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### 1NC – DA

#### Xi’s regime is stable now, but its success depends on strong growth and private sector development.

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In China, however, growth has come in the context of stable communist rule, suggesting that democracy and growth are not inevitably mutually dependent. In fact, many Chinese believe that the country’s recent economic achievements—large-scale poverty reduction, huge infrastructure investment, and development as a world-class tech innovator—have come about because of, not despite, China’s authoritarian form of government. Its aggressive handling of Covid-19—in sharp contrast to that of many Western countries with higher death rates and later, less-stringent lockdowns—has, if anything, reinforced that view.

China has also defied predictions that its authoritarianism would inhibit its capacity to [innovate](https://hbr.org/2011/06/what-the-west-doesnt-get-about-china). It is a global leader in AI, biotech, and space exploration. Some of its technological successes have been driven by market forces: People wanted to buy goods or communicate more easily, and the likes of Alibaba and Tencent have helped them do just that. But much of the technological progress has come from a highly innovative and well-funded military that has invested heavily in China’s burgeoning new industries. This, of course, mirrors the role of U.S. defense and intelligence spending in the development of Silicon Valley. But in China the consumer applications have come faster, making more obvious the link between government investment and products and services that benefit individuals. That’s why ordinary Chinese people see Chinese companies such as Alibaba, Huawei, and TikTok as sources of national pride—international vanguards of Chinese success—rather than simply sources of jobs or GDP, as they might be viewed in the West.

Thus July 2020 polling data from the Ash Center at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government revealed 95% satisfaction with the Beijing government among Chinese citizens. Our own experiences on the ground in China confirm this. Most ordinary people we meet don’t feel that the authoritarian state is solely oppressive, although it can be that; for them it also provides opportunity. A cleaner in Chongqing now owns several apartments because the CCP reformed property laws. A Shanghai journalist is paid by her state-controlled magazine to fly around the world for stories on global lifestyle trends. A young student in Nanjing can study propulsion physics at Beijing’s Tsinghua University thanks to social mobility and the party’s significant investment in scientific research.

#### Xi has committed to the commercial space industry as the linchpin of China’s rise – the plan is seen as a complete 180

**Patel 21** [Neel V. Patel, Neel is a space reporter for MIT Technology Review. 1-21-2021, "China’s surging private space industry is out to challenge the US," MIT Technology Review, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/01/21/1016513/china-private-commercial-space-industry-dominance/> accessed 12/14/21] Adam

Until recently, China’s space activity has been overwhelmingly dominated by two state-owned enterprises: the China Aerospace Science & Industry Corporation Limited (CASIC) and the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC). A few private space firms have been allowed to operate in the country for a while: for example, there’s the China Great Wall Industry Corporation Limited (in reality a subsidiary of CASC), which has provided commercial launches since it was established in 1980. But for the most part, China’s commercial space industry has been nonexistent. Satellites were expensive to build and launch, and they were too heavy and large for anything but the biggest rockets to actually deliver to orbit. The costs involved were too much for anything but national budgets to handle.

That all changed this past decade as the costs of making satellites and launching rockets plunged. In 2014, a year after Xi Jinping took over as the new leader of China, the Chinese government decided to treat civil space development as a key area of innovation, as it had already begun doing with AI and solar power. It issued a policy directive called [Document 60](https://archive.md/o/bc9l4/www.cpppc.org/en/zy/994006.jhtml) that year to enable large private investment in companies interested in participating in the space industry.

“Xi’s goal was that if China has to become a critical player in technology, including in civil space and aerospace, it was critical to develop a space ecosystem that includes the private sector,” says Namrata Goswami, a geopolitics expert based in Montgomery, Alabama, who’s been studying China’s space program for many years. “He was taking a cue from the American private sector to encourage innovation from a talent pool that extended beyond state-funded organizations.”

As a result, there are now 78 commercial space companies operating in China, according to a[2019 report by the Institute for Defense Analyses](https://archive.md/o/bc9l4/https:/www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/e/ev/evaluation-of-chinas-commercial-space-sector/d-10873.ashx). More than half have been founded since 2014, and the vast majority focus on satellite manufacturing and launch services.

For example, Galactic Energy, founded in February 2018, is building its Ceres rocket to offer rapid launch service for single payloads, while its Pallas rocket is being built to deploy entire constellations. Rival company i-Space, formed in 2016, became the first commercial Chinese company to make it to space with its Hyperbola-1 in July 2019. It wants to pursue reusable first-stage boosters that can land vertically, like those from SpaceX. So does LinkSpace (founded in 2014), although it also hopes to use rockets to deliver packages from one terrestrial location to another.

Spacety, founded in 2016, wants to turn around customer orders to build and launch its small satellites in just six months. In December it launched a miniaturized version of a satellite that uses 2D radar images to build 3D reconstructions of terrestrial landscapes. Weeks later, it [released the first images taken by the satellite](https://archive.md/o/bc9l4/https:/spacenews.com/spacety-releases-first-sar-images/), Hisea-1, featuring three-meter resolution. Spacety wants to launch a constellation of these satellites to offer high-quality imaging at low cost.

To a large extent, China is following the same blueprint drawn up by the US: using government contracts and subsidies to give these companies a foot up. US firms like SpaceX benefited greatly from NASA contracts that paid out millions to build and test rockets and space vehicles for delivering cargo to the International Space Station. With that experience under its belt, SpaceX was able to attract more customers with greater confidence.

Venture capital is another tried-and-true route. The IDA report estimates that VC funding for Chinese space companies was up to $516 million in 2018—far shy of the $2.2 billion American companies raised, but nothing to scoff at for an industry that really only began seven years ago. At least 42 companies had no known government funding.

And much of the government support these companies do receive doesn’t have a federal origin, but a provincial one. “[These companies] are drawing high-tech development to these local communities,” says Hines. “And in return, they’re given more autonomy by the local government.” While most have headquarters in Beijing, many keep facilities in Shenzhen, Chongqing, and other areas that might draw talent from local universities.

There’s also one advantage specific to China: manufacturing. “What is the best country to trust for manufacturing needs?” asks James Zheng, the CEO of Spacety’s Luxembourg headquarters. “It’s China. It’s the manufacturing center of the world.” Zheng believes the country is in a better position than any other to take advantage of the space industry’s new need for mass production of satellites and rockets alike.

Making friends

The most critical strategic reason to encourage a private space sector is to create opportunities for international collaboration—particularly to attract customers wary of being seen to mix with the Chinese government. (US agencies and government contractors, for example, are barred from working with any groups the regime funds.) Document 60 and others issued by China’s National Development and Reform Commission were aimed not just at promoting technological innovation, but also at drawing in foreign investment and maximizing a customer base beyond Chinese borders.

“China realizes there are certain things they cannot get on their own,” says Frans von der Dunk, a space policy expert at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Chinese companies like LandSpace and MinoSpace have worked to accrue funding through foreign investment, escaping dependence on state subsidies. And by avoiding state funding, a company can also avoid an array of restrictions on what it can and can’t do (such as constraints on talking with the media). Foreign investment also makes it easier to compete on a global scale: you’re taking on clients around the world, launching from other countries, and bringing talent from outside China.

Although China is taking inspiration from the US in building out its private industry, the nature of the Chinese state also means these new companies face obstacles that their rivals in the West don’t have to worry about. While Chinese companies may look private on paper, they must still submit to government guidance and control, and accept some level of interference. It may be difficult for them to make a case to potential overseas customers that they are independent. The distinction between companies that are truly private and those that are more or less state actors is still quite fuzzy, especially if the government is a frequent customer. “That could still lead to a lack of trust from other partners,” says Goswami. It doesn’t help that the government itself is often [very cagey about what its national program is even up to](https://archive.md/o/bc9l4/https:/www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-54076895).

And Hines adds that it’s not always clear exactly how separate these companies are from, say, the People’s Liberation Army, given the historical ties between the space and defense sectors. “Some of these things will pose significant hurdles for the commercial space sector as it tries to expand,” he says.

#### Shifts in regime perception threatens CCP’s legitimacy from nationalist hardliners

Weiss 19 Jessica Weiss 1-29-2019 “Authoritarian Audiences, Rhetoric, and Propaganda in International Crises: Evidence from China” <http://www.jessicachenweiss.com/uploads/3/0/6/3/30636001/19-01-24-elite-statements-isq-ca.pdf> (Associate Professor of Government at Cornell University)//Elmer

Public support—or the appearance of it—matters to many autocracies. As Ithiel de Sola Pool writes, modern dictatorships are “highly conscious of public opinion and make major efforts to affect it.”6 Mao Zedong told his comrades: “When you make revolution, you must first manage public opinion.”7 Because autocracies often rely on **nationalist mythmaking**,8 success or failure in defending the national honor in international crises could burnish the leadership’s patriotic credentials or spark opposition. **Shared outrage at the regime’s foreign policy failures could galvanize street protests or elite fissures, creating intraparty upheaval** or inviting military officers to step in to restore order. Fearing a domestic backlash, authoritarian leaders may feel compelled to take a tough international stance. Although authoritarian leaders are rarely held accountable to public opinion through free and fair elections, fears of popular unrest and irregular ouster often weigh heavily on autocrats seeking to maximize their tenure in office. Considering the harsh consequences that authoritarian elites face if pushed out of office, even a small increase in the probability of ouster could alter authoritarian incentives in international crises.9 A history of nationalist uprisings make Chinese citizens and leaders especially aware of the linkage between international disputes and domestic unrest. The weakness of the PRC’s predecessor in defending Chinese sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 galvanized protests and a general strike, forcing the government to sack three officials and reject the Treaty of Versailles, which awarded territories in China to Japan. These precedents have made Chinese officials particularly sensitive to the appearance of hewing to public opinion. As the People’s Daily chief editor wrote: “History and reality have shown us that public opinion and regime safety are inseparable.”10 One Chinese scholar even claimed: “the Chinese government probably knows the public’s opinion better and reacts to it more directly than even the U.S. government.”11

#### Xi will launch diversionary war to domestic backlash – escalates in multiple hotspots

Norris 17, William J. Geostrategic Implications of China’s Twin Economic Challenges. CFR Discussion Paper, 2017. (Associate professor of Chinese foreign and security policy at Texas A&M University’s Bush School of Government and Public Service)//Elmer

Populist pressures might tempt the **party leadership** to encourage **diversionary nationalism**. The logic of this concern is straightforward: the Communist Party might seek to **distract a restless domestic population** with **adventurism abroad**.19 The **Xi** administration wants to **appear tough** in its **defense of foreign encroachments** against China’s interests. This need stems from a long-running narrative about how a weak Qing dynasty was unable to defend China in the face of European imperial expansion, epitomized by the Opium Wars and the subsequent treaties imposed on China in the nineteenth century. The party is **particularly sensitive** to **perceptions of weakness** because much of its **claim to legitimacy**—manifested in **Xi’s Chinese Dream** campaign today—stems from the party’s claims of leading the **restoration of Chinese greatness**. For example, the May Fourth Movement, a popular protest in 1919 that helped catalyze the CPC, called into question the legitimacy of the Republic of China government running the country at that time because the regime was seen as not having effectively defended China’s territorial and sovereignty interests at the Versailles Peace Conference. **Diversionary nationalist frictions** would likely occur if the Chinese leadership portrayed a foreign adversary as having made the first move, thus forcing Xi to stand up for China’s interests. An example is the 2012 attempt by the nationalist governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, to buy the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands from a private owner.20 Although the Japanese central government sought to avert a crisis by stepping in to purchase the islands—having them bought and administered by Ishihara’s Tokyo metropolitan government would have dragged Japan into a confrontation with China—China saw this move as part of a deliberate orchestration by Japan to nationalize the islands. Xi seemingly had no choice but to defend China’s claims against an attempt by Japan to consolidate its position on the dispute.21 This issue touched off a period of heated tensions between China and Japan, lasting more than two years.22 Such dynamics are not limited to Japan. Other possible areas of conflict include, but are not necessarily limited to, **Taiwan**, **India**, and the **South China Sea** (especially with the **Philippines** and **Vietnam**). The Chinese government will use such tactics if it believes that the costs are relatively low. Ideally, China would like to appear tough while avoiding material repercussions or a serious diplomatic breakdown. Standing up against foreign encroachment—without facing much blowback—could provide Xi’s administration with a tempting source of noneconomic legitimacy. However, over the next few years, Xi will probably not be actively looking to get embroiled abroad. Cushioning the fallout from slower growth while managing a structural economic transition will be difficult enough. Courting potential international crises that distract the central leadership would make this task even more daunting. Even if the top leadership did not wish to provoke conflict, a smaller budgetary allotment for security could cause **military interests** in China to **deliberately instigate trouble** to **justify** their **claims over increasingly scarce resources**. For example, an air force interested in ensuring its funding for a midair tanker program might find the existence of far-flung territorial disputes to be useful in making its case. Such a case would be made even stronger by a pattern of recent frictions that highlights the necessity of greater air power projection. Budgetary pressures may be partly behind a recent People’s Liberation Army reorganization and headcount reduction. A slowing economy might cause a further deceleration in China’s military spending, thus increasing such pressures as budgetary belts tighten. Challenges to Xi’s Leadership Xi Jinping’s efforts to address economic challenges could fail, unleashing consequences that extend well beyond China’s economic health. For example, an **economic collapse** could give rise to a Vladimir **Putin–like redemption figure** in China. Xi’s approach of centralizing authority over a diverse, complex, and massive social, political, and economic system is a **recipe for brittleness**. Rather than designing a resilient, decentralized governance structure that can gracefully cope with localized failures at particular nodes in a network, a highly centralized architecture **risks catastrophic**, **system-level failure**. Although centralized authority offers the tantalizing chimera of stronger control from the center, it also puts all the responsibility squarely on Xi’s shoulders. With China’s ascension to great power status, the consequences of internecine domestic political battles are increasingly playing out on the world stage. The international significance of China’s domestic politics is a new paradigm for the Chinese leadership, and one can expect an adjustment period during which the outcome of what had previously been relatively insulated domestic political frictions will likely generate **unintended international repercussions**. Such dynamics will influence Chinese foreign policy and security behavior. Domestic arguments over ideology, bureaucratic power struggles, and strategic direction could all have **ripple effects abroad**. Many of China’s party heavyweights still employ a narrow and exclusively domestic political calculus. Such behavior increases the possibility of international implications that are not fully anticipated, **raising the risks** of **strategic miscalculation** on the world stage. For example, the factional power struggles that animated the Cultural Revolution were largely driven by domestic concerns, yet manifested themselves in Chinese foreign policy for more than a decade. During this period, China was not the world’s second largest economy and, for much of this time, did not even have formal representation at the United Nations. If today’s globally interconnected China became engulfed in similar domestic chaos, the effects would be felt worldwide.23 Weakened Fetters of Economic Interdependence If China successfully transitioned away from its export-driven growth model toward a consumption-driven economic engine over the next four or five years, it could no longer feel as constrained by economic interdependence. To the extent that such constraints are loosened, the U.S.-China relationship will be more prone to conflict and friction.24 While China has never been the archetypal liberal economic power bent on benign integration with the global economy, its export-driven growth model produced a strong strategic preference for stability. Although past behavior is not necessarily indicative of future strategic calculus, China’s “economic circuit breaker” logic seems to have held its most aggressive nationalism below the threshold of war since 1979. A China that is both comparatively strong and less dependent on the global economy would be a novel development in modern geopolitics. As China changes the composition of its international economic linkages, global integration could place fewer constraints on it. Whereas China has been highly reliant on the import of raw materials and semifinished goods for reexport, a consumption-driven China could have a different international trade profile. China could still rely on imported goods, but their centrality to the country’s overall economic growth would be altered. Imports of luxury goods, consumer products, international brands, and services may not exert a significant constraining influence, since loss of access to such items may not be seen as strategically vital. If these flows were interrupted or jeopardized, the result would be more akin to an inconvenience than a strategic setback for China’s rise. That said, China is likely to continue to highly depend on imported oil even if the economic end to which that energy resource is directed shifts away from industrial and export production toward domestic consumption.

