

ABSTRACT

The Liberal International Order: A Dual Policy Crisis

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America emerged from World War II an economic and military superpower. Decision makers in Washington used this unique moment in world history to construct the liberal international order: a system of institutions and norms conducive to democratic governance. Today, this international system faces a dual threat. China, an authoritarian state, is challenging American supremacy and shifting the global balance of power. In Western capitals, populists are assuming positions of influence and undermining centrist governing coalitions—the typical defenders of the liberal order. To preserve the international system, Washington must contend with this dual policy crisis. The following thesis explores both threats and offers two arguments: (1) populism has a distinct international origin and (2) America is in a state of relative decline amidst the world's shifting balance of power. The final chapter of this thesis offers domestic and foreign policy recommendations designed to bolster the liberal order in light of these two arguments.

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PREFACE

*It is time to put Youngstown, Ohio, Detroit, Michigan,
and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania — along with many, many
other locations within our great country — before Paris, France.¹*
- Donald Trump

Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 Presidential Election swept a populist agenda into power.² In the aftermath of the election, the foreign policy establishment immediately issued dire predictions about the fate of America’s internationalist project. John Ikenberry, the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University, warned that, “The world’s most powerful state has begun to sabotage the order it created. A hostile revisionist power has indeed arrived on the scene, but it now sits in the Oval Office, the beating heart of the free world.”³ Stewart Patrick, the director of the International Institutions and Global Governance Program at the Council on Foreign Relations, joined Ikenberry in criticizing the assumed foreign policy of the incoming administration. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Patrick declared that, “Since the administration of Franklin Roosevelt, 13 successive U.S. presidents have agreed that the United States

¹ Donald Trump, “Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord,” (speech, Washington, DC, Jun. 1, 2017), The White House.

² All references to populism within this paper refer to its nationalist form. This type of populism features an agenda which supports economic protectionism and a unilateral and isolationist foreign policy. It opposes further globalization, multilateral institutions, and security cooperation. Populist leaders will frame their campaigns and policies as asserting the rights of the authentic people against a corrupt elite.

³ John Ikenberry, “The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive,” *Foreign Affairs* 96 (2017), 2.

must assume the mantle of global leadership. That is about to change. U.S. President Donald Trump has promised a foreign policy that is nationalist and transactional.”⁴

These arguments are well founded. At the center of the struggle between Trump’s populist agenda and the Washington foreign policy establishment are the pillars of the liberal international order, including America’s global system of alliances and the United Nations (UN). During his campaign for the White House, then-candidate Trump routinely questioned both of these pillars. Speaking at an event hosted by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Trump asserted that, “The United Nations is not a friend of democracy. It is not a friend of freedom. It is not a friend even to the United States of America.”⁵ One month later, Trump questioned America’s current defense commitments in a major foreign policy speech at the Center for the National Interest: “The countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defense,” he argued, “and if not, the U.S. must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves. We have no choice.”⁶

Although America’s foreign policy establishment successfully identified the threat Trump’s unorthodox policies pose to the liberal order, they often overlooked the widespread support they received from conservative voters. The origins of this support are in part due to America’s post-WWII internationalist foreign policy. For example, China’s incorporation into the World Trade Organization (WTO)—a prominent aspect of U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s—affected millions of citizens. Globalization, moreover, hurt many regions within America, particularly rural areas, small towns, and manufacturing

⁴ Stewart Patrick, “Trump and World Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 96 (2017): 1.

⁵ Donald Trump, “American Israel Public Affairs Committee” (speech, Washington, DC, March 21, 2016), The American Presidency Project.

⁶ Donald Trump, “Center for the National Interest” (speech, Washington, DC, April 27, 2016), *The New York Times*.

centers. Consequently, it's not surprising that populism garnered mass appeal in the 2016 Presidential Election.

Arthur Vandenberg's admonition that partisan politics must end at the water's edge no longer seems to apply.⁷ Trump's election to the White House has shattered Washington's bipartisan foreign policy establishment. This problem, however, is compounded by the shifting distribution of power in the world. America today is in a state of relative decline. The unipolar moment that arose at the end of the Cold War no longer exists. In particular, the rise of China is fundamentally reshaping the balance of power in East Asia and could upend the liberal international order. This reality is most starkly reflected in America's share of the world's economic output. In 1985, the U.S. accounted for 22.5% of global GDP; today that number has slipped to 15.12% when measured according to purchasing power parity.⁸ During the same period, by contrast, China's share of global GDP more than quintupled, increasing from 3.4% to 19%.⁹

Consequently, American is facing a dangerous confluence of events. Two antagonistic forces—populism and a shifting balance of power—are threatening the international system. Both threats must be addressed simultaneously to preserve the liberal order; yet, these forces are opposite in nature. To secure the international system from the world's shifting balance of power, America must further embed herself into the liberal order, solidifying alliances and promoting global integration. Such actions, however, will

⁷ "Arthur Vandenberg: A Features Biography," United States Senate.

⁸ "GDP Based on PPP, Share of World," IMF Data Mapper. International Monetary Fund, 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

strengthen populists, who decry multilateral institutions, free trade agreements, and cooperative security.

Thus, Washington is in a policy trap. This paper will explore both threats and makes two arguments: (1) populism has a distinct international origin and (2) there is a shifting balance of power in the world and America is in a state of relative decline. In the final chapter, this paper will argue that Washington must implement both domestic and foreign policy solutions to save the liberal order. These solutions include limiting mass migration, countering the negative economic effects of globalization, promoting greater European autonomy, and strengthening America's regional order in East Asia.

CHAPTER ONE

The International Origins of the Populist Backlash

*We reject the ideology of globalism and
we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.¹
- Donald Trump*

The Fourth Turning

Americans have a tendency to view history in a linear fashion. We express our nation's story in terms of a steady march towards greater equality, greater prosperity, and greater justice. Francis Fukuyama famously declared the end of history in 1989, claiming that America's triumph over communism marked the "end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and the universalization of economic and political liberalism.² Any lay political observer surveying the current domestic and international landscape would find such a claim dubious. The rising current of economic and political populism sweeping the globe is challenging the post-WWII commitment to cooperation, free trade, and multilateral organizations.

Among those unsurprised by these developments is Steve Bannon, one of the chief executives of Donald Trump's presidential campaign and former chief strategist to the president. In many ways, Bannon most successfully articulated and championed the ideological principles driving many Trump Administration policies. He is an unabashed populist, decrying the harms of globalism and the evils of Wall Street and embracing tariffs

¹ Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (speech, New York, New York, Sep. 25, 2018), The White House.

² Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no.16 (1989) 3.

and stringent immigration laws.³ Policy, however, is not what ultimately distinguishes Bannon from many of his political contemporaries on the left and right. It is his view of history, understanding it to be cyclical rather than linear. Critical to Bannon's perspective is a book written by Neil Howe and William Strauss entitled *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*.

Rejecting the linear historical perspective of most Americans, Howe and Strauss posit a cyclical one based around the Roman understanding of a *saeculum*—a unit of time roughly equivalent to the span of a long human life.⁴ It is a natural century, lasting approximately 80 to 100 years. In Howe and Strauss' theory, each *saeculum* is composed of four turnings that come at regular intervals of about two decades.⁵ They progress in the following sequence: growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction. The destructive phase is the most alarming and is known as the fourth turning. This is an era built around a crisis that will annihilate the values of the old regime and lead to the birth of a new civic order. Howe and Strauss write that, "A fourth turning is a solstice era of maximum darkness, in which the supply of social order is still falling but the demand for order is now rising."⁶ In the past, America has undergone a fourth turning crisis three times, which include the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Great Depression and WWII.⁷

³ Scott Shane, "Combative Populist Steve Bannon Found His Man in Donald Trump," *The New York Times*, Nov. 27, 2016.

⁴ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (New York: Random House, 1997), 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷ *Ibid.*

America's current position in this cycle is not certain. Either the nation has passed through the entropy phase and entered the destructive phase or is just outside the destructive phase and is rapidly approaching a major crisis. Bannon, in a documentary entitled "Generation Zero," argues that the financial crisis of 2008 marked America's descent into a fourth turning. This belief is critical to understanding Bannon's ideology and, to an extent, the Trump White House. For Steve Bannon, 1989 did not mark the end of history; it was only a significant date in one turning of America's natural cycles.

The question for Bannon is not how to perpetuate the civic order of the last *saeculum*, but how to use this current period of crisis to reshape America's institutions for the coming cycle. Endless global integration, limitless free trade, and unrestricted multilateralism are not the inevitable future of mankind. For Bannon, policies that embodied such ideas are the catalysts of the ongoing crisis and the driving force behind the surge of populism sweeping the globe. Thus, America stands not at the end of history, but at the end of an era. This is the perspective that must be examined to understand the origins of the ongoing backlash. Populists see an opportunity to redirect our nation's trajectory. The last cycle may have been globalist in nature; the next cycle will be nationalist. This chapter will argue that populism is not merely an American phenomenon, but a global trend with an international origin.

Globalization's Economic Ramifications

Many scholars from across the ideological spectrum generally agree that globalization's economic downsides are spurring a populist backlash. Professor Robert Blecker, a progressive thinker, argues that these consequences are readily evident. He

points to China's incorporation into the WTO in 2001 and the signing of NAFTA as prominent examples of U.S. trade policy costing millions of American jobs.⁸ Richard Fontaine, a conservative scholar, agrees that globalization hurt many regions of the U.S., including rural communities and manufacturing towns. Consequently, Fontaine is not surprised that Donald Trump's populist positions garnered mass appeal in the 2016 presidential election.⁹ Although most multilateral organizations do not play a role in negotiating free trade deals, prominent multilateral institutions are often targeted as symbols of globalization and the "governing elite." Fontaine explains that, "People who believe globalization is inherently negative blame not only free trade deals but also multilateral organizations, whether or not those institutions are truly at fault."¹⁰

In a recent article published in *Foreign Affairs*, Jeff Colgan and Robert Keohane—professors of international relations at Princeton and Brown Universities—outlined the underlying economic and political trends that led to Donald Trump's election. They argue that the greatest foreign policy challenge facing the western world is not external threats, but domestic politics.¹¹ Populism is sweeping the U.S. and U.K.: the countries most responsible for the creation of the liberal order. The leaders of these movements, Colgan and Keohane argue, portray themselves as the defenders of national sovereignty, casting off foreign forces and selfish elites that hold back the "authentic people." Consequently, Colgan and Keohane maintain that, "Populism is not defined by a particular view of

⁸ Robert A. Blecker, interview by author, Washington, DC, April 11, 2018.

