

TikTok Containment meets “The threat of a good example” Inversion gets more than 15 seconds of fame

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When President Donald Trump proposed to ban the Chinese social media platform TikTok on national security grounds on August 6, 2020, it marked a pivotal moment in the interaction between many contending layers of political life. Cojoined in a register of nationalist rhetoric, US national policies cross-referenced geopolitics, and the history of international competition and cooperation in global trade flows with and against China. As such, the proposed ban gave credit to the ancient popular Chinese saying: “Things that oppose each other also complement each other” (Ban Gu nd: 84). More precisely, when seen through the lens of digital networking, Trump’s announcement marked an inversion of the un-assailed US domination of all things digital. In so doing, it marked a challenge to the overdetermination of technology by the United States against the emergence of a new, more complex set of forces operating through the digital or virtual sphere *as well as* every other level of human activity, given that so much of life has become defined by communication technologies. The Chinese model had arrived via the internet. This model, drawing on state planning for a managed economy that addresses the entirety of the Chinese population in a program of socialist development – provoked the ban on TikTok and, as such, operates as an example of the narrow US commitment to dominate the world with its communication technology. The resulting landscape is one in which communication is revealed as central to the continuing dialectic of human history through the collision between China as TikTok and the US as a national security state. Donald Trump’s announced bans on TikTok exposed this contradiction, illustrating how the inversion of the global power structure was constituted by the complementary energy of digital interaction.

If human history can be defined as the rupture of otherwise settled power relations by the emergence of contending forces, Trump’s efforts at putting a stop to TikTok marked the re-articulation of the US Government policy of “containment” initiated by George F. Kennan in 1947 (Office: undated). While previously, the containment of the Soviet Union was through Cold War confrontations about ideology and the superiority of the democratic West, TikTok marks the escalation of the containment of the material world to include advanced communication technologies. The complication is that the global hegemonic power of US digital technology transmogrified into an *obvious* US nationalist agenda to reveal the essence of white supremacist liberal democratic claims built into digital technology. Trump magnified this ideology through the digital field, setting it against a more

complex Asian opposite. The contradiction is that the networked technology of TikTok applied the energy of Western platform innovation, multiplying, transferring, and inverting it to the global virtual other, China, thereby drawing attention to the US opposite.

Historically, the success of the original US containment of the Soviet Union was achieved through the Monroe Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the Cold War, resulting in the US victory in establishing and then confirming the US as hegemon. The materiality of that approach was in the threat of raw power warfare. Containment Version 2, digital containment - or perhaps more correctly, the continuation of a permanent state of warfare initiated by the US - is appealing to US policymakers working with an uncritical national and Western media system after intentionally mischaracterizing China as “the enemy” (Larson 2021). But this was a new field of struggle between powers. The ban against TikTok evolved within the increasingly complex political economy of digital technologies that Jodi Dean described as “ever-morphing, interlinking,” indicating the articulation between diverse digital applications joined through the internet’s algorithmic logic (2010: 1). It evolved within the US approach to making globalization through the neoliberal economic system the priority since the 1980s, as US elites argued for “linking” economic and financial activity with China: just not as an equal. With the rise of TikTok, proposals emerged for delinking from China, arguing that it was necessary for the “self-sufficiency movement” to physically return industrial manufacturing to US factories on US soil, thereby expressing a nativist inflection of nationalist obsessions that found their digital moment in the TikTok and related bans (the related bans are not considered in detailed in this essay) (Chen & Li 2022). Such “onshoring,” or bringing industry home to the US, was an extension of a nationalist policy that continued to morph and harden in intensity, leading up to Trump’s TikTok ban announcement (Lind 2008).

The TikTok case illustrates that a nationalistic change imperative was happening in the digital domain, even as containment as it was originally conceived had been used by the US Government to suppress Marxist, socialist, communist, and left movements generally, most specifically and successfully through the Cold War with the USSR and its Eastern European Allies. In a semantic sleight of hand, the change imperative in the digital domain repurposed these containment priorities against the non-American, not liberal democratic “other.” Historically, international containment emerged in tandem with the success of the US Government and its elites in effectively suppressing and extinguishing the communist left as a political movement at home, mostly through the House of UnAmerican Activities (HUAC) and Senator McCarthy’s red-baiting hysteria. National security concerns were always the foundation of the containment arguments, and as I will illustrate, that tradition, grounded in the manipulation of popular public opinion that keeps hysteria at elevated levels of salience, continued unabated after Trump left government in 2021, as President Biden persisted with the bans. *The Wall Street Journal*, a public conduit to Republican and conservative US interests, illustrated the continuity when it reported early in the second year of Biden’s term, the view, summarized in its headline: “US Moving—Some Say Too Slowly—to Address TikTok Security Risk” (McKinnon and Leary 2022).

The original concept of containment had to be adjusted because digital communication technologies had become central to national, state, and individual survival. China became the cause for a new kind of containment, one where networked technology was central. Given that context, TikTok offers a gateway for analyzing the digital turn within the messy intersection of interconnected global capitalism, neoliberalism, socialism, and petty American domestic politics, fueled by irrational appeals to nativist and nationalistic emotions. These intersecting concerns appear through a variety of lenses. Indeed, as the game played on, the telescopic lens of evolving global political economy did not fall into place as the US would have preferred when looking from its high perch of hegemonic self-

interest. Nevertheless, digital containment was and remains a key US Government focus.

At one level, containment by the US, as originally conceived in relation to the Soviet Union, is not equipped to respond to the complexity of China's national interests, especially its technological innovations. Nevertheless, as Kennan argued in the containment document *The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State*, also known as *The Long Telegram*, "Part 5: [Practical Deductions from Standpoint of US Policy]" the foundation for contemporary US approaches resonate with his recommendation. Of relevance to the US-China trade dispute initiated by Trump, of which TikTok was an extension, Kennan offered a diplomatic insight:

(2) We must see that our public is educated about the realities of the Russian situation. I cannot over-emphasize importance of this. The press cannot do this alone. It must be done mainly by Government, which is necessarily more experienced and better informed on the practical problems involved. In this, we need not be deterred by the ugliness of the picture. There would be far less *hysterical* anti-Sovietism in our country today if realities of this situation were better understood by our people. Nothing is as dangerous or terrifying as the unknown (1947, emphasis added).