#### US–China war goes nuclear – crisis mis-management ensures conventional escalation - extinction

Kulacki 20 [Dr. Gregory Kulacki focuses on cross-cultural communication between the United States and China on nuclear and space arms control and is the China Project Manager for the Global Security Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, 2020. Would China Use Nuclear Weapons First In A War With The United States?, Thediplomat.com, https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/would-china-use-nuclear-weapons-first-in-a-war-with-the-united-states/] srey

Admiral Charles A. Richard, the head of the U.S. Strategic Command, recently told the Senate Armed Service Committee he “could drive a truck” through the holes in China’s no first use policy. But when Senator John Hawley (R-MO) asked him why he said that, Commander Richard backtracked, described China’s policy as “very opaque” and said his assessment was based on “very little” information. That’s surprising. **China** has been exceptionally **clear** **about** its **intentions** **on** the possible **first** **use** **of** **nuclear** **weapons**. On the day of its first nuclear test on October 16, 1964, China declared it “will never at any time or under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons.” That **unambiguous** **statement** **has** **been** a **cornerstone** **of** **Chinese** **nuclear** **weapons** policy for 56 years and has been repeated frequently in authoritative Chinese publications for domestic and international audiences, including a highly classified training manual for the operators of China’s nuclear forces. Richard should know about those publications, particularly the training manual. A U.S. Department of Defense translation has been circulating within the U.S. nuclear weapons policy community for more than a decade. The commander’s comments to the committee indicate a familiarity with the most controversial section of the manual, which, in the eyes of some U.S. analysts, indicates there may be some circumstances where **China** **would** **use** **nuclear** **weapons** **first** **in** a **war** **with** **the** **U**nited **S**tates. This U.S. misperception is understandable, especially given the difficulties the Defense Department encountered translating the text into English. The language, carefully considered in the context of the entire book, articulates a strong reaffirmation of China’s no first use policy. But it also reveals **Chinese** military planners are **struggling** **with** **crisis** **management** **and** **considering** **steps** **that** could **create** **ambiguity** **with** **disastrous** **consequences**. Towards the end of the 405-page text on the operations of China’s strategic rocket forces, in a chapter entitled, “Second Artillery Deterrence Operations,” the authors explain what China’s nuclear forces train to do if **“**a strong military power possessing nuclear‐armed missiles and an absolute advantage in high‐tech conventional weapons is carrying out intense and continuous attacks against our major strategic targets and we have no good military strategy to resist the enemy.**”** The military power they’re talking about is the United States. The authors indicate China’s nuclear missile forces train to take specific steps, including increasing readiness and conducting launch exercises, to “dissuade the continuation of the strong enemy’s conventional attacks.” The manual refers to these steps as an “adjustment” to China’s nuclear policy and a “lowering” of China’s threshold for brandishing its nuclear forces. Chinese leaders would only take these steps in extreme circumstances. The text highlights several triggers such as U.S. conventional bombing of China’s nuclear and hydroelectric power plants, heavy conventional bombing of large cities like Beijing and Shanghai, or other acts of **conventional** **warfare** **that** “**seriously** **threatened**” the “safety and **survival**” of the nation. U.S. Misunderstanding Richard seems to believe this planned adjustment in China’s nuclear posture means China is **preparing** **to** **use** **nuclear** **weapons** first under these circumstances. He told Hawley that there are a “number of situations where they may conclude that first use has occurred that do not meet our definition of first use.” The head of the U.S. Strategic Command appears to assume, as do other U.S. analysts, that the **Chinese** would **interpret** **these** types of U.S. conventional **attacks** **as** **equivalent** **to** a **U.S. first use** **of** **nuclear** **weapons** against China. But that’s not what the text says. “Lowering the threshold” refers to China putting its nuclear weapons on alert — it does not indicate Chinese leaders might lower their threshold for deciding to use nuclear weapons in a crisis. Nor does the text indicate Chinese nuclear forces are training to launch nuclear weapons first in a war with the United States. China, unlike the United States, keeps its nuclear forces off-alert. Its warheads are not mated to its missiles. China’s nuclear-armed submarines are not continuously at sea on armed patrols. The manual describes how China’s nuclear warheads and the missiles that deliver them are controlled by two separate chains of command. Chinese missileers train to bring them together and launch them after China has been attacked with nuclear weapons. All of these behaviors are consistent with a no first use policy. The “adjustment” Chinese nuclear forces are preparing to make if the United States is bombing China with impunity is to place China’s nuclear forces in a state of readiness similar to the state the nuclear forces of the United States are in all the time. This step is intended not only to end the bombing, but also to convince U.S. decision-makers they cannot expect to destroy China’s nuclear retaliatory capability if the crisis escalates. Chinese Miscalculation Unfortunately, alerting Chinese nuclear forces at such a moment could have terrifying consequences. Given the relatively small size of China’s nuclear force, a U.S. president might be tempted to try to limit the possible damage from a Chinese nuclear attack by destroying as many of China’s nuclear weapons as possible before they’re launched, especially if the head of the U.S. Strategic Command told the president China was preparing to strike first. One study concluded that if the United States used nuclear weapons to attempt to knock out a small fraction of the Chinese ICBMs that could reach the United States it may kill tens of millions of Chinese civilians. The authors of the text assume alerting China’s nuclear forces would “create a great shock in the enemy’s psyche.” That’s a fair assumption. But they also assume this shock could “dissuade the continuation of the strong enemy’s conventional attacks against our major strategic targets.” That’s highly questionable. There is a **substantial** **risk** **the** **U**nited **S**tates **would** **respond** **to** this implicit **Chinese** **threat** **to** **use** **nuclear** **weapons** **by** **escalating**, rather than halting, its **conventional** **attacks**. If China’s nuclear forces were targeted, it would put even greater strain on the operators of China’s nuclear forces. A **slippery** **slope** **to** **nuclear** **war** Chinese military planners are aware that attempting to coerce the United States into halting conventional bombardment by alerting their nuclear forces could fail. They also know it might trigger a nuclear war. But if it does, they are equally clear China won’t be the one to start it. Nuclear attack is often preceded by nuclear coercion. Because of this, in the midst of the process of a high, strong degree of nuclear coercion we should prepare well for a nuclear retaliatory attack. The more complete the preparation, the higher the credibility of nuclear coercion, the easier it is to accomplish the objective of nuclear coercion, and the lower the possibility that the nuclear missile forces will be used in actual fighting. They assume if China demonstrates it is well prepared to retaliate the United States would not risk a damage limitation strike using nuclear weapons. And even if the United States were to attack China’s nuclear forces with conventional weapons, China still would not strike first. In the opening section of the next chapter on “nuclear retaliatory attack operations” the manual instructs, as it does on numerous occasions throughout the entire text: According to our country’s principle, its stand of no first use of nuclear weapons, the Second Artillery will carry out a nuclear missile attack against the enemy’s important strategic targets, according to the combat orders of the Supreme Command, only after the enemy has carried out a nuclear attack against our country. Richard is wrong. There are no holes in China’s no first use policy. But the worse-case planning articulated in this highly classified military text is a significant and deeply troubling departure from China’s traditional thinking about the role of nuclear weapons. Mao Zedong famously called nuclear weapons “a paper tiger.” Many assumed he was being cavalier about the consequences of nuclear war. But what he meant is that they would not be used to fight and win wars. U.S. nuclear threats during the Korean War and the Taiwan Strait Crisis in the 1950s – threats not followed by an actual nuclear attack – validated Mao’s intuition that nuclear weapons were primarily psychological weapons. Chinese leaders decided to acquire nuclear weapons to free their minds from what Mao’s generation called “**nuclear** **blackmail**.” A former director of China’s nuclear weapons laboratories told me China developed them so its leaders could “sit up with a straight spine.” Countering nuclear blackmail – along with compelling other nuclear weapons states to negotiate their elimination – were the only two purposes Chinese nuclear weapons were meant to serve. Contemporary Chinese military planners appear to have added a new purpose: compelling the United States to halt a conventional attack. Even though it only applies in extreme circumstances, it **increases** the **risk** **that** a **war** between the United States and China **will** **end** **in** a nuclear exchange with unpredictable and **catastrophic** **consequences**. Adding this new purpose could also be the first step on a slippery slope to an incremental broadening the role of nuclear weapons in Chinese national security policy. Americans would be a lot safer if we could avoid that. The United States government should applaud China’s no first use policy instead of repeatedly calling it into question. And it would be wise to adopt the same policy for the United States. If both countries declared they would never use nuclear weapons first it may not guarantee they can avoid a nuclear exchange during a military crisis, but it would make one far less likely.

## Case

### Solvency

#### Chinese space industry is overwhelmingly dominated by the government—private enterprises cannot exist independently under domestic law—private sector complementary to the public sector means 0 solvency

Nie 12-24 (Mingyan Nie, JD; Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics Department of Law; 12-24-2021; "The Growth of China’s Non-governmental Space Sector in the Context of Government Support for Public-Private Partnerships: An Assessment of Major Legal Challenges";S*pace Policy* (2021) https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spacepol.2021.101461., accessed 1-14-2022; JPark)

* PPPs = public-private partnerships
* Strict and opaque governmental regulation basically makes it impossible for private entities to act independently and are subsumed by the state
* Laws are deliberately unclear to maximize state control – e.g., classifying launch vehicles as weapons

In light of China’s recent policies and other measures, it is evident that decision-makers in the space industry intend to privatize space activities to meet urgent market demands and social goals, including promoting PPPs.19 However, the **military dominates the Chinese space industry**, and the government **controls nearly all civil** space **activities**, while state-owned companies conduct programs related to space exploration. These dynamics have led to an unclear administration of space activities that has created an unstable environment for the growth of private enterprises. In addition, the reality of military-dominated space activities has engendered **harsh regulations** for **all non-governmental affairs** related to space exploration. 3.1. Complex administration of space activities and the non-governmental participation The role of the military and the government in the space field has resulted in a complicated framework for governing space activities in China. SASTIND, which was established under the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of the PRC (MIIT), is the main administrative body under the State Council tasked with coordinating and managing the country’s space activities20. The impact of China’s military on space activities is extremely relevant. The role of the Equipment Development Department (EDD), which belongs to the People’s Republic of China Central Military Commission,21 is also notable. The EDD is qualified to conduct space projects directly. For instance, the human spaceflight program and the launching infrastructure, including launching sites and the hub of China’s telemetry, tracking, and control network, are mainly operated by the EDD. Furthermore, the EDD collaborates with SASTIND to establish regulations, monitor their implementation, allocate research funds, and determine the qualification of private entities to enter the space industry [[17], p.13]. This **complicated** and **opaque organizational structure** is **detrimental** to the participation of private actors in space-related activities in China. Space facilities, including launching sites, are controlled by the military that does not distinguish the nature of space activities. Thus, private enterprises with a sole focus on developing commercial space activities will have to fulfill the same high-level military requirements as the government. Additionally, the co-existence of more than one administrative body with similar supervision functions impedes non-governmental enterprises’ involvement in space activities [[31], pp. 4–5]. 3.2. Strict supervision of non-governmental entry into the space field: focusing on launch activities and satellite development In contrast to the United States, which promotes private entities to comprehensively participate in numerous space areas through PPPs [5], existing Chinese PPP policies related to space activities stress the domains of space science research, the launching of commercial satellites, the manufacture and operation of satellites, space infrastructure construction, and so on.22 The newly defined scope of the new type of infrastructure in China contains satellite internet, which motivates the creation of PPPs in space programs, and demands the growth of private participants to succeed in doing so. The fields of most relevance to this are launching activities and satellite development (including micro-satellite). Furthermore, emerging non-governmental space corporations are mainly interested in developing their launching and satellite manufacturing capacities (including micro-satellites) [32]. This is consistent with the policy requirements and constitutes a good starting point for conducting space PPPs and will, in turn, contribute to the growth of the commercial space industry. However, the administration of the rules of these areas is unfavorable for the non-governmental sector. Concerning launch activities, in June 2019, SASTIND and EDD announced the ‘Notice on Promoting the Orderly Development of Commercial Launch Vehicles’ (2019 Notice) [33]. Commercial launch activities are divided into phases of research and development, manufacturing, and launching. For non-governmental entities that intend to get involved in any of these phases, authorization is required. However, conditions and other requirements for obtaining such permissions are unfavorable. For example, launch vehicles are identified as a weapon. Given that SASTIND provides authorization for the research, development, and manufacture of weapons, any related technology must comply with the ‘Regulation on the Administration of Licenses for Scientific Research and Production of Weapons and Equipment’23 and the ‘Measures for the Implementation of the License for Scientific Research and Production of Weapons and Equipment’.24 Furthermore, the 2019 Notice states that every applicant must receive support from the provincial government where its enterprise is registered. The involved provincial government must inform SASTIND by issuing a letter to express their support and elaborate supervision measures to ensure that relevant enterprises have conducted the authorized space activities in compliance with confidentiality, safety, security, and quality standards. Thus, before conducting authorized operations, a notification to SASTIND and the EDD is required. The requirements stipulated in the 2019 Notice are unfavorable to private entities starting space activities for many reasons. First, the 2019 Notice refers the notification process to the EDD. However, no further details are available on this procedure. Moreover, the specific functions of the EDD in this process are not explained. Second, the relevant provincial government’s letter is a prerequisite for applying to receive authorization. Also, the provincial government’s supervision measures are the primary basis for conducting permitted activities. However, how the applicants obtain the provincial government’s approval letter is unclear. Third, whether the supervision measures elaborated by the relevant provincial government are only applicable to the specific applicant or equally applicable to similar subsequent applicants is not addressed [[31], pp. 5–6]. In the context of conducting PPPs, provincial governments can act as the ‘public’ party, so if no specifics are clarified, it is **difficult** to ensure a **fair** **legal environment** for establishing PPPs in space, which may breed corruption. The launching phase is also strictly administrated. This phase mandates that the application of launching permits should generally be consistent with the ‘Interim Measures on the Administration of Permits for Civil Space Launch Project’, which was released in2002.25 However, an extra review process by the EDD has been added as the pre-condition for approving the permit. Furthermore, any launching activity should be carried out on officially authorized launching sites or testing grounds, administrated and controlled by the military department, and the rules thereof should be observed. When referring to the development of satellites, no regulations have been adopted thus far. Non-governmental enterprises that intend to invest in this field have to meet the requirements of national security safeguards. Accordingly, licenses are necessary. Since the government and military have historically been responsible for the research and manufacture of satellites, no specific rules applicable to the private sector can be found in this field. In 2008, the Aerospace Dongfanghong Development Ltd., Shenzhen (ADD Ltd.), a state-owned corporation, was established.26 This corporation focuses on micro-satellite development. It is the first Chinese company that received authorization to research and develop micro-satellites [35]. Before initiating micro-satellite development programs, this corporation established the ‘certified weapon and equipment quality management system’. Therefore, the corporation was qualified ‘as a weapon and equipment bearer’ and obtained permission to conduct weapon and equipment research and product and met the requirements of acting as a so-called ‘national secondary class confidential qualified corporation’.27 As a result, the ADD Ltd. example offers valuable insights into non-governmental entities that want to get involved in satellite development, especially micro-satellites, as part of the recent interest in building satellite-based interest as a new type of infrastructure. However, these conditions or qualifications are inconsistent with the fundamental policies of facilitating private growth in space-related activities. Specific rules must be formulated to remove or simplify the excessive obstacles that impede private participation in satellite development, including the development of micro-satellites and the implementation of relevant policies. Concerning the procedural requirements for satellites manufacturing, non-governmental enterprises have to get approval from the NDRC. These firms must submit application documents, including the files issued by the provincial development and reform commission, the application report, and the confidential agreement to begin work [36]. Similar to the launch permit application, these application requirements set forth by the NDRC allow for the provincial departments to determine the details of the process, creating an unstable legal environment for potential applicants. In brief, the inevitable growth of the private sector in space is the main reason for creating PPPs in space exploration. Yet, the **current dominant role of the military** in China’s space industry results in a **complex administrative framework** and **strict requirements** for those non-governmental entities willing to undertake space activities. This constrains the development of the private space sector that remains in an underdeveloped stage to date. In addition, ambiguous rules concerning the power of the relevant provincial departments in authorizing launching activities and satellite development make creating and effective implementation of space PPPs more difficult. However, given the growing importance of the private sector in the implementation of the PPP policies regarding space, the existing rules and regulations should be improved.

#### The plan has no effect—private space ventures are inextricable from public interest.

Goswami '19 (Dr. Namrata Goswami; author, strategic analyst and consultant on counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, alternate futures, and great power politics, worked at IDSA, selected as a Jennings-Randolph Senior Fellow, won MINERVA grant and contract with JSOU; 4-5-2019; "Misplaced Confidence? The US Private Space Sector vs. China"; https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/misplaced-confidence-the-us-private-space-sector-vs-china/, The Diplomat, accessed 1-14-2022; JPark)

Over the past three years, nearly 60 private space startups have entered the private launch industry, supported by the Chinese state. Spokesperson of the China National Space Administration (CNSA), Li Guoping, specified: The output value of the satellite application sector makes up over 80 percent of the whole satellite industry chain. So we encourage private companies and social capital to invest in the application of satellite communication, remote sensing and navigation…When we make a top-level plan for China’s aerospace development, we will consider the development of commercial space activity. The government will open space programs that can be carried out in a commercial way, and buy services from commercial companies… Since 2014, Xi has urged China’s private space sector to emerge as the leader in the “implementation of **civil-military integration** strategy.” Xi’s policy guidance has been followed up by the PLA, which opened its Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center (China’s primary launch facility) in the northwestern Gobi Desert for private rocket launches. This civil-military integration has been identified as a priority by Xi for China’s **overall national strategy** with regard to outer space. The planning chief of the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, Jia Lide, stated that “favorable policies and targeted measures have been created for the benefit of private space enterprises.” The latter point is particularly important. The U.S. private sector does very well with strong government support, through programs like Commercial Orbital Transportation System (COTS), Commercial Crew Program, and now the Commercial Lunar Payload Service (CLPS). Most U.S. space industries still rely to a significant degree on the government market either to get started or to stay solvent.

### Heg

#### Unipolarity is unsustainable—China will welcome multipolarity, but continued American pursuit guarantees lash-0ut and conflict.

Byun 7/7 [See-Won Byun, San Fransisco State University, See-Won Byun’s research and teaching focus on the politics of China, international relations of East Asia, and international relations theory. Her research examines China’s political economy and global integration, interdependence and security in Asia, and national identity politics in Asian relations. Before joining SF State, she was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Politics at Bates College. She received a Ph.D. in political science and M.A. in international affairs from The George Washington University, M.A. in international studies from Yonsei University and B.A. in economics from Brown University.) “Chinese Views of Hegemony and Multilateralism in the Biden Era” THE ASAN FORUM, November-December 2021, Open Forum, 7/7/2021] RM

Multilateralism was the driving theme of Xi Jinping’s 2021 World Economic Forum (WEF) speech in January, advancing his message there four years ago supporting economic globalization. Addressing post-pandemic global challenges, Xi insisted that “multilateralism should not be used as pretext for acts of unilateralism.” In addition, “differences in history, culture and social system should not be an excuse for antagonism or confrontation, but rather an incentive for cooperation.”1 Emphasizing a universal rules-based global governance system, Xi told Boao Forum partners in April, “what we need in today’s world is justice, not hegemony.” He reminded neighbors, “however strong it may grow, China will never seek hegemony, expansion, or a sphere of influence.”2 The Chinese state media contextualized President Joe Biden’s first overseas visit to Europe in June: “**the old international order in the post-World War II era led by the US has become increasingly unsustainable** and a new world order is far from being established, with the global system shifting from unipolar to multipolar.”3 **How do Chinese perceptions of the changing world order inform our understanding of Beijing’s external orientation in the Biden era?**

The Biden leadership extends Washington’s policy trajectory by identifying “a more assertive and authoritarian China” as “the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.”4 As Chinese observers point out, despite some openings for cooperation, Biden’s China policy leans toward “strategic competition and even confrontation.”5 Rejecting Trump’s unilateralism and explicit attacks on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Biden has chosen alternative tools of multilateralism and engagement with allies for the continued goal of constraining China’s influence. The first US-China talks in March displayed mounting frictions over human rights, Taiwan, cybersecurity, and “economic coercion toward our allies” according to Tony Blinken.6 The US Senate’s 2021 Strategic Competition Act in April signaled bipartisan consensus on a more aggressive China strategy,7 reinforcing debate on China’s response to a changing “hegemonic order.”8

This article assesses Chinese interpretations of the international order in the Biden era, focusing on views of hegemony and multilateralism. It first places these debates within China’s post-Cold War international relations discourse based on Wang Jisi’s review of Chinese worldviews in the 1990s and more recent conceptualization of “two orders” framing US-China relations. Second, it assesses current narratives on hegemony and multilateralism using Chinese academic publications in the first half of 2021. Third, it identifies how these views manifest in US-China interactions under the Biden administration. The concluding section considers prospects for Beijing and Washington’s respective agendas for global engagement.

