than the older missiles. In 1967, a Soviet Styx missile fired from Egypt sank an Israeli destroyer, the Eilat. The accuracy was stunning, as was the warhead's effect.

The sinking of the Eilat forced many to second guess the aircraft carrier. The assumption had been that fighters could provide protection to carriers. Enemy aircraft had to fly into the combat air patrol's space to deliver iron bombs and torpedoes. The Eilat incident showed that this was not necessary. A PGM fired from shore – or by an aircraft standing outside the air defense space of fighters, anti-air guns and missiles – could sink or wreck ships.

One way to defend against this was to expand the fighter space, but as this happens, it outstrips the availability of fighters. The focus turned, then, from shooting down attacking planes to destroying incoming missiles. Systems like the American Aegis were created, at enormous expense, to do so. No system is perfect, so keeping attackers at a distance remained critical. The cost of this was a massively increased number of advanced vessels designed to provide air defense and anti-submarine warfare capability. The carrier battle groups cost many billions of dollars in initial development and maintenance, to allow 30-70 attack aircraft to fly toward a target and fire PGMs into a similar defensive array.

The aircraft carrier had begun to look like the

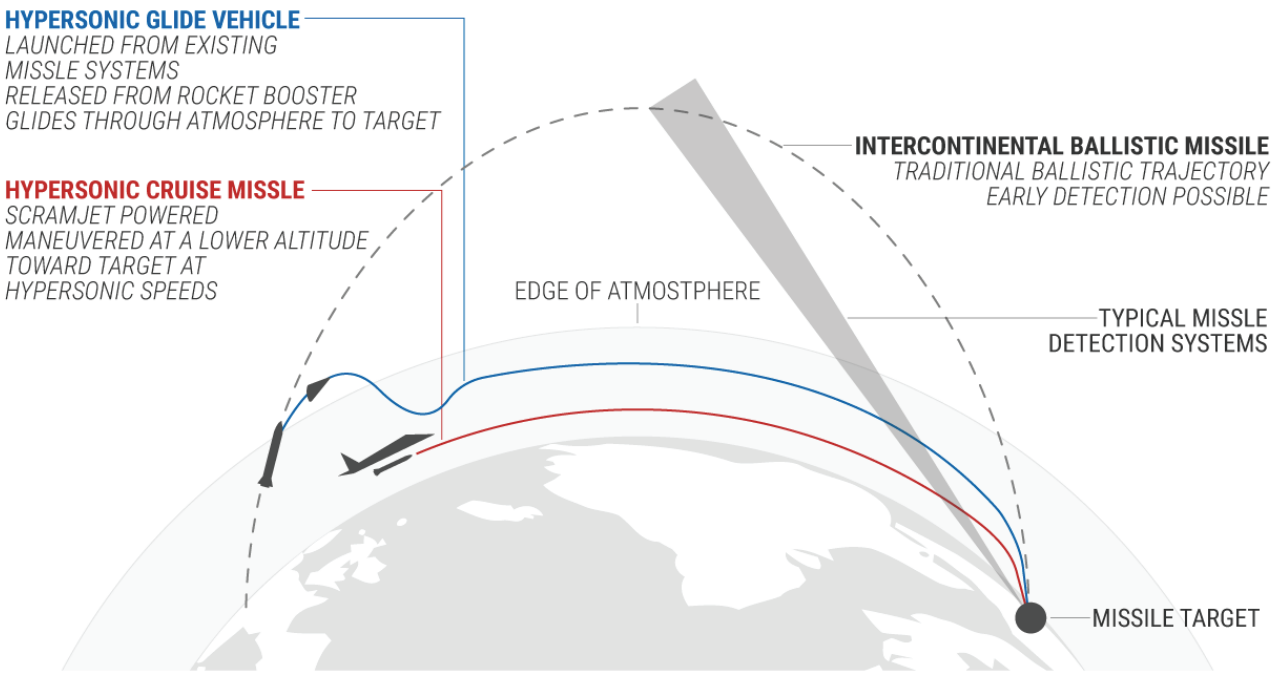
battleship, with pyramiding costs designed to provide defense. It was similar in a second sense. The PGMs evolved, partly in accuracy but mostly in speed and agility. This forced the air defense systems to evolve, too. The cost of evolving the PGM was much lower than the cost of evolving the defensive system, so as the cost of maintaining the security of the carrier battle group rose, the strike capability – the tonnage that could be delivered against an enemy – did not keep pace.

Introducing Hypersonics

The crisis point for the carrier has been reached with the emergence of hypersonic missiles, which can reach speeds of over five times the speed of sound, with maneuverability. The range of these missiles has expanded the combat envelope substantially, forcing extreme upgrades to the air defense system. Some claim that the explosives these missiles carry could not sink a carrier. But given their precision, they could render the carrier inoperable during battle by attacking key elements of the flight deck.

It is for this reason that the Russians and Chinese have trumpeted their hypersonic systems. They represent a challenge to the American command of the sea, so long as the foundation of the system is surface warships – and even submarines become more vulnerable as the oceans become more transparent to the hypersonic missile sensors.

Hypersonic Missiles: *A New Trajectory for Defense Systems*



Note: Illustration not to scale
Sources: RAND Analysis, Stratfor, The Hankyoreh

As the range of the hypersonic missiles increases and their cost decreases, the dangers to surface warships rise. Defenses are possible, but the missile-versus-missile paradigm becomes increasingly risky. A less risky solution is to render the missiles inoperable. This can be done by targeting the guidance system, which requires the general location of the enemy, and the onboard terminal guidance system. It is the intelligence on the general location of the ship that is the failure point.

To locate a fleet, it is necessary to have some reconnaissance. This can involve aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles or space-based systems. Aircraft can stumble into the carrier's kill zone. UAVs can be shot down or, worse, their electronics corrupted, their signals spoofed and so on. Nothing is without risk, but the primary strategic platform for monitoring an ocean must be space based. It alone has the breadth of vision to provide useful guidance to hypersonic missiles that must have a vast range to be most effective.

If the key to control of the sea becomes the hypersonic missile, it is like the carrier-based aircraft, or the battleship's guns. It is the deliverable. But just as the carrier-based plane or battleship guns must have targeting information, so must the hypersonic missile, wherever it is based. The primary source of strategic targeting must be based in space. And that means that command of the sea will depend on a space-based system that will control munitions. The aircraft carrier began to separate the platform and the munitions it delivers. The hypersonic missile radicalizes this by taking the targeting platform away from the sea into space, and the munition to be delivered away from the ship and to the land.

As the range increases, deploying hypersonics at sea or even on submarines is dangerous. The sea makes it very hard to hide a firing platform. Land is full of folds and holes and vegetation, all supplemented by manmade confusion. Identifying these will also require space-based reconnaissance and range to strike. War must now begin by blinding the enemy, and that means taking out reconnaissance satellites and then filling the gap with UAVs. War is initiated with space-based attacks, and the control of space becomes the foundation of control of the seas. However, with hypersonic missiles being located on the ground, there must be attacks on land-based launchers, which, mapped out by satellites, must become mobile and stealthy to survive.

Command of space is becoming the foundation of the command of the sea. Those who can see enemy missiles can destroy them and do so rapidly with longer-range hypersonics. Space denial, therefore, would be essential to protecting merchant vessels from enemy attack. We are not far from this reality. The satellites and UAVs exist, and new generations of hypersonic missiles are appearing. The command of the sea shifted from the surface of

the sea to the air and is now shifting from the air into space. It does not change the core geopolitics, but it does transform war.

Pearl Harbor and the Strategy of Economic Sanctions

December 10, 2019

There have been many lessons drawn from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. One was that wars need not begin according to international law. Another was that attacks can be unexpected and that constant vigilance is necessary. Still another was that underestimating an enemy can be catastrophic. And yet another was that failure to understand how new technology changes the nature of war can be disastrous.

The list of lessons learned is of course longer than the list of lessons remembered, one of which is particularly germane at this moment: When imposing economic sanctions, the more powerful the sanctions, the greater the pressure on your adversary to strike back. At a time when the U.S. is shifting from the use of military force to the use of economic power, the lesson of why Pearl Harbor was attacked needs to be considered carefully.

War Plans

Prior to World War I, Japan was the leading industrial power in the Western Pacific. After World War I, Japan expanded its military sphere of influence. It had sided with the Anglo-French alliance during the war, and as a reward, German holdings in the Western Pacific were turned over to it. This paralleled the growth of Japanese naval power, and it seemed that the American position in the Pacific, built around Hawaii and the Philippines, was in danger.

The United States had developed a series of global war plans after the end of World War I. War Plan Black assumed a war with Germany. War Plan Red assumed a war with Britain (not quite as insane as it sounds, since the U.S. had been dueling with Britain over control of the North Atlantic since its founding). The plan that was taken most seriously was War Plan Orange. For the U.S. Navy, War Plan Orange was the basis of all planning between 1920 and 1941. It assumed that the Japanese would move against the Philippines in order to take control of the resources in present-day Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The U.S. assumed that Japan could not achieve its goals unless the Philippines was in Japanese hands, since ships in the Philippines could cut the flow of supplies to Japan. The U.S. plan was to accept the conquest of the Philippines and then send the U.S. Pacific Fleet, a massive force built around battleships, westward to force the Japanese navy into a decisive battle that the U.S. fleet would win.

The entire premise behind War Plan Orange was that the Japanese had a hunger for raw materials. That was the decisive reality. Japan was a significant industrial power but was bereft of minerals at home. They had to import nearly all the raw materials needed for their domestic industry and defense. The U.S. assumed that at some point Japan would move south and intervened in China to undermine such a move. The U.S. national defense strategy was built not on Europe but on Asia, and on the assumption that Japan would move south.

The Japanese did not move beyond Japan until 1940. They had treaties with both the Netherlands and the French to supply a wide range of raw materials. But the collapse of France and the Netherlands put in question the value of those treaties and posed an existential problem for Japan. Japan saw Indochina as unable to guarantee compliance with the treaties, and so it moved into Indochina. The United States believed that if it simply accepted the move, it would guarantee Japanese control of China and open the door for their expansion into the South Pacific and the Indian Ocean basin.

The U.S. solution to this was actions they regarded as a means short of war. It halted all sale of U.S. oil and scrap metal to Japan and had U.S. agents buy up Indonesian oil not for shipment to the United States but to prevent Japan having access to it. The Americans demanded that Japan withdraw not only from Indochina but from China as a whole. The U.S. sought to put Japan in an impossible spot on the assumption that an aggressive Japanese response would trigger War Plan Orange, force a confrontation with the Japanese fleet somewhere between Taiwan and Borneo, and finish the Japanese.

