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The atmosphere within the Donald Trump administration, invariably overheated, recently become particularly perfervid following the publication in the venerable *New York Times* of an op-ed article by an unidentified 'senior official' somewhere within the higher echelons of the Trump hierarchy that is highly critical of the President's personality and operating style.¹ As top Trump officials scurried to deny that they were the author and affirmed their profound respect, admiration, and support for their loyalty-hungry boss, Trump himself characterized the piece as "TREASON" and called upon Attorney General Jeff Sessions—who himself ranked high on the list of suspected authors—to launch a criminal investigation. This notwithstanding the fact that publishing an unsigned article critical of the president under whom one serves, while likely to bring instant dismissal should the author's identity be revealed, is perhaps a tad sneaky but not illegal. It even, as one journalist pointed out, diverted attention from the ongoing congressional confirmation hearings of Supreme Court justice-designate Brett Kavanaugh, possibly to the nominee's advantage (at least until he faced unexpected accusations of youthful sexual misconduct).

For political and media circles and the general public alike, the week after Labor Day was suddenly transmuted into a gallimaufry of amateur sleuthing, as all focused on discovering who had written the immediately (in)famous essay. The frantic mole hunt offered instant fodder for serious media commentary, current affairs programs, and political satirists alike. But even if the specific individual responsible for this opinion piece should be unmasked and expelled from the Trump administration as Lucifer was from an increasingly uncongenial heaven, the allegation that its top circles harbor "many . . . senior officials . . . working diligently from within to frustrate part of his agenda and his worst inclinations" was exquisitely calculated to promote further internal suspicions and distrust among the distinctly paranoid president's leading advisers. Conspiracy theories proliferated, in tandem with administrative chaos. A cynic might wonder whether the ultimate Machiavellian inspiration and *deus/dea ex machina* orchestrating this entire episode could conceivably have been either an undercover Democrat or a Russian operative.

¹ Anonymous, "I Am Part of the Trump Resistance," *International New York Times*, 7 September 2018.

Meanwhile, as more hot air than light was generated by the not entirely novel revelation that some Trump appointees were less than enamored of his policies and style, one turned with some relief to a special issue of the *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* that includes four carefully thought out and well written articles on the first year of the Trump administration's policies toward Asia, together with an insightful introduction by James Matray, the journal's long-time editor.² The product of a roundtable on "Trump's First Year in Asia," held at the Ohio State University in late January 2018, by now the essays have in some respects inevitably been overtaken by events, especially the U.S. trade war with China—and with other countries—launched in earnest between March and July 2018, as Trump first announced and then in early July imposed major tariffs on Chinese imports, prompting retaliatory measures on the part of China. Chinese import duties were apparently carefully tailored to affect counties in the United States that voted for Trump rather than Hillary Clinton in the 2016 American presidential election. The announcement in early September that in August 2018 the monthly Chinese trade surplus with the United States grew by 13 percent, to \$31.08 billion—an increase observers ascribed largely to efforts by American importers to frontload orders in the interest of avoiding worse disruptions at a later date—seemed likely to inflame the situation further, possibly leading both sides to ratchet up trade restrictions further.³ Trump, en route to a Republican fundraiser in North Dakota, promptly threatened to impose tariffs on all \$500 billion of Chinese exports to the United States, not just the \$200 billion already tentatively targeted.⁴ On September 15, as the highly destructive Hurricane Flora made landfall in North and South Carolina, definite moves to implement the proposed \$200 billion tariffs—over protests from such major corporations as Apple—were set in motion. Although the projected level of duties was initially set at 10 percent, with the 25 percent originally contemplated not to take effect until 1 January 2019, taken together with the earlier tariffs, these new measures were likely to mean that around half of all China's exports to the United States would be affected.⁵ In response, China declined to participate in scheduled U.S.-Chinese trade talks.⁶

Shortly afterwards, the United States imposed additional economic sanctions on Beijing, intended to punish it for recent purchases of combat aircraft and surface-to-air weapons systems equipment from Rosoboronexport, a Russian firm that had been blacklisted by the United States and European countries, in retaliation for Russian activities in Ukraine. China quickly recalled the head of its navy from a visit to the

² To avoid potential questions of conflicts of interest, let me state here that since 2015 I have been a member of this journal's Editorial Advisory Board, but was not involved in the publication of this particular issue.

³ Jun Mai, "Trade War: China's Surplus with US Grows 10 per cent to US\$31 Billion as Donald Trump ups Ante," *South China Morning Post*, 8 September 2018.

⁴ Owen Churchill, "Donald Trump Threatens to Expand Trade War to all Chinese Imports as US Moves ahead with Further Tariffs," *South China Morning Post*, 8 September 2018.

⁵ Bob Davis and Jacob M. Schlesinger, "Trump to Announce New Tariffs on \$200 Billion in Chinese Imports," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 September 2018; Damian Paletta, "Trump Has Decided to Impose Tariffs on \$200 Billion in Chinese Goods in Dramatic Escalation of Trade Battle," *Washington Post*, 15 September 2018.

⁶ Reuters, "China Cancels Trade Talks with U.S. as Tariff Threats Escalate," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 September 2018.

United States and postponed upcoming military talks in Beijing with American officials.⁷ On both the Chinese and U.S. sides, fears proliferated that military relations were likely to deteriorate further.⁸ Within a few days, less than a fortnight after his announcement on tariffs, while addressing the United Nations, Trump compounded the injury by accusing China of meddling in the upcoming U.S. mid-term elections, citing as evidence a *China Daily* four-page advertisement in an Iowa newspaper that criticized his hard-line approach on tariffs and affirmed that U.S.-China trade was mutually beneficial. One expert at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a Beijing think tank with close links to the government, expected that in future both U.S. political parties would take a harder line toward China, stating: “No matter which party wins the midterm elections, Beijing is prepared for an eight-year Trump administration and will try to improve trade ties with countries other than the U.S.”⁹

Relations swiftly deteriorated even further, soon extending well beyond trade into increasingly unbounded strategic rivalry. Vice President Mike Pence, speaking to the Hudson Institute think tank in early October 2018, launched a broad-based attack on China, claiming that its interference in U.S. elections and political affairs dwarfed that of Russia. Pence also assailed Chinese militarization policies in the South China Sea; the extortion of forced technology transfers from Western firms as the price of access to the Chinese market; the involvement of Western companies, especially Google, in refining Chinese surveillance capabilities; the recent Chinese crackdown on religious observances of all kinds, Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim; and human rights abuses, including the brutal suppression of Uighur cultural identity in Xinjiang.¹⁰ Published immediately on the White House website, an endorsement that made it clear Pence was not speaking off the cuff but had the full weight of the administration behind him, the speech left Chinese and Western commentators alike somewhat stunned. Many speculated that it marked the opening of a new Cold War over global power and influence, this time between China and the United States.¹¹

Chinese officials appeared nonplussed by the depth of the Trump administration’s hostility. In a visit to Beijing, U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo had angry exchanges with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who accused the United States of exacerbating trade conflicts, encouraging independence forces in Taiwan, and meddling in China’s internal affairs. Although Wang cited the need for continued cooperation

⁷ Reuters, “US-Defense Secretary James Mattis ‘Looking for Way ahead’ after China Scraps Military Talks in Sanctions Protests,” *South China Morning Post*, 25 September 2018.

⁸ Kristin Huang, “China, US Military Ties May be in a Downward Spiral ‘for a Long Time,’” *South China Morning Post*, 27 September 2018.

⁹ Huang, “China ‘in for More Tough American talk’—No Matter Who Wins the November Midterm Elections,” *South China Morning Post*, 27 September 2018.

¹⁰ “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy Toward China,” October 4, 2018, White House website, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/>; Owen Churchill and Robert Delaney, “US Vice-President Mike Pence steps up attacks on China by backing Donald Trump’s claim it’s trying to sabotage elections,” *South China Morning Post*, 4 October 2018.

¹¹ Ishaan Tharoor, “Under Trump, United States enters a new ‘Cold War’ with China,” *Washington Post*, 11 October 2018.

on North Korea, Pompeo—who cited “fundamental differences” dividing China and the United States—was denied a meeting with President Xi Jinping.¹² On U.S. television’s Fox News, Cui Tiankai, the Chinese ambassador in Washington, complained how difficult it was to discover where responsibility for determining and implementing policies actually rested within the sprawling Trump bureaucracy.¹³ In the interests of competing with China for influence in Africa and Asia, in mid-October 2018, the Trump administration suddenly reversed its previous entrenched opposition to foreign aid programs, especially those benefiting what the president had inelegantly termed “shithole countries” in Africa. Instead, Trump has created a new agency, the United States International Development Finance Corporation, intended to direct \$60 billion in aid to developing countries where Chinese financial largesse was making strategic inroads at U.S. expense.¹⁴

In mid-October, China and the United States each attempted to shore up their position with existing or potential military allies in Southeast Asia, with U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis visiting Vietnam and Singapore and attending an annual meeting of Asian defense ministers, and China undertaking military drills with Malaysian and Thai forces.¹⁵ En route to these encounters, Mattis sought to defuse tensions, bluntly stating that “the United States was not out to contain China,” even though “we’re two large powers, or two Pacific powers, two economic powers. There’s going to be times we step on each other’s toes, so we’re going to have to find a way to productively manage our relationship.”¹⁶ Yet speculation was rife in Washington that Trump had lost confidence in Mattis and intended to fire him. (This may or may not have been related to the carefully argued hypothetical case made by the professor who had previously identified the journalist Joe Klein as the anonymous author of the 1996 political *roman à clef* *Primary Colors*, that Mattis had written the unsigned *New York Times* op-ed.¹⁷) In a television interview the previous weekend, Trump equivocated on just how long his secretary of defense might stay, describing Mattis as “a good guy” but also “sort of a Democrat,” concluding: “He may leave. I mean, at some point, everybody leaves.” He reiterated his complaints that China had interfered in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and was likewise doing so in the impending mid-terms. Trump confidently proclaimed that China did not possess the necessary economic

¹² Bloomberg News, “China-U.S. Tensions Flare in Testy Pompeo Visit to Beijing,” *Bloomberg*, 8 October 2018.