⁹ Richard Fontaine, interview by author, Washington, DC, January 26, 2018.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Jeff Colgan and Robert Keohane, "The Liberal Order is Rigged: Fix it Now or Watch It Wither," *Foreign Affairs* 96 (2017): 36.

economic distribution but by a faith in strong leaders and a dislike of limits on sovereignty and of powerful institutions.”¹² These leaders, however, are only responding to electoral incentives already ingrained within certain segments of the population.

According to Colgan and Keohane, there is a social contract at the heart of every liberal democracy predicated on the following notion: “Those who do well in a market-based society promise to make sure that those disadvantaged by market forces do not fall too far behind.”¹³ America’s elites violated this agreement, promoting multilateral trade deals while neglecting the nation’s social safety net. Although globalization produced vast economic benefits, many working-class citizens have been left behind, forced to cope with stagnating incomes, underfunded education systems, and dwindling job opportunities.¹⁴ Coupled with the ill effects of globalization is a phenomenon Colgan and Keohane term “multilateral overreach.”¹⁵ Cooperation promoted by institutions such as the UN often requires states to give up a piece of their autonomy. Institutions, however, have a natural tendency to grow, expanding their authority at the expense of national independence. Colgan and Keohane argue that this produces a feeling among many people that foreign actors are governing their lives and threatening their prosperity.¹⁶

Upon taking Office, President Trump immediately began to implement his populist policies. The White House first withdrew the U.S. from the TPP: a landmark accord which included eleven nations with a combined \$28 trillion GDP and 23% of the world’s

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 42.

¹⁶ Ibid.

exports.¹⁷ In March, the President ordered 25% tariffs be placed on all steel imports.¹⁸ Citing national security concerns, these economic protections were designed to bolster America's steel industry and generate new manufacturing jobs.¹⁹ For the current White House, free trade deals have been the method by which foreign nations have exploited the American worker and harmed our nation's economy. Before the UN in September, the President declared that, "The United States lost over 3 million manufacturing jobs, nearly a quarter of all steel jobs, and 60,000 factories after China joined the WTO. And we have racked up \$13 trillion in trade deficits over the last two decades."²⁰ Although the president's statistics are inflated, his underlying claim is not wrong—many Americans have suffered from globalization.

In 2001, Beijing entered the WTO, a development many thought would herald a new era in Chinese-American trade relations. Their entry followed fifteen years of negotiations that resulted in Beijing lowering tariffs, legalizing agricultural trade, and granting access to foreign service providers. America, in turn, would continue to grant China most-favored-nation (MFN) status—a level of tariffs Beijing had enjoyed since the 1980s. Both countries have benefited from this deal. Since China's entry into the WTO, their exports to the U.S. increased from \$102 billion in 2001 to over \$482 billion by 2015.²¹

¹⁷ Peter Petri and Michael Plummer, *The Economic Effects of the Trans-Pacific Partnership: New Estimates* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2016), 2.

¹⁸ Ana Swanson, "White House to Impose Metal Tariffs on E.U., Canada, and Mexico," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2018.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Trump, "Remarks by President Trump to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly," The White House.

²¹ Philip Levy, "Was Letting China into the WTO a Mistake?" *Foreign Affairs* (2018).

America, over the same time, watched her exports to China rise from \$19.2 billion to \$116.1 billion.²² Many multinational corporations gained from this development; however, workers throughout America's manufacturing communities suffered. A total of 2.6 million manufacturing jobs were destroyed and U.S. workers lost a combined \$37 billion in wages after having to accept lower paying, non-manufacturing positions.²³ Recent studies continue to show that competition with Chinese laborers suppress the wages of 100 million American workers without a college degree.²⁴

To counter these negative statistics, globalists will point to job creation in other industries, arguing that affected individuals will be able to find employment in new sectors. Economic analysis at the local level does not support this standard claim. Economic adjustments within community labor markets are proceeding slowly. David Autor and Gordon Hanson recently demonstrated that trade-induced manufacturing declines in community zones (CZs) have not, over the course of a decade, been offset by sectoral reallocation or labor mobility.²⁵ Furthermore, industries have a tendency to cluster together, ensuring that entire regions are heavily dependent on a single economic sector. These two trends, sectoral reallocation and industrial cluster, devastated many American communities, particularly in the Midwest.²⁶

²² Ibid.

²³ Robert E. Scott, "Growth in China-U.S. Trade Deficit between 2001 and 2015," (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2017).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David Autor and Gordon Hanson, "The China Syndrome: Local Labor Market Effects of Import Competition in the United States," *American Economic Review* 103, no. 6 (2013).

²⁶ Ibid.

China's entry into the WTO is not the only trade development President Trump decries. He also routinely blames NAFTA, and predominantly Mexico, for destroying American industry. This accusation, however, is not accurate. As Shannon O'Neil points out, "NAFTA-inspired job losses (leaving aside the new positions created by more trade) accounted for less than 1 percent of the nearly 18 million positions eliminated every year."²⁷ Mexico, like their northern neighbors, is not stealing jobs from the U.S. but losing them to China.²⁸

Furthermore, Beijing continues to support policies that exacerbate this trend. These policies include currency manipulation and the suppression of wage and labor rights. Perhaps more damaging, however, is China's extensive trade distortion practices. Beijing continues to subsidize the following industries: steel, glass, paper, concrete, and renewable energies.²⁹ They also continue to fuel rapid growth in their state-owned enterprises, creating excess capacity that far exceeds their domestic demand.³⁰ Much of this excess capacity ends up in U.S. markets. Additionally, Beijing continues to take little action to foster a consumer-driven economy—something Washington policy elites expected when granting China MFN status and giving them a seat in the WTO. In fact, China's national savings rate has risen over the last 15 years and the government will not support collective bargaining rights.³¹

²⁷ Shannon O'Neil, "NAFTA's Jobs Myth," *Council on Foreign Relations*, September 21, 2017.

²⁸ Ariel Armony, "Effects of China on the Quantity and Quality of Jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean," (Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2017).

²⁹ Robert E. Scott, "Growth in China-U.S. Trade Deficit between 2001 and 2015."

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

A recent study conducted by Andrea Cerrato and Francesco Reuggieri shows that globalization's negative results are having a direct impact on voting patterns. After determining every American county's exposure to competition from Chinese exports, they found that places "experiencing greater import shocks are the same counties where votes for the Republican presidential candidate jumped more in 2016."³² Every 1% in competition with Chinese imports created a 2.9% increase in support for Donald Trump and the Republican party in the 2016 election.³³ They conclude that, "economic globalization — and its consequences at the local level — has fostered demands for protection, especially among the most vulnerable categories of workers."³⁴ Further evidence that globalization is fostering populism can be found in its international manifestation. The following section will provide two case studies to demonstrate this phenomenon. The first case study will examine populism in Poland and the second will analyze the United Kingdom's exit from the EU.

Surging Populism Abroad

Sweeping to power in 2015, Poland's populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) seized an outright majority in the Polish Parliament—something never done since the end of communism. Dedicated to preserving Poland's unique national identity and blocking immigration from Africa and the Middle East, their domestic support remains strong. Recent polling continues to give them a broad mandate, while opposition parties struggle

³² Andrea Cerrato and Francesco Reuggieri, "Trump Won in Counties that Lost Jobs to China," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 201.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

to remain relevant.³⁵ With this support, PiS is reshaping Poland's government through reform measures that critics allege have undermined judicial independence, limited freedom of speech, and attacked opponents in the press. As Marc Santora explains, "Critics worry that the party is using the tools of democracy to undermine that very democracy."³⁶ Support for these illiberal policies primarily comes from Poland's extensive rural, religious communities. When asked to describe the lifestyle of these regions, one Polish woman said, "People here work the fields. They live on farms, erect shrines to the Virgin Mary and dutifully go to church every Sunday. It is not always an easy life."³⁷

Though it may not be "an easy life," a quick survey of Poland's economic growth indicates that their lives should be improving. Per capita GDP rose from \$1,727 in 1990 to \$12,355 in 2015. Economic integration and globalization, it seems, are fueling ever-increasing prosperity within this former communist state. Isolated statistics, however, can be misleading. Further investigation reveals a nation economically divided between the globalist elite and the rural impoverished. Over the same time period, the top 10% of Polish earners saw their share of the national income increase from 23% to 40%.³⁸ The famed 1% captured twice as much of the total income growth as the bottom 50%.³⁹ As Volha Charnysh explains, "Many low-income Poles now feel like second-class citizens, not only

³⁵ "Poland: Country Profile," (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2018).

³⁶ Marc Santora and Steven Erlanger, "Why are Poland's Nationalists So Popular," *The New York Times*, Mar. 3, 2018.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Pawel Bukowski and Filip Novokmet, "Inequality in Poland: Estimating the Whole Distribution by g-Percentile, 1983-2015," (London: Centre for Economic Performance, 2017).

³⁹ *Ibid.*

in the EU but also in their own country.”⁴⁰ The PiS captured this sentiment in their rise to power, promising to protect Poland from the cosmopolitan and technocratic elite in Brussels.

This promise is reflected in their party’s goal of reaching “a level of economic development on par with the West while keeping so-called traditional Polish values and maintaining its homogenous, Catholic, white demographic makeup.”⁴¹ Like Steve Bannon, they believe Europe is in a time of crisis. Western Europe, according to the PiS, has lost the basic values and social institutions that fostered its identity.⁴² They seek to avoid this at all costs through their populist, anti-immigrant platform. Support for these isolationist positions, however, stems from structural economic problems within Poland.⁴³ Globalization, fostered by the current international system, left many rural, impoverished voters behind. Just like their American counterparts, many of these voters decided to support a populist alternative.

