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<u>Article 1.</u>	The National Interest <u>Ukraine: Will Putin Strike?</u> <u>Joergen Oerstroem Moeller</u>
<u>Article 2.</u>	The Washington Post <u>Putin's Ukraine gambit</u> <u>Charles Krauthammer</u>
<u>Article 3.</u>	The Daily Beast <u>Does Alleged Corruption Video Spell the End Of Erdogan?</u> <u>Thomas Seibert</u>
<u>Article 4.</u>	Associated Press <u>Dahlan, exiled Palestinian leader, builds comeback</u> Mohammed Daraghmeh and Karin Laub
<u>Article 5.</u>	NYT <u>What Would Kennan Say to Obama?</u> Frank Costigliola
<u>Article 6.</u>	The Economist <u>What's gone wrong with democracy</u>
<u>Article 7.</u>	Jewish Review of Books

	<p><u>Original Sins</u></p> <p>Ronald Radosh</p>
<p><u>Article 8.</u></p>	<p>The Washington Free Beacon</p> <p><u>TNR editor Wieseltier bashes TNR editor over anti-Israel book</u></p>

Article 1.

The National Interest

Ukraine: Will Putin Strike?

Joergen Oerstroem Moeller

February 28, 2014 -- The world should brace itself for a Putin strike to prevent Ukraine from turning towards the West.

For those in doubt, suffice to recall President Putin’s statement in 2006 that the collapse of the Soviet Union was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the twentieth century.

Ukraine firmly anchored in the Western system, on its way towards membership of the EU in due course, or even worse, a member of NATO—these are outcomes he will never tolerate. It would be the final straw in dismantling Russian attempts to extend its influence over the ‘near abroad’—those parts of Central and Eastern Europe that escaped domination by Russia

in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Putin has several times invoked Russia's right to influence, labelling the 'near abroad' strategically vital for Russia. Giving up, especially under such circumstances as these, would be tantamount to a humiliating defeat more than wiping out his diplomatic triumphs (Syria, for example) last year. And the domestic strongman image Putin has carefully cultivated cannot be reconciled with being outmaneuvered by the West and sidelined by a large part of the Ukrainian population.

From Putin's perspective, this is not only a question of geopolitical power, but an omen of what may happen to Russia's own political system. If the Ukrainian people can topple a president propped up by Russia (to the tune of cheap gas prices and a USD 15 billion credit line), the same can happen inside Russia. Consequently, it may be that for Putin no cost is too high to prevent such an outcome in Ukraine. People power and the lure of the Western system must not prevail. What is happening in Ukraine is synonymous with a looming threat to his own power.

What can he do to forestall or prevent it from happening?

Economic measures as higher gas prices and restrictions for Ukrainian exports to Russia will hardly do the trick. It may even stoke animosity towards Russia, not only among those already distancing themselves from the big neighbour up north, but also among those in doubt. This kind of bullying has nourished the sentiment that the West is the better option.

And a "wait and see" approach is also not a very attractive option for Moscow. The coming elections will produce a

Ukrainian leadership that will most likely lean West, and whose legitimacy will be in little doubt. Russian intervention will be harder to justify; not the least because a new Ukrainian government will say, “yes, of course we want good and friendly relations with Russia.” Signing an agreement with the EU like the one on the agenda last year does not stand in the way of pursuing that goal. So Russia and Putin would be back to square one, only facing an even more difficult situation than they do now.

This leaves the option of some kind of intervention. Over the last couple of days Russia has indeed warmed up to do exactly this. Prime Minister Medvedev said on February 24 that he doubted the legitimacy of Ukraine's new authorities and that those now in power had conducted an "armed mutiny." The West should carefully weigh that statement. Maybe the most important part is that it comes from Medvedev who—erroneously—is seen by the West as a ‘better guy’ than Putin. He is not. He is as much part of the system as Putin. By using him to deliver the message, Moscow is signalling unity in the Russian leadership—and determination, too. If the Ukrainian government is seen as without legitimacy by Moscow the door is open for playing the card of Russian majorities in the east of the country and/or in Crimea.

It could be done in several ways. Rumours about suppression of Russians could be spread—there have already been such rumours on the internet, but without anybody knowing whether they are rooted in truth or planted to serve a purpose. One further step would be to encourage the eastern parts of the country or Crimea to declare that they do not recognize the government now sitting in Kiev. They might then establish their

own government. Moscow could then hasten to recognize them announcing a de facto split of Ukraine. There would be no obstacles for doing so, as Moscow has already cleared the way by denouncing the sitting Ukrainian government. The only real barrier is the inability so far to find prominent leaders in the the East to spearhead such a move. The opening moves of this scenario may already be playing out, given the rising tension in Crimea and Yanukovich's flight.

It is anybody's guess what the endgame might look like. Having watched and analysed the U.S. stance vis-à-vis Iran's alleged nuclear-weapons programme and Syria, Putin cannot be under the impression that the Obama administration has the stomach for some kind of military confrontation. The ill-timed announcement of drastic c [3]u [3]ts [3] to the U.S. military only reinforces that judgment. So does the ongoing withdrawal from Afghanistan. And the Europeans are not capable of doing much on their own. So in Putin's equation the military risks would be negligible. Nothing happened in 2008 when Russia sent its military into Georgia and South Ossetia. In fact Georgia-South Ossetia 2008 might serve—with some modifications—as a blueprint.

The main risks would be economic sanctions imposed by the West on Russia. They may hurt—the Russian economy is troubled of late, with a falling ruble auguring capital outflow. But Russia can respond by cutting gas and oil supplies to European countries that still depend on them. One uncertainty is the Chinese reaction, which Russia can hardly ignore in view of Russian-Chinese energy deals. China has invested heavily in Ukraine. A split may endanger some of those investments. Both how firmly China might react and how much weight Moscow

might give that reaction are difficult to judge.

Seen from Putin's and Russia's point of view, the downside risk of playing the secessionist card may be less than the political costs of a Ukraine on course to join the Western camp. Worse, Putin may bet that a weak Western reaction would further enhance his image as a strong player who would refrain from nothing in safeguard Russia's interests as he sees them. Succeeding there might turn a potential disaster into a victory.

Presuming that leaders to set secession in motion can be found, the decisive factor for whatever decisions Russia's leaders take may well be domestic politics. Will Putin's supporters endorse his gambling on a weak Western reaction? Are there political forces among Russia's population that will turn against him and start a turn of events similar to what has been seen in Ukraine?

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[Article 2.](#)

The Washington Post

Putin's Ukraine gambit

Charles Krauthammer

Henry Kissinger once pointed out that since Peter the Great, Russia had been expanding at the rate of one Belgium per year. All undone, of course, by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which Russian President Vladimir Putin called “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20th] century.”

Putin’s mission is restoration. First, restore traditional Russian despotism by dismantling its nascent democracy. And then, having created iron-fisted “stability,” march.

Use the 2008 war with Georgia to detach two of its provinces, returning them to the bosom of Mother Russia (by way of Potemkin independence). Then late last year, pressure Ukraine to reject a long-negotiated deal for association with the European Union, to draw Ukraine into Putin’s planned “Eurasian Union” as the core of a new Russian mini-empire.

Turns out, however, Ukraine had other ideas. It overthrew Moscow’s man in Kiev, Viktor Yanu-kovych, and turned to the West. But the West — the E.U. and America — had no idea what to do.

Russia does. Moscow denounces the overthrow as the illegal work of fascist bandits, refuses to recognize the new government created by parliament, withholds all economic assistance and, in a highly provocative escalation, mobilizes its military forces on the Ukrainian border.

The response? The E.U. dithers and Barack Obama slumbers. After near- total silence during the first three months of Ukraine’s struggle for freedom, Obama said on camera last week

that in his view Ukraine is no “Cold War chessboard.”

Unfortunately, this is exactly what it is for Putin. He wants Ukraine back.

Obama wants stability, the New York Times reports, quoting internal sources. He sees Ukraine as merely a crisis to be managed rather than an opportunity to alter the increasingly autocratic trajectory of the region, allow Ukrainians to join their destiny to the West and block Russian neo-imperialism.

Sure, Obama is sympathetic to democracy. But it must arise organically, from internal developments. “These democratic movements will be more sustainable if they are seen as . . . coming from within these societies,” says deputy national security adviser Benjamin Rhodes. Democracy must not be imposed by outside intervention but develop on its own.