¹³ Laura Zhou, “Trump-Xi meeting at G20 forum ‘may help ease tensions,’” *South China Morning Post*, 16 October 2018.

¹⁴ Glenn Thrush, “Trump aims to counter China with foreign aid,” *International New York Times*, 15 October 2018.

¹⁵ Kristin Huang, “China looks to counter US influence in joint drill,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 October 2018.

¹⁶ Bloomberg News, “The U.S. ‘Obviously’ Doesn’t Want to Contain China, Mattis Says,” *Bloomberg*, 16 October 2018.

¹⁷ Don Foster, “Right to remain Anonymous: Scholar who decoded ‘Primary Colors’ unmask author of Times op-ed,” *Salon*, 20 September 2018, <https://www.salon.com/2018/09/20/right-to-remain-anonymous-who-is-the-senior-official-who-wrote-the-times-op-ed/>.

leverage against the United States to win any trade war, declaring: “I consider it a skirmish. And we're gonna win.”¹⁸

The prospect of a full-dress Sino-American trade war, let alone comprehensive full-scale multiple confrontations between the two countries, was something many believed had been adroitly averted during the first year of the Trump presidency. Meredith Oyen, in an article focusing upon Trump's relations with China, lucidly describes the background to Trump's pre-presidential approach to China policy, as well as his dealings with China in his first year in office. She also provides an excellent and succinct exposition of the forces and outlook driving the approach to international affairs chosen by President Xi Jinping of China.¹⁹ By late 2017, Trump's need for Chinese assistance to handle the growing nuclear threat from an ever more assertive North Korea, and the careful cultivation of the new American leader by Xi Jinping, seemed to have moderated tensions between China and the United States. Yet, as Oyen readily admits: “The reemergence of a potential trade war with China as a result of dueling tariffs at the start of Trump's second year in office serves as a reminder that with such a volatile figure in the White House, no status quo can stay in place for long” (115).

This has proved true in spades. Whatever political capital President Xi and his supporters invested in nurturing good relations with Trump is apparently gone with the wind. Trump himself stated that Xi “may not be a friend of mine any more but I think he probably respects me.”²⁰ Impelled by its current leader, the United States government seems determined to push trade disputes with China beyond the brink and into territory still uncharted, in terms not simply of the bilateral relationship between the two powers involved, but also of its implications for other nations—such as those entangled in dependent supply chains—collaterally affected. For decades, trade negotiations between the United States and China have routinely been cliffhangers, saved quite literally at the eleventh hour before midnight on the last day before sanctions came into effect, or sometimes even later. Now, the deadlines are real, and so are the leaps over the precipice. Chinese businesses and their directors and employees are already buckling down to a new austerity, cutting back on little indulgences such as avocados and rather more expensive luxuries, such as offspring. China's newly introduced and slightly tentative two-, three-, or even unlimited-children policy may not be able to withstand the ravages of U.S. tariffs.

As relations between the United States and China continued to deteriorate, much of the rest of the world watched with deep and growing misgivings over the prospects for both the global economy and the broader international scene. Revelations in late October that both the Chinese and the Russians were apparently hacking Trump's personal iPhones proved inconsequential. Unspecified Trump administration officials expressed “confidence he was not spilling secrets because he rarely digs into the details of the intelligence he is

¹⁸ CBS, Full transcript of Lesley Stahl, interview of Donald Trump, 60 Minutes, 14 October 2018, posted 15 October 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/donald-trump-full-interview-60-minutes-transcript-lesley-stahl-2018-10-14/>.

¹⁹ Meredith Oyen, “Artless Dealing: The First Year of Trump's Relations with Asia,” *Journal of American-East Asian Studies* 25:2 (Summer 2018): 113-137.

²⁰ Huang, “China ‘in for More Tough American Talk’.”

shown and is not well versed in the operational specifics of military or covert activities.”²¹ Taking a tactic from Trump’s own playbook, the Chinese foreign ministry promptly characterized the report as mere “fake news” purveyed by the *New York Times*.²² Whatever secret information Chinese listeners were able to glean from this alleged intelligence coup did not seem to have translated into particularly effective moves to influence Trump’s outlook and policies.

A far more serious episode was a near collision between U.S. and Chinese naval vessels in the South China Sea in mid-October 2018, as each side aggressively asserted its presence in these disputed waters, prompting fears that military provocations and clashes might result in outright hostilities.²³ In a closing news conference at a regional meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations the following month, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore, which hosted the gathering, expressed fears that a Cold War-style antagonism was developing between China and the United States, in which each protagonist would pressure smaller nations to take sides. Voicing apprehensions that “[t]he circumstances may come where Asean will have to choose one or the other,” Lee nervously added: “I hope that does not happen soon.”²⁴ Continuing verbal attacks on China by U.S. Vice-President Mike Pence, who attended the ASEAN summit, delivering an address in which he stated “that empire and aggression have no place in the Indo-Pacific,” did nothing to allay such concerns.²⁵ A summit meeting of Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) members, held immediately afterward in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea, and attended by Pence, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and a high-level Chinese delegation led by Xi Jinping, then failed even to reach agreement on a final communiqué.²⁶

In October and November 2018, Xi Jinping reacted to the U.S. challenge with a series of high-profile affirmations of China’s commitment to an assertive international economic presence. At the beginning of November, he opened a five-day International Import Expo in Shanghai, pledging that China would further

²¹ Matthew Rosenberg and Maggie Haberman, “When Trump Phones Friends, the Chinese and the Russians Listen and Learn,” *New York Times*, 24 October 2018.

²² AFP, “China blasts Trump phone hack report as ‘fake news,’” *Times Live*, 25 October 2018.

²³ Julian Borger and Lily Kuo, “US-China Tensions Soar as ‘New Cold War’ Heats Up,” *New York Times*, 16 October 2018.

²⁴ Michelle Jamrisko, Jason Koutsoukis, and Toluse Olorunnipa, “Singapore PM Says ASEAN May Need to Choose Between U.S. and China,” Bloomberg, 15 November 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-11-15/singapore-fears-asean-may-need-to-choose-between-u-s-china>.

²⁵ John Geddie and Aradhana Aravindan, “Pence Says ‘Empire and Aggression’ Have No Place in Indo-Pacific,” Reuters, 14 November 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-summit-pence/pence-says-empire-and-aggression-have-no-place-in-indo-pacific-idUSKCN1NK084>.

²⁶ Katharine Murphy, “Apec Leaders Unable to Agree on Communiqué amid US-China Trade Tensions,” *The Guardian*, 18 November 2018; Agence France-Presse, “APEC Summit Fails to Reach Agreement on Statement Amid US-China Spat,” *The Guardian*, 18 November 2018.

open its economy to foreign trade and investment.²⁷ International luminaries such as Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, attended, as did representatives of numerous foreign governments, but U.S. officials were ostentatiously absent, as were their counterparts from the other G-7 countries, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Canada. Even so, 180 U.S. companies, including such giants as Google, Microsoft, General Motors, Ford Motors, and Walmart, were among the 3,000 firms represented there, eager to take advantage of recent reductions in Chinese tariffs. Bill Gates of Microsoft and Jack Ma of Alibaba were both highly visible presences, joining Lagarde in calling for the reduction of trade frictions.²⁸ Skeptical observers nonetheless wondered how many of the more than US\$50 billion of import agreements it was announced Chinese firms had concluded at this exhibition were genuine.²⁹ Eager to gain external support, China announced a range of new Belt and Road Initiative agreements, intended to win over other states. In late November and early December, Xi Jinping embarked on a punishing overseas travel schedule, embracing not just Papua New Guinea, but also the Philippines, Spain, the G-20 meeting in Argentina, Panama, and Portugal.³⁰ Sympathetic intellectuals and experts on Sino-US relations from Chinese think tanks and academe received government encouragement to embark on lengthier visits to the United States, with the objective of making contacts and developing ties with conservative American think tanks closely connected to elements of the Trump administration.³¹

While such tactical maneuverings might have a certain impact, few believed that they were likely to have more than a marginal influence upon U.S. policies toward China. The only avenue that seemed to offer genuine prospects of reaching some kind of understanding was believed to be another personal meeting between Xi Jinping and President Trump that would allow the latter to negotiate an agreement in which he possessed some proprietary stake. As December 2018 began, the Buenos Aires G-20 summit meeting of leaders of the world's foremost economies provided a suitable opportunity for such an encounter. Both men arrived in Argentina accompanied by a large entourage of top-level expert advisers and officials. At a working dinner, with each delegation arrayed on opposite sides of a long table, they reached agreement on a preliminary deal, whereby the United States would defer for two additional months its scheduled imposition from 1 January 2019 of a tariff rate of 25 percent on \$200 billion of Chinese imports, in exchange for what were Trump administration officials termed "very substantial" Chinese purchases of American agricultural and industrial products and energy. The 90-day postponement was intended to provide a window for negotiations that would resolve a range of existing Sino-U.S. economic disputes, including the trade imbalance, Chinese non-

²⁷ Kinling Lo and Sidney Leng, "Xi Jinping Promises Greater Opening up at China International Import Expo, Warns against Winner-Takes-all Mentality," *South China Morning Post*, 5 November 2018.