Hysteria is not new, as this comment from Keenan illustrates. Indeed, the absence of knowledge about Russia that Keenan identified is reproduced today in China and Asian culture generally, forming a foundation for a new hysteria. In fact, the absence of knowledge is the precursor to the psychological conditions of psychosis, which is constituted by fear, anxiety, panic, uncertainty, and so on to hysteria, as psychoanalysis has argued since Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of hysteria to human behavioral analysis. Structured ignorance about China's development continues the trajectory of imperial logic, where a population is directed into hysteria through a blocked relationship, where the intention is to manipulate public opinion through propaganda and magnified untruths rather than free-flowing information, according to liberal political theory. Ironically, or perhaps tragically, the "free flow of information" is privileged in US claims of liberal democracy, along with free speech, as a system in which more information generates a more informed citizenry. That is, until that information is grounded in a Chinese digital platform.

Kennan's recommendations still resonate today, albeit across the new complexities that are involved in addressing the containment of China. Part of this complexity is explained by recognizing that the US and China are coupled in the logic of neoliberal ideology and practice, with both nations having a 30-year history of integration in production and innovation. However, because the relationship between China and the US is not informed by public knowledge about China, it has been subjected to elite and corporate media propaganda that further blocks knowledge. Consequently, ignorance is the dominant currency of US public discourse. The epistemological landscape is one in which a contemporary form of anti-Chinese and anti-communist hysteria flourished, presaged by Kennan in his 1947 description.

In fact, public ignorance explains Trump's political success. In reference to China, his proposed ban of TikTok was part of a heightened defense by the US Government against China, although the ban was imbricated in what Greg Albo referred to as "the logic of the new technologies (in) fundamentally transforming capitalism" (2020: 321). This transformation of capitalism through its articulation with networked technology is central to the US Government's action against TikTok because capitalism worked through digital technology to transform China, just as it had the US and globally. For an ignorant US public, the idea that a nation would compete with and surpass the US

with its domination in technology was improbable, then unacceptable. However, this orientation to ignorance extended the lengthy history of colonial resource extraction that served the Western public, whose standard of living was kept high by such programs. That China might threaten the US at its own game - use technological innovation to generate capital, capitalist corporate formations, personal wealth creation, and improved standards of living - was translated into unfiltered support for the US nationalist impulses that informed Trump's anti-China efforts.

Meanwhile in China, national transformation was an ongoing narrative happening through the mobilization of a central planning model that runs counter to yet alongside the capitalist chaos of US liberal democracy. The rationalist Chinese planning model attracted containment energy from the US Government because the evidence is clear that economic and geopolitical power was (and is) shifting from the US and the West generally to the East, prompting McKinsey Consultants to ponder "how Asia will lead" globally (Tonby et al: 3). In the US, Trump refused to adopt the theoretical liberal foundations of traditional public policy settings: structure, rationality and institutional theory, adopting instead "irrational information processing" (Barnett 2018: 16-17). Trump's TikTok ban added to the capitalist chaos with one important proviso: it was coherent in the way the US foreign policy of containment was structured - always well funded - reflecting the US elite's interest in maintaining unrestricted hegemony through a process of targeted policy actions.

The original aspects of the Munroe Doctrine of containment to contain and manage the East and the West were undone when Trump launched the action against TikTok. As the international relations critic John Mearsheimer argued (already) in 2015, during the Obama era, the US jettisoned the doctrine of twentieth-century standards of spheres of the East and West in a "balance of power politics," to become a 21st-century power that no longer recognized spheres of influence (2015). The world belonged to the US as the sole hegemon. Balancing between spheres was no longer relevant. What were once the many tentacles of US Government policy-making within its quest for world supremacy became focused on China. In the morphing system of global flows of knowledge and power due to the internet, containment embodied a zealous, confrontational interest in suppressing the digital empowerment of China. The interest was fueled by hysteria that served the purpose of rattling the "liberal international order," softening up the public for actions like banning valuable communication technologies while leaving the public without resources for comprehending the changed conditions of global political power and any explanatory theory (Nye 2022). The aggressive US action in banning TikTok did not seek adaptation to the new state of great power relations, or the maintenance of balance of power. It was the equivalent of the thrashing around of a massive, uncontrollable creature that could not comprehend why it was no longer the master. In a more banal sense, the Trump action against TikTok was a response to "the threat of a good example," and as such, followed a lengthy history of US opposition to any alternative to the political-economic interests of the USA (Melrose 1989).

Sinicizing Marxism

Trump's action mobilized my keen interest in China's digital technologies. This research began as an attempt to further comprehend how the TikTok ban played out the way it did, to become little more than a whimper, soon after Trump left office, then escalated again later. In exploring the subject's history, the door was opened to the Sinicizing of Marxism, a process in which Mao Zedong sought to bring into alignment "the universal theory of Marxism with the 'concrete practice' of Chinese society and the Chinese revolution," to evolve in "highly problematic ways in which the 'foreign' theory of Marxism-Leninism could be adapted to the concrete historical realities of modern China" (Rošker

2019: 6, 8). The question is, how is TikTok connected with Sinicizing Marxism?

The answer to that question involves an appreciation for the dialectical method, in which two contradictory material elements create transformations in political economy. At the most elemental, this contradiction occurs as the Western superiority mentality collides with the Asian way of life, history, philosophy, and politics. After the height of neoliberalism's global integrationist phase, where the US and China became each other's economic and financial co-dependents, Trump's antagonism to TikTok marked the reframing of China as it exceeded, or outgrew, its role as the global collaborationist of US-dominated capitalism. Suddenly, as it were, Sinicizing Marxism demanded attention. Firstly, it relocates analysis that is not immersed in or unconsciously reproduces an imperial mindset. This has been more characterized as "Sinological-orientalism," an extension of Edward Said's concept of Orientalism that incorporates as its basic operating logic the racist trope that the Chinese cannot match the West or US advances (Vukovich 2012: 2-4). Secondly, Imperialism and Orientalism are a well-established couplet, in which the superiority of the imperialist is prefigured by dehumanizing "the other," usually non-white people or by mischaracterizing a population with racist ideation in order to undertake colonization in the interests of exploitation of the othered: the less than human indigenes. In the US, the linguistic aspects of generating an imperialist culture are significant, imbricating the values into the culture. For example, consider the ease with which "Yellow Peril propaganda" is mainstreamed in the media. At the same time, "its relatives xenophobia, Sinophobia, anti-Asian racism, and McCarthyism" have, at various historical moments, reached "consensus in the American public" (Luo 2021). Thirdly, seeking the truth means reframing China through an appreciation of and sympathy for its national project incorporated within Sinicizing Marxism. This involves admitting the rational, worthy qualities of the Chinese method. In this reframing, Orientalism is relocated outside the context established by the US history of supremacy.

