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Primacy and the United States: the Role of the US in the Modern Era

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Abstract: On the international stage today, there is no shortage of adversaries. Whether it be Putin's Russia or Xi's China, the United States has the responsibility to confront the nefarious actions of these revisionist states. However, academia has somehow become filled with deep forebodings of eventual American decline, as both the public and the political elite cast doubt on continued US primacy abroad in favor of advancing US interests at home. This article argues that the US still retains both the soft and hard power necessary in order to continue our role in the rules-based order which has been, and continues to be, the basis for peace and stability. Because of our adversaries' invidious attempts to undermine American democracy at home, the strength and trust of our political institutions rests upon a strong and determined stance abroad.

Keywords: primacy, United States, China, Russia, North Korea

Introduction

The global dominance of the United States has been threatened by a variety of actors on the world stage. The rise of revisionist powers such as China or Russia has caused many to doubt whether US power has weakened. These powers have sought to upend the American-led world order through military, economic, and political initiatives that have attacked the legitimacy and credibility of the United States. This paper will explore the underlying motivations for their actions and their likelihood of success. Most importantly, it will analyze how US foreign policy can be amended in order to counter these attacks in a way that protects the rules-based order that has been the linchpin for foreign relations since the Cold War. Although there seems to be deep skepticism toward the US responsibility to continue its global leadership, these fears are unfounded and primacy remains the best option to protect US interests. US hegemony has allowed the diffusion of American ideals abroad, creating a more peaceful and democratic world. To willingly forfeit this mission out of obduracy or entrust this supreme responsibility to other states would have immense repercussions at home and abroad.

Description of Primacy

The main objective of primacy is to use US hegemony to shape an international order congenial to US interests and values.¹ Primacy is built on the supposition that a hegemonic power which surpasses other countries in economic, military, and political affairs can alter the international structure in a way that suffuses the hegemon's influence and values abroad.² It is important to delineate, however, that primacy should not be confused with imperialism, a manner of rule which is dependent on force. Rather, according to liberal primacy, the hegemon uses mutually agreed upon rules and institutions to alleviate the nature of the anarchy by lessening ambiguity and forming interconnected relationships.³ Institutional agreements, in the form of multilateral and bilateral agreements, increase the flow of information between participant nations and act as mechanisms for the provision of public goods, all of which facilitates cooperation and makes the behavior of states more predictable.⁴ These arrangements do constrain the autonomy of the unipolar state with its attendant responsibilities, such as providing security or managing the global economy, but the benefits these agreements confer to the hegemon – in the form of economic progress, military security, or diplomacy – outweigh the costs. Furthermore, the services it offers act as an incentive for member nations to lose a part of their sovereignty as well; it is more economical to accept the public goods the hegemon has to offer, goods that its recipients have greater difficulty in providing. Therefore, the liberal hegemon can be understood as not only possessing material capabilities but also acting as a “hub” around which other states connect and operate.⁵ The United States assumed this role at the end of the Second World War.

Following the Second World War, the United States acted as the “hub” which knitted together every major democratic power. Possessing extraordinary economic, military, and material reserves, the US effectively built a new international order reliant on multilateral alliances, strategic restraint, cooperative security, and open and institutionalized rule-based relations as a response to what it deemed national security concerns.⁶ Through its support of organizations such as NATO, the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, the US has fundamentally altered the makeup of international relations. In fact, these institutions not only cultivated a sense of reciprocal altruism, but also an appreciation for democratic norms, values which have continued to spread under US auspices. However, with the Soviet Union gone and US power beginning to attenuate (as some would claim), many have doubted the practicality of this foreign policy. With the costs of international hegemony beginning to rise, it is unjustified for the United States to continue shouldering the burden for the world's welfare; such a course of action, if continued, may even be dangerous. Still, the United States is the only country today which has the “ability to deploy and support the largest and best-equipped forces but also the capacity to preserve the social cohesion.”⁷ The world needs the US, especially at this point in time, both for its power and its ideals, to ensure that challengers who pose a threat to the rules-based order will be defeated or divested of their purpose. The United States should be fully committed to this policy, especially when

confronting adversaries such as China or Russia, and still retains the necessary resources to pursue this aim.

The Rise of China

Despite China's tumultuous journey from communism to market capitalism, the country has proven to be an implacable enemy of the rules-based system which has so painstakingly been created since the end of World War II. With an historically tempestuous relationship with the US, China has evolved into an economic giant, successfully rising from an extreme level of poverty to become one of the world's most productive economies, supplying goods to markets worldwide. Indeed, China's GDP has grown by a whopping 7.75 percent, compared to only 2.5 percent for the United States in the year 2015.⁸ This growth is predicted to eventually surpass the United States in economic output, though not in per capita income, in the year 2020.⁹ Though the world has acclimated itself to this new economic giant, this monumental success masks the growing acrimony which characterizes its behavior toward the United States.

