



# September 2026 Newsletter



**Dr. Liane Hentschke**  
Executive Director

## From the Executive Director

We are living through a period of extraordinary global change. Wars and geopolitical tensions, shifting alliances, economic uncertainty, new technologies, and disruptions to global trade are reshaping the world. These developments may take place thousands of miles away, but their consequences reach Tennessee, our businesses, universities, communities, and daily lives. In this environment, the mission of the Tennessee World Affairs Council has never been more important: to provide knowledge, context, and diverse perspectives so Tennesseans can better understand a complex world and make informed decisions.

Our recent Distinguished Speaker Series events demonstrate this mission in action. Mohammed Soliman brought us an important discussion on The Iran War and the Asian Future of the Middle East, examining geopolitical developments with implications far beyond the region. Laura Ritchey, President and CEO of GEODIS Americas, approached global affairs from another perspective in The New Rules of Global Commerce. Her discussion reminded us that geopolitics and economics are deeply interconnected and that changes around the world directly affect companies, workers, consumers, and communities here.

None of this work happens without the dedication of many people. My special appreciation goes to Kristiina Oja, our Editor-in-Chief, for the creativity and commitment she has brought to this newsletter, expanding its content, developing its new format, and bringing new ideas for future issues. I also want to thank our Board of Directors and, last but not least, our wonderful volunteers, who generously contribute their time and talents to TNWAC. This issue also reminds us that we are part of something larger. TNWAC belongs to a national network of nearly 90 independent World Affairs Councils, united by a commitment to nonpartisan education, civil dialogue, and international understanding.

And there is much more ahead. On September 30, we will welcome Douglas Kreulen, President and CEO of the Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority, followed by Global Eats at the beginning of October, and a program focused on the transatlantic relationship and Germany on October 28. This conversation explores the importance of the U.S.-German partnership and the broader economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties that connect the United States and Europe. We will then conclude our fall season with two additional programs in November.

As the world becomes more complex, our commitment becomes stronger. Global understanding is essential to being an informed and engaged citizen. TNWAC is committed to ensuring Tennesseans have a place to engage with the world through knowledge, dialogue, and connection. Thank you for being part of TNWAC and for supporting our mission.

# 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.*



## Matthew Hughes

**President and CEO of the World Affairs Councils of America**

### United by a shared mission

Many people know the Tennessee World Affairs Council for its outstanding programs and commitment to fostering informed dialogue on global issues.

What you may not know is that The Tennessee World Affairs Council (TNWAC) is also part of something much larger. It is one of nearly 90 independent World Affairs Councils that together make up the World Affairs Councils of America (WACA), a nationwide network dedicated to advancing international understanding through nonpartisan education, civil dialogue, and community engagement. While each Council serves its own community, we are united by a shared mission: helping Americans better understand the world and America's place in it.

### Fostering our collaboration

Although Tennessee is one of the newer Councils in our network, it has already distinguished itself as a national leader. TNWAC was recognized by WACA as Council of the Year several years ago, an honor that reflects the innovation, dedication, and impact of the Council's leadership, board, volunteers, and members. At WACA, we support, strengthen, and represent this national network. We foster collaboration among Councils, provide professional development opportunities, cultivate national partnerships, and support signature programs such as Academic WorldQuest and Engage America.

### Experience the strength of our network

One of the best ways to experience the strength of this national network firsthand is at WACA's National Conference, our largest annual gathering. In November, Council leaders, board members, educators, students, diplomats, business leaders, and internationally minded citizens from across the country will gather in Washington, DC, for this year's conference, America's Global Choices: Then, Now, and Next.

As the United States commemorates its 250th anniversary, this year's conference will explore the evolution of America's role in the world, the challenges and opportunities we face today, and the choices that will shape our future. Through timely discussions with distinguished speakers and meaningful conversations among participants, the conference offers an opportunity to deepen understanding of global affairs while building relationships across our national network.

### Join us in Washington!

I am confident you will leave with new ideas, new relationships, and a renewed appreciation for the important work of World Affairs Councils. Thank you for your support of the Tennessee World Affairs Council and for all you do to advance global understanding in your community. I look forward to welcoming many of you to Washington this fall.