Views of the Post-Cold War International Order

Conventional structural perspectives frame mainstream Chinese views of the “international order” (国际秩序), as “the most global, long-term, and strategic issue in world politics.”9 Official narratives reject hegemony and favor multilateralism in line with a post-Cold War shift to a multipolar order. In Xi’s post-pandemic world, “there is no fundamental change in the trend toward a multi-polar world; **economic globalization is showing renewed resilience; and the call for upholding multilateralism and enhancing communication and coordination has grown stronger.”**10 As Xi defined it in January, “multilateralism is about having international affairs addressed through consultation and the future of the world decided by everyone working together.”11 Interpretations of hegemony in this changing structural context have expanded from a primarily military focus to broader forms of expansionist behavior for regional or global dominance. From a Chinese official’s perspective, US “hegemonism” means “not occupying land but promoting its own system and ideology, in an attempt to meet its own national interests through domination of the world.”12 According to Yang Jiechi, **multilateralism today prevails over recent pressures of “unilateralism and bullying,” “populism and de-globalization,” and “ideological confrontation**.” In China’s pursuit of multilateral diplomacy, “we oppose hegemony and power politics, and oppose any practice of unilateralism in the name of multilateralism.”13

Despite such official claims, China’s multilateralism remains described as “strategic” and “opportunistic.”14 Yang Jiechi made clear in February, “we will resolutely defend our national interests and dignity at multilateral fora when our core and major interests are at stake.”15 Skeptics view China’s multilateral diplomacy as part of counter-hegemonic strategies.16 The “new Chinese multilateralism” that emerged by the 2000s “has to be understood with its combination with multipolarism, the two being used together as a double-track strategy to deal with the United States…and to shape China’s desired future structure of world politics.”17 Xi’s push for global governance reform “is directly linked to counterbalancing the dominance of a liberal-based international order.”18 Especially at the regional level, China-led multilateralism “is an interim arrangement in China’s drive to acquire regional and global dominance.”19

Hegemony and Multipolar Order

Chinese assessments of hegemony and multilateralism have evolved with perceptions of the changing world order. **Studies of the post-Cold War order identify a long-term shift to “multipolarization” and persistent threat of “hegemonism,” with a growing emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.20 As Jiang Zemin indicated in 1997, while “the pattern of the world is moving in the direction of multipolarization,” “hegemonism and power politics continue to be the main source of threat to world peace and stability**.”21 Academic interpretations of such trends vary in terms of the dimensions and distribution of global power. But this multipolar transition is commonly linked to perceived changes in US power since the 1990s, when “one superpower, several great powers” characterized the international structure according to Chinese official assessments. Views of multipolarization not only assume more global resistance to US demands, but also disagreement within the West favoring alignment with Chinese worldviews.

From a historical cyclical perspective, power, interests, and rules shape the international order’s formation, involving “long-term competition and short-term compromise in the pursuit of common values.”22 **Uncertainty over the postwar liberal international order’s future has grown with the clear fragmentation of Western power.** China’s position in the existing order is viewed through the lens of US hegemony as the “peak form of Western historical hegemony.”23 US political elites advanced the “hegemonic” Bretton Woods system representing their preferences, successfully managing a domestic isolationist tradition and foreign resistance. **With the decline in US relative power, US policy shifted from “accepting” China into this dominant order to “rejecting” it.24 In particular, the United States can no longer accept a rising China as a strategic partner or member of the international system since “democratic discipline” has failed there**.25 China’s market transition from 1978 drove both US-China conciliation and eventual discord as China advanced its own economic and political agenda.

“Two Orders” in US-China Relations

Views of US hegemony have varied with shifts in US-China relations since the 1972 Shanghai Communique, which promised that “neither should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony.”26 While Chinese concerns in the 1990s centered on external threats to Taiwan, domestic political stability, and ethnic minority regions, the scope of contention now extends to economic and technological competition. In addition, the transition from Deng’s “keeping a low profile” principle to Xi’s “striving for achievement” shifts China’s external focus from primarily economic gains to political support, raising questions about the normative dimensions of Chinese grand strategy.27

US-China debates in an evolving world order are primarily about rulemaking. “Two orders” form Wang Jisi’s view of current US-China relations, including the CCP-led domestic order challenged by the United States, and the US-led international order challenged by China. With increased interdependence, the United States frowns on the CCP leadership’s rulemaking at home not just for ideological reasons, but more importantly for the implications for US material interests. Conversely, US rulemaking at the global level threatens Chinese interests. **The US quest to “promote global democracy” defies China’s insistence on non-interference and the “democratization of international relations” granting the developing “global majority” a bigger voice**.28 Yang Jiechi told Blinken in March, “it is important for the United States to change its own image and to stop advancing its own democracy in the rest of the world.”29

As Wang Jisi argues, “in Sino-US competition and cooperation today, almost everything is connected to the issue of rules.”30 This issue will be the biggest point of future contention, not because the United States fears being displaced by China economically, but because “they are concerned about how they will manage once they have been overtaken.”31 As Wang asked in 1997, “what will China do in global and regional affairs when its international status is enhanced, economic growth sustained, military capabilities improved, and political stability ensured?”32 Current assessments of hegemony and multilateralism offer tentative answers.

Current Views of Hegemony and Multilateralism

A general decline in Chinese academic interest in hegemony over the past two decades has accompanied a growth in interest in multilateralism, at a notably faster rate since 2016. Journal articles with the keyword “hegemonism” (霸权主义) fell in volume by 83 percent in 2000-2016, and became outnumbered by those with “multilateralism” (多边主义) from 2005 during the Hu Jintao administration.33 In both cases, the number of articles more than doubled in 2016-2019. But in 2019-2020, studies on hegemonism declined by 20 percent while those on multilateralism grew by another 49 percent. **While the multilateralism literature amounted to 10 percent of hegemonism studies in 2000 by publication volume, by 2020 it was almost five times greater.**

A perceived structural shift to a multipolarity contextualizes these trends. From the perspective of China’s international relations theorists like Qin Yaqing, one of the biggest changes in the past century is the end of not just US global hegemony but also hegemony itself as a world order. The current transition to a more pluralistic world of “inclusive multilateralism” points to “a multipolar power structure, multilevel institutional arrangements, and multidimensional ideas**.**”34 An alternative “one world, two systems” bipolar order lacks the material and institutional conditions for its formation, as well as US and Chinese support. In this changing external environment, **China’s participation in global governance has progressed in four stages since the PRC’s founding in 1949: 1) “anti-hegemonic governance” under Mao’s revolutionary diplomacy, 2) “active integration” after reform and opening, 3) “constructive participation,” and 4) the current phase of proposing “Chinese solutions.”35 As Chen Zhimin and Zhang Xueying indicate, China’s global role has shifted from a “revolutionary order-challenger” to a “reformist order shaper.”36 According to Yang Jiechi, Xi’s WEF speech this year embodied the need to “contribute China’s wisdom, visions and solutions.”37**

US-China power politics is a defining feature of the 21st century international order.38 Bilateral relations since diplomatic normalization in 1978 have evolved from “strategic coordination” to “strategic competition” under the Trump administration.39 **Relations have fluctuated with neoliberalism’s rise and fall in the West**. The 2008 financial crisis marked the most recent neoliberal crisis and decline in the US-China power gap, compelling new models for bilateral relations since the Obama administration.40 The competitive direction of US China policy is clear in the post-2008 trend of US economic strategy. According to Chen Yu, **bipartisan consensus emerged that “the US economic approach to China does not embed China in the hegemonic system under US leadership,” and instead facilitates** China’s rapid growth as a “revisionist” challenger to the US hegemonic order.41

**China’s international relations journals at the start of 2021 recognize a critical transition in the US-led liberal international order.** Current uncertainty surrounds a new phase of industrial and technological development, intensified major-power competition, globalization backlash, and vast repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic**. “Unilateralism, protectionism, and hegemony” present major external threats to the international order.42 Xi Jinping’s project of national revival enters a new stage in 2021, marking the 100th anniversary of the CCP’s founding and start of China’s 14th Five Year Plan (2021-2025).**

Post-Pandemic Debates: National Strategy, Global Governance, and Regional Order

**Two shocks to the global economy in 2020 frame current academic debates: the US “global trade war” to maintain “economic hegemony” while withdrawing from multilateralism, and COVID-19**.43 As the biggest global non-traditional security shock in a century, **COVID-19 catalyzed long-term changes in international strategic relations and US global leadership, placing multilateralism and global governance in a new external setting.**44 **Under the dual impacts of global health and economic crises, “the international order’s reform and reconstruction is imminent.”45 Specifically, while the United States has become the biggest destructive force by evading its global responsibilities, China has emerged as the biggest stabilizing force by assuming such obligations in line with its capabilities.** Current uncertainties reinforce the question of whether unilateralism or multilateralism will prevail. Xi Jinping’s WEF remarks this year favoring multilateralism intensified domestic debate on China’s strategic orientation, the ideological and practical dimensions of global governance reform, and the changing East Asian regional order.46

The historical pattern of the rise of great powers points to four strategic options: 1) protective unilateralism, 2) confrontational unilateralism, 3) centralized multilateralism, and 4) spontaneous multilateralism.47 In China’s case, its distinct advantages and constraints require building centralized multilateral networks in developing regions and a “virtuous economic cycle of internal-external linkages,” as Xi’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) currently embodies. As National Development and Reform Commission researchers anticipate, post-pandemic uncertainties will drive China’s continued pursuit of such integration between domestic and international development.48 Other assessments are largely inward looking, proposing change in China’s development model given anti-globalization forces of trade protectionism, shrinking global industrial chains, and multilateralism’s reversal. Such proposals emphasize the expansion of domestic consumer markets, industrial investment, and indigenous technological innovation, as China’s current Five-Year Plan outlines.49

At the global level, the dispute over international rulemaking is a competition between Western and Chinese “legal discourse power,” as shown in enduring South China Sea disputes and recent human rights issues surrounding Beijing’s 2020 Hong Kong National Security Law. In the reshaping of rules, non-binding “soft law” not only has significant meaning but also drives the development of “hard law,” promoting multilateralism’s persistence.50 The debate on relative discourse power in commercial and maritime disputes has sharpened since COVID-19, focused increasingly on reconciling domestic and international legal systems.51 **According to Wang Lin, safeguarding national security requires opposing “Western legal hegemony” and a “colonialist legal mentality” in favor of “socialist law with Chinese characteristics.”52 From a cultural perspective of modernization, by promoting the expansion of individual values and decline of social justice, capitalism generates disorder in the form of great-power hegemonism.53**

As Xi Jinping warned in Davos, avoiding such a scenario requires a UN-centered global governance system “based on the rules and consensus reached among us, not on the order given by one or the few.”54 China supported the creation of the UN’s “Friends of Neutrality Group for Peace, Security, and Development” last year as a platform for “like-minded partners,”55 exemplifying its commitment to multilateralism unlike the United States. As Yang Jin argues, “contrary to insisting on neutrality, the US repeatedly interferes in internal affairs of other countries…In recent days, it has been working hard to build an anti-China coalition to contain China.” Such behavior shows that “Washington is motivated by the desire to maintain its global hegemony and interests, and implement its “America First” policy.”56

The irrelevance of Cold War-style alignments is most notable in Chinese visions of the changing regional order. East Asia’s transformation from the “hub and spoke” system of US alliances to a “multinodal” one generated a structural discrepancy between the US bilateral model and the region’s multilateral orientation.57 The alliance system’s growing ineffectiveness in responding to regional security threats underscores the need to rebuild an Asian order in line with this multipolar shift. Multilateralism’s rise is clear in the economic domain, where trade protectionism and COVID-19 accelerated the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)’s signing in November 2020. As Chinese leaders claimed, the free trade deal was the biggest “victory for multilateralism” and regional economic integration since the 1990s, and a major opening for advancing China’s domestic reforms and global development model.58

#### Not inev- it’s a choice. Moving towards retrenchment now will create stability, but the aff results in endless military interventions.

Glaser 18 (John Glaser, director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, (2018) Status, Prestige, Activism and the Illusion of American Decline, The Washington Quarterly, 41:1, 173-197, DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445903, JKS)

Some observers link the prospect of retrenchment with the decline of America. Others insist hegemony is inherently cyclical and, given the decrease in relative U.S. economic and geopolitical dominance, decline is inevitable.107 Fears of U.S. decline, however, reflect a preoccupation more with the shadow of power than the substance of it.108 Though not without its problems, the U.S. economy continues to grow and Americans continue to enjoy a per capita income well above the global average. Roughly nine-in-ten Americans enjoy a standard of living higher than the global middle-income standard.109 A decline in superpower status will not change that. When it comes to security, Americans are likewise in an enviable position. Contrary to depictions in our politics and news media, the United States remains extraordinarily insulated from external threats, something unlikely to change with a more restrained grand strategy.110 Commentators worried about decline tend to associate it with a loss of status and some sense of failure, forfeit, and defeat. Beyond psychological loss aversion, however, it is hard to see how a reduction in America’s global military role equates to any real degradation in the wealth or security of American citizens. Over the course of the twentieth century, circumstances forced Britain to relinquish its top position in world politics and shed its global empire. This inflicted a painful sense of decline in Britain, but according to historian George L. Bernstein, “it is not clear that the loss of empire represented any decline in real power at all; the decline was primarily a perception by Britons and others who had identified Britain’s greatness with its empire.” In withdrawing, “Britain may well have lost an encumbrance rather than power.”111 Primacists assume too much American authorship of today’s peaceful and wealth-generating international order, and then warn hyperbolically of cata- strophic system collapse if the United States retrenches. In truth, today’s global stability trends and economic growth rates are more robust than that. And there is little reason to believe that staying out of the great power contest would undercut the wealth and security of U.S. citizens. Robert Jervis illustrates this point by reference to other former great powers, “Sweden is no longer a great power, but in what sense is this a failure? Swedish citizens, if not the abstraction of the Swedish state, probably are better off for this. They are rich and have been spared several wars. Similarly, postwar Japan was shorn of its empire and armed forces and is no longer a complete great power. But it is hard to say that the country and its citizens are the poorer for this loss of role and status.” He continued, “Sitting on the sidelines, although only possible under special circumstances of geography and the interests of other impor- tant states, can be a fine place to watch (and benefit) as the great power parade goes by.”113 Robert Kagan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, warns against com- mitting “preemptive superpower suicide out of a misplaced fear of ... declining [U.S.] power.”114 The real danger is closer to the opposite. Indeed, to the extent that America’s wealth and security is at risk of degradation and decline, it is likely to be exacerbated by a stubborn insistence on maintaining a costly perma- nent global military presno;ience, a hyper-interventionist foreign policy, and exces- sively high defense budgets.115 While America’s extraordinary wealth and resilience means it can probably sustain an expansive, status-driven, and activist foreign policy for the foreseeable future, the risks of over-extension and of succumbing to what Princeton Uni- versity’s G. John Ikenberry calls the “imperial temptation,” are very real.117 This temptation involves not only succumbing to ruinous adventures like Vietnam and Iraq, but also includes gradually sacrificing liberal democratic values at home as the security state undermines civil liberties protections, weakens consti-tutional checks on executive war powers, and incentivizes excessive government secrecy. The United States can choose to husband its still unmatched power and forswear status and prestige-driven foreign policy excesses, or it can hasten its own decline by extending its hyper-interventionist posture deep into the future. Neither path is imposed on us by circumstances; it remains a choice.

#### Even if some pursuit is inevitable, it still results in disastrous foreign policy decisions, which makes the affs impact unavoidable. Moving away from unipolarity is the only option.

