

It's the ideology, stupid



by Lev Tsitrin

["Why It Seems Everything We Knew About the Global Economy Is No Longer True"](#) is how the *New York Times*' titled its lengthy analysis of the discrepancy between rosy predictions of the proponents of globalization, and its outcome thirty years later. Back in the '90es, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was all sunshine, "a new world where goods, money and information crisscrossed the globe [and] would essentially sweep away the old order of Cold War conflicts and undemocratic regimes." A mere thirty years later, there are plenty of stormy clouds on the horizon – and storms, too: "A

global pandemic hit; war erupted in Europe; tensions between the United States and China boiled.”

The article was written by an economist, Patricia Cohen, who “covers the global economy and is based in London” – and her professional outlook caused her to seek the answer to the question of “why” in various economic factors, from misguided investments of the borrowed funds to over-reliance on raw materials and cheap labor from the actors who at some point refused to play by the rules, Russia and China. To that end, Ms. Cohen quotes Josep Borrell: “We have decoupled the sources of our prosperity from the sources of our security.” She quotes Janet Yellen: “Our supply chains are not secure, and they’re not resilient,” She quotes Jake Sullivan: “Ignoring the economic dependencies that had built up over the decades of liberalization had become really perilous.” Adherence to “oversimplified market efficiency,” he added, proved to be a mistake.”

In other words, It is still “the economy (plus the geopolitics), stupid.”

This is an amazing position to take, given that all our present adversaries – Russia, China, Iran – are motivated not by economic interests, but by ideology: Russia sees itself as the flag-bearer of basic family values, exuding abhorrence of Western looseness and perversion, and acting in defense of decency, generosity and goodness that are embodied in the healthy, Russian character – by trying to purge Ukraine of invasive and unnatural Western influences which Putin summarily denominated as “Nazism” that, if untreated, may seep into the Holy Russia itself, corrupting it. To China, Communism is the inevitable destination of the historical process, and it buys up the world as the first step towards the world-wide triumph of Communism. Iran has become a nuclear-threshold state focused on developing its military capacity to bring about the global triumph of God’s will that is so manifestly embodied in the Shia variety of Islam.

Economy is certainly a tool in all those goals – but not the goal in itself, unlike the Western democracies. Yet for reason I cannot understand, we in the West refuse to see any factors in play here other than economic ones. “It’s the economy, stupid” has become a new gospel. But in large portion of the globe, populations are motivated by a higher “truth” – be it a Russian World, Communism, or Islam. People there (or at least, leaders there – only they count in authoritarian societies, after all) are seekers of ultimate goodness – and the economy has nothing whatsoever to do with it. One could even argue that it is precisely because those societies are authoritarian that ideology, rather than economy, is driving policy in those countries: as soon as the power gets more distributed, and members of the public voice their needs for politicians to follow, the priorities would indeed turn out to be economic, and the grip of ideology may well vanish, ideologues who are now at the helm finding themselves in small minority. But when freedom is absent, the will of the majority is irrelevant, its voices suppressed and drowned by the likes of Putin, Xi, and Khomeini who personify the societies they lead, voicing their own, ideological aspirations on the assumption that they are widely shared by their publics – and they are, for who can object when a gun is pointed to one’s head?

And we in the West are not helping either – we developed a strange aversion to debating and debunking ideologies like Islamism. Everything to us is a “culture,” and any criticism is taken as a sign of disrespecting it – a deadly sin in our “multicultural” world. And so we stick to old formulas like “it’s the economy, stupid” – even when, like in the cases of Russia, China, and Iran it is patiently untrue, it being all about ideology, the economy being a mere tool of achieving ideological aims.

Bill Clinton apparently didn’t know this, and assumed that the prosperous China will be a peaceful China – and made it prosper by moving US manufacturing there. Obama thought that

prosperity would make Iran abandon nukes, and offered a relief of sanctions in his infamous “Iran deal” in expectation that the resulting wealth will make ayatollahs forget nukes and Islam. Europeans tethered themselves to Russian energy in expectation that the flow of money will tame Russia’s imperial instincts.

All this is very odd – because it contradicts our own history, which we somehow managed to thoroughly forget. Yes, we celebrate Thanksgiving, but forget that the Pilgrim Fathers came to this country for ideological – not economic – reasons: they wanted to escape religious persecution they faced in England. That alone should teach us the power of ideology – but somehow, it doesn’t.

A century and a half later, having observed that their ancestors imported their own share of ideological bigotry, the Founding Fathers decidedly shook it off, enshrining into a constitutional amendment anyone’s right to practice any religion they wish, and to speak their mind freely on any subject. This, perhaps, resulted in the present attitude. “The business of America is business,” Calvin Coolidge observed; and we extrapolate this to the entire world.

But in other countries, this is simply not true. Their business is still ideology – whether it is shiny Russian World, or Communism, or Islam. Not noticing this is the main error – and sin – of those who see the world through the America-tinted glasses. In the wider world, it is still “ideology, stupid.” It is high time for the *New York Times* and the rest of the media – and government – to start noticing this basic fact. Overcoming multicultural squeamishness and debunking crazy ideologies has to become the business of America, too.

Lev Tsitrin is the author of [“The Pitfall Of Truth: Holy War,](#)

Its Rationale And Folly"