

# New Perspectives IN FOREIGN POLICY

A JOURNAL WRITTEN BY AND FOR THE ENRICHMENT OF YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

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## NEO-OTTOMANISM: TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TO AFRICA

BY ASYA AKCA

opened its largest military base overseas in Mogadishu, starting trainings with Somali National Army soldiers.<sup>3</sup> The state-run Turkish Airlines now flies 52 routes from Istanbul to 33 different African countries, when it only flew to 14 in 2011.<sup>4</sup> Economically, Turkey has increased bilateral trade with Africa five-fold from 2003 to over \$20 billion in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

Leaders within the African Union (AU) have stated that Erdoğan has “won hearts and minds” through his humanitarian assistance and support for Muslim communities.<sup>6</sup> Africa is 54 countries strong, and Erdoğan views his increased engagement across Africa as a way for Turkey to achieve greater global relevance. However, Erdoğan sees the existing network of Fetullah Gülen-affiliated institutions and schools across

the African continent as an impediment to his growing Turkey-Africa partnerships, as he blames Gülen for orchestrating the July 15, 2016 coup attempt on his government. Therefore, Erdoğan has made a concerted effort to relieve countries of these networks, making economic, cultural, and security deals contingent on the closure of Gülen institutions. Turkey's increased expansion into Africa is a component of Erdoğan's big-picture foreign policy agenda, often characterized as Neo-Ottoman, to take Turkey closer to the status of global power.

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### TURKEY'S INCREASED EXPANSION INTO AFRICA IS A COMPONENT OF ERDOĞAN'S BIG-PICTURE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA TO TAKE TURKEY CLOSER TO THE STATUS OF GLOBAL POWER.

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#### NEO-OTTOMANISM IN PRACTICE

Over the course of Erdoğan's rise to power, Turkish foreign policy has expanded into the African continent as never before seen in the republic's history, making headlines with his major humanitarian contributions and economic cooperation agreements.<sup>7</sup> Erdoğan has visited 26 African countries, a record for a non-African head of state,

and has the goal of building Turkish diplomatic presence in every country on the continent.<sup>8</sup> The origins of Turkey's foreign policy approach to Africa date back to Ahmet Davutoğlu, the former prime minister of Turkey. His vision for Turkey, most notably articulated in his 2001 book *Strategic Depth* (Stratejik Derinlik), is often referred to as “Neo-Ottomanism” due to its vision of expanding Turkish engagement across the globe, especially in areas of former Ottoman influence. Davutoğlu wanted “to make Turkey a center of stability in surrounding regions and a country providing a new vision . . . for international relations.”<sup>9</sup> The ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) under President Erdoğan's leadership has continued to articulate this vision for Turkey even after Davutoğlu's departure.

In 2011, Turkey credited itself as being one of the only countries that supported Somalia after its devastating famine. Erdoğan was the first non-African head of state to visit the country in 20 years.<sup>10</sup> Since then, the Turkish-Somali relationship has flourished, moving from humanitarian aid to now include security cooperation programs.<sup>11</sup> In the fall of 2017, Erdoğan opened a Turkish military base in Mogadishu worth \$50 million, Ankara's largest overseas base.<sup>12</sup> “We are doing our best to help our Somali brothers and sisters in terms of restructuring, equipping, and training the Somali armed forces,” said Mehmet Yasin Kalın, the commander of the base.<sup>13</sup> A few months later, Erdoğan announced in Khartoum that Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir had issued a decree granting the Turks a 99-year lease to restore Ottoman ruins on Suakin Island, located off the coast of Sudan in the Red Sea. Erdoğan said that they would “restore and make it worthy of its historical glory.” Before the formal announcement, there were suspicions that Turkey was trying to acquire access to the island to build a military base there.<sup>14</sup>

Not only has Turkey taken on major infrastructure projects across the continent, such as the construction of roads and railways, but it has also exercised other soft power tools to positively influence African perceptions of Turkey. The Turkish government has opened “maternal and child care centers in Niger, women's shelters in Cameroon and a vocational training center in Madagascar.”<sup>15</sup> As more countries are engaging with Africa, African leaders themselves have started finding alternatives to China when deciding who should build the next road or hospital. For example, the Turkish construction company Yapı Merkezi won a \$3 billion railway project deal in Ethiopia and Tanzania over Chinese competitors.<sup>16</sup> A local resident recounted that “The Turkish workers know how to live and work with the local community” because they “have a similar culture.”<sup>17</sup> Turkey has capitalized on gaining popularity within Africa's Muslim populations, particularly in the Horn of Africa, where communities tend to be more sympathetic to Erdoğan's overtures. Even First Lady Emine Erdoğan has taken on her own women's empowerment project in Africa, which she discussed at the 2018 U.N. General Assembly.<sup>18</sup> Turkish TV dramas have also gained increased popularity in African countries such as Sudan, Ghana, and Kenya, which expose African people to Turkish tourist destinations, food, and Turkey's perceived “modern and progressive society,” as one Sudanese viewer reflected.<sup>19</sup> All of these elements contribute to making African leaders more willing to concede to Erdoğan's wishes, whether they be

about closing down Gülen schools or opening more Turkish embassies.

The Turkish government has simultaneously been playing up its anti-Western rhetoric in its public diplomacy campaigns. On a trip to Zambia, President Erdoğan said that Turkey is “not going to Africa to take their gold and natural resources as Westerners have done in the past” but instead that Turkey is building a “solid and sustainable partnership based on mutual benefits.”<sup>20</sup> Although the Ottoman Empire only held minor parts of North Africa, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlights that “the Ottoman Empire prevented colonial expansion in North Africa . . . and East Africa.”<sup>21</sup>

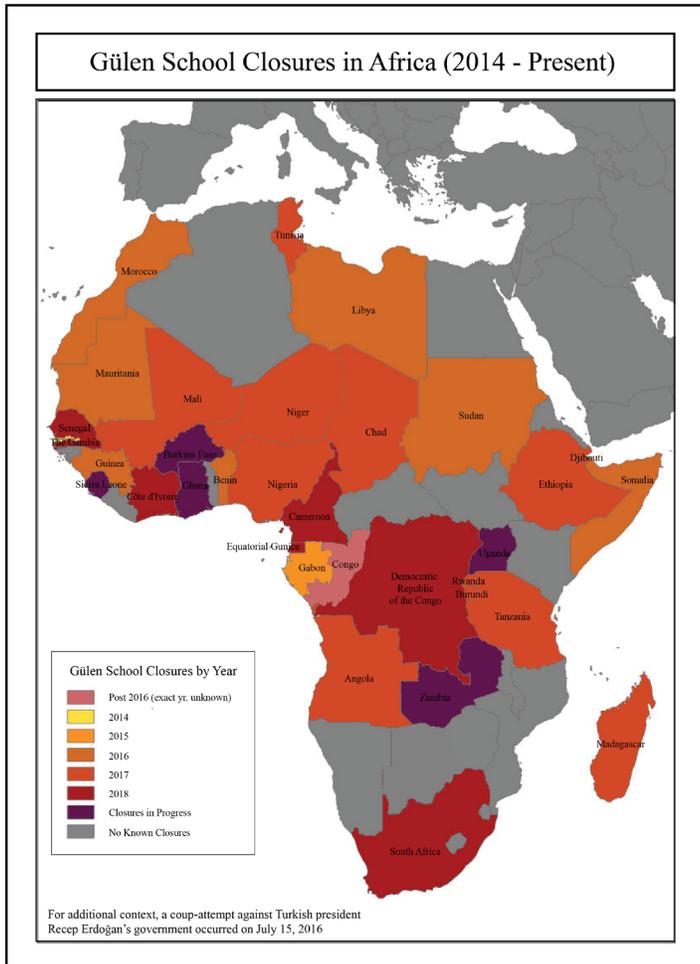
## **TURKEY VS. GULF STATES**

As Turkey builds up its relations with African countries, the Gulf states are taking notice and beginning to push back, bringing their traditional rivalries with them from the Middle East and competing with Turkey’s rapid expansion of diplomatic missions across the continent. Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia criticized Erdoğan for trying to build an “Ottoman caliphate” in the region.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> The Gulf-aligned Egyptians have also been agitated by Turkey’s encroachment into its own backyard and were particularly concerned with Turkey’s negotiations with Sudan surrounding Suakin Island, which ultimately led to greater tensions between Egypt and Sudan.<sup>24</sup> As a response to Turkey’s increased presence across the Horn of Africa, it is no surprise that the Egyptians, and its Gulf partners, have tried to exert more influence themselves in the region.

## **GÜLEN SCHOOLS CLOSURES**

Erdoğan’s has painted Turkey’s commercial, security, and cultural engagements in Africa as mutually beneficial. However, the aid and security assistance accompanying strengthened diplomatic ties has come at a cost. Following the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, Turkey began an international effort to shut down all institutions affiliated with the U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fetullah Gülen, who is accused of orchestrating the coup. To date, Erdoğan has successfully negotiated with 29 African countries to close down all of the Gülen-affiliated schools in their countries, with several more countries currently working with the Turkish government on future closures.<sup>25</sup> With these agreements, Erdoğan pledges to open new Turkish schools to replace the former Gülen-affiliated African institutions through the state-run Maarif Foundation, founded in 2016 specifically as part of this effort.<sup>26</sup> The foundation’s president, Birol Akgün, has repeatedly said that Western countries (such as the United States, which has more than 140 Gülen schools) refuse to hand over these institutions, but that the foundation has made more progress in Africa.<sup>27</sup> “We’re having positive reception from countries especially in Africa, we have made some progress and transferred the control of a prominent number of schools to our administration,” Akgün said.<sup>28</sup>

Due to Erdoğan’s increased pressure, Senegal has closed more than a dozen schools, which catered to more than 3,000 students.<sup>29</sup> “Our cooperation with Senegal in combating FETO is to continue. Shutting down of FETO-linked schools is very, very important,” Erdoğan said.<sup>30</sup> South Africa recently closed 11 Gülen



schools which taught 2,800 students.<sup>31</sup> Angola cited “national security reasons” behind shutting down its schools, while the Rwandan Ministry of Education announced that it would shut down a Gülen-affiliated school only two months after it opened.<sup>32</sup> Ethiopia, Mali, Tanzania, Benin, Niger, and Madagascar, among many others, have all similarly shut down their Gülen schools. Another handful of countries, which include Zambia and Ghana, are in the process of shutting them down after pressure from the Erdoğan government. Following the July 2016 coup attempt, it is clear that Turkey has been able to increase pressure on African leaders to shut down Gülen schools at Ankara’s demand, leaving many families and students angry and without a school to attend in the interim.<sup>33</sup>

## CONCLUSION

By bringing more diplomatic reach through its embassies and supplying aid to various pockets of Africa, Turkey has been able to garner the political buy-in it needs to encourage the closure of Gülen affiliated schools. Erdoğan has brought his domestic fight against Gülenists to the international arena. Part of the President

Erdoğan’s foreign policy agenda is to turn Turkey into a global power, while also taking the country back to the glory days of the Ottoman Empire. By shutting down Gülen schools in almost 30 African countries (and counting), Erdoğan sees himself as putting down possible threats to Turkey’s global expansion efforts.