The Japanese were familiar with the concepts behind War Plan Orange due to numerous naval war games that simulated it. The danger of peacetime readiness is that it reveals the kind of war you expect to fight. The Japanese knew that if they failed to comply with U.S. demands, U.S. sanctions would cripple them at best. But if they did comply with U.S. demands, they would be reduced to an American vassal state.

Their third option was war, but knowing the specifics of U.S. war plans, they would have to fight the war in a way that would deny the U.S. the opportunity to bring its fleet of battleships to bear. They knew that the U.S. expected to lose the Philippines but that the Americans intended the loss to lead to the destruction of the Japanese navy. The Japanese understood the threat that resisting or complying with U.S. sanctions posed, and that war waged as the U.S. expected it to be waged would lead to defeat. The Japanese had hoped to avoid war with the United States, but American sanctions convinced them that the U.S. intended to break Japan. What the U.S. saw as an alternative to war the Japanese saw as forcing their hand.

Most important, they would not fight as War Plan Orange expected. They would not engage

the American fleet in a surface battle. Rather than serving as the culmination of war, they decided they had to engage the U.S. fleet as the first act of war. Thus, they chose to use aircraft carriers as the main strike force that would approach from a completely unexpected direction (from the northwest), and try to fight the decisive battle not with a surface fleet against a surface fleet, but with naval air power against a surface fleet in port.

To emphasize, the Japanese did not intend or expect war with the U.S. until the U.S. put sanctions on them. Japan saw itself as maintaining access to raw materials guaranteed by treaty. It saw U.S. sanctions as an attempt to compel Japan to capitulate without engaging in war and capitulation as permanent subordination to the United States. Under this pressure, they chose war but deliberately avoided the war the U.S. had planned. They ultimately lost by underestimating the recuperative power of the United States. But they understood that their core geopolitical problem was lack of resources, which compelled them to capture Southeast Asia.

Economic Warfare

The Japanese could not back off; they had to be aggressive. The United States saw the challenge posed to U.S. security by Japan's imperative as requiring the imposition of pressure that challenged Japan's fundamental interests. Rather than capitulating, the Japanese chose to launch a war in a totally unexpected way. The U.S. had constantly signaled how they would wage a war with Japan, and the Japanese adjusted their own war plan in ways the U.S. didn't expect. The Japanese were aware of the extremely high risk of the war, but thought the U.S. would negotiate rather than try to invade Japanese-held territory. Japan viewed war as less risky than sanctions. Both sides were wrong. The Americans did not anticipate the Japanese response to sanctions directed at fundamental Japanese interests. The Japanese did not understand that after Pearl Harbor, the U.S. would wage war asking and giving no quarter.

American strategy during and especially after the Cold War has depended heavily on the use of sanctions. Over the past decade, the U.S. has shifted its posture away from military action toward economic warfare. In China, Iran, Russia, Turkey and numerous other countries, the first American response to divergent interests is not to wage war but to take what is seen as a less threatening step of imposing sanctions. The United States produces nearly 25 percent of the world's gross domestic product and is the largest importer in the world. This gives it significant options and forces other countries to consider whether complying with U.S. demands is less harmful than the risk of resisting those demands.

The Japanese example is a classic case in which sanctions, deliberately targeted against a country's core interests, caused the country to choose a military option rather than to duel

economically. Tokyo realized it would lose the latter and had a chance with the former. The core lesson of Pearl Harbor was not that economic pressures aren't a valuable tool, but that the assumption that the adversary would not choose a military response is uncertain. The more effective the sanctions, the greater the chance of a military response. The assumption that the adversary has no military options may be true given expectations of capabilities. But, as with Japan, effective sanctions can compel the other side to develop innovative and painful solutions.

The danger of War Plan Orange was that it drilled into a generation of naval officers a perception of how a war would be fought. The combination of effective sanctions and the gift of a clear understanding of American war plans caused the Japanese to adjourn the economic confrontation and commence an unexpected opening to war.

In undertaking economic sanctions, there must also be parallel and unexpected military options on the table. The predictability of U.S. operational principles allows the enemy to innovate unexpectedly. The assumption that the economic dimension will remain economic because we wish it to fails to understand one of the main lessons of Pearl Harbor.

This is not an argument against economic sanctions; they have been used for decades. It is a warning to carefully select who they are directed against and how they are applied. They can create a situation where the sanctions are so effective that war can seem like an attractive alternative. If such sanctions are required, the U.S. should not expect the enemy to go to war in a way that is most advantageous to the United States. As with Pearl Harbor, the enemy will strike where we least expect and as hard as possible. The more desperate the adversary becomes, the more the military must anticipate an unexpected response.

A Mixed Bag

Intellectuals and Thugs: The Russian Revolution

October 4, 2017

The 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution is approaching. It was a revolution based not merely on hope but on the certainty that the human condition could be filled with equality, plenty and freedom. It created a regime that was willing and felt compelled to go to any lengths to create that perfection, but that regime ended in 1991, exhausted by the squalor it had created.

The Russian Revolution was inspired by the work of Karl Marx, and that work was the reductio ad absurdum of the French Enlightenment. The Enlightenment had argued that humanity was engaged in progress – knowledge was constantly accumulating and, with that, the human condition was constantly improving. At the center of this process was reason, which would drive progress. And its main thrust was that the most perfect government was one that promoted the principle of human equality.

The agent of all of this was the intellectual, who placed reason at the center of all things, and therefore was the one who would deliver progress. The intellectual would understand the necessity of improving the human condition and therefore understand that anyone who impeded this was the enemy. The intellectual became a politician seeking power, and then driving the masses toward a transformation of human life.

But the Enlightenment presented a paradox. If human progress was certain, then why should the intellectual have to undertake the effort and risk of driving it forward? But there was another paradox. The intellectual was also hungry for a significance beyond those with whom he shared his life. He hungered for power and recognition, and therefore the vision of progress being his to deliver to humanity was tremendously seductive. The paradox needed examination by the contemplative. But the contemplative bypassed the paradox and presided over the French Revolution. And those who thwarted progress had to be eliminated. The intellectuals displayed the ruthlessness of pure logic, a logic that saw the people as tools to be shaped.

A Revolutionary Party

Marx took the Enlightenment's impulse to its logical conclusion. He believed not only in progress but in progress that would result in the perfection of humanity. That perfection

would lead to the end of scarcity and the emergence of true human equality. This was inevitable because capitalism's internal contradictions would ultimately destroy it, freeing the proletariat to impose a dictatorship that would forge this reality.

The problem, however, was that the proletariat, shattered by capitalism, would be unable to rise up and build the new order. Again, the tension between the inevitable and the necessity of human action showed itself. Marx tried to solve the problem by arguing that a revolutionary party would emerge from the proletariat and impose a dictatorship that would be the agent to both organize the workers and forge a new humanity.

Vladimir Lenin focused on building a communist party. The problem, he argued, was that the working class suffered from "false consciousness." It did not know what its own interests were because of its condition and therefore couldn't free itself. The Communist Party had to be built from those who had pierced the veil of false consciousness and saw clearly what needed to be done. It wouldn't simply lead the working class; it would compel the workers toward progress. And the people who could see through false consciousness were the intellectuals, who came to be the leaders of the Bolsheviks.

Lenin and the people of his party were intellectuals who spoke for scientific socialism and who would do whatever was needed to compel the working class to fulfill their destiny. But it was not the working class that would trigger the Russian Revolution. Rather, it was World War I, which led to the death of millions, broke the back of the Russian army and triggered a rising of soldiers. Lenin arrived in St. Petersburg thanks to the German army, which smuggled him into the city on a sealed train to use him to forge a rising that would take Russia out of the war.

The rising succeeded and triggered a long civil war in which millions more died. The Red Army, created by the intellectual Leon Trotsky, waged the war ruthlessly and effectively. It was during this war that Lenin apparently uttered the timeless phrase, "The purpose of terror is to terrify." The revolution could succeed only if it could terrify the masses into doing its bidding, and to that end terror was applied. It was a terror that would last a long time but whose purpose it was to build a new, humane society. The vision of a decent society merged with a pride in ruthless logic, and ruthless politics. It created a culture in which mercy was a counter-revolutionary weakness.

The truth was that the intellectuals knew terror only as an abstraction. They applied it, but not with the thorough ruthlessness of the complete thug. They thought too much and that stayed their hand.

Ruthlessness Personified

What emerged from this was Josef Stalin,

who acted as a thug to perfection – the only thing that had in fact been made perfect. Men like Trotsky and the other leaders of the Bolsheviks wrote of the merciless prosecution of revolution, but Stalin was ruthlessness personified. He was not like the intellectuals; he had no interest in their theories and delusions. He displaced the intellectuals who had led the revolution, and ultimately murdered them and millions of others. When the Soviet Union needed to modernize its industry in the expectation of war, it raised the money by selling grain – almost all the grain the Ukrainians produced – creating mass starvation and leading to the death of millions.

The first mission of the Communist Party, according to doctrine, was that it had to survive, and for that, the Soviet Union had to survive – by any means necessary. Lenin was a theorist of terror and its practitioner. But what he opened the door to was not the liberation of humanity, but to Stalin, a man who practiced terror as an end rather than a means.

It is unclear whether Stalin was actually a Marxist or used Marxism as a justification for taking and holding power. But regardless, Stalin believed that the party could not survive without ruthless suppression in order to liberate. And that meant that Stalin had to remain in power to manage the suppression. Stalin's beliefs and Stalin's interests were the same, and the niceties mattered little.

After taking power, Lenin signed a peace treaty with Germany that ceded large areas of the new Soviet Union to the Germans. It helped secure the Soviet Union, but Lenin held on to the possibility that it would lead to something better. When Stalin took power, the Soviet Union became a nation like any other, pursuing the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union in a natural, ruthless way. In theory, the purpose was to protect the party of the workers and to spread the doctrine of communism to the world by whatever means necessary. But the Enlightenment's vision of human progress had become obsolete. Ruthlessness had become an end in itself. The necessary evil became the normal course of events.

Turning the Means Into an End

The Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were equally ruthless. Hitler was no intellectual in the sense of being a scholar, but he did live in a world of ideas, and in that world the goal was not communism but the elevation of the Aryan race. Hitler regarded this as inevitable, but like the communists, he had to act with utter and merciless brutality to make it happen. Why the Aryans didn't already rule if they were superior was as irrelevant as why the proletariats needed intellectuals to guide them if their victory was inevitable.

This was the kind of problem that thinkers should think on. But being men of action rather than men of contemplation, Stalin and Hitler pursued their dreams with a scientific precision that focused only on considerations of

necessity and not of humanity. The distance between thinkers and common sense was never greater than in the 20th century. Rather than sorting through the tensions in their thoughts, they put them aside in order to act. And to put them aside, they turned the means – ruthlessness – into an end.