Studies done on the British referendum on EU membership show similar economic trends. With 30 million people participating, the United Kingdom voted by a margin of 3% to leave the EU and separate themselves from continental Europe.⁴⁴ The result of this democratic referendum sent shock waves throughout the entire region and the global

⁴⁰ Volha Charnysh, “The Rise of Poland’s Far Right,” *Foreign Affairs*, Dec. 18, 2017.

⁴¹ Remi Adekoya, “Why Poland’s Law and Justice Party Remains So Popular: It has Effectively Combined Nationalism and Welfarism,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 3, 2017.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Marcin Rzegocki, “Wealth Redistribution Won’t Solve Poland’s Demographic Crisis,” *Acton Institute*, February 17, 2017. It is important to note that Poland is not at any risk of losing its identity. The population is comprised of 96% ethnic Poles; 87% identify as Roman Catholics. Emigration, not immigration, is the greater demographic threat to the state.

⁴⁴ Alex Hunt and Brian Wheeler, “Brexit,” *BBC News*, Jan. 31, 2019.

economy. The British Pound plunged to a thirty-one year low against the dollar and stock markets lost \$2 trillion worth of value the next day.⁴⁵ The Prime Minister, David Cameron, was forced to resign. After the initial shock of the decision cleared, political analysts quickly realized this democratic decision was a reaction against globalization and regional integration. A post-referendum assessment completed at the University of Southern California found that “the interaction of nativist sentiment and anti-elitist attitudes, the cocktail of populism, led to widespread support for Brexit, even while controlling for other factors.”⁴⁶

Analysis conducted at the London School of Economics confirmed this assessment. Study leader Sara Hobolt, after using four different models to analyze voter data, concluded that globalization’s economic repercussions substantially affected the vote.⁴⁷ She goes on to explain that, “Those who have benefitted from increased international co-operation and trade – the better educated, the young and the well-off – are less likely to vote for Leave compared to those who are ‘left behind’ – the low-skilled, the old and the poor.”⁴⁸ Thus, the indicators from the United Kingdom and Poland point to globalization as the common culprit behind the reemergence of populism. People, particularly in industrialized countries, have suffered from this global trend and are democratically expressing their opposition to further economic integration. Consequently, the opportunity for populists, such as Steve Bannon, to reshape the international political landscape throughout the West

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Evgeniia Iakhnis and Brian Rathbun, “Populist Referendum: Was Brexit an Expression of Nativist and Anti-Elitist Sentiment?” (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 2018).

⁴⁷ Sara Hobolt, “The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, A Divided Continent,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 9 (2016).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

exists. People are struggling, and the appeal of populism will not fade without substantive reforms.

CHAPTER TWO

A Shifting Balance of Power

*Peace and security both in Europe and in the Pacific still depend on a balance of power.*¹
- Lee Kuan Yew

All empires will undergo a period of relative decline. This axiom of international relations is best illustrated through the economic principle of diminishing returns. A nation initially achieves supremacy by maximizing its strategic advantages that separate it from competitors. This could include improvements to a diverse array of state components of power, including the bureaucracy, industry, or military.² Continued reform and investment in one of these components eventually produce a diminishing contribution to overall state power. Thus, a nation can only hope to enjoy a temporary advantage, as its competitors will eventually replicate its success and sustained investment in that facet of national power produces ever smaller benefits. It is this basic principle that fosters the global dynamic of states in ascension and relative decline. Today, this dynamic is once again in motion and is producing a shifting balance of power. Revisionist nations are challenging the liberal international order and its greatest defender, America, is in a state of relative decline.

The most recent nation to completely undergo this process of rise and decline was the United Kingdom (UK). In the 19th century, the British established an empire that encompassed 24% of the world's territory and held supremacy over every ocean. This awe-

¹ Graham Allison and Robert Blackwill, "Interview: Lee Kuan Yew on the Future of U.S.-China Relations," *The Atlantic*, Mar. 5, 2013.

² Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), 131-152.

inspiring fact led famed historian John Seeley to declare that the UK “conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.”³ Though expansion was never a deliberate government policy, by pioneering a system of free trade and capitalizing on its geographic position through a strong navy, the British managed to enjoy global supremacy for a century. This position atop the world order, however, could not be sustained indefinitely. The UK soon found herself in a state of relative decline.

In the far east, Japan emerged from the Meiji restoration a burgeoning world power. Its distant island position undercut British naval supremacy and threatened its colonial possessions in Asia.⁴ European rivals, particularly Russia and France, also began to increase their investment in naval capabilities and signaled their willingness to cooperate militarily. This challenged British control of regional waters and her ability to prevent European competitors from reaching the open ocean.⁵ To the west, America started to rebuild its fleet after letting it decay in the decades following the Civil War. This buildup threatened English territories in North America, as pre-existing deployments did not have the capability to counter the emerging military and economic power of the United States.⁶

Thus, by the turn of the 20th century, it was clear in London that their standing security commitments had to be rethought. The UK had incurred these obligations prior to a rising Japan, an emerging America, and growing European naval competition. Like the Romans and Hapsburgs before them, the British now faced the problem of imperial

³ John Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

⁴ Aaron Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 165.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

overstretch commensurate with their relative decline. The balance of power, both regionally and globally, was shifting and the UK needed to restructure its overseas commitments to prevent disaster. A century later, the balance of power is once again shifting. This time, however, America sits atop the global order and is facing the dangers of relative decline. Washington must heed the historical lessons of the UK's rise and decline. Unrivaled America supremacy will not persist, and the U.S. remains vulnerable to the problem of imperial overstretch. Revisionist challengers are rising, and America will need to restructure its overseas commitments to ensure a favorable balance of power.

The Rise of the Liberal Order and Its Revisionist Challengers

The United States emerged from WWII an economic giant and relatively unscathed compared to Europe and East Asia. The total soldier and civilian casualties suffered by each nation during the conflict reflects this fact. America, in total, lost 418,000 citizens; the Soviet Union, by comparison, suffered 24,000,000 casualties. Consequently, America's power and influence towered over the rest of the global community. Decision makers in Washington used this unique moment in the post-war world to construct the liberal international order: a system of institutions and norms that are fundamentally open and rules-based.⁷

The "open" nature of the order stems from its economic components. These include the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF), which foster economic interdependence and promote a free flow of capital, goods,

⁷ Hans Kundnani, "What is the Liberal International Order?" (Policy Brief, The German Marshall Fund, 2017) 1.

and services. The “rules” based element of the system is the security component. Fundamentally, it helps control the actions of states by establishing a set of international laws and norms that govern how a nation may exercise its power.⁸ The primary bodies responsible for this component of the order are America’s interlocking network of alliances, including NATO and the hub and spoke security order in East Asia. The UN Security Council, which is tasked with the “maintenance of international peace and security,” also plays a major role in preserving global security.⁹

The origins of the liberal order can be traced back to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, in which the principles of sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states were established.¹⁰ Upon this foundation, the United States and the UK incorporated liberal ideas into the structure of the order, including open markets, international institutions, security cooperation, and the rule of law.¹¹ Many of these principles were first elaborated in the 1941 Atlantic Charter, a joint declaration signed by American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.¹² This document, however, only secured an agreement between the world’s great democratic powers.¹³ The only widely-consented to legal basis for the current international order is the 1945 UN

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ U.N. Charter art. 24, para. 1.

¹⁰ Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 23.

¹¹ John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 169-185.

¹² John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 165.

¹³ Ibid.

Charter: a document signed by fifty nations, including the United States, the UK, France, China, and Russia.¹⁴

This period of order building and stability soon gave way to the Cold War. As the world divided itself between Washington and Moscow's spheres of influence, the liberal international system met its first existential threat. Five-decades later, however, the Soviet Union collapsed, and America emerged triumphant. This dramatic conclusion ushered in a unipolar world in which Washington's power was unmatched. Although scholars such as Fukuyama hypothesized the end of history, more astute observers recognized the growing restraints on American power.¹⁵ Writing for *Foreign Affairs* in 1989, former UN ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick stated:

If things develop in Eastern Europe as expected, Europeans will have new burdens to assume. Americans will have old burdens to relinquish. We will need to learn to be a power, not a superpower. We should prepare psychologically and economically for reversion to the status of a normal nation, still seeking to encourage democratic institutions, strengthen the rule of law, and advance American interests.¹⁶

A quick survey of Washington's post-Cold War actions definitively show that America's decision makers failed to heed Ambassador Kirkpatrick's advice; the Global War on Terror and the continued expansion of NATO are perhaps the most prominent examples. These actions, among many others, expose Washington's failure to remember one of international relations' golden rules: all empires will undergo relative decline.

Where Kirkpatrick saw the beginnings of relative decline, America is now experiencing its full manifestation. The international system is rapidly moving away from

¹⁴ Linda Fasulo, *An Insider's Guide to the UN* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 16-20.

¹⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest*, no. 16 (1989): 3-18.

¹⁶ Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Beyond the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 1 (1989): 14.

a unipolar world towards a multipolar one. The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) reflects this development. In describing the global strategic environment, its authors conclude that, “The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers.”¹⁷ The two challengers most concerning are Russia and China: nations that seek to reshape the world order to favor authoritarian governance.¹⁸ The NDS warns that, “China and Russia are now undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting its principles and rules of the road.”¹⁹ Consequently, Europe and East Asia are the flashpoints in the struggle to define the balance of power for this century.

Growing Trouble in Europe

A strong and unified Europe is essential to American security. It ensures America never becomes embroiled in wars similar to those of the 19th century and provides Washington natural democratic allies who support the liberal order. Since the end of WWII, ever-increasing integration and cooperation defined Europe; this era, however, seems to be ending. The UK’s decision to exit the European Union (EU) and rising populism are shifting the balance of power away from defenders of the liberal order towards revisionist challengers.