²⁸ Sarah Zheng, "China Takes Aim at Trade Critics with Import Expo as US Officials Stay Away," *South China Morning Post*, 4 November 2018.

²⁹ Xie Yue and Ren Wei, "China Touts US\$57.8 Billion Deals after Shanghai Import Export, but How Much of That is Window Dressing," *South China Morning Post*, 10 November 2018.

³⁰ Xinhua, "Xi's Visits to Spain, Argentina, Panama, Portugal to Enhance Bilateral Ties, G20 Cooperation," *People's Daily* online, 25 November 2018, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2018/1125/c90000-9521744.html>.

³¹ Wendy Wu, "China Wants Academics and Think Tank Members to Help Defuse Tensions with US," *South China Morning Post*, 30 November 2018.

tariff restrictions hindering the entry of U.S. goods and services into the Chinese market, forced transfers of U.S. technology to China, and Chinese industrial espionage and theft of foreign trade secrets. The Chinese government also agreed to take action to block illegal shipments of the opioid fentanyl to the United States, a move intended to assist the Trump administration's efforts to combat the domestic American narcotics crisis. Issues such as differences over policies toward Taiwan and strategic rivalries in the South China Sea and elsewhere were apparently not addressed. As Trump returned to the United States, the White House proclaimed the merits of this accord. Many observers, however, remained skeptical that it offered more than a temporary breathing space, which would prove too brief for successful negotiations to ensue. Experts also felt that the tensions of the previous two years had permanently altered the character of the Sino-U.S. relationship: the United States would be likely to take a tougher line toward China in future, denying it the benefit of the doubt, and China could be expected to move to make itself less dependent upon the United States.³²

Trump's suspicion of foreign trade is, we learn from the second article in this collection, nothing new, but dates back at least to the 1980s, when his hostility targeted not China but primarily Japan, then widely regarded as the upcoming Asian and possibly global superpower. Jennifer M. Miller of Dartmouth College perceptively explores Trump's early views on trade, highlighting his deep suspicion of Japanese imports and support for tariffs and other U.S. counter-measures during the late 1980s, a concern that did nothing to moderate his enthusiasm for Japanese investment in his own real estate ventures and, more broadly, in the American economy at large.³³ Japan was, of course, a key U.S. ally in the Cold War, which was still in progress at this time. Miller argues that, *mutatis mutandis*, Trump's suspicions of Japan have been extended to embrace all other U.S. commercial and even military agreements and understandings with allies and partners, including the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) (from which he has withdrawn the United States), the World Trade Organization (WTO), about which he has recently expressed deep skepticism, and assorted pacts and deals with South Korea, Japan, various Southeast Asian nations, and China. He would also like to negotiate one-on-one with European Union members, rather than deal with a collective whose members might gang up against the United States. In the thicket of accords, treaties, and regimes, I may have missed a few, but the general purport is clear. The Donald prefers an atomized world, in which U.S. economic muscle can be deployed to overawe smaller and individually weaker opponents. It is an approach Trump shares with Xi Jinping of China, even as he himself has shown great determination in applying it to the People's Republic.

Miller also notes that, while playing down the theme of shared democratic values that has since the ending of the Cold War been used to characterize and justify the U.S.-Japan alliance, Trump has affirmed its value to the United States in military and strategic terms. She also highlights the many similarities between Trump

³² David J. Lynch, "U.S. and China Agree to New Talks as Trump Pulls back on Tariffs," *Washington Post*, 1 December 2018; Julian Borger, "Donald Trump and Xi Jinping declare trade truce at G20," *The Guardian*, 2 December 2018; Zhou Xin, "Xi Jinping and Donald Trump agree to trade truce, no additional tariffs, China state media says," *South China Morning Post*, 2 December 2018; Zhou Xin and John Carter, "Xi and Trump Agree to Trade War Truce," *South China Morning Post*, 3 December 2018; David J. Lynch, "Despite Pause in Trade War, U.S. and China's Economic Relationship is Forever Changed," *Washington Post*, 2 December 2018; John Pomfret, "Engagement with China is Failing. Time for 'Constructive Vigilance'," *Washington Post*, 3 December 2018.

³³ Jennifer M. Miller, "Let's Not Be Laughed at Anymore: Donald Trump and Japan from the 1980s to the Present," *Journal of American-East Asian Studies* 25:2 (Summer 2018): 138-168.

and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, both of them “strong nationalists who place patriotism and national pride at the center of their political visions” (153) and “elevate military power as a key element” (154) of their respective outlooks. Both alike have also “express[ed] their nationalist agenda through celebration of specific historical sites and monuments, ironically utilizing the language of culture and military disaster to reclaim military disaster as national renewal” (154), paying gratuitous tribute to controversial memorials and shrines. The two have apparently struck up a personal relationship, one sedulously cultivated by Abe with gestures calculated to appeal to Trump’s idiosyncracies and interests. Abe also upgraded Japan’s military spending and level of operational engagement, moves that largely accorded with his own existing priorities.

Yet just as clearly, Trump consistently relegates Abe to a position inferior to his own; this is not a reciprocal partnership of equals, but one of patron and admiring, even sycophantic, client. The two initially united in fierce opposition to North Korea’s nuclear buildup, but in March 2018 Trump embarked on negotiations with North Korean president Kim Jong-un without prior consultation with Abe, who learned of Trump’s projected meeting with Kim only after the fact. Simultaneously, Trump continued throughout to assail Japan’s trade deficit with the United States as the result of policies that were “not fair” and “not open” (157). Japan—together with China and many other nations—had, he consistently argued, “take[n] advantage of the United States” (161) for decades on trade. Meanwhile, he also continued to urge Japanese investors and businesses to direct their funding to the United States, welcoming decisions by leading auto firms such as Mazda and Toyota to build new plants on American soil.

Some may greet with shock or incredulity the suggestion that Trump could—to quote his recent anonymous critic in the *New York Times*—possess “any discernible first principles” or international philosophy whatever beyond sedulous promotion of the interests of Donald Trump. Miller argues, by contrast, that “the core of his worldview, especially his ideas about trade, alliances, national greatness, and executive power, emerged decades earlier. Over the past thirty years, Trump has shown a striking consistency in his foreign policy ideology, especially his emphasis on protecting American jobs and manufacturing through aggressive trade policy; his criticism of ‘freeloading’ allies; his constant denunciations of weak American leadership that has allowed other countries to manipulate both the United States and the international economic order; and his view, brought from his business career, that life is struggle where the goal is always victory, never compromise” (163-164). Since the 1980s, he has also been “a firm believer in foreign capital, which he thought had to be free from state regulation” and able to “flow . . . between borders” (164). It is perhaps worth noting—though Miller does not—that at least in his current incarnation, Trump often seems to envisage these capital movements as one-way traffic, vocally demanding that American businesses such as Harley-Davidson and Apple bring their overseas operations back home even as he applauds foreign investment within the United States. This despite the fact that, as critics have pointed out, he and his daughter Ivanka—who announced in July 2018 that she intended to close her fashion business and focus on politics—have out-sourced much of the production of their own businesses to plants far beyond American borders.³⁴

³⁴ Mary Papenfuss, “Trump Rips Harley-Davidson for Overseas Operation—Just Like His Own,” *Huffpost*, 1 July 2018; Adam Gabbatt, “Trump’s ‘Made in America’ Week: the President’s Hypocrisy Is on Display,” *The Guardian*, 18 July 2017; Jefferson Graham, “Trump wants Apple to Make iPhones in the US. There is just One Problem,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 2018.

Trump frequently seems to believe that the United States has no overseas interests beyond the economic. Yet he gives every appearance of roundly enjoying exercising the powers of commander-in-chief, unleashing bombs and missile strikes, boosting the use of drones, and threatening still worse, even as he berates U.S. allies for what he considers their over-reliance on American military protection and their reluctance to boost defense spending. Some ambiguities notwithstanding, an array of strong armed forces second to none and considerably superior to those of potential rival powers, that can with ease overawe all competitors on the international scene, appears integral to his vision of “America First.” Who can forget his boasting to Kim Jong-un (“Little Rocket Man”) “that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!”³⁵ And according to Bob Woodward’s new exposé of his presidency, in April 2017 Trump ordered Defense Secretary James Mattis to assassinate Syrian president Bashar Hafez al-Assad, instructions Mattis ignored and toned down into limited air strikes on Syria.³⁶

In an article that focuses primarily upon Trump and Korea, Mitchell Lerner employs the innovative concept of “Walmart Unilateralism” to characterize Trump’s approach to international affairs.³⁷ Trump’s *modus operandi* when dealing with the outside world is, he argues, an adaptation of the practices of today’s huge American corporations, one that prioritizes short-term returns based on the financial bottom line, and eschews long-term alliances and the promotion of common international interests in favor of the ruthless pursuit of purely national goals. Trump has effectively rejected the post-World War II system of rules-based liberal internationalism, choosing instead to use American power for purely U.S. ends, as he defines them. Whenever possible, this involves the utilization of his country’s economic or military superiority to extract concessions from weaker nations. The idea of a win-win situation is incomprehensible to him. Following Trump’s atomized interpretation of the world, the United States should “reject the very concept of enduring allies and rivals in favor of an approach devoted to avoiding long-term commitments and rooted in the idea that anyone and anything is simply replaceable” (174).