Glaser 18 (John Glaser, director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, (2018) Status, Prestige, Activism and the Illusion of American Decline, The Washington Quarterly, 41:1, 173-197, DOI: 10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445903, JKS)

Status and prestige have been the most prevalent drivers of U.S. foreign policy for decades, with frequent references to the idea of America as the world’s sole superpower, the leading state, and the indispensable nation. As Wohlforth explains, America’s drive to maintain U.S. predominance even in the face of steep costs and a lack of serious security threats has much to do with the fact that “U.S. decision makers derive independent utility from their state’s status as a unipole.”54 Yet, the expansive grand strategy pursued by the United States, especially since the end of the Cold War, is unnecessary to secure America’s core economic and security interests, and frequently undermines them. Obsession with America’s place in the international hierarchy and with maintaining America’s prestigious image means the United States is more likely to pursue interventionist policies for the sake of nonmaterial gains, often to the detriment of its own wealth and security.55 The Cold War intensified America’s preoccupation with status and Washington framed its victory in profoundly triumphalist, prestige-satisfying terms. President George H. W. Bush talked about a “New World Order” led by an unchallenged United States, and used rhetoric that flattered Americans’ perception of their nation as exceptional.56 Internal Defense Department documents, too, called for maintaining the new U.S. position by “discourage[ing] [other nations] from challenging our leadership” and “deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role.”57 Larger regional roles for distant nations in the immediate post–Cold War environ- ment would not likely have threatened U.S. security, and in fact could enhance it to the extent that these states could carry the burden for resolving local disputes or balancing against rising powers. However, nations aspiring to larger regional roles would undermine America’s standing and eminence as an unrivaled victor. Being the sole superpower intensified the emphasis on status. In his second inaugural speech, President Bill Clinton proclaimed, “America stands alone as the world’s indispensable nation.”58 Secretary of State Madeline Albright, in perhaps the most famous iteration of this idea, justified America’s bombing of Iraq in 1998 in the following terms: “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and see further than other countries into the future.”59 In her memoirs, Albright explained her “purpose was not to put down others, but rather to stir a sense of pride and respon- sibility among Americans, so that we would be less reluctant to take on pro- blems.”60 In other words, appealing to Americans’ belief in their country as one of exceptionally high status, unmatched by any other state, bolstered support for foreign policy activism and intervention. A grand strategy of primacy—in which America acts as the world’s policeman, guarantor of global security, inter- vener of first resort, and adjudicator of far-off disputes—was justified by appeals to its status as Number One. The assertive interventionism of the United States in the post–Cold War era largely involved responding to low-threat challenges by weak, lower-ranked actors—including Serbia’s Slobodan Milosevic, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, North Korea’s Kim dynasty, al-Qaeda and the Taliban. None of these largely symbolic challenges, save al Qaeda’s attacks, threatened the physical security of the United States. Nuclear proliferation by rogue regimes might have undermined strategic stability in distant regions, but the likelihood that any state would welcome its own destruction by using nuclear weapons for anything other than deterrence was always vanishingly small. Certainly none of these adversaries threatened America’s relative power position in the international system. But if left unaddressed, they would have humiliated the sole superpower and raised doubts about U.S. leadership.61 A major reason for the Clinton administration’s intervention in Bosnia, though public statements emphasized humanitarian and security-oriented objectives, was encapsulated in a stinging critique from then-French President Jacques Chirac that America’s refusal to take military action in the former Yugoslavia would have meant that “the position of the leader of the free world is now vacant.” Clinton later reportedly complained to his National Security Advisor Anthony Lake that conflict in Bosnia was “killing the U.S. position of strength” and “doing enor- mous damage to the United States and our standing in the world.”62 According to the late international relations theorist Kenneth Waltz, the United States “acted [in the Balkans] not for the sake of its own security but to maintain its leadership position in Europe.”63 The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 led many observers to conclude that the post–Cold War era of low security threats was over. But this false impression by no means diminished the role of status and prestige. The subsequent invasion of Iraq, although justified in security and norm-oriented imperatives, arguably had more to do with an expression of rage and recovery of America’s prestige than any legitimate threats to U.S. or global security. Myriad ideas drove the case for war, but attacking Iraq, Lebow argues, was “intended to showcase U.S. military might and political will and send a message of power and resolve ... to act decisively” and “by so doing lock in the United States as the world’s sole hegemon.”64 In a post–9/11 context, Saddam’s perceived defiance of America became especially intolerable. Failure to prosecute the war, in the words of two of its most prominent advocates, Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol, would rep- resent an “abdication of global leadership” and the unacceptable permission of “successful challenges to American power.”65 German strategist Josef Joffe wrote in 2006 that the war was about “the certification of U.S. supremacy.”66 Two other Iraq war supporters, Gary Schmitt and Thomas Donnelly, justified the inva- sion as necessary to “restore American preeminence” in the Middle East and “restore national honor” in the aftermath of 9/11.67 Henry Kissinger reportedly described his support for the Iraq War in similar terms. We needed to invade Iraq, not because Saddam posed a threat, but “because Afghanistan was not enough”; the forces of radical Islam want to humiliate us, he said, “and we need to humiliate them.”68 Fixation with America’s status continued in the Obama years, as the adminis- tration maintained America’s expansive grand strategy of primacy and continued to use U.S. power assertively. In his 2010 State of the Union Address, President Obama lamented Chinese, German, and Indian efforts to improve their national standing. “These nations aren’t playing for second place,” he warned, and “I do not accept second place for the United States of America.”69 In his 2016 address, he boasted about America being “the most powerful nation on Earth,” adding that, “our standing around the world is higher than when I was elected to this office, and when it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead. They call us.”70 This equation of America’s military dominance and high rank with the obligation to intervene to solve myriad international issues is illustrative of how status drives activism.

#### American pressure on China causes lash out, but current international pressure results in internal reform and prevents conflict.

Babones 21 [Salvatore Babones is a Foreign Policy columnist and an adjunct scholar at the Centre for Independent Studies in Sydney, China Is Losing Influence—and That Makes It Dangerous, Foreign Policy, 3-3-2021, Accessible Online at https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/03/china-losing-influence-biden-should-do-nothing/] DL 3-9-2021

Over the last two decades, China has moved from the periphery to the very center of the world’s international relations. Given that China’s economy is now more than five times as large as it was at the turn of the millennium, that transition is hardly surprising. But many of China’s new international relationships, initially hopeful, have now turned hostile. China still has some down-at-the-heel allies, such as Pakistan and North Korea, but it is increasingly isolated from the developed countries that alone can facilitate its continued economic growth.

For China, that means trouble. Its promises are no longer taken seriously, and its propaganda falls on deaf ears. Many of its Belt and Road Initiative projects have ground to a halt. Virtually no one supports its nine-dash line in the South China Sea, and Western countries have been lining up to offer immigration pathways to professionals fleeing Hong Kong after Beijing’s takeover last year. Many countries have banned China’s Huawei and ZTE from their telecommunications networks. And India, Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan are all modernizing their armed forces in response to potential Chinese threats.

Under these circumstances, the best thing that U.S. President Joe Biden can do to stem the rising tide of Chinese expansionism is … nothing. China’s red tide is already rolling out all on its own. Biden can afford to pursue a policy of “masterly inactivity,” relying on China’s own aggressive foreign policy to further isolate the country from the rest of the world. Instead of increasing the pressure on China, now is the time for him to lighten up a bit.

The worst thing Biden could do is put so much pressure on China that its leaders lash out because they feel they have nothing to lose. That was arguably what happened in 1941, when the United States successfully countered Japanese expansionism with military aid to China, a trade embargo, and the freezing of Japanese assets in the U.S. banking system. Japan wasn’t on the rise in 1941; it was on the wane. Bogged down in China, checked by the Soviet Union in a little-remembered conflict in Mongolia, and increasingly squeezed by U.S. economic sanctions, Japan’s leaders recklessly sought a kantai kessen (“decisive battle”) with a naval strike at Pearl Harbor. They saw no other way to forestall a long, smothering defeat.

Of course, what Japan’s leaders got instead was a decisive, blood-soaked defeat. But today, no one except the hardest of hard-liners wants to see China defeated. That kind of language makes no practical sense. Short of a world war, there is no way for anyone outside China to dislodge Chinese Communist Party leadership from its headquarters in central Beijing. A more sensible goal for the United States and its allies would be to see China return to the slow liberalization trajectory it was arguably following before President Xi Jinping took power as the party’s leader at the end of 2012. And that’s a goal that China must be convinced to choose for itself.

As long as China’s leaders remain convinced that all of their problems stem from Washington’s ill will, reform is unlikely. Today, they seem to completely buy into their own narrative that the United States is a petulant former superpower too proud to gracefully stand aside while China takes its rightful place at the top of the world. But as China finds itself at odds with more and more countries, often with no connection to U.S. pressure, its leaders may eventually get the message. Whatever the future of their relationship with the United States, the other countries of the world have their own reservations about Chinese hegemony.

Biden can afford to pursue a policy of “masterly inactivity,” relying on China’s own aggressive foreign policy to further isolate it from the rest of the world.

Australia’s fight with China over the former’s efforts to restrict foreign influence, Japan’s standoff with China over the Senkaku Islands, India’s actual battle with China in Ladakh—none of these were prompted by U.S. arrogance. Nor was the South China Sea dispute, which pits China against no fewer than five of its Southeast Asian neighbors. Beyond its immediate region, China is now also arguing with European countries over human rights, with Latin American countries over illegal fishing, and with African countries over development debts. At some point, it must dawn on China’s leadership that these problems have little or nothing to do with the United States, and everything to do with their own provocative behavior.

The most effective way the Biden administration can help drive home that message is to mind its own business. Each of these countries has its own reasons to be unhappy with China. They don’t need U.S. encouragement, and it would only muddy the waters to offer support. For all Biden’s talk of working with allies and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s pledge to hold China “accountable for its abuses of the international system,” they should resist the temptation to try to solve other countries’ China problems. The truest love the United States can offer the world on China right now is the tough love of encouraging other countries to stand up for themselves.

Biden shouldn’t try to out-Trump former President Donald Trump by showing he is even tougher on China. If Biden really wants to differentiate his China policy, he should sit back and let history take its course. While keeping sensible restrictions on Chinese access to U.S. advanced technologies, he should consider pulling back in areas where the Trump administration arguably overreached. A good first step might be to reverse the steel and aluminum tariffs aimed at China that have hurt friendly countries such as Japan and Taiwan. He could also lift Trump’s visa limitations on members of the Chinese Communist Party, which are almost entirely symbolic and nearly impossible to enforce. Such measures would establish a more conciliatory tone in U.S.-Chinese relations without relieving any of the pressure Beijing faces for reform.

But whatever else Biden does, his top priority should be a negative one: Don’t give China’s leaders any reason to panic, any legitimate grounds for self-defense, or any cause that might justify war. That is simultaneously the best way to keep U.S. allies onside and the best way to hasten China’s fall. The first because Washington’s position is strongest when allies need U.S. support, not when they have it. The second because the Chinese regime can’t be brought down by the United States; it can only be dismantled from within.

Politically and temperamentally, the hardest thing for any U.S. president to do is nothing. The extraordinary power concentrated in the president’s hands generates extraordinary temptation to use it, and there are many stirring arguments for decisive leadership. But in the current situation, decisive leadership can only disrupt an already benign policy environment. China’s only hope for victory in the current situation is to provoke a crisis—and then benefit from the ensuing disorder. Biden’s number one job is to make sure the crisis doesn’t occur.

#### No heg impact and retrenchment’s stabilizing – prefer cross-regional estimates and new statistics.

Fettweis 18—Associate professor of political science at Tulane University [Christopher J., 2018, *Psychology of a Superpower: Security and Dominance in U.S. Foreign Policy*, Chapter 1: Unipolarity and the System, pgs 28-34, Columbia University Press, Accessed through the Wake Forest Library]

Even the most ardent supporters of the hegemonic-stability explanation do not contend that U.S. influence extends equally to all corners of the globe. The United States has concentrated its policing in what George Kennan used to call the "strong points," or most important parts of the world: Western Europe, the Pacific Rim, and the Persian Gulf.70 By doing so, Washington may well have contributed more to great-power peace than to the overall global decline in warfare. If the former phe-nomenon contributed to the latter, by essentially providing a behavioral model for weaker states to emulate, then perhaps this lends some sup-port to the hegemonic-stability case.71 In general, Washington has shown less interest in the affairs of the global South since the end of the Cold War, and the level of violence in almost all regions has declined. The United States intervenes far less in the political and military affairs of Latin America compared to any time in the twentieth century, for instance, and the states of the region are more peaceful. Warfare in Africa is at an all-time low, as noted above, as is relative U.S. interest outside of counterterrorism and security assistance. Regional peace and stability exist where there is active U.S. intervention, in other words, as well as where there is not. No direct relationship seems to exist across regions. The U.S. sheriff certainly appears to have enforced rules upon the great powers. Since we do not have a "control" Europe, however, one without the presence of U.S. troops and alliance commitments, it is dif-ficult to know what is causing those states to behave. In much of the rest of the world, the United States has not been especially eager to enforce any particular rules. Even rather incontrovertible evidence of genocide has not been enough to inspire action. Washington's intervention choices have at best been erratic: crises in Libya and Kosovo inspired responses, but much more blood flowed uninterrupted in Rwanda, Dar-fur, Congo, Sri Lanka, and Syria. When U.S. intervention has occurred, its wisdom and efficacy have not been encouraging. The security situation in the Persian Gulf and broader Middle East, to cite the most obvious example, would be better off if U.S. troops had stayed home.72 In recent years, substantial hard-power investments (Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq), moderate intervention (Libya), and reliance on diplomacy (Syria) have been equally ineffective in stabilizing states torn by conflict. The region may well be essentially unpacifiable and immune to outside policing. At the very least, it seems hard to make the case that the U.S. presence has improved matters. In this strong point, unipolarity has failed to bring peace. To say that the United States has not always been successful in impos-ing peace on willing combatants would be to understate. The fruitless effort to encourage the various combatants in Syria to stop killing one another is a prominent example, and there are others. The United States also took the peacemaking lead during one of the rare interstate conflicts of the New Peace era, the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. A high-level U.S. delegation containing former and future national-security advisors (Anthony Lake and Susan Rice) made a half-dozen trips to the region, but it was unable to prevent either the outbreak or recurrence of the con-flict. Lake and his team shuttled back and forth between the capitals with some frequency, and President Clinton made repeated phone calls to the leaders of the respective countries, offering to hold peace talks in the United States, all to no avail.73 The war did not end until the Ethiopians essentially won in late 2000. The globocop was irrelevant. The Horn of Africa is hardly the only region where states are free to fight one another today without fear of serious U.S. involvement. Since they are choosing not to do so with increasing frequency, something else is probably affecting their calculations. Stability exists even in those places where the potential for intervention by the sheriff is minimal. Hegemonic stability can only take credit for influencing those decisions that would have ended in war without the presence, whether physical or psychological, of the United States. It seems hard to make the case that the relative peace that has descended on so many regions is primar-ily attributable to the kind of heavy hand of the neoconservative levia- than or that of its lighter, more liberal cousin. Something else appears to be at work. CONFLICT AND U.S. CHOICES If U.S. power is the only thing holding back the forces of global chaos, then we would expect to see some variation in violence as the relative capabilities of the United States wax and wane. During the 1990s, the United States cut back on defense by about 25 percent, spending $100 billion less in real terms in 1998 than it did in 1990.74 To those believers in the neoconservative version of hegemonic stability, this irresponsible "peace dividend" endangered both national and global security. "No serious analyst of American military capabilities doubts that the defense budget has been cut much too far to meet America's responsibilities to itself and to world peace," argued Kristol and Kagan at the time.75 The world grew dramatically more peaceful while the United States cut its forces, however, and it stayed just as peaceful even as spending rebounded after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The incidence and magnitude of global conflict declined while the military budget was cut under President Clin-ton, kept declining (though more slowly) as the Bush administration ramped it back up, and stayed steady as Obama cut back again. U.S. mili-tary spending has varied during the New Peace from a low in constant dollars of less than $400 billion to a high of more than $700 billion, but war does not seem to have noticed. The same nonrelationship exists between other potential proxy mea-surements for U.S. power and conflict. No connections exist between warfare and fluctuations in U.S. GDP, or alliance commitments, or for-ward military presence. Europe experienced very little fighting when there were 300,000 American troops stationed there, for example, and very little after 90 percent of those troops were removed. It is hard to find much correlation between U.S. actions and systemic stability. Noth-ing the United States actually does seems to matter to the New Peace. Absolute military spending might not be as important as relative. Although Washington cut back on spending during the 1990s, its advan-tage over all possible rivals never wavered. The United States has accounted for between 35 and 41 percent of global military spending every year since the collapse of the Soviet Union.76 Perhaps perceptions of U.S. power, as well as its willingness to use it, keep the peace. Fluc-tuations in its enormous defense budget might be unimportant com-pared to how the United States chooses to employ that budget. In other words, perhaps the grand strategy of the United States, rather than its absolute capability, is decisive in maintaining stability. Perceptions of U.S. power and the strength of its hegemony are to some degree functions of its willingness to use that power. A strong United States that chose to stand on the sidelines during crises would not encourage or enforce international cooperation. If indeed U.S. stra-tegic choices are directly related to international stability, then variation in its choices ought to have consequences for levels of conflict. A restrained United States would presumably be less likely to play the role of sheriff than one following a more activist approach. Indeed, hege-monic-stability theorists warn that following a grand strategy that did not make global policing a priority would court disaster. The "present danger" about which Kristol, Kagan, and their fellow travelers warned is that the United States "will shrink its responsibilities and—in a fit of absentmindedness, or parsimony, or indifference—allow the interna-tional order that it created and sustains to collapse."77 The Pulitzer Prize—winning journalist Brett Stephens predicted that an insufficiently activist U.S. grand strategy would result in "global pandemonium." 78 Liberals fear restraint as well and also warn that a militarized version of primacy would also be counterproductive in the long run. Washing-ton can undermine its creation over time through thoughtless unilat-eral actions that violate its own rules. Many liberals predicted that the invasion of Iraq and its general contempt for international institutions and law would call the legitimacy of the order into question. Ikenberry worried that Bush's "geostrategic wrecking ball" would lead to a more hostile, divided, and dangerous world.79 Thus while all hegemonic- stability theorists expect a rise of chaos during a restrained presidency, liberals also have grave concerns regarding primacy. If either version is correct—that global stability is provided by U.S. hegemony—then maintaining that stability through a grand strategy based on either primacy (to neoconservatives) or "deep engagement" (to liberals) is clearly wise.80 If, however, U.S. actions are only tangentially related to the outbreak of the New Peace or if any of the other proposed explanations are decisive, then the United States could retrench with-out fear of negative consequences. The grand strategy of the United States is therefore crucial to theo-ries of hegemonic stability. And, once again, there is no evidence that U.S. choices matter much. Although few observers would agree on the details, most would probably acknowledge that post—Cold War grand strategies of American presidents have differed in some important ways. As it happens, each administration is a reasonable representation of one the four ideal types of grand strategy laid out by Posen and Ross in 1996.81 Under George H.W. Bush, the United States followed the path of "selective engagement," which is sometimes referred to as "balance-of- power realism"; Bill Clinton's grand strategy looks a great deal like what Posen and Ross call "cooperative security" and others call "liberal inter- nationalism"; George W. Bush, especially in his first term, forged a strat-egy that was as close to "primacy" as any president is likely to get; and Barack Obama, despite some early flirtation with liberalism, followed a restrained realist path, which Posen and Ross label "neoisolationism" but its proponents refer to as "strategic restraint."82 In the lingo of political science, we have substantial variation in the independent variable, more than enough to determine its effect on the phenomenon under consider-ation. The result is clear (see table 1.1). Armed-conflict levels fell steadily throughout the post—Cold War era, irrespective of the grand strategic path Washington chose. Neither the primacy of George W. Bush nor the restraint of Barack Obama had much effect on the level of global violence. Despite continued warnings (and the high-profile mess in Syria), the world has not experienced an increase in violence while U.S. behavior became more restrained. Once again, if the grand strategy of the United States is responsible for the New Peace, it is leaving no trace in the evidence. If a correlation did exist between U.S. actions and international stabil-ity, if other states had reacted differently to fluctuations in U.S. military spending or grand strategy, then surely hegemonic-stability theorists would argue that their expectations had been fulfilled. Many liberals were on the lookout for chaos while George W. Bush was in the White House, just as neoconservatives have been quick to identify apparent worldwide catastrophe under President Obama.83 If increases in vio-lence would have been evidence for the wisdom of hegemonic strate-gies, then logical consistency demands that the lack thereof should at least pose a problem. As it stands, the only evidence we have regarding the relationship between U.S. power and international stability suggests that the two are unrelated. The rest of the world appears quite capable and willing to operate effectively without the presence of a global police~~man~~. Those who think otherwise base their view on faith alone. Hegemonic stability is a belief, in other words, rather than an estab-lished fact, and as such it deserves a different kind of examination.

