

# précis

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facultyfeature

## Global policy advice for President Biden

Essays by scholars affiliated with the MIT Center for International Studies (CIS)



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In this issue of précis, we continue to explore many of the global challenges facing the Biden administration. Scholars affiliated with the Center offer their advice to the US president on a range of policy issues, including arms control, cybersecurity, financial recovery, human displacement, and how to approach Iran and Russia.

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Mahsa Rouhi, Research Fellow and Professor, National Defense University; and Research Affiliate, CIS

Biden meeting with Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg in the Oval Office, June 7, 2021

Photo courtesy Adam Schultz

## Approaching Iran

**Mahsa Rouhi**

*The analysis and conclusions presented by Rouhi are based on her individual research and do not necessarily represent the policies or perspectives of the National Defense University, the US Department of Defense, or the US Government.*

President Biden made returning to the Iran nuclear deal a foreign policy objective for his administration. Following an initial stalemate over which side would move first, negotiations in Vienna began in May 2021, albeit without direct American participation, focusing on returning the US and Iran to compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It became clear from the onset that there are fundamental challenges facing the negotiations ranging from scope of sanctions relief to domestic political constraints posed by Iran's election. The election of Ebrahim Raisi, a hardline political figure with a nefarious human rights record, poses a major challenge to the future of nuclear negotiations. The talks are already stalled, and this may prove to be yet another missed opportunity in the history of US-Iran relations.

Raisi and his support base will likely assume a more transactional and compartmentalized approach in dealings with the US. The ideological underpinning of Iran's hardline factions is centered around resistance to the US hegemony and deep mistrust of Washington. Their worldview is geared toward challenging US dominance and moving the international order towards multipolarity. Thus, Iran will likely continue to push back at the US through regional non-state actor partners that challenge US interests and presence in the Middle East.

What should President Biden expect from Tehran in this bid to re-instate the JCPOA? Over the past several years, Iran has been walking a fine line in taking escalatory measures, while refraining from crossing lines that could provoke a war. The Biden administration should expect a continuation of this approach. Under Raisi, it is likely that Tehran will test boundaries even further on the nuclear program, missile program, and regional issues under the assumption that the US is reluctant to start a war. Hardliners may be interested in building leverage/capabilities to secure best possible terms for sanctions relief as well as seizing the opportunity to strengthen the Quds forces as well as Iran's regional strategic network.

Tehran's main interests will be in deals that can offer sanctions relief. It will be less interested in more comprehensive security agreements. Even if there is an agreement on a roadmap to revive the JCPOA, the US should expect that Iran will push boundaries on compliance. Iran also is unlikely to meaningfully engage in "follow-on talks" about other areas of contention such as missiles and regional stability issues. In response, the US should also adopt the more transactional approach while forcefully responding to Iran's regional provocations like it has been doing in Iraq and Syria. The top priority for the Biden administration policy should be restricting Iran's nuclear program. From there, the US could support initiatives led by regional states on a range of issues related to Afghanistan, Yemen, and Iraq.



Noora Lori, Assistant Professor of International Relations, Boston University; and Steering Group Member, Inter-University Committee on International Migration, CIS

### Global human displacement crisis

Noora Lori

Human displacement is growing exponentially, and the current structure of the international human rights framework is woefully inadequate for responding to current displacement levels, let alone future projections.

Existing international and domestic laws are designed to protect refugees on an individualized basis, but human displacement is increasingly driven by a range of structural forces (eg, conflict, climate change, and income inequality) that force people to move, even if they have not been individually persecuted. This means that a large proportion of displaced persons (including internally displaced persons) do not necessarily meet the statutory definition of a “refugee” as someone who is fleeing persecution “for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” And the vast majority of people who might meet this definition are unable to attain asylum because “there are very few ‘humanitarian corridors’ providing a legal way for refugees to travel to a safe country and ask for asylum.” For 99% of refugees, one of the only ways of accessing asylum is to engage human traffickers and undertake increasingly dangerous journeys as “illegal” migrants.

Moreover, the countries that have some of the most robust refugee protections—like the United States—have also been at the forefront of erecting extraterritorial or “remote” border controls that are designed to interdict migrants before they can reach the territorial threshold of the state to be screened for asylum. While this migrant interdiction policy began under the Reagan administration, it has become an entrenched practice of the United States across administrations, and has also diffused to European states and Australia over the past four decades. This has created a “Catch-22” for refugees as “rich democracies are essentially telling them, ‘We will not kick you out if you come here. But we will not let you come here.’” Paradoxically, while states increasingly associate migrants with “security threats,” the current migration management approach directly pushes migrants into the hands of human smugglers. In other words, “the hardening of the border through new security practices is the source of the violence, not a response to it.”

When faced with this current and future crisis, what should the Biden Administration do? I offer four policy recommendations:

1) *The US and other advanced liberal democracies increasingly outsource migration enforcement to other states or non-state actors to deter migrants by pushing them out of their own territories or detaining them in offshore sites without due processes. Instead of focusing on cooperative deterrence, the US should increase inter-state cooperation on providing refugees with remote asylum-screenings and durable resettlement solutions.*

2) *The US should move the humanitarian protection mandate of the state alongside its security arms; extra-territorial border enforcement should also include extra-territorial asylum screening.*

3) The US should de-privatize migrant detention (privatization is more costly from both the monetary and human cost perspectives), and private actors are not held to the same public oversight and accountability standards as public institutions in democracies.

4) Finally, it is time for the international community to grant Palestinian refugees the same protections as other refugees around the globe. In the short term, the Biden administration has already pledged to restore funding to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is a step in the right direction. But in the long term UNRWA needs to be brought into the fold of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the international community should take concrete steps to close the major protection gap that has emerged in this protracted refugee situation.



Joel Brenner, Senior Research Fellow, CIS

## Cybersecurity threats

Joel Brenner

The president has issued a detailed executive order addressing weaknesses in federal networks and has appointed excellent cyber leaders in the White House and the Department of Homeland Security. The proof will be in the follow-through. The order's requirements should be rigorously overseen, with meaningful consequences for non-compliance.

The Pentagon, spooked by vulnerabilities in our grid, wants major military bases to generate their own power. The Defense Department's inspector general should find out if it's happening. Transportation Command, which is the military's logistical lynchpin but whose networks are famously vulnerable, should be stress tested. Weapons systems are also vulnerable. In a war with the Russians or Chinese, many of them will be penetrated and some won't work. Procurement requirements for cybersecurity should be toughened up—and enforced. This is another potential focus for the Department of Defense (DoD) Inspector General (IG).

The hardest challenges involve the private sector, especially privately owned critical infrastructure, where the state of defenses and resilience varies widely. Here the president lacks directive power. My top recommendations are:

- 1) Create stringent stress tests for the electric grid, as we do for banks, including simulated cross-sectoral disasters. Grid operators should not be allowed to constrain the parameters of these tests, which should include cold starts. Major insurance carriers should be consulted on simulation design.
- 2) Create statutory liability for selling hardware and software with known vulnerabilities. This is the only area of our economy where you can knowingly sell defective goods without penalty.
- 3) Permit Cyber Command to attack the network infrastructure of foreign parties that plan and direct disruptive attacks on our economy.

4) Harden critical supply chains, including code verification.

5) Sharply increase investment in the security of critical sectors and in cybersecurity R&D.

6) The focus on government information sharing with private firms is misguided. Real-time sectoral sharing among major firms is more important and gets too little attention. The president should twist arms to get this done.

7) Adopt the Cybersecurity Solarium Commission's recommendation to create a cybersecurity certification and labeling authority.

8) Be more aggressive taking down botnets.

9) Do not certify or subsidize educational coding curriculums that do not include a rigorous requirement for secure coding.

Ubiquitous connectivity and massively aggregated data have enabled huge efficiencies while introducing vulnerabilities whose costs are finally becoming obvious. Talk is cheap. These steps are overdue.



David Singer, Raphael Dorman-Helen  
Starbuck Professor of Political Science, MIT

### Financial recovery

**David Singer**

We are in the midst of a period of sustained low interest rates, and this creates opportunities that should be exploited and risks that should be monitored. Some of the opportunities are obvious: increasing spending on infrastructure, including roads and bridges, the power grid and renewable energy, and internet—all of which are areas that will yield a high rate of return and place the country on firmer footing for future economic growth. Perhaps less obvious—but critically important—is that low interest rates provide an opportunity for investments in children and support for poor families. In the short term, such investments will ensure that the labor market recovery extends to the bottom of the income distribution; in the long term, the expansion of the middle class will boost spending and sustain future growth. As to risks, low interest rates create the potential for financial instability as investors search for riskier assets, banks' margins are squeezed, and asset prices rise. The ample regulatory agencies of the US financial system, including the Comptroller of the Currency, Federal Reserve, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and the Financial Stability Oversight Council, should remain attentive to these risks and assess the adequacy of prudential regulations in the coming years.



Carol Saivetz, Senior Advisor, MIT Security Studies Program

## Approaching Russia

**Carol Saivetz**

When US President Joe Biden invited Russian President Vladimir Putin to a summit in Geneva, there were many who felt that Biden gave away what Putin wanted most—international recognition of Russia as a coequal of the US—without getting anything in return. Others argued that Biden’s trip was well orchestrated and that (re)establishing predictability in the bilateral relationship after four years of the Trump Administration was worth the ostensible cost. Biden’s goal was two-fold: to initiate what he called the Strategic Stability Dialogue and to make clear US national interests. Going forward, the question is how effective Biden’s two-pronged approach will be.

Since the Geneva meeting, Russian hackers perpetrated a major ransomware attack that paralyzed companies around the world. (For Putin, cyber activity, especially as implemented by erstwhile criminal gangs, allows the Russian president plausible deniability.) Simultaneously, Putin signed a new national security strategy that describes much darker ideological and cultural divides between Russia and the West. The document threatens “symmetric and asymmetric measures” in response to “unfriendly actions” to disrupt Russia’s sway among the post-Soviet states and within Russia itself.

Putin’s goals are clear: To restore Russia’s superpower status, and to stay in power and suppress any manifestations of “people power.” Some would add to the list mitigating the economic damage from US and European sanctions. In pursuit of these goals, Putin and his entourage will utilize cyber and other methods of interference in the politics of their adversaries to chip away at Western power.

So what should the Biden Administration do now? Following the latest ransomware attack, Biden held a one-hour conversation with Putin. When asked about the call, Biden said: “I made it very clear to him that the United States expects, when a ransomware operation is coming from his soil even though it’s not sponsored by the state, we expect them to act if we give them enough information to act on who that is.”

On July 13, 2021, REvil, the group blamed for the latest cyber attack, went dark; but, we don’t know why. Should it or others regroup and reappear, the US should retaliate. Putin already knows that the US has penetrated many of Russia’s systems and we should make it clear that we will use the access we already have.