But Ukraine is never on its own. Not with a bear next door. American neutrality doesn’t allow an authentic Ukrainian polity to emerge. It leaves Ukraine naked to Russian pressure.

What Obama doesn’t seem to understand is that American inaction creates a vacuum. His evacuation from Iraq consigned that country to Iranian hegemony, just as Obama’s writing off Syria invited in Russia, Iran and Hezbollah to reverse the tide of battle.

Putin fully occupies vacuums. In Ukraine, he keeps flaunting his leverage. He’s withdrawn the multibillion-dollar aid package with which he had pulled the now-deposed Ukrainian president away from the E.U. He has suddenly mobilized Russian forces bordering Ukraine. His health officials are even questioning the

safety of Ukrainian food exports.

This is no dietary hygiene campaign. This is a message to Kiev: We can shut down your agricultural exports today, your natural gas supplies tomorrow. We can make you broke and we can make you freeze.

Kissinger once also said, “In the end, peace can be achieved only by hegemony or by balance of power.” Either Ukraine will fall to Russian hegemony or finally determine its own future — if America balances Russia’s power.

How? Start with a declaration of full-throated American support for Ukraine’s revolution. Follow that with a serious loan/aid package — say, replacing Moscow’s \$15 billion — to get Ukraine through its immediate financial crisis (the announcement of a \$1 billion pledge of U.S. loan guarantees is a good first step). Then join with the E.U. to extend a longer substitute package, preferably through the International Monetary Fund.

Secretary of State John Kerry says Russian intervention would be a mistake. Alas, any such declaration from this administration carries the weight of a feather. But better that than nothing. Better still would be backing these words with a naval flotilla in the Black Sea.

Whether anything Obama says or does would stop anyone remains questionable. But surely the West has more financial clout than Russia’s kleptocratic extraction economy that exports little but oil, gas and vodka.

The point is for the United States, leading Europe, to counter

Russian pressure and make up for its blandishments/punishments until Ukraine is on firm financial footing.

Yes, \$15 billion is a lot of money. But it's less than one-half of one-tenth of 1 percent of the combined E.U. and U.S. GDP. And expending treasure is infinitely preferable to expending blood. Especially given the strategic stakes: Without Ukraine, there's no Russian empire.

Putin knows that. Which is why he keeps ratcheting up the pressure. The question is, can this administration muster the counterpressure to give Ukraine a chance to breathe?

Article 3.

The Daily Beast

Does Alleged Corruption Video Spell the End Of Turkey's Erdogan?

Thomas Seibert

A video of the Turkish prime minister allegedly telling his son to hide large sums of money has created a crisis for the once-unassailable leader just weeks before key elections.

2.27.14

ISTANBUL—It was Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 60th birthday this

week, but the Turkish Prime Minister could be forgiven for not being in the mood for celebrations.

Already under fire for more than two months because of corruption allegations against his government, Erdogan is now facing calls for his resignation after recordings emerged of alleged phone conversations between him and his son Bilal that purport to show he was personally involved in hiding large sums of money from prosecutors.

Roughly four weeks before key elections on March 30, the Prime Minister is fighting for his reputation as an honest man who worked himself up from humble beginnings in a rough Istanbul neighbourhood to the highest echelons of power as the most successful Turkish leader in half a century.

“Remember when Visa, Mastercard, and PayPal wouldn’t process payments to Wikileaks because of U.S. government pressure? Bitcoin allowed supporters to keep sending donations because there wasn’t a third party the feds could threaten or squeeze.”

Some observers predict Erdogan will be unable to undo the damage done by the corruption affair. “The era of Tayyip Erdogan is about to end,” columnist Cengiz Candar wrote in the Radikal newspaper on the Prime Minister’s birthday on Feb 26th. “What we don’t know is when and how he will leave.”

Erdogan denounced the recordings as fake. “We are facing a very serious attack,” he told an election rally in the southwestern city of Burdur on Thursday. “This attack is not only directed against me and my family, but against the Turkish Republic.”

In a total of five conversations that were posted on the Internet late Monday, Erdogan and Bilal appear to be discussing ways to get an undisclosed sum of money in euros, dollars and Turkish liras out of Bilal's house in Istanbul. Bilal, 33, is the younger of Erdogan's two sons. The prime minister also has two daughters, Esra and Sumeyye.

"Son, are you home?" a voice resembling that of Erdogan asks at the beginning of the first conversation, said to have been held on the morning of December 17, the day Istanbul prosecutors had several dozen people, including the sons of four ministers of Erdogan's cabinet, arrested on corruption charges.

Erdogan, who is allegedly calling from Ankara, tells Bilal about the arrests and says he should "get out everything that you have in your house". Bilal answers: "What should I have here? Your money is in the safe." "That's what I'm talking about," Erdogan allegedly responds. He then tells Bilal to confer with his brother Burak, his sister Sumeyye and other relatives.

In a later conversation on the same day, Bilal allegedly reports to his father that he has not been able to "nullify" the whole sum left in the house and has 30 million Euros left.

Many questions were left unanswered. Some media reports claimed that the total sum Erdogan and his son were talking about equaled hundreds of millions of dollars, an immense volume of cash with a weight of several hundred kilograms. No reason was given in the reports why Erdogan should decide to keep such a bulk in a private home.

It also remained unclear who taped the alleged conversations and why. As news of the recording broke, Istanbul's top

prosecutor said a total of 2,280 people had been wire-tapped over three years by prosecutors who were fired recently. Pro-government newspapers reported that Erdogan was among those targeted.

Fake or genuine, the telephone leaks have damaged the Prime Minister. Bilal Erdogan's greeting to his father on the telephone, "Alo babacigim" or "Hi Dad," has become a new slogan for anti-government protesters in Turkey. Fans at a soccer stadium in Istanbul this week unfolded a banner saying "Hi Dad—there are thieves about," in a reference to the alleged corruption.

Erdogan argues the corruption charges from December as well as the leak of the alleged conversation with his son are the work of supporters of Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Islamic cleric. Gulen's movement has millions of followers in Turkey, some of whom occupy key posts in the judiciary, the police and the bureaucracy. After years of support for Erdogan, the movement started to distance itself from the government last year. Erdogan says Gulen wants to topple him, a charge the cleric denies.

Following the December corruption charges, Erdogan had thousands of alleged Gulen supporters in the police force and the judiciary replaced, among them the prosecutors leading the corruption investigation against the government. At the same time, Erdogan's government tabled bills in parliament designed to strengthen government control over the Internet and the judiciary and giving more power to Turkey's intelligence service, which is close to Erdogan.

The opposition says it is taking the reforms to the constitutional court because they violate basic democratic principles like the

separation of powers. Opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu told Erdogan to “get into a helicopter and flee abroad or resign.”

Observers say the row is expected to heat up further in the weeks leading up to local elections on March 30. The poll is seen as a key test for Erdogan and an indicator of his chances to become head of state in a presidential election expected in August. Erdogan’s aides say the electorate is so far unmoved by the corruption allegations, and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) enjoys a strong lead in opinion polls.

But the pressure on Erdogan is unlikely to diminish until polling day in March. Gulen’s movement “wants an AKP without Erdogan,” Rusen Cakir, a respected columnist, wrote in the centrist Vatan daily.

Some observers say Erdogan has already lost much credibility through his handling of the corruption scandal and the country-wide wave of protests that started in Istanbul’s Gezi Park last year.

Mehmet Yilmaz, a columnist for the mass-selling Hurriyet daily, reminded his readers that Erdogan had misled the public several times during the Gezi riots, saying protesters defiled a mosque by drinking alcohol there, an episode that turned out to be untrue.

Erdogan’s behaviour in the past made it difficult to give him the benefit of the doubt in the current row surrounding the alleged wire-tapped phone calls, Yilmaz wrote. “How are we supposed to believe him, after those lies?” he asked.

Associated Press

Dahlan, exiled Palestinian leader, builds comeback

Mohammed Daraghmeh and Karin Laub

Feb. 28, 2014 -- Ramallah, West Bank (AP) — Fueled by millions in Gulf aid dollars that are his to distribute, an exiled Palestinian operative seems to be orchestrating a comeback that could position him as a potential successor to aging Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas.