#### **It’s unsustainable, but holding on convinces China of containment, which flips them toward adventurism**

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American policy in the Western Pacific has long been framed in terms of preventing the emergence of an exclusive, hostile hegemon that could threaten vital U.S. interests and deny American access there. The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy respectively assert that “China seeks to displace the United States” in East Asia and thus achieve “Indo-Pacific regional hegemony.” Avoiding this possibility has required Washington, also as a matter of policy, to maintain its own hegemony in the region (although we prefer to call it “primacy” or “preeminence”) as the best and only guarantee against such a danger. This mantra was central to the Obama administration’s “rebalance” in East Asia, and remains central to the Trump administration’s advocacy of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” But this policy mantra has two fundamental problems: it mischaracterizes China’s strategic intentions in the region, and it is based on a U.S. strategic objective that is probably no longer achievable. First, China is pursuing hegemony in East Asia, but not an exclusive hostile hegemony. It is not trying to extrude the United States from the region or deny American access there. The Chinese have long recognized the utility—and the benefits to China itself—of U.S. engagement with the region, and they have indicated receptivity to peaceful coexistence and overlapping spheres of influence with the United States there. Moreover, China is not trying to impose its political or economic system on its neighbors, and it does not seek to obstruct commercial freedom of navigation in the region (because no country is more dependent on freedom of the seas than China itself). In short, Beijing wants to extend its power and influence within East Asia, but not as part of a “winner-take-all” contest. China does have unsettled and vexing sovereignty claims over Taiwan, most of the islands and other features in the East and South China Seas, and their adjacent waters. Although Beijing has demonstrated a willingness to use force in defense or pursuit of these claims, it is not looking for excuses to do so. Whether these disputes can be managed or resolved in a way that is mutually acceptable to the relevant parties and consistent with U.S. interests in the region is an open, long-term question. But that possibility should not be ruled out on the basis of—or made more difficult by—false assumptions of irreconcilable interests. On the contrary, it should be pursued on the basis of a recognition that all the parties want to avoid conflict—and that the sovereignty disputes in the region ultimately are not military problems requiring military solutions. And since Washington has never been opposed in principle to reunification between China and Taiwan as long as it is peaceful, and similarly takes no position on the ultimate sovereignty of the other disputed features, their long-term disposition need not be the litmus test of either U.S. or Chinese hegemony in the region. Of course, China would prefer not to have forward-deployed U.S. military forces in the Western Pacific that could be used against it, but Beijing has long tolerated and arguably could indefinitely tolerate an American military presence in the region—unless that presence is clearly and exclusively aimed at coercing or containing China. It is also true that Beijing disagrees with American principles of military freedom of navigation in the region; and this constitutes a significant challenge in waters where China claims territorial jurisdiction in violation of the UN Commission on the Law of the Sea. But this should not be conflated with a Chinese desire or intention to exclusively “control” all the waters within the first island chain in the Western Pacific. The Chinese almost certainly recognize that exclusive control or “domination” of the neighborhood is not achievable at any reasonable cost, and that pursuing it would be counterproductive by inviting pushback and challenges that would negate the objective. So what would Chinese “hegemony” in East Asia mean or look like? Beijing probably thinks in terms of something much like American primacy in the Western Hemisphere: a model in which China is generally recognized and acknowledged as the de facto central or primary power in the region, but has little need or incentive for militarily adventurism because the mutual benefits of economic interdependence prevail and the neighbors have no reason—and inherent disincentives—to challenge China’s vital interests or security. And as a parallel to China’s economic and diplomatic engagement in Latin America, Beijing would neither exclude nor be hostile to continued U.S. engagement in East Asia. A standard counterargument to this relatively benign scenario is that Beijing would not be content with it for long because China’s strategic ambitions will expand as its capabilities grow. This is a valid hypothesis, but it usually overlooks the greater possibility that China’s external ambitions will expand not because its inherent capabilities have grown, but because Beijing sees the need to be more assertive in response to external challenges to Chinese interests or security. Indeed, much of China’s “assertiveness” within East Asia over the past decade—when Beijing probably would prefer to focus on domestic priorities—has been a reaction to such perceived challenges. Accordingly, Beijing’s willingness to settle for a narrowly-defined, peaceable version of regional preeminence will depend heavily on whether it perceives other countries—especially the United States—as trying to deny China this option and instead obstruct Chinese interests or security in the region. This leads to the second inherent problem with the mantra that the United States must maintain its primacy in the Western Pacific to prevent a hostile rival hegemon: U.S. primacy in the region itself is not sustainable, and trying to sustain it will probably be counterproductive. For all intents and purposes, American primacy in East Asia—depending on how it is defined—is arguably already a thing of the past. Since about a decade ago, China has a larger share of East Asian regional trade than the United States, and is now the biggest trading partner of most of its neighbors. If defined in military terms, most net assessments suggest that the American advantage in power projection forces within the region is eroding relative to Chinese capabilities; and it is not at all clear in the wake of sequestration and competing budgetary priorities that the United States could or will devote the resources necessary to arrest this trend. American primacy in East Asia has often been characterized in terms of the United States serving as the guarantor of regional security, protecting the “global commons” and providing “public goods” there. The U.S. alliance network in the region certainly extends an umbrella of protection to those countries with which Washington has defense pacts; and its military freedom of navigation operations signal an intention to resist excessive Chinese maritime claims. But even U.S. allies do not perceive that China is being deterred in the South and East China Seas. More broadly, it is not clear what other public goods the United States is actually providing in the East Asian commons. For example, commercial shippers in the Western Pacific do not presume or rely on the protection of the U.S. Navy—which doesn’t have the fleet to provide it. And Washington’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership has undermined the idea of U.S. leadership in the region on behalf of shared economic interests. Indeed, most East Asian countries—including U.S. allies—appear increasingly uncertain about Washington’s attention to their interests and their security. Questions and even doubts about the substance and sustainability of the American commitment to the region have grown over the past decade, and most of the countries in the region—again, including U.S. allies—have already been adjusting their foreign and security policies to hedge against the potential unreliability of the United States. Indeed, such hedging and independent-mindedness by U.S. allies is itself contributing to the erosion of U.S. influence in the region. On balance, it is hard to make the case that the United States retains effective primacy in the Western Pacific when much of the region has doubts about Washington’s ability and willingness to exercise it. So what can and should Washington do to address these new historical circumstances? It may be possible to regain the confidence of U.S. allies and partners in East Asia, but restoring and retaining American primacy there over the long term is probably no longer achievable, given the shifts in the regional balance of power and the constraints on U.S. resources. It’s not 1945 anymore, or even 1991. The United States sought and maintained a preponderance of power during the Cold War, but this almost certainly is not permanently sustainable, either globally or within East Asia. American primacy in the Western Pacific was a historical anomaly, and sooner or later the United States will have to get used to a regional role that is something less than that. Moreover, policies and strategies aimed at upholding U.S. primacy in East Asia are likely to be counterproductive because such an approach, probably more than anything else, would reinforce Beijing’s belief that the United States seeks to contain China by keeping it subordinate within its own region. This would increase the chances of Beijing feeling compelled to adopt a more confrontational and aggressive posture. Chinese pursuit of a more exclusive hostile hegemony could thus become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

#### Decline inev--

#### COVID AND long-term effects of trump.

Walt 20 Stephen M. Walt, Stephen M. Walt is the Robert and Renée Belfer professor of international relations at Harvard University. 7-23-2020, "How to Ruin a Superpower," Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/23/how-to-ruin-a-superpower/> - BS

By the mid-1990s, the United States found itself in a position of primacy unmatched in modern history. Its combination of economic, military, and soft power dwarfed all others, and scholars such as William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks offered sophisticated and well-reasoned arguments for why the unipolar era might last as long or longer than the bipolar era that preceded it. What these optimists did not anticipate, alas, was the series of self-inflicted wounds that the United States would suffer in the years that followed, a train wreck of recurring blunders that has accelerated and worsened under Donald Trump. In particular, Trump’s egregious mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic is producing debilitating long-term effects that will further accelerate America’s decline. Even if he is defeated in November and a Joe Biden administration does nearly everything right, the consequences of Trump’s reign of error will be with us for many years to come.

Before Trump, the mistakes of the unipolar era fell under three main headings. The first error was adopting a grand strategy of liberal hegemony, which sought to spread democracy, markets, and other liberal values far and wide and to bring the whole world into a liberal order that was designed and led by the United States. This vastly ambitious strategy provoked a strong backlash from a variety of quarters, led to unnecessary and costly wars that squandered trillions of dollars, and undermined key sectors of the U.S. economy.

The second mistake was to allow public institutions to deteriorate, by starving them of resources and then blaming them for all our problems. Republican leaders pushed tax cuts with scant regard for the fiscal consequences, while the IRS was defunded to the point that it could no longer deter or detect widespread evasion and fraud. Like the Prussian Junkers or the pre-revolutionary French aristocrats, wealthy Americans—including Trump—found countless new ways to avoid contributing enough to public coffers and with less and less fear that they might get caught. Instead of creating and funding robust, competent, and respected public institutions—the sort of administrative and managerial capacity that would be invaluable in a pandemic and that some other countries have—Americans decided they didn’t need them.

The third misstep was the weaponization of partisan politics that began with the Newt Gingrich revolution in the U.S. Congress. As Julian Zelizer documents in a fascinating but disturbing new book, Gingrich’s decision to take down House Leader Jim Wright began a process that turned American politics into a blood sport where gaining and retaining power mattered more than advancing the public interest. Aided by talk radio hate-mongers like Rush Limbaugh and the factually challenged propagandists at the Weekly Standard and Fox News, conspiracy theories, slander, and the steady erosion of the “soft guardrails” of democracy replaced respectful debate, discussion, and compromise.

Unfortunately, these three trends were also sharply at odds with each other. Remaking the world in America’s image is an enormous undertaking; if you were serious about it, you’d need a large, well-funded, and highly competent state to do it. Not only would running the world require a strong military, but it would also take a large, highly professional diplomatic corps to manage the political fallout abroad, a vast army of well-trained development experts, and lots of safety-net programs back home to deal with the destabilizing consequences of economic globalization. In this way, the grand strategy of liberal hegemony was fundamentally at odds with the endless demand for tax cuts and the concomitant desire to shrink the state. Liberal hegemony’s defenders got around this problem by assuming that the tides of history were running their way and that creating a global liberal order would be relatively easy. As Fareed Zakaria noted back in 1998, the result was a “hollow hegemony,” as the United States tried in vain to manage the world on the cheap.

Moreover, if a single country hopes to mold local politics in lots of very different places, it damn well better be politically united at home. Running the world entails substantial sacrifices, and doing it effectively requires a powerful bipartisan consensus and robust public support. Needless to say, a poisonous atmosphere of relentless partisanship, where politicians on the make repeatedly grandstand over made-up scandals (remember those endless congressional hearings about Benghazi?), is antithetical to the forging of national unity. Endless gridlock also made American democracy a less appealing model for other societies.

To be clear: I don’t think liberal hegemony would have worked even if the United States decided to pursue it in a more serious and sophisticated fashion. But doing it in the half-assed way America did made failure inevitable and at no small cost.

The consequences of these three errors provided the toxic brew that allowed an incompetent and narcissistic charlatan like Trump to reach the White House. Since then, he has managed to drive America’s image around the world to record lows, bungled the trade war with China, pushed Iran closer to a nuclear bomb, and lavished praise on a number of murderous dictators (some of whom are openly hostile to the United States). His only significant foreign-policy achievement to date is getting Britain to decide not to use Huawei technology for its new 5G digital network, but that’s not much to show for nearly four years in office. Apart from appointing a lot of conservative judges, Trump’s major achievement as 2020 dawned was not screwing up the economic recovery that Barack Obama had bequeathed to him.

Then came COVID-19.

It’s not just that the United States has made mistakes—the very idea of U.S. global leadership is broken from the ground up.

The administration’s disastrous mishandling of the pandemic has been well documented elsewhere, and there’s no need to rehearse that depressing story once more. Instead, I want to highlight what the long-term consequences for America’s global position are likely to be. Spoiler alert: It’s not a pretty picture.

First, as I’ve argued before, Trump’s attempt to wish away the problem (along with the rest of his administration’s incompetent response) has tarnished America’s dwindling reputation as a society that knows how to get things done effectively. When countries all over the world are barring Americans from their territory due to legitimate fears that they will spread the disease, while looking on with a combination of shock and pity, you know something has gone badly wrong. Consider this: Rwandans, Uruguayans, and Algerians are all welcome to visit Europe this summer. Americans aren’t.

Second, the economic depression caused by the pandemic will leave deep scars on the U.S. economy, and the damage increases the longer the crisis occurs. Jobs won’t suddenly reemerge once a lot of businesses have gone under, and bankruptcies and layoffs will continue until we get the virus under control. The U.S. Federal Reserve and Congress have provided emergency funds to cushion the blow temporarily, but these measures have ballooned the federal deficit to historically high levels. The longer the crisis continues, the bigger the pile of debt will be.

Here’s the key takeaway: Although the pandemic has harmed every economy in the world, other countries have got it under control, can begin to reopen safely, and will suffer less long-term damage as a result. That’s why Trump’s failure is so disastrous: By prolonging the period where the United States has to maintain lockdowns and other restrictive measures, he has guaranteed that a subsequent recovery—whenever it finally occurs—will be slower and less vigorous.

Third, the lockdown has exacerbated both intimate partner abuse and child abuse while making it harder to detect both. Schoolteachers often spot and report signs of child abuse, for example, but that is less likely to happen when kids aren’t physically in class. Chronic abuse has serious emotional consequences for its victims, and the longer the pandemic continues, the worse such problems will be. The result: The United States will have a higher-than-expected incidence of mental health problems in the future, which is both a tragedy for the victims and a further drain on U.S. power.

Fourth, although keeping public schools closed is necessary to get the virus under control, it will inevitably have a negative effect on learning and put American kids even further behind their foreign counterparts in terms of educational achievement. Once again, education everywhere has suffered as a result of COVID-19, but the damage will be greatest in countries that didn’t deal with it successfully and are still facing an escalating spiral of new cases. Sad to say, the United States is one of those countries.

Fifth, higher education will take a big hit, too. America’s colleges and universities have been the world’s best for decades and a huge driver of innovation for the U.S. economy. They are suffering from the shutdown and especially from the loss of foreign students, who have been both a source of revenue and in the past a further engine of technological advancement. Although the Trump administration has reversed its ill-advised attempt to ban foreign students receiving only online education this fall, the poor U.S. response to the pandemic will lead some of the foreign students who used to come to the United States to pursue educational opportunities in countries where their health is not at risk and universities are open for normal operations. America has long benefited from so-called “brain gain” (i.e., talented foreigners who arrived in the country for college or graduate school and chose to remain, lending their talents to innovative U.S. companies); that benefit is likely to be smaller in the future. The longer America trails the world in dealing with COVID-19, the more damage it will suffer on this front as well.

Last but not least, the pandemic has not stopped women from bearing children, but many are now doing so in an atmosphere of enormous economic uncertainty and coronavirus-related stress. A growing body of research shows that maternal stress of all kinds has deleterious effects on fetal and early childhood development, with long-term consequences for a child’s physical well-being, cognitive abilities, emotional maturity, and overall life chances. Once again: These harmful effects are undoubtedly present in every country where the coronavirus has spread, but the damage will be greatest in countries where the virus has yet to be brought under control. That’s America.

The United States still has a number of important advantages compared with other major powers, including abundant natural resources, a still innovative economy, temperate climate (at least so far), and an extremely favorable geopolitical location. Those qualities make long-term success more likely but do not guarantee it. The country also faces a number of serious rivals—most notably a still rising China—but recent decades suggest that Americans remain their own worst enemy. Trump didn’t deliberately and consciously set out to ruin the United States—and torpedo his own chances for reelection—he just couldn’t help himself. It is the rest of us—and especially our children and grandchildren—who will suffer the consequences.

#### Economics---china will outpace the US---that’s Layne AND

MacDonald 18—Associate professor of political science at Wellesley College [Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent (Associate professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame), April 2018, *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment*, Chapter 10: Conclusion: Retrenchment as Reloading, pgs 190-1, Cornell University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, Accessed through the Wake Forest Library]

There are many complex issues bound up in this debate. Scholars differ on what metrics to use, what timeframes to examine, and what comparisons to make. We follow the method that yielded the most commonsense cases: lasting ordinal transitions involving relative shares of great power gross domestic product (GDP). Using this approach, the United States is on pace to enter acute relative decline sometime in the next decade. 23 To be perfectly clear, this prediction depends on a number of factors that are hard to predict. Extrapolating out from present trends is notoriously unreliable, and much depends on the baseline year one chooses to begin with. There will be shocks and surprises, and it is impossible to know their frequency, magnitude, or direction. Yet using our terminology, the United States is likely to face a decline that is small or medium in magnitude. This is good news for the United States and for China, since it affords both powers the time and space to manage the impending transition. It deserves emphasis that China is no world-beater, the United States is no weakling, and American decline is likely modest. As always, much depends on the measures used. Power is an intricate concept and sensitive to context. Every measure of power has its drawbacks, and we already detailed many of the ﬂaws of using GDP in chapter 3. We agree that GDP trends mask a great deal of nuance, cross-national GDP ﬁgures are imprecise, and China’s ﬁgures are more suspect than most. Yet GDP is determinate and correlates with a number of compelling metrics, many of which suggest that China is indisputably gaining ground on the United States. Over the past decade, the United States has experienced a decline in global share of high technology exports, trademark applications, market capitalizations of its publicly traded companies, and renewable energy production. Meanwhile, China has gained relative to the United States in terms of patent applications, high technology exports, and information and communication technology service exports. 24 Even when it comes to GDP per capita, which many claim provides “a much more robust indicator of national power,” China is gaining ground. 25 China’s GDP per capita has tripled over the past decade, and the U.S. advantage has declined as a result. Naturally, these are not the only indicators one could point to, and economic measures may lose traction on the political consequences of China’s rise. Yet experts come to similar conclusions: Thomas Christensen ﬁnds China’s rise very real, though the United States retains a commanding lead on many measures, and Jonathan Kirshner sees American economic advantages fading. 26 Even U.S. policymakers, who reject the term decline, nevertheless acknowledge that the distribution of international power is shifting. In his West Point speech, President Obama observed, “The world is changing with accelerating speed. This presents new opportunities, but also new dangers.” 27 Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton conceded, “The Asia-Paciﬁc has become a key driver of global politics. . . . Harnessing Asia’s growth and dynamism is central to American economic and strategic interests.” 28 Whether one prefers the term “rising power” or “emerging power,” the implication is the same: the geopolitical landscape is shifting, and U.S. policymakers must plan accordingly.