## WACA's national conference

**Nov 17 - 20 2026**

**Mayflower Hotel in Washington DC**

2026 WACA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**America's  
Global Choices**

Then · Now · Next

WHEN  
November  
17 - 20, 2026

WHERE  
The Mayflower Hotel  
Washington, D.C.

HOSTED BY

**National Conference: Engage with  
leading voices in global affairs,  
diplomacy & policy**

**Learn more and register to the  
WACA National Conference**

# Board Member Highlight: Jill Kolin



When the invitation came to join the Board of the Tennessee World Affairs Council, I knew right away it was something I wanted to be part of. The Council's mission of building global awareness and understanding across our community speaks to something I care about deeply, and it lines up beautifully with how I grew up and the work that has filled my career. My professional life has taken me around the world. I've led teams in Hyderabad, India, worked in Central America, lived and studied in Mexico City, and supported programs in dozens of countries.

Every one of those experiences taught me the same thing: the world is far more connected, and far more human, than the headlines would have us believe. Understanding other cultures isn't just smart business. It's how we build trust, tackle shared challenges, and truly see one another. That's why staying curious about global affairs matters right now. It shapes our economy, our neighborhoods, and our children's futures right here in Tennessee. A little global literacy goes a long way. It helps us show up as thoughtful, engaged citizens rather than anxious bystanders, and it prepares the next generation to lead in a world without borders. As a Board member, I can't wait to help the Council grow its reach, deepen its partnerships across Nashville's business and civic community, and welcome even more people into this mission. I'm truly honored to serve, and I look forward to all we'll accomplish together.

**Jill Kolin is Director of Community Engagement at Trinetix**

## Applications open until 1 Oct



For Tennessee students 13 and older  
**[READ MORE HERE](#)**

## Sponsor Highlight

**Thank you to Brown Advisory for becoming our Silver Sponsor!**



*Thank you for your support!*

## Volunteer Spotlight:

### Ibram Ibrahim



Ibram was born in Egypt, raised in Nashville, and now based in Spring Hill, Tennessee. He is a sophomore at Middle Tennessee State University, majoring in Political Science with an emphasis in Pre-Law, and minoring in Criminal Justice and Arabic. He has always been interested in global affairs, especially after the Arab Spring began in 2011, and he moved with his family from Cairo to Nashville at age five. After looking for internships in international relations, he came across TNWAC. From the beginning, TNWAC felt like home because it focuses on global education in all aspects, including economics. In addition to his enthusiasm for international relations, he also loves soccer (his favorite team is Liverpool).

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR EVENTS



## The Iran War and the Asian Future of the Middle East

with **Mohammed Soliman**  
Director, McLarty Associate  
Senior Fellow,  
Middle East Institute

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*I heard about the Tennessee World Affairs Council from my professor, who told us about the partnership between our university and the Council. At the events, I've met people from many professional areas and it has broadened my perspective about what international relations can be.*

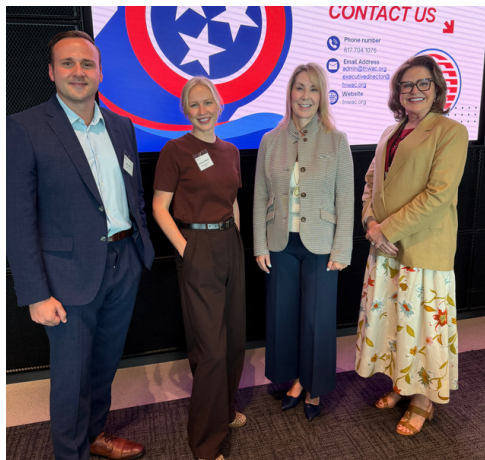
Arlie Akers, Lipscomb University Student

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## The New Rules of Global Commerce: Why Adaptability is the New Competitive Advantage

with **Laura Ritchey**  
President & CEO Geodis  
Americas Region



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*TNWAC provides knowledge, context, and diverse perspectives to help people make informed decisions. For companies, understanding geopolitical change and different environments helps them anticipate risks and identify opportunities.*

Dr. Liane Hentscke, Executive Director,  
Tennessee World Affairs Council

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# Guest Columnist

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## What Tennesseans should know about China in 2026

### A brief guide to cutting through the media fog on the People's Republic of China

Beijing is salivating at America's troubles in the Strait of Hormuz and readying plans to invade Taiwan! But China's military is at its weakest point in decades because Xi Jinping keeps purging his generals! Chinese robots and AI will take over the world! But Chinese innovation is just the result of intellectual property theft, doomed to second place in the race for the future!