In a phone interview from London, Mohammed Dahlan spoke of his aid projects in the Gaza Strip, his closeness to Egypt's military leaders and his conviction that the 79-year-old Abbas has left the Palestinian national cause in tatters.

If staging a successful return, Dahlan, a former Gaza security chief once valued by the West for his pragmatism, could reshuffle a stagnant Palestinian deck. Some caution that Dahlan has made too many enemies in Abbas' Fatah movement and will continue to be ostracized by those planning to compete for the top job in the future.

Dahlan, 52, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that he is "not looking for any post" after Abbas retires, but called for new elections and an overhaul of Fatah.

"Abbas will leave only ruins and who would be interested to be a president or vice president on these ruins?" Dahlan said.

"What I am interested in is a way out of our political situation, not a political position."

In the past, he and Abbas were among the leading supporters of negotiations with Israel as the preferred path to statehood.

Dahlan now believes the current U.S.-led talks "will bring nothing for the Palestinian people," alleging Abbas has made concessions that his predecessor, the late Yasser Arafat, would not have.

Abbas aide Nimr Hamad and senior Fatah official Jamal Muhaisen declined to comment Thursday on Dahlan's statements. Last week, Muhaisen said anyone expressing support for Dahlan would be purged from Fatah.

The bitter feud between Abbas and Dahlan seems mostly personal, but also highlights the dysfunctional nature of Fatah, paralyzed by incessant internal rivalries, and Abbas' apparent unwillingness to tolerate criticism.

Abbas banished Dahlan in 2010, after his former protege purportedly called him weak. Dahlan has since spent his time between Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Dahlan grew up poor in a Gaza refugee camp, but as a top aide to Arafat became the territory's strongman in the 1990s, jailing leaders of rival Hamas which was trying to derail Arafat's negotiation with Israel through bombing and shooting attacks.

Dahlan was dogged by corruption allegations at the time, like Arafat and several other senior Palestinian politicians, but has

denied wrongdoing and was never charged.

In exile, he has nurtured political and business ties in the Arab world.

Dahlan said this week that he has been raising millions of dollars from business people and charities in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere for needy Palestinians.

Last year, he said he delivered \$8 million to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

"In Gaza, I do the same now," he said. "I'm collecting money for desalination in Gaza. It's unbearable. Fifty percent of the water in the houses is sewage water. Hamas and Abbas are doing nothing to solve the real problems of the Gazans."

When asked if he was buying political support with Gulf money, he said: "This is not political money." He added that the UAE also provides financial aid to Abbas.

Dahlan's relationship with Gaza and former arch-enemy Hamas is particularly complex.

Security forces under Dahlan lost control of Gaza in a brief battle with Hamas gunmen in 2007. The defeat cemented the Palestinian political split, leading to rival governments, one run by Hamas in Gaza and the other by Abbas in parts of the West Bank, and was seen as perhaps the biggest blot on Dahlan's career.

However, there are now signs of a possible rapprochement between Dahlan and the Islamic militants — apparently because of Dahlan's close ties to Egyptian military chief, Field Marshal

Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

Dahlan said he has met el-Sissi several times and supported last year's coup — he called it the "Egyptian revolution" — against the country's ruling Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas is the Gaza offshoot of the Brotherhood.

Since the coup, el-Sissi has tightened a closure of Gaza's border with Egypt. That blockade has squeezed Hamas financially, and the Islamic militants have been looking for ways to pry the border open.

In January, Hamas allowed three Fatah leaders loyal to Dahlan to return to the territory. The Fatah returnees and Hamas officials formed a committee to oversee construction of a new Gaza town to be funded by the UAE, said a Hamas official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the contacts.

Senior Fatah officials accuse Dahlan of trying to split the movement.

"Dahlan has created an alliance with Hamas," Nabil Shaath, an Abbas aide, has told Palestine TV. Dahlan loyalists in Gaza "have distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars without having the movement's permission," he said.

Underlying Fatah's fears about a return of Dahlan is the open question of succession.

Abbas was elected in 2005, but overstayed his five-year term because the Hamas-Fatah split has prevented new elections. Abbas has not designated a successor and there is no clear contender.

Analyst Hani al-Masri said regional support has boosted Dahlan, but that he's not a serious challenger yet because he has not offered any plans.

Palestinians "won't support a specific leader without being convinced of his political platform," he said.

Associated Press writer Ibrahim Barzak in Gaza City contributed to this report.

Article 5.

NYT

What Would Kennan Say to Obama?

Frank Costigliola

Feb. 27, 2014 -- "I don't really even need George Kennan right now," Barack Obama volunteered to David Remnick in a recent interview. Obama got it wrong. He, and we as a nation, do need Mr. Kennan now, as much as at the dawn of the Cold War.

Mr. Kennan's diary and other writings offer timely advice about balancing United States policy in the era after the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and managing Iran. Though Mr. Kennan is most famous for predicting in 1947 that containment would lead to the eventual breakup of the Soviet Union, his strategic thinking ranged far wider.

Whether planning policy at the State Department or writing history at the Institute for Advanced Study, Mr. Kennan stood out as an intellectual who thought otherwise — indeed as a thinker whose thought was often wise. Like the Founders, he believed the wisest foreign policy limited military intervention abroad while affording the broadest scope for hard-headed diplomacy. He saved his most candid advice for his diary, which he kept for 88 years.

Along with the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Mr. Kennan insisted that the challenge facing the United States was containing not only rival nations and threatening ideologies, but also America's own outsized ambitions and self-righteous assertions of virtue. Both men understood that however loud the claims of American exceptionalism, Americans could escape neither original sin nor its secular manifestation, the will to power.

In 1946-47, Mr. Kennan laid out his containment policy, intending to limit its application to the major power centers of the world, particularly Western Europe and Japan. He grew horrified as containment exploded into a global venture mirroring the United States in areas of marginal strategic importance, such as Vietnam. In the post-Cold War era, Mr. Kennan criticized military interventions in Panama, Somalia and Iraq as a waste of scarce resources. Policing the globe exacerbated resentment abroad while neglecting the decaying infrastructure at home. Trying to spread democracy by using military force, he said, “is something that the Founding Fathers of this country never envisaged or would ever have approved.”

Mr. Kennan's strategic vision entailed containing adversaries,

curtailing our foreign ventures, and conserving our moral and material assets.

This advice pertains to dealing with Iran. Mr. Kennan understood that even if bargaining positions start off at loggerheads, they can evolve toward compromise if diplomats receive reasonable freedom to cut deals. Today such flexibility is threatened by the Senate proposal to fetter the Obama administration's negotiations seeking to thwart Iran's nuclear program. As a lifelong skeptic of legislative interference with diplomacy, Mr. Kennan would certainly protest the Senate measure. Although ardently opposed to nuclear proliferation, he would also dispute the bill's insistence that a negotiated deal reduce to zero Iran's capacity to enrich uranium. That restriction would preclude even the face-saving option of low-grade uranium enrichment for civilian purposes.

Diplomacy seeking capitulation rather than compromise was foolish, Mr. Kennan pointed out, because a settlement resented as unfair would be undermined by overt or covert resistance.

After the Cold War, Mr. Kennan fiercely opposed the eastward expansion of NATO and other measures that would take advantage of Russia's weakness. Nor was it wise to humiliate even a powerful adversary. When George Shultz, President Ronald Reagan's secretary of state, asked Mr. Kennan how to approach the new Kremlin leader, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the former diplomat replied that the Soviets remained "in many respects insecure people and require reassurance in the form of respect for their prestige." So do the Iranians, who nurture both pride in their history and resentment of their humiliations, such as the C.I.A.-sponsored overthrow of their elected leader,

Mohammad Mossadegh, in 1953.

Mr. Kennan believed that psychologically astute tactics were the most effective way to manage tensions. He warned that all-out efforts to weaken a rival's capabilities could backfire by hardening resolve or by escalating into a dangerous preemptive war. Diplomacy and soft power were more cost effective in influencing a rival's intentions.

“We are ultimately dependent on the intentions, rather than the capabilities, of the adversary, the influence of which is primarily a political and psychological, not a military problem,” Mr. Kennan explained. War itself should aim not at killing for killing's sake, but rather at changing the enemy's “understanding and disposition.”