And we can use sanctions more effectively. New refined and narrowly targeted sanctions can be directed against Russian oil exports and/or further limiting Russia’s links to international financial institutions. Even if cyber attacks emanating from Russia continue, the US should consider further targeting Putin’s cronies and even Putin, himself—perhaps focused on their assets in the West. For the two-pronged approach to be successful, Biden must take care to calibrate possible retaliation. At the same

time, Biden must use every opportunity to discuss and push forward negotiations on arms control, climate, and Covid, to name a few.

In the final analysis, the goal is to create a bilateral security architecture that facilitates cooperation on common interests and ensures that disagreements do not escalate. Put more bluntly, the Biden Administration must make sure that Putin understands that enough is enough when it comes to cyber and political interference without foreclosing options for cooperation.



Heather Williams, 2020–21 Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow, MIT Security Studies Program

### Arms control, emerging technologies

Heather Williams

Historically, arms control has been a tool for managing the world’s deadliest weapons. But how can arms control manage weapons that cannot be counted, such as offensive cyber capabilities, or dual-use technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI)? These questions are particularly important as the United States and Russia prepare to meet for Strategic Stability dialogues.

Arms control for emerging technologies will require getting back to first principles—ultimately, arms control is about the prevention of war. Arms control does not always equate to disarmament and may not necessarily entail reductions or eliminations, but rather is avoiding arms races and crisis escalation. Tools for managing emerging technologies, such as AI and cyber, may look very different than they did for nuclear weapons. Three guidelines for exploring future opportunities for arms control of emerging technologies might include:

*Specificity*—because technologies such as AI can have both positive and negative effects on international security, it will be important to identify specific applications that are potentially dangerous. For example, the use of AI in nuclear decision-making could present ethical and strategic challenges. Nuclear possessors might jointly agree to always keep a “human in the loop” in nuclear decision-making.

*Cross-domain*—because of dual-capable systems, such as Russian cruise missiles or hypersonics, future arms control cannot be solely nuclear focused. Instead, it might focus on how non-nuclear systems could increase nuclear risks, such as cyberattacks on nuclear command and control. As such, the United States, Russia, and China might agree to refrain from offensive cyber intrusions into each other’s nuclear command and control.



*Flexibility*—treaties take time and political capital to conclude, but technology is evolving at a rapid pace and US domestic support for arms control might be waning. The United States and Russia, therefore, might conclude less formal agreements that reduce nuclear risks, such as a 21st-century version of the Incidents at Sea Agreement.

As ever, though, prospects for arms control will depend on political rather than technical factors. Russia's legacy of non-compliance and America's repeated withdrawal from existing agreements will be difficult for both sides to ignore. China continues to refuse to engage in strategic arms control dialogues. And, of course, the private sector is an increasingly important actor in many of these technological advances that should be involved at some point. ■

# briefings

## 3 Q: Richard Samuels on Japan's 3.11 triple disaster and its impact 10 years later

Michelle English, CIS



An SH-60F helicopter assigned to the Chargers of Helicopter Antisubmarine Squadron (HS) 14 from Naval Air Facility Atsugi flies over the port of Sendai to deliver more than 1,500 pounds of food to survivors of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. The citizens of Ebina City, Japan, donated the food. Photo courtesy US Navy

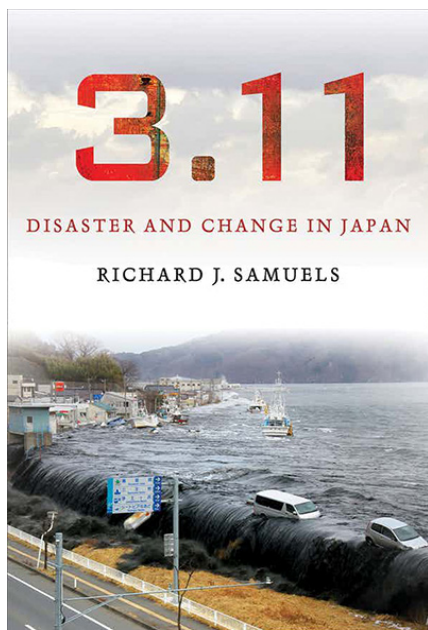
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Within minutes, the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown on March 11, 2011, brought an unprecedented wave of death, displacement, and destruction to Japan. Richard Samuels revisits its impact one decade later.

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Richard Samuels, Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT and director of the Center for International Studies, offered the first broad assessment on Japan's response to the horrific triple disaster in his book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* (2013, Cornell University Press).



Ten years ago, on March 11, 2011, Japan was struck by the most powerful earthquake in its recorded history. Of 9.1 magnitude by many accounts, the earthquake occurred off the Pacific coast of Tohoku and triggered a tsunami and meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant.

Nearly 20,000 Japanese—and most of their worldly possessions—were washed away in a matter of minutes. 340,000 survivors were displaced, and only a fraction ever returned to their homes. For some survivors, this decade passed with the speed of light, while for many others—most, perhaps—time has lumbered along, encumbered by reminders of loss.

Richard Samuels, the Ford International Professor of Political Science at MIT and director of the Center for International Studies, offered the first broad assessment on Japan's response to the horrific triple disaster in his book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* (2013, Cornell University Press). His work explored the impact of 3.11 on policy preferences of Japan's leaders across three key sectors: national security, energy policy, and local governance.

For some reformers, 3.11 was a warning for Japan to overhaul its priorities and political processes. It was a chance to push the nation forward in a new, and better direction. For others, 3.11 was a "black swan"—a once-in-a-millennium event that required no tinkering and certainly no new dramatic changes to business as usual. Still others declared that the catastrophe demonstrated the need to return to an idealized (and more simple) past; Japan needed to recover what had been lost to modernity and globalization.

On March 11, he led a conversation with other scholars, including Miho Mazereeuw, associate professor of architecture and urbanism at MIT and director of MIT's Urban Risk Lab, at a virtual event, 3.11 Ten Years Later: Disaster and Resilience in Japan. Here, Samuels reflects on whether 3.11 was a force of change, or a return to status quo, in Japan's politics and public policy.

**Q: Ten years later, what are some examples that 3.11 impacted Japan's government and society, for good or bad?**

A: In the days and months after the tsunami and the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, the nation and the world closed ranks to support the survivors under the banner "*Gambare Nippon!*" ("Hang Tough, Japan!"). This was a moment of great promise—or at least one of great promises. Politicians vowed that Japan would be reborn, revitalized, rebuilt, and renovated. Many of their promises became hopes. And, sadly, many of these hopes remain unrealized a decade later.

Indeed, a shroud of disappointment covers many communities in northeastern Japan—and across the rest of the archipelago as well. In a survey by the *Asahi Shimbun* in January, nearly two-thirds of the Japanese do not trust the government to ensure the safety of nuclear power generation. And an even greater number disapprove of how the government has handled the Fukushima Daiichi plant in particular. In a Kyodo survey taken in November, only 30 percent of Fukushima Prefecture residents say

# briefings

## 3 Q: Richard Samuels on Japan's 3.11 triple disaster and its impact 10 years later

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"Social science teaches that great and unexpected shocks can stimulate great and unexpected social and political change... But what I found was that even an event as cataclysmic as 3.11 did not change the policy preferences of Japan's leaders."

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reconstruction has been sufficient. "There is nothing left for me to return home to" has become a common, elegiac refrain.

**Q: You warn in your book to look for continuity, and not change, following major catastrophe. How has this played out in Japan?**

A: The facts that support this conclusion have surprised many observers: For example, the same majority of the Japanese public that, when polled, declared its opposition to nuclear power also voted to return the pro-nuclear Liberal Democrats to power in 2012. The same Japanese public that emphatically embraced the alliance with the United States after the US military supplied 20,000 troops and nuclear expertise to come to their rescue continues to oppose plans to reconfigure the footprint of US bases on the Japanese home islands.

Social science teaches that great and unexpected shocks can stimulate great and unexpected social and political change. Catastrophes on a 3.11 scale should "punctuate equilibria," making it impossible for the status quo to be reconstructed and for change to happen. Events such as this, we think, free up paths for new sets of institutions, practices, preferences, and ideas to shape the future. 3.11 was, I thought, a great case to test this long-held idea. But what I found was that even an event as cataclysmic as 3.11 did not change the policy preferences of Japan's leaders.

Perhaps the most striking development in the weeks and months after the devastation was how political entrepreneurs from across the political spectrum used the catastrophe to frame the event to justify, to legitimate, to fortify, and to sell their pre-existing preferences. Those who were anti-nuclear before 3.11 said that Fukushima proved they were right. Those who supported nuclear power insisted that since this destruction was beyond anyone's imagination (*souteigai*) they were not responsible and, besides, they would learn from the accident, making future ones even less likely. Those who were opposed to the rearmament before 3.11 lauded the hard work of the Japanese military in its rescue work, but said that this service was only possible because Japanese soldiers carried shovels, not guns. Those who sought a strong military and who supported the alliance with the United States declared that 3.11 proved the value—and the need to strengthen—both.

That said, there were important changes. In 2012, the Japanese government stood up a new regulatory body that has had surprisingly sharp teeth. By 2013, the agency issued safety standards requiring new plants to prove they would be able to withstand earthquakes, floods, and terrorist attacks. The Japanese military was allowed for the first time to work with local officials and the utilities to develop emergency plans in the event of another Fukushima-like accident. And, while nine nuclear reactors have been approved for restart, only four—a tiny fraction of the 54 that had been producing power before 3.11—are in operation today. The government—a pro-nuclear power government—now aims to have renewables account for 22 to

24 percent of the country's electricity generation, more than the share projected for Japan's nuclear power.

And, in what is the most heartening measure of “non-change,” the Japanese press reports that the Tohoku region, which accounted for nearly 16 percent of Japan's total agricultural output in 2008, achieved a 15 percent share by 2017.

**Q: You wrote your book on 3.11 in record speed following the catastrophe. How were you able to pivot so quickly to this pressing yet unexpected topic and produce, within two years, such compelling work?**

A: For about four years before 3.11, I had been working on a project on how political captivity—kidnappings, POWs, etc—have been used in democratic states by political entrepreneurs to capture foreign policy. For centuries—and without regard for location—political abductions have figured in the construction of national identities and in justifications both for aggression and conciliation. Many ambitious politicians and their support groups have capitalized on captivity to frame and highlight national weakness and the fecklessness of opponents. Others have spun out accounts of heroism to demonstrate national strength and visionary leadership. Either way, the manipulation of the captivity passion for political ends often has been used to mobilize public sympathy to reorient national policies. This work will be the subject of my next book.