China's economic expansion has been a topic of considerable discussion, and has had a generally salutary effect on the world economy; however, this is juxtaposed by China's growing military ambitions. Chinese technological innovation has allowed its military forces to achieve approximate parity to their US counterparts in a number of important military scenarios, including air superiority, anti-surface warfare, and airspace penetration.¹⁰ Furthermore, though China's nuclear arsenal is still numerically inferior to that of the US, the survivability of these weapon systems have increased throughout the last decade.¹¹ Perhaps the most disconcerting of China's military developments has been the creation of sophisticated missile systems designed to take out aircraft carriers, the first rate ship in the US Navy's arsenal.¹² This development is supplemented by a proliferation of Chinese submarines operating in areas such as the South China Sea; reports indicate that "between 1996 and 2015, the number of modern diesel submarines in China's inventory rose from 2 to 41, and all but 4 of these boats are armed with cruise missiles."¹³ Both of these activities will prove to be a substantial obstacle to the US Navy in the area if these assets are deployed. Unfortunately, it seems that the Chinese government has no compunctions toward doing this.

To the consternation of the world community, China has displayed a willingness to flex its military muscles when it deems its interests have not been adequately recognized. Accompanied by specious "peaceful" proclamations, it has arrogated a rather broad claim to the South China Sea, known as the area within the "nine-dash line," which is contested vehemently by Vietnam and the Philippines. This alarming trend has evoked the ire of these nations whose security and economic welfare are inextricably woven into that sea. For example, in 2012, China used patrol ships to prevail over the Philippines in a dispute over the Scarborough Shoal, and in 2016, a serious dispute erupted after a Chinese oil company installed a large oil rig in Vietnamese

waters.¹⁴ Coupled with these invidious actions have been concurrent island-building operations China has pursued. China has effectively “built” and reinforced various islands in the Spratly Archipelago and a section known as the Fiery Cross Reef.¹⁵ On these islands are “airstrips, ports, radar facilities, solar arrays, lighthouses and support buildings.¹⁶ If missile systems are placed on China’s territorial acquisitions near this important maritime route, specifically on the Scarborough Shoal, it will pose a severe threat to the US Navy operating in the area. Only a clear and cogent strategy by the US and its allies such as the Philippines, and Vietnam can nullify this threat. Yet, it is doubtful those allies would have the temerity to confront China without the support of the US; our stance is an essential determinant for the security of these nations. Hence, the belief that China poses no threat to the rules-based order, including the US, is not only quixotic, but simply dangerous. Indeed, China’s provocative behavior has not only manifested itself in its military posture, but also in its diplomatic efforts as well.

If we are to accept China’s newfound position in the world order, we must also expect it to adhere to a certain set of standards for governance, participation in international organizations, and environmental policies. However, China has not exemplified much of what the US or the international community should expect given its economic and military expansion. Indeed, despite its nominal participation in international organizations such as the UN, there is a litany of questionable actions China has committed with blatant disregard for international laws and resolutions. For instance, in October 2011, “China and Russia both vetoed an already weakened UN resolution condemning the Syrian regime’s human rights abuses.”¹⁷ Furthermore, these same two countries have habitually ignored the 1951 UN Convention which stipulates that refugees should not be returned to countries in which they are likely to be persecuted.¹⁸ Sometimes, this refusal turns into outright neglect. In 2016, China boycotted a UN tribunal which had enunciated a clear violation of Philippine sovereignty by Chinese maritime actions, stating the resolution was “ill founded,” and that they would not be bound by it.¹⁹ Coupled with widely known systemic intellectual property theft, China cannot be considered a role-model for other countries to aspire to. According to one major report, the Chinese government is still plagued by mass protests stemming from labor disputes, land acquisitions, forced demolitions, pollution, traffic accidents, and incidents involving ethnic groups.²⁰ The number of these incidents have risen each year from 2010.²¹ China’s behavior is simply unacceptable, and has affected US efforts to contain other threats, such as North Korea, as well.