Even during the most perilous periods of the Cold War, Mr. Kennan insisted that the other side retained a lively interest in self-preservation. However much the Soviets might fulminate against the United States, they would not invite certain destruction by bombing America or its allies. Nor, Mr. Kennan would add if he were still alive, would a nuclear-armed Iran risk such devastation by launching an attack, or by giving atomic weapons to a client group. Deterrence works, he argued.

As for America's role in the world, Mr. Kennan wanted the United States to abandon its exhausting efforts at playing world policeman. “The greatest service this country could render the rest of the world would be to put its own house in order and to make of American civilization an example of decency, humanity, and societal success from which others could derive whatever they might find useful to their own purposes.”

As he neared the end of his 101-year life, Mr. Kennan comforted himself that “much of what I have said has a chance of being rediscovered after my death ... and to evoke understanding by that perverse quality of human nature that makes men more inclined to respond to the work of someone long dead than to those of any contemporary.” Although President Obama cannot talk to Mr. Kennan, he can rediscover his wisdom.

Frank Costigliola is a professor of history at the University of Connecticut and the editor of “The Kennan Diaries.”

[Article 6.](#)

The Economist

What’s gone wrong with democracy?

THE protesters who have overturned the politics of Ukraine have many aspirations for their country. Their placards called for closer relations with the European Union (EU), an end to Russian intervention in Ukraine’s politics and the establishment of a clean government to replace the kleptocracy of President Viktor Yanukovich. But their fundamental demand is one that has motivated people over many decades to take a stand against corrupt, abusive and autocratic governments. They want a rules-based democracy.

It is easy to understand why. Democracies are on average richer

than non-democracies, are less likely to go to war and have a better record of fighting corruption. More fundamentally, democracy lets people speak their minds and shape their own and their children's futures. That so many people in so many different parts of the world are prepared to risk so much for this idea is testimony to its enduring appeal.

Yet these days the exhilaration generated by events like those in Kiev is mixed with anxiety, for a troubling pattern has repeated itself in capital after capital. The people mass in the main square. Regime-sanctioned thugs try to fight back but lose their nerve in the face of popular intransigence and global news coverage. The world applauds the collapse of the regime and offers to help build a democracy. But turfing out an autocrat turns out to be much easier than setting up a viable democratic government. The new regime stumbles, the economy flounders and the country finds itself in a state at least as bad as it was before. This is what happened in much of the Arab spring, and also in Ukraine's Orange revolution a decade ago. In 2004 Mr Yanukovich was ousted from office by vast street protests, only to be re-elected to the presidency (with the help of huge amounts of Russian money) in 2010, after the opposition politicians who replaced him turned out to be just as hopeless.

Between 1980 and 2000 democracy experienced a few setbacks, but since 2000 there have been many

Democracy is going through a difficult time. Where autocrats have been driven out of office, their opponents have mostly failed to create viable democratic regimes. Even in established democracies, flaws in the system have become worryingly visible and disillusion with politics is rife. Yet just a few years

ago democracy looked as though it would dominate the world.

In the second half of the 20th century, democracies had taken root in the most difficult circumstances possible—in Germany, which had been traumatised by Nazism, in India, which had the world's largest population of poor people, and, in the 1990s, in South Africa, which had been disfigured by apartheid.

Decolonisation created a host of new democracies in Africa and Asia, and autocratic regimes gave way to democracy in Greece (1974), Spain (1975), Argentina (1983), Brazil (1985) and Chile (1989). The collapse of the Soviet Union created many fledgling democracies in central Europe. By 2000 Freedom House, an American think-tank, classified 120 countries, or 63% of the world total, as democracies.

Representatives of more than 100 countries gathered at the World Forum on Democracy in Warsaw that year to proclaim that “the will of the people” was “the basis of the authority of government”. A report issued by America's State Department declared that having seen off “failed experiments” with authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government, “it seems that now, at long last, democracy is triumphant.”

Such hubris was surely understandable after such a run of successes. But stand farther back and the triumph of democracy looks rather less inevitable. After the fall of Athens, where it was first developed, the political model had lain dormant until the Enlightenment more than 2,000 years later. In the 18th century only the American revolution produced a sustainable democracy. During the 19th century monarchists fought a prolonged rearguard action against democratic forces. In the first half of the 20th century nascent democracies collapsed in

Germany, Spain and Italy. By 1941 there were only 11 democracies left, and Franklin Roosevelt worried that it might not be possible to shield “the great flame of democracy from the blackout of barbarism”.

The progress seen in the late 20th century has stalled in the 21st. Even though around 40% of the world’s population, more people than ever before, live in countries that will hold free and fair elections this year, democracy’s global advance has come to a halt, and may even have gone into reverse. Freedom House reckons that 2013 was the eighth consecutive year in which global freedom declined, and that its forward march peaked around the beginning of the century. Between 1980 and 2000 the cause of democracy experienced only a few setbacks, but since 2000 there have been many. And democracy’s problems run deeper than mere numbers suggest. Many nominal democracies have slid towards autocracy, maintaining the outward appearance of democracy through elections, but without the rights and institutions that are equally important aspects of a functioning democratic system.

Faith in democracy flares up in moments of triumph, such as the overthrow of unpopular regimes in Cairo or Kiev, only to sputter out once again. Outside the West, democracy often advances only to collapse. And within the West, democracy has too often become associated with debt and dysfunction at home and overreach abroad. Democracy has always had its critics, but now old doubts are being treated with renewed respect as the weaknesses of democracy in its Western strongholds, and the fragility of its influence elsewhere, have become increasingly apparent. Why has democracy lost its forward momentum?

The return of history

THE two main reasons are the financial crisis of 2007-08 and the rise of China. The damage the crisis did was psychological as well as financial. It revealed fundamental weaknesses in the West's political systems, undermining the self-confidence that had been one of their great assets. Governments had steadily extended entitlements over decades, allowing dangerous levels of debt to develop, and politicians came to believe that they had abolished boom-bust cycles and tamed risk. Many people became disillusioned with the workings of their political systems—particularly when governments bailed out bankers with taxpayers' money and then stood by impotently as financiers continued to pay themselves huge bonuses. The crisis turned the Washington consensus into a term of reproach across the emerging world.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party has broken the democratic world's monopoly on economic progress. Larry Summers, of Harvard University, observes that when America was growing fastest, it doubled living standards roughly every 30 years. China has been doubling living standards roughly every decade for the past 30 years. The Chinese elite argue that their model—tight control by the Communist Party, coupled with a relentless effort to recruit talented people into its upper ranks—is more efficient than democracy and less susceptible to gridlock. The political leadership changes every decade or so, and there is a constant supply of fresh talent as party cadres are promoted based on their ability to hit targets.

China says its model is more efficient than democracy and less susceptible to gridlock

China's critics rightly condemn the government for controlling public opinion in all sorts of ways, from imprisoning dissidents to censoring internet discussions. Yet the regime's obsession with control paradoxically means it pays close attention to public opinion. At the same time China's leaders have been able to tackle some of the big problems of state-building that can take decades to deal with in a democracy. In just two years China has extended pension coverage to an extra 240m rural dwellers, for example—far more than the total number of people covered by America's public-pension system.

Many Chinese are prepared to put up with their system if it delivers growth. The 2013 Pew Survey of Global Attitudes showed that 85% of Chinese were “very satisfied” with their country's direction, compared with 31% of Americans. Some Chinese intellectuals have become positively boastful. Zhang Weiwei of Fudan University argues that democracy is destroying the West, and particularly America, because it institutionalises gridlock, trivialises decision-making and throws up second-rate presidents like George Bush junior. Yu Keping of Beijing University argues that democracy makes simple things “overly complicated and frivolous” and allows “certain sweet-talking politicians to mislead the people”. Wang Jisi, also of Beijing University, has observed that “many developing countries that have introduced Western values and political systems are experiencing disorder and chaos” and that China offers an alternative model. Countries from Africa (Rwanda) to the Middle East (Dubai) to South-East Asia (Vietnam) are taking this advice seriously.