In short, work on how politics can be kidnapped intrigued me—and I found myself pivoting to study this in the painful context of 3.11. It was immediately clear that a competition was emerging for control of a national narrative that could be manipulated to shape minds and generate political support. As I saw it, 3.11 would provide a different, but parallel laboratory for investigating how the identification of heroes and villains—and the assignment of credit and blame—matter for democratic politics. ■

précisinterview  
Claude Grunitzky



The image above is "The Great Green Wall" documentary about an African-led movement with an epic ambition to grow an 8,000km natural wonder of the world across the entire width of Africa. The Wall promises to be a compelling solution to the many urgent threats not only facing the African Continent, but the global community as a whole—notably climate change, drought, famine, conflict and migration. Once complete, the Great Green Wall will be the largest living structure on the planet, three times the size of the Great Barrier Reef. The documentary was executive produced by Grunitzky, alongside Fernando Meirelles, the director of "City of God," "The Constant Gardener," and "The Two Popes." The award-winning "The Great Green Wall" premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2019.

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After graduating from MIT as a Sloan Fellow in 2012, Claude Grunitzky founded TRUE Africa as a news and culture website to promote African perspectives about modern Africa. In 2019, Grunitzky launched his next venture—TRUE Africa University (TAU)—which is currently incubated at the MIT Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab (J-WEL).

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Claude Grunitzky is a CIS research affiliate and runs the MIT X True Africa University (TAU) Webinar Series.

**précis: Given your work in media and now education in Africa, what role do you see for new digital platforms planning in Africa? How has the pandemic changed your view?**

**CG:** As a native son of Togo who was raised on the continent, but also raised in France, the UK, and the US, I see the pandemic as changing pretty much everything about Africa, especially in terms of development. Access to phones and smartphones is really influencing the way that young Africans see the world. I'll give three specific examples of areas that could be transformative for Africa's sustainable development.

The first is telemedicine. The pandemic has forced a lot of people with smartphones to look for telemedicine solutions due to the lack of access to proper healthcare. However, inconsistent rules among African countries' regulations make it harder for telemedicine startups to grow and service populations in the way they should. The second change is in financial technology. This is enabling Africans to move away from cash-based economies. Fifty percent of the startup money that's been flowing to Africa consistently over the last five years has been focused on fintech.

The third is education. I founded my African media platform TRUE Africa because I wanted to find a way to champion young African voices and tell African stories as opposed to constantly having Western views of Africa being the dominant narrative of reporting. Through this experience in media, I noticed that education was the missing link. A lot of young Africans that I was engaging with—and that my editors and writers were engaging with through TRUE Africa—did not have the education they needed to fully understand the world and the way it is evolving. That's why I decided to launch TRUE Africa University (TAU). The goal of TAU is to accelerate development in Africa by bringing some of the best tools for learning to the continent. Fortunately Sanjay Sarma, the vice president for Open Learning at MIT, supported this initiative and invited me to incubate it at MIT's Abdul Latif Jameel World Education Lab.

**précis: What do you see as the impact of COVID-19 on African youth more broadly? What is your message to the African youth you work with, especially in the wake of the pandemic?**

**CG:** I am most hopeful about the new tech ecosystems that are emerging all over the continent, because these tech ecosystems are attracting the best and brightest Africans. A lot of these people don't necessarily have the most formal education, but they're identifying African solutions to African problems. There is a disconnect, however, between young Africans and older Africans who are still the ruling class. A lot of African governments are very much living in the past and not pushing for reforms that would position technology at the center of economic development for Africa. This issue of authority dictated by elders has stunted African growth in my opinion. Growing up in Togo, we were taught not to speak if you are young and to listen to the elders. Some countries in Africa are helping to foster environments where tech ecosystems can flourish. Tunisia is a trendsetter in this area. It enacted legislation to push for tax incentives and paid leave for young entrepreneurs to launch startups. Morocco has also made progress and other countries are starting to do that. But it's taking a while, because Africa's reinvention can only come through technology and innovation led by

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"The Africa Rising narrative was just another media slogan created to help attract foreign direct investment to the continent. This is a good thing, but it oversimplifies African issues that are often very, very complex."

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these young entrepreneurs. These are the youth that I write about and am hoping to help educate on the TRUE Africa University platform.

**précis: The "Africa Rising" narrative has been a dominant feature of the current discourse surrounding Africa's trajectory. What trends do you see, particularly in regards to young tech entrepreneurs? What is the pandemic's impact? What do you see as the differences between start-up culture between that in the US or what you saw at MIT?**

**CG:** The Africa Rising narrative was just another media slogan created to help attract foreign direct investment to the continent. This is a good thing, but it oversimplifies African issues that are often very, very complex. If we look at Africa Rising—and look at it systemically across the entire African continent—we realize that there are multiple Africas and most are not rising. On the issue of digital connectivity, for instance, most of that infrastructure is nonexistent across rural areas. In metropolises like Lagos—which in some ways is the economic and cultural capital of Africa—or Nairobi, you'll see high-speed internet that works pretty much like in New York, Boston, Paris, or London. You'll see co-working spaces and tech hubs. That's great, but the people who are responsible for African development—the governments and big corporate leaders who are called African champions and run the largest corporations in Africa—have not pushed for an infrastructure rollout that would benefit the poor. Half of African consumers of the internet don't use the internet to access content that they need in order to be more productive across telemedicine, fintech, or even education tech. The Africa Rising narrative is a victim of politics. The first thing that these governments need to do is provide access to electricity and then, in turn, boost Internet connectivity across rural, urban, and suburban areas in order for ecommerce and digital services to truly grow and enable Africa to reach its potential.

**précis: In the "Great Green Wall" documentary we learned about how climate change drives migration, often leading to disastrous outcomes for African youth. How do you think migration will affect the African youth population you're discussing and how does the education platform fit into this trend?**

**CG:** It was very important for me to produce a film about climate change in Africa. I partnered with the Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles to produce the *Great Green Wall* (GGW), which documents one of the most urgent movements of our times. GGW is an African-led initiative that aims to grow an 8000-kilometer mosaic of trees across the entire width of the African continent. This will transform the lives of millions of Africans living in despair, because it's going to provide food security and new jobs for people who often migrate illegally to southern Europe. GGW will help prevent desertification across that entire Sahel region, from Senegal all the way to Djibouti. So it's going to help with biodiversity and a lot of the direct effects of climate change. Lastly, it is going to give hope to Africans who will take pride in having created their own solution as opposed to always expecting that Europeans, Americans, and Chinese are going to come and save us. The colonial mentality is still very present with a lot of leaders that are in place in Africa right now. GGW is a grassroots African-led movement that is led by the African Union. It's going to give a new sense of pride to young Africans and en-



gender more awareness of climate change issues. A lot of the young Africans think that climate change is a white man's concept and really something that only affects Europe and developed countries. They don't realize the devastating effects that it's having on the African continent. To help address this issue, I launched an introductory course that started on July 19 and lasted for six weeks so that 55 young Africans can learn about the African perspective on climate change. Through a call for nominations, we were able to identify students, handpicked from 20 countries in Africa. We had applicants from 33 of the 54 African countries! The course focused on various expert perspectives on how climate change is affecting African people. We're going to look at the policies and possible solutions that will help to protect communities all over the African continent, not just along the Great Green Wall, but also in other parts of Africa. With Africa's population growing so fast, this is a really important issue and I want TRUE Africa University to be at the forefront of reporting on it and helping students work on project-based assignments around climate solutions such as the Great Green Wall.

**précis: Closer to home, you've been leading the MIT x TAU webinar series, which was hosted by CIS and its MIT Africa Program. How has the series been going? What are your main takeaways from the experience?**

**CG:** I really loved the 11-week series that we produced from March to May, because the audience and the participants responded well to these live webinars. We made it very conversational, but we also wanted to make it educational and first and foremost relevant to Africans on the continent. I think the reason it was successful—and one of the reasons we're going to start a second season in September 2021—is because of the diversity of speakers that we were able to feature. Our interviewees ranged from academics like Jeffrey Sachs and Evan Lieberman, to entrepreneurs like Iyino-luwa Aboyeji, and creative economy leaders like the writer Taiye Selasi. We also had venture capitalists like Maya Horgan Famodu, who has a Nigerian father and a white American mother from Minneapolis. She moved to Lagos in her early 20s to launch a VC firm to fund these new tech startups. We offered a balance of views from the African diaspora and the African continent and were able to address some of the key issues facing Africa from a sustainable development perspective.

**précis: George Floyd's murder and the recently heightened awareness around racial inequality have been dominating the US news. Have you been engaging in the issue on your platform and from the perspective of the African diaspora?**

**CG:** It's a major issue. On the TRUE Africa media platform ([trueafrica.co](http://trueafrica.co)), we did a lot of reporting on the Black Lives Matter movement pre and post George Floyd actually. I was one of the first people to write about Black Lives Matter back in 2014 after the events in Ferguson because I met and became friends with Opal Tometi who is one of the three co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement. I've been documenting the cultural shift that they have been pushing for seven years now. Our reporting accelerated after the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 because I felt a lot of the needed change in mentality that is related to the inferiority complex many people associate with black people will come from African American leaders. I've been pushing for a global viewpoint on Black Lives Matter because the most relevant calls for action that come out of the Black Lives Matter movement can and should be adapted

# précisinterview

## Claude Grunitzky

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"...the most relevant calls for action that come out of the Black Lives Matter movement can and should be adapted to the various contexts in Africa, and also the African diaspora in Europe, the Caribbean, and Latin America."

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to the various contexts in Africa, and also the African diaspora in Europe, the Caribbean, and Latin America. I have spent my entire career trying to promote the philosophy of Marcus Garvey, who was a Jamaican-born Black nationalist and leader of the Pan-African movement. His goal is my goal as well. In the early 20th century, he sought to connect and unify people of African descent worldwide. What we are trying to do with media and education is continue along the lineage of Marcus Garvey by uniting Black people around the world. I believe that Black Lives Matter is pretty much at the forefront of that movement of unity, where African Americans can also relate more to Africans from the continent whether they are living in Europe, the Caribbean, or Latin America. I hope that TRUE Africa University will become useful and powerful as a platform of education and expression, because we're bringing Black voices and also non-Black voices to development issues that affect the African continent, and Black people around the world. So this is a project of a lifetime. I've been at it for two decades now, and I intend to continue this work for at least a few more decades.

**précis:** You've spent considerable amount of time at MIT, both as a student and now as a research affiliate. How, in your opinion, have MIT's engagements with Africa evolved since you were a student?