Such a shift in orientation is a critical strategy that relies on the ability to admit, change, and welcome new knowledge contexts, in this case, a context that is not defined by the aggressive, militarized imperialistic US policy method embodied in containment (Fassin 2019: 21). This reorientation further recognizes that the Chinese method contains internal contradictions that express the foundations of Marxist philosophy in theory and practice at the specific site of national application. This occurs even while China has come into existence in the contemporary Western mind, through its articulation with and expression of global capitalism, through the publicity about and the popular use of TikTok. The context is both curious and contradictory. It is one where TikTok globally elaborates on US consumer culture and individualist identitarianism on a social media platform, even as Sinicizing Marxism matures and advances in China.

Anti-China racism

As the Trump presidency ended, white nationalist emotions appeared to be consensual for the 75 million people who voted for him. Their emotions occurred against "the other" of China and were magnified in anti-Chinese propaganda. Those emotions were translated into violence and abuse against Asians on US streets, with estimations of 3,800 events recorded over the year by mid-2021, in the second year of the pandemic (Ho 2019). Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic added to the pressure on China, layering yet another negative affective sensibility toward non-whites in the US. This negative emotion - hatred by any other name - about claims that the virus emerged in China, sharpened Orientalism, promoted by Trump's characterization of COVID-19 as "Kung Flu" and "China virus." While further references to COVID may be instructive, I will not extend the discussion of the pandemic and its association with China, except to note that the prejudicial, racist statements made

by Trump and conservative politicians further hardened the US public against any comprehension of Sinicizing Marxism, or knowledge of China, its history or continued rise. Furthermore, there were no signs that the kind of humanistic education that would comprehend China and its culture emerged in the US during the Trump Presidency or post-Trump. Rather, “China hawks” questioned the way China funds research to “indoctrinate” US college students (Reuters Staff 2020), while the US Senate voted to close Chinese government-funded Confucius Institutes on US college campuses (Horsley 2021). The focus on China as “the other” whose knowledge could be harmful to the US, overwhelmed the policy environment to the detriment of practical learning about culture, economics, or international relations.

To illustrate the point, the major response taken by the US Congress as racist acts against Asians escalated, was to introduce the *COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act* (2021). Typically, in a nation built on libertarian philosophy, where freedom of entrepreneurial action is followed by public policy regulations, the Hate Crimes legislation attempted *post-factum* to undo the racist nature of the attacks on Asian people, without reference to TikTok, Chinese technology, or containment. By evading these matters, the Federal campaign to stop anti-Asian and anti-Chinese hate continued the US public policy tradition of addressing one matter in great detail *after* it had happened, leaving comprehensive attention to the causes of the hate unattended. Consequently, the argument here is that if there had been no anti-Chinese containment model campaigns against Chinese technology firms, to begin with, hate crimes would not have escalated to the level they did. Not quite a digression, the *COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act* enacted law enforcement procedures at Federal, State, and Local levels, giving succor to Asian minorities without addressing the root causes of racism, its Orientalist meaning, or its role in the US imperial project.

TikTok redefines the complicated relationship between the historical consideration of the Chinese as “othered” and the stunning recent success of China’s networked technology. This approach was reinforced, as Alain Badiou argued in *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings* (2012), because “the dominant media” had suggested “a simple interpretation of the riots in the Arab world: ... a desire for the West” (2012: 48, cited in Breen 2020). Such an imperial imaginary begins by defining The West as the universal standard for progress. Badiou added that “the space of realization of emancipatory ideas is global” and that “genuine change would be *an exit from the West*, a ‘de-Westernization’” (2012: 52, emphasis in original). Extending Badiou, the prevailing US view is in keeping with anti-Chinese, anti-communist, pro-western colonialism. The cosmopolitanist’s acknowledgment of difference, which is Badiou’s preference, was and remains outside the purview of US priorities, and with low levels of education in the US and the West about China’s Sinicizing approach, government and media campaigns persist with unquestioned propositions about western supremacy. Of course, informed discussion of Sinicizing Marxism in US public discourse is unlikely, given the antipathy to the open investigation of Marxism, reproducing a knowledge gap within the dominant liberal democracy. If the US were to take the time to learn about Chinese accomplishments in networked technologies as a constituent of Marx’s theory of capitalism, it would be better placed to enter into cooperative arrangements with China as a continuously evolving organism. This failure to acknowledge the uniqueness of China’s conditions means that any connection with US priorities, even imperial ones, quickly reach a stalemate. China’s determination not to be “western” according to the hegemon’s dictates - taking Badiou on, as it were - means that it moves in directions of its own choosing. More precisely, the application of Sinicizing principles directs it to a vein of structured knowledge within emerging Marxism. At the same time, the US, compared to its ill-directed liberal democracy, almost operates as a knowledge desert and certainly as a reactionary bulwark against developmental progress.

This contradictory minefield consists of contrasting epistemological systems. Nevertheless, the US and China must be considered together because they are coupled in the world system. Until recently, the global ambitions of the US were constructed as a confident commitment to international capitalist leadership and dominance. The success of this hegemony was defined by Kennan's 1947 anti-communist screed in which the word "Communist" is mentioned 16 times, with little or no reference to the integration of the US with Russia, because at that time, there was no neoliberal global project and therefore almost no collaboration. Until neoliberalism, when market fundamentalism or unregulated free trade became codified, trade between nations was maintained within the structure of the balance of powers. In contrast, China now operates as a part of the global system with a different remit, informed by a 5000-year history while building toward a long socialist horizon that informs its Sinicizing Marxism model. It is a model that continues to evolve within and against capitalism, with and against the US. Trump's effort to ban TikTok from domestic American use was an effort to stop a Chinese social media application from taking a foothold in the US to present a challenge to the world hegemon. In the spirit of the dialectic, TikTok challenged the hegemon because it was an extension of global capitalism within the neoliberal order.