These are, Lerner argues, the principles that have driven the highly successful “utilitarian” economic model adopted by Walmart, which has prioritized cutting production costs above all else, satisfying the short-term needs of customers for low prices and maintaining its immediate profits at the expense of suppliers, employees, business competitors, and broader community interests. Workers are disposable, with older and experienced staff routinely discarded in favor of younger and less expensive operatives, and benefits kept to a minimum, leading to high employee turnover, a contrast with more generous rivals such as Costco. In “the foreign policy arena[, t]o the president and many of his closest advisors, strict cost-benefit analyses steer them away from long-term investment and development programs and sustained relations based on shared values.

³⁵ Chris Cillizza, “Donald Trump’s Nuclear Button is Way Bigger than Yours,” 3 January 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/03/politics/trump-size-matters-analysis>.

³⁶ Lydia O’Connor, “James Mattis Reportedly Ignored Trump’s Order To ‘F**king Kill’ Bashar Assad,” *Huffpost*, 4 September 2018.

³⁷ Mitchell B. Lerner, “The Death of Liberal Internationalism? Donald Trump, Walmart, and the Two Koreas,” *Journal of American-East Asian Studies* 25:2 (Summer 2018): 169-197.

They instead push them toward a more business-like program with an emphasis on short-term financial returns and impermanent relationships at the expense of everything else” (177).

Others have explored the ramifications of this short-term and confrontational outlook for the Trump administration’s fundamentally disastrous dealings with Europe. Lerner, by contrast, looks at Korea, both North and South. By now, the world knows that one or more anonymous dissenters within his administration deplore Trump’s current policies toward the hereditary dictator Kim Jong-un, with whom, despite the latter’s fondness for ostentatious missile-rattling and the execution or assassination of inconvenient family members and officials, Trump appears to have developed some kind of rapport following their June 2018 meeting in Singapore. Indeed, in late September 2018 he told supporters at a rally in Wheeling, West Virginia, that during this summit both Kim and he were “tough” and “went back and forth. And then we fell in love, okay. No really. He wrote me beautiful letters, and they’re great letters. We fell in love.”³⁸ The two signed an agreement—strongly endorsed by South Korea’s President, Moon Jae-in—that set the ultimate objective of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. This accord undoubtedly represents a distinct change from earlier exchanges between Kim and Trump, which appeared to anticipate full-scale nuclear war between the United States and North Korea. Trump’s rapprochement with Kim was, however, one of the issues on which the author of the recent anonymous *New York Times* op-ed saw fit to differ with him, disapprobation likewise extended to Trump’s dealings with Russia (though not, interestingly, with China).³⁹

Lerner’s article appeared before it was possible to draw such fine distinctions. He concentrates on highlighting deep-rooted existing flaws in Korean-American ties and in Trump’s assumptions regarding the nature of relations between North Korea and China. Trump has repeatedly and publicly assailed what he perceives as South Korea’s failure to pay its fair share of its own defense costs and its trade imbalance with the United States. Meanwhile, he initially assumed that, faced with the threat of the imposition of tariffs on its own trade with the United States, mainland China would rapidly make what he considered the rational decision to win American good graces by pressuring North Korea to abandon its nuclear program, and perhaps even helping to overthrow Kim Jong-un’s regime. Trump almost certainly exaggerated the degree of Chinese leverage over North Korea, which insofar as it has been an ally-cum-client of either China or the Soviet Union, for decades took a remarkably obstreperous attitude toward its communist neighbors and patrons. To give only one example, to the fury of Chinese foreign ministry advisers, when the national funeral obsequies for top Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping were in progress in February 1997, North Korean goons were besieging the South Korean embassy in Beijing and trying to kidnap South Korean businessmen on the streets, measures they undertook in an effort to recapture a North Korean official who had defected to the South and taken refuge in its Beijing embassy. China has already imposed significant sanctions upon North Korea, which have, it seems, helped to persuade Kim Jong-un to negotiate with the United States and even strike up a personal

³⁸ David Barden, “Trump: Kim Jong Un and I ‘Fell in Love,’” *Huffpost*, 30 September 2018.

³⁹ Anonymous, “I Am Part of the Trump Resistance.”

relationship with Trump, who now considers his erstwhile *bête noire* “a tough guy” and “a very smart guy. . . a great negotiator.”⁴⁰

For a variety of reasons, more drastic measures by China are unlikely, even as Kim drags his feet on the specifics of his supposed deal with Trump, the United States, and South Korea’s Moon Jae-in for a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, while demanding a second meeting with Trump. Even supposing China were willing to impose much harsher and more stringent economic sanctions on North Korea, in practical terms, these would in all probability merely stoke nationalist defiance on the part of Kim Jong-un, whose nuclear arsenal, whatever its limitations, could undoubtedly target not just South Korea and American bases and civilian targets in Japan, Guam, Hawaii, and parts of the continental United States, but also many major Chinese cities and military installations. Notwithstanding the fact that the secretive and uncommunicative North Korean leadership often conceals information from the Chinese and apparently disregards whatever advice China may offer, it is, Lerner argues, extremely unlikely that China will simply scrap a relationship dating back more than seventy years with a neighboring Communist nation, to promote the collapse of Kim’s government and chaos on its borders. Some Chinese military men, it seems, toyed with the prospect of a Sino-American surgical strike on North Korea’s nuclear program, but this idea fell by the wayside when those involved realized there could be no real guarantee that one hundred percent of the offending facilities would be destroyed. Trump’s belief that China will turn its back on North Korea, in return for a short-term, and what all by now recognize is a fundamentally unreliable rapprochement on trade with his administration, is unrealistic.

But even if it did, North Korea could survive. Assorted African and Middle Eastern states are happy to do business with Kim Jong-un, and take sanctions-busting in their stride. President Vladimir Putin’s Russia is also providing North Korea with extensive assistance, including coal, fuel, and technical assistance for its weapons program, aid that—whether or not Trump wishes to acknowledge the fact—further dilutes the impact of external economic sanctions. Ultimately, too, Kim has the domestic option of appealing to fervent nationalist sentiment and blaming the United States for any difficulties and shortages sanctions may inflict upon his country.

Meanwhile, Trump apparently fails to recognize that even within the southern Republic of Korea (ROK), a “latent strain of suspicion and even anti-American sentiment” is “engrained” (183). The history of Korean-American relations in the twentieth century, marked by U.S. reluctance to back Korea first against annexation by Japan and then, during the late 1940s, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, against the Communist threat from the north, means that “many South Koreans worry that despite its promises, they cannot trust the United States to support the nation’s still-young democratic system” (183). Equally, events during the later 1960s, when the United States largely ignored North Korean incursions into the south and clashes across the Demilitarized Zone that separates the two Koreas, opting for diplomatic rather than military solutions, “left further doubts about the extent of their ally’s commitment” (185). After taking office in 1976, President Jimmy Carter anticipated Trump in contemplating the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from South Korea, plans ultimately abandoned under pressure from Asian specialists within the U.S. foreign policy apparatus. Pro-democracy forces within South Korea also remember with bitterness the eagerness of the

⁴⁰ Nicole Hensley, “Trump Lauds Kim Jong Un as Smart ‘Tough Guy’ When Confronted about North Korean executions,” *New York Daily News*, 13 June 2018, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/ny-pol-trump-compliments-north-korea-20180613-story.html>.

administration of President Ronald Reagan during the 1980s to offer continued backing to an authoritarian military dictatorship and ignore its suppression of rising dissent.

Further complicating matters, younger Koreans in the south find the very presence on Korean soil of U.S. bases irksome, in part because these would be prime targets in any North Korean attack, but also because these are symbols of Korea's military subordination to the United States. Trump's own rhetoric and volatility are almost certainly contributing to further Korean disenchantment with the United States. His demands for the renegotiation of the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and that South Korea pay for the installation of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system suggest that he does not value the ROK as an ally. His imposition of tariffs on China has also had economic repercussions within South Korea, prompting President Moon Jae-in to undertake a major cabinet purge in August 2018, in the hope of reversing rising unemployment, stimulating growth, and reining in the power of the inefficient large corporate chaebols, in the interests of boosting competitiveness and productivity.⁴¹ In South Korea, as elsewhere in Asia and beyond, Trump's unpredictability is eroding the credibility of the United States as a reliable ally. His slights, snubs, and missteps, some calculated, others the product of ignorance, also have the effect of driving North and South Korea closer together.