The Enlightenment was the age of ideas. Ideas left to themselves, without being wrapped in a sense of decency, know no bounds. That was the history of much of the 20th century, shaped as it was by Hitler, Himmler, Lenin and Stalin. Logic is like a game of chess. You don't worry about the fate of a pawn. So too the ideologies of the 20th century. The death of a pawn meant nothing compared to dreams. And the greater the dreams for the people, the less important people were. Thinkers embody logic, and logic that is unleashed is devoid of pity.

What emerged after Stalin were no longer tyrants but survivors, people who lived through Stalin by doing what had to be done, without dreams and with only fears. Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev were men who wanted to live and prosper but who had no great dreams beyond protecting the Soviet Union. With the idea lost in endless blood, survival was all that was left; and this is where geopolitics – the art whereby states survive – comes in. But geopolitics born of vast visions is a shallow thing, and it could not support the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union collapsed for many reasons, but mostly it was out of exhaustion and cynicism. With nothing left to believe, it became a weak version of a real nation. What emerged in the end was the old Mother Russia, tired and soiled by its dreams, neither believing very much in nor even playing the game of geopolitics with crisp precision.

The lesson of this is the danger of ideas when unleased as absolute truths demanding utter logic, thus precluding the softening of kindness or decency. If ideas must be pursued at all costs, then anything standing in their way must be crushed. The problem is that in that world, the man who crushes best wins. Thus Marx, the hapless intellectual who set this all in motion, was superseded by Lenin, half intellectual and half thug, who was in turn superseded by Stalin, entirely a thug.

The distance between Marx and Stalin appears great. But in truth there is an intimate connection between the two. Intellectuals think and have ideas. Put into practice, these ideas lose the fuzziness of the library and classroom and take on a clarity that demands obedience. The intellectual in the end lacks the will to impose the fear needed for obedience. And that necessitates the introduction of the thug.

The Russian Revolution was the embodiment of an idea – an idea turned into a political party, ruled by a man who claimed the authority of logic and who killed anyone who stood in his way. The 20th century was filled with such men. Today, thugs have fewer ideas, and that makes them less ambitious. For the most part.

Marketing and the Delegitimization of Elections

April 11, 2018

Last week, I wrote about the use of marketing in elections. This week, as Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg faces a congressional hearing on how Facebook data was used during the 2016 presidential election, I will address one of the critical consequences of marketing. It is a tool used on a global basis to delegitimize elections and, with it, democracy.

As I argued last week, the use of marketing, particularly online marketing, has been growing. But this doesn't necessarily mean it is becoming more effective. It has been claimed that the Russians interfered in the U.S. election by spreading fake news stories to help Donald Trump get elected. It has also been revealed that consulting firm Cambridge Analytica helped run the Trump campaign's data operations and used social media user data to target certain voters with customized content. The connection between alleged Russian interference and Cambridge Analytica is murky, but they are both being used as examples of how the internet can sway election results. This assumes that such techniques are effective enough to change voters' minds and influence the outcome of a presidential election.

The Effectiveness of Marketing

There is serious doubt about the precision of online campaigns that are supposed to target individual users. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some individuals have little interest in the content that shows up in their Facebook feeds. That means that news stories and political ads may not be targeted at the right people and that there is area bombardment going on, with a wide range of users being served messages in the expectation that many of them will be susceptible to the messages – some of which may be fake news. Marketers, understandably, claim that their methods are highly effective both in reaching the right audience and in convincing that audience to believe what the marketer wants them to believe. But how effective is online marketing really?

Some claim that Cambridge Analytica was a decisive force in Trump's election. More than anyone, Cambridge Analytica benefits from this belief. Except for the possibility of it having taken illegal action, Cambridge Analytica's greatest marketing triumph may have been earning the very public reputation of having the expertise to shape history. Imagine what it can now charge customers to help them sell

far less controversial products.

The truth is that it is not clear how effective Cambridge Analytica's activities were. The call to action, as marketers call it, was to have those individuals who received customized ads or other content vote for Trump. But there's no real way of knowing how these individuals behaved offline, and voting is an offline activity. We don't know if the ads reached the right people, if they convinced people to vote for Trump, or if they only reached those who intended to vote for him anyway.

Undermining Democracy

Mark Zuckerberg is in a difficult position. On the one hand, his business runs on making his users available for marketing. In selling access to his users, he naturally wants them to be both accessible and persuadable. If he denies these two premises, the value of advertising on Facebook declines. On the other hand, if he affirms the value, he will then be seen as creating an engine that undermines democracy.

The core issue is not one of marketing but one of citizenry. If the citizens' minds are so vulnerable to lies and manipulation, the ultimate assumption of marketing is that once you find voters, you can persuade them to do things they would not do otherwise. An important question would then be whether this has always been true and the internet simply makes the process more efficient, or whether internet technology vastly increases voters' susceptibility. And here lies the issue. On the one hand, the willingness of voters to change their minds based on the information they receive ought to be a core component of democracy. A voter incapable of changing his mind weakens democracy. But if the internet has the ability to control – rather than influence – someone's mind, then democracy is endangered. This is why the question of how effective internet marketing is cuts to the heart of democracy.

The problem is not that a candidate for office tried to shift voter opinion; that is as old as the Republic itself. The problem is that the internet is such a powerful tool that it can compel voters to vote when they didn't intend to or to vote for a candidate they didn't initially want to vote for, not because they were persuaded to but because of some unique and non-rational power that a company like Cambridge Analytica can harness. Put differently, we have been seeing 30-second ads on TV for several generations. The internet is orders of magnitude more powerful.

Claims of Illegitimacy

I don't know this for sure because the data isn't there, but I suspect that most of the campaign advertising went to people who weren't susceptible to being manipulated, and that those who were susceptible already had their minds made up. But I do know that the belief in the power of the internet has created a suspicion that an elected candidate can be illegitimate. If the Russian use of the internet was as ef-

fective as some imagine, then Donald Trump was elected not through legitimate means but through a kind of manipulation of the voters' minds that vastly outstripped television and newspapers ads, torchlight rallies and the calm reason of the citizens of the Republic.

Claims of illegitimate elections go back to 1824, when Andrew Jackson charged John Quincy Adams with stealing the election. But the internet issue is different because it ultimately asserts that the voter's psychology is so vulnerable to the machinations of internet marketing that a Clinton voter can be persuaded to vote for Trump and vice versa.

The truth or falsehood of this statement is not the point. The point is that this has become plausible, and if it is plausible, then many will believe that any election whose outcome they dislike or which surprises them must have been stolen by the nefarious tools provided by the internet. And since all use the internet in some way, all elections become subject to a new notion of fraud.

Of late, the attempt to delegitimize elections has become common. In the United Kingdom, anti-Brexit campaigners have tried to reverse the outcome of the referendum by claiming that the proponents of Brexit lied and misled the ignorant. In Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu's electoral victory was held suspect by some because of his last-minute warning of high Arab voter turnout in an effort to rally his supporters. But it has been in the United States where the most significant claim was made, and that claim was based extensively on the power of the internet. This was the claim that the Russians intervened in the election, partly by stealing emails and partly by planting lies in the internet. Except for this machination, it's argued, Trump may not have won. Add to this the Cambridge Analytica affair and the plot grows even thicker.

One of the foundations of a democracy is the willingness of the defeated to accept the outcome of the election and to go into loyal opposition, planning for the next election. If that is lost and elections are no longer definitive, then the governance of the Republic becomes illegitimate. Therefore, the question of whether online marketing is so powerful as to reshape the mind of the voter and thereby the election becomes an issue central to our democracy.

The issue is not a matter of persuasion, which is the point of a campaign. Rather, it is the assumption that a substantial part of the electorate can be manipulated to change its vote not via arguments but via irresistible, targeted and crafted content, some of which may be lies.

I personally don't think online marketing is nearly as effective as has been claimed. But just the claim that it is that effective legitimizes the idea that the outcome of the election does not reflect the will of the people. Anyone can use the internet, and anyone can use it to market anonymously. So long as that is the case, everyone will try to play the game. But the assumption

that the voter is actually manipulated by all this is dubious.

The Illusion of Free Trade

June 7, 2018

The United States' decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imported from certain countries has added to the fears of a trade war. Some believe that these tariffs are a dangerous move by the U.S. because they will invite retaliation and thus could lead to a massive breakdown of trade. The problem with this way of thinking, however, is that it focuses primarily on formal barriers to trade and ignores informal and indirect barriers. Even if there is a free trade agreement between two countries, it does not necessarily mean that businesses in both countries will be able to trade with each other without impediments, as is often assumed.