The TikTok ban provokes two questions: Will Sinicizing Marxism evolve to transform capitalism through digital innovations, creating a Sino-inflected political economy? If such a new form takes shape, will US containment in its anti-Chinese, anti-communist iteration be turned on its head? The answer is somewhat already evident. Arguably, a type of Sinicizing public policy emerged in the US, with President Biden's proposals for massive public investments to "overhaul the economy" valued at several trillion dollars in the American Jobs Plan (2021) and the American Families Plan: "an ambitious, once in a generation investment to rebuild the middle class and invest in America's future." (2021: np). They somewhat mirror Chinese efforts at national infrastructure development aimed at economic growth. Indeed, the Biden policies inverted the Trump-era free market, anti-regulationist approach and were informed by a moral economy that aligns citizens with the orbit of state social provisioning, where such provisioning is in addition to the bloated military budget. TikTok inverted the hegemon.

What Happened? Creating hysteria: Tweet, then sign

US and global media provided detailed coverage of the proposed US bans of TikTok. The background to the TikTok ban can be unraveled by exploring the programmatic system of formal antagonism against China that appears in the US Government's public documents, reaching back to Kennan's "Long Telegram." In fact, the TikTok ban was a continuation of US bans on communication technologies that were detailed in Executive Order 13873 (EO) *Securing the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply Chain* on May 17, 2019. At that time, Trump wanted to put a stop to Chinese communication technologies operating unimpeded within the US because they posed a national security threat. The order required The Director of National Intelligence:

to assess threats to the United States and its people from information and communications technology or services designed, developed, manufactured, or supplied by persons owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a foreign adversary (EO 1387 2019, 22691).

More centrally, the order established an emotional foundation grounded in threats to national security, pointing the finger at foreign technologies and anyone who was not American. Trump signed on with the assertion that:

The unrestricted acquisition or use in the United States of information and communications technology or services designed, developed, manufactured, or supplied by persons owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of foreign adversaries augments the ability of foreign adversaries to create and exploit vulnerabilities in information and communications technology or services, with potentially catastrophic effects. It thereby constitutes *an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security*, foreign policy, and economy of the United States (italics added, EO 1389 2019, 22689).

Only the United States of America was named in this document. No other nation's name appeared in the 2019 Executive Order (EO), although the language made the case for the US positioning against any contingency, for example (above) naming "potentially catastrophic effects," "extraordinary threat," as if the nation was facing a dire eventuality.¹ Such appeals to catastrophe and threat due to "foreign adversaries" constructed a resonance of psychotic fear in the US, a fear associated with othering-through-ignorance and harking back to the claims that non-American foreigners generated what Kennan referred to as "hysteria." It was a short step from the sense that, "Lurking in the background is a growing fear that the rise of China will spell the end of the American era" (Nye 2019: para 1).

The irrationality that produces public hysteria is part of the political and cultural landscape that has been sharpened in its relationship with digital media, a theory I explored in *Uprising: The Internet's Unintended Consequences* (2011). Evidence of the chaotic character of irrationality when set against the formality of rationality along with its conceptual and Kantian philosophical twin maturity, was evident in claims by Trump made on the social media platform Twitter. Short blasts of text by Trump reinforced the irrational because they – like his entire presidential enterprise – were directed at an emotional register for white nationalists and their evangelical ilk, cohorts whose principal motivation in support of Trump were "grievances" translated into a rhetorical and activist passion that leapt over the established processes of the deliberative style of parliamentary politics and the myths of objective media reporting. Specifically, the "white grievance" of the Trump supporters provoked protest that "is gendered and sexualized in particular ways, as Trump supporters express(ed) misogynistic and homophobic fears about gains by women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) citizens" (Hooker 2017: 493). Such grievances came just a decade after Sarah Palin's play-on-words about the "mainstream media" being the "lamestream media," on Sean Hannity's radio show in 2009. Made when Palin was the Vice-Presidential running mate for John McCain, her catchy wordplay consolidated the trajectory of grievance by creating a linguistic framework for the public rejection of the mainstream media as the trustworthy fourth estate (Barr 2009: np.). Grievances feed every social movement, even reactionary ones, drawing on the sensations of exclusion experienced by many "out-groups" and operating as the foundation for social mobilization and political action (LeFevre and Armstrong 2018). Trump's use of Twitter was no exception. As a feature of the success of Trump in rising to the Presidency, grievances informed the conservative project generally, constructing the primary form of meaning as a negative visceral reaction by the white out-group to rational forms of compassion and empathy: values that are degraded in a society that rewards hyper-competitive individualism, celebrated with emotional media displays. When set against rational liberal ideals of tolerance, diversity, and equality, irrational claims

about the fourth estate's media coverage were used during the Trump Administration to negatively present immigrants, Muslims, and Mexicans, in fact, any non-white person as "othered" within an affective landscape of resentment. Devoid of rationality, the "other" as non-white and non-Protestant were incorporated into the emotionality of public discourse. Professionally packaged Executive Orders gave heft to the negative political rhetoric that characterizes "the other" as enemies. Acting together against the grain of rationality, it was straightforward logic to add the Chinese Government and China to the list of threats to the US, thereby creating hysteria.

Trump's Executive Order, *Securing the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply Chain*, established the foundations for targeting TikTok, although two high-profile Chinese companies were subjected to formal pressure followed by bans by Trump before TikTok came into focus. Huawei and ZTE were active in the US through business alliances and research collaborations with firms like Qualcomm and Vodafone when a list of complicated accusations stemming from the US Government, as described by *Ars Technica*, led to bans on these firms:

The accusations against a concern fueled by the US government that Huawei wishes to compromise or undermine networks and systems belonging to the US and Europe, as well as a concern that the company tries to unlawfully use intellectual property taken from Western countries. Among Chinese firms, Huawei is viewed with particular suspicion due to its ties to the Chinese military.

Huawei's CFO was arrested in Canada on behalf of the United States, which says that Huawei has violated the *US sanctions against Iran*, and the company has also been indicted for stealing robotic phone-testing technology from T-Mobile. (ARS Staff 2019).