China's advance is all the more potent in the context of a series of disappointments for democrats since 2000. The first great

setback was in Russia. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the democratisation of the old Soviet Union seemed inevitable. In the 1990s Russia took a few drunken steps in that direction under Boris Yeltsin. But at the end of 1999 he resigned and handed power to Vladimir Putin, a former KGB operative who has since been both prime minister and president twice. This postmodern tsar has destroyed the substance of democracy in Russia, muzzling the press and imprisoning his opponents, while preserving the show—everyone can vote, so long as Mr Putin wins. Autocratic leaders in Venezuela, Ukraine, Argentina and elsewhere have followed suit, perpetuating a perverted simulacrum of democracy rather than doing away with it altogether, and thus discrediting it further.

The next big setback was the Iraq war. When Saddam Hussein's fabled weapons of mass destruction failed to materialise after the American-led invasion of 2003, Mr Bush switched instead to justifying the war as a fight for freedom and democracy. "The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat," he argued in his second inaugural address. This was more than mere opportunism: Mr Bush sincerely believed that the Middle East would remain a breeding ground for terrorism so long as it was dominated by dictators. But it did the democratic cause great harm. Left-wingers regarded it as proof that democracy was just a figleaf for American imperialism. Foreign-policy realists took Iraq's growing chaos as proof that American-led promotion of democratisation was a recipe for instability. And disillusioned neoconservatives such as Francis Fukuyama, an American political scientist, saw it as proof that democracy cannot put down roots in stony ground.

A third serious setback was Egypt. The collapse of Hosni Mubarak's regime in 2011, amid giant protests, raised hopes that democracy would spread in the Middle East. But the euphoria soon turned to despair. Egypt's ensuing elections were won not by liberal activists (who were hopelessly divided into a myriad of Pythonesque parties) but by Muhammad Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood. Mr Morsi treated democracy as a winner-takes-all system, packing the state with Brothers, granting himself almost unlimited powers and creating an upper house with a permanent Islamic majority. In July 2013 the army stepped in, arresting Egypt's first democratically elected president, imprisoning leading members of the Brotherhood and killing hundreds of demonstrators. Along with war in Syria and anarchy in Libya, this has dashed the hope that the Arab spring would lead to a flowering of democracy across the Middle East.

Meanwhile some recent recruits to the democratic camp have lost their lustre. Since the introduction of democracy in 1994 South Africa has been ruled by the same party, the African National Congress, which has become progressively more self-serving. Turkey, which once seemed to combine moderate Islam with prosperity and democracy, is descending into corruption and autocracy. In Bangladesh, Thailand and Cambodia, opposition parties have boycotted recent elections or refused to accept their results.

All this has demonstrated that building the institutions needed to sustain democracy is very slow work indeed, and has dispelled the once-popular notion that democracy will blossom rapidly and spontaneously once the seed is planted. Although democracy may be a "universal aspiration", as Mr Bush and Tony Blair insisted, it is a culturally rooted practice. Western

countries almost all extended the right to vote long after the establishment of sophisticated political systems, with powerful civil services and entrenched constitutional rights, in societies that cherished the notions of individual rights and independent judiciaries.

Yet in recent years the very institutions that are meant to provide models for new democracies have come to seem outdated and dysfunctional in established ones. The United States has become a byword for gridlock, so obsessed with partisan point-scoring that it has come to the verge of defaulting on its debts twice in the past two years. Its democracy is also corrupted by gerrymandering, the practice of drawing constituency boundaries to entrench the power of incumbents. This encourages extremism, because politicians have to appeal only to the party faithful, and in effect disenfranchises large numbers of voters. And money talks louder than ever in American politics. Thousands of lobbyists (more than 20 for every member of Congress) add to the length and complexity of legislation, the better to smuggle in special privileges. All this creates the impression that American democracy is for sale and that the rich have more power than the poor, even as lobbyists and donors insist that political expenditure is an exercise in free speech. The result is that America's image—and by extension that of democracy itself—has taken a terrible battering.

Nor is the EU a paragon of democracy. The decision to introduce the euro in 1999 was taken largely by technocrats; only two countries, Denmark and Sweden, held referendums on the matter (both said no). Efforts to win popular approval for the Lisbon Treaty, which consolidated power in Brussels, were abandoned when people started voting the wrong way. During

the darkest days of the euro crisis the euro-elite forced Italy and Greece to replace democratically elected leaders with technocrats. The European Parliament, an unsuccessful attempt to fix Europe's democratic deficit, is both ignored and despised. The EU has become a breeding ground for populist parties, such as Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom in the Netherlands and Marine Le Pen's National Front in France, which claim to defend ordinary people against an arrogant and incompetent elite. Greece's Golden Dawn is testing how far democracies can tolerate Nazi-style parties. A project designed to tame the beast of European populism is instead poking it back into life.

The democratic distemper

EVEN in its heartland, democracy is clearly suffering from serious structural problems, rather than a few isolated ailments. Since the dawn of the modern democratic era in the late 19th century, democracy has expressed itself through nation-states and national parliaments. People elect representatives who pull the levers of national power for a fixed period. But this arrangement is now under assault from both above and below.

From above, globalisation has changed national politics profoundly. National politicians have surrendered ever more power, for example over trade and financial flows, to global markets and supranational bodies, and may thus find that they are unable to keep promises they have made to voters. International organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the European Union have extended their influence. There is a compelling logic to much of this: how can a single country deal with problems like climate change or tax evasion? National politicians have also

responded to globalisation by limiting their discretion and handing power to unelected technocrats in some areas. The number of countries with independent central banks, for example, has increased from about 20 in 1980 to more than 160 today.

From below come equally powerful challenges: from would-be breakaway nations, such as the Catalans and the Scots, from Indian states, from American city mayors. All are trying to reclaim power from national governments. There are also a host of what Moisés Naim, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, calls “micro-powers”, such as NGOs and lobbyists, which are disrupting traditional politics and making life harder for democratic and autocratic leaders alike. The internet makes it easier to organise and agitate; in a world where people can participate in reality-TV votes every week, or support a petition with the click of a mouse, the machinery and institutions of parliamentary democracy, where elections happen only every few years, look increasingly anachronistic. Douglas Carswell, a British member of parliament, likens traditional politics to HMV, a chain of British record shops that went bust, in a world where people are used to calling up whatever music they want whenever they want via Spotify, a popular digital music-streaming service.

The biggest challenge to democracy, however, comes neither from above nor below but from within—from the voters themselves. Plato’s great worry about democracy, that citizens would “live from day to day, indulging the pleasure of the moment”, has proved prescient. Democratic governments got into the habit of running big structural deficits as a matter of course, borrowing to give voters what they wanted in the short

term, while neglecting long-term investment. France and Italy have not balanced their budgets for more than 30 years. The financial crisis starkly exposed the unsustainability of such debt-financed democracy.

With the post-crisis stimulus winding down, politicians must now confront the difficult trade-offs they avoided during years of steady growth and easy credit. But persuading voters to adapt to a new age of austerity will not prove popular at the ballot box. Slow growth and tight budgets will provoke conflict as interest groups compete for limited resources. To make matters worse, this competition is taking place as Western populations are ageing. Older people have always been better at getting their voices heard than younger ones, voting in greater numbers and organising pressure groups like America's mighty AARP. They will increasingly have absolute numbers on their side. Many democracies now face a fight between past and future, between inherited entitlements and future investment.

Adjusting to hard times will be made even more difficult by a growing cynicism towards politics. Party membership is declining across the developed world: only 1% of Britons are now members of political parties compared with 20% in 1950. Voter turnout is falling, too: a study of 49 democracies found that it had declined by 10 percentage points between 1980-84 and 2007-13. A survey of seven European countries in 2012 found that more than half of voters "had no trust in government" whatsoever. A YouGov opinion poll of British voters in the same year found that 62% of those polled agreed that "politicians tell lies all the time".

Meanwhile the border between poking fun and launching protest

campaigns is fast eroding. In 2010 Iceland's Best Party, promising to be openly corrupt, won enough votes to co-run Reykjavik's city council. And in 2013 a quarter of Italians voted for a party founded by Beppe Grillo, a comedian. All this popular cynicism about politics might be healthy if people demanded little from their governments, but they continue to want a great deal. The result can be a toxic and unstable mixture: dependency on government on the one hand, and disdain for it on the other. The dependency forces government to overexpand and overburden itself, while the disdain robs it of its legitimacy. Democratic dysfunction goes hand in hand with democratic distemper.