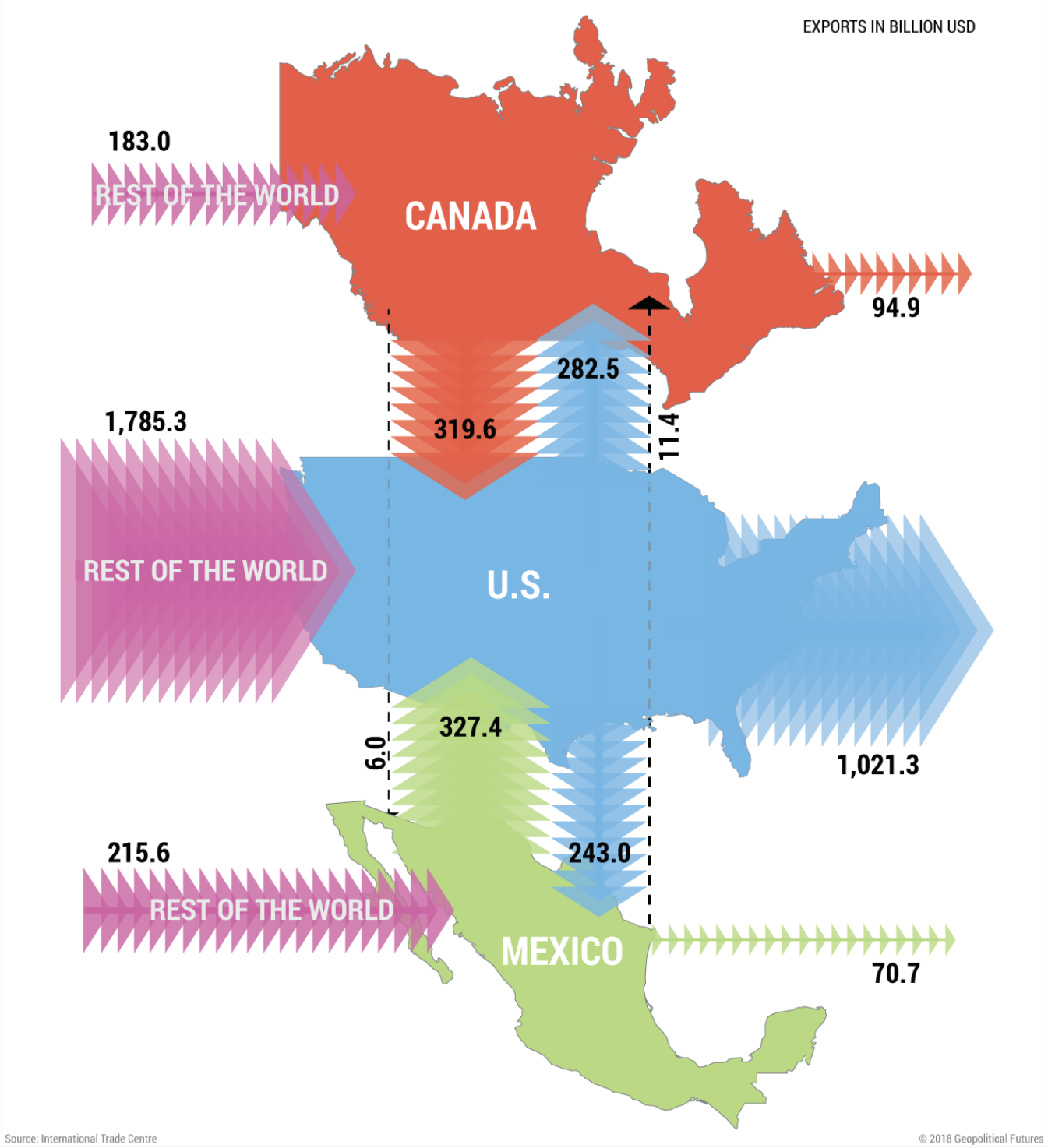
Governments have a range of tools available, formal and informal, designed to mitigate the effects of free trade. In other words, a free trade agreement will eventually evolve into something very different. For example, regulations can be put in place that impose massive additional costs on an exporting country, forcing increases in prices. This wouldn't involve the imposition of tariffs, but it would make it more difficult for exporters to compete with domestic manufacturers. Antitrust laws can be implemented that fine companies and force them to cut back their market share. The cost of domestic production can be reduced by relaxing labor laws. Countries may also enter into agreements knowing full well that their consumers have little interest in certain imports, such as Japanese consumers spurning American cars. And exporters may be forced to sell products in a country through certain wholesalers that dominate the domestic market, and having to do that may slash their revenue.

Free trade, in its purest form, is said to be financially beneficial to all countries. That may be true, but this assumption ignores three vital variables. The first is timing. When will the benefits show themselves? It could take years or even decades. The second is short-term versus long-term impact. Some industries may become uncompetitive and even collapse before others flourish. The third is how patterns of economic activity change based on foreign competition. Some businesses will win, others will lose.

Free trade is not only an economic process but also a political one. The destruction of an industry can destroy the livelihoods of millions of people, even if the country's gross domestic product surges. In economics, the assumption

is that individuals will pursue their self-interest. Oddly, economists tend to assume that they will – or at least ought to – pursue those interests only through economic activity. But peo-

NAFTA Trade, 2017



ple can also pursue their self-interest politically. A government that negotiates a free trade agreement that damages this generation with the promise of better things later is likely to face serious political repercussions. The next government will take a different approach.

Economics is a subset of politics, and the political system moves to protect the interests of citizens to maintain social stability and, in democracies, keep governments in place. The focus on tariffs misses the reality of international trade, which has both an economic dimension, focused on increasing the wealth of nations, and a political dimension, focused on assuring that the wealth doesn't flow into the hands of a few while the rest are left devastated.

The United States is not yet in this extreme condition, but it has entered into a series of trade agreements that, while beneficial on the surface, have had some negative consequences. The most important consequence has been the transfer of factories out of the U.S. to low-wage countries. By the law of comparative advantage, this should in the long run benefit the United States. But it will do so at a massive cost to one sector. GDP might rise, but that in no way indicates that wealth would be distributed in a way that the political system can endure.

Every government has to consider three factors when entering into a trade agreement. The first is the benefit to an industry that will have access to a new market. The second is the damage the agreement will do to those who will lose their jobs. The third, and trickiest, is how the foreign government with whom the trade deal is agreed will use non-tariff tools to shift the agreement to their advantage and, by definition, against their trading partner.

People shouldn't worry about a new trade war emerging because a constant and intense guerrilla war is already underway in every trade regime to undermine the agreement and reshape it through subtle intrusions. This is why multilateral trade agreements have grown so troubling. A trade agreement that creates a single regime encompassing drastically different economies is inherently implausible. The non-tariff trade barriers in each country, not to mention the challenges of monitoring and enforcing the agreement, create mindboggling hurdles. The World Trade Organization can be used to settle some disagreements, but its decisions can be difficult to enforce.

Free trade is rarely free, and when it is free, it imposes costs in unexpected places. The decision of the U.S. to force a renegotiation of trade relations is a result of the fact that certain sectors of the U.S. economy have been hurt by prior trade regimes, and the U.S. is now using the political process to pursue its self-interest. This is not new, nor is the surprise of those who have benefited from the old regime or who are ideologically committed to the illusion of free trade. It is part of an ongoing shift in economic relations driven by political realities.

The Myth of the Liberal International Order

September 19, 2018

In the late 1700s, the philosopher Immanuel Kant put forth a vision of universal peace in which nations would subordinate themselves to principles and entities that would make this possible. Many shared this vision, with good reason. It was believed to have "norms, rules and institutions" that were respected, creating a system that was stable, predictable and able to manage disagreements without creating conflict. Many believe we had achieved that order, which they called the liberal international order, and that it's now dying. They mourn the loss.

The problem is that the liberal order never really existed. And their nostalgia is dangerous if what they pine for is a fiction.

Not that there weren't attempts to create such an order. There were three tries in the past century. The first came after the end of World War I. Europe was horrified by what it had done to itself. The United States introduced the idea of a League of Nations that would manage international friction to prevent future self-destructive efforts. Except no nation was prepared to surrender its interests to an international organization, and in any case the organization had no real power to impose its will. The United States turned out to be the most honest among all nations in this regard, declining to join it in spite of the fact that its architect was the American president, Woodrow Wilson. Other nations joined; joining was easy, since none of them had any intention of obeying the league's edicts anyway. What made the entire idea absurd was that most of the members were imperial powers with colonies, and their interest was in creating "norms, rules and institutions" for ruling and exploiting those colonies. The League of Nations was primarily but not exclusively a European club, and it lasted only as long as it took European powers who opposed the post-war peace to recover and reassert themselves.

The second attempt came after World War II with a more ambitious entity, the United Nations. The League of Nations made clear that no country would really abide by an international organization, so the U.N. created the Security Council, comprising the United States, the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom and China, which could block anything its members didn't like. And since there was always at least one country at the table that didn't like something, the U.N. could never really achieve its purpose:

stopping wars. (Only once did it do so, in Korea, when the Soviets boycotted the Security Council.)

The United Nations created some tools that major powers might use, things like the World Health Organization and UNICEF and so forth. But the international order, to the extent that it existed, was formed primarily from alliances created in preparation for war against the other. One half of the structure was the Warsaw Pact, an international institution with rules and norms that were not especially liberal.

The other half comprised the allies of the United States, bundled together in a variety of international institutions. There was, of course, NATO. There was the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. There was U.S.- and U.K.-supported economic integration, starting with the European Coal and Steel Community, which in turn ultimately became the European Union. They were all liberal institutions with rules and norms.

But Europe was not the world. Most of the world belonged to what was inexplicably called the Third World, into which the European imperial system was collapsing. And yes, this world too had norms, rules and institutions. The United States and Soviet Union fought a cold war to absorb these vestiges of empire, or at least to prevent the other side from absorbing them. No one observing the Cold War in real time believed there was much of an order to things, apart from the utter bifurcation of Europe.

All the while, the prospect of nuclear holocaust hung over the world like a cloud of smoke. The Cold War didn't bring about the end of the world, of course, but its failure to do so wasn't the result of the strength of our international institutions. It was because the United States and the Soviet Union tried very hard not to engage in nuclear war. As always, with the end of the Cold War, the victors believed two things. The first thing was that they would be able to reshape the world as they chose. The second was that all reasonable people would want to be just like them.

After 1992, it appeared that war had become impossible, and that the international systems that had won the Cold War would remain in place and ensure the peace. NATO would deal with the rogues, and the international financial and trading system, designed for the Cold War, would expand to encompass the world. The problem of the world was now management, and a technocracy able to solve global problems would come together in the various remnants of the Cold War and preside over Kant's perpetual peace.

Perhaps no entity embodied this dream more than the European Union, the absolute paragon of rules, norms and institutions. The EU saw itself as the civilizing force of the newly liberated nations, there to teach them the civility of technocracy. NATO no longer had a clear purpose and was given the abstract task of providing security, although who was being secured from what was never made clear.

The illusion began to fade after 9/11. It faded further after 2008. But that hasn't prevented some from mythologizing a system that had failed them. First comes a war, and then comes a pledge for there to never be one again. The defeated, devastated by their loss and with their people living in misery, pull themselves together and rebuild. They create, more or less, what came before them. And with that resurrection, and the rise of other powers, the history of humanity continues.

The problem wasn't that no one had thought to create something that could mitigate the risk of war. The U.S. and Soviet Union, for all their faults, avoided annihilating the world during the Cold War. The problem is in the vast ambition of the victors, who believe they can defy history with the administration of an unruly world. This is not liberalism. This was the hubris of the victors.

The Battle for the Past

July 16, 2019

We all live in the past. We were born in a certain place and time, to a certain family that believed certain things and shared those things with others in the community. Even when we reject our past, we cannot reject the joys and traumas that shaped us, nor the failures, successes, embarrassments and enemies that we and our families faced. The one thing that cannot be forgotten is our memory of the past, our victories, defeats, heroism and cowardice. We can try to imagine that we were something other than what we were, and that the terrible moment when our true nature was revealed to the world didn't happen. But it is an illusion. Our memories are always there and always delighting or haunting us.

Just as people try to shape memories of the past, so too do religions and nations. As Christianity spread through Europe, it sought not only to defeat paganism but to wipe Europe's memory of it. Christianity was, after all, also a political movement, governed as it was by Pope Boniface's doctrine of two swords – one religious and one political. Paganism was an alternative to religion, but it, too, was a political movement that threatened to arise. The Church sought to obliterate the memory of paganism by appropriating and Christianizing some and crushing the rest. The goals were to save the heathens from the lies they were taught and to break the source of the pagan world's power: the memory of who its followers were. It was, as with all victories, imperfect. The memory of paganism still haunts Europe, and sometimes it bursts forth, as it did with Hitler.