**CG:** That's a great question. I could go on and on but I'll try to answer it concisely. I came to MIT at a really interesting period in my life. I was in my late 30s and had just sold my media company TRACE, which was (and still is) a successful venture that was funded by Goldman Sachs. A lot of my friends thought I was crazy to then come to MIT to become a student again as a successful entrepreneur. But I came to MIT because I wanted to unlearn a lot of the things that I had learned as a media entrepreneur. Most importantly, I wanted to approach digital technologies with a fresh lens. I did a lot of listening when I was at MIT. Before coming to MIT, I was used to being the first and last person speaking as the founder or the chairman and CEO. At MIT, I became just one student amongst many. It taught me humility and the power of discourse through open dialogue centered on new ideas and that MIT desire to solve some of the world's biggest problems. It also helped me to develop my new vision. I had a very clear idea coming into MIT that I wanted to continue in media, but not in traditional media, where I'd honed my skills since I was in my early 20s. I knew I wanted to focus on Africa and development in Africa, but I didn't know how specifically my interests would manifest. At MIT, I met several people who ended up having a huge effect over my career choices, including the decision to launch TRUE Africa University. Sandy Pentland and Joost Bonsen at the MIT Media Lab helped me shape the vision for TRUE Africa. Sanjay Sarma helped by providing opportunities to explore my ideas through the open learning channels that he oversees. John Tirman helped me philosophically shape what I was trying to achieve and provided a platform at CIS to launch the TAU webinars. ■

# briefings

## Human rights journalist Ada Petriczko joins CIS as its Elizabeth Neuffer Fellow



Ada Petriczko, the 2021 Elizabeth Neuffer Fellow at CIS, will explore themes within her past reporting, like the journey of women who have survived acid attacks and the rise of Hindu nationalism in India. She will also report on her home country of Poland, where democratic stability and women's rights are under threat.

Polish journalist Ada Petriczko will be joining CIS as its 2021 Elizabeth Neuffer Fellow. The fellowship is awarded annually by the International Women's Media Foundation and provides its recipient with educational, training and coverage opportunities related to their reporting on global injustice.

Petriczko's fellowship will include work as a research associate at CIS, as well as reporting positions with both the *Boston Globe* and the *New York Times*.

"The Center is thrilled to have Ada Petriczko join our research community this fall. Her work demonstrates a brave and passionate commitment to victims of human rights and social justice abuses, very much in the spirit of Elizabeth Neuffer. My hope is that she will find her time at MIT welcoming and fruitful," said Richard Samuels, director of the Center for International Studies and Ford International Professor of Political Science.

Neuffer, whom Samuels knew personally, died in an automobile accident in 2006 while on assignment in Iraq as a reporter for the *Boston Globe*. In her honor, the Center helped the IWMF establish the Elizabeth Neuffer Fellowship to advance women journalists working in the field of human rights and justice.

Focusing on the ways communities and governments silence women's voices, Petriczko will explore themes within her past reporting, like the journey of women who have survived acid attacks and the rise of Hindu nationalism in India. She will also report on her home country of Poland, where democratic stability and women's rights are under threat.

"I am overjoyed. It is a great honor and an even greater responsibility," said Petriczko. "Like Elizabeth, I see myself as a witness, committed to telling stories that are often obliterated. Who is allowed to speak and who is being silenced determines the shape of our society. I look forward to improving my skills under the mentorship of some of journalism's greatest academics and editors and hope to become a valuable voice in the current events of my country."

Prior to accepting the Neuffer Fellowship, Petriczko worked as a freelance journalist and foreign correspondent in Poland, covering women's rights, social justice, and culture for *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Wysokie Obcasy*, *Vespucci Group*, *Are We Europe*, *Przekrój* and others. Petriczko was also an editor at *NewsMavens*, the first European newsroom run entirely by women, to counter the underrepresentation of female journalists in the media industry. During this time, she led a cross-border reporting series *Witch Hunt*, supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation.

Petriczko has also reported from North India, where she researched *Missing Women*, a non-fiction series and book about the 45 million women missing from the Indian population due to sex selection; the project was supported by the IWMF and will be released by *Agora* and *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Petriczko holds degrees from Goldsmiths College in London, the University of Warsaw, and the Polish School of Reportage. ■

## Fear and a pattern of political killing in Russia

Suzanne Freeman, PhD Student, Department of Political Science



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"Navalny's MediaZona interview presents a Russian regime that is purposefully using fear to intimidate people and recognizes the specific uncertainty and terror around poisoning as tool of political killing. The Kremlin cares greatly about the optics of these murders, which indicates some form of strategy."

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Suzanne Freeman is a PhD student in Security Studies and Comparative Politics, focused on deterrence, civil-military relations, and grand strategy with Russia as a primary case study.

Photo left: Protesters marching along Moscow's Tverskaya Street, March 26, 2017

Photo courtesy Evgeny Feldman, Wikimedia Commons

One year ago, in August 2020, officers from the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) allegedly attempted to poison Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny using a military-grade nerve agent called Novichok.<sup>1</sup> But this was not the first time that Russia tried to assassinate an opponent of its regime. Indeed, the attempted murder of Navalny follows a pattern of action by the Russian state against its critics, including journalists, politicians, and defectors. The regime thus may be employing violence strategically to elicit fear in order to silence dissent. Although fear is typically associated with mass terror, the nature of fear-driven inference can make less violence fearfully impactful.

What does the attempt on Navalny's life tell us about this pattern and how effective it is? First, a deeper understanding of fear shows that a regime can kill its opponents infrequently—much less than during historical examples of mass repression—yet still effectively use fear as a tool of control. Second, the use of poison created uncertainty around the attempt on Navalny's life, and this uncertainty was a tool to intimidate people and purposefully stifle opposition. However, the failure of the political killing left the Russian security services looking anemic and opened the regime up to scrutiny by the investigative reporting from *Bellingcat*.

## A modern strategy of fear

I argue that Russia uses violence to silence dissent and may be employing a strategy of fear. Between 1992 and 2019, the murder of 31 journalists was attributed to Russian government officials, military officials, or political groups.<sup>2</sup> Yet, rule by fear is not a “popular” tactic employed by contemporary autocrats according to current literature. Scholars Daniel Treisman and Sergei Guriev argue that rule by fear is not the strategy of 21st-century autocrats, like Russian president Vladimir Putin, because autocratic leaders are less likely to rely on violent repression and more likely to use information manipulation to silence dissent.<sup>3</sup> Mass terror is more costly today because of highly educated populations' lower tolerance for repression and the increased visibility of repression due to interconnected societies, human rights groups, and mass communication and surveillance technologies.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to Treisman and Guriev's expectations, what is Russia doing and why would it still employ this fear-based strategy? To answer this question, one must examine how emotions influence political behavior and how leaders can use emotions to their benefit. Fear elicits a fight or flight response and is caused by the “cognition that a situation is dangerous.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly, for a regime critic or would-be critic, threat of death is a dangerous situation whether it be via poisoning or shooting. Feelings of fear can suppress regime-damaging behavior because fear enhances the action tendency of “self-preservation,”<sup>6</sup> and privileges “defensive reaction.”<sup>6</sup>

Even without the mass terror of 20th-century autocrats, fear can be effective through targeted killings. A little fear goes a long way for three reasons: 1) fearful people make pessimistic risk assessments,<sup>7</sup> 2) fear-driven inference can socially amplify fear,<sup>8</sup> and 3) fearful people focus on the source of the threat.<sup>9</sup> Fearful people's pessimistic assessment of risk is desirable for a state looking to suppress internal dissent because

## Fear and a pattern of political killing in Russia

Suzanne Freeman, PhD Student, Department of Political Science

potential critics would be deterred from risking regime critique. For example, fearful people are likely to pick a safe bet,<sup>10</sup> so a targeted killing could cause a fearful journalist to avoid a news story critical of the Russian state.

Less violence can still inspire fear because of a psychological phenomenon called fear-driven inference. This negative feedback loop deepens the effects of fear because initial feelings of fear become evidence that the appraisal of fear is correct.<sup>11</sup> From the state's perspective, this negative feedback loop could induce the ideal type of paranoia and anxiety<sup>12</sup> that prevents regime-damaging behavior. Additionally, emotions are amplified socially across social networks,<sup>13</sup> so the spread of fear-driven inference ensures that the effect of political killing impacts observers across the political system, not just those close to the victim. Thus fear-driven inference inflates the fear produced by political killing so that observing would-be regime critics might fear the state will target them next, even if relatively few critics end up dead. Thus, fear can heighten the perception of the probability of being killed. Making matters worse, fearful people in uncertain conditions collect information, process it with bias, and focus only on "the source of threat."<sup>14</sup> Together, the attention funneling caused by fear-driven inference and the action tendencies of those with fear mean that a regime can employ targeted killings infrequently and still have a significant fear impact. Today, 21st-century autocrats concentrate on using fear with precision by killing more selectively and capitalizing on the uncertainty of their crimes.

### Applying the fear theory to Navalny

In October 2020, about two months after the poisoning, Navalny was interviewed by the Russian news website *MediaZona*. In this interview, Navalny expressed the power of fear and its effect on the opposition in general. Navalny said that he thought the primary goal of the attempted murder was to weaken the opposition, but also more broadly: "to intimidate a large number of people. People are more afraid of these things [poisoning] than bullets."<sup>15</sup> Using the word "intimidate" frequently, he essentially states the fear-based argument, that the goal of the killings is to make people afraid, and that the state recognizes that poisoning, a private killing, is more fear-inducing than shooting, a public killing. He went on to say that the reason it was more frightening and more challenging to contest was because of its uncertainty: "This is the trick of this murder format because everything is very unclear."<sup>16</sup> This lack of certainty is associated with appraisals of fear, and a lack of someone to blame makes fear more likely than anger.

Navalny said that he thought Putin authorized the murder stating that "clearly Putin personally revels in the idea that he has a battalion of invisible assassins,"<sup>17</sup> which emphasizes both Putin's agency and the idea that he enjoys causing fear. But he argued that the deeper reason for poisoning is a lack of control on the part of the Russian leadership: "they also poison people—precisely because they feel that the earth is slipping from under their feet."<sup>18</sup> According to Navalny, Russia is poisoning individuals out of desperation.