¹⁷ Jim Mattis, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Pentagon, 2018), 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The UK is America's foremost ally. They amplify Washington's power on the global stage and defend the current international system. On June 23, 2016, the UK voted to leave the EU and forge a separate identity. This democratic decision undercut their ability to serve as America's primary ally and further shifted the balance of power away from defenders of the status quo. A maxim of grand strategy is that economic strength underpins a state's military power. The UK must grapple with this fundamental tenet, as withdrawal from the EU will mean reduced economic growth. Striking a free trade agreement with the EU will limit the economic damage. If they fail to reach such an agreement, however, the UK's GDP growth projections drop by an estimated 7.7%.²⁰ Furthermore, the nation's military budget has already fallen by 20% in real terms since 2007.²¹

The growing concern over London's ability to project power globally and support Washington prompted a 2018 letter from U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to his British counterpart. In this letter, Mattis writes that, "I am concerned that your ability to continue to provide this critical military foundation for diplomatic success is at risk of erosion while together we face a world awash in change. The reemergence of great power competition requires that we maintain vigilance and the ability to operate across the full combat spectrum."²² London continues to wield substantial influence throughout the world; they have immense soft-power, a seat on the UN Security Council, leading universities, and advanced industry. The EU, however, acted as a "power multiplier for its

²⁰ "The Economic of Brexit: How bad could it get?" *Economist*, Mar. 17, 2018.

²¹ "Global Britain" *Economist*, Mar. 15, 2018.

²² Robin Emmott, "Mattis Letter Warns that British Defense Capabilities are at Risk," *Atlantic Council*, July 4, 2018.

largest Member States.”²³ When Europe acts collectively, it commands the largest economy in the world, features a population of 500 million, and “dispenses half the world’s foreign assistance.”²⁴ The UK’s decision to exit the EU strips London of this force multiplier, leaving the country unable to exert the same level of diplomatic, economic, or commercial influence.

The rise of populism—whose origin is detailed in the first chapter—is further challenging the post-WWII order by weakening centrist parties and strengthening Russian influence. Populist leaders, who decry immigration, globalization, and multilateral institutions, continue to attract large portions of the electorate away from centrists: the typical defenders of the liberal order.²⁵ In September, the anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AFD) party won 94 seats in the Bundestag—a total of 12.6% of the vote; the Freedom Party in Austria recently won 26% of the national vote and is now a member of the governing coalition.²⁶ In March, Italy’s Anti-Immigrant League received 18% of the vote and recent polling indicates they are now the most popular party in the country.²⁷ This rising populist enthusiasm is coming at the expense of centrist parties and politicians. Germany’s Angela Merkel—a strong advocate for the EU and the liberal order—recently

²³ Pierre Coffinier, “Brexit: Impact on British Global Power,” *The Thomas More Institute*, April 2018.

²⁴ Joseph Nye, “Brexit and the Balance of Power,” *Harvard Kennedy School*, April 12, 2016.

²⁵ Jakub Grygiel, “The Return of Europe’s Nation-States: The Upside to the EU’s Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs* 95, no.5 (2016), 94.

²⁶ William Galston, “The Rise of European Populism and the Collapse of the Center-Left,” (Policy Brief, Brookings Institution, 2018).

²⁷ Chiara Albanese, “Italy’s Anti-Immigrant League Tops Five Star in Poll for First Time,” *Bloomberg*, June 18, 2018.

announced her intention to step down at the end of her term.²⁸ The latest polling also shows falling support for many of Europe's center-left parties, including the Socialist (France), Social Democratic Party (Germany), Labour (Netherlands), and Social Democrats (Czech Republic).

This shifting political landscape has strengthened Russia's influence throughout Europe. Putin, who supports "ethno-nationalism" and "religious traditionalism," is embracing these populist movements and leaders.²⁹ These individuals and political parties tend to reciprocate this friendship, as Putin "offers an attractive model of renewed, unapologetic patriotism and national confidence."³⁰ This is a dangerous development for Washington and reignites a competition for influence in the region. The authors of the NDS conclude that, "Russia seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter NATO, and change European security structures."³¹ Thus, with Moscow's influence growing, the UK declining, and populism rising, the liberal order is facing a serious threat in Europe.

A Rising China

Napoleon once said, "Let China sleep, for when she awakes she will shake the world."³² Two hundred years later, Napoleon's prediction appears to be coming true. China

²⁸ Jennifer Rankin, "Twilight of Merkel era is already closely watched in EU," *Guardian*, Oct. 29, 2018.

²⁹ Galston, "The Rise of European Populism and the Collapse of the Center-Left."

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Mattis, NDS, 2.

³² David Shambough, *The China Reader: Rising Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

is awake and the world is watching her apprehensively. Beijing's economic strategy, begun under Deng Xiaoping, continues to fuel rapid economic development.³³ One decade ago, 90% of all Chinese citizens subsisted on \$2 per day. Today, that number is down to 3%.³⁴ The IMF estimates that the Chinese economy will be 20% larger than America's next year when measured using purchasing power parity (PPP).³⁵ Furthermore, China's two-year increment of economic growth is greater than the entire Indian economy.³⁶ This renewed economic strength is allowing China to wield ever-increasing influence regionally and globally. On this subject, Graham Allison wrote, "If history is our guide, nations with larger GDPs over time have proportionally greater influence in shaping international affairs."³⁷ Two things are clear about China's rise: they have the means and intention to replace American predominance in East Asia.

China, under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is seeking to be the dominant power in the region. This quest for regional hegemony is unsurprising when considered in the context of China's traditional behavior over the last two millennia. As Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis explain, "[The] tributary relations with periphery vassal states and kingdoms was considered extremely important during the imperial era as a means of affirming the hierarchical, Sinocentric, Confucian international order."³⁸ When

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Allison Graham, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 14.

³⁵ Ibid., 10.

³⁶ Ibid., 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 19.

³⁸ Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis, *Interpreting China's Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000), 25.

asked if Beijing intended to supplant Washington as the region's greatest power, Lew Kuan Yew replied simply, "Of course. Why not?"³⁹ America and China will share this century, Yew believes, the next hundred years, however, will belong to Beijing.⁴⁰

The 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) and the 2018 NDS share Yew's assessment of Beijing's intentions. The NSS concludes that, "China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda."⁴¹ The NDS adds that, "[China] is pursuing a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future."⁴² Thus, China is a revisionist nation. Their ultimate goal is to achieve regional hegemony by displacing America power in East Asia

Today, Washington sits at the center of a strained regional order. Through bilateral security commitments and open markets, America created a "hub and spoke" system that binds Washington to Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia.⁴³ Ikenberry writes that, "A sort of grand bargain has existed behind the scenes. The United States provides security, open markets, and working political relations and in return, these countries agree to affiliate with the United States, manifest in trade, alliance, and political partnerships."⁴⁴ China's

³⁹ Allison Graham and Robert Blackwill, *Lee Kuan Yew: The Grand Master's Insights on China, the United States, and the World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴¹ Donald Trump, *2017 National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 46.

⁴² Mattis, NDS, 2.

⁴³ John Ikenberry, "From Hegemony to the Balance of Power: The Rise of China and American Grand Strategy in East Asia," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 23, no. 2 (2014): 49.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

economic rise, however, is threatening the “hub and spoke” system. Nations within East Asia are now a part of two orders: a security hierarchy led by Washington and an economic one led by Beijing. Thus, this creates a situation in which countries must look to the “dragon” for trade and the “eagle” for security.⁴⁵

China is already the dominant economic power in the region. Its growing economic clout, however, will also give Beijing the means to slowly dislodge the American security order. As Ikenberry points out, it was economic ties and open markets that formed the foundation of America’s “hub and spoke” system.⁴⁶ Countries will struggle to accept the American security hierarchy if their economy is completely bound to China, not America. Yew argues that, “China is sucking the Southeast Asian countries into its economic system because of its vast market and growing purchasing power. Japan and South Korea will inevitably be sucked in as well. It just absorbs countries without having to use force.”⁴⁷

Beijing’s recent actions and regional trade statistics underscore this point. For example, Beijing restricted shipments of rare-earth elements to Japan in protest over the detention of a Chinese fishing captain.⁴⁸ In 2011, China also implemented economic sanctions against Norway after the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Liu Xiaobo: a Chinese dissident and democratic activist.⁴⁹ Trade statistics further emphasize Beijing’s

⁴⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Graham and Blackwill, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 6.

⁴⁸ Keith Bradsher, “Amid Tensions, China Blocks Vital Exports to Japan,” *New York Times*, Sept. 22, 2010.

⁴⁹ Sewell Chan, “Norway and China Restore Ties, 6 Years After Nobel Prize Dispute,” *New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2016.

immense economic power. South Korea, for example, is a treaty ally of the United States, yet its largest trading partner by far is China.⁵⁰ Australia exports \$65.4 billion worth of goods annually to China; its export trade with America is valued at only \$8.86 billion.⁵¹ Graham Allison neatly sums up the result of China's growing economic power: "Before 1989—when a crisis or issue arose the first question Asian leaders always asked was: What does Washington think? Today, when something happens, they ask first: What does Beijing think?"⁵²

It is important to note that Chinese supremacy is not inevitable. As David Lampton points out, the CCP's legitimacy "rests on the trinity of rising popular welfare, greater stature in the world, and social stability."⁵³ The persistence of these three trends is not certain. Though only slightly, China's economic growth is slowing, and Beijing must contend with the dangerous "middle-income trap."⁵⁴ President Xi Jinping's removal of term limits and his anti-corruption campaign have weakened support for high CCP officials among academics, bureaucrats, and the private sector.⁵⁵ Furthermore, "span of control" is becoming a major problem within the bureaucracy, as power is progressively localized into the hands of fewer ideological officials.

⁵⁰ "South Korea Trade Statistics," *Global Insights*. Michigan State University, Jan. 1, 2018.

⁵¹ Alexander, Simoes, "Australia," *Observatory of Economic Complexity*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

⁵² Allison, *Destined For War*, 24.

