

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As a topic of inquiry, the 'rise of China' is as ubiquitous in the field of International Relations as the rise of yeast is in baking. Having already published two issues on China's ascent as a Great Power in two issues more than ten years apart, (issues 6.2 in 2011 and 17.1 in 2022), I must confess that we at STAIR had half a mind to abandon this topic altogether out of due self-awareness. However, in keeping with Issue 20.1 on the subject of Fascism, we are less interested in 'pinning the Cold War on the dragon,' as it were, and more interested in the ways in which hegemonic competition between China and the United States interpolates and configures in International Affairs more generally. A preoccupation with China and the United States as belligerents in a civilizational clash and teleological tango can be myopic, and even jingoistic. This issue is therefore not about US-China relations, but how their direct and indirect competition is a dimension of other issues in International Affairs, including the fate of the EU, Artificial Intelligence, trade wars, and other milieus.

In conjunction with Issue 20.1, this series has sought not merely to take stock of international affairs and global (geo)politics, but to do so in a way which asserts that we must embrace different narratives than those of twenty years ago. The world has not merely 'changed' since STAIR's founding - it has become, in some respects, unrecognizable if the lexicons, assumptions, and narratives of two decades ago are taken for granted. Put simply, we find ourselves unsure as to whether the term 'Cold War' is even appropriate any longer. A narrative of bipolar competition between paramount strategic hegemonies in Asia and North America, one ostensibly socialist and the other capitalist, in the broader context of the rise of nation states once colonized by the West, with the threat of global destruction looming as a possible consequence of their co-escalation, cannot help but evoke memories of the Cold War. What I have noticed, however, working with STAIR's diligent editors on this issue, is that since we did not grow up during the Cold War, we understand that dichotomy in largely abstract ways having learned about it in school, as opposed to as an intuitive and internalized attribute of our social consciousness. We hazard the observation that those of our generation recognize the trope that 'the United States fights war for oil' as more sensible and self-explanatory than 'the United States fights wars to contain socialism,' for instance. Perhaps we are

less cognizant of the ideological narratives that shape International Affairs, and thus assume that decontextualized 'interests' are the signal and 'beliefs' are the noise.

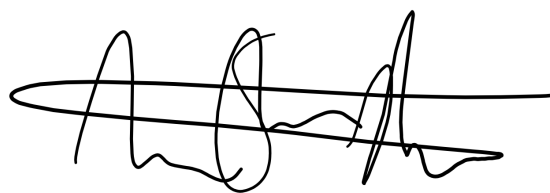
We can be persuaded that notwithstanding the 'multipolarity' which characterizes our age, a degree of strategic clarity has (re)emerged in International Affairs. What does not seem as intuitive to us are the extent to which the assumed friend-enemy distinctions which drive decision-making in international affairs are as coherent as we would expect of the kind of civilizational conflict often associated with the Cold War. Speaking for myself, I can attest as a Canadian, however anecdotally, that the sudden surge in patriotic identification following the imposition of tariffs on Canada by the United States varied independently, and certainly did not compromise, Canadian enmity towards China or Russia in the context of our fears of their incursion upon our interests in the Arctic, or their alleged espionage and interference in our elections, among other issues. As much as we continue to regard the United States as an ally, we also continue to boycott American products when it is convenient, whereas Chinese products tend to escape unharmed and unnoticed.

The hard work and talent of STAIR's editors and contributors deserves recognition. Bosco and Noah, your work on the Theme Section was exemplary, and has set a standard for future issues. Your knowledge of the subject matter, broad and deep, expertly informed the selection of pieces, the identification of peer reviewers, and the feedback returned to authors. Elena and Theo, the podcast continues to come close to outshining the journal itself as our preferred source of content. You have made the podcast into a truly professional production and have done so with a relieving independence. STAIR owes a special debt of thanks to Ismail, who stepped in at a critical juncture as Production Editor, producing the covers and contents for 20.1 and 20.2. Your decisive refashioning of STAIR's entire production process has been the only truly smooth step in our transition to Open Access publication.

Finally, to Yacine, I wish the best of luck as Editor in Chief for the coming year. Having done more than your share on the General Section of both of this year's issues, I am confident that the journal is in the best hands. Feel free to make good use of me at your leisure as I join the Steering Committee as an alumnus. I can't wait to see where you take STAIR as it begins the third decade of its journey. And, as always, my thanks to the reader for reading the work of the incredible authors included herein, now in open access format.

Sincerely,

Armin Safavi, Editor in Chief

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Armin Safavi', written over a horizontal line.