#### Fiscal and military overstretch.

Porter 18—Professor of international security and strategy at the University of Birmingham [Patrick, 6/5/2018, “A World Imagined: Nostalgia and Liberal Order”, Cato Institute, <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/world-imagined-nostalgia-liberal-order>, Language edited change denoted by brackets]

The United States is accumulating record deficits and growing, unsustainable debts. According to the Congressional Budget Office, federal debt will reach 150 percent of GDP by 2047.70 Because repayment obligations are the first, compulsory items in expenditure and because heavy fiscal burdens beyond a certain proportion of debt-to-GDP tend to choke economic growth,71 a growing debt load directly impedes the country’s ability to sustain its way of life alongside its extensive international commitments. U.S. grand strategy also gives Washington a proclivity to continuous wars that it chooses to fund through deficits. According to one estimate, U.S. wars from 2001 to 2016 had a budgetary cost of approximately $4.79 trillion, taking into account indirect costs such as interest on borrowing and through-life care for veterans.72 Those wars have led to further geopolitical crises and demand for further commitment. Conflict-induced anarchy in Iraq and Libya created footholds for the Islamic State and, by upsetting the balance of power in the Persian Gulf, opened the way to a Saudi-Iran cold war that now implicates the United States. The Trump administration has not reversed this imbalance but aggravated it. It has significantly increased the defense budget, while significantly reducing taxes. It has embarked on a deficit-financed military buildup, a pattern that historically increases imbalances in the economy and triggers a “boom-bust” cycle, and where overreaching wars (like Iraq) and financial meltdowns (like the global financial crisis) are linked.73 The final 2018 defense budget is expected to be 13 percent higher than that of 2017.74 The United States’ grand strategy of primacy saddles it with defense and national security expenditures that amount to over 68 percent of discretionary spending, taking into account the base budget and overseas contingency operations and support for veterans affairs, homeland security, and the nuclear weapons program.75 Meanwhile, the overall direction so far of President Trump’s foreign policy has been to multiply America’s security commitments and entanglements.

The United States has implicated itself more deeply in the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf. Trump has intensified America’s confrontation with Iran by abandoning the multiparty settlement on Iran’s nuclear program. He has reinforced U.S. patronage of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies, while hardening Washington’s alignment with Israel by recognizing Jerusalem as its capital. By November 2017, Trump had increased the number of troops and civilians working for the Department of Defense in the Middle East by 33 percent.76 At the time of writing, the status of America’s commitment in Syria is not clear, with the administration both promising to withdraw yet indicating it would stay to defeat the remnants of the Islamic State, and threatening to continue to punish Syria for chemical weapons use. He increased the U.S. commitment to the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater. Lastly, the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy openly acknowledges competition against “revisionist” powers Russia and China.77 And its Nuclear Posture Review expands the conditions under which the United States would threaten nuclear use and plans an increased arsenal of low-yield nuclear bombs.78 Escalating rivalries are the likely result. Not only is this imbalance between power and commitments financially difficult to service. It also makes the country harder to govern. Recurrent clashes over federal budgets and the increasing tradeoffs between consumption, investment, and defense lead to periods of [demise] ~~paralysis~~. We see a dangerous interaction between domestic discord and foreign policy failure. These deteriorating circumstances make it imperative for Washington to conduct a cold reassessment of its grand strategy. It needs to ask what works and what doesn’t, to rank its interests into a hierarchy and distinguish what is vital from what is desirable, to assess what is achievable, and what costs and sacrifices it can bear. The growing demand on already scarce resources, from the mounting costs of defense to the current and future burdens of entitlements, means that it will be difficult for the superpower to increase its extraction of resources from its population base. For a reassessment to be realistic, the country must be able to consider retrenchment, burden shifting, the accommodation of potential rivals, and the limitation of commitments. History suggests strategies that bring a state’s power and commitments into balance and that can successfully prevent overstretch, insolvency, or exhaustion.79 To do this, decisionmakers can draw on an American tradition of prudential, realist thinking about aligning resources and goals. As Samuel P. Huntington summarized it, to address the gap between ambitions and capabilities, states can attempt to redefine their interests and so reduce their commitments to a level which they can sustain with their existing capabilities; to reduce the threats to their interests through diplomacy; to enhance the contribution of allies to the protection of their interests; to increase their own resources, usually meaning larger military forces and military budgets; to substitute cheaper forms of power for more expensive ones, thus using the same resources to produce more power; to devise more effective strategies for the use of their capabilities, thereby securing also greater output in terms of power for the same input in terms of resources.80 If, however, Washington is held to a fictitious and demanding historical standard, this exercise will be impossible. If “liberal order” visions prevail, it will be deemed immoral even to consider an alternative of restraint. A pernicious byproduct of such nostalgia is its reductionism, whereby traditionalists assert a false choice between primacy or “global leadership” on one hand and inward-looking isolation on the other. Accordingly, advocates of primacy brand today’s realists who call for retrenchment as Trumpian.81 By contrast, if Washington can be liberated from the burdensome historical fantasy that hegemonic nostalgists impose upon it, then it can gain a clearer-sighted appreciation of the choices now before it.

#### Rise of authoritarianism.

Michael J. Boyle 20, Associate professor of political science at Rutgers University and a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, “America and the Illiberal Order After Trump,” Survival, Vol. 62, Issue 6, 12/02/2020, T&F. language edited.

The liberal order, as we knew it, is gone. The network of institutions, rules and norms established by the United States after the Second World War has long been under siege, pressured from without by China and other rising powers, and from within by populist leaders who saw little value in it. The coronavirus pandemic has compounded these pressures and revealed that many assumptions about the liberal order were false. Global institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) have not proven capable of coordinating governments to respond collectively to threats, liberal-democratic states have not cooperated either inside or outside of such institutions, and the United States could not be counted on to lead others through a crisis.1 Multinational institutions such as the United Nations appeared irrelevant as states closed their borders and chased after medical supplies with increasing desperation. The G7 and G20 both failed to come up with workable plans, while the WHO became a battleground for influence between Washington and Beijing.2 The greatest failure, however, lay with the United States, which catastrophically failed to manage its own epidemic, much less lead others in managing theirs.3 Against this background, any hope of a return to the previous liberal order premised on US power is now extinguished.

The big question is what comes next.4 There are three broad schools of thought. The first is that the United States can recover from this crisis and restore some version of the liberal order, curtailing China’s geopolitical ascent.5 This view holds that the institutions of the liberal order are battered but fundamentally sound, and can be recast to take account of diminished American power.6 Under the second view, China will emerge victorious from the pandemic because it has successfully controlled the virus at home, albeit with draconian measures, and will use its success and a dose of propaganda to assert an increasingly dominant status.7 In a manner befitting its power, China will seek to dramatically revise or overturn the liberal order and elevate its own institutions. A third, more pessimistic, outlook is that the world will belong to no one and that what will follow this crisis is anarchy, closer in practice to a chaotic multipolar order than to the unipolar order that prevailed following the collapse of the Soviet Union.8 In this scenario, the decline of the US will [destroy] ~~cripple~~ institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, and produce a patchwork of institutions and norms mirroring the dispersal of power and influence in a world dominated by neither Washington nor Beijing.

There is a fourth, worrying possibility: that the increasingly stark geopolitical competition between the US, Russia and China will yield not anarchy but an illiberal order, marked by strengthened regional hierarchies, the hollowing out of the institutions of the liberal order, and the spread of illiberal practices and values.9 Under this bleak scenario, the order becomes illiberal because it reflects the character and foreign-policy practices of the leading states: Russia and China, two illiberal, authoritarian powers; and the United States, which showed signs of a slide into authoritarianism under President Donald Trump. A global struggle involving three illiberal states would induce other states to mimic their foreign-policy practices and furnish a permissive environment for the growth of authoritarianism elsewhere. This darker world would not be an inevitable consequence of China’s exporting its values, but rather an outcome of the United States’ abandonment of its liberal values and its decision to act more like Russia and China in the struggle for power and influence. The international order will consolidate around illiberalism so long as the three most powerful states in the system – the United States, Russia and China – have that character. In a 2018 speech, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas acknowledged that due to internal changes in the three most powerful states, the ‘world order that we once knew, had become accustomed to and sometimes felt comfortable in – this world order no longer exists’.10

The consolidation of an illiberal order would be more favourable to China and Russia, and to illiberal regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, than to the remaining liberal democracies. This presents some difficult choices for the next US administration. After the damage inflicted by the Trump administration, the world is unlikely to go back to trusting the leadership of the US and accepting its natural leadership of a liberal order.11 At the same time, in an environment shifting to the advantage of its enemies, and with its allies increasingly weak, distrustful and divided, the US cannot afford to withdraw entirely from the world for fear of giving Russia and China opportunities to exploit. Facing the immense difficulty of either restoration or retrenchment, a Biden administration must instead engage in rapid reform of American political institutions in order to compete effectively with Russia and China and salvage, in weaker forms, the surviving institutions of the liberal order. To be successful, US foreign policy must now begin at home: the US, if it recovers, will not be able to manage a long-term ideological struggle against illiberalism unless it addresses illiberalism in its political institutions and shows that liberalism has something to say for itself in a world unforgiving of its weaknesses.

Two and a half superpowers

The days when US policymakers hoped that it was possible to work with China as a responsible stakeholder of the liberal order are over. Today, most policymakers and analysts accept that the US will be locked in a struggle against an increasingly assertive China for generations. Some have described this as the Cold War 2.0.12 The logic behind this claim is that China is a rising power, with vast economic clout and growing military strength, and is positioning itself as a counterweight to the US. China’s grey-zone operations and cyber attacks, its hostage-taking of foreign citizens and its aggressive propaganda suggest that Beijing is seeking to expand its global reach. The consequences of its harsh authoritarianism are now undeniable, from its construction of vast concentration camps for Uighurs in Xinjiang to its brutal clampdown in Hong Kong. In some ways, China’s conduct seems to echo the Soviet Union’s at the beginning of its advance to global power, and to imply that more clashes between the US and China are inevitable. The Cold War 2.0 analogy is also comforting to the American foreign-policy establishment in its suggestion that the US would eventually prevail without resorting to outright war.

Yet the analogy misleads more than it informs, especially concerning the role that ideology will play. Naturally, the US and China will engage in intense geopolitical competition for some time, and China will attempt to extend its global reach, as its recent economic and security agreements with Iran indicate.13 But the ideological character of the contest is different from that of the first Cold War. China does not offer an ideology or model of government that is easily transferable to other states. Its attempts to promote the Beijing consensus as an alternative model of development has been taken up only by a relatively small number of states, many of which have used it as leverage to play Washington and Beijing off one another.14 The ideological appeal of China is principally limited by the fact that it is pursuing a national vision of greatness, not a global project intended to make the world like China. The future that China offers is not the promised land of a world transformed by the abolition of private property, which the Soviet Union once appeared to offer, but rather one in which capitalist acquisition and wealth creation is made more efficient and less encumbered by democracy and human-rights concerns than what has been on offer from the West.

China’s own mistakes have also circumscribed its ideological appeal. These include, in particular, its efforts to bully and exploit states in the developing world to give it exclusive access to natural resources. Especially under President Xi Jinping, China’s assertiveness in the South China Sea has made its neighbours in Asia even more nervous. Recent border clashes with India have only reaffirmed suspicions of China’s expansionist intentions and made others harden their positions. It is increasingly clear that bandwagoning with China comes with unacceptable costs. As Australian Minister of Defence Linda Reynolds has noted, ‘in the grey zone, when the screws are tightened, influence becomes interference, economic cooperation becomes coercion and investment becomes entrapment’. 15 While China has traditionally feared encirclement by US allies, it has effectively encircled itself with enemies. 16 Its efforts to crush dissent, as well as its bungled attempt to hide the scale of the coronavirus outbreak, have also won it few friends in Europe and North America.

The Cold War 2.0 analogy also ignores Russia’s substantial role in opposing the United States and joining China in trying to undermine the liberal order. Critics argue that Russia should not be considered a superpower along the lines of China and the United States, with Barack Obama having once dismissed Russia as little more than a ‘regional power’. According to this view, its vestigial superpower status derives largely from its legacy nuclear arsenal rather than its ability to wield broad geopolitical power. It is certainly true that Russia is not comparable to China or the United States in many standard measures of power. Its economy is relatively small and quite weak, subject to price fluctuations in oil and gas revenues and plagued by stagnant incomes, growing unemployment and rising discontent. In 2019, the Russian Federation ranked 11th in the world in GDP, below India and Brazil. 17 It is also widely distrusted in its own region for its invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

This view, though, understates how well President Vladimir Putin plays a weak hand, developing new strengths to compensate for Russia’s shortcomings. Unable to compete in raw military or economic power globally, Russia has instead positioned itself as a power broker in regions such as the Middle East, which has no dominant one. 18 This explains Russia’s willingness to join the negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal, to prop up the regime of President Bashar al-Assad in Syria and to send mercenaries into Libya. In other regions, it plays the spoiler, undermining the US and its allies with covert actions that violate long-held norms, such as offering bounties to the Taliban for killing American soldiers in Afghanistan or assassinating dissidents abroad. A large element of its strategy has been exploiting institutional weaknesses in democratic states by interfering in their elections, hacking their computer systems, flooding their media with disinformation and exploiting opportunities for corruption of public officials. 19 Russia does not need to compete with the US or China in every way as long as it can use corruption, disinformation, subversion and cyber warfare to inflate its influence. By doing so, Russia can preserve its strategic independence and carve out a space for manoeuvre amid two giants with global ambitions.

If Russia were just an obstructionist power – albeit a nuclear-armed one – it would still be possible to dismiss it as half a superpower. But since 2014 Russia has developed a stronger relationship with China that amplifies Moscow’s power and influence. By casting them as US rivals but also minimising their potency, American foreign policy has helped to drive Russia and China closer together in an uneasy strategic partnership, creating a bloc of two powerful authoritarian states opposed to American power. 20 The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy rightly describes Russia and China as strategic rivals that together wish to ‘shape a world antithetical to US values and interests’. 21 But it also portrays both countries as having little impact outside their regions and underestimates the seriousness of their attack on the liberal order. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s calls for a ‘new alliance of democracies’ to balance China comes too late and ignores the role Russia plays in bolstering China. 22 Their partnership does not resolve all differences: Russian and Chinese interests are not always aligned, and geopolitical competition between them is regular and ongoing. But they are in accord about the undesirability of the liberal order and the advantages that would flow from working in concert to overturn it. To that end, practical Sino-Russian cooperation has increased in terms of joint military exercises and cooperation on missile defences. In 2019, trade between the two exceeded $100 billion for the first time, and today China is Russia’s largest trading partner and Russia is China’s largest oil supplier. 23 Their relationship, which Putin himself describes as ‘alliancelike’, has some fissures, but also sufficient grounding against the liberal order to keep them aligned against the United States. 24

An illiberal order

Although neither country can sell its own government as a model for others in the way that the Soviet Union once did, together they are making a different kind of ideological argument for replacing the liberal order with an illiberal one. Their case comprises three overlapping critiques of the liberal order. Firstly, Russia has led an attack on the efforts by the United States to sidestep the restrictions on the use of force in the UN Charter and to engage in regime change. Russia’s rhetorical strategy is to present itself as a defender of ‘Charter liberalism’, specifically existing institutions such as the UN and international law, and to call for a return to first principles in their application, especially concerning the injunction against the use of force other than for self-defence. 25 Like China, it positions itself as a defender of sovereign rights of recognised states regardless of their human-rights records. The underlying idea is to reinforce the UN Charter’s restrictions on the use of force and to articulate a norm of neo-Westphalian sovereignty that will restrain the US from using military force to overthrow governments the way it did in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011. 26 Russia in this way seeks to stake out the moral high ground, appearing to support a fairer and more rules-based world order and the restraint of an overbearing rival. Russian arguments against US interventionism are flagrantly hypocritical, as Russia itself has intervened in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria without UN approval. But the Russian position has still resonated with China and many rising powers, including Brazil, India and South Africa, which are protective of their sovereign rights due to long legacies of imperialism and embrace the norm of non-intervention as a way of guarding against US intervention in their affairs.

Secondly, for over 20 years Russia and China have advocated a return to a multipolar order, sharing the baseline view that a world with a less dominant US and a diffusion of power to regions is consistent with their interests. 27 In 2007, speaking in Munich, Putin argued that unipolarity was inherently dangerous because it encouraged the US to behave recklessly and would eventually destroy it from within. 28 On balance, China has remained more ambiguous, hinting at various points that it would accept a unipolar order, or at least one with a more equitable relationship between the US and China. But an underlying theme of its arguments since 1992 has been a call for a multipolar world that restrains any one country from pursuing ‘gunboat diplomacy’. 29 Although it has shied away from directly targeting the US by name, it has consistently called for a ‘democratization of international relations’ and an effective end to unipolarity. 30 For more than a decade, China has positioned itself as a partner of ‘newly emerging powers’ in the developing world in hopes that their gradual development will foster a multipolar order. 31 At a minimum, it demands that non-Western countries have a greater say in setting rules and norms of the international order than they did in the US-dominated one.