⁵³ David Lampton, "China: Challenger or Challenged?" *The Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2016): 112.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

These are challenges Beijing must face; however, they seem unlikely to prevent China's rise to the top. Yew correctly concluded that, "As long as the CCP can produce results and improve people's lives, its legitimacy will not be challenged."⁵⁶ China's economic growth will continue to outpace the West's, allowing Beijing to rapidly assemble advanced economic and military means to resolve diplomatic disputes. Nations, particularly in East Asia, will gradually be drawn into Beijing's economic sphere of influence, weakening their ability to resist Chinese aggression. Consequently, it is clear Beijing has both the means and intention to achieve supremacy in East Asia. Any regional system they create will likely replace the liberal order and foster a system conducive to authoritarian governance.

Conclusion

In a 2012 press conference at the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton stated that America "cannot afford to keep looking at the world through old lenses, [such as] balance-of-power politics."⁵⁷ This conclusion is wrong. Today, the U.S. is in a state of relative decline: a condition all empires must eventually face. America's falling contribution to global GDP plainly illustrates this fact. In 1960, the U.S. was responsible for 40% of the world's GDP; America's contribution was down to 22% in 2016.⁵⁸ China, through a series of free-market reforms, has unleashed rapid

⁵⁶ Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World To First: The Singapore Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 655.

⁵⁷ Hillary Clinton, "Remarks at the Strategic and Economic Dialogue U.S. Press Conference," Remarks by Secretary Clinton. U.S. Department of State, (Dec. 2, 2018).

⁵⁸ Mike Patton, "America's Role in Global Economy Declines Nearly 50%," *Forbes*, Feb. 29, 2016.

economic growth and is now challenging Washington in East Asia. In Europe, America's traditional ally, the UK, is facing serious economic hurdles after withdrawing from the EU. Rising populism is also contributing to the fragmentation of the European continent. Centrist parties—the strongest defenders of multilateral institutions and the liberal order—are losing support among the electorate. Furthermore, Russia is embracing these new populist leaders by emphasizing their shared support for ethnic nationalism and religious traditionalism.

Like the UK in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, America is facing a shifting balance of power. Weakened European allies, a resurgent Russia, and rising populism are contributing to this shift. Their impact, however, pales in comparison to the effect of China's rise. London managed its decline well. For example, they used sound diplomacy to alleviate threats from rising powers, including the 1902 Anglo-Japanese treaty.⁵⁹ The UK, nevertheless, had one key advantage that Washington does not: the British could turn to America—a country bound to them by history, culture, language, religion, and similar political institutions—to relieve their global obligations. There is no rising democratic nation to which Washington can hand the burden of global hegemony. Thus, Yew is correct when he writes, “Peace and Security both in Europe and in the Pacific still depend on a balance of power.”⁶⁰ To create this new system, Washington must seek help from like-minded states, particularly in East Asia. Without the help of these nations, the liberal international order—a system conducive to democratic governance and free trade—will be in jeopardy.

⁵⁹ Friedberg, *The Weary Titan*, 296.

⁶⁰ Graham and Blackwill, *Lee Kuan Yew*, 39.

CHAPTER THREE

Competition, Innovation, and Reform

To understand the course of world politics it is necessary to focus attention upon the long-term elements rather than the week by week shifts of diplomacy and politics.¹

- Paul Kennedy

Though many states are contributing to the world's shifting balance of power, China's impact is the greatest. America cannot address the dual threat to the international system of surging populism and a shifting balance of power without anticipating Beijing's future actions. The following chapter will argue that the CCP—after failing to liberalize politically—faces a legitimacy crisis. Deng Xiaoping's reforms, though substantial, only bought the CCP time. To ensure their continued control, the CCP will likely pursue an aggressive foreign policy. To justify this prediction, the following chapter will heed Winston Churchill's advice that, "the farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." Thus, this chapter will begin in 656 BC, detailing the Warring States period. It will demonstrate that China's unification two thousand years ago limited Beijing's ability to innovate and reform. European powers, meanwhile, remained fragmented, fostering competition and development. It is this difference that necessitated China's modern reform efforts.

Competition vs. Unification

Ancient China was defined by warring states—each seeking to achieve regional hegemony. Between 656 and 254 BC, Chu, Qin, Jin, Wu, and Wei each sought supremacy

¹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), 23.

and instituted reforms to acquire strategic advantages over their competitors. For example, Wei, under Marquis Wen, innovated across multiple spectra of state power in the fifth century. Wei amplified their military strength through peasant armies, increased agricultural production through new irrigation techniques, and bolstered tax extraction through a centralized registry.² These reforms allowed Wei to achieve preeminence, but only temporarily. Qin, a state “relatively backward economically and politically” before the mid-fourth century, imitated and improved upon Wei’s reforms, ending its brief hegemonic reign.³

Though replicating both their “mass peasant armies” and “agriculture-for-war policy,” Qin also introduced new innovations, developing agricultural quotas and tax incentives designed to award valor on the battlefield and productivity on the farm.⁴ Other states—in a bid to prevent Qin from attaining hegemony—underwent another round of innovative reforms. Zhao developed light cavalry, Han strengthened their bureaucracy, and Chu adopted Wei’s earlier reforms.⁵ This time, however, it was too little too late; Qin had already weakened their relative capabilities. Thus, their motivation to innovate was high, but their capacity to develop and implement meaningful reforms was low. Qin, as a result, achieved hegemony and ended the Warring States period in 221 BC.⁶ By closing China’s

² Victoria Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 60.

³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

great period of competition in the ancient era, Qin reduced the pressure for innovation: an outcome of history that affected China in the modern era.

In Europe, interstate competition also dominated the continent. Unlike ancient China, however, no state achieved hegemony and the region remained decentralized. This engendered an arms race, with each state seeking the military capabilities required to preserve their autonomy. Phillip Hoffman describes this dynamic as a tournament model: a “winner-take-all” competition in which contestants extort enormous efforts to win a prize (land, money, or fame).⁷ Thus, European states continually sought new military innovations, spurring improvements to gunpowder grains, barrel texture, and gun mountings.⁸ China—the birthplace of gunpowder—and the Middle East all had civilizations with expertise in firearms.⁹ These states, however, already possessed a monopoly on the technology in their respective regions, providing them with no incentive to innovate. Consequently, Europe possessed a decisive military advantage by the eighteenth century.

These military innovations did not occur in a vacuum; other important developments, including the rise of market economies, also gave European powers a substantial edge. With no centralized authority, commercial activity, scientific discovery, and intellectual freedom could not be fully suppressed. This ensured that merchants, scientists, and academics were welcomed by some local rulers, allowing a “symbiotic relationship” to develop between governments and a growing civil society (artisans,

⁷ Philip T. Hoffman, *Why Did Europe Conquer the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 16.

⁸ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 23.

⁹ Hoffman, *Why Did Europe Conquer the World*, 14.

bankers, scholars, or traders).¹⁰ For non-European states to “ascend the ladder of world power,” Paul Kennedy concludes that, “it would have implied a wholesale borrowing of those general features which distinguished the societies of the West from all others.”¹¹

Inquiry, experimentation, and commercial activity required freedom; high levels of cultural and ideological orthodoxy could not produce these outcomes. Thus, other centers of human civilization, such as China and Japan, had to undergo major cultural, economic, and political changes before they could rival the West.

This era of competition and innovation remains a decisive influence on international relations today. As a British colony, America inherited most European advances. Other states, however, did not emulate these innovations until much later. For example, Japan—under pressure from the expanding West—underwent the Meiji Restoration in 1868. This major historical event swept reformers into government, ending feudalism and transforming the nation into an industrial power.¹² Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese war at the dawn of the 20th century confirmed their arrival as a modern state. Though facing similar pressures from the West, China did not transform. The Confucian order, which dominated Chinese society at the time, inhibited change and spurred a “union of conservatism at home and concessions abroad.”¹³ This policy resulted in the famed Century of Humiliation: a period of time lasting from 1839-1949, in which China was subject to the whims of foreign powers. Emulation of Western advances did not occur in China until the late 1970s with Deng Xiaoping’s era of market-oriented reforms.

¹⁰ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹² W.G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1972), 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

Today, these reforms have catapulted China into a position of great influence, profoundly affecting the international system. These reforms, however, are not substitutes for real political liberalization. Instead, they bought the CCP time, allowing the government to temporarily justify its rule. That time is now running out. To preserve their monopoly on power, the CCP will turn to an aggressive foreign policy. The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate this through a historical analysis of China's modern reform efforts.

China's Leap into the Twenty-First Century

Assuming power in 1978, Deng Xiaoping faced monumental economic and political challenges. Peasants, who comprised 80% of the population, subsisted on \$40 per year and an estimated 100 million did not have sufficient food.¹⁴ The Cultural Revolution had shuttered primary schools and eliminated higher education, resulting in an uneducated and often illiterate workforce.¹⁵ Industrial productivity remained hampered by outdated technology imported from the Soviet Union in the 1950s.¹⁶ All of these failings were compounded by deep political tensions plaguing China's government and society. Urban residents, fearful of losing their jobs, resisted the mass migration of 200 million peasants into the country's booming cities; military elites zealously fought downsizing and budget reductions to the armed forces; a general animosity towards new ideas, inventions, and foreign capital persisted, all while old rifts between the victims and perpetrators of the

¹⁴ Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 396.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Cultural Revolution continued to reopen.¹⁷ It was in this national atmosphere—one dominated by division and old prejudices—that Deng Xiaoping introduced his slate of reforms.