When considering imprisonment versus killing, Navalny indicated that he thought the regime mistakenly associated long prison sentences with "heroization," arguing

instead that he thought killings produced martyrs.<sup>19</sup> He thought that the Kremlin wanted to avoid any positive press for those targeted. When asked if he thought the Kremlin considered international backlash in planning the murder, he said no, because the state assumed he would die. Therefore, they would be able to pass it off naturally, and no one would be able to investigate. He mentioned that he thought Putin was annoyed with the result of the prior Zelyonka incident (bright green antiseptic dye thrown in Navalny's face in 2017) because "the Kremlin was more likely to get angry since I would get sympathy" due to the eye surgery needed.<sup>20</sup>

When Navalny was asked why he thought the regime let him leave Russia for the treatment, he argued that "it would have been on the conscience of the regime for sure" if he died,<sup>21</sup> but not necessarily because they felt guilty. Instead, it would be because of the sympathy and heroization he would receive. Ideally, for the Russian state, these killings do not result in martyrdom for the individual, and therefore potentially cut off the fear-fight action tendency or the anger-prosecute action tendency. However, Navalny has become even more of a symbol after the poisoning as his January 2021 arrest spurred some of the largest protests across Russia to date.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the media attention on Navalny after this poisoning and denunciations of the action by western media, he stated that he thought the Russian government would use poison again, musing, "Who else will they poison tomorrow?"<sup>23</sup>

Navalny's *MediaZona* interview presents a Russian regime that is purposefully using fear to intimidate people and recognizes the specific uncertainty and terror around poisoning as tool of political killing. The Kremlin cares greatly about the optics of these murders, which indicates some form of strategy. Navalny also presents a regime that is slightly unhinged and desperate. However, part of that may be his opposition language since the desperation and inevitability of the collapse of the Putin regime is a common refrain in Navalny's speeches and writings.

## State power and the security services

Who is responsible for these attempted killings? The security services are the main actor that carry out these killings. The failure of the security services to successfully kill Sergei Skripal<sup>24</sup> and Navalny could demonstrate that the attempt, and not the kill, is the goal—or that the security services have suffered operational failures. *Bellingcat* investigative reports show more evidence for the latter. In the case of Navalny, "it would have been impossible to properly dose and administer a less-than-lethal amount of a chlorines inhibitor nerve agent of the Novichok type."<sup>25</sup> There are a few other details within the *Bellingcat* investigation that appear as tradecraft failures. First, the August 2020 attempt was the third attempt to poison Navalny since 2017.<sup>26</sup> The failure made the FSB a laughingstock; while poking jest at the failed poisoning and tradecraft failures by the elite FSB team, one *Novaya gazeta* journalist quipped, "how did the FSB turn out to be less professional than Madame Bovary?"<sup>27</sup> Second, the FSB appears to only have become aware that an involved FSB officer mistakenly admitted to the poisoning after the *Bellingcat* report was published because the FSB arrived at the officer's apartment about 10 minutes after the report was posted.<sup>28</sup> Third, during the approximately three years that FSB officers trailed Navalny within Russia, officers

violated operational security protocols by improperly turning on cellphones, resulting in geolocation data for *Bellingcat* to collect.<sup>29</sup> These operational failures leave the FSB looking weak, which is another negative externality of the fear-inducing poisoning strategy. Moreover, the very existence of *Bellingcat*'s investigation took away residual uncertainty about the attempted murder that had contributed to heightened fear.

### Is a strategy of fear effective?

Putin and his regime are certainly a 21st-century autocracy, but that does not mean that fear is absent or they hide violence from public view as an informational autocrat should.<sup>30</sup> Fear-driven inference and the pessimistic risk assessments of fearful individuals amplify the effect of comparatively low levels of violence. But individuals using 21st-century investigative tools at *Bellingcat* have taken some of the impact out of the strategy of fear by removing uncertainty about the murder's perpetrators and methods. When people have someone to blame definitively for a threatening activity, they are more likely to become angry instead of fearful,<sup>31</sup> which is just what *Bellingcat* provided, and angry people are more likely to continue their opposition. Today, a strategy of fear may have more negative externalities than previously understood. ■

1 *Bellingcat*, "If It Hadn't Been for the Prompt Work of the Medics: FSB Officer Inadvertently Confesses Murder Plot to Navalny" (*Bellingcat*, December 21, 2020), <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/12/21/if-it-hadnt-been-for-the-prompt-work-of-the-medics-fsb-officer-inadvertently-confesses-murder-plot-to-navalny/>; *Bellingcat*, "FSB Team of Chemical Weapon Experts Implicated in Alexey Navalny Novichok Poisoning" (*Bellingcat*, December 14, 2020), <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/12/14/fsb-team-of-chemical-weapon-experts-implicated-in-alexey-navalny-novichok-poisoning/>.

2 Committee to Protect Journalists, Journalists Killed Data, [https://cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&motiveUnconfirmed%5B%5D=Unconfirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc\\_fips%5B%5D=RS&start\\_year=1992&end\\_year=2020&group\\_by=year](https://cpj.org/data/killed/?status=Killed&motiveConfirmed%5B%5D=Confirmed&motiveUnconfirmed%5B%5D=Unconfirmed&type%5B%5D=Journalist&cc_fips%5B%5D=RS&start_year=1992&end_year=2020&group_by=year). The Committee to Protect Journalists is a US-based nonprofit devoted to press freedom.

3 Guriev, Sergei and Treisman, Daniel. "Informational Autocrats," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 4 (November 1, 2019): 101-2, 110-13, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.33.4.100>. Treisman and Guriev label Putin as one of these quintessential "informational autocrats."

4 Guriev and Treisman. 102.

5 Petersen, Roger and Liaras, Evangelos. "Countering Fear in War: The Strategic Use of Emotion," *Journal of Military Ethics* 5, no. 4 (2006): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570601086886>.

6 Petersen and Liaras. 320.

7 Lerner, Jennifer S and Keltner, Dacher. "Fear, Anger, and Risk," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81, no. 1 (2001): 146, 150, 152, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.81.1.146>.

8 Thagard, Paul and Nussbaum, A David. "Fear-Driven Inference: Mechanisms of Gut Overreaction," *Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Et* 8 (2014): 49, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-37428-9\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-37428-9_3).

9 Halperin, Eran. *Emotions in Conflict: Inhibitors and Facilitators of Peace Making*, 78.

10 Lerner and Keltner. 149.



- 11 Thagard and Nussbaum. "Fear-Driven Inference: Mechanisms of Gut Overreaction," 43–44.
- 12 Thagard and Nussbaum. "Fear-Driven Inference: Mechanisms of Gut Overreaction," 47.
- 13 Thagard and Nussbaum. "Fear-Driven Inference: Mechanisms of Gut Overreaction," 49.
- 14 Halperin. 78.
- 15 Smirnov, Sergei, "'There Was a Plane, and I Died in It.' Interview with Alexey Navalny ('bil Samolyot, i v Neyom Ya Pomer'. Intervyu Alekseya Navalnovo)," *Zona Media*, October 7, 2020, <https://zona.media/article/2020/10/06/navalny>.
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- 17 Smirnov, Interview with Alexey Navalny, *Zona Media*, October 7, 2020.
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- 22 Troianovski, Anton, Kramer, Andrew E., and Higgins, Andrew, "In Aleksei Navalny Protests, Russia Faces Biggest Dissent in Years," *New York Times*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/23/world/europe/navalny-protests-russia.html>.
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- 25 *Bellingcat*, "If It Hadn't Been for the Prompt Work of the Medics': FSB Officer Inadvertently Confesses Murder Plot to Navalny."
- 26 *Bellingcat*, The first was allegedly while he was in a detention center on July 28, 2017, and the second was when he was on vacation in Kaliningrad on July 2, 2020.
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# briefings

## Ice melts on US-Sudan relations, providing new opportunities

MISTI



Ari Jacobovits, managing director,  
MIT-Africa Program

It was over 27 years in the making. When the White House removed Sudan from the "State Sponsors of Terrorism" list in December 2020, ZAHARA for Education was ready.

ZAHARA was founded by MIT technology and policy master's student Ilham Ali and Harvard University alumna Sahar Omer to expand educational opportunities between Sudan and the United States. Earlier this year, the organization partnered with MIT-Africa, an MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI) program, to launch the first-ever Global Teaching Labs (GTL) workshop for young leaders in Sudan. GTL is a long-running MISTI program that places over 300 students per year as teachers in high schools around the world.

"ZAHARA approached the MIT-Africa Program as a passionate and well-organized group," says MIT-Africa Program Managing Director Ari Jacobovits. "It was clear that now was the time to engage with Sudan in a new and exciting way."

Sudan-US relations have recently entered a new chapter of cooperation. For decades, the two nations were frequently at odds over Middle East policy and Sudan's civil unrest. A significant development occurred in July 2011, when South Sudan voted to break away from Sudan and establish a new country with a capital in Juba. During 2018 and 2019, Sudan's youth-led peaceful revolution set an example for change in the country and has motivated its citizens to work toward a new era of peace and prosperity, long term.

Guided by Sudan's changing geopolitical landscape, ZAHARA focused the lab on "being agents of change in a changing world" and led sessions on topics ranging from change-making strategies to the climate crisis to democracy and governance.

"We chose to broadly focus on the idea of 'making change as Sudanese youth' to help empower our students and fellow generation to be thoughtful leaders in their communities," Ali says. "Our main goal was to have a diverse class of students in terms of age, backgrounds, and disciplines, and to equip them with the tools to break down problems they see around them, as well as piece together innovative solutions. In picking our class topics, we relied on the strengths of the teaching team, who all have a wealth of knowledge and expertise in the various subjects presented."

Joining Ali as lead instructors were Abdalla Osman, a senior studying mechanical engineering, and Shakes Dlamini, an SM candidate in the Technology and Policy program. The program received hundreds of applications from high school and college students eager to take part. Ali, Osman, Dlamini, and other members of the ZAHARA team then made the difficult decision of selecting their first cohort of 50 students.

"We were incredibly surprised by the amount of traction the initiative gathered on social media," Osman says. "The application was live for only a couple of weeks, and in that time, we received over 400 applicants. We realized students all over Sudan were sharing the application with each other and encouraging each other to apply, and we were inspired by the excitement that each applicant showed. It was definitely a challenge to trim down the list of applicants to 50 students."

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“ZAHARA approached the MIT-Africa Program as a passionate and well-organized group,” says Jacobovits. “It was clear that now was the time to engage with Sudan in a new and exciting way.”

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Hailing from Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Dlamini saw an opportunity to be involved with GTL in Sudan as a chance to hone his educational efforts back home.

“It was an honor to be part of the ZAHARA team. I care deeply about expanding opportunities to young people in Africa; hence joining the team was a no-brainer for me,” Dlamini says. “This is the kind of work I have been involved in with the Knowledge Institute since its founding in 2013. Working with the students and learning about their ideas and accomplishments was also inspiring for me, as it demonstrated to me the value of such programs to youth. I am looking forward to taking part in more MIT-Africa programs and working with groups like ZAHARA.”

After two intensive weeks of lectures from the lead instructors and guests, the program culminated with a poster session where student teams tackled some of the country’s biggest issues. Student groups proposed innovative solutions such as bioswales to lower pollution in the Nile River, solar energy to ease transport woes in the capital, and interactive teaching methods to improve secondary school experiences around the country.