David Kang, in the most iconoclastic article in this issue, argues that in reality, the Trump presidency is merely accelerating and highlighting trends that have become increasingly pronounced in U.S.-Asian relations since at least 1990.⁴² Kang characterizes as "a myth" the idea that "the United States always performed as a stable, predictable, status quo, and welcome hegemon, and both Democrat and Republican presidents worked within a broad consensus until the surprise election of Trump ruined everything" (199). He argues that well before Trump came on the scene, major changes were under way across much of Asia, with the United States effectively ceding predominance and leadership to China and most Asian nations accommodating themselves to this situation. Kang further argues that, in dealing with the "long-term decline of U.S. leadership and influence" in the region, "observers often forget how dynamic and proactive East Asian countries are themselves" (200). For several decades, he argues, a "continuing and gradual American withdrawal from leadership" has been in progress, even as trade, investment, and "cultural and social flows" are likely to persist and even increase. This means that "the long-term relationship between the United States and East Asia only is going to become more intense, even while the U.S. position at the top of the regional hierarchy may come increasingly into question" (200). Although Trump has "moved well beyond the typical mainstream U.S. policies toward East Asia" in terms of trade wars, and his policies are "capricious" (202), arguably "the central challenge to American hegemony arises from political, economic, and social issues in the United States itself" (203).

⁴¹ William Pesek, "With an Ally like Trump, Does South Korea's President Moon Jae-in Really Need an Adversary?," *South China Morning Post*, 2 September 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/business/global-economy/article/2162228/ally-trump-does-south-koreas-president-moon-jae-really-need>.

⁴² David C. Kang, "Trump's First Year in Asia: Accelerating a Long-Term Trend," *Journal of American-East Asian Studies* 25:2 (Summer 2018): 198-220. Kang elaborates many of these arguments in David C. Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); and David C. Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Kang scrutinizes in detail long-term developments within East Asia, especially growth in GDP and levels of defense spending. Whereas in 1990 China was responsible for only 8 percent of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), in 2014 the figure was 51 percent, while Japan's share had slipped from 72 percent to 22 percent. Over the same period, the PRC's share of regional trade has grown from 8 percent to 39 percent, while Japan's share dropped from 47 percent to 16 percent. Across eleven major states in East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand), between 1990 and 2015, total defense spending dropped from 3.35 percent to around 1.84 percent of regional GDP. These overall figures are skewed by the fact that, given the massive increase in Chinese GDP over this period, Chinese defense expenditures have in reality risen dramatically, from around \$6 billion in 1990 to something like \$107 billion in 2015, around 2 percent of Chinese GDP, a figure greater than the total defense spending of all other Asian countries combined. What they do suggest is that, as Kang argues, other East Asian nations have not responded by embarking on an arms race, but "steadily have reduced their defense spending, which suggests these countries do not think most of the region's unresolved issues are worth fighting over" (205). According to Kang: "This East Asian reality runs counter to a largely Western narrative of threat inflation that views the PRC's rise as dangerous and the region as increasingly unstable." He sees "little evidence that East Asian states are engaged in an arms race, and few states are sending costly signals about their resolve to suffer the costs of war" (206).

Does the reluctance of other countries in East Asia to challenge China directly or engage in military competition necessarily imply that U.S. power in the region is declining? Around 54,000 U.S. military personnel are currently based in Japan, the largest contingent of overseas troops in the U.S. military, followed by Germany with over 34,000 troops, with South Korea in third place.⁴³ When one looks in detail at the figures for U.S. forces in Korea, the numbers are instructive. Between 1991, as the Cold War came to an end in Europe, and 2004, the number of U.S. military personnel serving in Korea fluctuated between 41,000 and 35,000, suddenly falling by almost one-quarter to 31,000 in 2005, a steep drop probably caused by the unanticipated needs of the ongoing war in Iraq.⁴⁴ Today, the numbers have fallen further, to 23,468. Meanwhile, over 60,000 American troops are deployed in European NATO states, over half of them in Germany.⁴⁵

According to Kang, between 1997 and 2016, polls have shown that around half (49 percent in 1997 and 52 percent in 2016) of Americans "believe that European ties are far more important than Asian ties for the United States" (209), with only one-third (32 percent in 1997 and 31 percent in 2016) ranking Asian ties first. Interestingly, if sheer numbers count, U.S. troop deployments today seem to demonstrate precisely the reverse. Kang's own figures and charts reveal that the United States is currently spending close to "three times as much on its military as does China, and that gap has remained fairly consistent over the past three decades" (208). Here, he may understate his argument. Looking closely at the chart he cites, as late as 2006, U.S.

⁴³ Greg Price, "U.S. Military Presence in Asia: Troops Stationed In Japan, South Korea and Beyond," *Newsweek*, 26 April 2017.

⁴⁴ Tim Kane, "Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950-2005," May 24, 2006. *The Heritage Foundation Website*.

⁴⁵ "Trump: What Does the US Do for the NATO Alliance in Europe?" BBC World News, July 10, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-44717074>.

defense budgets were still over six times those of China, so over the last decade, the gap has narrowed quite rapidly. Even so, the advantage is still heavily in the favor of the United States.

Meanwhile, “China is the largest trading partner of the United States, comprising sixteen percent of total trade in 2015. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and India are all top-ten trading partners of the United States.” Japan is also “the second-largest investor in the United States, with a cumulative \$393 billion invested over time” (209). To put the figure for China in perspective, total U.S. trade with the entire European Union constitutes around 18.5 percent of all American trade. Yet Kang demonstrates that definite disconnects exist between U.S. economic or even strategic ties and cultural and educational links. Of American students who choose to study abroad, a mere 4.5 percent go to the People’s Republic of China, and only 6.5 percent to all of Asia. The great majority choose Western destinations. Equally, Asia is heavily under-represented in elite U.S. university doctoral programs focusing upon international relations, with fewer than half of the top 42 graduate schools offering even one seminar course on Asia. Within the U.S. academic and policymaking communities, Asia may enjoy a higher profile than it did three or four decades ago, but it is still—military and business connections notwithstanding—decidedly a minority interest. Networks exist, but they cannot match the sheer density and multiplicity of ties linking the United States, Western Europe, and Canada, and perhaps, too, Australasia.

Even so, the United States, with leading corporate headquarters located in the region’s major cities, American Chambers of Commerce representing business interests throughout East and Southeast Asia, and its naval forces and aircraft patrolling the sea lanes, collecting intelligence, and testing the responses of rivals, especially China, remains a definite and by no means unobtrusive presence in East Asia. ‘White men speak with forked tongues’ may at times seem an apposite if unkind description of the ever-changing working principles and dizzying rapid reversals of the Trump administration, ideally designed to baffle those observers who seek to comprehend its underlying strategy. But, despite the President’s periodic musings that South Korea and Japan might manage perfectly well if U.S. military forces were withdrawn, unless there should develop in either country the kind of deep-rooted popular and political opposition to American bases that forced the United States to close its Philippine redoubts in 1991, this seems unlikely to happen. The United States is, if anything, expanding its military footprint in Asia. In spring 2018 the Philippine government even allowed the establishment of revived American military bases on its territory.

If China’s neighbors have chosen to focus on building their own economies, does this, as Kang argues, mean that “there is little contesting of China’s rise in East Asia itself” (206) and they have effectively acquiesced in ceding regional hegemony to China? Kang notes that, despite sometimes well-publicized political rivalries, across Northeast Asia trade, investment, and financial transactions with China are growing. While some of these exchanges may reflect government policies and incentives, many—even if undertaken with some kind of official sanction—are presumably private business deals. New, Asian-backed institutions are also emerging. When Trump decided to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the trade agreement that ranked as a key achievement of the administration of his predecessor, President Barack Obama, the remaining members simply went ahead without the United States, signing the new accord in March 2018 and in some cases even contemplating the possibility of inviting China to join. This despite the fact that originally, the new institution had been envisaged as a counterbalance to China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the closely associated Belt and Road Initiative. Even as they supported the U.S. initiative, all its members had already also agreed to join its supposed rival, the AIIB.

Accepting that China is and will be a constant presence and neighbor, and declining to respond to increased Chinese military spending by engaging in a costly and unwinnable arms race against a power with deeper pockets, is not necessarily identical with simple subservience to the region's greatest power. Since at least the 1970s, states belonging to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, founded in 1967, have evolved their own working methods. They have generally sought to promote peace, stability, and growth in Asia, including making Southeast Asia a nuclear-free zone, and have at times contemplated regional economic arrangements that would have reduced the influence of the United States. Do Chinese claims that, at various times in the past, China exercised preponderance over much of Asia, with other states acquiescing in a tributary relationship, carry much genuine weight or legitimacy among these targets today? I would suggest, building on a recent article by David Shambaugh, that in practice, Asian nations—especially those in Southeast Asia, which are individually too small to be credible opponents of China—are following a rather sophisticated hedging strategy.⁴⁶ Most can and do call on nationalist traditions, some dating back centuries, others the product of more recent independence struggles, that encourage resistance to external hegemonic dominance. Not all choose precisely the same route. But most are reluctant to subordinate their policies to Chinese direction, and—following initial shock and incredulity over Trump's electoral victory and his antics—they are doing what they have so often done in the past, balancing and playing off one awkward great power against another.

Clearly, at both the official and popular levels, across much of Asia, significant genuine resentment of overbearing and tactless Chinese behavior and the bullying of smaller states exists, together with suspicion of the broader implications of Chinese investment. A recent collection of essays edited by Evelyn Goh of Australian National University has suggested that, even when China has invested substantially in Southeast Asia, those governments do not necessarily become more amenable to Chinese pressure on specific issues.⁴⁷ Malaysia is a case in point. Since his surprise May 2018 election win, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad has been rolling back Chinese development projects, openly complaining that if these went forward, Malaysia would be so heavily indebted to China that its independence would be compromised. Yet he did so while professing respect and friendship for China. Despite its current somewhat grandiose ambitions, China has acquiesced in this development, and welcomed Mahathir on a visit to Beijing, according him a number of particularly deferential gestures.⁴⁸ At least in the area of economics, there is, it seems, distinct scope for regional powers to push back against China. And Chinese leaders are perhaps slowly coming to recognize that their country's financial reserves are not unlimited, and the process of translating raw cash into domestic growth and social stability and external influence is far from straightforward.