Democracy's problems in its heartland help explain its setbacks elsewhere. Democracy did well in the 20th century in part because of American hegemony: other countries naturally wanted to emulate the world's leading power. But as China's influence has grown, America and Europe have lost their appeal as role models and their appetite for spreading democracy. The Obama administration now seems paralysed by the fear that democracy will produce rogue regimes or empower jihadists. And why should developing countries regard democracy as the ideal form of government when the American government cannot even pass a budget, let alone plan for the future? Why should autocrats listen to lectures on democracy from Europe, when the euro-elite sacks elected leaders who get in the way of fiscal orthodoxy?

The financial crisis has starkly exposed the unsustainability of debt-financed democracy

At the same time, democracies in the emerging world have

encountered the same problems as those in the rich world. They too have overindulged in short-term spending rather than long-term investment. Brazil allows public-sector workers to retire at 53 but has done little to create a modern airport system. India pays off vast numbers of client groups but invests too little in infrastructure. Political systems have been captured by interest groups and undermined by anti-democratic habits. Patrick French, a British historian, notes that every member of India's lower house under the age of 30 is a member of a political dynasty. Even within the capitalist elite, support for democracy is fraying: Indian business moguls constantly complain that India's chaotic democracy produces rotten infrastructure while China's authoritarian system produces highways, gleaming airports and high-speed trains.

Democracy has been on the back foot before. In the 1920s and 1930s communism and fascism looked like the coming things: when Spain temporarily restored its parliamentary government in 1931, Benito Mussolini likened it to returning to oil lamps in the age of electricity. In the mid-1970s Willy Brandt, a former German chancellor, pronounced that "western Europe has only 20 or 30 more years of democracy left in it; after that it will slide, engineless and rudderless, under the surrounding sea of dictatorship". Things are not that bad these days, but China poses a far more credible threat than communism ever did to the idea that democracy is inherently superior and will eventually prevail.

Yet China's stunning advances conceal deeper problems. The elite is becoming a self-perpetuating and self-serving clique. The 50 richest members of the China's National People's Congress are collectively worth \$94.7 billion—60 times as much as the 50

richest members of America's Congress. China's growth rate has slowed from 10% to below 8% and is expected to fall further—an enormous challenge for a regime whose legitimacy depends on its ability to deliver consistent growth.

At the same time, as Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in the 19th century, democracies always look weaker than they really are: they are all confusion on the surface but have lots of hidden strengths. Being able to install alternative leaders offering alternative policies makes democracies better than autocracies at finding creative solutions to problems and rising to existential challenges, though they often take a while to zigzag to the right policies. But to succeed, both fledgling and established democracies must ensure they are built on firm foundations.

Getting democracy right

THE most striking thing about the founders of modern democracy such as James Madison and John Stuart Mill is how hard-headed they were. They regarded democracy as a powerful but imperfect mechanism: something that needed to be designed carefully, in order to harness human creativity but also to check human perversity, and then kept in good working order, constantly oiled, adjusted and worked upon.

The need for hard-headedness is particularly pressing when establishing a nascent democracy. One reason why so many democratic experiments have failed recently is that they put too much emphasis on elections and too little on the other essential features of democracy. The power of the state needs to be checked, for instance, and individual rights such as freedom of speech and freedom to organise must be guaranteed. The most

successful new democracies have all worked in large part because they avoided the temptation of majoritarianism—the notion that winning an election entitles the majority to do whatever it pleases. India has survived as a democracy since 1947 (apart from a couple of years of emergency rule) and Brazil since the mid-1980s for much the same reason: both put limits on the power of the government and provided guarantees for individual rights.

Robust constitutions not only promote long-term stability, reducing the likelihood that disgruntled minorities will take against the regime. They also bolster the struggle against corruption, the bane of developing countries. Conversely, the first sign that a fledgling democracy is heading for the rocks often comes when elected rulers try to erode constraints on their power—often in the name of majority rule. Mr Morsi tried to pack Egypt's upper house with supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mr Yanukovich reduced the power of Ukraine's parliament. Mr Putin has ridden roughshod over Russia's independent institutions in the name of the people. Several African leaders are engaging in crude majoritarianism—removing term limits on the presidency or expanding penalties against homosexual behaviour, as Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni did on February 24th.

Foreign leaders should be more willing to speak out when rulers engage in such illiberal behaviour, even if a majority supports it. But the people who most need to learn this lesson are the architects of new democracies: they must recognise that robust checks and balances are just as vital to the establishment of a healthy democracy as the right to vote. Paradoxically even potential dictators have a lot to learn from events in Egypt and

Ukraine: Mr Morsi would not be spending his life shuttling between prison and a glass box in an Egyptian court, and Mr Yanukovich would not be fleeing for his life, if they had not enraged their compatriots by accumulating so much power.

Even those lucky enough to live in mature democracies need to pay close attention to the architecture of their political systems. The combination of globalisation and the digital revolution has made some of democracy's most cherished institutions look outdated. Established democracies need to update their own political systems both to address the problems they face at home, and to revitalise democracy's image abroad. Some countries have already embarked upon this process. America's Senate has made it harder for senators to filibuster appointments. A few states have introduced open primaries and handed redistricting to independent boundary commissions. Other obvious changes would improve matters. Reform of party financing, so that the names of all donors are made public, might reduce the influence of special interests. The European Parliament could require its MPs to present receipts with their expenses. Italy's parliament has far too many members who are paid too much, and two equally powerful chambers, which makes it difficult to get anything done.

But reformers need to be much more ambitious. The best way to constrain the power of special interests is to limit the number of goodies that the state can hand out. And the best way to address popular disillusion towards politicians is to reduce the number of promises they can make. The key to a healthier democracy, in short, is a narrower state—an idea that dates back to the American revolution. “In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men”, Madison argued, “the great

difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.” The notion of limited government was also integral to the relaunch of democracy after the second world war. The United Nations Charter (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) established rights and norms that countries could not breach, even if majorities wanted to do so.

The most successful new democracies managed to avoid the temptation of majoritarianism

These checks and balances were motivated by fear of tyranny. But today, particularly in the West, the big dangers to democracy are harder to spot. One is the growing size of the state. The relentless expansion of government is reducing liberty and handing ever more power to special interests. The other comes from government’s habit of making promises that it cannot fulfil, either by creating entitlements it cannot pay for or by waging wars that it cannot win, such as that on drugs. Both voters and governments must be persuaded of the merits of accepting restraints on the state’s natural tendency to overreach. Giving control of monetary policy to independent central banks tamed the rampant inflation of the 1980s, for example. It is time to apply the same principle of limited government to a broader range of policies. Mature democracies, just like nascent ones, require appropriate checks and balances on the power of elected government.

Governments can exercise self-restraint in several different ways. They can put on a golden straitjacket by adopting tight fiscal rules—as the Swedes have done by pledging to balance their budget over the economic cycle. They can introduce

“sunset clauses” that force politicians to renew laws every ten years, say. They can ask non-partisan commissions to propose long-term reforms. The Swedes rescued their pension system from collapse when an independent commission suggested pragmatic reforms including greater use of private pensions, and linking the retirement age to life-expectancy. Chile has been particularly successful at managing the combination of the volatility of the copper market and populist pressure to spend the surplus in good times. It has introduced strict rules to ensure that it runs a surplus over the economic cycle, and appointed a commission of experts to determine how to cope with economic volatility.

Isn't this a recipe for weakening democracy by handing more power to the great and the good? Not necessarily. Self-denying rules can strengthen democracy by preventing people from voting for spending policies that produce bankruptcy and social breakdown and by protecting minorities from persecution. But technocracy can certainly be taken too far. Power must be delegated sparingly, in a few big areas such as monetary policy and entitlement reform, and the process must be open and transparent.

And delegation upwards towards grandees and technocrats must be balanced by delegation downwards, handing some decisions to ordinary people. The trick is to harness the twin forces of globalism and localism, rather than trying to ignore or resist them. With the right balance of these two approaches, the same forces that threaten established democracies from above, through globalisation, and below, through the rise of micro-powers, can reinforce rather than undermine democracy.

