



June 2026 Newsletter



Dr. Liane Hentschke
Executive Director

From the Executive Director

As we enter the second half of 2026, I would like to thank our members, sponsors, volunteers, and partners for making the Tennessee World Affairs Council's most recent season one of our strongest and most impactful yet.

Our Distinguished Speaker Series concluded on a high note with an outstanding presentation by Seth Bernstein, CEO of AB. In a thoughtful conversation moderated by TNWAC Board Chair Karl Dean, Seth explored the global economic landscape, the importance of international markets, and the opportunities and challenges facing businesses in an unpredictable world. His remarks reinforced a central theme of TNWAC's mission: global developments are no longer distant events. They directly influence our communities, economy, and future.

As we prepare for our Summer/Fall 2026 season, we are excited to welcome an exceptional group of speakers and thought leaders who will help us examine some of the most important issues shaping our world today. On August 12, TNWAC will commemorate America's 250th anniversary with a distinguished panel discussion, *America at 250: The U.S. Armed Forces and Global Leadership*, featuring Army Col. Kevin Baird, Navy LT CMDR Patrick Ryan, and Air Force BRIG GEN Eden Murrie, moderated by Dr. Breck Walker. This timely conversation will explore the role of the Armed Forces in shaping the nation and advancing American leadership worldwide.

On August 19, we will welcome Mohammed Soliman, one of the leading voices on Middle East affairs and emerging geopolitical trends, for a discussion connected to the launch of his new book, *West Asia*. On September 15, we are honored to host Mona Yacoubian of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), who will provide expert insights into the rapidly evolving Middle East and the implications of regional conflict for global security and U.S. foreign policy.

In addition, we are developing an exciting lineup of programs for the remainder of the year, including discussions on Germany, Africa, international trade, global economics, and the strategic challenges shaping the international order. In the next pages, you will find analysis from our guest columnist, updates on our volunteers and board members, opportunities for international engagement, and information about upcoming events designed to help Tennesseans better understand the world and their place in it.

Thank you for your continued support, engagement, and belief in the importance of informed dialogue. We look forward to welcoming you to our upcoming programs.

With sincere gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liane Hentschke". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Explore International Careers

GLOBAL HEALTH PROGRAM OFFICER

In this role, you will contribute to programs that improve healthcare access, disease prevention, and public health outcomes worldwide. You will collaborate with international agencies, NGOs, and government partners to coordinate projects, analyze health data, and support strategies that promote well-being across diverse populations.

[Learn more...](#)

PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION SPECIALIST

In this role, you will support efforts to prevent conflict, promote dialogue, and strengthen social cohesion in regions affected by instability. You will engage with international organizations, local communities, and policymakers to design initiatives that foster peace, human rights, and long-term development.

[Learn more...](#)

Volunteer Spotlight:

Kristiina Oja



Originally from Finland, Kristiina Oja grew up in Helsinki and developed an international perspective from an early age through her education at the International School of Helsinki, an

exchange year in Oregon, and extensive travel throughout Europe. She earned a Master's degree in International Politics from the University of Helsinki and continued her studies at the London School of Economics. Her career in corporate communications and leadership spanned the financial industry, where she collaborated with colleagues and stakeholders across Europe and the United States.

Today, she remains closely connected to Finland while dedicating her time and expertise to serving her community through volunteer work, bringing with her a wealth of professional experience, global perspective, and a passion for connecting people across cultures.

Did You Know?

More people voted in 2024 than in any other year on record. More than 60 countries, representing nearly half of the world's population, held national elections, including major democracies such as the United States, India, Mexico, Indonesia, South Africa, and the European Union.

An estimated 4 billion people were eligible to vote, making it one of the most significant years for global democracy in modern history. Elections held across these nations helped shape international priorities on issues ranging from climate change and economic development to security, migration, and technological innovation.

Sponsor Highlight:



Brown Advisory is dedicated to creating meaningful opportunities for individuals and communities through its commitment to excellence, integrity, and long-term partnership. By fostering a culture of collaboration, professional development, and client-centered service, the firm invests in the growth and success of both its clients and employees. Through thoughtful leadership, mentorship, and a focus on creating lasting impact, Brown Advisory empowers current and future professionals to develop their talents, build strong networks, and contribute positively to an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

Thank you for your support!

Guest Columnist

The views and opinions expressed in our guest column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Tennessee World Affairs Council.



Dr. Susan Haynes

Associate Professor of Political Science

Lipscomb University

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the official closure of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it is worth assessing whether predictions of Chinese aid increases have come to fruition. When the United States first cut its foreign aid, many reports warned that China was likely to exploit the impending vacuum. The problem with such analyses, however, is that they overstated what China had to do to secure a soft-power victory. The answer, astonishingly, was nothing. By hastily retracting much of its foreign aid, the US essentially forfeited the game. Its retreat cost hundreds of thousands of foreign jobs and tens of thousands of domestic jobs, it abruptly ended life-saving programs for millions, and it is believed to have contributed to the latest outbreak of Ebola in Africa. China could decide to “swoop in” and “save the day,” as there were early indications of such moves in Nepal and Cambodia, but such steps are strategically unnecessary. China already has the win.