Under Trump, U.S. policies in Asia and elsewhere are undoubtedly erratic. But one should bear in mind that Asians have long memories, and many of them recall the late 1970s and the aftermath of the Vietnam War,

⁴⁶ David Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?" *International Security* 42:4 (Spring 2018): 85-127.

⁴⁷ Evelyn Goh, ed., *Rising China's Influence in Developing Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁴⁸ Bhavan Jaipragas, "Mahathir Mohamad. Malaysia's Anti-China Rebel? Not so Fast ...," *South China Morning Post*, 22 August 2018; Tom Plate, "Criticism of China by Malaysia's Mahathir Resonates around East Asia, and with Beijing," *South China Morning Post*, 28 August 2018.

when it seemed quite possible that a demoralized United States would withdraw its forces entirely from the region. Thailand abrogated existing Thai-U.S. defense agreements in 1975, refusing to host American military facilities and moving to normalize relations with both Vietnam (now united) and Beijing. By summer 1976, despite internal dissent from more conservative forces within Thailand, the U.S. forces were gone. Even so, covert American cooperation with dissenting Thai elements continued. Early in his presidency following the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, Jimmy Carter planned to remove all U.S. troops from authoritarian South Korea, a move that greatly alarmed non-communist Southeast Asian governments, who feared being left exposed and unprotected against what many saw as potential Vietnamese expansionism. Many quietly welcomed the brief Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979, a move they felt delivered a salutary lesson to Vietnam and helped to restrain its ambitions.⁴⁹

Asians have long since learned, as Kang suggests, to live with a United States that experiences strange, even inexplicable, changes of course. China is probably less skilled at navigating such shoals than its smaller and more adaptable neighbors—in part, because the latter have had more practice, but possibly too because Chinese leaders, currently attuned to the pursuit of national greatness and international influence and predominance, find it difficult to believe that a great power would wittingly embark on such self-destructive, short-sighted, and counterproductive policies. U.S. policymaking in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has been at best messy and at worst a Grade A disaster area. As Kang points out, the role of ill-thought-out U.S. policies in precipitating the 2008 global financial meltdown and the subsequent American failure to address many of the problems revealed, as the United States’ deeply polarized political parties rejected taking decisive action to promote growth and address underlying weaknesses, has brought decreased respect for Western economic expertise. And, though Kang does not explicitly state this, the very fact that a self-proclaimed democratic political system that has ostentatiously promoted democracy as a model for the rest of the world cannot take action to remedy national weaknesses but can produce a leader such as Trump has done nothing to burnish the luster and appeal of democracy.

Trump’s recent actions may, in fact, drive other states in the region closer to China. Despite his anonymous critic’s revelations of the ad hoc efforts of ‘adults in the room’ to tone down the impact of his behavior, under his leadership, the United States is less than one hundred percent dependable as a strategic partner, and his trade policies are an Asian (and European, Canadian, and Mexican) nightmare come true. Given the complicated nature of supply chains, they have the potential not merely to derail Chinese economic growth, but to inflict collateral damage on the economies of the entire region and beyond. Despite Trump’s clear preference for bilateral negotiations and picking off opponents one by one, Asian nations are likely to feel there is little alternative to adopting Hillary Clinton’s 2016 campaign slogan of “Stronger Together” as their motto when dealing with the United States.

Kang perceives Donald Trump’s administration as representing merely the continuation of trends in U.S.-Asian relations that have been in progress for several decades. Yet many feel that his presidency is qualitatively different. If so, why is he something new, and where did he come from? Here, we perhaps need to look at

⁴⁹ These observations are based on detailed reports of the Asia Society’s Williamsburg Conferences during the late 1970s, located in various archives, including the papers of the Asia Society, Rockefeller Archive Center, Pocantico Hills, New York; the Mark Gayn Papers, University of Toronto; the George W. Ball Papers, Mudd Manuscripts Library, Princeton University; the Hugh N. Scott Papers, University of Virginia; and the papers of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

developments in the 1970s and 1980s, and to employ the insights of the articles in this special issue by Miller and Lerner. Trump is the product of a specific decade—the 1980s—and a particular intellectual outlook, that focused upon trade imbalances above all others, but also embraced deregulation as an article of faith.

The involvement of businessmen in politics is far from novel. The architects of the current beleaguered liberal international system were largely North American and European liberal capitalist businessmen, the intellectual products of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century progressive movement, who viewed society as an organic whole. Domestically, this outlook promoted labor-business, consumer-producer, and government-private partnerships, and a commitment to economic growth that would provide higher living standards for all, the counterpart to the inclusive world order for which blueprints were developed in the aftermath of World War I. These plans, only partially implemented during the 1920s, came to fruition after the even more destructive global conflict of the Second World War. They assigned an important managerial economic role to governments, which were expected to take active measures at the national and international level, in order to promote prosperity, stable economic growth, and social justice. Their most notable proponent was probably the British economist John Maynard Keynes, famous for his advocacy of counter-cyclical government spending and taxation as a means of moderating the peaks and troughs of the business cycle. Following World War II, this approach became an effective liberal consensus, enshrined across the Western world in generous welfare state provisions and safety nets.⁵⁰

During the 1970s, as the global and especially Western economy experienced an unprecedented combination of low growth and high inflation, in both the United States and Europe, especially the United Kingdom, a far more hard-edged ideological economic outlook known as neoliberalism won increasing numbers of adherents. Its intellectual founders included the University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman; the Czech economist and philosopher Friedrich A. von Hayek; and the American novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand. Among its most notable proponents were two politicians, Republican Governor Ronald Reagan of California, subsequently president of the United States, and the Conservative Member of Parliament Margaret Thatcher, who became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979. Another prominent devotee was the economist Alan Greenspan, chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board from 1987 to 2006. All rejected the postwar liberal consensus, instead favoring free markets, lower taxation, and the almost unlimited rollback of government spending and regulation at every level. Government intervention was perceived as the enemy and cause, rather

⁵⁰ On this outlook, see, e.g., R. Jeffrey Lustig, *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern American Political Theory, 1890-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe: Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Sklar, *The United States as a Developing Country: Studies in U.S. History in the Progressive Era and the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sklar, *Creating the American Century: The Ideas and Legacies of America's Twentieth-Century Foreign Policy Founders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kim McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners: Big Business in American Politics, 1945-1990* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); McQuaid, *A Response to Industrialism: Liberal Businessmen and the Evolving Spectrum of Capitalist Reform* (New York: Beard Books, 2003); Melvyn P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest: America's Pursuit of European Stability and French Security, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

than the solution, to economic and social problems of every kind. Reducing the role of government in the economy and unleashing the power of free markets became the neoliberal mantras. In the 1970s and 1980s, this outlook existed in tandem with deep antagonism to Communism, fueling demands for an upsurge in defense spending, the end of Western-Soviet détente, and military confrontation with the Soviet Union and its satellites and allies.

During the 1980s, Thatcher and Reagan were the foremost political advocates of neoliberalism to fill major positions of power. Both were vocal anti-Communists who believed in a strong defense and adamant military opposition to the Soviet Union, even as they called for tax reduction, cuts in government spending and subsidies, the end of state regulation, and, in Thatcher's case, the privatization of government-owned industries and housing. They anticipated that their policies would unleash high economic growth and prosperity for all. With doctrinaire fervor, they also argued that free markets would automatically provide the ideal solutions to economic and social problems alike. Social safety nets were to be removed. Simultaneously, many of the economic regulations dating back to the Great Depression that had been designed to serve as safeguards against financial malpractices were dismantled, as were legislative barriers to the unfettered movement of capital and profits across national borders. The pursuit of individual interest and personal gain became a new religion, one that its adherents claimed would promote the greater good of the entire community (insofar as that still existed). In an interview with *Woman's Own* magazine, in 1987 Thatcher famously declared that "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first."⁵¹ In many cases, Thatcher, Reagan, and their followers were also sympathetic to racist, non-democratic, and authoritarian regimes, so long as these were non-Communist, and deeply suspicious of international organizations, including the European Union and the United Nations. These they regarded as havens for fellow-traveling liberals and radicals who were unduly sympathetic to socialism, and haunts of free-loading representatives of Third World nations.

The tenure of power of Thatcher and Reagan coincided with the collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union, which Reagan's admirers like to contend was hastened by the massive military buildup he launched, competing with which overstretched the Soviet economy until it collapsed. In practice, entrenched economic inefficiencies and growing disenchantment with Cold War dogmas among elites and the general population, together with general disaffection toward Soviet rule in the satellite states and imperial overstretch, probably played at least as great a part in precipitating the end of the Soviet Union and Soviet empire. The implosion of Communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites validated neoliberal free-market prescriptions, which became a new orthodoxy, one that was rapidly imposed upon former Communist states and developing nations alike as they sought the holy grail of speedy economic progress and profitability, whatever the cost in human or other terms. This might, the argument went, involved short-term pain, but it represented the only reliable route to prosperity for all.