Designed to “release the talents of the Chinese people, whose natural economic vitality and entrepreneurial spirit had long been constrained by war and ideological dogma,” Deng’s reforms gradually loosened the government’s stranglehold on the economy.¹⁸ Market forces, spurred by limited free enterprise and foreign capital, were permitted to form in Special Economic Zones; new distinctions were made in state-owned enterprises between ownership and management, granting on-site supervisors greater freedom to increase productivity; agricultural communes were ended, and decentralization was encouraged, allowing for “family farming.”¹⁹ With 80% of the country classified as peasants in a predominantly rural society, the agricultural reforms in particular touched many Chinese citizens.²⁰ The new policies did not allow for private ownership of land, but families were permitted to sell surplus crops in rural free markets. The law of supply and demand, not government fiat, determined food prices in these trading outposts. Moreover, banks (all state-owned) created new financial products for farmers, “generating rural credit so that budding peasant entrepreneurs can invest in new seed, fertilizer, and machinery.”²¹ The combined effect of these agricultural reforms made an immediate impact in the lives

¹⁷ Ezra Vogel, *China Transformed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 694.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁹ Donald Zagoria, “China’s Quiet Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 62, no. 4 (1984).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

of many rural peasants, with productivity increasing rapidly and per capita profits rising 36% between 1978 and 1983.²²

Deng complimented these agricultural reforms with a complete overhaul of China's industrial sector. The "Stalinist" emphasis on heavy industry and defense production was abandoned in favor of light industry and consumer goods. With the spread of modern transportation networks, these new products were distributed over a wide geographic area, "increasing the scale of production for domestic as well as foreign markets."²³ Chinese brands, previously non-existent, developed a national and international consumer base and individual families experienced an increase in living standards. By 1984, the income of peasants doubled, and the private industrial sector comprised 50% of the country's entire industrial output.²⁴ Former luxury goods—such as refrigerators, fans, and televisions—were accessible for many families and China's GDP averaged 9% growth throughout the decade.²⁵

Displaying "authority, experience, strategic sense, and political judgment," Deng Xiaoping's leadership was pivotal in China's successful transformation.²⁶ His reform agenda, however, was aided by a confluence of geopolitical events beyond Beijing's control. The West's strained relationship with Moscow, particularly after America's withdrawal from Vietnam, made Washington and Europe "receptive to helping China

²² Ibid.

²³ Vogel, *China Transformed*, 703.

²⁴ Zagoria, "China's Quiet Revolution."

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Vogel, *China Transformed*, 695.

loosen its ties with the Soviet Union.”²⁷ This gave Beijing access to new markets and technologies, particularly from advanced East Asian states, including Japan and South Korea. Other nations, such as Singapore, provided China with a roadmap for rapid modernization in the twentieth century. Deng leveraged these development models, markets, and technologies to unleash China’s economic potential, affecting Chinese families, their country, and the international system. But unlike Japan, Singapore, and South Korea, political liberalization did not take hold in China.

The Era of Peaceful Restraint

In the 1990s, many foreign policy experts subscribed to a simple theory: economic freedom will inevitably produce political liberalization. The internal logic of this idea is sound. A quick historical analysis of Europe—the birthplace of free market economics—demonstrates that capitalism did not develop in a vacuum; rather, it required a political environment conducive to commercial activity, scientific discovery, and intellectual inquiry.²⁸ Thus, authoritarian governments with rigid cultural and ideological orthodoxies cannot sustain free markets. With this simple theory in hand, America’s foreign policy experts preached the doctrine of peaceful restraint: a policy predicated on using free markets to spur political change in China. “Social forces unleashed by China’s economic reforms,” it was argued, “were driving towards a fundamental transformation of Chinese

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 20.

politics.”²⁹ America’s leaders “can best serve [their country’s] own interests, as well as those of the Asian region, by behaving with the restraint and grace befitting its status.”³⁰

The doctrine of peaceful restraint was convincing and dominated the diplomatic thinking of both Republican and Democratic administrations. George W. Bush, speaking before a crowd at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, argued that free trade was a “forward strategy for freedom.”³¹ “The case for trade,” he claimed, “is not just monetary, but moral. Economic freedom creates habits of liberty. And habits of liberty create expectations of democracy . . . Trade freely with China, and time is on our side.”³² A few months later, President Bill Clinton delivered an address focused exclusively on America’s foreign policy towards China at Johns Hopkins University. Clinton urged Americans to recognize that “we can work to pull China in the right direction, or we can turn our backs and almost certainly push it in the wrong direction.”³³ Congress, Clinton argued, must support Beijing’s ascension to the WTO if they desire “a future of greater openness and freedom for the people of China . . . [and] greater prosperity for the American people.”³⁴

Twenty years later, these predictions appear naïve. China, according to Freedom House, is the sixteenth least free country in the world, providing fewer political rights and

²⁹ George Gilboy and Eric Heginbotham, “China’s Coming Transformation,” *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 4 (2001).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ George W. Bush, “A Distinctly American Internationalism,” (speech, Simi Valley, California, Nov. 19, 1999).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Bill Clinton, “Full Text of Clinton’s Speech on China Trade Bill,” (speech, Washington, DC, March 9, 2000).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

civil liberties than Cuba, Iran, and Russia.³⁵ Competitive elections do not exist and the CCP “monopolizes all forms of political organization.”³⁶ Ethnic and religious minorities, including Tibetans, Uighurs, and Mongolians, are restricted in their political activity and are subject to state-sponsored discrimination. The Chinese government has also created the world’s most advanced censorship apparatus, regulating access to information and overseeing all news media. State-run news outlets continually “tout the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party, and, increasingly, of President Xi Jinping as “core” leader.”³⁷ All aspects of religious activity are controlled by the CCP and religious doctrine and leaders are vetted to ensure compliance with party guidelines.³⁸ Thus, it is clear that the forecasts of the 1990s and early 2000s were inaccurate. The logic underpinning these predictions, however, remains sound.

Borrowed Time

Governments are not immune to economic forces, but must adjust policies and practices in response to their influence. China is no exception. Though Deng’s economic reforms often dominate headlines, “development is a coevolutionary process. States and markets interact and adapt to each other, changing mutually overtime.”³⁹ The bureaucracy underwent enormous changes to facilitate free markets and promote entrepreneurship

³⁵ *China Profile* (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2018).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *China Events of 2017* (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, 2017).

³⁸ *China Profile*.

³⁹ Yuen Yuen Ang, *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 3.

under Deng Xiaoping. Local governments were empowered through a systematic campaign to decentralize authority, enabling counties and provinces to adjust tax rates, make investments, and design new reforms. By 1982, 80% of revenues were retained by provinces for local investment and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) dotted the east coast, allowing certain regions to seek foreign investment without Beijing's direct oversight.⁴⁰ The central government also experienced significant reform. Instead of one-man rule, Deng encouraged collective leadership and established a mandatory retirement age. The open positions created through these reforms "rejuvenated the party" with young officials and prevented the "accumulation of personal power."⁴¹

Further down the bureaucracy, Deng revamped the cadre evaluation system: a mechanism designed to assess the work of local leaders. Abandoning Mao's emphasis on class and ideology, the CCP implemented new performance targets focused exclusively on economic growth and revenue production.⁴² Localities were ranked against each other and performance-based bonuses were awarded to the highest performing civil servants. Competition and accountability—major benefits of multiparty elections—characterized this new system, allowing the CCP to reap some benefits of democracy without liberalizing. Consequently, China did not become a liberal democracy; rather, it morphed into an "autocracy with democratic characteristics."⁴³ Cadre evaluations, though emphasizing economic goals, still retain one absolute requirement from the Moa era: local

⁴⁰ Zagoria, "China's Quiet Revolution."

⁴¹ Yuen Yuen Ang, "Autocracy with Chinese Characteristics," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (2018).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

leaders, at all times, must maintain political stability.⁴⁴ For Beijing, development and revenue growth are irrelevant if officials fail to meet this one objective.

Bureaucratic reform, therefore, bought the CCP time, allowing Beijing to avoid major political reforms. Time, however, is running out. China now contains an ever-growing middle class: a group of people characterized by high levels of education and prosperity⁴⁵. Like their peers in developed Western democracies, middle class citizens are politically aware and active, demanding more than just economic growth. This has placed increased pressure on local leaders, who must now “maintain social harmony, protect the environment, supply public services, enforce party discipline, and even promote happiness.”⁴⁶ Bureaucratic reform and the cadre evaluation system cannot respond effectively to this new pressure.⁴⁷ Furthermore, sustaining rapid economic growth in a developed country requires more than agricultural reform and infrastructure investment. Innovation and research—products of civil society and intellectual freedom—are required. Thus, American foreign policy thinkers were not wrong: economic freedom will inevitably demand political liberalization. They merely misjudged the delaying effect of bureaucratic reform.

Ideological Competition

In spite of these new pressures, some foreign policy experts argue that Chinese autocracy poses an ideological challenge to Western democracy. Richard McGregor, a

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Cheng Li, “How China’s Middle Class Views the Trade War,” *Foreign Affairs*, Sep. 10, 2018.

⁴⁶ Ang, “Autocracy with Chinese Characteristics.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

senior fellow at the Lowy Institute, contends that “under Mr. Xi’s leadership, the Communist Party is devouring China’s governing institutions while promoting its ideology for export like never before . . . That makes China not only an economic and security rival,” he claims, “but [also] an ideological one.”⁴⁸ There is some evidence for this claim. Xi Jinping, in a speech before the 19th CPC Congress, declared that, “scientific socialism is full of vitality in 21st century China and . . . is now flying high and proud for all to see . . . It offers a new option for other countries to help speed their development while preserving their independence; it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind.”⁴⁹

Though Xi proudly advertises it, Beijing’s policy elite cannot even agree on the elements that comprise the “China model.” Some argue it was Maoism, others contend it was Dengism; a mix of central planning and decentralization is required, yet the right formula is unknown. Thus, China’s work to promote its development model are often “reduced to showing off model sites, invoking Confucianism, or idealistically portraying the party as meritocratic.”⁵⁰ Xi’s efforts may produce limited results in Africa or South America, but appear unlikely to affect established democracies. Western voters are “too attached to [the] capacity to throw the scoundrels out of office,” and are unwilling to cede their right to “democratic dissent.”⁵¹ Moreover, the recent uptick of authoritarian politics

⁴⁸ Richard McGregor, “Xi Jinping’s Ideological Ambitions,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 1, 2018.

⁴⁹ Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” (speech, Beijing, Oct. 18, 2017).

⁵⁰ Yuen Yuen Ang, “The Real China Model,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 19, 2018.