All religions try to reshape memory, turning what had been noble into something blighted and imposing a new nobility on the old. When the Hebrews conquered the promised land, they obliterated those who were there before them. When Islam surged out of Arabia, it sought to impose its truth on the memories of those it encountered.

In "1984," George Orwell wrote of the memory hole, a device through which records of things the regime did not want remembered were destroyed. But this wasn't good enough for Big Brother. He demanded the destruction of not only the written record but also the memory of Winston Smith, an employee of the Ministry of Truth tasked with rewriting historical accounts. Big Brother tried to destroy Winston's memory by finding the thing that frightened him the most, and using it to break his soul. The point

Orwell was making was that political power rests in the ability to shape minds, and the ability to shape minds rests in owning memories.

Mao Zedong understood that the greatest danger to communism was memory. To destroy it, he had to destroy the past, and to do this, he launched the Cultural Revolution. At the heart of the revolution was the war against the Four Olds: old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas. He set loose a reign of terror that China has tried to overcome but can't possibly forget.

There is perhaps no country that struggles with its memories more profoundly than Germany. It produced an evil so extreme that it had no precedent within which to frame it. It was not just the murder of Jews. They were a fraction of the Nazi's victims, who also included the disabled, political opponents, and the soldiers who fought in a war that Germany started. For Germany, the memory of what it did is unbearable, and forgetting it is impossible. The country learned to live with its memories by embracing them, not in celebration but in shame. But more important, it drew a distinction between those who perpetrated the evil and those who came later. Those who came later were absolved of the guilt of those who committed the evil acts. In this way, the nation both bears the burden of the evil that was committed and also absolves itself. You cannot forget, but you can forgive, even yourself.

The battle over the past is the battle for the right to define the future. Honore de Balzac writes that all great fortunes are built on great crimes. It's a truth that applies, to different degrees, to all of our lives. Some struggle to forget. Others struggle to remember and to forgive themselves. But as Orwell pointed out, whoever defines the past controls the present and future. And in all these examples, these monuments of civilization, the struggle to subdue the past to shape the present is central.

The great crime on which the United States was founded was the enslavement of captured Africans and their offspring. The crime was not merely the practice of slavery, which was practiced in many parts of the world. It was that the drafters of the United States' founding documents believed deeply that all men are created equal, and yet slavery was allowed to continue and became the foundation of the South's economy. So it was decided that Africans were not fully human – a concept that even other societies that had practiced slavery hadn't applied. Denying them their rights, therefore, wasn't considered a violation of the United States' foundational beliefs.

This tore the country apart and culminated in a war that killed more than 600,000 people. Some claim that the war was not about slavery but about tariffs. They argue that the war was driven by commercial interests, not justice. I find it very hard to believe that these men died over tariffs. But the argument is important to those who reject the idea that the Civil War, in any way, absolved the United States of its

crime. Others, however, believe that, though slavery can never be forgotten, it must be laid side by side with the redemption of the Civil War. For this group, the full debt may not be repaid, but a massive down payment has been made. For the others, the basic disease of the founding – the belief that Africans are not equal – has not only been left uncured, but the very memory of the American past is tarnished and must be cleansed.

Many of the founders were from Virginia, and most owned slaves. But they left in place an extraordinary regime. The question now is whether the American regime should be honored considering its past. Does slavery sully everything they accomplished and everything the U.S. represents, or does acknowledging that American slavery was wicked and recalling the dead at Antietam allow us to praise the founders despite their great crime?

For what little my opinion matters, part of the answer rests with Shelby Foote, a great Civil War historian. He once said that the Civil War ended when the North acknowledged that the Southerners fought bravely and the South acknowledged that the North's victory was for the best. Left out of this reconciliation, of course, were the former slaves themselves. And because of that, the reconciliation was never really satisfactory until the slaves' fate began to be taken seriously.

The reconciliation itself ultimately proved insufficient. Many in the North rejected the honor given to the South, and many in the South rejected the idea that their defeat was for the best. But as with all the battles over the past, the key is that a great crime can only be healed by a great lie. I think this is what Plato was referring to when he wrote of the "noble lie." It is a memory that is not true but that heals. I think of the way in which the Germans have lied to themselves. They are the heirs of the culture that gave rise to horror. But the Germans and the world are safer for the falsification.

We cannot forget the past, and in the minutes before we sleep, it haunts us, reminding us of our failures. But then we wake up and tell ourselves our tale and forget the monstrous things we might have done, giving ourselves a chance, this day, to find redemption. Memories haunt and destroy some even when the sun is at its highest. The battle over monuments is the battle over memory. Whoever controls the past will also define the future.

Technology

The Irony of High Tech

June 26, 2017

Technology is a major foundation of national power. Its uses are obvious. But the path from innovation to obsolescence is frequently less obvious.

Technologies that define an era usually come from a major geopolitical power. Roman engineering, for example, helped shape the Mediterranean world. British technology created and sustained the industrial revolution. These empires could absorb the cost of innovation because they had the money to do so and because they knew it would only reinforce their power. And because technologies are meant to reinforce power, even the most benign were invented for military purposes.

The Origins of the iPhone

Consider the iPhone, an invention of Apple, the genius of Steve Jobs, and a helpful, hip, and harmless product. Or so it would seem.

The centerpiece of the iPhone, as is the case with so many electronics today, is the microprocessor. The microprocessor was the fruit of the labor of a variety of scientists and engineers who were sponsored by the US government, which needed a lightweight computer for missiles, aircraft, and other systems. The technology quickly found use in the F-14 fighter aircraft, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and submarine-launched nuclear missiles.

Fast forward to 1985. General Dynamics, known at the time as GTE, helped the US Army create an advanced network for a device invented some 12 years earlier. The device was the cellphone, which would face its first true test in Operation Desert Storm. The Army needed a reliable wireless communications system that could be easily deployed, and the cellphone fit the bill.

Many of the iPhone's accessories and ancillary functions were developed for similar purposes. The idea of digital photography was developed by the National Reconnaissance Office, which needed a better way to produce photographs taken by their satellites. (Chemical photography required developing, and that meant that the film had to be ejected by the satellite and caught by an aircraft in the air.) The NRO, therefore, developed a digital camera that could stream pictures back to earth. The descendants of this camera—this tool of spycraft—are found in every iPhone.

Maps and location services—a fixture on every iPhone—likewise have military forebears. GPS was originally meant to accurately guide the systems and vehicles of the armed forces, not Uber drivers. The satellites that make GPS possible, even today, are operated by the US Air Force.

And then there is the Internet, which is available literally at our fingertips. It was developed by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, more commonly known as DARPA.

The more recent generations of iPhones, meanwhile, feature voice recognition software. SIRI, as we've come to know her, was originally a DARPA-funded project of SRI International, an American research institute.

The Mature and the Obsolete

A few points follow. The first and most obvious is that the iPhone, an icon of innovation, is actually a composite of older technologies; only SIRI was invented this century. To its credit, Apple updated those technologies, fused them into a single platform, and turned that platform into a brilliantly packaged and marketed product. Still, what is called "high tech" is frequently an older innovation updated for modern use. It's evolutionary, but it isn't revolutionary.

Second, the military is a primary source of innovation in our society. The 50 or so years the Cold War was fought, for example, was a heyday of technological growth. The technology needed to support global war—in space, in the air, on the sea, under the sea, and on land—required unbound creativity. In this regard, the United States, with its intellectual and financial resources, had the advantage. But the public is either unaware of or indifferent to the fact that much of the technology we now consider peaceful was designed to allow the US to wage global thermonuclear war.

Third, we are reminded not just of the age of technologies but of their maturity. Maturity is different from obsolescence. The microprocessor cannot be considered cutting edge—it was put to practical use before 1970. But neither can it be considered obsolete—it is still widely used. It has become a foundation of society even though it is no longer being radically innovated. The same could be said of the automobile and the internal combustion engine. It was incredibly useful and would be sold for more than a century, but the basic innovations were in place around 1970, and the industry mostly became about marketing thereafter. The microprocessor has a bright future, but its heroic days are behind it.

The greatest innovations follow this loose pattern: A handful of scientists create possibilities, which are later developed for military use before being sold in consumer markets. Governments, which are responsible for national defense, typically underwrite the research; private industry, which eventually benefits from it, is too risk averse. Put differently, the private sector builds off the foundation created by the government.

As well the government should underwrite this research: New generations of technology are needed to raise productivity. If the model that has been in place since before World War II continues, then another generation of entrepreneurs will take advantage of military research and development, deploy it, and announce how much they dislike government interference in their work. Selling products is important, but we need to understand the role that war plays in consumer products. For the pacifists who love technology, and the libertarians who love it at least as much, there is a deep irony at work.

The Internet and the Tragedy of the Commons

December 12, 2019

The tragedy of the commons is a concept developed by a British economist in the early 19th century and refreshed by ecologist Garrett Hardin in 1968. They were addressing different issues arising out of the commons, an area that is owned by no one but used by everyone. The commons could be a green space at the center of a town, public land used for agriculture or the atmosphere. The tragedy of the commons is that while many benefit from it, no one is responsible for it. Each person's indifference has little effect. Everyone's collective indifference will destroy the commons. The tragedy of the commons is that it is vital, vulnerable and destroyed by the very people who need it.

The internet has become the global commons. This has happened with lightning speed. In this case, the commons is not just one place. It is a collection of places where people meet, discuss the latest news and gossip, play games and perhaps do a little business. The internet, with its complex web of connections and modes of communication, from email to Twitter to Instagram, has had a profound effect on society. There used to be private life and the village green, where public life was lived. There is now private life and the lives we live online. We have lost intimacy but have gained access to a vast world.

Good manners and the desire to be well thought of by your neighbors mitigated the tragedy of the physical commons. Even if you were not motivated to care for the commons, you were motivated to behave properly while using the commons. The incentive did not come from law but a sense of community; the community could censure and shun you if you failed to behave appropriately. Embarrassment and shame were compelling forces that shaped your behavior. What made both possible was that you were known. You would have to live with the consequences of your behavior, while trying to develop that thing which all humans crave – a good reputation and even being admired. The worst thing, the ultimate punishment of the Greeks, was to be exiled. The commons were still exploited tragically but not wantonly savaged.

The problem with the internet is anonymity and the lack of privacy. This seems contradictory, since anonymity is derived from ultimate privacy, but the internet makes it possible. The world is now discussing whether the Russians hacked into the Democratic National Com-

mittee and John Podesta's emails. This has evolved into a matter of geopolitics because the internet has become a battleground in several ways. One way is the constant invasion of privacy by hackers stealing emails and private correspondence. However, there is no way to know for certain who did it. The CIA may know, in rare circumstances, or may claim to know for political reasons. In general, it is difficult to find out who is violating your privacy and stealing your property.