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## QUESTIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN 2019

BY JANHAVI APTE

unable to scale back aid and push for self-reliance among affected communities because the needs are too overwhelming. You are responding to enduring health crises, with brutal epidemics affecting generations. And now you ask the million-dollar question: “[how] will this ever end?”

Getting to the ideal answer is not easy. Conflict is the primary driver of humanitarian crises today, which are lasting longer and affecting increasing numbers of people. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that the number of people in need of assistance has grown by over 60 percent from 2014 to 2018.<sup>1</sup> In the same period, the average length of conflicts has increased from 5.2 years to 9.3 years respectively.<sup>2</sup> Examples of this are everywhere. The Syrian conflict is in its eighth year, the war in Yemen is reaching its fourth, and the Venezuelan crisis is unfolding right before our eyes. Proving that there is no such thing as a short-term response, “emergencies” are lasting for years, if not decades. Wars today are the consequences of ignored developmental issues such as extreme poverty, social and political discrimination, and unemployment.

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**BAND-AID SOLUTIONS TO  
COMPLEX CRISES DO NOTHING  
TO ADDRESS DEEPLY-ROOTED  
GRIEVANCES OR STRUCTURAL  
WEAKNESSES IN SOCIETIES,  
THEREBY LEAVING ALREADY  
FRAGILE CONTEXTS EXPOSED  
AND STILL VULNERABLE TO  
FURTHER INSTABILITY.**

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**W**hen you think of a humanitarian crisis, you likely picture a place ridden with massive casualties, destruction, displacement, and disease. When imagining a response to such a crisis, you probably envision airplanes dropping food into inaccessible areas, aid workers setting up clinics and refugee camps, and the distribution of basic supplies like water and sanitation kits. Now imagine doing this for not just a few months, but for years, in multiple contexts, and with no end in sight. You are

The term *violence* is not limited to the loss of human life, but also includes destruction of large infrastructure and institutions, and the world is learning to deal with unsettling new threats posed by violent extremist groups. With the changing nature of conflict and overwhelming levels of people affected, humanitarian action must also evolve to include elements of resilience building and long-term development to help secure viable peace in volatile situations.<sup>3</sup> Band-aid solutions to complex crises do nothing to address deeply-rooted grievances or structural weaknesses in societies, thereby leaving already fragile contexts exposed and still vulnerable to further instability.

It is crucial to remember that humanitarian crises caused by violent conflict require political solutions. However, given the glacial pace at which political developments tend to progress, humanitarian action, as the first line of response to any crisis, must work towards some key goals: alleviating human suffering, ending the need for aid, and creating an environment conducive to lasting peace. This cannot happen if the humanitarian community remains reliant on its siloed approach of responding only to the immediate needs of the crisis-affected. Instead, it must strive to be forward-looking, collaborate with a wide range of actors to work towards collective outcomes, and respect humanitarian principles to not just respond to crises but also prevent their reemergence.<sup>4,5</sup>

The rising costs of providing humanitarian aid and assistance come hand-in-hand with a sharp dwindling of political will; nations no longer want to remain engaged in increasingly drawn out conflicts. Between 2011 and 2018, global humanitarian response plan (HRP) appeals have increased from \$8.92 billion to \$24.93 billion, marking a 179 percent increase in funding demands.<sup>6</sup> Given current trends, these numbers are expected to continue rising, with the global humanitarian funding appeal for 2019 expected to be over \$25 billion.<sup>7</sup> This is making states nervous about the sustainability of such efforts, as they struggle to keep up with the rapidly changing and increasing costs of responding to conflicts for an extended period of time. With aid budgets shrinking and a renewed pressure to utilize funds effectively, investing in diversified partnerships across the humanitarian and development sectors for more comprehensive programming could help lead to greater reform rather than just increasing spending for humanitarian assistance.<sup>8</sup>

For example, the average duration of displacement for a refugee today is approximately 17 years.<sup>9</sup> In the absence of development efforts, this could mean that a refugee might require aid for 17 years, which is unsustainable. In places where governing bodies lack the capacity to provide basic services—such as food, water, shelter, and education—to citizens and refugees alike, aid actors could usurp the role of service-providers, leaving room for aid dependency to take hold.

Yemen is a prime illustration of where more resilience-focused responses need to be employed. If hostilities end following the recent peace-talks in Sweden, it will not automatically pave the way for peace and stability in Yemen, nor will it end the need for humanitarian actors on the ground.<sup>10</sup> Existing hostilities aside, Yemen has long been an unstable country. Following a very brief stint in the limelight as a success story from the Arab Spring, Yemen quickly descended into chaos as the new leadership failed to consolidate its power.<sup>11</sup> Deeply-rooted grievances, a secessionist South, unreliable institutions, and a rapidly collapsing economy proved to be fertile grounds for the Houthi movement to gain traction, and the violence that followed only exacerbated an already looming crisis in the country. What is happening right now in Yemen was predictable far before UN famine declarations and heart-wrenching media coverage of emaciated children, but it took this level of tragedy for it to make the international community's priority list.<sup>12</sup>

Humanitarian response does not end when the violence ends, and the necessary political solutions to protracted crises are hard to come by. Therefore, it is imperative for humanitarian action to incorporate development tools in its programming to better control the negative impacts of crises and to carve a path forward. These tools could include educating women on health and hygiene, providing longer-term medical assistance, or working with civil society to conduct livelihoods training for people affected by crises. This does not mean that humanitarians must take on the role of development professionals but rather need to form meaningful partnerships, exchange knowledge, and use their expertise of working in conflict and post-conflict settings to help build capacities to withstand future shocks.<sup>13</sup> If partnerships take form in this manner, the road to stability will be less fragile when the political solutions finally arrive.

If the dream of every humanitarian—to have a day where their work is no longer required—is to come true, humanitarian action will have to push its boundaries. The humanitarian agenda must adapt to the changing international landscape in which it seeks to operate.<sup>14</sup> Though emergency assistance is vital, if there is no simultaneous focus on planting the seeds of long-term development within humanitarian programs, humanitarian action runs the risk of producing the exact opposite of its intended result, an outcome which will entrap the international community in a vicious cycle of reactionary (and extremely costly) policies and create huge dependencies on aid. And as for the dream of making humanitarian action obsolete, it will remain a dream.

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# COMING TOGETHER TO FIGHT FAKE NEWS: LESSONS FROM THE EUROPEAN APPROACH TO DISINFORMATION

BY ANNINA CLAEISSON

For observers across the pond, Europe has been a testing ground for tactics to counter disinformation in democracies. Over the course of many national elections in the past few years, Europe has tried a variety of measures to counter disinformation efforts from multiple sources. Now, the European Union is aiming to complement national efforts by scaling up its own response through EU-level policies.

In an effort to address what some civil society and media organizations have criticized as an overly disaggregated approach by the European Union, current EU efforts focus on proper coordination with and among the many actors involved in countering disinformation. Specifically, the EU response is focused on three lines of effort: improving interagency and international cooperation; stepping up ambitions

in addressing the role of the private sector; and instituting a plan to support media literacy. In addition to helping the European Union tackle disinformation campaigns that seek to disrupt the democratic process, these measures can also serve as a template for the United States and other countries as they design their own anti-disinformation strategies.

## STRENGTHENING INTERAGENCY AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The problem of disinformation is a complex and disaggregated one. While the United States often sees disinformation narrowly as the dissemination of “fake news” by Russian trolls, the “European approach” often takes a wider view.<sup>1</sup> In its recent communications, the European Union presents disinformation as a problem rooted in complex and rapid socioeconomic changes. Our democracies are now characterized by stark societal divisions that malign actors may seek to exploit. While this is nothing new, technological developments have made disinformation a powerful, inexpensive, and often profitable method of influencing a range of actors from powerful states to small extremist groups. State-sponsored Russian campaigns in particular have become a mounting threat to European democracies and remain a significant challenge ahead of the 2019 European parliament elections, but other groups (such as those on the far-right) have also been active in disinformation campaigns in recent European elections.<sup>2,3</sup>

Since disinformation is a problem with diverse and complicated roots, the challenge of countering it does not land in any one portfolio. It requires cooperation

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**OUR DEMOCRACIES ARE NOW CHARACTERIZED BY STARK SOCIETAL DIVISIONS THAT MALIGN ACTORS MAY SEEK TO EXPLOIT. WHILE THIS IS NOTHING NEW, TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS HAVE MADE DISINFORMATION A POWERFUL, INEXPENSIVE, AND OFTEN PROFITABLE METHOD OF INFLUENCING A RANGE OF ACTORS FROM POWERFUL STATES TO SMALL EXTREMIST GROUPS.**

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between different agencies within states and internationally. As an important co-regulatory actor, this is where the European Union has a vital role to play. Over the course of 2018, the European Union has stepped up its ambitions in countering disinformation campaigns through a range of new initiatives.