Whatever the merits of this rigorous approach, it prioritized short-term profits and immediate returns over long-term investment and planning. Heavily leveraged takeovers and asset-stripping became hallmarks of the 1980s. In the United States, Britain, and much of Western Europe, major reductions in taxation were accompanied by cutbacks in social spending and welfare programs. This was the decade in which homeless people first appeared in large numbers on British and American city streets. In the United States, in

⁵¹ "Margaret Thatcher: A Life in Quotes," *The Guardian*, 8 April 2013.

particular, the process of dismantling legislation and agencies intended to protect the environment and natural resources began during the Reagan presidency, to be continued with accelerating speed in future Republican administrations. The concept that certain assets—clean air and water, for example, or affordable healthcare, education for all, or even protection against financial fraud—represented public goods that governments had an obligation to provide became attenuated.

In most Western countries, popular support for the welfare state and for relatively interventionist governments at least moderated the harshness of this approach. In the United States, a longstanding suspicion of government combined with deep ethnic and cultural divisions and resentments which Republican politicians from President Richard Nixon onward did not hesitate to exploit pushed politics ever further to the right. As jobs were outsourced overseas, resentment of “unfair” competition from Japan, Mexico, China, and other foreign producers burgeoned, concentrated among labor leaders and the working class. Republican businessmen, many of whom profited from these shifts, the product of the “globalization” that became an economic watchword of the post-Cold War era, were generally far less hostile. This was not true of all businessmen, however, notably the populist Texas billionaire Ross Perot, who ran for the presidency as a third-party candidate in 1992 and 1996, winning 18.9 percent of the popular vote in 1992 and 8.4 percent four years later. His platform called for an end to the movement of American jobs to other countries and vehemently opposed NAFTA.

Donald Trump was, as the articles by Mitchell and Lerner highlight, a product of this period. His views on trade, especially his stubborn commitment to tariffs, which many of his business-oriented Republican supporters find appalling, continue to reflect what seem to have been his formative political and business experiences during the 1980s. One can probably go further, and argue that his entire style and outlook have been affected by the lessons of his business career. His major enterprises have been concentrated in the New York construction industry and real estate, casinos, and the fringes of the entertainment complex, none of them particularly salubrious economic sectors and all reputedly linked to organized crime. He now lives in a world in which he believes the United States is surrounded by ravenous competitors, all of them eager to take advantage of a naïve and trusting Uncle Sam. Meanwhile, Trump has settled into Washington bent on furthering his own economic interests. Established safeguards against conflicts of interest do not seem to apply to him and his appointees; instead, the United States has what might be described as the Al Capone presidency.⁵² At home and abroad, the maximization of short-term profits no matter what the cost is the one priority. All arrangements are temporary, and apart from close family members, no one can be trusted. It is not particularly surprising that the foreign ruler with whom Trump feels greatest empathy is Vladimir Putin, supremo of a kleptocracy that has, in what one historian has described as “the raid of the century,” looted the Russian economy for personal gain.⁵³ And even in that case, there are suspicions that Trump’s obdurate insistence on backing Russia and Putin’s policies, all allegations of malicious Russian intervention in U.S.

⁵² Helaine Olen, “Trump Didn’t Drain the Swamp. Supporters are Starting to Notice,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 2018.

⁵³ Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 622.

affairs notwithstanding, is driven by knowledge on Trump's part that Putin possesses highly compromising evidence of some kind related to his personal or financial dealings.⁵⁴

Trump's mindset undoubtedly displays certain traits that Americans and non-Americans alike may find unnerving. One of the more unpleasant is his near-total lack of loyalty to all but his immediate family and, at least to date, Putin. Otherwise, he seems determined to undermine his credibility with even those foreign leaders, such as Japan's Premier Abe, President Xi Jinping of China, and President Emmanuel Macron of France, who have made sedulous efforts to cultivate and work with him. Loyalty is strictly a one-way street, something that he demands from those around him but does not reciprocate. In the aftermath of revelations of disaffection among his advisers in an anonymous *New York Times* essay and Bob Woodward's book *Fear* (2018), Trump is reportedly deeply upset by these betrayals from insiders within his entourage.⁵⁵ Yet why should he, who will jettison anyone and anything if he believes this to be to his advantage, be surprised that those around him follow the same guidelines? Anything else would be contrary to his own fundamental principles, such as they are.

Trump's relationship with the truth is equally problematic. Clearly, he senses that facts are important, or he would not cite them so often. Only too frequently, however, his prized factoids and nuggets of scientific knowledge are invented. He is not the first president to maintain an elastic relationship with the truth; Ronald Reagan likewise habitually invoked the authority of grossly inaccurate information. In a sense, Trump is following the rules of the glaringly misnamed 'reality' television show, a completely artificial construct dependent on the complicity of the participants, where Trump was in his element as host. Truth, it seems, is infinitely malleable and negotiable, an outlook that the ability of computers and digital media to massage images and appearances and create alternative scenarios and fantasies in the entertainment world may well have encouraged. Trump keeps the fact-checkers working overtime. He has prioritized the fake over the genuine, style over substance, appearances over reality.

One can only be deeply skeptical whether the dissenting elements within Trump's administration described in the recent anonymous article are genuinely any better. He is probably correct to suspect that the author—according to Wikileaks probably older, conservative, and male⁵⁶—is someone within the national security apparatus. Anonymous apparently agrees with Trump's policies on cutting taxes, deregulation, and boosting military spending, but parts company with him when it comes to foreign trade and his admiration for both Putin and Kim Jong-un. The author is also highly critical of Trump's personality and character. Left unmentioned one way or another are Trump's actions on immigration, race, China, NATO and Europe, Iran, Israel, and climate change, and his absence of ethical standards. Anonymous also notes that foreign officials find that within the U.S. bureaucracy, lower-level American representatives continue to maintain

⁵⁴ David Leonhardt, "Of Trump and Talk of Laundering," *International New York Times*, 12 September 2018.

⁵⁵ Gabriel Sherman, "'Trump Believes There's a Coup': Freaked by the *Times* Op-Ed, the President Is Seeing Enemies Everywhere," *Vanity Fair*, 13 September 2018; Bob Woodward, *Fear: Trump in the White House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

⁵⁶ Johnny Lieu, "Wikileaks Gets Roasted for Obvious Prediction of Who Wrote That NYT Trump Op-Ed," Mashable, 7 September 2018, <https://mashable.com/article/wikileaks-trump-op-ed-prediction>.

good relations with them, and do not share their boss's contempt for their countries.⁵⁷ Considerate though this is of them, just how much difference does this actually make, one wonders.

The article provides valuable insight into the thinking of some of those working for Trump, fairly conservative Republicans who would probably have been somewhat out of sympathy with the post-World War II architects of the liberal international order. They, at least, genuinely believed in financial discipline and in funding military commitments and other programs through taxes, rather than running continuous deficits designed to gut Social Security and Medicare. One week later, Thomas L. Friedman excoriated Anonymous and his or her likeminded colleagues within the Trump administration for accepting a 'devil's bargain' whereby they tolerated an incompetent president who was recklessly boosting deficits to unprecedented highs, while completely ignoring the need to take drastic action to deal with the present and future impact of impending climate change. In the interest of generating immediate profits for dirty energy, the Trump administration is cheerfully jettisoning environmental protections. The rise in defense spending was also unjustified, he argued. Republicans were, in Friedman's view, "taking huge fiscal and environmental risks—effectively throwing away [the United States'] bumpers and spare tires that we may soon need to drive through the next financial or climate storm—for a short-term economic and political high."⁵⁸ Ironically, other less fortunate nations envy the United States its relatively clean air and water, abundant natural resources, and unspoiled parks and majestic scenery, assets the anonymous self-styled "resistance" members within the Trump administration apparently value just as little as the president himself does.

One unsympathetic analysis of the recent anonymous letter compares the author and those who share this approach to the German rightists who backed Nazi leader Adolf Hitler during the 1930s. Despite considering him "an ignorant demagogue, unqualified for high office and dangerously divisive," conservative businessmen and top military officials found Hitler useful and believed that they could keep him under control and thwart their tool's worst impulses.⁵⁹ I, for one, have always been deeply skeptical over the motivation of those military conspirators who, once it was clear that Germany was facing massive defeat, tried to dispose of Hitler in 1944. For more than a decade, Germany's armed forces had obediently followed Hitler's instructions, dutifully overrunning and occupying most of Europe, invading and devastating Russia, and facilitating the murder of six million Jews and many others. As disaster loomed ever closer, they still tried to negotiate a deal with the Allied powers whereby Germany might retain some of its wartime conquests. Could the military elite really plead innocence, or were they simply attempting to ditch at the last minute an unsuccessful leader who had become an embarrassment? The Trump resistance would no doubt reject the less than flattering comparison, but the analogy has some validity. The recent exercise in special pleading by Anonymous and the

⁵⁷ Anonymous, "I Am Part of the Trump Resistance."