Another reason identified by *Ars Technica* journalist-researchers for opposing Huawei was their leadership in 5G technology, which is a case study (not considered here) of how the US became visibly deficient in the development and rollout of new mobile technologies. Putting the pieces together – including the reference to Iran – points to the breadth of US claims against Chinese firms. Those firms, engaged in global partnerships for business ran afoul of comprehensive technological, military, strategic US interests, and perhaps most powerfully yet subtly, the knowledge that Chinese telecommunication firms were outperforming the US. Only a new strategic containment program could suppress what increasingly appeared to be "the threat of a good example," of Chinese development.

The accusations against China were not new. They had been rehearsed in detail in 2012 when The House Intelligence Committee investigated and then released the 52-page "Investigative Report on the US National Security Issues Posed by Chinese Telecommunications Companies Huawei and ZTE" (2012) that said: "Based on available classified and unclassified information, Huawei and ZTE cannot be trusted to be free of foreign state influence and thus pose a security threat to the United States and to our systems" (2012: 45). Most dramatically, the committee recommended that US companies should buy their telecommunication equipment from other providers, thereby beginning the break in communications integration that would emerge seven years later with Trump. Moreover, this 2012 inquiry set the groundwork for the precision of the Trump attacks. As the report indicated:

Chinese telecommunications companies provide an opportunity for the Chinese government to tamper with the United States telecommunications supply chain. That said, understanding the level and means of state influence and control of economic entities in China remains difficult. As Chinese analysts explain, state control or influence of purportedly private-sector entities in China

is neither clear nor disclosed (2012, 11).

The die was cast during the Obama Administration for Trump to turn the screws and for alarmist “hawks” seeking to characterize Chinese firms in the US as threats to national security. In fact, the report details claims about connections between Huawei and ZTE and the CCP, while raising questions about oversight, ownership structures, ethics, and Chinese state entities. The questions and complaints from the committee showed how Chinese firms formally connect with the Chinese Government in a system that is unlike the civil society approach of Western culture, where economic activity operates as somewhat autonomous and private (despite Government contracts), rather than dependent and public. The Chinese method extends Sinicizing Marxism and is the basis of the critique from the US Government has been characterized by US neo-liberal protagonists as Chinese mercantilism, where instead of free markets:

... it is about maximizing long-term producer welfare and achieving autarky. And it's a particular kind of producer welfare where the owner of the factors of production is the Chinese Communist Party. As such, the focus on producer welfare is tied not just to a particular theory of economic growth but to direct self-interest of the Chinese government and officials in it (Atkinson 2012: 7).

The contrast in styles translates into reporting about the Chinese Government that essentially presents negative connotations about the CCP through linguistic framing in which communism (and socialism) is reiterated in the socially constructed meaning of unacceptable, evil, and unworthy of rational consideration in the US or by liberal democracies.

Deep criticism of China was circulating well before Trump came to power, although it was Trump's application of America First settler colonial originalism through applied personal belligerence that translated into policy action. Birtherism - white native-born - was “the foundation of Donald Trump's presidency,” in which “the negation” of the Presidency of Barack Obama extended to establish Trump's “entire political existence... on the fact of a black president” (Coates 2017). While applicable, this racist dialectic fails to adequately expand on the systemic whiteness of US elites and their history of “cruel exploitation” through slavery, expropriation of land from indigenous peoples and persistent warfare (Horne 2020, 211). The affect of racist domination by whiteness was the foundation for his action before his term in office began, then refined with demands for Made in America, by his administration.

Trump personified the break to decoupling from China, informed and legitimized by the federal bureaucracy. This bureaucracy was dedicated to “disrupting and deterring the wide range of national security threats posed by the policies and practices of the People's Republic of China (PRC) government,” according to *The China Initiative*, a program that refined and broadened the opposition to Huawei and ZTA in 2012 (2019: np). The 2018 *China Initiative* became the foundation for opposition to China. It was regularly updated as a Trump era anti-China effort that engaged in litigation by a variety of Trump-appointed District Attorney's on US academics engaged in research with collaborators in China. By 2022, it was publicly discredited as a “xenophobic threat” to the US economy and US ideals, although the tenets of its arguments remained, albeit updated (Tang and Walsh). In February 2022, it was abandoned after complaints that included the following observation from *The New York Times*:

The move comes a year after civil rights proponents, business groups, and universities first raised concerns to the Biden administration that the program had chilled scientific research and contributed to a rising tide of anti-Asian sentiment (Benner 2022).

Any thought that this move away from anti-China securitization indicated a change in US orientation was deconstructed by the disturbing claim made by the journalist reporting the closure of the China Initiative: “But the end of the initiative does not mean that Beijing is no longer a significant national security threat.” Accordingly, “national security cases related to China (were folded) back into the overall mission of the national security division” of the Justice Department (Benner 2022). The move meant that Chinese media and technologies would be less open to public scrutiny as they disappeared into the bureaucratic miasma of Washington D.C. There, they could be massaged to maximize emotional anxiety, according to the priorities of the race-based national security ideology that Trump had gestated against China.

TikTok as National Security with Executive Orders

TikTok became China. Or, TikTok-as-China became the target of opposition to China through the mish-mash of actions beginning with policy-through-press-release, an approach initiated by the uber-anti-Communist, Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, a conservative with impeccable conservative Republican Party anti-communist credentials due to his family’s Cuban refugee status. The TikTok opposition was consolidated when Rubio noted in October 2019: “There continues to be ample and growing evidence that TikTok’s platform for Western markets, including those in the United States, is censoring content that is not in line with the Chinese Government and Communist Party directives” (Pham 2019). The headline to this claim expressed the kind of national security hysteria-inducing emotions that are foundational to the conservative anti-Communist, anti-Castro community in Florida: “TikTok could threaten national security, US lawmakers say” (Pham 2019). To add fuel to the fire, on October 24, 2019, Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer and Republican Senator Tom Cotton released a letter to Joseph Maguire, the Acting Director of National Intelligence in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence: “We write to express our concerns about TikTok, a short-form video application, and the national security risks posed by its growing use in the United States” (Cotton 2019). The political bipartisanship much lauded by the US political elites was getting an airing after years of Trump and the Republican Party refusing to collaborate with the Democratic Party, proving that matters of national security are easily transferred across the political parties. When it came to the difference between liberals and conservatives, security was the unifying topic. Even when freighted with the Orientalism that Trump embodied, the US had to be defended against TikTok.²

Four months later and with the cast set, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, speaking at a conference in Munich on February 16, 2020, segued from criticism of Chinese adjustments of its international borders to technology: “And let’s talk for a second about the other realm, cybersecurity. Huawei and other Chinese state-backed tech companies are *Trojan horses for Chinese intelligence*” (Macias 2020: np). Pompeo was using a linguistic method in which deference to the military and national security constructs the language through fear of the other. This rhetorical tactic begins with an image in which liberalism or openness to the other admits a threat at the top of the slippery slope of impending American misery. The negation of the Trojan horse riding “other” is made through the semiotic appeal to popular images of warfare in the conservative imagination, having been consistently reinforced by generations of media propaganda, then consolidated through leisure

activities such as online games that feature militarism as a Western “good.” Unsurprisingly, TikTok offered another vehicle for the US to press its case against China.