Anonymity has another effect. On the village commons, everyone knows who you are and you are held responsible for what you say. On the global commons, you cannot be held responsible for what you say, because your identity is masked. The internet was created to function that way, less on purpose than by technical default. The consequence is that the most powerful human emotions, shame and the desire to be well thought of, don't restrain what you say. False news has become a topic of discussion recently. False news has always existed, but it was readily distinguishable from reliable news by where it was published. An article from an unknown source was suspect. An article in the mainstream media was more respected.

Mainstream media outlets used to be the arbiters of the commons and their opinions meant something. They were respected for their banker-like primness. Their right to judge other sources of news was rooted in their meticulous fairness and visible objectivity. It is said that complete objectivity is impossible. That is likely true. But perfect love is also impossible. The lack of perfection does not excuse you from making your best efforts.

In a recent poll by the Pew Research Center, only 5 percent of Americans surveyed said that they had a great deal of confidence in the news media. This is a stunningly low number, but it is not a new phenomenon. What is striking is that this consistent lack of confidence in the media hasn't created an uproar in newsrooms. I doubt that many reporters at The New York Times or The Washington Post voted for President-elect Donald Trump. That is fine, so long as the newspapers maintain rigorous objectivity. I am sure that the staff of both papers think they do, and it is likely that their friends, who share their views, also feel that way. But the majority of the public has its doubts. Therefore, in the public's mind, these media outlets have given up their role as overseer of the commons of public discourse.

The anonymity of the web allows people to act without shame and to tell lies without fear. I would urge everyone not to believe that this behavior only comes from people on the right. During the George W. Bush administration, I read many preposterous claims about him from people who appeared to be liberals. These kind of claims were also made by their right-wing friends. There is no accountability for what people say or do, no shame attached. Therefore, lies flourish, despicable charges are made, and some on each side are

free to believe what they want to believe. The promise that the internet would create a democratic commons where all can be heard and the media loses the right to censor has been achieved. Censors and accountability no longer exist. Twitter is the place where malicious people with time on their hands can tell lies.

But in reality, the internet has not become more democratic. More fastidious citizens no longer visit the commons, or if they do, only to speak to those they know. It is increasingly the place of the marginal. It is interesting how the mainstream media has used Twitter to gain a sense of public opinion. I frequently wonder if the person from Twitter being quoted in a news story is a 12-year-old whose medications are no longer effective. The media doesn't know. There are still worthwhile conversations to be had there, but many people now becoming less engaged.

The internet is a place with two problems, both masked. Some use it to steal private information and correspondence. Some use it to spew venom through the promise of anonymity. They are both destroying the global commons that had so much hope, in the same way that the village commons would be destroyed if it were invaded by people wearing masks, stealing people's diaries and money and shouting obscene improbabilities. The tragedy of the commons today is not indifferent exploitation. The tragedy of the commons is that it can be dominated by criminals and those harassing others who want a civil conversation. It reminds me of Central Park in New York in the 1970s. Anyone who was there after dark was a mugger or crazy.

The right to privacy is an absolute, and in due course, as thieves keep breaking into people's property (why thieves sometimes are called hackers is beyond me), we will simply return to older modes of communication. Perhaps phone calls and handwritten letters will be resurrected. Far better than having your secrets arrayed in public. But still, banks and companies like Geopolitical Futures have to do their business online, and the threat from criminals who can't be identified is great.

But a greater problem is the media. The prestige press, as we used to call it, squandered its inheritance from prior generations of journalists and lost its right to pronounce the truth. Social media is now subject to Gresham's Law: Bad ideas will drive out good ones. This can't go on.

The first principle has to be to make masks illegal on the internet. Many countries and U.S. states have laws against wearing masks in public. In the United States, many of these laws were passed to stop the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, knowing that only anonymity and a large crowd made its members brave. But other countries passed similar laws on the reasonable assumption that someone hiding his face is up to no good. In the end, it came down to this: If you want to be in public, you must show your face. You have a right to privacy

in your home and on your property. You don't have a right to privacy when you choose to go into public spaces.

The problem is technical. Today's computers descended without dramatic change from those available 20 years ago. The internet got larger with more bandwidth but is still as primitive as when it was first designed for a small group of scientists wanting to share information. The security that exists today consists of complex add-ons that require sophisticated managers, and they still can be broken into. Security can't be an add-on. It has to be at the heart of the system, and its first requirement should be to eliminate anonymity, so that criminals can be identified and so that the vile will know shame.

The reason I am writing on this topic is that we are facing an international confrontation between Russia and the U.S. over whether Russia stole emails to help Trump become president. Some also claim that the Russians penetrated the U.S. power grid. The problem with this issue is quite simply that the system is so primitive that proving the Russians are responsible is impossible. An entity can penetrate a critical system like the power grid without anyone knowing who did it.

The situation is getting out of hand. The internet has become not just the commons for private individuals but the business and government center of the world. Therefore, some limits need to be put in place. Hiding your identity already is illegal in certain circumstances. You must provide ID to buy alcohol or get on a plane. I expect privacy in my home, but when I go into the world, I want assurance that the people out there don't mean me harm. The design of the internet denies me that. The arbiters of propriety have themselves collapsed. Crazy people are making insane charges in public. This has to stop.

It is in the interest of the tech community to do something about this issue because if thieves run lose and social media is dominated by sociopaths, people will treat the internet like they did Central Park. And if the tech community believes that it is so dependent on internet privacy that it can't budge on this issue, then it is as deluded as the major media has been. Someone broke into the power grid and we don't know who. Enough is enough. Wars have been started over less.

Thoughts in and around Geopolitics

Enchantment and Disenchantment

September 19, 2019

Let me begin by saying I was stunned by the enormous number of letters we received in response to last week's piece urging me to continue with my philosophical mumblings. Also bear in mind that in philosophy, the one may well be wiser than the many. In any case, I will continue a bit more in this vein, discussing today a strange topic: enchantment.

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the political philosophy of the Frankfurt School, a group of German philosophers. This was later published as a book. Dissertations are written by students who are still, in most cases, "children," but it occurred to me that there might be something of value to be found in it. One of the philosophers I wrote about was Theodor Adorno. Adorno viewed antiquity as a place of enchantment, where the laws of nature were transcended by miracles, and where life itself could take on marvelous and terrible shapes.

For Adorno, the dividing line in the world was Odysseus, who fought with the Greeks at Troy, as chronicled in Homer's "Iliad." After the Trojan War he left on his odyssey, confronting the enchantment of the world. He met the Cyclops, whose vision was perfect but without depth. He met the Lotus-Eaters, who ate from a plant that caused them to forget everything they had been, giving them a life free from memory, happier but poorer for that. And, perhaps most marvelous of all, he met the Sirens. These were woman so seductive that merely on hearing their song, men would knowingly and eagerly serve them to their quick death.

The teaching of Homer was that the world that we prosaically call experience is a lie. It hides the uncanny beauty that is there in plain sight. The Siren and the Lotus draw you to death, but you are going there anyway. Let the death be beautiful, enfolded in the extraordinary improbability of the enchantment around us. According to Adorno, Odysseus encountered each of these enchanted truths and, in resisting their seductive power, destroyed them. Put another way by Adorno, Odysseus brought enlightenment to the world; he disenchanted it and, with that, abolished the uncanny and miraculous. And we were forever poorer for it, because with enlightenment, death became a tragedy rather than fulfillment.

The work I have been doing much of my life has been intended to disenchant the political life (and yes Senator, I know you knew Homer,

and I know I am no Homer). Still, I live in the traditions of our past, and the method for understanding the politics of the world that I have labored on is on the distant and majestic tradition of "The Odyssey." Whatever I touch, I make small. I take away both will and choice, and I declare the greatest of men to be mere bubbles trapped in the tides of history, their greatness crafted by illusions that make us think of them as enchanted. My task has been to tear away the enchantment and reveal the geopolitical machine screeching and clanking away behind the uncanny facade of genius, courage, generosity and evil. The splendid texture of humanity is pulled aside to reveal the tragedy of reality.

My discussion on the attack on Saudi oil facilities by the Iranians could have been a tale of beauty, courage, desperation and hope, a tale as ancient as the Bible being rewritten in the Arabian sands. I could call the drones dragons and their creators sorcerers. I could have turned it from what squalid affair human things are, to the marvelous things human things had been. I could have – but didn't. Both visions are true in their way, but the truth I wanted to find was the mechanics that caused Iran to use the Houthis to attack the Saudis and the cold calculations that went into what was, in the end, simply the work of geopolitical necessity. I was like Odysseus, who was nothing if not clever, and by stripping the world of courage and gallantry, of sacrifice and triumph, I told a truth that was only part of the truth, and the less satisfying part.

The problem of geopolitics as I have pursued it is not that it is wrong, but that it is insufficient for the human soul. If that is all that there is, then what are we? I keep coming back to these lines from "Macbeth":

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

There is no promise of meaning in geopolitics. The only thing it tries to deliver is understanding. It tells us who we are. It leaves us little hope that something extraordinary might happen. Understanding why things happen is as important as Odysseus understanding the Sirens. What we know, we will protect ourselves from.

A scholar can live in this arid world. He is as doomed to live in this world because that is his nature, and that is his fate, just as any fabled creature from antiquity. But a scholar is also a human, or should be. As a human, he yearns for the uncanny, the miraculous, the unexpected – the heroic. As a scholar, he understands necessity alone and knows that there are no longer heroes.

And this is the deep weakness of geopolitics and the enlightenment. In all things, it can explain how, robbing it of its truth. Consider love – in my case, love of a woman. There are certainly biological forces. And as one study showed, love is based on accidental proximity and cyclical necessity. That is probably true, but I know that there is more. It is nothing I can write in a formula, but it is something that can be grasped by a few lines of beautiful language or a snatch of a song. It cannot be published, but it is real. So too is heroism. A man might come to the crucial moment by accident, but when he faces his enemy, his mind stages a battle between fear, duty and pride. That battle cannot be footnoted, but at that moment, man encounters the uncanny.

I am proud of what I have done in geopolitics, but it is insufficient, all the more so because of the vastness of its pretensions. It brushes aside love and bravery as incidental to the truth, and it is not wrong. But I remember in the movie "A Beautiful Mind" when the mathematician yells "insufficient, insufficient," having discovered that there is more to economics than what economists think.

The problem of the enlightenment is that its ruthless destruction of the enchanted has failed. The enchanted cannot be banished so easily. It merely comes back in increasingly terrifying forms to a world that thinks it has been banished. For me, at this point in my life, it seems a reconciliation of enlightenment and enchantment is what our souls cry out for. Meaning, not in having one or the other, but in finding that they are opposite sides of the same thing.