There are several positive lessons to draw from these. Perhaps most importantly, the European Commission has appropriately identified the need for a unified, multi-stakeholder response to disinformation, including participation from governments, civil society, and the private sector.<sup>4</sup> The commission's most recent action plan, released in December 2018, sets out important improvements in this regard. The EU budget for tackling disinformation is expected to more than double in 2019, going from €1.9 million

in 2018 to €5 million.<sup>5</sup> This is not to be disregarded—money matters a great deal, especially when Russia invests over €1 billion each year into their disinformation and propaganda efforts.<sup>6</sup>

The action plan's most concrete new step is the creation of a rapid alert system, which provides alerts on new disinformation campaigns as they emerge in real time.<sup>7</sup> This mechanism is set to involve NATO and could become a promising tool for intelligence and data sharing across borders. This action plan also strengthens previously under-resourced tools such as the East Strategic Communication Task Force, an issue which was identified by experts as a significant roadblock to improving anti-disinformation efforts in the European Union.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these and other improvements to the European Union's overall strategy, managing a multi-stakeholder response without losing oversight and control of policy efforts remains a difficult balancing act. The European Union's current track record shows a tendency to over rely on "outsourcing" anti-disinformation efforts to independent networks. The EU vs Disinfo campaign, part of the East Strategic Communication Task Force, has so far provided the starkest example of these shortcomings.<sup>9</sup> The campaign runs through a volunteer "myth-busting" network of more than 400 experts, journalists, government officials, NGOs, and think tanks. However, only around a dozen of these appear to be active.<sup>10</sup> The campaign came under fire when three legitimate Dutch publications had to go to court in order to be removed from the campaign's black list.<sup>11</sup>

Relying on networks of “fact-checkers” may sound like a simple solution to countering the spread of false information, but this strategy has several problems. Conflicts of interest risk complicating these collaborations. Parties and leaders who have benefited from the proliferation of false narratives (such as the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban) have little incentive to invest in higher journalistic standards or fact-checking. Nor do private actors have much incentive to prioritize the truth over profit margins, a prerequisite for effectively participating in such initiatives. It is crucial to strike a balance between involving a wide variety of actors and maintaining accountability for such efforts to galvanize appropriate levels of political leverage for countering disinformation.

## ADDRESSING THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector has a role to play in this regard. Private actors are the ones running the online platforms where disinformation campaigns launch and spread. Algorithm-based, advertising-driven social media dynamics have served as a key facilitator of amplified dissemination of false messages.<sup>12</sup> The European Union has explicitly acknowledged the failure of private-sector actors to address this issue and has urged private corporations to step up their efforts through a series of initiatives over the past year.

The EU Code of Practice on Disinformation, published on September 26, 2018, covers five areas of competence to increase transparency and accountability of the online media landscape.<sup>13</sup> The code’s publication marked the first time worldwide that industry (including tech giants such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter) agreed on a voluntary basis to sign up for regulatory standards for the purposes of reducing false information spread online. To complement the code, the European Union’s action plan introduced a monitoring body to oversee the implementation of the code’s commitments.<sup>14</sup>

This last step is vital but could be developed further. The voluntary and self-regulatory code of practice lacks teeth if it is not complemented by other measures to improve scrutiny of private actors. However, the business models of many online platforms favor manipulative content that can spread rapidly on a wide scale, a key driver of disinformation campaigns. When it comes to the business models of online platforms, the European Data Protection Supervisor rightly points out that “fake news is a symptom of concentrated, unaccountable digital markets, and constant tracking and reckless handling of personal data.”<sup>15</sup>

The EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into force in 2018, remains one of the strongest data protection regulation systems in the world. Through it, the European Union has elevated data privacy into the realm of individual rights and created some guarantees for the processing of personal data, particularly during electoral activities.<sup>16</sup> Preventing the misuse of personal data is another important tool for combating disinformation campaigns. While the European Commission has previously acknowledged the role of GDPR and similar initiatives (such as ePrivacy) in the context of disinformation, there is no

mention of these mechanisms in the European Union’s recent Action Plan.<sup>17, 18</sup> Without a plan to enforce these measures as part of wider disinformation efforts, illegal data collection for illicit use remains a risk factor and key weakness of the new EU strategy.

## STRENGTHENING MEDIA LITERACY

Perhaps most importantly, the European Union’s new initiatives show an understanding that you cannot fight disinformation by cutting off the “heads of the hydra” one at a time. A more sustainable policy must involve a sustained effort to promote positive counter-messages (for example, on the benefits of EU membership or multiculturalism) that can compete with false and divisive content. These measures focus on solutions from the demand-side rather than the supply-side, building resilience to disinformation campaigns from the bottom up.<sup>19</sup>

The latest action plan calls on member states to intensify proactive and objective communications to provide positive counter-narratives to disinformation campaigns. These measures have often been recommended from state and civil society actors as a crucial part of a successful strategy to counter disinformation, and it is a positive sign that the European Union has incorporated such tactics into its strategy. The goal is not just to disseminate counter-propaganda but rather to consistently communicate facts in an approachable way in order to build up a resilient “other side of the story” that citizens should understand before encountering false information. Crucially, this should not be the sole job of EU institutions or national governments but must also involve civil society and independent media.<sup>20, 21</sup>

Improving media literacy—strengthening critical attitudes among citizens towards different sources of news—is another vital tool for an effective anti-disinformation strategy. This is evident from countries like Ukraine that have long been subjected to heavy disinformation and propaganda campaigns on behalf of the Russian state and have since implemented successful national education plans for media literacy. Evidence from these states show that media literacy programs are particularly effective when they are not limited to young people but target all citizens in different sectors of society, including media professionals.<sup>22</sup> The European Union and the United States can go even further in strengthening media literacy education in all sectors of society.

## LESSONS BEYOND EUROPE

Reviewing the European Union’s new initiatives provides several positive lessons on how to design policy responses to disinformation that go beyond tech. Due to the rapid development of the technology behind disinformation campaigns, there remains a significant risk that the European Union’s response will lag behind the latest tools. Disinformation has a social dimension as well as a technological one, and any effective policy must take a holistic approach. In 2018, the European Union took many important steps in this regard. Through improved interagency coordination, measures to regulate the private sector, and support for

media literacy, the European Union is now on a path to build resilience against disinformation ahead of the 2019 elections.

That is not to say that there is not room for improvement. The mixed success of the EU vs Disinfo campaign illustrates the difficult balance between involving a diverse network of stakeholders and “outsourcing” information defense operations to the point where they become unreliable. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation is crucial as a part of the process of improving cooperation between sectors. Civil society has already provided counsel to the European Union in this regard: civil society should be directly involved in monitoring and evaluation in order to improve accountability.

Reviewing the European Union’s policies provides an opportunity for countries like the United States to draw lessons to inform their own multi-stakeholder strategies to counter disinformation. While the United States does not operate under the same legal framework as the European Union, the logic behind the European Union’s raised ambitions to counter disinformation should certainly still apply across the pond. Perhaps most importantly, the “European approach” highlights the necessity and difficulty of involving all parts of society in this fight. In 2018, the European Union has made landmark progress particularly in addressing the private sector and protecting personal data. The effectiveness of measures such as GDPR and the Code of Practice must be carefully evaluated both within and outside of the European Union. The United States would greatly benefit from reviewing the results of such an analysis to inform future policy conversations about whether to implement similar measures.

The disinformation challenge has always changed with the times and will continue to do so. Learning from each other—on an interagency or transatlantic basis—remains the best way of staying ready to counter it.

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## THE IGNORED INDIGENOUS GENIUS

BY HAILEY DOUGHERTY

Rio de Janeiro in June of 2012 to discuss the urgent need to improve human livelihoods while prioritizing environmental protection. It was at this conference, Rio+20, that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were first conceptualized, signifying an acknowledgement by world governments that we must pursue development in a different way.

The 17 SDGs, officially adopted by all UN member states in 2015, establish an ambitious blueprint for prosperity for people and the planet, a broad agenda to bring about sustainable global growth by 2030. , Why sustainable? We cannot carry

Old customs of development, namely habits of the global north, have polluted our planet's vital land and marine resources and erased lifeforms. Climate change, the direst threat facing our world today, was brought on by industrial, agricultural, and economic modernization. In an effort to respond to these challenges, UN member states convened in

on developing without the sufficient, healthy, and nutritious resources required to do so. The vast environmental degradation resulting from conventional models of development suggests that there are ecological limits to growth. Sustainable development, the strategy to cope with these ecological limitations, is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The 17 overarching global goals create "peer pressure" for political leaders to curb human-in-

duced environmental destruction, but they establish no clear roadmap for the way forward. Where can we turn for exemplar *sustainable* development models? Answers conceivably lie beyond mainstream approaches. Achieving global sustainable development by 2030 calls for an immediate and focused examination of the breadth of existing knowledge on sustainable livelihoods and requires taking seriously all forms of expertise.

### INDIGENOUS EXPERTISE

*"Sooner or later, we will have to recognize that the Earth has rights, too, to live without pollution. What mankind must know is that human beings cannot live without Mother Earth, but the planet can live without humans."*

-Evo Morales, First Indigenous President of Bolivia

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**THE VAST ENVIRONMENTAL  
DEGRADATION RESULTING  
FROM CONVENTIONAL MODELS  
OF DEVELOPMENT SUGGESTS  
THAT THERE ARE ECOLOGICAL  
LIMITS TO GROWTH.**

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A strong source of human capital has been largely overlooked in sustainable development governance. Amid rapid globalization, indigenous communities have proven their relentless ability to preserve ecological services and co-evolve with nature. Through millennia, indigenous peoples have widely maintained sustainable livelihoods, but their shared experience as victims of societal and institutional discrimination has diminished their roles in political and development discourse.