This is the confusing picture you're likely to get from American news reports and social media commentary on China. The policies of the Chinese government are often reported on with an American lens that distorts Chinese realities and misleads American decision-makers.

Here's what I'd tell you instead, as a Nashvillian who lived in China for 20 years, and recently returned for a month ([I wrote about it here](#)).

#### What Chinese people want

Most Chinese people want the same things that most Americans want. Young Chinese people are talented and ambitious; parents want the best for their children; older people want to retire in peace. They all put up with (or are forced to put up with) a highly centralized, authoritarian government which does things that make Americans gasp. (As many non-Americans gasp at what Americans put up with these days.) As in America, life in China is quite good for most people. In China, however, this is a recent phenomenon: most educated urbanites in their 50s remember poverty in their childhood.

#### How the government operates effectively

The Chinese government is highly centralized and optimizes for national strength, not citizen-consumer comfort. This allows it to make very different decisions about national priorities than the American government. But China's leaders are not immune to citizen dissatisfaction either. To survive, the system has to deliver benefits to what Party-speak calls the "broad masses." It's working: For the vast majority of Chinese people, material life is significantly better now than it's been in living memory.

#### Are they really Communist, and what does that mean?

The Communist Party runs the government, and its leader is a committed communist. Xi Jinping uses an adapted form of Marxist-Leninist ideology to organize the Party. The words "communist" and "Marxist" tend to be wildly misunderstood in the U.S., so perhaps a better way of thinking about it is that the Party has a really comprehensive mission statement that everyone who works for the government must study and try to implement. This mission statement is backed by an army and a surveillance-enabled police force, and it helps the Party implement top-down planning effectively, despite the dreary, wasted hours of meetings and Xi Jinping Thought lessons officials must endure. Individual rights are not prioritized, but the general aim is to raise citizens' standard of living.

#### The AI "race" and tech and R&D dominance

China's companies and factories turn out the world's best tooling engineers and drug developers, and make the best electric cars and parts of all the world's robots, partly because the education system produces excellent technologists, scientists, and engineers. The country is investing heavily in both basic and applied research. These are extraordinary competitive advantages. Any lead in technology that the U.S. now has—and that's pretty much down to chips for AI, jet engines, and satellite internet—is temporary. No U.S. legislation can fundamentally change this reality.

# Guest Columnist continued

## Taiwan

The Communist Party has consistently repeated the same message since the 1990s, and Xi Jinping has doubled down on it: The People's Republic will eventually be unified with Taiwan, peacefully or otherwise. Given that Xi Jinping has actually purged many of his senior generals in the last few years, and that, as military analysts increasingly argue, Taiwan would be really tough to invade and occupy, it seems unlikely that Beijing is readying plans to invade Taiwan in the near future, no matter how weak America looks against Iran right now. In the long term, economic and technological squeezes—inducements and punishments—are the most likely means to unification. But the possibility of invasion is not zero, and Xi Jinping has been exhorting the People's Liberation Army to be “ready to fight and win wars” for more than a decade.

## Global power

Chinese companies will aggressively expand abroad, and the Chinese government will consistently expand its diplomatic and political presence around the world, and—very slowly—its military footprint. Private and state actors will globalize in ways that are different from America's, and that sometimes but not always lead to outcomes that are not in America's interests. It's far from certain that Chinese overseas expansion will produce global common goods, but it is already producing enough goodwill around the world to ensure that China has many reliable trade partners in all the continents, and good friends in international organizations.

## China's future, and America's

For these reasons, it is almost inevitable that in the coming decade and beyond, China will be at least as dominant as the United States and will overtake it by many economic, technological, and other measures. I added that “almost” to hedge: China remains a “fragile superpower,” as Susan Shirk called her 2007 book, with vast inequalities, plenty of economic problems, a demographic crisis of too many old people and not enough babies, and an autocratic leader who doesn't appear to have a plan for a successor. Anything could happen. But my bet is that the U.S. will have to learn to live in a world where China is a peer competitor or the number one player in almost every field of human endeavor.