For me and for geopolitics, there are two moments of enchantment on which we rest. The first is the love of a man and woman and the child that they bring to life, and the enchantment of the world that makes it so. This is the foundation of all community. The second is when a friend I once had stood his ground and went to his death because, I think, he understood the enchanted moment life had offered him and he took it. Geopolitics is about nations and war. It is about generations not yet born and the heroes they will make. This is the point where the inhumanity of geopolitics can find a grounding in the enchantment that was taken from us by Odysseus.

On Viewing Rembrandt's 'Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer'

November 21, 2019

Last weekend I was in New York City, with a rare moment for indulgence. I chose to visit an old love, one who taught me about my life and what it would cost me. That love was a painting by Rembrandt, the centerpiece of an exhibition of Dutch masters at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is called by several names, but for me, its name will always be "Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer." It is a painting about philosophy, politics and beauty, and the longing for what no one can have: all three.

Aristotle is at the center, dominating the painting. He is dressed lavishly in cloth of extraordinary luxury, with an ambiguous hat, barely visible, atop his head. But the true center of the painting is a magnificent gold chain that encircles his body. It is sensuous in its beauty, but the beauty can't hide its strength. What it surrounds it controls, and it surrounds Aristotle. The reason he is wearing the chain is at first a mystery; he is, after all, a philosopher, a scholar who studied under Plato. Such men neither have the means nor the appetite for such ornaments. Then, if you look very carefully at the painting, you see a small medallion attached to the chain, and on the medallion is an image of Alexander the Great, the man who conquered the known world to the foot of the Himalayas and planted himself in eternity, with cities named after him scattered through his empires. He used these cities as the foundation of his empire, linking them together in trade and weapons. And in his short life, the Greek from the foothills of the Balkans reshaped the world.

The mystery begins to resolve itself with that medallion, for Aristotle was Alexander's teacher and teachers bear at least some or sometimes all of what their students become. Aristotle clearly was proud of his student; otherwise, why would he be clothed in silks and gold and bear the picture of his student so near to his heart? His bearing is proud in the painting; a man who taught Alexander how to be great must be great as well.

Aristotle's teaching was not of the art of war but rather of philosophy. Philosophy teaches about the moral obligations that men bear. It teaches them about justice, and it teaches them when justice requires kindness and when it requires cruelty. Philosophy teaches about the city, the polis – or our modern-day nations – and teaches how they are constructed, how they should be ruled, and how they should

avoid defeat and slavery. In the end, philosophy teaches about a place, justice and injustice, and teaches the warrior who must choose the place, and choose what is just.

To me, Aristotle bears himself as a well-decorated soldier. His hand on his hip, his posture straight, he appears to us as Alexander might, a warrior who has risked much, from his life to his soul, and has emerged with both intact. When Napoleon visited the great German writer Goethe, Bonaparte is said to have exclaimed, "You are a man." He expected to meet another feeble scholar, one who I suppose infested the Bourbon court, uttering platitudes. That a great writer, and truly a philosopher as well, should turn out to be both a thinker and a man in full astounded Napoleon, perhaps the greatest warrior since Alexander, does not surprise me. There is a connection in my mind between the scholar and weakness, a willingness to imagine justice but not to fight and die for it. But Rembrandt understood Aristotle, the philosopher.

The chain is the chain of office. It is the chain an important adviser to a ruler might wear. And in the end, philosophy becomes an adviser to the ruler. A man who devotes himself to questions of justice and war and to truly understanding their necessity and the paradox that exists in them, is inevitably advising the ruler, whether the ruler understands it or not. He shapes the time in which he lives, waging a war against the superficial and self-serving, and usually losing. Aristotle had won. He had honed an instrument of justice and war unlike many the world has seen, and Alexander understood – according to Rembrandt, at least – that he had been honed.

You can see the pride with which he wears the gold chain. But you can also see sadness. To Aristotle's right, clouded in the darkness Rembrandt had mastered, is the bust of Homer, the blind poet of the heroic age of Greece, without malice on the part of anyone, shunted off into the murk. Aristotle's hand rests on Homer's head, gently and almost tenderly. His eyes do not face straight ahead like a soldier's, or suspiciously in all directions as a politician's would. Aristotle's hand rests on the bust like a lover's, but the eyes aren't focused. They see Homer, but they see something else, something that is not there but that rivets Aristotle's attention. He has one hand on his chain, another on Homer, and his eyes contain a deep sadness.

Forget that the chain is gold, forget that it is a reward for his greatness. It is still a chain that binds him to Alexander, a bond forged because he was a philosopher who taught a conqueror how to conquer. That is a triumph – the highest triumph philosophy can achieve – but is it enough to satisfy the soul of philosophy?

Homer was a poet, and poets hear and sing songs. He knew that hearing the songs of the sirens was worth dying for. He wrote of the battle for Troy as if dying were a small price to pay for having been there. The poet's song is the song of beauty and despair and makes no

attempt to justify either. This makes poetry the enemy of philosophy. Philosophy must explain everything. Its need, its compulsion, is to leave nothing as the philosopher found it but to examine it, twisting and turning it until he owns its soul. Poetry celebrates the simple reality of being. It does not weigh the good and the evil but gives thanks to the gods that both are there.

The philosopher is proud of what he knows and is proud of the mark he left on history. The poet is a sensualist. He wants to teach feeling by revealing it in language turned to song. With this, the poet teaches what true joy and true sorrow feel like. The philosopher lives by rigor, suppressing feelings in the name of truth and necessity. The poet lives sensually, in the mind, soul and body, and contents himself with celebrating what is, whether victory or defeat. In a way, the poet is an anarchist, subject to his tropes only when he chooses, in love with what he sees and with whoever listens. The lover may be twisted and depraved, but that simply makes his lover worthier of the song.

Aristotle is caught between the power of the state, the rigor of philosophy and the voluptuousness of the poet. Aristotle chose to be the adversary of the poet, and he achieved everything any reasonable man could dream of. But the price he paid for both was the rigorous management of all his feelings, a constant analysis of why the world is as it is and why rulers rule as they do. Homer never cared about either. He accepted the world as it was, and he wanted to capture treachery, bravery, banality and the enchanted. He never explained why the siren's song was so seductive. He was simply content to speak of women who generate urges that would cause men to knowingly go to their death. Aristotle would have dissected it. Homer might well have died simply to die hearing that song.

The tension is between experiencing life, understanding life and dominating life. Aristotle ultimately chose the last two. Homer chose the first. Rembrandt portrays Aristotle, perhaps at the moment he realized what he won and what he lost, longing for the life of the poet. There is a sense given to all of us who are human, when the tension between being somewhere and cherishing it for what it is, competes with the mind wandering off to other things. Homer was the siren, asking us to stop thinking and give ourselves over to his song. And Aristotle was the philosopher and adviser to the great who realized he had never done that, and that it was now too late to do more than imagine that purity.

Rembrandt had to have understood this agony, or he couldn't have painted the picture. Philosophy, statecraft and poetry are far from the only moments, but they are at the extreme. The painting is a monument to our lives, of the price we pay for Eden, where we learned of good and evil, and from which Cain could learn to kill Abel. It would seem to be the tragedy of the human condition, that the search for justice and power destroys the pleasure of being

human. I myself have rarely found escape from the conundrum, but I have found a path. She who lives hidden in plain sight.

Returning to the Beginning

January 16, 2020

In recent weeks, I have been writing on the very ordinary but precious moments of my life. I wrote about the complexity of my family's holidays and of a vacation, with what I hope came across as humor. All this is in preparation for my return to my original project: to place geopolitics in the philosophical tradition. There may seem to be no connection between the ordinary moments of life and something as exalted as philosophy, but they are intimately connected.

Ordinary life is extraordinary. The task of philosophy and geopolitics is to find the sacred in everyday life, and to do so with deep irony, which requires being able to laugh heartily. For who are we humans to speak of our lives and the sacred? Anyone who tries must do so with a deep sense of its pretentiousness. In elevating a rum punch during a beach vacation to a subject worthy of deep thought, we do three things: We elevate the ordinary, force ourselves to realize that there is little that is ordinary there, and face the chasm separating our attempt to understand the world and the absurdity of the attempt. But in that rum punch, in the game it plays with your mind, there is a freedom to both elevate yourself and mock yourself.

The problem of philosophy is that it tends to be boring. It is boring because it is complex and because it is abstracted from the lives that people live. The great philosophers give you a window through which to see yourself. That window is irony or, for those of us less elevated, humor. The entire idea of philosophy is humorous. Here we are, human beings who know many things, being told that we do not know the most important things. But humans know well the most important things: doing one's duty, nurturing children, battling nature and society to provide for them, being just without being a martyr, being kind and being forgiving, even to those who won't forgive.

This is a random list, and many things can be refined and added, but if philosophy is the study of the true and beautiful, then it at best makes elegant the things we already know. Philosophy holds no surprises, except for one profoundly important one: that human beings, in the course of their lives, should contemplate such matters without holding an advanced degree. And with that, philosophy contributes its most important gifts: irony and caution.

Irony is telling a truth in such a way that we can see it through the veil of laughter. As Plato infers, who are we mere humans to dare to think such exalted thoughts? I think of my father, who survived the Mauthausen concentration camp and a Soviet occupation, whom life had crushed too many times, who still had the ability to hope for something better and laughed at me, saying I was such a scrawny child to place his hopes in. He had faced Hitler's and Stalin's ideas directly and survived them, yet could still know that all homes, especially the most urgent, must be clothed in laughter.

Philosophy must also cloak the best and worst from the world. A philosopher is not someone with an advanced degree. It is someone who has confronted the best and worst of the world, and discovered that it takes courage to face both. I have an advanced degree and wrote books and articles that were designed not to enlighten but to demonstrate my brilliance through their obscurity. Later, doing other work, I discovered that philosophy does not live in the academy where justice is discussed but in the world, where justice must be lived.

Geopolitics is not recognized as a field, so I made it a business. But geopolitics is at the heart of philosophy. If we agree that all the examples I cited can be summed up by the question "who is man?" then the first answer is that humanity is divided into two parts: man and woman, and all that follows from this. The first discussion of duty must somehow revolve around this.

Geopolitics is a field that tries to define, explain and forecast the relationship among communities. The story it tells is a story of greatness and horror, but it begins in the simplest things that make us human. The first question I have raised in other places is, what creates a community or nation? The answer is the love of one's own, the love of the things you were born to, and being brought up to know that their loves are yours and their hates are yours as well. But where does the love of one's own come from? The irreducible truth is that the love of one's own must be preceded if not with love then at least with lust. To have a child you must have sperm and an ovum. However we reengineer the human being and reproduction, and whatever journey in life the child undertakes, it begins with the sperm and ovum, and most usually the man and woman, retelling the oldest story there is.