The UN system recognizes groups as indigenous peoples only if they self-identify as such. The world's indigenous communities are culturally diverse, but several traits help to spell out their likeness: historical place-based roots, connections to communities preceding colonization or pre-settler societies, distinct languages, social practices, belief systems, and a harmonized group identity. Indigenous groups have long thrived on traditional knowledge of their surroundings. They have fine-tuned livelihood strategies through trial and error over generations—an underappreciated form of science.

Among their many areas of expertise, they have accumulated best-practices for the sustainable management of natural resources. It is no surprise then that globally the highest levels of agricultural biodiversity are found in the farmed plots of indigenous populations. Agrobiodiversity is the variety and variability of plant species or genetic resources that are used for food. Humans play a central role in shaping and conserving rich biodiversity in their food systems. The central Andean countries of Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador have one of the greatest concentrations of agrobiodiversity “hot spots” thanks to the conservation skillsets of Quechua and Aymara farmers. There, a single agricultural field can contain up to 74 different varieties of potatoes, compared to the average of 5-8 varieties that Northern American agriculture relies upon. Communities not only understand how to maintain biodiversity but how to obtain the greatest benefits from each species' unique properties. And it is the indigenous women who possess the large majority of knowledge on species diversity. Rich agrobiodiversity contributes to ecological conservation and the empowerment and autonomy of women and provides benefits to nutrition, food security, medicine, climate resiliency, and the economy—all of which are mandates of the UN 2030 Agenda.

Indigenous communities also possess insights into climate change adaptation. Unfortunately, adaptation is not a new concept for many indigenous communities who have been marginalized onto rural and remote land with poor infrastructure and productivity potential. Drought and other extreme weather events have been a recurring challenge faced by people in sub-Saharan Africa, and indigenous groups have employed a variety of strategies to cope with an unpredictable environment. For example, indigenous farmers of southern Uganda have long monitored seasonal weather patterns with high attention to detail in the weeks leading up to rains. Dissimilar to modern climatology, these farmers utilize diverse and largely qualitative environmental signs, or *obubonero*, to shape livelihood decisions. These include visible and audible observations of nearby rainstorms, bird calls, and the news of weather events disseminated by regional travelers. In recent years, they

have adapted oral knowledge sharing to radios and mobile phones, with proven adaptation benefits. Indigenous early warning systems could have compelling implications for future development projects geared towards knowledge-sharing for resiliency. Additionally, the collective memories of indigenous farmers in sub-Saharan Africa stretch back years before formal meteorological data collection, offering valuable climatic insights. For indigenous African peoples, traditional knowledge is widely considered collective and belonging to the whole community, unlike conventional economic development models that encourage the patenting and ownership of ideas. The practice of information-sharing reflects the common indigenous values of transparency and reciprocity for the benefit of all.

To realize the 2030 Agenda, widespread behavioral change will need to be instrumental. Policies and education systems must encourage greater respect and cohesion among humans and in human relationships with nature. In these efforts, indigenous ethics should be paid greater consideration. Common indigenous principles of sustainable living are (1) relationships, (2) place, and (3) kinship (*spiritual relationships*) among humans and the resources needed for survival. *Aloha aina* (to love the land) and *Malama aina* (to care for the land) are at the heart of indigenous Hawaiian virtues, which encourage commitment to respecting and protecting one's surroundings. Indigenous peoples have attempted to call attention to their profound and inherently reciprocal relationships with nature, with little recognition. It is a commonly held notion that indigenous "beliefs" are solely extrasensory superstitions devoid of veracity. But on the contrary, indigenous "beliefs" originate from tangible sequences involving sensations, emotions, and rationalizations—they are records of lived experiences, as a native Ka'u Hawaiian describes.

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## **INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS ARE MORE THAN CULTURAL BELIEFS, THEY ARE EXPERT HUMAN CAPITAL COLLECTIONS WITH PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.**

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Time and time again, indigenous peoples have entered the global stage only for their insights, concerns, and requests to fall on deaf ears. International governments and development actors need to restructure current conversations on traditional practices of sustainable living. Indigenous knowledge systems are more than cultural beliefs, they are expert human capital collections with practical applications for sustainable development. Appropriate institutions are needed to integrate this sophisticated and underappreciated wealth of knowledge into sustainable development governance. Consider-

ing the highly regional and localized wisdom of indigenous groups, the capacity of these communities to contribute to sustainable development governance will require a bottom-up approach in which local institutions and community organizations are empowered in higher-level dialogues.

Indigenous peoples should be given a lead voice in assessing (and implementing, when appropriate) the scalability potential of their practices, as a lack of inclusiv-

ity in development discussions would only exacerbate inequalities, contradicting SDG 10 (reducing inequalities within and among countries). Sustainable development is not a new concept to indigenous peoples, so working towards this goal on a global scale should not prompt reinventing the wheel. Incorporating the knowledge of indigenous peoples in development projects and governance will empower historically ignored sustainability experts in shaping our shared future.

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## A FRIEND OF A FRIEND: HOW BETTER CHINA-JAPAN RELATIONS BENEFIT THE UNITED STATES

BY ZIJIA HE

On October 25, 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a state visit to Beijing, a significant moment between the two countries—he is the first Japanese prime minister to visit China in seven years. A historically contentious relationship wrought by multiple wars, invasions, and periods of conflict escalation, China and Japan have struggled to forge mutual understanding for generations. Japan’s nationalization of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2012 further complicated the China-Japan dynamic and hindered the development of productive bilateral relations between the two countries in recent years. Yet, this recent visit, alongside an ongoing series of bilateral meetings and a 2018 trip made by Chinese Premier

Li Keqiang to Tokyo, marks an improvement in this crucial relationship. Not only did Prime Minister Abe’s visit mark an official thaw in Tokyo-Beijing relations, but it could also serve as an important regional stabilizer, counteracting the U.S.-China trade disputes.

As the current U.S. administration has embarked on a crusade to renegotiate trade relations with all major trading partners, many China watchers in the United States have feared that President Trump is unintentionally pushing traditional allies like Japan closer to strategic competitors like China, which would undermine U.S. interests. However, this view exaggerates the harm and downplays the benefits of the recent China-Japan rapprochement. The United States should not forget its role as the security guarantor of Japan, and thus, Washington should be confident that Tokyo would never sacrifice its security protection solely for economic development. Instead of seeing this change as counterproductive, the United States should view improved China-Japan relations as beneficial to U.S. interests, specifically in three distinct ways: greater accountability in global infrastructure development, improved strategic communications between the United States and China, and progress towards regional stability.

Most directly, the China-Japan rapprochement benefits regional infrastructure and development, an area in which the United States has shown increasing interests. The China-Japan thaw would lead to tangible progress in filling the \$1 trillion gap in infrastructure spending each year in Asia. During a cooperative forum co-hosted by China and Japan in Beijing in October 2018, the two sides signed 52 cooperative agreements worth \$18 billion. Multiple projects in Thailand could be the first to follow the cooperation initiative, as the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the China Development Bank signed a financing agreement targeting countries, like

Thailand, whose bilateral relations with both Japan and China are friendly. Japanese media have also reported collaborative projects in countries ranging from the United Arab Emirates to Kazakhstan. Through cooperation, both countries will achieve better coordination and allocate resources more effectively in Asia, where \$1.5 trillion of U.S. foreign trade took place in 2017.

Washington worries that Beijing could employ its infrastructure investments as a form of foreign policy leverage, leading to disputes of the lack of competition in the Belt and Road Initiative projects, China's trillion-dollar infrastructure development program. This flagship Chinese foreign policy provides infrastructure investments across the Eurasian landmass and has faced accusations of misconduct abroad. In contrast, Japan's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure—Tokyo's infrastructure plan—has established a reputation of high standards in the United States, promoting project transparency and debt sustainability. Bilateral cooperation between Beijing and Tokyo will ensure that joint infrastructure projects will be held at a higher standard moving forward and thus be more aligned to Washington's standards. By fostering collaboration between the respective Japanese and Chinese institutions, Washington could be reassured that shared standards and practices between the United States and Japan—including environmental regulations, labor rights, and financial sustainability—will be upheld by Tokyo.

Better Sino-Japanese relations also necessitate deeper and more frequent communication that improves information exchange between China and Japan. Ultimately, the flow of information and improved communication between the United States and China could occur through Japan, as Japan and the United States continue to maintain their close relationship. This is especially important given the current state of affairs; facing the uncertainty of trade conflicts, timely communication between the United States and China does not always occur. Prior to a dinner between Presidents Trump and Xi Jinping at the G20 in Buenos Aires, direct high-level negotiations between the two countries on trade issues were paused for months. The most significant high-level bilateral communication channels between the two nations, the four-pillar U.S.-China Comprehensive Dialogues, have been canceled outright or languish on the sidelines. Established on the basis that increasing mutual understanding could resolve major issues, the four dialogues are now in vain and desperately need supplements that could encourage information exchange. In contrast, between Li's visit to Tokyo in May 2018 and Abe's visit to Beijing in October 2018, China and Japan have conducted at least seven high-level official meetings. The indirect communication between the United States and China through Japan partially makes up for the lack of direct communication between the world's two largest economies and lowers the risk of misunderstanding and miscommunication. As the world economy, and particularly the United States and China, face downward pressure, neither country could afford a strategic miscalculation that is solely due to inefficient communication or erroneous information.

Finally, the China-Japan thaw could lower political and security risks in Northeast Asia. The delicate balance between China, Japan, and the Koreas is difficult

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**VIEWING CHINA AS A STRATEGIC  
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to maintain. The improving relationship between China and Japan is a signpost that both nations have decided to temporarily place aside other complex issues, such as territorial disputes. Instead, they have elected to focus on constructive issues like third-party cooperation in which both countries help promote economic development in other nations.