What then is to be done to keep up? Sanctions, export controls, tariffs and other such measures may have short-term tactical use to slow China's advance in specific sectors—China certainly uses such measures—but the U.S. won't be able to meaningfully hinder China's advance by slapping bans on chip or other hardware purchases. Instead, America should focus on its traditional advantages:

- High levels of immigration and integration of immigrants into society;
- Generous private and public funding of research and education—driven by both scholarly curiosity about apparently useless fields, and by entrepreneurial speculation;
- Freedom of expression and inquiry;
- A global vision with policies and budgets to implement it.

Sadly, right now these traditions are under attack. But they are the ingredients of America's secret sauce, and China cannot replicate the recipe. If we lose the secret sauce, China will use its own ingredients to cook us up for lunch, and they'll pick the bones clean.



## Jeremy Goldkorn

*Jeremy Goldkorn is a South African-born editor and entrepreneur whose work has focused on China where he lived from 1995 to 2015, when he moved to Nashville. He is an Editorial Fellow with the Asia Society's ChinaFile.*

# GLOBAL AFFAIRS KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

A great opportunity to test how well you paid attention at our recent event  
'The Iran War and the Asian Future of the Middle East'!

**1 Which three Sunni Middle Eastern powers recently signed the Mecca Agreement?**

- A** Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia
- B** Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan
- C** Turkey, Qatar, and Pakistan
- D** Syria, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia

**2 What role do the Gulf States play in the European Union's efforts to strengthen its position in relation to the United States?**

- A** AI Infrastructure
- B** Purchase of European brands
- C** Energy supply
- D** Defense procurement

**3 Which Gulf nation recently coordinated with Iran on maritime security of the Strait of Hormuz?**

- A** United Arab Emirates
- B** Oman
- C** Qatar
- D** Saudi Arabia

**4 What could be the regional and international impacts of a major escalation between the USA and Iran affecting the Persian Gulf region?**

- A** Gulf Debt financing of Africa and West Asia would halt, throwing much of the developing world into a debt crisis
- B** Oil supply to Asia would dry up, forcing widespread industrial shut-downs at the factories of consumer electronics the world relies on
- C** Gulf desalination plant destruction causes massive migration and humanitarian crisis that turns cities like Dubai and Doha uninhabitable
- D** All of the Above

**5 Which Middle Eastern state was recently dropped by the US gov't as a state sponsor of terrorism?**

- A** Iraq
- B** Iran
- C** Syria
- D** Yemen

Thank you to our Board Member, **Sam Waitt**, for creating these quiz questions!

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



# A Note from the Editor

I've always been curious and eager to learn, but joining the Tennessee World Affairs Council has opened up a whole new world for me.



From discussions on the Middle East and global supply chains, to reading a detailed account of China and meeting colleagues from World Affairs Councils across the country, I've been reminded of just how much there is to learn and how many perspectives there are to consider. I hope this newsletter brings some of that knowledge to you.

There is clearly no shortage of important topics to explore. Have an idea, question, or perspective to share? We'd love to hear from you — or have you contribute: [info@tnwac.org](mailto:info@tnwac.org).

*Kristiina Oja is a volunteer at TNWAC.*

## 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!

# TNWAC Events

REGISTER NOW!

## The Middle East After the Iran War: A New (Dis)Order Emerging?

**Mona Yacoubian**

*Director and Senior Advisor of the Middle East Program at CSIS*



SEP 15

## Over the Horizon at BNA

**Douglas Kreulen**

*President and CEO, Metropolitan Nashville Airport Authority*

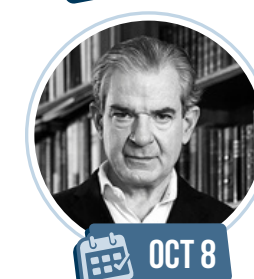


SEP 30

## All the Presidents' Wars | 25 Years of America's War on Terror

**Peter Bergen**

*Vice President at New America, Professor at Arizona State University*



OCT 8

## TNWAC now on Giving Matters!



The platform connects donors, funders, and the community online with nearly 2,000 nonprofits across Middle Tennessee.

You can find our listing [here](#).

## 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) D    5) C

[executivedirector@tnwac.org](mailto:executivedirector@tnwac.org) | [www.tnwac.org](http://www.tnwac.org)