Another group pitched a nationwide flood alert system in the wake of the devastating regional flooding throughout 2020, the team’s driving motivation for pursuing the project. “Flooding in Sudan is a huge concern that threatens our welfare. In knowing that every minute counts when lives are on the line, our flood warning system was the perfect choice,” shares the team of five. “Working virtually as a team was a challenge, but we felt rewarded by the value our project has in potentially saving many lives and possessions.” Though based in different states in Sudan, members of the organization collaborated effectively to produce a robust project vision.

Awab Rhamtalla, a student at the University of Khartoum from Jabal Awlia, was excited to participate in the inaugural program. “The reason I joined the GTL program was because I knew some things can’t be found on Google. Rich experience, tailored advice, wonderful colleagues, and awesome instructors are the reasons people go to places like MIT, and the ZAHARA team brought these things to our doorstep,” shares Rhamtalla. “To say that I am grateful for every day of the program would be an understatement. I can only hope to pay tribute to these two weeks by passing their message forward.”

Professor Elfatih Eltahir, a faculty member in MIT’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, had an opportunity to observe the poster session. “The ZAHARA team did an excellent job in planning and execution of their online course. I was impressed by the quality of the presentations by young Sudanese participants,” says Eltahir. “In particular, the presentation of the project reimagining how high school students can be taught differently in Sudan was very good, and offered a concrete example for the success and impact of this GTL-Sudan activity.”

Continued on page 35

# briefings

## MIT-Japan Program establishes the Patricia Gercik Memorial Fund



Patricia Gercik (center) with her former MIT students at the 35th anniversary celebration of the MIT-Japan Program

Photo courtesy Lillie Paquette

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The endowed fund will provide financial support for student internships in Japan.

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The MIT-Japan Program is thrilled to announce the establishment of the Patricia Gercik Memorial Fund. The endowed fund will provide supplemental stipends to students seeking internships in Japan.

Gercik served as managing director of the MIT-Japan Program for almost three decades and introduced hundreds of MIT students to Japanese culture, history, and in-country internship experiences.

MIT-Japan is a part of (and was the prototype for) the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI)—the Institute’s pioneering global internship program. Gercik simultaneously served as associate director of MISTI, which is among the largest and most renowned programs at the Center for International Studies (CIS).

“Pat was one of a kind—truly a force of nature. In her tireless efforts to facilitate collaboration with Japan at MIT, Pat blazed new paths in international education and truly epitomized the MIT spirit of innovation. She touched so many students so deeply, and we are proud to have worked closely with many of them to establish this endowed fund in her memory,” said Richard Samuels, Ford International Professor of Political Science, director of CIS, and the founding director of the MIT-Japan Program.

Gercik’s early and sustained enthusiastic leadership of the MIT-Japan Program clearly demonstrated this commitment. Her knowledge of all things Japanese was vast and her passion for the country was infectious.

Born to a British mother and a Russian father who relocated to Kobe, Japan, in the 1930s, Gercik lived a Japanese childhood. She recalled “confronting” US soldiers during the Occupation and wandering through the black markets of a reconstructing Tokyo in her autobiographical novel, *The Outsider*. She also authored *On Track with*

*the Japanese*, an interactive guide based on the experiences of Program interns that provides insights to non-natives into Japan's complex society.

Informed by her own experiences in Japan, she thoughtfully matched students studying a wide range of disciplines with challenging internships that would encourage them to grow in unexpected ways. She had an uncanny knack for clearly conveying the nuance and subtlety of Japanese communication to those who weren't familiar with Japan. For many of her students, she instilled a life-long love of and connection to a country that, without her guidance, could have seemed mysterious and unknowable.

In 2010, the Institute recognized her extraordinary work by bestowing her with an MIT Excellence Award. She was described by her nominators as having "a passionate belief in our mission to help MIT students become informed global citizens" and as "a visionary leader whose spontaneous enthusiasm and zeal for life can barely be contained."

Sadly, after battling a long illness, Gercik died on September 17, 2019.

"When we learned the heartbreaking news about Pat, we really wanted to do something in her honor. We—and especially her former students—could think of no better tribute to Pat's life and contributions to MIT than to establish a memorial fund in her honor," said Christine Pilcavage, managing director of the MIT Japan Program.

Alumni of the MIT-Japan Program were instrumental in raising the initial seed money and making the memorial fund a reality. Their dream, now realized, was to endow the fund in perpetuity so that her legacy continues at MIT.

The inaugural recipients of the Patricia Gercik Memorial Fund will be announced in the spring of 2022 with the hope of resuming in-country internships by that summer. Travel restrictions for MIT students due to the Covid-19 pandemic have paused travel to Japan since the spring of 2020.

The MIT-Japan Program looks forward to hosting a ceremony next spring to honor Gercik and celebrating the first students to receive this award.

To learn more about Gercik, including quotes from her former students and information on how to donate to the Patricia Gercik Memorial Fund, please visit the MIT-Japan Program's Patricia Gercik Memorial web page. ■

# briefings

## Apekshya Prasai receives 2021 Jeanne Guillemin Prize

Michelle English, CIS



Growing up in the periphery of the civil war in Nepal, Apekshya Prasai was exposed to a 10-year conflict that by some accounts left 19,000 people dead and 150,000 people internally displaced.

The insurgency was led by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) with the aim of overthrowing the ruling monarchy and establishing a people's republic. The war ended in 2016 under the auspices of the United Nations, and a peace treaty between the Nepalese government and the Maoist rebels.

"We lived in Kathmandu, the capital city, and were fortunate to be sheltered from most of the conflict and direct violence. But we were close enough to be aware of and concerned about what was happening in the countryside," says Prasai.

Of the many related activities that were difficult for Prasai to make sense of at the time, she was particularly perplexed by the large numbers of women who joined the People's War.

"Thousands of women were fighters, leaders, and in other kinds of support roles in this violent conflict. And given the deeply patriarchal nature of our society, I have always found this to be astounding."

As a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science, Prasai seeks to better understand this puzzling phenomenon and investigate the dynamics of women's participation in conflict. Drawing on original data collected through fieldwork in Nepal and secondary data from across South Asia, Prasai's dissertation analyzes the processes that trigger women's inclusion in rebel organizations and examines how women themselves influence these processes.

Prasai is the recipient of this year's Jeanne Guillemin Prize at the MIT Center for International Studies (CIS). Guillemin, a longtime colleague at CIS and senior advisor in the Security Studies Program, endowed the fund shortly before her death in 2019. An authority on biological warfare, Guillemin established the prize to help support female PhD candidates working in the field of security studies, which has long been dominated by men.

Apekshya Prasai is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science. Drawing on original data collected through fieldwork in Nepal and secondary data from across South Asia, her dissertation analyzes the processes that trigger women's inclusion in rebel organizations and examines how women themselves influence these processes. She is pictured here at the district office of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists in Surkhet.

Photo courtesy Apekshya Prasai

Like Guillemín, Prasai is committed to advancing women and other historically excluded groups in academia and has worked in various capacities to further this goal. In the past, she has chaired the Women in International Politics and Security working group at CIS—a network that supports women graduate students, fellows, and faculty in the greater Boston area. Prasai also served as gender and diversity co-chair in the political science department's Graduate Student Council and was a member of its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee.

"The Guillemín prize is especially meaningful to me because Jeanne was not only an esteemed research scientist, but she was also passionate about supporting women. I share her commitment and feel humbled and honored that I could benefit from her generosity," says Prasai.

## From Nepal to MIT

Prasai left Nepal in 2012 for undergraduate studies in the United States at Bowdoin College. It was at Bowdoin that she was first exposed to political science and began noticing how coursework on politics and conflict rarely, if ever, mentioned women.

"I was taking political science courses and noticed how discussions of wars, both interstate and civil wars, rarely mentioned women. This was odd given what I knew from the conflict in Nepal. So I became curious if women's participation in violence was something unique to Nepal."

Curiosity compelled her to explore the issue further. As early as her sophomore year, she delved into learning about women in conflict beyond the Nepal context. And, during a junior year abroad at Oxford University, she began exploring the role of women in resistance movements more broadly. The following summer, she got a grant from Bowdoin to conduct an independent study on women's participation in violent movements across South Asia. This formed the basis of her undergraduate honors thesis on female suicide bombers.

The thesis left Prasai with more questions than answers and inspired her to pursue a doctoral degree at MIT.

"Broadly, my dissertation tries to shed light on the gender dimensions of civil wars. Specifically, I am trying to understand the processes that trigger women's inclusion in male-dominated rebel organizations operating in patriarchal communities. I am especially keen on exploring how women themselves influence these processes and aspire to bring otherwise-neglected women's voices into the discourse on gender and civil wars."

Prasai feels incredibly fortunate to be a part of the political science department and SSP community.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from exceptionally talented faculty, fellows, and students, who are all doing creative and important research. And I am thank-

# briefings

## Apekshya Prasai receives 2021 Jeanne Guillemin Prize

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“As a Nepali woman, doing work that can help us understand women’s roles in a movement that changed the socio-political trajectory of Nepal and making even a small contribution towards conserving their history, holds great meaning to me and many in my community.”

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ful for having the latitude to pursue research I care about while receiving excellent advising that helps me explore answers to questions that are meaningful to me in a manner that is both rigorous and relevant to the real world.”

### For women’s sake

Prasai’s research has involved extensive fieldwork interviewing CPN-M members who participated in the People’s War and collecting primary documents back in Nepal.

She will apply the funds from the Guillemin prize toward additional fieldwork in Nepal. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed her travel plans, she hopes to return by the end of this year.

“Many of the women I have spoken to have never had an opportunity to put their experiences into words. They are often eager to tell their stories, which, along with their contributions to the movement, they hope will not be forgotten,” she explains. One of her dissertation goals is to try to shed light on these women’s experiences in the People’s War and help conserve some aspects of their history.

“As a Nepali woman, doing work that can help us understand women’s roles in a movement that changed the socio-political trajectory of Nepal and making even a small contribution towards conserving their history, holds great meaning to me and many in my community,” she says. “And I am thankful for support from the Guillemin Prize, which will allow me to continue this work.” ■



# Exploring generations of influence between South Asia and MIT

MISTI



For an MIT oral history project, students conducted interviews with Institute alumni. Pictured here is Almitra Patel '58, MS '59, the first woman in engineering from India to graduate from MIT, with a Tech article in which she is featured.

When thinking about how to celebrate the approaching 60th anniversary of Sangam, the Association of Indian Students at MIT, Ranu Boppana '87, president of the MIT South Asian Alumni Association (MITSAAA) began to reflect upon ways in which to explore the rich history of South Asians at MIT.