⁵⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, "'Anonymous' is Hiding in Plain Sight," *New York Times*, 11 September 2018. See also Frank Rich, "The Anonymous White House Official is a Collaborator, Not a Resister," *New York Magazine*, 6 September 2018, <http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/09/frank-rich-anonymous-trump-official-collaborator-not-resister.html>; and Greg Sargent, "Trump's Paranoid Rage is Getting Worse. But the White House 'Resistance' is a Sham," *Washington Post*, 6 September 2018.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Chait, "It Takes More Than 'Adults in the Room' to Control a Petulant Leader Like Trump," *New York Magazine*, 14 September 2018.

conservative “steady state” co-conspirators may even have been a rather inept effort to persuade wavering Republicans to hold their noses and turn out and vote for their party in the upcoming mid-term elections. But can they seriously believe that, as Secretary of State Alexander Haig once notoriously proclaimed in the White House following the March 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan, they are “in control here”?⁶⁰

If Trump represents one model of American business with roots in the 1970s and 1980s, and is indeed almost a caricature of the worst aspects of the ‘ugly American’ nouveau riche mobster arriviste, there are signs that a different kind of businessman is also functioning on the American and global scene, one not dissimilar from the enlightened corporate liberals who rose to prominence around a century ago. In 2000, the political commentator John B. Judis lamented the “apostasy of the elites,” the degree to which prominent members of the supposed “establishment” had abandoned the quest to “defin[e] the national interest in terms that took account of business, labor, and the other competing groups of society” and thereby encouraged “democratic pluralism.” Instead, he charged, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of “new organizations, think tanks, and foundations . . . designed to undermine democratic pluralism—to further the rule of business and of its K Street lobbyists over the political process.”⁶¹ Wealthy businessmen funded organizations that advocated policies intended to cement the political and social predominance of narrow business norms. Their overriding purpose was to ensure that the rich became steadily richer. The pursuit of conspicuous wealth as a measure of social status replaced concern for society as a whole.

The major global corporations—Microsoft, Google, Facebook, Ford, Amazon, Starbucks—that operate across national borders have for some time been targets for popular hostility, a theme that Trump has avidly taken up, citing the need to put ‘America First.’ (In many cases, their leaders are now learning to shrug off shrill presidential Twitter assaults as so much hot air, rather insignificant background noise that has only a transitory impact.⁶²) But, despite (or because of?) these criticisms, some of the most successful and innovative business figures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are beginning to take the lead in advocating the pursuit of the public interest rather than simple private profit as a guiding principle of governance. As was the case in the early twentieth century, some argue that business itself cannot function effectively under totally free-market conditions. The leading Silicon Valley entrepreneur Marcus Ryu, chief executive of Guidewire Software, which works closely with the insurance industry, recently stated that “rational and apolitical regulation is essential for our capitalist engine to function.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Richard V. Allen, “When Reagan was Shot, Who Was ‘in Control’ at the White House?” *Washington Post*, 25 March 2011.

⁶¹ John B. Judis, *The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of the Public Trust* (New York: Random House, 2001), quotation from 157.

⁶² Peter Eavis, “Broad­sides by President Make Little Impression,” *International New York Times*, 8-9 September 2018.

⁶³ Marcus Ryu, “Regulate Silicon Valley,” *International New York Times*, 14 September 2018.

A number of top American businessmen have publicly expressed dismay over at least some of Trump's more controversial decisions. Jamie Dimon of the top New York bank J. P. Morgan Chase, though less stratospherically wealthy than those entrepreneurs who started major companies, is nonetheless—following a traditional trajectory established by leading twentieth-century financiers from both J. P. Morgan and Chase Manhattan—one of the most prominent figures within what passes today for the liberal American business elite. He has joined numerous other top U.S. executives in deploring Trump's views on climate change and his decision in June 2017 to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Accords, with which Dimon “absolutely disagrees.”⁶⁴ His bank recently established a \$500 million program to promote the regeneration of major American cities. But Dimon—despite a recent spat with Trump, during which the financier proclaimed his own credentials as a self-made man and rather hubristically claimed he could beat the incumbent should he choose to run for president—has not totally abandoned Trump, and still serves on his Council of Economic Advisers, on the grounds that it provides him with input into policies.⁶⁵ Others, including Elon Musk of Tesla and Bob Iger of Disney, resigned in protest.⁶⁶

In many cases, the new billionaires have come to regard their stupendous wealth as an asset that should be employed to solve global problems. Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, has abandoned business and placed much of his wealth in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the world's largest private philanthropic organization, currently worth US\$97.9 billion, which is dedicated to tackling major international health and development issues.⁶⁷ Gates and the renowned American investor Warren Buffett have opposed the Republican strategy of tax cuts that disproportionately favor the wealthy, and publicly argued in favor of an inheritance tax on large fortunes, as a means of reducing social inequality and dynastic tendencies in the United States.⁶⁸ Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook and his wife Priscilla Chan have proclaimed their ultimate intention of donating 99 percent of their fortune to philanthropic enterprises, and are currently targeting such

⁶⁴ Matt Egan, “Jamie Dimon Sticking by Trump despite Paris Decision,” CNN, 2 June 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/06/02/investing/jamie-dimon-trump-paris-decision/>.

⁶⁵ Halie Britzky, “Jamie Dimon Belittles Trump: My Money ‘Wasn’t A Gift from Daddy’,” *Axios*, 12 September 2018, <https://www.axios.com/jamie-dimon-donald-trump-2020-presidential-election-e0d4135c-cb9d-4ee0-a89d-d5284faef2b0.html>; Thomas Heath and Renae Merle, “‘He Will use Words that Others Won’t Use’: J P Morgan’s Jamie Dimon Gets into A Kerfuffle with Trump,” *Washington Post*, 13 September 2018.

⁶⁶ Julia Horowitz, “Elon Musk to Trump: You Quit Paris, So I Quit You,” CNN, 2 June 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/06/01/news/elon-musk-resigns-trump-adviser/>.

⁶⁷ Forbes Magazine, Profile of Bill Gates, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/bill-gates/>.

⁶⁸ Matthew J. Belvedere, “Warren Buffett, The World’s Second Richest Man, Says Eliminating the Estate Tax Would Be A ‘Terrible Mistake,’” CNBC, 3 October 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/03/warren-buffett-thinks-its-a-mistake-to-eliminate-the-estate-tax.html>; Emmie Martin, “Bill Gates Has Paid over \$10 billion in Taxes—Here’s Why He Says He Should Pay More,” CNBC, 21 February 2018, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/02/21/bill-gates-has-paid-10-billion-in-taxes-and-says-he-should-pay-more.html>.

causes as affordable housing and mass incarcerations in U.S. prisons.⁶⁹ Jeff Bezos of Amazon has recently pledged US\$2 billion to fund preschools for disadvantaged children and shelters for the homeless, a donation that apparently merely marks “Day One” of far more extensive philanthropic ventures.⁷⁰ Such career trajectories are not restricted to Western corporate moguls. Jack Ma, founder of the Chinese giant Alibaba and one of the most articulate global advocates for business entrepreneurship, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, has recently announced that he plans to retire in his mid-fifties and devote himself to promoting education and philanthropy.⁷¹

Critics of the endeavors of these super-rich capitalists to remake the world and solve its problems can be found on both left and right. At present there exists—just as there did a century ago—great unease over the sheer economic and political power that resides in the huge transnational enterprises that have come to characterize the late twentieth and twenty-first century business world. Are these ostensibly benign billionaires, most of them mainstays of the annual Davos meetings of the international great and good and influential, simply seeking to aggrandize themselves still further, by setting the global agenda? To what degree are their efforts to portray themselves as good international citizens self-serving, undertaken simply to safeguard the best interests of the mammoth enterprises with which they are associated? Are their own business practices always above criticism? And does the very existence of these masters of the universe who can deploy vast pools of concentrated capital subvert the workings of a democratic system? The current controversies surrounding the operations of major Internet-based search engines and social media, including Google, Facebook, and Twitter, their monopolistic or oligopolistic nature, their ability to track and even mold the thinking of their customers, and their vulnerability to outside manipulation, are manifestations of the growing discomfort and wariness these data-based behemoths provoke even—or especially?—among those dependent on their services.

Around a century ago, similar ambiguities, inconsistencies, and potential conflicts of interest characterized the emergence of the liberal internationalist U.S. business elite of the progressive period and beyond. Few could boast an ethically perfect track record. Most, however, possessed a certain sense of social responsibility, and a desire to mitigate the harsher aspects of the capitalist system. Divisions within today’s big business community are complex, but this is nothing new: comparable differences were easily discernible in the first half of the twentieth century. It is perhaps instructive that, in the early twenty-first century, a significant cohort of those who have profited most under the new dispensation ushered in during the 1980s perceive a need to move beyond the simple maximization of profits and pursue higher goals. In the decades to come, the contest between these two corporate models seems likely to become increasingly heated and intense, and to involve not just U.S.- or Western-based firms, but also those with origins in Asia. And, indeed, their governments. At present, many commentators, politicians, and business elites are grimly or cheerfully

⁶⁹ Paris Martineau, “How Should We Feel about Mark Zuckerberg’s Philanthropic Ambitions?” *New York Magazine*, 25 October 2017.

⁷⁰ Jordan Weissmann, “Jeff Bezos’ \$2 Billion Donation to Build Preschools and Fight Homelessness Is, Well, Morally Complicated,” *Slate*, 14 September 2018, <https://slate.com/business/2018/09/jeff-bezos-2-billion-donation-homelessness-preschool.html>; Farhad Manjoo, “Why Jeff Bezos Should Push for Nobody To Get as Rich as Jeff Bezos,” *New York Times*, 19 September 2018.

⁷¹ Laura He and Eugene Tang, “Alibaba Appoints Daniel Zhang to Succeed Jack Ma as Chairman in 12-month Succession Plan,” *South China Morning Post*, 10 September 2018.

anticipating the collapse of liberalism and the opening of an era in which nationalism, authoritarianism, ethnic conflict, and social polarization between super-rich elites and the remainder become the new norms. History suggests that which worldview will ultimately prevail remains an open question.

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