This could open more productive conversations between China and Japan regarding other sensitive issues in the region, such as the denuclearization of North Korea, an issue that requires coordinated efforts between many countries, including the United States, China, and Japan. China and Japan share a complicated history that neither can ignore, but a forward-looking mindset could offset the histori-

cal grievances and produce a positive outcome. Given the uncertain future of the Korean peninsula, improvement in Sino-Japanese relations could mitigate more complicated hostility in the region and serve as an important security stabilizer.

As global challenges mount in 2019 and the world economy faces a slowdown, global decisionmakers need to think outside the box and tackle these challenges together. Welcoming Sino-Japanese rapprochement would bring the United States the concrete benefits of global infrastructure development accountability, strategic communications between the United States and China, and regional stability. Viewing China as a strategic competitor should not put an end to U.S. collaboration with China. Instead, it is the right time to devise creative ideas to manage the relationship between the two largest economies in the world.

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## YOUNG GUNS: FRESHMAN NATIONAL SECURITY FIGURES IN THE 116TH CONGRESS' HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY ZACHARY MARSHALL

The outcome of the 2018 midterm elections has resulted in a “blue wave” for Democrats, with the party picking up 40 seats in the House and returning to the majority in that chamber for the first time since 2010. A notable byproduct of these midterm elections is the large number of freshman members with backgrounds in national security. In total, 19 freshman members served in the U.S. military.<sup>1</sup> Also present are former Assistant Secretary of Defense Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D-MI) and former Assistant Secretary of State Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-NJ). Reps. Slotkin and Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) are former members of the intelligence community. Finally, Rep. Andy Kim (D-NJ) served as a strategic adviser to Generals David Petraeus and John Allen and served on the National Security Council under the Obama administration.

A bitter partisan environment has dominated Congress for much of the past two decades, particularly in the areas of foreign policy and national security. Debate over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have contributed significantly to that divide, as have other issues including the use of torture and the Benghazi investigation. If there will be any bipartisan cooperation, it will likely involve at least some of these “national security freshmen.” Reps. Slotkin and Malinowski have reached out to Republican members of Congress and expressed positivity with working across the aisle. “[A] lot of my national security community from both sides of the aisle have been reaching out and saying, ‘Anything we can do,’” said Slotkin in an interview.<sup>2</sup> On the GOP side, Rep. Michael Waltz (R-FL) explained, “on the ship, in the foxhole, no one cares about your political affiliation. It’s about mission. It’s about getting results.”<sup>3</sup> This attitude may contribute to greater progress in bipartisan efforts. According to the Lugar Center, veterans serving in Congress are more likely than nonveterans to cosponsor bipartisan legislation.<sup>4</sup>

The 116th Congress offers several opportunities for bipartisan cooperation in foreign affairs and national security. Topics that may generate bipartisanship include promoting America’s role in the international community, countering the rise of China, and holding Saudi Arabia accountable for its human rights violations.

### AMERICA’S ROLE IN THE WORLD

President Trump’s “America First” strategy, as evidenced by his administration’s policies and actions over the past two years, largely centers on diminished U.S. involvement and leadership on the international stage and a predilection for unilateral

action.<sup>5</sup> Despite his expressed interest to withdraw the United States from foreign entanglements, most of these national security freshmen oppose such a retreat.

While Trump campaigned on “getting the hell out” of Afghanistan and leaving Iraq and Syria, he is unlikely to find allies on such actions from national security freshmen on either side of the aisle.<sup>6</sup> GOP Rep. Michael Waltz, who served in the George W. Bush White House as Vice President Dick Cheney’s senior advisor for South Asia and Counterterrorism, believes that we simply cannot pull out of Afghanistan or Iraq, and that doing so will cause “the situation [to] worsen . . . so the choice here is how do we do it better, not whether we stay engaged.”<sup>7</sup> In an op-ed, Democratic Rep. Andy Kim called upon the Trump administration to “reassure the Iraqi government of continued U.S. commitment” in the fight against the Islamic State.<sup>8</sup>

Amongst these freshmen, there is a strong bipartisan consensus supporting America’s continued role as a leader in foreign affairs. Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R-TX) views the United States as “the leader of the free world,” and holds that we “should not back down from this responsibility.”<sup>9</sup> On the campaign trail, Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO) held that Trump’s foreign policy “retreats from our allies and embraces our enemies.”<sup>10</sup> Rep. Slotkin prioritizes using her expertise to “ensure our government is using its diplomatic and military power to advance U.S. interests in the world.”<sup>11</sup>

State Department funding will be a point of contention between Congress—most notably House Democrats (along with internationalist-minded Republicans)—and the administration. Democratic Reps. Elaine Luria (D-VA), Abigail Spanberger, and Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ) have raised the alarm over possible cuts, with the latter claiming that budget cuts “prevent us from dealing with developing international crises, strengthening partnerships, or applying pressure to bad actors.”<sup>12, 13, 14</sup> Given the internationalist views and firsthand experiences of the members here, it is likely that the majority of them (especially Democrats), if not all, will oppose cuts to State Department funding.

## CHINA

U.S. relations with China have provided opportunities for both parties to cooperate. Highlights of cooperation include bipartisan Senate legislation to sanction Chinese phone maker ZTE for violating U.S. export control laws and condemnation of human rights violations over the Chinese government’s mass detention of Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang region.<sup>15, 16</sup>

In the new Congress, bipartisan legislation pertaining to both of these matters has been introduced. Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) introduced a bill that would ban U.S. telecommunications equipment exports to Chinese telecom companies (including ZTE and Huawei) that are violating U.S. laws and sanctions.<sup>17</sup> Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), co-chair of the bicameral Congressional-Executive Commission on China, introduced legislation to condemn China for human rights violations against Muslims in Xinjiang and call for an end to such discriminatory activities.<sup>18</sup>

The majority of the national security freshmen view China as a threat towards U.S. interests and national security, particularly Reps. Mark Green (R-TN) and Sherrill.<sup>19, 20</sup> Several believe that China has unfairly taken advantage of the U.S.-China trade relationship. Rep. Malinowski labeled China a violator of the global trading system while Rep. Slotkin called Beijing out for “unfair trade practices,”<sup>21, 22</sup> and Rep. Steve Watkins (R-KS) similarly branded them “bad actors” on trade.<sup>23</sup>

These members also view China as a threat to U.S. global leadership. Rep. Sherrill raises caution about the nation’s expansion in the South China Sea.<sup>24</sup> Rep. Waltz believes that China will force the United States to “give in” on trade in order for them to get tougher on North Korea.<sup>25</sup> Rep. Crow asserts that China is making more progress on renewable energy and infrastructure and stands to win out economically from these investments.<sup>26</sup>

## SAUDI ARABIA

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Congress’s approach towards Saudi Arabia has featured moments of robust bipartisanship, ranging from the 2004 findings of the country’s culpability in the attacks detailed in the 9/11 Commission Report to the 2016 veto by President Obama of bipartisan legislation that would allow families of 9/11 victims to sue the Kingdom.<sup>27, 28</sup> A recent example of unique bipartisan coalition-building includes the Murphy-Paul measure to block weapons sales to the country—with separate bipartisan coalitions built by those for and against the legislation.<sup>29</sup>

However, the fallout of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s (MBS) complicity in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi has brought both sides even closer together with a near unanimous (except for the Trump administration) condemnation of MBS. This, combined with Saudi military interventions into the Yemeni Civil War, has led to much questioning over the future of U.S. military support to the Saudis.<sup>30</sup> With the Senate invoking the Global Magnitsky Act against Saudi Arabia last October and the House expected to review the measure in 2019, we may see a substantial shift in Congress on U.S. policy towards Saudi Arabia.<sup>31</sup> Right now, whether the White House will be able to continue holding out and keep the relationship (and military support) afloat or fold under political and public pressure is anyone’s guess.

Amongst the freshman class, there has been bipartisan condemnation towards Saudi Arabia. Rep. Crenshaw considers the country a human rights violator, and Rep. Malinowski has listed “scrutinizing the U.S.-Saudi relationship” as a priority of his.<sup>32, 33</sup>

Nevertheless, support remains for the U.S.-Saudi relationship as a bulwark of regional security, particularly against Iranian influence in the Middle East. Despite calling for repercussions against the state vis-à-vis Khashoggi, Waltz acknowledges that the relationship “is a centerpiece for security in the Middle East, which is a broader step towards U.S. security.”<sup>34</sup>

## RUSSIA

There is bipartisan agreement on the threat Russia poses towards the United States and its allies. Nearly all of the national security freshmen vocally viewed Russia as a threat, including Reps. Crenshaw, Green, Malinowski, Sherrill, Slotkin, and Waltz.<sup>35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40</sup> A notable example is Rep. Mark Green, who wrote in a Tennessee Star op-ed that Russia “seeks to recreate the power and influence of the former Soviet Union” while calling for a stronger NATO response against the adversarial nation.<sup>41</sup>

While the majority of the featured freshmen take a strong stance against Russia, not all of them have been critical of President Trump’s response to its aggressive behavior. During his campaign, Rep. Waltz said that Trump’s been “incredibly tough” on Russia.<sup>42</sup>

Tom Malinowski may take a leading role in pushing the investigation of Russia’s meddling in U.S. elections. As an assistant secretary at the State Department, Malinowski played a leading role in convincing Congress to continue investigations and hearings against Russian interference.<sup>43</sup> In a January 2018 Politico interview, Malinowski said that Putin and Trump had similar “authoritarian instincts.”<sup>44</sup> Not far behind him would be Abigail Spanberger, a former CIA operations officer who says that “underestimating Russian active measures [of meddling in U.S. elections] is a dangerous mistake for our national security” and fears future attacks against the United States.<sup>45</sup>

## COMBATting SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MILITARY

Finally, one noticeable difference between the 116th Congress freshman class and previous classes is the notable number of women with national security backgrounds, highlighted by Reps. Luria, Sherrill, Slotkin, and Spanberger. This significant influx of women on the Hill (veterans and otherwise) combined with momentum from the #MeToo movement could lead to increased support of reforming

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**PERHAPS THIS FRESHMAN CLASS CAN RESTORE A BIPARTISAN AND LEVELHEADED APPROACH TO CONGRESS’S FOREIGN POLICYMAKING BEFORE THE INSTITUTION COMPLETELY ERODES ITS ABILITY TO HANDLE SUCH MATTERS.**

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military procedures against sexual assault. This would be a boon of good fortune for Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) as she seeks more support for her “Military Justice Improvement Act” that has stalled in the Senate. Gillibrand’s legislation has already received bipartisan backing, including the support of GOP senators Ted Cruz and Rand Paul.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, the loss of Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO) in last November’s midterm elections eliminates one of the bill’s most significant opponents.<sup>47</sup> If a Democratic-led House can produce and pass similar legislation, the Senate will have a difficult time turning it away.

## THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Overall, the national security freshmen members of the 116th Congress show a strong preference for internationalism over isolationism. The combination of ever-increasing executive control over foreign affairs since 9/11 and Congressional gridlock has stymied Congress from having an effective voice on foreign policy matters.

Perhaps this freshman class can restore a bipartisan and levelheaded approach to Congress's foreign policymaking before the institution completely erodes its ability to handle such matters. These members understand the stakes and know that their backgrounds can help cure the problem. For instance, Dan Crenshaw believes that veterans "can help clean up politics," while Jared Crow says his time in the U.S. Army showed him "the strength our country has when we come together over shared values."<sup>48, 49</sup>

Areas for potential agreement exist with America's role in the world and posture towards Russia and China. There will certainly be challenges and areas of disagreement on policy, most notably on military spending and U.S. posture against Iran, but if Congress can manage to advance bipartisan legislation in areas ripe for agreement, we would all consider that a success.

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# TOO LITTLE FOR TOO MUCH? OR A LOT FOR A LITTLE? THE AIR FORCE OA-X LIGHT-ATTACK PROGRAM

BY NIGEL MEASE

Since July 31, 2017, the United States Air Force (USAF) has been testing the abilities of a “light attack” aircraft to more effectively manage its operating costs by better tailoring the force for low-intensity operations.<sup>1</sup> While the air force recently announced that the start of the competition for the OA-X contract has been postponed indefinitely, the two aircraft that had been under consideration were the Sierra Nevada/Embraer A-29 Super Tucano and the Textron/Beechcraft AT-6 Wolverine.<sup>2,3,4</sup> The addition of one of these aircraft is intended to reduce wear on the fleet of fifth-generation fighters (aircraft such as the F-22 Raptor and F-35 Lightning II, which possess stealth qualities as well as advanced flight and weapons systems).<sup>5</sup> This program, designated OA-X, has generated significant debate

surrounding the feasibility of safely using small propeller driven aircraft in combat zones. This discussion will provide an examination of the advantages and disadvantages of the OA-X program in comparison to the current USAF force structure.

Critics’ arguments against the OA-X program can be synthesized into three main points. First, some postulate that the aircraft under consideration are too vulnerable in a world of increasing air defenses as the United States is supposed to be transitioning away from low-intensity conflict to great power competition per the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*.<sup>6</sup> The OA-X is designed for situations of low-intensity conflict where the opposition engages in combat below the level of conventional war, such as the conflicts the United States has been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. In these situations, air-to-air threats are non-existent and ground-based air defenses are minimal as well.<sup>7</sup> Some individuals have questioned whether such largely uncontested airspace, even in low-intensity conflict areas, would exist in the future or indeed if it exists today, citing as evidence the downing of a Russian Su-25 jet over Syria (considered a low-intensity conflict zone by the United States) on February 3, 2018 and the downing of a Jordanian F-16, also over Syria, in December 2015.<sup>8,9</sup>

These examples, however, neither prove that uncontested airspace is vanishing nor diminish the potential usefulness or survivability of the OA-X aircraft in situations of low-intensity conflict. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) contested the notion that the F-16 crash resulted from ground action by ISIS. And while the case of the Su-25 was indeed connected to a Man Portable Air-Defense System (MANPADS), it should be noted that U.S. Marines with Stinger MANPADS were unable to get locks onto A-29s (one of the two planes being considered for OA-X) participating in the 2016 Green Flag exercise in Nevada.<sup>11,12</sup> This demonstration, coupled with the suc-

successful operations carried out by Afghan A-29 Super Tucanos without the loss of an aircraft since February 2018, illustrates that the OA-X is survivable even in a somewhat contested aerial environment within a low-intensity conflict.<sup>13, 14</sup> The heavily defended airspace that could be expected in a more high-intensity conflict is not the environment for which the OA-X aircraft are intended. The United States has not engaged in a conventional war since 1991, and it's unlikely that the United States will completely abandon military assistance missions supporting governments against insurgent opposition in low-intensity scenarios. Within the realm of high-intensity warfare, the advanced fourth- and fifth-generation fighters will be reoriented towards more competitive aerial combat zones, the very conditions the planes were designed to operate and dominate in.<sup>15</sup> In a high-intensity conventional war, a small fleet of OA-X aircraft can assist in possible counter-insurgency operations behind the forward lines, allowing aircraft like the A-10 and F-35 to conduct operations in the higher threat environments.

The second argument against the OA-X program is that the USAF already has close-air-support (CAS) and ground attack capable aircraft.<sup>16</sup> The USAF can use its fourth- and fifth-generation fighters, such as the multi-role F-16, F-15, and F-35, to conduct CAS missions.<sup>17</sup> It also has a fleet of the CAS and ground attack purpose-built A-10s which carry a well-deserved reputation as a formidable and strong ground-attack aircraft.<sup>18</sup> All of these jets have the ability to carry more ordinance than the OA-X aircraft and have a much higher speed.<sup>19</sup> The MQ-9 Reaper drone is yet another possible contender for use in low-intensity conflict, carrying more ordinance than the OA-X competitors, but is slower than both.<sup>20</sup> The MQ-9 has the added bonus of being unmanned and not risking the life of the pilot in conflict. While both the AT-6 and A-29 can loiter over a combat area for prolonged periods of time compared to the jet counterparts, even the A-10, the MQ-9 has the longest loiter time of any of the aircraft.<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the MQ-9 is also the most susceptible to cyber-attacks and electronic warfare.<sup>22, 23</sup>

The third and final argument against the OA-X program is that its cost would be too high at a time when the air force should be putting funds towards modernization of the force.<sup>24</sup> The OA-X program, however, has its greatest strength in giving the air force a low-cost per flying hour alternative to the other aircraft in the fleet while maintaining a CAS capability. In a highly publicized incident in November 2017, an F-22 Raptor, though not a designated CAS platform, was used to strike a Taliban drug lab in Afghanistan.<sup>25</sup> The cost per flying hour of the F-22 hovers at around \$70,000, meaning at bare minimum with only one hour of flight time the United States spent \$70,000 to destroy a drug lab.<sup>26</sup> This incident is not representative of all the CAS options the USAF possesses but demonstrates a strength of the OA-X program. For comparison, the F-15 is \$40,000, the F-16 is \$23,000, and the A-10 is \$20,000 per flying hour.<sup>27</sup> Notably, the cost per flying hour of the A-29 is \$1,000, and the trainer version of the AT-6 comes in at \$2,500.<sup>28</sup> These are even lower than the MQ-9's per hour cost of \$3,624.<sup>29, 30</sup> In addition, the Senate Armed Services Committee under Senator John McCain in 2017 requested \$1.2 billion over five years to purchase up to 300 OA-X aircraft.<sup>31</sup> This same amount of appro-

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## THE OA-X PROGRAM OFFERS A VERSATILE MEANS OF PROVIDING A LOW-INTENSITY CAPABILITY TO COMPLIMENT THE CURRENT HIGH-INTENSITY STRUCTURE OF THE USAF.

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priations funding would cover about 10 F-35s using the unit cost of a single F-35 aircraft or 52 MQ-9s according to the USAF FY2019 budget.<sup>32, 33</sup>

The OA-X program offers a versatile means of providing a low-intensity capability to compliment the current high-intensity structure of the USAF. While the air force does possess CAS capable aircraft which have many superior characteristics compared to the OA-X aircraft, these characteristics come at a massive cost.

The OA-X offers a low-cost alternative, in both up-front and operating costs, as compared to other aircraft in the USAF fleet, especially for operations in situations where the use of the more expensive aircraft is not necessary. OA-X aircraft can also keep the usage of high-intensity aircraft down while simultaneously giving the USAF a platform from which it can still conduct CAS missions within short notice and a platform which is survivable in low-intensity conflict situations. The OA-X program gives the United States the ability to better combat its adversaries at a time of fiscal constraints and continuing conflict.

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## THE GIVE-AND-TAKE OF BRI IN AFRICA

BY PEARL RISBERG

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**EXAMINING BRI  
PROJECTS IN AFRICA  
REVEALS A NUANCED  
REALITY OF HOW THE  
INITIATIVE FUNCTIONS  
IN THE DEVELOPING  
WORLD, WHERE  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
FINANCING IS  
DESPERATELY NEEDED,  
AND POLITICAL  
EXTERNALITIES  
ARE OF SECONDARY  
CONCERN TO THE  
RECEIVING STATES.**

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**D**istracted by worst-case scenarios, the United States is missing an opportunity to support the development of African states and to find an area of common ground with China. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure investment platform, has positive economic implications for developing countries and the United States, but is consistently overshadowed by political and national security concerns.<sup>1</sup> Some analysts discount the threat of the BRI as inflated, while others advocate for a U.S. response to counter a rising hegemonic power.<sup>2,3</sup> However, the slow burning economic implications of the BRI are not necessarily a threat to U.S. prosperity, nor to global development. Examining BRI projects in Africa reveals a nuanced reality of how the initiative functions in the developing world, where infrastructure financing is desperately needed, and political externalities are of secondary concern to the receiving states.