“As president of MITSAAA, I met several South Asian alumni who had been at MIT in the '60s and '70s. As an alum who was on campus in the '80s, I could see that they were trailblazers whose presence led to the conditions and opportunities that current students take for granted, like better gender equity on campus, internships through the MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI) MIT-India program, and cultural programs that help students feel at home away from home,” Boppana explains.

She remembered the 2017 exhibition “China Comes to Tech” at MIT’s Maihaugen Gallery, which commemorated the 140th anniversary of Chinese students at the Institute. She wondered how long South Asian students and their organizations had been at MIT and soon found the work of Ross Bassett, author of *The Technological Indian*. Bassett had been researching how people from a region left behind by the industrial revolution came to be among the world’s leaders in engineering and technology.

MIT, in fact, played an outsized role in South Asia’s economic development and even in its struggle for independence from colonial rule. Boppana was stunned to learn that the first student from South Asia came to MIT in 1882, soon after the Institute’s founding. She felt that these stories of South Asian alumni needed to be told and was delighted that MIT-India could fund 11 students to do this research under the guidance of associate professor of history Sana Aiyar.

“This project tells the remarkable story of South Asia at MIT and MIT in South Asia, celebrating their far-reaching accomplishments, technical expertise, and ingenuity that have made significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge at MIT and life beyond the Institute, in South Asia, the United States, and across the world,” says Boppana.

## A “history lab” is formed

Over Independent Activities Period, students were involved in conducting research, looking at historical archives on campus and beyond, and conducting oral history interviews with alumni in India and the United States. The project laid the groundwork for an online archive that traces the personal, professional, and intellectual journeys of alumni, documenting the incredible relationship between South Asia and the Institute.

MIT’s first student from South Asia, Keshav Bhat, arrived at the Institute in 1882, and by the dawn of the 21st century more than 1,300 students from India alone had graduated from MIT. Today, the Institute’s South Asian alumni include hundreds of undergraduates and graduates from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, as well as a

# briefings

## Exploring generations of influence between South Asia and MIT

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“I wanted to bring a historian’s gaze to this project to showcase the scope and scale of MIT’s very long and diverse engagement with South Asia,” explains Sana Aiyar, professor of history at MIT.

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very large number of first- and second-generation South Asians from the United States, the UK, Canada, East Africa, Mauritius, and elsewhere. Across the schools of Engineering; Science; Architecture and Planning; Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences; and the Sloan School of Management; MIT faculty, students, and staff have been engaged at the forefront of research, technology, and innovation related to South Asia.

“I wanted to bring a historian’s gaze to this project to showcase the scope and scale of MIT’s very long and diverse engagement with South Asia,” explains Aiyar. “For six weeks, students were busy in what I like to call a ‘History Lab,’ digging up the history of the first few decades of South Asia’s MIT connections, and putting together an online archive that included oral histories of more than 30 alumni whom they interviewed.”

The students not only learned about the rich history between South Asia and MIT, but they were also able to reflect on their own personal journeys as students and connect them to the experiences of students from previous generations.

“As a present student, I think the most interesting part of this whole experience was interviewing alumni and realizing you had a lot more in common than you thought you did,” says urban studies and planning and media studies junior Husain Rizvi. “When they were talking about grappling with these issues of anti-war protests, anti-fascism—it’s just so interesting that we as students are still dealing with that today, in our own way.”

Mathematical economics senior Catherine Huang interviewed Priyamvada Natarajan, an accomplished theoretical astrophysicist who graduated from MIT with a bachelor’s degree in physics and math in 1990 and a master’s degree from MIT’s Program in Science, Technology, and Society. What was intended to be an hour-long interview extended into a longer conversation around the theme of “never stop learning” as a way of keeping up with the world’s challenges.

“The reason I wanted to interview her was [because] I was interested in her perspective as a woman of color in the sciences, at a time when there were very few women in science at all.”

Through their interviews, other students found opportunities for further research. Junior linguistics and electrical engineering and computer science major Rujul Gandhi saw connections between MIT and Boston’s larger international community, noting, “MIT seemed to have a large concentration of international students, so it became the hub of where people from different campuses would come to meet.”

“MIT is an institution that is continually looking to the future, but in uncovering its history, we learn much about ourselves,” adds Boppana. “Students found that MIT probably had more South Asian ties than other universities in the US at the time. The South Asian students at MIT led to MIT’s increasing connections to South Asia, which have shaped MIT into what it currently is—a global institution. I believe that knowing this history has implications for current South Asian students and how they see themselves, as they grapple with issues of belonging and identity much like generations of South Asian students before them.”

Jeffrey Ravel, professor of history at MIT, echoes the value of connecting current MIT students with prior generations. "Seeing the enthusiasm of our current students regarding the contacts made and the lessons learned from our alums was great," he says. "In general, I think we need to find ways to make our classrooms and learning experiences more multi-generational."

### Connecting oral histories to a larger story

Moving forward, Aiyar, MITSAAA, and MIT-India will continue to build upon the work completed by this first cohort of students by creating an online archive that traces this incredible story and the personal, professional, and intellectual journeys of MIT's South Asian affiliates. The project will culminate in the launch of an exhibition in conjunction with MIT Libraries to commemorate the upcoming 60th anniversary of Sangam in 2022.

Organizers hope the project will tell a larger story of how students and alumni go on to shape their communities and the role of the Institution in providing students with the experiences to accomplish this, both inside and outside the classroom.

"These histories are so rich in detail—they are deeply intimate and personal, but also allow us to tell a larger story of the South Asian presence at MIT and MIT in South Asia," says Aiyar. "This archive, I hope, will preserve these stories for future historians and MIT students. Ultimately this is their genealogy and their history." ■

## Ice melts on US-Sudan relations, providing new opportunities

*Continued from page 27*

MIT-Africa Faculty Director Evan Lieberman also joined for one session of the class. "I was impressed by the level of engagement on the part of the Sudanese students. Despite the challenges of remote teaching and learning, it was clear that this was a productive educational opportunity."

Jacobovits and the ZAHARA team hope to build on the success of the remote GTL to launch an in-person program in the future post-Covid.

"Our main mission is to expand educational opportunities between the United States and Sudan," Ali says. "We hope to host GTL in Sudan annually and have students from MIT visit the country once travel resumes. ZAHARA is also continuing to work on several innovative ways to bring students from the US and Sudan together and to provide educational opportunities for youth, in particular." ■

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### MIT X True Africa University webinars

CIS and the MIT-Africa Program partnered with the newly launched TRUE Africa University (TAU) to host a webinar series focusing on sustainable development in Africa. MIT alumnus and CIS research affiliate Claude Grunitzky, who spearheaded the new series, interviewed the thinkers, shapers, and doers whom he sees as the inventors of the future of Africa. The webinars featured: Taiye Selasi, the Ghanaian-Nigerian author; Jeffrey Sachs, the American economist; Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, the Nigerian serial entrepreneur behind some of Africa's most valuable startups; Evan Lieberman, the Total Professor of Political Science and Contemporary Africa at MIT; and M Amah Edoh, the Homer A Burnell Assistant Professor of Anthropology and African Studies at MIT. The webinars will continue in spring 2022.

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### CIS awards 17 summer study grants

Seventeen doctoral students in international affairs at MIT were awarded summer study grants, each receiving up to \$3500. The competition is open to advanced doctoral students in international affairs, regardless of home department. This year's awards were made to students in the Department of Political Science; the Department of Urban Studies and Planning; History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS); Institute for Data, Systems, and Society (IDSS); and the Department of Architecture.

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### Starr Forums

The Center hosted multiple virtual Starr Forums on global issues, including: "Israelis and Palestinians: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" with Peter Krause, Boston College; Stephen Van Evera, MIT; and moderator John Tirman, MIT; "The Haitian Constitutional Crisis and the International Community," with Robert Fatton, University of Virginia; Georges Fauriol, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Sabine Manigat, Independent Researcher (Haiti); Amy Wilentz, University of California at Irvine; and moderator Malick Ghachem, MIT; "Myanmar and South Asia: Democratization, Authoritarianism, and Refugees," with Ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyaya, Centre for Policy Research; Jonathan Saha, Durham University, UK; Yasmin Ullah, Rohingya Social Justice Activist; Harn Yawngwe, Euro-Burma Office; and moderator Sana Aiyar, MIT; "On Causes of and Responses to Anti-Asian Violence" with Melissa Nobles, MIT; Paul Watanabe, University of Massachusetts Boston; Katharine Moon, Wellesley College; Tram T Nguyen, Massachusetts State Representative and House Asian Caucus; and moderators Kenneth Oye and Christine Pilcavage, both from MIT; "Advice for President Biden: Dealing with Putin's Russia," with Andrey Kortunov, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC); Angela Stent, Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies and Georgetown University; and co-chairs Elizabeth Wood and Carol Saivetz, both from MIT; and "3.11 Ten Years Later: Disaster and Resilience," with Daniel Aldrich, Northeastern University; Miho Mazereeuw, MIT; Tatsujiro Suzuki, Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition at Nagasaki University (RECNA), Japan; and moderator Richard Samuels, MIT.

Visit our website and events calendar for a complete listing of spring/summer 2021 activities. Many of our events are captured on video and available to view on YouTube.

## FEATURED

### MISTI's Global Seed Funds 2020-21 winners receive more than \$1.9 million

The MISTI Global Seed Funds (GSF) grant program promotes and supports early-stage collaborations between MIT researchers and their counterparts around the globe. This year, a total of 90 faculty international research projects received over \$1.9 million in funding. The projects were selected from among 155 proposals submitted by faculty and research scientists across the Institute. Many of these joint projects lead to additional grant awards and the development of valuable long-term relationships between international researchers and MIT faculty and students. The next GSF Call for Proposals will launch on September 13, 2021, with a deadline of December 13, 2021.

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### SSP Wednesday Seminars

The Security Studies Program's lunchtime weekly series continued virtually and included: Rana Mitter, University of Oxford, on "How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism"; Jakana Thomas, Michigan State University, on "Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves: How Female Combatants Gender Peace Agreements in Civil Wars"; Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, University of Oslo, on "Explaining Change in Russian Nuclear strategy"; David Smith, Stimson Center, on "Is India a Strategic Asset for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific Region or a Strategic Millstone Around the Neck?"; and Markus V Garlauskas, Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security's Asia Security Initiative at the Atlantic Council, on "Strategic Assessment of a Hard Target: North Korea."

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### Emile Bustani Middle East Seminar

Each semester the Bustani Seminar invites scholars, journalists, consultants, and other experts from the Middle East, Europe, and the United States to present recent research findings on contemporary politics, society, and culture, and economic and technological development in the Middle East. The spring lectures included "Youth and the October Revolution in Iraq; Between Sectarianism and Democracy," with Eric Davis, Rutgers University; and "US-Iran Relations: What Will It Take, on Both Sides, to End the 'Forever Enemies' Stalemate," with Ali Banuazizi, Boston College.