Thirdly, Russia and China are repudiating liberalism at home and abroad, and rejecting the laissez-faire free trade traditionally associated with globalisation. 32 They depict liberalism as an ideology of weakness, enfeebling states already strained by the forces of globalisation and allowing their societies to be infected by pernicious outside influences. Putin has argued that liberalism is ‘obsolete’, urged its rejection at home and sought to repel American proselytising abroad. 33 China is redoubling its efforts to extend its ‘discourse power’ against the West, and includes several core values of liberalism – such as constitutionalism, civil society and universal values – among its ‘seven perils’. 34 The underlying argument – that liberalism fails at home to deal with the causes of societal disorder – implies that global institutions premised on Lockean liberalism, such as the United Nations, might also fare poorly against transnational threats and the effects of hyper-globalisation, especially the rapid movement of capital flows and people. If liberalism is falling apart at home, the reasoning also goes, then international institutions premised on its ethos may no longer be fit for purpose. Russia and China couple these arguments with covert efforts to illustrate the weaknesses of liberal governments by means of disinformation and election-hacking, as well as killing or imprisoning dissidents, spies and journalists. 35

The call for a return to respecting sovereignty norms, a fairer multipolar order and a rejection of liberalism as an organising principle in politics constitutes an attack on what John Mearsheimer has described as the ‘thick’ version of the liberal-international order. 36 This version, in operation from 1990 to 2019, involved a bipartisan effort to transform the order from one constrained by the boundaries of state sovereignty into something more ambitious and progressive. 37 One result was that respect for democracy and human rights became a condition of entry for many institutions of the liberal order. The West, under American leadership, wanted to spread liberal democracy around the world and to recast the order itself as truly international, based on a normative consensus in support of human rights and the responsibility of states to adhere to specific standards of liberal political and economic governance. 38

It is this thick version of the liberal order that China and Russia reject and seek to replace. Beyond that, their arguments articulate an alternative order favourable to their interests and established by instilling illiberal values in governments around the world. The quid pro quo is the expansion of their freedom of action for stronger norms against intervention and in support of repressing domestic enemies. This deal is attractive to governments nervous about unchecked American power and alarmed about the degree to which successive US administrations have swept international law aside and forcibly overthrown governments. The reassertion of the right of non-interference would end what is perceived as the United States’ exclusive prerogative, as the presumptively ‘indispensable power’, to undertake humanitarian intervention, regime change and other selective uses of force.

With the US restrained, Russia and China would enjoy a permissive environment for establishing informal hierarchies in their immediate regions and extending their influence outward through illiberal means. 39 Consistent with their preferences for a neo-Westphalian conception of sovereignty, inter-state war of the old kind – declared, formal and conducted by recognised armies – and overt regime change would be rare. But beneath those thresholds, Russia and China would be free to play dirty and to extend their influence by penetrating, influencing and weakening the political systems of other governments through subversion, disinformation, corruption and hacking. What will change is not the tactics – these are not new – but rather their scope and the frequency of their use, particularly against the remaining liberal democracies and liberal institutions, as both Russia and China reassert their regional dominance and probe the limits of their geopolitical reach.

In this illiberal order, the contest for influence would become particularly bitter with respect to the character of institutions, with the traditional ones of the liberal order coming under the greatest pressure. As the examples of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank show, China and Russia are developing these regional institutions alongside existing US-led ones in order to weaken them and enmesh other countries in a deeper economic relationship with Moscow and Beijing. The idea is to afford these countries greater access to capital while limiting their freedom to seek other trading partners. By way of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, development would be advanced through preferential deals, but with multiple choke points built in to give China leverage against participants that might later object to their terms. These institutions weaken US leverage and the patronage networks that left many governments in the developing world beholden to Washington. 40 Within traditional institutions of the liberal order, such as the World Trade Organization and the WHO, Russia and China employ coalitions of illiberal states to stymie US initiatives, particularly in the area of human rights. Witness the duelling letters sent in 2019 to the UN Human Rights Council over China’s detention programme in Xinjiang: 22 liberal democracies (excluding the US) signed a condemnatory letter, while 37 authoritarian and illiberal states signed a supportive one. 41 Russia, China and their supporters will continue to mount other efforts to change the character of these organisations, such as changing vote allocations and influencing committee appointments.

Accompanying the shift to an illiberal order will be the worldwide diffusion of illiberal values. Freed from respect for democracy and human rights as a precondition of joining and benefiting from global institutions, other states could indulge in illiberal governance at home, cracking down on dissidents, rigging elections and persecuting minorities, all under the guise of protecting sovereignty. Underwritten by Russian and Chinese power, and supported by norms prioritising sovereign prerogatives, governments could impose trade restrictions to withstand some of the negative effects of globalisation while celebrating exemplary economic and cultural nationalism. Liberal commitments to democracy and human rights would no longer impede governments from restricting global trade and finance, or immigration flows, on the pretext of surviving in a world made turbulent by the rapid movement of people, ideas and capital.

The shift towards illiberalism was already evident in the pre-pandemic world and is likely to accelerate thereafter. According to Freedom House, 2020 was the 14th straight year of decline in global freedom, with 64 countries having experienced some deterioration in the strength of their democracy. 42 With support from Russia and China, authoritarian governments and populist right-wing movements are finding common cause. As Bruce Jones and Torrey Taussig have written, ‘worryingly for the Western institutions in which they operate, illiberal actors across the West and beyond at times appear to be forging a loose “nationalist international”, with shared disdain for liberal domestic and multilateral arrangements’. 43 Transnational links, now in evidence among right-wing parties worldwide, have opened up space for Russia or China to intervene, offering assistance ranging from overt endorsement to covert support for elements aligned with their interests.

Both China and Russia present a vision of the world attractive to governments weary of fighting the coronavirus. It prioritises a neo-Westphalian approach to sovereignty, insisting on strong governments against threats that move easily across borders. It offers tight control over immigration and the use of digital surveillance to control unseen risks from within their populations. To a world increasingly worried about dispersed and congested supply lines, an illiberal order stresses self-reliance against the evils of globalisation and justifies closing borders to people and goods in the name of economic and cultural nationalism. It rejects global institutions based on shaky US leadership in favour of less demanding regional institutions. In a world that has been reminded of the need for capable, insulated governments against unpredictable perils, an illiberal order, even at a steep price, might seem attractive.

Illiberal America

The democratic decay of the United States itself has lent momentum to the development of an illiberal order. Much of the blame rests with Trump, who was elected as the American embodiment of the illiberal values espoused by an increasingly reactionary Republican Party. But Trump is a symptom as well as a cause, given that many drivers of democratic decay in the US – the influence of money in its politics, gerrymandering and a hyper-partisan media – long predate his entry into politics. Even so, political and social polarisation has now reached levels in the US not seen since Reconstruction. 44 Authoritarian instincts, particularly among Republican voters, have grown. 45 Since the emergence of the Tea Party, the Republican Party has drifted farther to the right than most of its European counterparts, making US politics largely a contest between a centrist party and a far-right one. 46 Corruption under Trump has soared, with the US ranking 23rd out of 180 countries on Transparency International’s 2019 index. 47 Democratic norms that have traditionally restrained the political parties have been shattered, and Republicans have sought to use any lever of power necessary to stack institutions such as the federal judiciary to their advantage. 48

As a result, American institutions are growing more dysfunctional. Polarisation has hobbled the effectiveness of the US Congress in conducting effective oversight of presidential actions. 49 Appointments to major positions in the executive and judicial branches are routinely held up by Republican Senate leaders for political gain. Relations between the executive and the legislative branches are increasingly rancorous, with each side denying the legitimacy of the other to act in various domains, including foreign policy. 50 Due to Republican obstructionism, Congress often cannot pass an annual budget and must resort to last-minute emergency appropriations. 51 This has increased doubt about the ability of the US government to honour its debt, which in April 2020, before the full effect of the pandemic was known, was estimated to be a cumulative $24 trillion. 52

The election of Donald Trump marked an important change in American foreign policy. Despite efforts to explain him through the Jacksonian tradition, Trump represents something different: an attempt to extend American dominance through predominantly illiberal means. 53 Trump’s foreign policy is not isolationist, and despite various glosses on ‘America First’, it does not articulate a radically new foreign policy. 54 Instead, it echoes many of the presumptions of his predecessors – in particular, that the US is the leader of a unipolar order, that alliances and institutions are useless without it, that it can use force as needed. What is different with Trump is the centrality of illiberalism to his thinking. He praises the illiberal elements of George W. Bush’s policy – for example, preventive war, torture and extraordinary rendition – and amplifies them with new ones borrowed from authoritarian governments. His endorsement of crackdowns on dissidents worldwide and his willingness to solicit bribes for policy changes are closer to the behaviour of Russia and China than to that of any Republican predecessors. Such emulation has made the boasts of a new ‘swagger’ in American foreign policy all the more pathetic, because under Trump the US has become more of a value-taker from authoritarians than a global value-maker.

The influence of illiberalism in Trump’s foreign policy can be seen in his approach to democratic allies and authoritarian rivals. Many critics have noted that he effectively reversed the traditional pattern of supporting friendly democracies and isolating authoritarian rivals. He treats long-standing allies such as Canada, France and the United Kingdom as if they have accepted a subordinate status in a hierarchy dominated by the United States. When Trump threatens firm allies like Germany for their failure to ‘pay’ for their defence, he belittles them as though they were mere appendages of American power. In adopting an entirely transactional approach to alliances, he echoes his predecessors’ discomforts about burden-sharing without making any conscientious effort to persuade allies to increase their commitments. Thus, Trump’s behaviour erodes the hierarchical element of the liberal order, abandoning the procedures and atmospherics of consent that rendered it tolerable and disregarding the autonomy and preferences of other states, much as authoritarian great powers like China have treated their tributary states.

Trump has also shown far greater contempt for established institutions than his predecessors have done. Granted, many presidents have sidelined the UN and other multilateral institutions when they have stood in the way of American objectives, and when expeditious have sought to extend American influence through such institutions. Trump, however, has tried to hold them hostage to American demands by denying their legitimacy, threatening their funding or withdrawing from them outright. His approach derives from the illiberal presumption that dominant states call all the shots all the time. Trump sees value in international institutions only insofar as they act in accord with and amplify American power. 55

Finally, Trump’s conduct appeared to mimic the illiberalism of Russia, China and other authoritarian states in his celebration of nationalism and naked self-interest. Some have described Trump’s foreign policy as ‘illiberal hegemony’ because it abandoned efforts to spread democracy. 56 Trump did not accept the traditional liberal presupposition that a state’s regime type is relevant to its foreign-policy orientation, according no special status to democracies or the US itself. In 2017, President Trump remarked in a CNN interview that ‘there are a lot of killers. You think our country’s so innocent?’ 57 Implicitly, Trump’s foreign policy emphasised an organic conception of the nation and defended any actions to protect it as natural and inevitable. This explains Trump’s call for a ‘great awakening of nations, for the revival of their spirits, their pride, their people and their patriotism’. 58 A corollary was that, as one of his advisers remarked, liberal internationalism was ‘well past the point of diminishing returns’ and that states should act unashamedly in the interest of their nation. 59 This is more than just cold-blooded realism; in Trump’s hands, it amounts to a licence to do whatever is needed to protect the dominant group, including restrictions on immigration or crackdowns on minorities. Trump’s denial of liberal norms in favour of a chauvinistic conception of the nation also was at the root of US Secretary of State Pompeo’s making the validity of human rights conditional on their alignment with foundational American beliefs. 60 This redefinition places the US closer to China and other illiberal states, many of which have rejected universal definitions of human rights on the same grounds.

While illiberalism has manifested itself during previous administrations, only with Trump did it become the central thrust of US foreign policy. It has diminished America’s reputation but also its power, for as Hannah Arendt long ago noted, power diminishes when it is used for domination. Its gravest effect has been on the liberal order. Shredding norms and institutions, denigrating the value of international public goods and celebrating America’s unilateral military power, Trump offered little incentive for states to accede to a thick liberal order that grants exceptional privileges to the United States. 61 In effect, he allowed the mask to slip, advertising the liberal order’s brutality but offering few reasons to accept its continuance.

The case for reform

The United States’ descent into illiberalism and the growing assertiveness of Russia and China are yielding an illiberal order distinguished by renewed efforts to establish regional hierarchies, the weakening and supplanting of US-led global institutions, and the propagation of illiberal values. These changes are resetting the ways in which states compete, as evidenced by the increase in scope and frequency of tactics such as cyber warfare, subversion and disinformation, designed to sow discord in democratic political systems. 62 Over time, the rules, norms and institutions that marked the liberal order will atrophy and give way to ones that formally protect state sovereignty but turn a blind eye to subversion.

For the United States, already marked by deep dysfunction and an illiberal Republican Party, such a world presents a dangerous temptation. The country could continue to drift in an illiberal direction, becoming more like Russia and China in the contest for global influence as it ceases to uphold and defend existing institutions. Doing so might yield some short-term benefits: an unconstrained US could shake down allies for greater burden-sharing and more advantageous trade deals, manipulate global institutions and – as it often did in the Cold War – underwrite authoritarian and illiberal governments to advance its own interests. Such measures might allow it to compete with Russia and China effectively, but at the cost of consolidating the illiberal order, fracturing alliances, permanently [destroying] ~~disabling~~ many global institutions and squandering whatever moral legitimacy the US still possesses.

The obvious alternative is to attempt to return to the status quo ante and restore the liberal order that existed during the Obama administration, as Joe Biden has pledged to do. This policy of restoration is naturally attractive, as it casts Trump as an aberration and allows the US to reclaim the mantle of world leadership. But it is not clear that durable restoration is possible. Many allies have come to distrust the US due to its erratic policies and contemptuous behaviour. Given the current levels of domestic political polarisation and institutional dysfunction, there is also no reason to believe that a future Republican president would not repudiate many of the policies of a restorationist Biden administration. The breakdown of the Cold War-era bipartisan strategic consensus has reduced the United States’ capacity to maintain a stable and predictable foreign policy. 63 The prescription for remedying US foreign policy probably cannot be just more US leadership. 64

Another option would be for the US to retrench, scaling back its military commitments abroad in the hopes of reallocating resources to domestic policy. There are powerful arguments for this approach. The Pentagon budget is bloated with enormous waste while healthcare, education and infrastructure remain chronically underfunded. The US military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost $6.4trn, to little if any strategic advantage. 65 There is a growing consensus in Washington that continued immersion in the Middle East would produce diminishing returns. 66 The pursuit of hegemony and the defence of the liberal order has led the US to incur high political and economic costs while allowing other threats, such as climate change, to grow. 67

A strategy of retrenchment, however, also carries risks. In regions like Europe and Asia, it could signal to Russia and China that US alliances are vulnerable. US allies, in turn, would have fewer reasons to honour US leadership and join coalitions when needed. Retrenchment would thus create permissive conditions for the regional hierarchies that Russia and China are seeking to establish and allow them to expand their reach outwards, accelerating rather than restraining the development of an illiberal order. 68 It might also [destroy] ~~cripple~~ some of the key global institutions, thus undercutting the ability of the United States to manage transnational threats such as climate change and nuclear proliferation. 69

Neither restoration nor retrenchment would halt or reverse the emergence of an illiberal order without the reform of America’s own illiberalism. Its urgent foreign-policy challenge is at least partially ideological: to prove that liberal democracy can compete in an increasingly illiberal world. For this, domestic institutional reforms are required. First, however, the Biden administration needs to stop the current bleeding at the international level. To do so, it should immediately seek to reassure allies in Europe and Asia of its military support and guarantees, and reaffirm commitments to institutions such as the WHO and to various existing trade deals. In particular, it should renegotiate the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as Biden has pledged to do. More broadly, the US should advocate a ‘flexible coordinator’ model of international collective action rather than presumptively defaulting to American leadership in all areas. Such a model would allow allies greater diplomatic autonomy and leverage over a particular issue. A post-Trump foreign policy must forsake the default assumption that the US retains primus inter pares rank over all issues and decisions, and go beyond the atmospherics of consent to provide genuine issue ownership for allies. Doing so would set the US apart from Russia and China as a liberal-international steward. Such an approach would not forsake American power – the US would still enjoy military superiority and political influence – but would rather apply it so as to enable flexible and adaptive coalitions of partners to take the lead over different issues.

In addition, the United States should recast its approach to Russia and China. Neither is a suitable or willing US ally, and their long-term goal – an illiberal order conducive to their geopolitical expansion – is not in the US interest. This does not mean that the US should be unrelentingly hostile to them, which would only drive them closer together. Cooperation over common threats like climate change is possible, and should be pursued. But cooperation with Moscow or Beijing will not happen until both recognise that the US is no longer on the defensive and is capable of reasserting itself after experiencing what Putin has described as a ‘deep internal crisis’. 70 One way to signal this reassertion is to make Russia and China pay a larger, more public cost for interference in US elections and attempts to subvert American democracy. To do so, it goes almost without saying that the White House cannot publicly deny the reality of such efforts or task the US intelligence community’s leadership to downplay them, as Trump has done. Nor can it merely treat such attacks as garden-variety aspects of spycraft. Instead, it must confront them as overt security threats. More muscular retaliatory policies could include sanctions on governments or individuals, trade penalties, the limitation of access to US banks and covert reprisal. 71

With these policy adjustments made, the Biden administration can turn to the paramount element of a reoriented US foreign policy: domestic reform. There are many areas in pressing need of it, including healthcare, economic inequality, education and policing. From a foreign-policy perspective, however, the most profound and urgent need is to fix the institutions of democratic governance itself. Much as the civil-rights movement in the 1960s galvanised Americans to believe that the US had a fixable if flawed political system, sustained efforts to fix American institutions today would renew faith in the United States and give other countries a reason to join it in opposing the consolidation of an illiberal order. To this end, the Biden administration should seek the swift passage of a new Voting Rights Act, named after the late US congressman John Lewis, which would address the racial discrimination that underlies voter suppression, especially in poor and minority areas. 72 It should also back statehood for both Washington DC and Puerto Rico, thus changing the Electoral College map in a way that will compel the Republican Party to stop catering to a minority of white voters and abandon the illiberalism embraced by the party during the Trump years. In addition, Congress should tighten US laws against corruption to reduce foreign influence in the US political process. In addition to diminishing public trust, an American political system penetrated by foreign powers can lower the confidence of allies and partners in shared intelligence and jointly undertaken action, and impel them to distance themselves from the United States. The Biden administration needs to propose legislation to close the loopholes opened by the US Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision that allow money to pour into the US system through corporations. 73 It also needs to tighten regulations on lobbying for foreign entities and close the revolving door through which US national-security officials can capitalise on their experience and connections to lobby for other governments. Cutting off these pathways of corporate and foreign influence in American politics will boost faith in the integrity of the political system and thwart efforts by Russia, China and other illiberal states to influence policy outcomes.