By July 6, 2020, Pompeo was on the record saying that the US Government was “certainly looking at” banning Chinese social media apps, including TikTok, adding the accusation that TikTok shared information with the Chinese government (Singh and Kalia, 2020: np). As noted above, public ignorance of China allows for a type of Orientalism that characterizes “others” as enemies, allowing any statement encoded with Orientalist meaning to be constructed negatively. This technique is refined in military training and was of concern for Kennan, who recommended education to avoid a hot war. As a broadly applied method of dehumanization, it is in use against Russia, called into operation as it has been against enemies since time immemorial.³ Add to this the long-standing anti-communist or anti-left rhetoric within policy making in the US mirrored by the media, and the pieces fell into place, such as the following report from Reuters.

US lawmakers have raised national security concerns over TikTok’s handling of user data, saying they were worried about Chinese laws requiring domestic companies “to support and cooperate with intelligence work controlled by the Chinese Communist Party” (Singh and Kalia 2020).

This comment reinforced the negative view of the CCP, establishing in the media the nexus between Chinese technology and Communism. The point was further reinforced by Pompeo, who repeated it:

“Only if you want your private information in the hands of the Chinese Communist Party,” Pompeo remarked when asked if he would recommend people to download TikTok. (Singh and Kahlia 2020).

The next iteration of this approach was Fox News, a trusted outlet for the Trump Administration and the most persistent trigger for Trump supporters in the Republican Party’s effort to construct the US as an illiberal, white supremacist country. Indeed, television provided the central imaginary for Trump, who was knowledgeable about the influence of TV from his years as the host of *The Apprentice* reality TV show on NBC from 2004-2017. His use of Twitter extended the emotional range of connectivity to his supporters, generating a cult of irrationality, one based on emotion. As a cable news provider, Fox News also constructed the visual code for Trumpism that resonated with his emotional manipulation of Republicans.

In fact, Fox News played a significant role during Trump’s administration and was the unofficial media outlet for the Trump Presidency. As a relative latecomer to broadcast and cable news and information services, and after its launch on October 17, 1996, the Fox News currency was emotion: “fear... the anger, the bombast, the virulent paranoid streak, the unending appeals to white resentment” (Dickinson 2011). The station reported that it “finished 2020 as the most-watched basic cable network for the fifth straight year” (Flood 2020). With three million viewers each night watching Sean Hannity, the numbers suggest the station and its supporters in the conservative movement deployed itself like a complex publicity apparatus to influence public opinion through secondary reporting in the media ecosystem - primarily Twitter - more than reporting the news itself. Described as the prime mover for “peak cable news” because of the number of viewers watching all cable news channels in the US during the Trump years, Fox News offered Pompeo space to question the Chinese and TikTok on the Laura Ingraham Show, concentrating the public imagination on the politics of anti-communism (Pompeo 2021). His point was summarized in the headline on Fox

News: “Pompeo warns of potential restriction of Chinese TikTok app; US users may be ceding info to ‘Chinese Communists’” (Creitz 2020).

Keeping the emotional energy within the spectrum of irrationality, was straightforward politics for Trump, the television reality star. His knowledge of and capacity to generate emotional cues were formed through a career in branding and marketing, making him a valuable vehicle for irrationality, given that it is irrationality that advertising and marketing relies on to sustain consumerism. In a contradictory sense, professionally written policy statements like those delivered in Executive Orders, are examples of texts that are “performed” within the irrationality of the televisual, as the documents are signed with televisual urgency, creating breathless coverage on Fox News and mainstream television. The urgency of the coverage molds public affect. By filling the Executive Orders about TikTok with the specter of communism and national security, the energy of irrationality magnified the threats they posed. For example, the apparent urgency of the matter was codified on August 6, 2020, when Trump invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, along with the National Emergencies Act, signing the Executive Order: *Addressing the Threat Posed by TikTok, and Taking Additional Steps To Address the National Emergency With Respect to the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply Chain*. The “threat” and its affective baggage, whether true or not, was clearly defined:

TikTok automatically captures vast swaths of information from its users, including internet and other network activity information such as location data and browsing and search histories. This data collection threatens to allow the Chinese Communist Party access to Americans’ personal and proprietary information—potentially allowing China to track the locations of Federal employees and contractors, build dossiers of personal information for blackmail, and conduct corporate espionage (EO2020, 48637).

Assertions were also made about Chinese “censorship” and “disinformation campaigns” about Hong Kong protests, China’s treatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. Having established in the Executive Order the overpowering need to ban TikTok, the appeal returned to the old saw of security, the core of US domestic thinking that rests on the sentimental public imaginary of protecting nativist heroics: “The United States must take aggressive action against the owners of TikTok to protect our national security” (EO 13942 2020, 48637). Ofcourse, the negative characterization of TikTok did not stop there.

Executive Order 13942 added financial transactions, prohibiting in 45 days after August 6: “any transaction by any person, or with respect to any property, subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, with Bytedance Ltd” the majority shareholder of TikTok (EO 13942 2020, 48638).

Having worked through the emotional logic of the “emergency” threat posed by TikTok as a social media platform, the remaining effort in achieving the subjugation of TikTok to US interests was relatively simple: attack its business and finance arrangements. While the US public could be relied on to go into hysteria through negative othering of China and Communists, business and finance opposition had to be constructed along economic nationalist lines. In so doing, Bytedance was introduced as a morally bad entity in the US business environment. Simplistically, Bytedance’s Chinese ownership of TikTok made the business possible and needed to be opposed because it was not a US-based business operation. Somewhat later, Trump acknowledged that TikTok could continue to operate in the US if it were owned by US investors, making capital accumulation and platform control acceptable if it were not Chinese.