The BRI is often critiqued as so-called "debt trap diplomacy."<sup>4</sup> According to this narrative, China provides infrastructure funding to developing economies under opaque loan terms, only to strategically leverage the recipient country's indebtedness to China for economic, military, or political favor. The debt-for-equity swap of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port is an oft-used example, where China excused Sri Lanka's \$8 billion debt in exchange for a 99-year lease of the Sri Lankan port in 2017.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, critiquing China's BRI is one of the few major policy issues that saw bipartisan support in 2018's hyperpolarized political landscape.<sup>6</sup> While the unifying aspect of a shared enemy may be beneficial to domestic U.S. politics, this snowballing criticism tends to minimize or ignore positive aspects, missing opportunities to work constructively with China to accomplish shared goals in the developing world.

There are real reasons to criticize China's actions along the Belt and Road, ranging from an expanding military agenda, psychological and political influence campaigns toting the benefits of authoritarianism, and the use of telecommunications technology to surveil other governments.<sup>7</sup> The opacity of Chinese infrastructure loans and investment is detrimental to U.S. companies' ability to compete and increases states' vulnerability to debt leveraging.<sup>8</sup> This risk is exacerbated by China's courtship of African political and military leaders through visits from top leadership.<sup>9</sup> U.S. national security concerns are particularly potent, as the Chinese military base in Djibouti has become the epitomizing symbol of China's aggression

along the Belt and Road.<sup>10</sup> While these concerns are valid and broadly defended by U.S.-China policy experts, they overshadow the positive outcomes of the BRI and thwart any opportunity the United States may have to work alongside China to uplift African states.

China lists 39 African countries on the Belt and Road official website, ranging geographically from Tunisia to South Africa. Of these countries, China's government financing is the principal creditor of only three countries: Congo-Brazzaville, Djibouti, and Zambia.<sup>11, 12</sup> Overall, 67 percent of African governments' external debt is owed to either the private sector (which may include Chinese companies) or multilateral institutions, while 20 percent is considered Chinese government lending.<sup>13</sup> There is no official figure for total Chinese investment into Africa, but a recent estimate from the China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) at Johns Hopkins University places concessional loan totals at around \$5 billion per year.<sup>14</sup> This study also found that Chinese loans are not a major contributor to debt distress in Africa, identifying only six countries where China, among several other financiers, is contributing to heavy borrowing.<sup>15</sup> When another study by AidData at the College of William and Mary analyzed the effects of Chinese financed infrastructure on economic activity, findings revealed that the positive economic spillovers of Chinese investment produced a more equal distribution of economic activity.<sup>16</sup> While there are substantial concerns for both African states and global stability that should not be overlooked, China's impact on Africa is, at least in part, positive. This is notable considering the United States has pumped over \$1 trillion into Africa in the past decades with uncertain impacts on per capita income.<sup>17</sup>

When evaluating China's BRI, there must be a delicate balance between protecting U.S. interests and supporting efforts to develop global markets.

Disentangling the positive economic outcomes of China's presence in developing countries from the negative is difficult due to the complicated and contentious nature of the BRI, including all economic, political, militaristic, and ideological inputs. "China's strategic aspirations are causally related to its economic engagement in Africa and are mutually reinforcing each other," opined Yun Sun, a director at the Stimson Center, during a congressional hearing on China's presence and investment in Africa.<sup>18</sup> While positive and negative economic outcomes are inherently connected, a sound economic analysis of the BRI depends on a comprehensive understanding of China's multifaceted impact.

It would be dangerous to claim that all of China's engagement along the BRI is detrimental. For the interests of both the receiving country and the United States, there are economic benefits to greater global connectivity, even if China leads and enables this effort.

As Judd Devermont, the director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, stated in the same congressional hearing, "it is essential to draw a clear distinction between Chinese activities that threaten U.S. interest and those that are neutral or complimentary." China struggles with project quality,

adherence to environmental standards, and transparent procurement processes, necessary practices for sustainable infrastructure development everywhere. However, China's contributions to many African countries' development have become a central aspect of those countries' development strategies. Many of China's infrastructure projects in Africa address a desperate need for roads, railways, ports, and energy.<sup>19</sup> This includes a 2,600 MW hydropower scheme in Nigeria, \$3 billion in telecom equipment to Ethiopia, Sudan, and Ghana, and major railroad projects in Nigeria, Gabon, and Mauritania.<sup>20</sup>

U.S. Vice-Admiral Michael Franken echoed this notion of dependency, emphasizing the irrelevance of China's motives in many cases. "The Chinese may stay or they may go, but the railroad they are building will stay," and the railroad is what many African countries are counting on.<sup>21</sup> Where few other lending countries or international financial institutions are funding infrastructure, China is showing up. As Devermont also pointed out, at the September 2017 UN General Council, nine African leaders stated a preference for doing business with the United States, but the United States is not there the way China is.

Studies suggest that the growing dependence on externally funded infrastructure in African countries arises from enormous need and low private investment.<sup>22</sup> Limited by insufficient transportation infrastructure, regional trade in sub-Saharan Africa remains low, constituting only 20 percent of total trade in 2016.<sup>23</sup> In May 2018, the African Development Bank launched an investment platform to address the estimated \$87-112 billion annual infrastructure funding gap.<sup>24</sup> This need represents an opportunity for the United States to engage with African partner countries while countering the most concerning Chinese practices. By increasing U.S. infrastructure engagement in Africa, deliberately aligning U.S.-China efforts where they do overlap and bringing U.S. procurement and transparency standards to the region, both African states and the United States could benefit from China's involvement in Africa. Further, these African states could represent an opportunity for the United States to engage and partner with China and pursue a constructive shared vision.

China's hostile economic practices, military expansion, and coercive political and ideological tactics in Africa should not be ignored. However, establishing a clear distinction between *detrimental* and *essential* BRI engagement is crucial to fostering development, building common ground with China, and expanding the global market.

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## CHABAHAR PORT: UNLOCKING AFGHANISTAN'S POTENTIAL

BY ASHA SAWHNEY

**IF THE TRUMP  
ADMINISTRATION  
SEEKS TO REDUCE U.S.  
MILITARY BURDEN IN  
AFGHANISTAN, IT MUST  
PLEDGE FULL SUPPORT  
FOR THIS REGIONAL  
INVESTMENT IN THE  
AFGHAN ECONOMY.**

Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012.<sup>1</sup> Chabahar is Iran's only oceanic port, but the Islamic Republic only recently began to bring it to its full potential. The port has particular promise as a means of access to the Indian Ocean for landlocked Afghanistan. Iran and India are the two nations financing this large-scale project.<sup>2</sup> The

U.S. government has maintained tacit approval for the two countries' investments in Chabahar, for which it only occasionally announced its explicit approval. If the Trump administration seeks to reduce U.S. military burden in Afghanistan, it must pledge full support for this regional investment in the Afghan economy.

Chabahar Port, located off the Gulf of Oman in Iran's southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, is the lifeline Afghanistan needs to reinvigorate its trade potential.<sup>3</sup> The Trump administration showed that the United States is well aware of this fact when it specifically cited bolstering Afghanistan's trade potential as its reason for granting a sanctions exemption re-imposed on Iran after the United States withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the Iran Deal.<sup>4</sup> The Chabahar port and corresponding Chabahar city are in Sistan-Baluchistan, a province that spans both Iran and Afghanistan. The two countries seek to complete a multimodal system that will more efficiently connect Kabul to the port and in turn reduce reliance on Pakistan.<sup>5</sup> This will significantly boost trade capacity because, as it stands, Pakistan does not allow India overland transit access, a major obstacle for critical trade between Afghanistan and India.<sup>6</sup>

Without Chabahar, Afghanistan must depend on Iran's other major shipping site, Bandar-e Abbas, which manages 70 percent of the country's seaborne traffic. Located in the Persian Gulf, Bandar-e Abbas does not have direct access to the Indian Ocean. Trade must first pass through ports in the United Arab Emirates to be unloaded onto smaller ships.<sup>7</sup> Heightened tensions between Iran and its neighboring Gulf states

The Trump administration's plans to withdraw troops from Afghanistan did not come in the wake of improved conditions in the country. The security and economic outlook remains bleak after decades of civil war and an ongoing power struggle between the government and the Taliban. Another decision by the Trump administration, however, brings hope in an otherwise intractable situation. In November 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that economic activity related to the development of the Chabahar port would be exempted from certain reinstated sanctions from the Iran

make this a tenuous arrangement. Furthermore, the Strait of Hormuz, the 21-mile strip of water connecting the Persian Gulf to the ocean, is a chokepoint vulnerable to a variety of potential security and environmental disruptions.

Despite its clear strategic advantage, political strain has put numerous obstacles in the way of developing Chabahar Port. Iran set out its initial plans for the trade hub in 1973, when the country's then monarch, Reza Shah, announced an \$8 billion investment in the project, but the OPEC oil crisis of the 1970s halted the plan. After the Iran-Iraq War, the Islamic Republic had a renewed interest in lowering its dependence on other Gulf countries and relaunched its development plans. Iran recruited Indian firms in the 1990s to lead the project, but increased sanctions by the United States made only a partial completion possible. In 2012, after the initial repeal of sanctions under the JCPOA, India invested \$500 billion.<sup>8</sup> The port has faced many bouts of uncertainty, but with the reinstatement of sanctions in November 2018, the United States holds the decisive power over the port's future.<sup>9</sup> As a close ally, India is particularly wary of maintaining good relations with the United States and responsive to U.S. influence.

India's close relationship with the United States and Israel make it an unusual ally to Iran but simultaneously the ideal actor to oversee a responsible economic partnership between Iran and Afghanistan. U.S. government support for a prolonged military presence in Afghanistan is on the decline, and the distribution of U.S. aid often requires military oversight. It is in the United States' best interest to bolster the success of Chabahar Port as a means of responsibly reducing U.S. aid to Afghanistan in favor of regional cooperation and increased investment. Afghanistan has no prospects for stable security without greater avenues for economic empowerment.