Tocqueville argued that local democracy frequently represented democracy at its best: “Town-meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people’s reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it.” City mayors regularly get twice the approval ratings of national politicians. Modern technology can implement a modern version of Tocqueville’s town-hall meetings to promote civic involvement and innovation. An online hyperdemocracy where everything is put to an endless series of public votes would play to the hand of special-interest groups. But technocracy and direct democracy can keep each other in check: independent budget commissions can assess the cost and feasibility of local ballot initiatives, for example.

Several places are making progress towards getting this mixture right. The most encouraging example is California. Its system of direct democracy allowed its citizens to vote for contradictory policies, such as higher spending and lower taxes, while closed primaries and gerrymandered districts institutionalised extremism. But over the past five years California has introduced a series of reforms, thanks in part to the efforts of Nicolas Berggruen, a philanthropist and investor. The state has introduced a “Think Long” committee to counteract the short-term tendencies of ballot initiatives. It has introduced open primaries and handed power to redraw boundaries to an independent commission. And it has succeeded in balancing its budget—an achievement which Darrell Steinberg, the leader of the California Senate, described as “almost surreal”.

Similarly, the Finnish government has set up a non-partisan commission to produce proposals for the future of its pension system. At the same time it is trying to harness e-democracy:

parliament is obliged to consider any citizens' initiative that gains 50,000 signatures. But many more such experiments are needed—combining technocracy with direct democracy, and upward and downward delegation—if democracy is to zigzag its way back to health.

John Adams, America's second president, once pronounced that "democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide." He was clearly wrong. Democracy was the great victor of the ideological clashes of the 20th century. But if democracy is to remain as successful in the 21st century as it was in the 20th, it must be both assiduously nurtured when it is young—and carefully maintained when it is mature.

[Article 7.](#)

Jewish Review of Books

Original Sins

Ronald Radosh

Genesis: Truman, American Jews, and the Origins of the Arab/Israeli Conflict

by John B. Judis

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 448 pp., \$30

The jacket of journalist John Judis' new book features a photo of Harry Truman, placed so that only one of his eyes stares out from the cover. This is probably meant to signify the president's failure to see clearly the morass into which his misguided Middle Eastern policy would ultimately lead the United States. But Truman is guilty, according to Judis, not only of a failure of perception. He deserves blame for lending his nation's support to a movement that was most unworthy of it.

Genesis isn't a rant, but it is a profoundly anti-Zionist book. Judis bitterly denounces Zionism as a "settler-colonialist" movement, employing an all-too-familiar term derived from what his colleague at The New Republic Leon Wieseltier rightfully terms "the foul diction of delegitimation, the old vocabulary of anti-Israel propaganda." The movement's fundamental and deplorable aim, he writes, was "to conquer and not merely live in Palestine." (Judis dedicates his book to "my colleagues, past and present, at The New Republic," not all of whom are likely to be touched by the gesture.)

With the Balfour Declaration, "the British and Zionists had conspired," as Judis crudely puts it, "to screw the Arabs out of a country that by the prevailing standards of self-determination would have been theirs." Judis doesn't deny that Jews had a right to settle in Palestine, but he reiterates many times his conviction that they should have been prepared to live there as a minority among an Arab majority. The only Zionists for whom he has any real tolerance are those who eschewed the idea of

Jewish sovereignty and sought nothing more than a binational state. The Zionists who upset him the most are those who succeeded in the past and are still succeeding in obtaining the support of the American government for their supposedly unjust political aims.

It is above all to counteract what Judis regards as these people's nefarious influence that he has devoted years to writing his book. One can't help but wonder, however, why it took him so long. His overview of the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict and his account of America's part in this history are virtually devoid of original research and, for the most part, go over well-trod ground, covered by many writers over the years, including me. Nor is there anything new in his attack on Zionism, which echoes the arguments (as well as the deceptions) of the movement's many opponents over the past century. In fact, if *Genesis* were not the work of a staff writer and editor at *The New Republic* and put out by a major publisher, there would be no particular reason to pay any attention to it.

Some of the book's many weaknesses are due to the fact that Judis doesn't really possess the command of his subject that he pretends to have. His narrative is full of the sort of errors and omissions that abound in polemics disguised as history. Some of them are relatively minor, such as his drastic reduction of the number of First Aliyah settlers on hand in Palestine in 1884 from many hundreds to "about a score" and his postponement by two years of the date that Baron Edmund de Rothschild began extending financial assistance to these people. More revealing, perhaps, of his failure to do his homework is his statement that "Palestine was quiet during World War II." While he knows that the "Stern Gang" staged terrorist attacks against the British

during the war, he seems to be utterly unaware of the Irgun's revolt in 1944 (or, for that matter, of any of its activities during the next couple of years, except for the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946, which he mentions in passing, without explaining in any way).

If Menachem Begin altogether escapes Judis' notice, his mentor, Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, comes in for more than his share of criticism. Jabotinsky's defense in the 1920s of a militant "iron wall" policy, which rested on the assumption that "the Jews would succeed in gaining Palestine only by defeating, or intimidating, the Arabs militarily," confirmed, he writes, "the Arab population's worst fears about Zionist intentions." What Judis fails to note is, to quote Walter Laqueur's *A History of Zionism*, that "Jabotinsky wrote in his programme that in the Jewish state there would be 'absolute equality' between Jews and Arabs, that if one part of the population were destitute, the whole country would suffer." (One suspects that Judis is aware of these things, for it is Laqueur himself who heads the list of people he thanks in his acknowledgments for supplying him with reading material.) While Judis pounces, when he can, on any reference on the part of a Zionist leader to the transfer of the Palestinian Arab population to some other territory, Judis makes no mention of the fact that Jabotinsky vociferously opposed any such notion.

It is Jabotinsky's people that Judis blames, too, for the descent of Palestine into violence in 1929. In the midst of a year-long dispute over the Western Wall in Jerusalem, several hundred members of the Revisionist youth group "shouting 'The wall is

ours!’ and carrying the Zionist flag, marched to the mufti’s home, where they held a large demonstration. That set off a succession of Arab demonstrations that degenerated into large-scale riots.” What Judis conveniently neglects to describe fully, however, is the central role the owner of the house in question, the Grand Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, had in stirring things up. He didn’t just convene international conferences, as Judis notes. Throughout the 1920s, he distributed *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and regularly taught hatred of the Jews. In 1929, as Efraim Karsh has shown, he incited a youth rally to unleash “a tidal wave of violence.” (Judis is consistent, one might note, in his protection of the Palestinian Arab leader’s soiled reputation, touching only very lightly on his later collaboration with the Nazis, which seems to be deplorable in his eyes mostly because his “identification with Hitler’s Germany had allowed these Zionists to reframe their own role in Palestine and on the world stage to avoid any taint of imperialism or settler colonialism.”)

Judis is scarcely any friendlier to the Zionists of the Left than he is to those of the Right. In his thoroughly tendentious overview of the movement’s formative years, the only Zionists who earn his commendation are those who restricted their goals to the establishment of a Jewish cultural center in Palestine and were content with “being a minority in a binational state.” He admiringly traces the efforts of Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, and others to implement a non-statist Zionism, up to the last possible minute—May of 1948. He acknowledges, however, that everyone except a handful of Arab intellectuals ignored what he himself describes as their utopian proposals. Only before the issuance of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, he concludes, was

it at all likely that the ground could have been prepared for “a majority Arab state with a vibrant Jewish minority.” True, Judis cautiously notes, “Such a nation would not have been free of conflict.” And at that anyone with knowledge of the fate of religious minorities in the Arab world in the 20th century can only laugh. The notion that a Jewish minority could ever have enjoyed security in such a polity is entirely ludicrous.

After devoting Part I of his book to the depiction of political Zionism as an unjust cause, Judis briefly recounts in Part II the history of the Zionist movement in the United States up to the end of World War II. In Part III, which constitutes more than half of the book, he deals with the “Truman years,” during which, as he puts it, “the pattern of surrender to Israel and its supporters began.”

Judis’ narrative of this last period follows the same trajectory as my wife’s and my recent book *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, which he credits with being “the latest and most complete blow-by-blow account of what happened” at that time. Yet I’m afraid that we see the same facts somewhat differently. We develop the story of how Truman came to accept the existence of a Jewish state in the making, while Judis writes of the tragedy he believes took place when Truman ignored those in the State Department who favored a more pro-Arab policy and yielded to Zionist pressure.