A look at the Chinese narrative proves the point. In China, the demise of USAID reads like an irreverent obituary to a self-destructive and unstable uncle who was never anyone’s favorite to begin with. The Global Times, for instance, tells the story of USAID and uses quotes from US sources and officials to highlight its deficiencies, summarizing that the agency succumbed to its own injuries of “severe waste, profit repatriation, lack of transparency, [and] broken promises.” It also links to a 2024 Chinese Foreign Ministry report that claims that these characteristics are also emblematic of America as a whole. The same report unironically likens USAID to a leech, saying that it sucks others dry to make America more powerful.

Such nonsensical insults make sense when one realizes the overwhelming advantage the US has over China in the area of aid. The US was the first country to institutionalize international assistance and make it a mainstay of its foreign policy, and it has contributed an average of nearly \$50 billion in economic aid annually since 1949. Even when you exclude the Marshall Plan, which allocated the equivalent of \$133 billion to resurrect Europe after World War II, the annual average is still an impressive \$40 billion. China’s economic aid allocations, meanwhile, peaked in 2015 at US \$3.14 billion, and China’s sluggish economic growth dampens the possibility of a sizable increase. China also lacks the institutional capacity to have multitudinous aid programs and has focused much of its energy instead on infrastructure and manufacturing.

I have written before that the United States ignores China to its peril. In this case, however, hyper-focusing on China’s next move is equally ill-advised. It makes the mistake of assuming that the game is still in play - the battle is ongoing. It’s not. China is not advantaged by twisting the knife in a self-inflicted wound - especially if doing so would come at an economic cost. Instead, it needs only to heed the advice of Chinese general Sun Tzu and not interrupt the enemy who is making a mistake.



Board Member Highlight: Scott Imbrosciano

This month, we're proud to recognize Scott Imbrosciano, a dedicated Board Member whose extensive experience in global banking and financial services strengthens TNWAC's mission. As a Senior Relationship Manager in Global Commercial Banking at Bank of America, Scott helps middle-market clients navigate complex challenges by delivering customized financial solutions.

Before joining Bank of America, Scott spent 15 years at JPMorgan Chase in International Trading and Risk Management, with professional experience in both New York and London. A graduate of Oneonta State College with a Bachelor of Science in Business Economics and a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA), Scott brings valuable global expertise, strategic insight, and a commitment to fostering international understanding through his service on the TNWAC Board.

MAY EVENT RECAP



GLOBAL AFFAIRS KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

1 Which country officially became the newest member of BRICS in 2024?

A Argentina

B Egypt

C Turkey

2 The war in Ukraine has significantly increased the strategic importance of which resource for the global energy transition?

A Lithium

B Coal

C Uranium

3 Which international organization adopted the Global Digital Compact in 2024 to promote a safer and more inclusive digital future?

A NATO

B United Nations

C World Trade Organization

4 Which region has become a major focus of geopolitical competition due to its shipping routes, natural resources, and strategic location?

A The Arctic

B The Caribbean

C The Mediterranean

5 Which body of water has become a major flashpoint in tensions between China and several Southeast Asian nations?

A Ukraine

B Finland

C Sweden

Find the answers to the quiz on the last page of the newsletter





SAVE THE DATE

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES



SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS & CALEDONIAN CANAL

Jun 26 - Jul 7



SCANDINAVIA & BALTIC SEA: SWEDEN, POLAND, DENMARK, LATVIA, FINLAND, & ESTONIA

Jul 9 - Jul 19

REGISTER NOW



Support TNWAC

As a nonpartisan nonprofit organization, our mission is to **promote international awareness, understanding**, and connections to enhance the region's global stature and to prepare Tennesseans to thrive in our increasingly complex and interconnected world.

1

Bring a friend to one of our events and encourage them to join us as a member!

2

Introduce our team to an **expert in your network** to join us as a speaker in 2026!

3

Encourage **businesses you love to join TNWAC** as a corporate member or sponsor!

AMERICA AT 250: THE U.S. ARMED FORCES AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

August 12



Moderator:
DR. BRECK WALKER



LT CMDR PATRICK RYAN



COL KEVIN BAIRD



BRIG GEN EDEN MURRIE



Mohammed Soliman

August 19, 2026



Mona Yacoubian

September 15, 2026

Answers for the knowledge Quiz

- 5/5 – Your global knowledge is amazing. You're truly on top of world affairs! 🌍
- 4/5 – Impressive! You have strong global awareness.
- 3/5 – Not bad! You're well-informed, with room to grow.
- 2/5 – A good start! Keep exploring global issues.
- 1/5 – You're just getting started – stay curious!
- 0/5 – TNWAC bring knowledge and understanding through in-person events, webinars, and the Newsletter

1) B 2) A 3) B 4) A 5) C