⁵¹ David Runciman, “China’s Challenge to Democracy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 26, 2018.

in Western democracies has been restricted, “to threats to take away the rights of others—people who supposedly don’t belong.” These movements, including those in Hungary and Poland, are “populist distortions of democracy, not alternatives to it.”⁵²

The CCP, however, is threatened by the ideology of the West. In Document 9—a leaked internal threat assessment—party leaders outlined the “false ideological trends, positions, and activities” that required particular vigilance.⁵³ These include promoting Western constitutional democracy, universal values, civil society, neoliberalism, and the West’s idea of journalism. Such ideas, the document claims, could, “set the party against the masses, weaken government control of the national economy, and undermine the principle that the media should be infused with the spirit of the party.”⁵⁴ CCP officials, therefore, must, “strengthen management of the ideological battlefield, demonstrate unwavering commitment to control of the media, and help party members distinguish between true and false narratives.”⁵⁵

The West—with its commitment to universal values, a free press, and representative democracy—is clearly a threat to the CCP. Under the weight of China’s growing prosperity, Deng’s bureaucratic reforms are cracking, and party officials recognize the growing dangers to their hold on power. In response, Xi Jinping and the CCP are likely to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy designed to stir up nationalism and ensure the continued legitimacy of their government. This “diversionary aggression” will

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Document 9: China File Translation,” *China File*, Nov. 8, 2013.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

create a more “destabilizing and unpredictable foreign policy.”⁵⁶ David Lampton, writing in the *Washington Quarterly*, maintains that an “assertive foreign policy” will act as “legitimacy compensation for slower growth and provide a rationale for political tightening in a more unstable domestic circumstance and a more challenging external environment.”⁵⁷

The Chinese population, moreover, seems receptive to an aggressive foreign policy. In a 2019 study, Jessica Weiss found Chinese attitudes to be “generally hawkish.”⁵⁸ A majority of the study’s participants endorsed a “greater reliance on military strength and greater spending on national defense.”⁵⁹ Furthermore, a plurality supported the deployment of troops to “reclaim disputed islands in the East and the South China Sea,” and strongly disapproved of America’s military presence in the region.⁶⁰ Xi Jinping’s recent foreign policy decisions appear to capitalize on these attitudes.

In 2014, China aggressively began to assert its control over the South China Sea. It reclaimed 3,000 acres of land in eighteen months and “rapidly transformed its artificial islands into advanced military bases, replete with airfields, runways, ports, and antimissile systems.”⁶¹ One year earlier, China declared an air defense identification zone over

⁵⁶ Erin Carter, “Diversionary Aggression in Chinese Foreign Policy,” *Brookings Institution*, Jan. 22, 2019.

⁵⁷ David M. Lampton, “China: Challenger or Challenged,” *The Washington Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2016): 115.

⁵⁸ Jessica Weiss, “How Hawkish is the Chinese Public: Another Look at Rising Nationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Contemporary China* (2019).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Ely Ratner, “Course Correction: How to Stop China’s Maritime Advance,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 4 (2017).

disputed waters in the East China Sea, “alienating virtually every neighbor.”⁶² These actions led Hal Brands to conclude that “Preventing an increasingly confident great power from remaking the East Asian order, and challenging U.S. interests globally, will be the defining challenge of American statecraft in the twenty-first century.”⁶³ The final chapter of this paper will offer a number of policy solutions designed to preserve the international system amidst this shifting balance of power and surging populism.

⁶² Jonathan Tepperman, “China’s Great Leap Backward,” *Foreign Policy*, Oct. 15, 2018.

⁶³ Hal Brands, “The Chinese Century?” *The National Interest*, Feb. 19, 2019.

CHAPTER FOUR

Policy Solutions

In the months following the 2016 presidential election, a host of distinguished scholars made policy recommendations designed to preserve the liberal order. Many of these solutions were not comprehensive; others lacked foresight. Scholars Ivo Daalder and James Lindsey offered a solution that combined both of these characteristics. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Daalder and Lindsey proposed the creation of a new international consortium termed the G-9.¹ Comprised of American allies, this new group would include the United Kingdom, Germany, and Italy, as well as, Japan, South Korea, and Australia.² Their plan called for these nations to “leverage their collective economic and military might to save the liberal world order . . . and to lay the basis for a more stable and enduring world—one that is better suited to the power relations of today.”³ Many other scholars offered similar recommendations.

John Ikenberry, for example, called upon foreign leaders—such as Angela Merkel and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe—to band together and counteract the Trump Administration’s foreign policy; Jeffery Hornung, an expert at the Rand Corporation, urged Japan to assume leadership of the international system.⁴

¹ Ivo Daalder and James Lindsay, “The Committee to Save the World Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 6 (2018).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jeffery Hornung, “The Fate of the World Order Rests on Tokyo’s Shoulders,” *Foreign Policy*, (2018). John Ikenberry, “The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive.”

All of these proposals, when considered in light of the preceding chapters, suffer from one clear flaw: they fail to account for interactions. To preserve the liberal order, policymakers must condition their strategy on the threat from populism and a shifting balance of power. There is tension between these two interactions. Countering the shifting balance of power requires greater global integration and multilateral cooperation; yet, populism is generated from these very proposals. Trade-offs, therefore, will be required to account for both of these trends. Thus, the U.S. must implement domestic policies designed to limit mass immigration and offset the negative economic effects of globalization. Washington policymakers must also simultaneously pursue foreign policies designed to promote European autonomy and strengthen the U.S.-led regional order in East Asia.

Domestic Policy Proposals

Any substantial proposal must first address the political situation in America. Populism, spurred by globalization's economic downsides, is eroding support for the liberal order. Exacerbated by Washington's support for certain policies, this force will continue to roil our nation's politics without substantive policy changes. Consequently, domestic politics is perhaps the greatest threat to America's internationalist foreign policy. Today, public opinion is more isolationist and no longer reflects Washington's assessment of the international environment. The 2018 National Defense Strategy argued that "long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers" is America's greatest security threat; yet, only 32% of the electorate believes foreign policymakers should emphasize limiting Chinese power and influence.⁵ Among younger Americans, support for this objective drops

⁵ James Mattis, *National Defense Strategy*, 2.

18% and it is not a priority for either Democrats (26%) or Republicans (39%).⁶ The public, instead, emphasizes countering terrorism (72%) and protecting jobs (71%).⁷ Accordingly, Washington must develop a new education campaign to promote internationalism and reshape public perceptions on matters of national security.

Even John Ikenberry, an ardent defender of the American led international system, recognizes the need to reorient the electorates' views on foreign affairs. He suggests that leaders recapture the narrative of the last seventy years by pointing to the great economic accomplishments the liberal order created and the disasters it prevented.⁸ Ikenberry is right that a narrative is needed. An old narrative, however, is not the solution; rather, Washington must develop a new one. This will be challenging. As Hal Brands points out, "The task of defending the liberal order has never been an easy sell to the American people."⁹ It requires defending foreign nations, guarding distant borders, and working through multilateral institutions. "That is a lot to ask any country, particularly one as geographically fortunate and naturally secure as the U.S."¹⁰

Rekindling U.S. internationalism will require instilling an appropriate level of both fear and hope in the American people. China and its threat to the American-led order is the ideal strategic challenge to highlight. Its burgeoning military power and growing international agenda should provoke a degree of fear in the electorate. Fear, however, is

⁶ Carroll Doherty, "Conflicting Partisan Priorities for U.S. Foreign Policy," (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2018).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John Ikenberry, "The Plot Against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive."

⁹ Hal Brands, "America's Global Order Can Be Saved," *Bloomberg*, August 16, 2018.

¹⁰ Ibid.

not enough. Its twin pillar—hope—must also be included in Washington’s education campaign. After nearly two decades of war in the Middle East, the American people are skeptical of U.S. engagement abroad. Only 17% of respondents in a 2018 poll agreed that “promoting democracy in foreign countries” should be one of America’s leading foreign policy objectives.¹¹ Consequently, Washington must find a hopeful narrative in other goals. One ideal candidate is human rights. A recent poll conducted by the Penn Biden Center found that 71% of respondents favored “the U.S. government taking steps to support human rights in other countries.”¹² College graduates, in particular, are more sympathetic to this objective; around 80% identified it as a good priority for U.S. foreign policy.¹³ Furthermore, a poll conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations found that a majority of voters believe all governments should guarantee the following: freedom of expression (98%), right to demonstrate peacefully (94%), media freedom (88%), and religious freedom (77%).¹⁴

A new education campaign, however, is not a cure. Populism and isolationist tendencies will persist without real domestic policy changes. One issue that unites populist parties across the world is their anti-immigration platforms. Though their arguments are often xenophobic and ethnocentric, their popularity reflects the growing concern over immigration in many democratic countries. Hillary Clinton, speaking at an event in Europe, noted that “if we don’t deal with the migration issue it will continue to roil the body

¹¹ Carroll Doherty, “Conflicting Partisan Priorities for U.S. Foreign Policy.”