A difficult third step for a Biden administration would involve rolling back the vast executive powers that the White House has accumulated. Presidents are generally and perhaps understandably loath to shrink the powers of the office, but now it is necessary. An over-endowed executive branch – and, in particular, tolerance for the profligate use of the executive order – is the primary reason that Trump has been able to inflict so much damage on the American polity over the past four years. He is not unique: both George W. Bush and Obama relied heavily on executive orders to govern in the face of a deadlocked Congress. Like many authoritarians, however, Trump has inordinately relied on special powers deriving from national emergencies to enact policies that Congress would never have approved. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, the president can now invoke 136 statutory emergency powers, many of which are obscure and have rarely been used. 74 The fact that the US government is substantially ruled by decree, with each president imposing or repealing previous executive orders, makes the government less predictable and credible to allies. It also allows illiberal policies to flourish when someone like Trump is elected. If Biden wants to enhance the democratic credibility of the United States abroad, efforts to abolish some emergency powers, to strengthen the oversight powers of Congress and to reduce the sweeping executive powers of the presidency are necessary.

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It seems counter-intuitive that in a time of great danger US foreign policy must begin at home. It also seems jarring that to meet the challenge of illiberalism the US needs to limit the powers of the executive branch. But the hard reality of the post-Trump moment is that an illiberal order is coalescing around the preferences of Russia and China. Liberalism is failing at home and abroad. Addressing this requires admitting that the unipolar moment is over and that a ‘thick’ liberal order is out of reach. But it does not mean abandoning liberalism or pretending that there is no ideological dimension to the threat. While not succumbing to the temptation of behaving as if it faces a second cold war, the US must toughen its line against the efforts of Russia and China to sow discord in democratic governments while also urgently fixing its own political institutions. A foreign policy of reform is the best way to rise to the threat and to show a fearful world that liberalism is not a defunct value system.

### Debris

#### 1] Non UQ – squo US debris thumps

Orwig 16 [(Jessica, MS in science and tech journalism from Texas A&M, BS in astronomy and physics from Ohio State) “Russia says a growing problem in space could be enough to spark a war,” Insider,’ January 26, 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-says-space-junk-could-spark-war-2016-1>] TDI

NASA has already [warned that](https://www.businessinsider.com/space-junk-at-critical-density-2015-9) the large amount of space junk around our planet is growing beyond our control, but now a team of Russian scientists has cited another potentially unforeseen consequence of that debris: War.

Scientists estimate that anywhere from 500,000 to 600,000 pieces of human-made space debris between 0.4 and 4 inches in size are currently orbiting the Earth and traveling at speeds over [17,000 miles per hour](https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/news/orbital_debris.html).

If one of those pieces smashed into a military satellite it "may provoke political or even armed conflict between space-faring nations," Vitaly Adushkin, a researcher for the Institute of Geosphere Dynamics at the Russian Academy of Sciences, reported in a paper set to be published in the peer-reviewed journal [Acta Astronautica](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0094576515303416), which is sponsored by the International Academy of Astronautics.

#### 2] Warming exponentially increases space debris—

O’Callaghan 21 (Jonathan, freelance space and science journalist that specializes in commercial spaceflight, space exploration, astronomy, and astrophysics, “What if Space Junk and Climate Change Become the Same Problem?”, May 24, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/science/space-junk-climate-change.html>) CS

It’s easy to compare the space junk problem to climate change. Human activities leave too many dead satellites and fragments of machinery discarded in Earth orbit. If left unchecked, space junk could pose significant problems for future generations — rendering access to space increasingly difficult, or at worst, [impossible](https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/06/science/space/06orbi.html).

Yet the two may come to be linked. Our planet’s atmosphere naturally pulls orbiting debris downward and incinerates it in the thicker lower atmosphere, but **increasing carbon dioxide levels** are [lowering the density](https://www.nsf.gov/news/news_summ.jsp?cntn_id=108187) of the upper atmosphere, which may **diminish this effect**. A study [presented last month](https://space-debris-conference.sdo.esoc.esa.int/page/programme) at the European Conference on Space Debris says that the problem has been underestimated, and that the amount of space junk in orbit could, in a worst-case scenario, **increase 50 times by 2100**.

“The numbers took us by surprise,” said Hugh Lewis, a space debris expert from the University of Southampton in England and a co-author on the paper, which will be submitted for peer review in the coming months. “There is **genuine cause for alarm**.”

Our atmosphere is a useful ally in clearing up space junk. Collisions with its molecules cause drag, pulling objects back into the atmosphere. Below 300 miles above the surface, most objects will naturally decay into the thicker lower atmosphere and burn up in [less than 10 years](https://www.spaceacademy.net.au/watch/debris/orblife.htm).

At lower altitudes, [infrared radiation](https://scied.ucar.edu/learning-zone/how-climate-works/carbon-dioxide-absorbs-and-re-emits-infrared-radiation) is trapped by the thick atmosphere as heat. But above 60 miles where the atmosphere is thinner, the opposite is true. “There’s nothing to recapture that energy,” said Matthew Brown, also from the University of Southampton and the paper’s lead author. “So it gets lost into space.”

The escape of heat causes the volume of the atmosphere to decrease. This results in atmospheric contraction, which reduces its density at a given altitude. Since 2000, Mr. Brown and his team say the atmosphere at 250 miles has lost [21 percent of its density](https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1029/2021JD034589) because of rising carbon dioxide levels. By 2100, if carbon dioxide levels double their current levels — in line with the [worst-case scenario](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/09/the-worst-case-climate-change-scenario-could-look-like-this-we-need-to-avert-it/) assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — that number could rise to 80 percent.

**For space junk, the implications are stark**. More than [2,500 objects](https://platform.leolabs.space/visualization) larger than four inches in size currently orbit at or below an altitude of 250 miles. In the worst-case scenario, increased orbital lifetimes of up to 40 years would mean fewer items are dragged into the lower atmosphere. **Objects** at this altitude would **proliferate by 50 times to about 125,000.**

Even in a best-case scenario, where carbon dioxide levels stabilize or even reverse, the amount of space junk would still be expected to double. Mr. Brown thinks a more probable outcome is somewhere in between, perhaps a 10 or 20 times increase.

The research is “very important work,” said John Emmert, an atmospheric scientist at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C., who has studied atmospheric density loss. However, Dr. Emmert says more research is needed to understand the severity of the problem — with the impact of the sun’s solar cycle also known to be a [major factor](https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1989JSpRo..26..439W/abstract#:~:text=Because%20density%20is%20mainly%20an,respect%20to%20the%20temperature%20change.&text=The%20atmospheric%20drag%20on%20satellites,on%20satellite%20lifetimes%20are%20profound.) in atmospheric density changes.

The findings may also pose challenges for regulators and satellite operators, **especially SpaceX, Amazon and other companies** seeking to build megaconstellations of thousands of satellites to beam internet service down to the ground from low Earth orbit.

Just last month, for example, the U.S. Federal Communications Commission approved a request from SpaceX to [decrease the orbits](https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2021/04/fcc-lets-spacex-cut-satellite-altitude-to-improve-starlink-speed-and-latency/) of nearly 3,000 satellites in its [Starlink constellation](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/science/spacex-starlink-satellites.html), reasoning that atmospheric drag would naturally sweep up dead satellites and debris in a reasonable amount of time.

Research by Mr. Brown and his team suggests that assumption may be flawed.

An F.C.C. spokesman said that most of its applicants currently used NASA’s [Debris Assessment Software](https://orbitaldebris.jsc.nasa.gov/mitigation/debris-assessment-software.html) to predict lifetimes of satellites in low Earth orbit. “We do not know at this time if there are any plans to change that program to address the changes in atmospheric composition predicted in the paper,” he said. “The F.C.C. periodically reviews its rules and regulations and updates them consistent with developments in the marketplace and in scientific knowledge.”

SpaceX did not respond to a request for comment.

Dr. Lewis said that he suspected that some of the modeling, however, relies on outdated data, and that more needed to be done to actively remove satellites and debris from orbit rather than relying on the passive atmospheric effect. “Operators have to make this aspect of the mission a priority,” he said.

Even a moderate increase in lifetimes for large constellations could pose significant problems. “If SpaceX’s spacecraft re-enter passively in 10 or 15 years, would you argue that’s good enough?” Dr. Lewis said. “Given the fact that it’s a large constellation, lots of people would say probably not.”

#### 3] Anti-missile satellite tests proliferates space debris, spray is just as strike-prone as clusters – aff insufficient

Omaly 21 (Pierre, an engineer at the Center National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES) he holds the position of space debris expert and manager of the Tech 4 Space Care initiative within the Orbital Systems Directorate in the Space Flight Safety Department, “Destroyed Russian satellite creates yet more space debris to threaten the International Space Station“, November 17, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/destroyed-russian-satellite-creates-yet-more-space-debris-to-threaten-the-international-space-station-172078>)

On Monday 15 November, Russia [destroyed](https://edition.cnn.com/2021/11/15/politics/russia-anti-satellite-weapon-test-scn/index.html) one of its old satellites in an anti-satellite missile test.

The impact created a cloud of space debris in an area of space through which the International Space Station regularly passes, and members of the ISS were forced to seek safety in their spacecraft in the immediate aftermath of the test.

The US 18th Space Control Squadron confirmed the breakup of the COSMOS-1408 satellite on November 16. It estimates that there could be around 1,500 new pieces of debris floating through space as a result of the incident.

There is a vast amount of debris circulating in Earth’s orbit: it is one of the inherent consequences of human activity in space.

The first debris arrived in 1957 with the launch of Sputnik-1. More than 5,000 launches have taken place since then – generating 23,200 catalogued objects larger than 10 centimetres across, which represent 99% of the total mass in orbit, more than 8,000 tonnes.

The launches have also generated about 740,000 objects between 1 and 10 centimetres in size, as well as more than 160,000 objects between 0.1 and 1 centimetres.

In recent years, new satellite constellations launched by private companies have put more objects into orbit than the country of France has in its entire history.

In Earth’s orbit, there are operational satellites, end-of-life satellites, abandoned launch vehicle stages and fragments of all sizes, mainly from accidental or deliberate explosions or the ageing of materials in space.

Objects in low orbit (an altitude of less than 2,000km) travel at very high velocity. At eight kilometres per second, a piece of debris can inflict significant damage on an operational satellite in the event of a collision.

Two major events have generated a significant amount of the space debris currently in orbit. In 2007, China deliberately destroyed one its own satellites in an [anti-missile weapon test](https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-anti-satellite-test), with 3,527 pieces of identified debris still in orbit in March 2021. Then, in 2009, the [American satellite Iridium 33 and the Russian satellite Cosmos 2251](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-7091-0318-0_10) collided in orbit. This event alone doubled the amount of debris over 10 centimetres currently circulating.

Some of the pieces of unidentified debris (those smaller than 10 centimetres) came down and burned up on re-entering the atmosphere. Despite this, there are probably still a number that cannot be seen because they are too small but which nevertheless pose a danger to operational satellites.

Space debris can also pose a risk on the ground if large fragments fall back to Earth. Statistically, one large piece of debris falls to the Earth’s surface every week (mostly into the sea).

To date there have been no fatalities caused by falling space debris. One person was reportedly hit on the shoulder [in the United States](https://www.wired.com/2009/01/jan-22-1997-heads-up-lottie-its-space-junk/) in 1997, and a piece of debris over 10 metres long from a Chinese rocket [fell to Earth in Cote d’Ivoire](https://www.theverge.com/2020/5/13/21256484/china-rocket-debris-africa-uncontrolled-reentry-long-march-5b) in 2020.

#### 4] No space war – it’s hype and systems are redundant

Johnson-Freese and Hitchens 16 [Dr. Joan Johnson-Freese is a member of the Breaking Defense Board of Contributors, a Professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval War College and author of Space Warfare in the 21st Century: Arming the Heavens. Views expressed are those of the author alone. Theresa Hitchens is a Senior Research Scholar at the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), and the former Director of the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) in Geneva, Switzerland. Stop The Fearmongering Over War In Space: The Sky’s Not Falling, Part 1. December 27, 2016. https://breakingdefense.com/2016/12/stop-the-fearmongering-over-war-in-space-the-skys-not-falling-part-1/]

In the last two years, we’ve seen rising hysteria over a future war in space. Fanning the flames are not only dire assessments from the US military, but also breathless coverage from a cooperative and credulous press. This reporting doesn’t only muddy public debate over whether we really need expensive systems. It could also become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The irony is that nothing makes the currently slim possibility of war in space more likely than fearmongering over the threat of war in space.

Two television programs in the past two years show how egregious this fearmongering can get. In April 2015, the CBS show 60 Minutes ran a segment called “The Battle Above.” In an interview with General John Hyten, the then-chief of U.S. Air Force Space Command, it came across loud and clear that the United States was being forced to prepare for a battle in space — specifically against China — that it really didn’t want.

It was explained by Hyten and other guests that China is building a considerable amount of hardware and accumulating significant know-how regarding space, all threatening to space assets Americans depend on every day. If viewers weren’t frightened after watching the segment, it wasn’t for lack of trying on the part of CBS.

Using terms like “offensive counterspace” as a 1984 NewSpeak euphemism for “weapons,” it was made clear that the United States had no choice but to spend billions of dollars on offensive counterspace technology to not just thwart the Chinese threat, but control and dominate space. While it didn’t actually distort facts — just omit facts about current U.S. space capabilities — the segment was basically a cost-free commercial for the military-industrial complex.

In retrospect though, “The Battle Above” was pretty good compared to CNN’s recent special, War in Space: The Next Battlefield. The latter might as well have been called Sharknado in Space – because the only far-out weapons technology our potential adversaries don’t have, according to the broadcast, seems to be “sharks with frickin’ laser beams attached to their heads!”

First, CNN needs to hire some fact checkers. Saying “unlike its adversaries, the U.S. has not yet weaponized space” is deeply misleading, like saying “unlike his political opponents, President-Elect Donald Trump has not sprouted wings and flown away”: A few (admittedly alarming) weapons tests aside, no country in the world has yet weaponized space. Contrary to CNN, stock market transactions are not timed nor synchronized through GPS, but a closed system. Cruise missiles can find their targets even without GPS, because they have both GPS and precision inertial measurement units onboard, and IMUs don’t rely on satellite data. Oh, and the British rock group Pink Floyd holds the only claim to the Dark Side of the Moon: There is a “far side” of the Moon — the side always turned away from the Earth — but not a “dark side” — which would be a side always turned away from the Sun.

More nefariously, the segment sensationalized nuggets of truth within a barrage of half-truths, backed by a heavy bass, dramatic soundtrack (and gravelly-voiced reporter Jim Sciutto) and accompanied by sexy and scary visuals.

Make no mistake there are dangers in space, and the United States has the most to lose if space assets are lost. The question is how best to protect them. Here are a few facts CNN omitted.

The Reality

The U.S. has all of the technologies described on the CNN segment and deemed potentially offensive: maneuverable satellites, nano-satellites, lasers, jamming capabilities, robotic arms, ballistic missiles that can be used as anti-satellite weapons, etc. In fact, the United States is more technologically advanced than other countries in both military and commercial space.

That technological superiority scares other countries; just as the U.S. military space community is scared of other countries obtaining those technologies in the future. The U.S. military space budget is more than 10 times greater than that of all the countries in the world combined. That also causes other countries concern.

More unsettling still, the United States has long been leery of treaty-based efforts to constrain a potential arms race in outer space, as supported by nearly every other country in the world for decades. Indeed, under the administration of George W. Bush, the U.S. talking points centered on the mantra “there is no arms race in outer space,” so there is no need for diplomat instruments to constrain one. Now, a decade later, the U.S. military – backed by the Intelligence Community which operates the nation’s spy satellites – seems to be shouting to the rooftops that the United States is in danger of losing the space arms race already begun by its potential adversaries. The underlying assumption — a convenient one for advocates of more military spending — is that now there is nothing that diplomacy can do.

However, it must be remembered that most space-related technologies – with the exception of ballistic missiles and dedicated jammers – have both military and civil/commercial uses; both benign — indeed, helpful — and nefarious uses. For example, giving satellites the ability to maneuver on orbit can allow useful inspections of ailing satellites and possibly even repairs.

Further, the United States is not unable to protect its satellites, as repeated during the CNN broadcast by various interviewees and the host. Many U.S. government-owned satellites, including precious spy satellites, have capabilities to maneuver. Many are hardened against electro-magnetic pulse, sport “shutters” to protect optical “eyes” from solar flares and lasers, and use radio frequency hopping to resist jamming.

Offensive weapons, deployed on the ground to attack satellites, or in space, are not a silver bullet. To the contrary, U.S. deployment of such weapons may actually be detrimental to U.S. and international security in space (as we argued in a recent Atlantic Council publication, Towards a New National Security Space Strategy). Further, there are benefits to efforts started by the Obama Administration to find diplomatic tools to restrain and constrain dangerous military activities in space.

These diplomatic efforts, however, would be undercut by a full-out U.S. pursuit of “space dominance.” This includes dialogue with China, the lack of which Gen. William Shelton, retired commander of Air Force Space Command, lamented in the CNN report.

Given CNN’s “cast,” the spin was not surprising. Starting with Ghost Fleet author Peter Singer set the sensationalist tone, which never altered. The apocalyptic opening, inspired by Ghost Fleet, posited a scenario where all U.S. satellites are taken off-line in nearly one fell swoop. Unless we are talking about an alien invasion, that scenario is nigh on impossible. No potential adversary has such capabilities, nor will they ever likely do so. There is just too much redundancy in the system.