Criticizing Chinese ownership was superficially racist, while from the Trump perspective, it was presented within the nationalistic framework of global technological domination. These positions derived from and confirmed the hegemony that the US had enjoyed as the overlord of the global internet until the Chinese appeared to offer effective networking technologies of their own, evidenced through TikTok. More important in constructing these arguments, was an agenda that connected US ownership with national security. Chinese ownership meant that computer server hardware was physically located in China or in territories not allowing US access. Conversely, US ownership of Bytedance would give the US Government the power, drawing on Homeland Security laws, to observe exactly what it accused China of doing – surveillance of TikTok users. The inversion of the power of US surveillance of its citizens by the Chinese-owned TikTok had to be corrected.

The corrective capacity was available through the application of Homeland Security law. This law operates as an ideology, whereby after the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001, it mobilized a totalizing rearrangement in US Government surveillance power and came into operation through George W. Bush, followed by President Barack Obama. This is clear from Wikileaks document releases as well as Edward Snowden's whistleblowing action revealed in his memoir *Permanent Record* (2019). Snowden identified how the US Intelligence Community (IC) globally surveilled internet users through a series of interconnected efforts utilizing tools such as STELLARWIND and PRISM, put to comprehensive effect by the National Security Agency and its UK equivalent GCHQ (Gelman and Poitras, 2013). Taking legal liberties with techniques that identified "foreign targets whose communications cross US infrastructure," Trump magnified the Homeland Security method with the proposed ban on TikTok (Gelman 2013). The "method" was a comprehensive US surveillance system, as long as access to the data and software could be guaranteed. This meant that the data needed to be located in the US or its "partner" territories, such as that of the "Five Eyes" partners, the US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, whose national sovereignty is questionable when considered through the lens of US surveillance and securitization. In fact, "the myth of sovereignty" for US partners has been identified as a significant aspect of the relationship between the US and its foreign partners, such as the Five Eyes ones, and became obvious as pressure built on TikTok and as more was learned about legal protocols, or the absence of them in Homeland Security law and practice (Patience 2023).

Meanwhile, US data firms were an open book: "Collection directly from the servers of these US Service Providers: Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Facebook, PalTalk, AOL, Skype, YouTube, Apple" (Gellman and Poitras 2013). Before TikTok, the US Government's assumption had been that its global domination of networked technology would be secure, notwithstanding the Great Firewall of China. In fact, such was the Homeland Security ideology, that the US Government established a suspicion system, "The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA) of 2004 and the 2007 National Strategy for Information Sharing Suspicious Activity Reporting or SAR ... to establish locally controlled distributed information systems wherein potential terrorism-related information could be contributed by the 18,000 state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) law enforcement agencies for analysis to determine whether there are emerging patterns or trends" (Nationwide SAR Initiative). An extension of the Suspicious Activity Reporting effort was the US Government's directive: "Ten Way to Integrate suspicious Activity Reporting into your Agencies operations," which inverted open society values of liberal democracy with values that closed down human relations as a site of trust, support and solidarity (NSI Initiative). Simultaneously, SAR reinforced antagonism to China or anything foreign or othered, as a threat. This was not an isolated case. Rather, it was an expression of the culture of national security. The National Threat Evaluation and Reporting (NTER) Office extended the national security focus with emotional ties, reinforced by questions about foreign social media

platforms, thereby establishing TikTok within a frame that focused on the contradictions, inverting its role from a social media platform to a national security challenge (NSI Initiative).

Furthermore, citizens from nine Islamic states were banned by Trump on January 27, 2017, by Executive Order 13769, *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States from traveling to the USA*, commonly referred to as “The Moslem Ban.” Outrage and appeals followed, but The US Supreme Court upheld the selective ban on Muslims, with Chief Justice Roberts writing in support of the ban, noting that President Trump had, “ample statutory authority to make national security judgments in the realm of immigration” thereby reinforcing in the public mind the nationalist security project that was underway in the virtual world and in the proposed ban of TikTok (Liptak and Shear 2017).

The repetition in the language around the bans moved in the echo chamber of Fox News, Twitter, and the national media ecosystem, to become codified US political rhetoric. Negative emotional associations parlayed an Orientalist view of China and the Chinese with Communist access to US platforms and was reiterated in the threatening language of national security due to unknown associations of TikTok’s parent company Bytedance with the Chinese Government. Being Chinese was enough to invoke communism, which was red meat to conservative hawks like Pompeo, who readily prompted Trump with urgent Executive Orders.

Furthermore, the rhetoric became an explicit layer of national public policy-making with a financial angle. It was used in defense of the US digital industry, especially the social media platform Facebook. As an expression of national industry policy, the mention of Facebook appeared to catch Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg off guard. Silicon Valley reporters, putting their American supremacist ducks in a row noted that, “Zuckerberg misunderstands the huge threat of TikTok” while “failing to win one of the social feeds (short form video) his business depends on” (Constine 2019).

Financially, concerns expressed by US market commentators highlighted the impact on Facebook valuations if TikTok captured a larger user base in the US. If TikTok continued to grow beyond 100 million US users by August 2020, the profit calculations of Wall Street looked poor (Douyin 2021; businessofapps 2021). As an expression of emotion and affect, anxious financial reporting contributed to the public construction of irrational emotions that further inflamed anti-Chinese hysteria.

By January 2021, metrics used in evaluating social media platforms and their stock value illustrated how market valuations of Chinese companies in the US became an additional motivation for Senator Rubio, Secretary of State Pompeo, and President Trump in 2020 to launch the anti-TikTok campaign. *In Time Spent per User*, an evaluation and measurement tool for Wall Street analysis, time on TikTok was up 325% year-over-year, outperforming Facebook for hours spent per user per month:

TikTok is in a league of its own when it comes to revenue, ranking as the #2 non-gaming app in terms of consumer spending. While many social media apps monetize through ads, TikTok monetizes through ads and allows users to purchase digital goods (Southern 2021: np).