¹² Elliot Abrams, “The American People Support Promoting Democracy Overseas,” *The Council on Foreign Relations*, June 28, 2018.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ “U.S. Opinions on Human Rights,” (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2009).

politic.”¹⁵ Tony Blair, echoing this statement, argued that a candidate “cannot stand for election unless they have strong position on immigration. If they do not,” Blair maintains, “you leave a large space into which the populists can march.”¹⁶

These are not unfounded opinions. Recent analysis conducted by the center-left Migration Policy Institute supports their claims. Martin Schain, the study’s lead author, concluded that, “Migration crises, and the chaos they engender, can bolster support for populist radical-right and anti- immigration platforms . . . The pace and scale of arrivals in 2015 and 2016,” Schain argues, “fueled the radical-right.”¹⁷ In Austria, there was a direct correlation between the refugee crisis and the populist Austrian Freedom Party’s (FPÖ) electoral success.¹⁸ Germany politics also highlights this correlation. Under Angela Merkel, Germany approved the entry of over one-million migrants, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.¹⁹ A backlash against migrants soon swept the country and the AFD—a populist, Eurosceptic party—won 94 seats in the Bundestag during the 2017 federal election.²⁰

Immigration must be limited to prevent further populist gains. Although this is not a policy paper on migration, there are a few consensus proposals. One potential solution is

¹⁵ Patrick Wintour, “Hillary Clinton: Europe Must Curb Immigration to Stop Rightwing Populists,” *The Guardian*, Nov. 22, 2018.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Martin Schain, “Shifting Tides: Radical Right Populism and Immigration Policy in the United States and Europe,” (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Kirsten Grieshaber, “Germany Presents New, More Restrictive Migration Plan,” *Associated Press*, Jul. 10, 2018.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

to “leverage the support of frontline countries.”²¹ For American policymakers, this might include Mexico and other Latin American nations. European leaders, however, face a more daunting task. They must end the wars in Libya and Syria, promote development in West Africa, and end extreme repression in Eritrea and Afghanistan.²² This will not be accomplished immediately. “Mass migration,” a report by the Brookings Institution concluded, “will be a permanent challenge to 21st-century states and the world order.”²³ Policies must be instituted to ensure immigration surges do not overwhelm state capacity or “erode traditions of welcoming refugees and migrants.”²⁴

Migration, however, is not the only force driving populism. Globalization and its economic downsides have “indeed injured certain sectors of American manufacturing and displaced U.S. workers.”²⁵ Washington’s economic policy must reflect this development; moreover, there is historical precedence for a more nationalist internationalism. In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan implemented trade policies designed to punish discriminatory practices and “ensure that the costs of globalization were not borne disproportionately by U.S. firms and workers.”²⁶ His policies, nevertheless, did not prevent him from pursuing a global trade agenda. Reagan continued to lay the foundation for the

²¹ Keith McCammon, “The Refugee and Migration Crisis: Proposals for Action, U.N. Summit 2016,” (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016).

²² Patrick Kingsley, “Ten Ways to Manage the Migration Crisis,” *The Guardian*, Sept. 4, 2015.

²³ Keith McCammon, “The Refugee and Migration Crisis: Proposals for Action, U.N. Summit 2016.”

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Hal Brands, “U.S. Grand Strategy in the Age of Nationalism: Fortress America and its Alternatives,” *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2017): 83.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Uruguay Round of trade negotiations. This round included 123 nations and led to the creation of the WTO.²⁷

Washington policymakers should follow this historical precedent. Free trade—as the next section will detail—must remain an important aspect of U.S. foreign policy. Its negative effects, however, need to be offset by domestic initiatives. Changing certain tax policies is one potential solution. For example, the federal government could provide tax credits to incentivize businesses to develop job-training programs.²⁸ Washington could also incentivize certain types of education, including apprenticeships and career training. At the least, policymakers should avoid regressive tax policies.²⁹ Populism is predicated on pitting the authentic people against the cosmopolitan elite. Fueling this perception will only spur a greater populist backlash. Revenues must be redistributed to benefit the working class, “helping build support for economic openness.”³⁰

Foreign Policy Proposals

Addressing domestic populism, however, will not save the liberal order. Washington must also develop policies to confront the world’s shifting balance of power. Today, the international system is moving away from a unipolar world towards a multipolar one. Great power competition—fostered by revisionist challengers Russia and China—is expected. In Europe, populism is weakening centrist governing coalitions: the typical

²⁷ “The Uruguay Round: Understanding the WTO,” *World Trade Organization*, 2005.

²⁸ Jeff Colgan and Robert Keohane, “The Liberal Order is Rigged: Fix it Now or Watch it Wither.”

²⁹ “Overcoming the Risks and Contradictions of Globalization,” (London: Chatham House, 2015).

³⁰ Colgan and Keohane, “The Liberal Order is Rigged.”

defenders of the liberal order. Furthermore, the United Kingdom, Washington's foremost ally, is enduring a contentious withdrawal from the EU. America requires strong allies to maintain the liberal order. Consequently, U.S. foreign policy must strive to ensure Europe is a capable, independent actor on the global stage.

Currently, Europe is neither capable nor independent. The European project, embodied in the EU, has “brought 70 years of unprecedented peace to a war-torn continent.”³¹ This peaceful cooperation, however, would not have been possible without America's sustained military presence. The U.S. defense shield, “enabled Europe to become economically robust and politically integrated—but it has also left Europeans unprepared for a world of great power competition.”³² As former President Barack Obama explained, Europeans are “free riders.”³³ Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates echoed this concern. Speaking at the Security and Defense agenda in Brussels, Gates warned Europe that there “will be dwindling appetite and patience in the American body politic to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources . . . to be serious and capable partners in their own defense.”³⁴

Thus, Washington must work to ensure Europe becomes capable and independent. This will require more forceful alliance management and an increased emphasis on burden

³¹ Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polykova, “Why Strategic Autonomy Should Be the Continent's Goal,” *Foreign Affairs*, Oct. 17, 2018.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Jeffery Goldberg, “The Obama Doctrine,” *The Atlantic*, Apr. 2016.

³⁴ Robert M. Gates, “Remarks by Secretary Gates at the Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, Belgium,” (speech, Brussels, Belgium, June 10, 2011), The Department of Defense.

sharing. Words will not be enough. Policy officials must make future additional deployments of U.S. personnel contingent on greater allied spending. Higher performing allies, moreover, should be given priority consideration in Washington. To promote a better European “division of labor,” the Pentagon should also “provide direct input into allied defense strategy reviews.”³⁵ All of these initiatives will forge a more autonomous Europe, ensuring America’s allies are capable of contributing to the liberal order’s defense. Furthermore, such a strategy will allow the United States to invest more assets in countering Russia and China.

This approach will also not exacerbate the influence of populism either in Europe or America. For the United States, promoting greater burden sharing is a consensus policy. As Hal Brands explains, it is a more “benign and constructive nationalism—essentially, internationalism with a nationalist accent.”³⁶ Populists in Europe, moreover, are unlikely to oppose U.S. foreign policies dedicated to greater European autonomy. By investing greater resources in their military capabilities, Europe’s centrist coalitions could also erode some of the insurgent parties’ nationalist appeal, weakening their support among the electorate.

Great power competition, however, will not be limited to Europe. In East Asia, China possesses both the means and intention to replace the American-led regional order. Today, two systems dominate the region: an economic order run by Beijing and a security order directed by Washington. This forces nations to look towards China for trade and America for protection. Competition between these two systems is inevitable. Furthermore,

³⁵ Hal Brands, “U.S. Grand Strategy in the Age of Nationalism: Fortress America and its Alternatives.”

³⁶ Ibid.

the Chinese Communist Party must now contend with a growing middle class—a group of citizens who are politically active and demand more than mere economic growth. With Beijing unwilling to implement major political reforms, the CCP will likely employ an assertive foreign policy to ensure domestic stability. Washington policymakers must anticipate this clash and prepare to defend the American system in East Asia from revisionist China. With these interactions in mind, Washington should implement a foreign policy guided by two principles.

First, America must further embed itself into the regional order in East Asia. The U.S. is not capable of countering China in its own backyard without significant support from allied nations. This effort will hinge on economics. America must re-support a regional free trade agreement, ensuring China’s great economic power does not further erode the U.S. security order. As Robert Blackwill and Ashley Tellis explain, free trade agreements “will not erase China’s asymmetrical economic advantage with respect to the nations of Asia.”³⁷ Such efforts, however, “will be a vivid demonstration that the United States is determined to compete on the Asian economic playing field.”³⁸ Strengthening America’s regional alliances also capitalizes on Washington’s greatest strength: its ability to develop formidable coalitions to isolate threats. Working in coalitions, moreover, “endows American foreign policy with legitimacy,” highlighting the disparity between China’s unilateral aggression and the stable, U.S.-led order.³⁹

³⁷ Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, *Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2015), 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Michael Mandelbaum, “The New Containment,” *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 2 (2019).

Second, America must be more proactive in countering Chinese aggression. Though Beijing's foreign policy has grown more assertive, it has not triggered major American counteractions. As Oriana Mastro explains, China's leadership has "pursued an ambiguous strategy," recognizing that their foreign policy success is contingent on avoiding unfavorable U.S. responses.⁴⁰ This strategy has worked, particularly in the South China Sea.⁴¹ Thus, America must undertake a more comprehensive counter-pressure strategy, employing both symmetric and asymmetric measures to counter Chinese aggression. Such measures could include helping allied nations develop their own anti-access area-denial systems or mounting information operations to expose CCP corruption.⁴² Above all, however, America must always act within the context of its alliance system, ensuring the legitimacy and effectiveness of its efforts.

Conclusion

Populism and the shifting international system are global forces, and both must be accounted for in any strategy. Washington cannot merely pursue order building in Asia or promote greater European autonomy and overlook the domestic political situation in America. All three spheres are linked. Understanding these linkages and implementing an effective plan to preserve the liberal order is vital.

⁴⁰ Oriana Mastro, "The Stealth Superpower: How China Hid Its Global Ambitions," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2019).

⁴¹ Gregory Poling, "How the U.S. Can Step Up in the South China Sea," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan. 16, 2019.

⁴² Charles Edel, "Limiting Chinese Aggression: A Strategy of Counter Pressure," *The American Interest*, 2018.

Today, the situation is precarious. Populism is surging, threatening the centrist governing coalitions most responsible for preserving the liberal order. Without its typical champions, the international system is vulnerable and revisionist challengers are now threatening it. If given the opportunity, these nations would reshape the international system to favor authoritarian government. Standing before a crowd in Phoenix, Arizona, Ronald Reagan reminded America that “freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.”⁴³ Amidst the current challenges to the liberal order, this lesson must be heeded. A balance of power, favorable to democratic governance, is essential. Without one, authoritarianism may be more familiar to future generations than democracy. Washington policymakers must implement new domestic and foreign policies to prevent such an outcome.

⁴³ Ronald Reagan, “Encroaching Control,” *Ronald Reagan-Encroaching Control*. The Internet Archive, (Dec. 2, 2018).

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