Afghanistan cannot be forced to rely on its capricious relationship with Pakistan in order to secure resources. Pakistan's alleged support for the Taliban render it a disagreeable ally for Kabul, and Pakistan-India tensions stand in the way of Afghanistan increasing its trade with India, the regional economic powerhouse and reliable ally. Prior to outright barring Indian access to overland trade routes, Pakistan imposed regulations in the hopes of encouraging Afghanistan to prioritize Pakistani imports and limit Kabul's cooperation with New Delhi. At its peak between 2014 and 2015, Afghanistan's trade with Pakistan was \$2.7 billion, but excessive documentation requirements at Pakistani ports as well as unpredictable closings at the Chaman and Torkham border crossings led the Afghan government to reassess its options.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, the series of stringent regulations backfired and trade with Pakistan fell to \$500 million in 2018 as Afghanistan shifted trade to Iranian ports at both Bandar-e Abbas and Chabahar, where 80 percent of Afghanistan's cargo traffic now lies.<sup>11</sup>

Indian Ocean access stands to transform trade entirely for Afghanistan by cutting cost in an unprecedented way and allowing for efficient passage of critical resources. Iran and India's construction of a multimodal system is in various stages of

completion, but overall the routes provide a 60 percent reduction in shipping costs and a 50 percent reduction of shipment time between India and Central Asia.<sup>12</sup> Even without the completion of the highway and rail system between Chabahar and the Iran-Afghanistan border, India successfully shipped 110,000 tons of wheat and 2,000 tons of pulses to Afghanistan in 2018, as a part of its promise to deliver a total of 1.1 million tons of food supply on a grant basis.<sup>13</sup> These shipments from India will maintain the supply of Afghanistan's strategic grain reserves that provide resources for impoverished citizens and emergency resources in times of crisis.<sup>14</sup> Trade from Chabahar to Afghanistan has thus far been mostly of non-sanctionable goods such as agricultural products and medicine.<sup>15</sup>

Afghan traders have responded with enthusiasm to Chabahar's reliable trade and transit offerings. Traders are looking forward to a forthcoming shipping line that will fly Afghanistan's flag and feel that the more cargo they can shift to Chabahar, the better. Iran and India aimed to give as lucrative a deal as possible to Afghan traders and initially provided a 30 percent discount in customs tariffs, 50 acres of land for Afghan investment, and free cooling storage facilities.<sup>16, 17</sup> In 2017, the offer was raised to an 80 percent discount in export tariffs.<sup>18</sup> Already, Afghan traders make up 165 of the 500 companies registered with the Chabahar Free Zone authority.<sup>19</sup> The Iranian government has ambitious goals for Chabahar, with an intended nominal capacity of 86 million tons by 2024, and Afghanistan intends to have a considerable stake in these operations.<sup>20</sup>

The U.S. government granted India a waiver to the latest series of Iranian sanctions in order to ensure its punitive actions against the Islamic Republic will not impede economic reconstruction in Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> Yet, U.S. support remains unpredictable. The port offers economic benefits to Iran, a difficult reality for the Trump administration as it seeks to economically isolate the Islamic Republic. The administration follows each expression of support with a reminder that Washington can revoke its support at any time. While reviewing India's eligibility for a sanctions waiver, the Trump administration stated that it does not want to interfere with "legitimate business" between India and Iran.<sup>22</sup> After the announcement of the waiver, John Bass, U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, warned Afghan officials that sanctions exemptions for trade through the Chabahar Port will only continue if traders remain careful to not violate rules against business involving those on the list of sanctioned regime officials.<sup>23</sup>

Afghanistan's strongest prospect for a brighter future is greater trade through the Chabahar Port. The consequences from a lack of legitimate trade routes in and out of Afghanistan have been grave. As of 2017, the illegal opium trade is up to 32 percent of Afghanistan's official GDP. Insurgent groups including the Taliban generated an estimated \$116-184 million in profit in 2017 alone, while the country's legal exports of goods and services amounted to only 7 percent of GDP.<sup>24</sup> Opioid usage fueled by this illicit trade has sparked an addiction crisis across large parts of South Asia, particularly in northern India.<sup>25</sup> With little improvement on dampening illegal trade, the U.S. government cannot compound the situation with a tepid

approach towards trade through Chabahar, particularly as it makes the drastic decision to halve the presence of U.S. troops in Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup>

The Trump administration must have confidence in Chabahar Port and India's presence in managing sanctions compliance. India depends on its security and economic ties with the United States, its most powerful ally, and simultaneously cannot afford to sacrifice its Iranian oil imports. Its dual dependence on the United States and Iran make it the ideal actor and mitigating force to keep Afghanistan in-line with sanction stipulations. The Trump administration can express clear support for this regional attempt to secure a new path forward for Afghanistan by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with India that affirms U.S. support for India's involvement in Chabahar. India has already signed a similar MoU with Iran and Afghanistan to ensure continued cooperation for the development of the Chabahar Port.<sup>27</sup> The United States must follow suit to prove its commitment to stability and economic growth in Afghanistan as the country prepares for the withdrawal of U.S. troops.

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## CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS: INCREASING AWARENESS AND REDUCING THE GAP

BY SIMONE WILLIAMS

Since the late 1970s, the American public has consistently rated the military with high confidence levels compared to other U.S. institutions.<sup>1</sup> In a 2017 Gallup Poll, 78 percent of those surveyed rated confidence in the military as a “great deal” or “quite a lot.”<sup>2</sup> The same poll listed the role of the military (“importance of what they do”) and the perception of effectiveness (“competence, how well they do their job”) as a few of the factors for high confidence. If the American public consistently maintains such high confidence in the military, why then do critics believe that there is a growing divide in civil-military relations?

Civilian control of the military is a fundamental tenet of U.S. democracy. Civil-military relations is defined as a bargain negotiated between the citizens, civilian government authorities, and the military.<sup>3</sup> Although citizens may not be directly involved in creating the bargain, it “cannot be sustained without their acquiescence.”<sup>4</sup> In order for democracy to continue to thrive, it is pivotal that the public is engaged such that society maintains a healthy balance. Alternatively, “bad” civil-military relations are reflected by the dominance of military institutions in society or the politicization of the military. Some have postulated that the absence of a military coup d’état, because they drastically illustrate military dominance, is an adequate bar for determining healthy relations in democratic states, but this is a low bar at best.<sup>5</sup> No one would argue that a coup is a positive measure for civil-military relations, but the lack of a coup should not equate to good health. In her piece for the *Texas National Security Review*, Lindsay Cohn posits that elevating troops to a level of “sacrosanctity” in public discourse and creating an environment where the military can pick and choose which policies to heed is unhealthy.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the health of civil-military relations, there are concerns about the widening gap between the military and society. Servicemembers are increasingly reporting that they feel isolated from society upon re-entry, feeling that they cannot relate, whereas non-serving citizens struggle to understand the military.<sup>7</sup> “Generations at War,” a report by the Center for New American Security (CNAS), defines this as the “familiarity gap.” The growing gap between citizens and those who fight or have fought results in increasing levels of ignorance about the role and engagement of the military, despite the support and respect the public maintains for the military.<sup>8</sup> Further “unprecedented support coupled with lack of familiarity creates a situation in which force can be used increasingly liberally without public oversight.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, the American public is largely unaware of military decisions and operations until they

become controversies and tragedies. For example, prior to the death of four U.S. troops in Niger in October 2017, many Americans were unaware of U.S. military involvement in Africa.<sup>10</sup>

While research has recommended a varying range of policies to mitigate the growing divide, some have posited that education levels of the public could serve as a valid measure of health in civil-military relations and reduce the military-social gap.<sup>11</sup> An educated public can lead to balanced relations and a more knowledgeable public engaged in military discourse. Yet, education is not fundamentally related to Americans' confidence in the military. As reflected in the aforementioned Gallup Poll, perception motivates confidence. Similarly, a 2013 study, commissioned by then-retired General James Mattis and Kori Schake, found that most Americans supported the military but did not know or had no opinion about specific policies, issues, or how the military works.<sup>12</sup> They further argue that the combination of ignorance and admiration for the military is problematic, could lead to unexamined risks, and leads to the public dissociating themselves from defense issues.<sup>13</sup> This dissonance illustrates that perception of effectiveness, rather than actual knowledge, drives confidence in the military.

The narrative of war and the perception of effectiveness are major contributing factors that impact how Americans think about the military and threaten the rela-

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**WITH AN EVER-SHRINKING SHARE OF AMERICANS SERVING, THE MILITARY MUST INCREASE THE TRANSPARENCY SURROUNDING ITS OPERATIONS TO DRIVE GREATER AWARENESS OF ITS ROLE AND MISSIONS.**

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tionship between civilians and the military.<sup>14</sup> To foster healthier civil-military relations, we must strive to close the familiarity gap and create a more connected and engaged public willing to participate in balanced debates and discussions. A sense of personal connection must be restored. With an ever-shrinking share of Americans serving, the military must increase the transparency surrounding its operations to drive greater awareness of its role and missions.<sup>15</sup> While acknowledging that these recommendations are not unique to this piece, they could arguably create a more knowledgeable public and reduce the shock threshold of breaking military news. Furthermore, confidence in our troops would be based on an actual understanding of their mission rather than blind acceptance and result in well-rounded critical discernment of military activities. Greater engagement with the military and debate over its role would improve civil-military relations. As Alice Hunt Friend has written, "one of the measures of that quality is whether all citizens engage in the gravest decisions our government makes."<sup>16</sup>

Although these concerns over public awareness and a familiarity gap lead many to question the health of civil-military relations, Mattis and Schake conclude that, overall, American civil-military relations are strong. If they are correct, perhaps our focus on increasing public awareness and familiarity of the military's role and missions is our attempt to achieve and maintain a more en-

gaged public. Or maybe a healthy dose of skepticism is a necessary component to maintaining the grand bargain and overall health of civil-military relations.

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