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### Myron Weiner Seminar Series on International Migration

The International Migration Committee's seminar series explores global population movements and their impact on sending and receiving countries and relations. Recent events included: "Immigrant Incorporation in East Asian Democracies," Erin Aeran Chung, Johns Hopkins University; "Millionaire Mobility and the Sale of Citizenship," Kristin Surak, London School of Economics and Political Science; and "Race, Refugees, and Europe: A Look Back at the Last Decade," Eddie Bruce-Jones, Birkbeck University of London.

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### Global Startup Labs at MISTI

MIT's Global Startup Labs (GSL) program cultivates young innovation-driven entrepreneurs by empowering MIT students to teach entrepreneurship courses at partner universities around the world. MIT GSL student instructors give aspiring young entrepreneurs a valuable foundation in problem solving, principles of engineering, and entrepreneurial thinking while being enriched by a unique international experience. The program is administered by MIT International Science and Technology Initiatives (MISTI). Since 2000, over 2,500 students have taken advantage of 84 GSLs. Many of them gain the skills to translate their ideas into one or even multiple startups, creating jobs and forging new avenues of economic development. (*Erratum: In a prior issue of *precis*, Global Startup Labs was referred to as Global Seed Labs.*)

# end notes

## PEOPLE

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Senior Research Fellow **Joel Brenner** was appointed to the Intelligence Community Studies Board, which is sponsored by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and operates under the aegis of the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Technology.

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PhD Candidate **Emma Campbell-Mohn** and PhD Student **Suzanne Freeman** received special recognition for their work from the Janne Nolan Prize for Best Article on National Security/International Affairs hosted by the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and Texas National Security Review.

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Ford International Professor in the Social Sciences and Director of MIT Socio-technical Systems Research Center **Fotini Christia**'s paper, coauthored with PhD Alumna **Tugba Bozcaga** and entitled "Imams and Businessmen- Islamist Service Provision in Turkey" was selected as the best MENA Politics paper presented to the 2020 meeting of the APSA. The paper was awarded the Weber Best Paper in Religion and Politics Award of the Religion and Politics Section of APSA. She received a \$25,000 grant from World Bank, UNCHR, and UKAid on "Preventing Social Conflict and Promoting Social Cohesion in Forced Displacement Contexts"; organized the Systemic Racism and Computation Workshop Series (five sessions with colleagues from SHASS, DUSP and SCC); and co-organized the AI for Healthcare Equity Conference.

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SSP Alumna **Fiona Cunningham** joined the political science department at the University of Pennsylvania as an Assistant Professor in July 2021. She also testified before the US.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Hearing on Deterring PRC Aggression Towards Taiwan, February 2021.

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Director of the Project on Technology, the Economy & National Security (TENS) at the MIT Internet Policy Research Initiative and CIS Research Fellow **David Edelman** helped organize the AI Policy Forum: Symposium. The symposium

engaged a number of foreign and US policymakers on matters of practical AI in public policy. One particularly relevant panel included former Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, former Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray, and OECD's top technology and innovation head Andy Wyckoff, and was chaired by Schwarzman College of Computing Dean Dan Huttenlocher.

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Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science and Director of SSP **Taylor Fravel** gave the following talks: "Cooperation and Conflict on China's Periphery" Ananta Centre, Delhi, May 2021; "China's Grand Strategy" Seminar XXI, May 2021; "Few Strings Attached: Why Countries Join China's Belt and Road Initiative," School of Oriental and African Studies, April 2021, and Oxford University, January 2021; and "China's Military Strategy in the New Era," Center for Land Warfare Studies, Delhi, India, June 2021; Oxford University, April 2021; University of Kentucky, April 2021; and Fairbank Center, Harvard University, March 2021.

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Professor of History and CIS Research Affiliate **Malick Ghachem** organized and moderated a Starr Forum event on "The Haitian Constitutional Crisis and the International Community" with panelists Robert Fatton, University of Virginia; Georges Fauriol, Center for Strategic and International Studies; Sabine Manigat, Independent Researcher (Haiti); and Amy Wilentz, University of California at Irvine on May 19, 2021.

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PhD Alumnus **Andrew Halterman** will begin as an Assistant Professor in political science at Michigan State University in August 2022. During the 2021-2022 academic year, he will be a Faculty Fellow at New York University's Center for Data Science.

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PhD Candidate **Eyal Hanfling** received Honorable Mention for the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP).

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MIT-Africa Program Manager **Ari Jacobovits** spoke on the education panel at the Africa Innovate conference in July 2021.

# end notes

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Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft Fellow **Renanah Joyce** received the American Political Science Association's 2021 Kenneth N. Waltz Award, awarded annually for the best dissertation published in the previous year in security studies. She was also awarded the American Political Science Association's 2021 Dissertation Award for the best dissertation published in the previous year in international collaboration. The title of her dissertation is "Exporting Might and Right: Great Power Security Assistance and Developing Militaries."

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Associate Professor at Boston College and Research Affiliate at the Security Studies Program **Peter Krause** spoke at APSA Middle East and North Africa Section, Research Methods Training Seminar, May 2021; and at a Starr Forum on "Israelis and Palestinians: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," MIT Center for International Studies, May 2021.

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PhD Student **Sam Leitner** won the John Quincy Adams Society and the *National Interest's* 2021 Student Foreign Policy Essay Contest. His article is titled "How Japan is Falling Short."

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Assistant Professor of Political Science **Erik Lin-Greenberg** received a James A. and Ruth Levitan Teaching Award from MIT's School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, and was appointed a Class of 2021 Fellow of the Schmidt Futures International Strategy Forum.

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PhD Alumnae **Rachel Tecott** and **Sara Plana** with PhD Students **Suzanne Freeman**, **Nina Miller** and PhD Candidate **Emma Campbell-Mohn** helped organize the Future Strategy Forum: The Future of National Security and Technology on May 10-12. Freeman gave opening remarks, and Tecott and Plana both moderated panel discussions. The virtual conference was held with the support of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Johns Hopkins SAIS Kissinger Center.

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Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow **David Logan** testified at a hearing of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission and presented on US goals in arms control with China at the Princeton-Tsinghua-Wuhan Arms Control Seminar.



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Associate Professor of Political Science **Richard Nielsen** was selected co-winner of this year's APSA MENA Politics Section Award for Best Article, for his article "Women's Authority in Patriarchal Social Movements: The Case of Female Salafi Preachers."

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Professor of Political Science and Professor of Data Systems and Society; Director of the Program on Emerging Technologies; and Seminar XXI Program Director (2020-21) **Kenneth Oye** and MIT-Japan Program Manager **Christine Pilcavage** organized and moderated a Starr Forum "On Causes of and Responses to Anti-Asian Violence," with Melissa Nobles, MIT; Paul Watanabe, University of Massachusetts Boston; Katharine Moon, Wellesley College; and Tram T Nguyen, Massachusetts State Representative and House Asian Caucus, on March 31, 2021.

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PhD Candidate **Apekshya Prasai** received the 2021 Jeanne Guillemin Prize from the Center for International Studies. She also received a Peace Scholar Award from the US Institute of Peace and will be a Peace Scholar during the academic year 2021-2022.

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The **Security Studies Program** co-sponsored a special panel on academia, artificial intelligence and the armed forces, featuring MIT's President Reif, Eric Schmidt (formerly of Google), Army Reserve Medical Command Commanding General Jonathan Woodson, the Directors of MIT's CSAIL and USAF-MIT AI Accelerator, and the Chief Technology Ventures Officer of MIT Lincoln Laboratory in May 2021.

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Ford International Professor of Political Science and Director of CIS **Richard Samuels** moderated a CIS Starr Forum: "3.11 Ten Years Later: Disaster and Resilience," with Daniel Aldrich (Northeastern University), Miho Mazereeuw, (MIT), and Tatsujiro Suzuki, (Research Center for Nuclear Weapons Abolition at Nagasaki University, Japan) on March 11, and was a speaker in "A conversation about Japanese politics and public policy," at UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy on March 10.

# end notes

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SSP Senior Advisor **Carol Saivetz** discussed "Biden administration's focus on Russia," on New England Cable News, March 23; and "What's next after the Biden-Putin summit?" on New England Cable News, June 18. She co-organized with Professor of History and Co-director of the MISTI Russia Program **Elizabeth Wood** the Focus on Russia Speaker Series featuring: "Palaces & Sandcastles: Deconstructing Putin's Power," with Sam Greene (Kings College London) on March 1; and "Advice to President Biden: Dealing with Putin's Russia" with Angela Stent (Georgetown University) and Andrey Kortunov (Russian International Affairs Council) on April 20.

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PhD Alumnus **Erik Andrew Hustand Sand** was appointed assistant professor in the Strategic and Operational Research Department of the US Naval War College.

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PhD Candidate **Meicen Sun** was awarded a Global Political Economy Project pre-doctoral fellowship from the Mortara Center for International Studies at Georgetown University,

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Principal Research Scientist and CIS Executive Director **John Tirman** moderated a CIS Starr Forum on "Israelis and Palestinians: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," MIT Center for International Studies, May 2021, and was named a Fellow at the Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN).

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SSP Senior Research Associate **James Walsh** was awarded a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York for a project on communicating about nuclear weapons on social media and other digital platforms; he made multiple media appearances, and gave five talks, including for Lincoln Labs, the Special Forces Command in Tampa, and the Korea Institute of Nuclear Nonproliferation and Control (KINAC); and he completed a monograph on "The Implications of the JCPOA for Future Verification Arrangements Including a Potential Agreement with the DPRK."

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Professor of History and Co-director of the MISTI Russia Program **Elizabeth Wood** gave a talk on "Russian Influence and Counter-Influence: What Is to Be Done?" to the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration through the Industrial Liaison Program in March 2021; with SSP Senior Advisor **Carol Saivetz** organized

the Focus on Russia Speaker Series featuring “Palaces & Sandcastles: Deconstructing Putin’s Power,” with Sam Greene (Kings College London) on March 1; and “Advice to President Biden: Dealing with Putin’s Russia” with Angela Stent (Georgetown University) and Andrey Kortunov (Russian International Affairs Council) on April 20. With Managing Director of the MIT Russia Program **Ekat-erina Zabrovski** she organized: “Soviet and Russian Space Exploration: Celebrity and Propaganda, 1957–Present” with Victoria Smolkin (Wesleyan) and Andrew Jenks (California State University, Long Beach) as well as “MIT’s Own Astronaut: A Virtual Conversation with AeroAstro Alumnus Michael Fincke” (MIT-Russia and AeroAstro).

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