Given this, the Government’s action against TikTok also expressed national economic anxieties. More importantly, TikTok’s identity as an emergent economic powerhouse provoked expressions of nationalistic finance fetishism that challenged Silicon Valley innovators and Wall Street investors. This reading reinforces an appreciation of US digital technology as fundamental to the US economy, incorporating social, economic finance, and cultural power: a triple play, as it were. Until the

emergence of TikTok, US firms like Facebook and Google had unrestricted dominance in the US and globally – with the exception of China. In effect, the US technology that always wins is central to the US colonial mind, as David Noble showed in *America by Design*, colonizing US citizens and foreigners alike, “to inescapably reflect the contours of that particular social order which has produced and sustained it” (1977: xxii). Moreover, this ideology was refined by neoliberalism, whose original rationale included opening global markets for US products, ideation, and culture. In such a context, any innovative foreign entity outperforming US social media platforms and technologies became a target for crushing, in the spirit of US capitalism.

In order to achieve a competitive advantage in neoliberalism, the US needed allies, as the Five Eyes Alliance mentioned earlier illustrates. At the geo-political level, as the US mobilized its power as hegemon, the Trump Administration opened wide the door to long-term containment of China by drawing in traditional allies, such as historical Euro-centric white allies like Australia, New Zealand and the UK, to states with elements of ethno-nationalism like Hungary, Israel, and India. Consequently, the proposed US ban on TikTok did not stand alone. The most obsequious enactments of US power came from one member of the latter group as part of the US project to push back against China and TikTok when the Indian Government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi banned TikTok on June 29, 2020, along with 223 other Chinese apps. India’s Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology argued that the app was “prejudicial to sovereignty and integrity of India, defense of India, security of state and public order” (Smith 2021: np). The geopolitics of the bans had the appearance of an organized move against Chinese communication technologies in general, not only TikTok. It was a move that mirrored activities Kennan had proposed in 1947’s containment strategy:

(4) We must formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see that we have put forward in the past. It is not enough to urge people to develop political processes similar to our own. Many foreign peoples, in Europe at least, are tired and frightened by experiences of past, and are less interested in abstract freedom than in security. They are seeking guidance rather than responsibilities. We should be better able than Russians to give them this. And unless we do, Russians certainly will. (Kennan 1947: np).

The digital containment strategy against TikTok and other Chinese technology firms mobilized during the Trump years is clear in this statement if the references to Russia are replaced with China.

Not a TikTok Conclusion

The moves during the Trump Presidency against TikTok can be summarized as taking place at several interconnected sites through the use of US Government policies that drew on variations of anti-communist containment strategies hatched in 1947. There were inevitable differences because China is not the USSR. The primary difference being that China and the US were integrated in trade, but not in the flow of digital data. If TikTok had been owned by US firms, it would have been open to backdoor scrutiny by US Government surveillance techniques, and the opposition to TikTok as a successful social media app would have been moot. Such an approach was not possible. Running in tandem with the absence of unlimited scrutiny of the Chinese social media platform, the foundational ideas presented by Trump and his administration in the US media were grounded

in anti-Chinese Orientalism that was reconfigured within the long-standing ideological agenda of anti-communism. To Rubio, Pompeo, Trump, and American supremacists, the fact that TikTok was succeeding and appealing to more Americans than US social media apps, collided with US economic conceits about the superiority of its technology and financial domination within the global model of open market liberalism. And while the Trump Administration's campaign against TikTok consolidated the suppression of Chinese communication technologies generally, public ignorance about China enabled the US Government's opposition to fit into the established playbook of containment, inverting and negating TikTok as a social media platform with rhetoric and public policies. Meanwhile, as the proposed anti-TikTok bans went forward, the continued use of digital technologies for surveillance illuminated by Wikileaks, Snowden, and others, added to the further inversion of the open society theory of liberal democracy.

The political agenda was clear at an ideological register: Trump's TikTok bans dehumanized China and the Chinese in an Orientalist move that insisted on maintaining the US as a global imperial hegemon. Media was used to set the emotional register of public antagonism against TikTok. For its part, the contrast with TikTok inverted public ignorance, generating knowledge about Sinicizing Marxism to suggest the effectiveness of China at utilizing digital technologies within the contradictory CCP model of social and economic development: integrating developmental aspects of their national project within global capitalism. In the US political calculation, knowledge about China and its achievements could not be known or shown as positive, lest it offer a path to socialism as an alternative to the dominant US and Western method of capitalism within increasingly circumscribed liberal democracy. TikTok had to be stopped by the US Government because it expressed in digital form the rise of China. As such, it was a "threat of a good example." To not oppose TikTok would give credit to a player on the world stage whose national development offered a contradictory and complex model of progress within global capitalism.

Endnotes

¹ The 2019 EO was released a few days before Edward Snowden's book *Permanent Record* appeared, a book that detailed the US security agency's universal surveillance of global internet communication. Snowden was not mentioned in the 2019 EO.

² Claims that US Government security is managed in a democratic way, meaning *open to public scrutiny*, is not sustainable, even though the US persists in pointing the finger at China and many other nations about communication security. For example, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISA) has not made fully public its assessments of national security matters for many years. The ACLU argued persistently into 2021 that secrecy about surveillance of US digital communication was unconstitutional, with transparency advocates noting that "many of the surveillance court's opinions remain secret, and the *USA. Freedom Act* does not ensure that the court's future opinions will see the light of day." David D. Cole, Jameel Jaffer, and Theodore B. Olson offered a *Guest Essay* in the Op-Ed pages in the *New York Times*.

³ Russian critic Andrei Liakov offered these examples of dehumanization against Russians: "Other Western commentators have also dehumanized the people of eastern Ukraine. Further, this dehumanization has seeped into a general dehumanization of all things Russian. From the start of the crisis in Ukraine, the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement was presented to Western readers as a "civilization choice" for Ukrainians between a "civilized Europe" and a "barbaric, Asiatic Russia." During the Euromaidan protests in December 2013, Sweden's former Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, the co-architect of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) program, tweeted that the growing conflict between the protesters and police symbolized "Eurasia versus Europe in [the] streets of Kiev." Even more extreme, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili declared Moscow to be the "new Tatar-Mongol yoke." Courtesy of an email from -----, May 30, 2021, to the No Cold War members of Massachusetts Peace Action Nuclear Disarmament.

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