The greatest misdeed of the American Zionists, according to Judis, was their sabotaging of the so-called Morrison-Grady Plan. The outcome of joint British and American investigations and deliberations with regard to the Palestine problem, it called in July of 1946 for the division of Palestine into two partially

self-governing provinces—one Jewish and one Arab—with a British-controlled central government. Jerusalem and the Negev would be under the direct jurisdiction of the British Mandatory power, which would maintain control over defense, foreign affairs, taxation, and immigration—following the admission of 100,000 Jewish wartime refugees into the country.

The Zionists rightfully noted that this plan gave them only 1,500 square miles under tight federal rule, less than what had been offered to them by the Peel Commission in 1937. President Truman, for his part, thought Morrison-Grady might solve the Palestine problem, but was quickly opposed by Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York and by James G. McDonald, the former League of Nations high commissioner for refugees, who told Truman if he accepted this plan, “you will be responsible for scrapping the Jewish interests in Palestine.” In the United States Senate, there was strong bipartisan opposition to the plan, led by Wagner and by “Mr. Republican,” Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio.

Judis again and again blames the Zionists for having thwarted American support for the Morrison-Grady plan. But how much would it have mattered if they had acted differently? The Arabs, for their part, not only rejected Morrison-Grady but refused to consider subsequent British proposals that were even more favorable to their position. When the British, at the beginning of 1947, “tilted markedly to the Arabs,” as Judis puts it, and presented a plan that would lead in five years to what would have been a unitary state under Arab majority rule, “the Arabs, who were unwilling to compromise even on 100,000 immigrants, also rejected it unconditionally.” They refused, in fact, even to enter into negotiations over the plan, since they

refused to meet at that point with any Jews, from Palestine or anywhere else. It was their own leadership, no less than American Zionists, that stood in the way of their attainment of their goals.

Judis does lament the Palestinian Arabs' failure to take advantage of "genuine concessions," but he will not condemn them for it, for they were, in the end, holding out for what he believes was rightfully theirs: immediate and untrammelled sovereignty in their own land. Nor, in the final analysis, will he condemn Harry Truman for failing to create a binational or federated Palestine. He could only have done so, Judis says, "through credibly threatening and, if necessary, using an American-led force to impose an agreement upon the warring parties. And it might have taken years (as it has in the former Yugoslavia) to get the Jews and Arabs to accept their fates, and it still might not have worked."

More surprisingly, Judis won't even condemn the post-war Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion for being as resistant as he was to compromise. He was, after all, still leading the Zionist movement in the shadow of the Holocaust. While the Nazi defeat discredited political anti-Semitism in much of Europe and in the United States, that was by no means evident in 1946. The Jews, as far as Palestine's Zionists were concerned, were still engaged in a war of survival. With these comments, Judis seems to be belatedly and inconsistently opening the door to a justification of political Zionism. But if so, he doesn't open it very wide. However great the wrongs inflicted by Europeans and others on the Jews, he immediately insists, "the Zionists who came to Palestine to establish a state trampled on the rights of the Arabs who already lived there."

To Judis, this is the wrong that is most in need of universal acknowledgment. Not the decades-long war of Israel's enemies "to push the Jews into the sea" (or in its modern equivalent, to "liberate Palestine from the river to the sea") but the Jews' desire to have a state of their own in territory representing less than 0.02 percent of the land mass of the Arab Middle East. To atone for this wrong, Judis believes, one of the principal guilty parties, the United States, should change its overall orientation. "If America has tilted in the past toward Zionism and toward Israel, it is now time to redress that moral balance" by making sure that the Palestinians "get treated justly."

But what does justice entail, in this case, in the eyes of a man who regards the very establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a profound injustice? Would enough justice be attained if a two-state solution were reached? Or does justice require, as some anti-Zionists and post-Zionists proclaim, the dissolution of the state of Israel and its replacement by a unitary state in all of Palestine as Judah Magnes once advocated? The last paragraphs of Judis' final chapter highlight the problem of the Palestinian refugees. Does he think that justice entitles all of them to a "right of return"? Does he look forward to the day when they, in their millions, together with the Arabs currently living in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza will constitute the large majority of the population of the unitary state that will replace Israel?

Genesis does not contain Judis' answers to these questions. In a piece published on the The New Republic website in January 2014, however, he is more forthcoming. If a "federated or binational Palestine" was "out of the question in 1946," he writes, "it is even more so almost 70 years later. If there is a 'one-state solution' in Israel/Palestine, it is likely to be an

authoritarian Jewish state compromising all of British Palestine. What remains possible, although enormously difficult to achieve, is the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.” Thus, without ever acknowledging explicitly that a Jewish state has any real right to exist, Judis tacitly accepts Israel as a fixture on the scene. But he does so grudgingly. Indeed, in *The New Republic* piece he insists that Truman and his State Department were right to be apprehensive about the way things were unfolding in the late 1940s: “their underlying concern—that a Jewish state, established against the opposition of its neighbors, would prove destabilizing and a threat to America’s standing in the region—has been proven correct.”

Judis clearly regrets that a Jewish state was ever established. Whether Israel, in the course of its 65-year history, has any great achievements to its credit, or whether it has ever enhanced America’s position in the Middle East, are not questions of any real interest to him. What he wants above all is to see his own country make amends for America’s past support of Zionist settler-colonialism’s sinister project of migration to Palestine, launched “with a purpose of establishing a Jewish state that would rule the native Arab population.” He has now done his own little bit to make this happen by writing a book that often presses history out of shape and into the service of his aspirations.

Ronald Radosh is an American writer, professor, historian, former Marxist, and neoconservative. He is known for his work on the Cold War espionage case of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and his advocacy of the state of Israel.

Article 8.

The Washington Free Beacon

TNR editor Leon Wieseltier bashes TNR editor over anti-Israel book

February 25, 2014 -- *Literary editor of the New Republic Leon Wieseltier is calling a new book written by his TNR colleague John Judis, a senior editor, “shallow, derivative, tendentious, imprecise, and sometimes risibly inaccurate” and also “insulting” and “nasty.”*

The scathing remarks are contained in an email Wieseltier sent to historian Ron Radosh praising his negative review of the Judis book, which argues that Israel should not exist. Marty Peretz, the longtime former editor of TNR, remarked in 2010 that on the Middle East, “John Judis knows zero.”

Wieseltier wrote in his email:

Ron,

What you’ve written is absolutely correct. In some respects I’d have gone further. I am no authority on Truman’s decision (though you are), but I know with certainty that Judis’ understanding of Jewish history, and of the history and nature of

Zionism, is shallow, derivative, tendentious, imprecise, and sometimes risibly inaccurate—he is a tourist in this subject. Like most tourists, he sees what he came to see. There is more to be said also about the utter shabbiness of discovering a Jewish identity in—and for the purpose of—criticizing the Jews: it is not only ignorant but also insulting. The magnitude of Judis' indifference to the fate of the Jews in the very years in which they were being massively slaughtered—the 1940s: now there was a decade of Jewish power!—is quite shocking. (His Abba Hillel Silver is just an early version of Howard Kohr, in consonance with his AIPAC-centric view of the world.) The truth is that no amount of sympathy for Palestinians requires this amount of antipathy to Israelis.

Remember Rosa Luxemburg's letter to her friend in which she proudly announced that she had no corner of her heart for the Jews? Judis is her good disciple. But my favorite bit of self-congratulation on Judis' part is his belief that he is heroically defying the Zionist thought-police at the New Republic. For three decades and more we—by which I emphatically mean Marty [Peretz] too—have been publishing criticisms, even bitter ones, of Israeli policies by myself, Michael Walzer, and many others. True, we have not published pieces rejecting the legitimacy of Jewish nationalism or wishing away the Jewish state, and we have published pieces defending Israel against states and non-state actors (and intellectuals arguing on their behalf) who have denied the right of Israel to exist and have used violence in the name of that idea—and all this, I know, makes us highly unsatisfactory as progressives. Israel was indeed a house obsession here—but not any single idea or image of Israel. There has been no conformity of opinion in this office

about this subject or any other subject in the two hundred years I have worked here. And now comes Judis's nasty little book to prove this definitively! By jumping on a bandwagon he has rescued our reputation for freedom of thought!

So, my compliments.

Leon