Philosophy ought not to be about pontificating, and certainly not advocacy of policies, although listening to a professor discussing the just war is a hoot. But it is a hoot meant not to reveal hidden things but to set rules unrelated to reality. He is saved by the grace of indifference.

This may strike you as pointless or obvious. But that is the purpose of philosophy, to hold up to the light things that you are intimately familiar with and suddenly see something you never imagined you would see there. And those things are easiest to see when you see how preposterous it is for you to be seeing

them. Next week, I will try to start climbing the mountain.

Thinking About This Moment

April 2, 2020

My job is to write, and my goal in writing is to put things in perspective. The world has been to me an endlessly shifting kaleidoscope of nations, all moving in different directions that can be predicted by understanding the forces that shape their actions. I take pleasure in seeing the order behind the chaos. Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I fail, but I have lived in a world of many colors, shapes and tempos.

For the past month, a vast fog has made that world difficult to see. The coronavirus pandemic has rendered normal global events irrelevant. Something deadly is stalking the world, and it respects neither power nor money. Governments are obsessed with protecting us, or at least with appearing to protect us, but there is no protection except for what we provide ourselves. An infection cannot be destroyed yet. It will run whatever course it runs. Our bodies may or may not rally to overcome it. Our will has nothing to do with what happens.

Therefore, the only action we can take is to not allow the virus to enter our bodies, and the way it can enter our bodies is not through the air, or through food, or even through dirt. The disease invades our bodies from the bodies of other human beings. So we avoid contact with others. Governments have adopted a policy of building barriers between nations and sometimes barriers within their nations. The choice of families is to build barriers between themselves and their neighbors. Our politics and our lives are focused on this at the moment, and the distance we put between ourselves and the rest of the world.

The other consequences of doing social distancing are not at the moment of prime importance. There is something unseen out there that will sicken us and even kill us, and we cling to whatever safety there is by being alone. But we are social animals. We do not live alone. Love of one's own is not simply love of those in our household but of those with whom we share language, faith and history. If we see our neighbors, our countrymen and the world as being potentially infected with a hidden pestilence, if the barriers of borders and doors supplant all of these other things, then how do we remain human?

I have been at home for nearly a month, my wife making heroic forays to pick up pre-ordered food at the supermarket, commanding me not to share her risks for I must not get ill so I can think and write and earn money. I am

the man, and I am supposed to risk my life at the supermarket, yet she insists I must not get ill. The oddity of all of this is not only that this reduces my sense of manhood, but that a trip to the supermarket has become an act of quiet heroism.

What is most frightening in all of this madness is that it is not madness. It is all we can do, and we are for the most part doing it. We are not doing it because of threats from the government; we are doing it because it is all we can do. I used to think about the Russia-Turkey confrontation in Libya, about Brexit, and about the development of hypersonic missiles. All that is still there, but for now none of it matters. There are slight glimpses of U.S.-China tensions or a Belarusian leader saying that the cure to all this is vodka. In some ways he makes more sense. Doctors tell us to wait. The president of Belarus tells us to get drunk. That won't save us, but at least we won't be afraid.

This is an extraordinary moment in human history. Our world has contracted. And this is true not in one country but in virtually all countries. In some countries, of course, life goes on unchanged along with all too common disease and death. In most countries, those violating the new laws and customs are seen as social deviants. But even in wartime, perhaps especially in wartime, I have not seen social responsibility being defined as refusing to enter into social life.

I am a fan of science fiction, and I love post-apocalypse novels. This is not playing out as it's supposed to. We have our disease, but it will not wipe out everyone but a lone woman, as happened in "Extinction Point." In novels like these, the virus would be delivered by aliens even now colonizing the planet, and the woman making contact with a crippled man in Alaska plans survival and resistance. Reality is even more stunning. We do not face the annihilation of the species – or so it seems – but we do, almost seamlessly, face the danger and transform our lives. We face combat not with aliens but at most with our own boredom.

What is perhaps most different in our apocalypse novel is that we have not seen a surge of banditry roving over the landscape. For me, one of the most remarkable things – and from what I can see, this is true globally – is that our retreat into our homes and ourselves has been remarkably orderly. But that I suppose is because heroes are still at work in our warehouses and trucks and stores, and food is still ample. That may continue indefinitely, but in a world we can't recognize, nothing is certain.

That this cannot become the new model of human existence is obviously true. It can be done only if we accept a level of poverty and loneliness until the day medicine finds a solution. And since the experts speak in terms of years, maintaining our current stance will be difficult. Our position now is that preventing deaths from the virus takes precedence over all other things. Whether this posture can be maintained in the face of massive social and

economic failure, where the trip to the supermarket is pointless, is unknown. But for the moment that is not the question. For the near future this will go on, and my world will contract, and my kaleidoscope will see grey, not the vivid colors I have lived with. And I do take walks, seeing occasionally other neighbors out walking, and we pass on opposite sides of the street each wondering whether the other is in the grip of the invisible plague.

We can do this. For a while longer.

Traveling Geopolitically

April 25, 2018

A few years ago, I wrote a series titled "Geopolitical Journeys." Since I tend to travel widely, it was intended to be a consideration of the geopolitical nature of a country, with a discussion of its present situation. I want to resume that series because I was told it was interesting, and because I gained a great deal when I visited countries I knew I was going to write about. Knowing that you will have to write about a place provides a discipline that merely being there does not. In the next two weeks, I will be visiting Portugal and Italy. I will see far less than the whole of these countries, but I will see a part, and from that part I can learn important things about the whole.

The assumption I am making is that the current situation of a nation and its geopolitical reality are opposite sides of the same coin. Geopolitics is an analysis at the highest possible level of military, economic and political realities. It is intimately bound with the present moment. The present is just the latest frame in a movie. And with movies, if you go to enough of them, you can take your seat at any point and quickly gain a sense of what came before and what comes next. Movies have a structure and logic defined by the technology of moviemaking and the economic imperative behind it. Surprises are few and, even when effective, constrained by the reality of the art. This is far from a perfect analogy, but it does give a sense of the relationship of the particular to the general.

These journeys have gotten somewhat more difficult for me. I was once completely unknown. Today, I have risen to being quite obscure. With obscurity comes the possibility that I will be read, and with that comes the possibility that the reader will become upset. I recall an early Geopolitical Journey I wrote during a visit to a European country. Though I have total confidence in statistics, on occasion the sampling process might be slightly flawed, or the surveyor might be under a little political pressure. So I like to take measurements of my own. In this Geopolitical Journey, I described a method I have to evaluate the economic well-being of a country. I go to neighborhoods where BMWs are commonplace and I look at the tires. If the tires on many of these cars are in good condition, I know the economy is pretty good. If they are worn, the economy is doing badly. Luxury car owners take care of their cars. If times are tough, the tires are one of the first places they'll skimp. If a whole bunch of BMWs are way down on treads, the economic

situation is poor.

In this particular European country, the BMW test meshed with government statistics, so everyone should have been happy. But a high-ranking government official read the piece and sent a message to me basically saying, "Next time you come, why don't you cut the crap?" His words were far more restrained, but that was the gist. (He is now a very good friend of mine, but I have reined in my incredible sleuthing powers in that country.)

All governments expect to be praised. This is the eternal dilemma of journalism. If an interviewer rips someone in an interview, they won't get another. It is also a matter of good manners. Having been invited to visit a country by its leaders, and having been given the privilege of meeting with them and receiving reasonably honest information (that's as good as it gets), it is churlish in the extreme to leave and attack them. It also means that you are unlikely to have contact again, nor a chance to speak publicly in that country, perhaps influencing it – a long shot, of course.

One solution to this dilemma flows from my method. Policies are wishes, and reality dominates all things. I am not looking to find out the intentions of leaders. Leaders come and go, and intentions go even faster. Instead, I am looking to discover two things: what leaders must do, and what they can do. This tells me what they will do. Leaders understand this intimately, and they actually welcome someone who cares about what they must do – though they aren't necessarily so grateful to hear comments in public about what they can (and can't) do. But leaders have a desire to be understood, particularly by those who have no political agenda of their own. Given that I'm not a consultant and don't work for a nongovernmental organization, and I don't draw moral judgments (inasmuch as there are so many of those people that the world doesn't need me in that role), I can be seen as a friend while uttering criticisms.

But the most precious thing about visiting a country isn't meeting with the leaders but walking the streets. Visiting a supermarket, seeing the prices and watching people shop can tell a person a great deal. If a shopper picks up an item, checks the price and puts the item down, then repeats the process before buying something, I know things are tight. If it's in a poor neighborhood and the item is a staple like butter, things are especially tough. I can also walk the streets and look at the shoes on children or the posters on the wall and learn far more than I would in a meeting. In driving past a military installation and catching a glimpse of a sergeant and how he carries himself, or the age of a truck, there is much to be learned.

Preparation is necessary. A good history of the country or city is essential, as is a novel or poem that remains a national treasure. For example, Portugal Day commemorates the death of Luis Vaz de Camoes, a 16th-century poet. Any poet of the past who has endured to the present is someone who must be read, even if

you won't understand it all. You will still get a sense of what moves the Portuguese.

Geopolitics is about the broad constraints and imperatives that shape the soul of the nation. Its history and literature is geopolitics at work. The grocery store is where constraints and imperatives work themselves out in this frame of the movie. There, and on the tires of BMWs.

I leave early next week and will report the week after.

Mission Statement of GPF

The mission of Geopolitical Futures is contained it its name. Geopolitical Futures understands the world through the rigorous application of geopolitics: the political, economic, military and geographic dimensions that are the foundation of a nation. The imperatives and constraints contained in these define the nation. We study first the past and thereby understand the future. At its core geopolitics assumes, as does economics, that events are governed by these impersonal forces and not by individual whim or ideology. Geopolitical Futures is rigorously non-ideological. Our staff may have their personal beliefs, but they must check them at the door.

We therefore strive to be objective, not merely neutral, but indifferent to the opinions swirling around the world. We have one underlying belief, which is that liberal democracy can survive only if there is a segment of society, which we call the learned public, who is not caught up in the passions of the moment, but is eager to look at the world as it is, and influence the polity toward the prudence that flows from understanding. It is this learned public we serve with the methods we have developed. Above all, Geopolitical Futures is an intellectual undertaking, an ongoing experiment in finding order in the apparent chaos of the world. We are a business that lives the life of the mind.

Geopolitical Futures gives you the information you need to cut through the hype and get to the meaning behind the sensationalist headlines. The meaning that can transform the way you view the world.

Every day the media produces an overwhelming amount of information, projected through the biases of whatever interests pay their bills. A recent Gallup poll found that 62 percent of Americans think the news media favors a political party.

This is where we come in. Geopolitical thought leader and New York Times bestselling author George Friedman founded Geopolitical Futures to disrupt the conversation about foreign policy and international news.

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