North Korea has committed massive amounts of resources toward the development of nuclear tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), a pursuit which has largely been successful. Unlike China or the US, which have reaped the benefits of economic liberalization, North Korea is an autarkic, totalitarian country known mainly for its human rights abuses, extreme poverty, and the megalomaniacal behavior of its authoritarian leaders.²² In the year 2016 alone, North Korea tested over 26 missiles, of which ten were successful.²³ It has largely been speculated that the latest missile systems within North Korea’s arsenal are capable of hitting US soil.²⁴ Given North Korean propaganda that has repeatedly alluded to an eventual

war against the US “imperialists,” this development can no longer be ignored; just this past year, for instance, Kim Jong-un threatened to bomb the US island of Guam during a series of recriminations between US President Donald Trump.²⁵ Unfortunately, our capabilities are limited. Reports indicate that “SM-3 and THAAD interceptors have shown success against IRBMs in test environments [but] they cannot assure defense against multiple North Korean Hwasong-12 missiles in a real attack scenario.”²⁶ In short, there is little probability of the US successfully defending against a nuclear attack, in which numerous missiles are fired simultaneously. Furthermore, as articulated brilliantly by the journalist Mark Bowden, any military action to topple the regime or destroy its nuclear weapon systems have low chances of success.²⁷ Therefore, an attempt to successfully deter North Korea would have to include its only trading partner, China. This has proven to be an intractable issue because China’s relationship with North Korea, though it has not been without a fair number of disputes, has largely been congenial. This relationship has also been indirectly supported by a reluctant US, which has relinquished much of its previous sanction-based strategy against this threat.

Despite years of severe sanctions which have made nearly 90 percent of North Korean exports illegal and the nation-state’s legitimacy acknowledged by President Trump’s administration (who has taken Kim’s promises of denuclearization at face value), North Korea’s nuclear program is not going anywhere any time soon.²⁸ Indeed, it is difficult to see how the country would want to backtrack itself into placating the views of either the US or the UN when nuclear weapons were the key to its success; apparently, developing nuclear weapons is enough to make a “madman” an “honorable leader,” according to President Trump.²⁹ If the US were to reinstate its previously effective efforts at applying pressure to the regime, especially now that North Korea suspended further talks with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo earlier this December, it would be even more difficult to do so. Rather than continuing with the “maximum pressure” strategy, both South Korea and China have sought to ease tensions toward the country amidst Trump’s anomalous actions, placing the US in a quandary over supporting its ally South Korea or continuing to be taken advantage of by Kim’s duplicity.³⁰ If there is any hope of disabusing Kim of his desire for international recognition without jettisoning his growing arsenal, the US must continue to support UN Security resolutions, lead international cooperation of a multitude of other countries (something it has done many times already), and apply new sanctions. If the US refuses to remonstrate North Korea or its Chinese benefactor, other nations may become inspired to commit similar pernicious acts as well. Luckily, the US still retains the resources needed to prevent this from happening again.

US Power

Recent academia has become filled with prophetic works warning of the eventual decline of the US, especially as China seems to surpass the US in economic output. Whether through realist pundits such as Graham Allison, Christopher Layne, or John Mearsheimer, China’s ascendancy

has conjured growing fears that the period of American hegemony is over and that a policy of “offshore drilling” may be the only prudent foreign policy method we have, considering our newfound military and economic handicaps. Accepting these arguments, however, would have detrimental consequences, especially since the US still retains the capabilities necessary to confront these revisionist threats. Contrary to what these thinkers would have many believe, the US will remain a country that is both strong and wealthy.³¹ Despite the growth of China’s and India’s economies, this occurrence has only resulted in a mere 3.48 percentage point drop of the US share of world GDP from the year 1980 to 2010.³² Although many contemporary academics have a penchant for extolling China’s presumptive economic ascendancy, it is still too cursory to conclude America’s decline to be inevitable. As Professor Joseph Nye of Harvard University has indicated, per capita income, rather than overall GDP, is a more authoritative tool for gauging the sophistication of a nation’s economy.³³ Using this, it can be deduced with ease the relative disparity between the US and China; China’s economy, in terms of per capita income, will not equal that of the US until the second half of the century.³⁴

Estimates indicate that Chinese per capita income is under 12,000 USD, compared to the US’s 58,000 USD.³⁵ Furthermore, it is an economy dependent heavily upon legal and illegal copying of foreign technologies rather than domestic innovation.³⁶ This derivative economy has also exasperated existing social and economic inequalities; for all the benefits Deng Xiaoping’s embrace of capitalism has brought to China, it has only accentuated the growing inequitable distribution of income, which has led to pervasive domestic issues such as corruption, social inequality, a contentious urban-rural divide, and a growing gender gap. These exigencies are all insuperable challenges for the aging and maladaptive Communist government; it is improbable they can address these infirmities without a dramatic change in governance.

Considering the issues described above, a contentious foreign policy climate between the US and its allies in the region would not seem to be in China’s favor. Yet, in the case that it does provoke the US (which has already occurred), our superiority in hard and soft power will make it a lopsided contest. When comparing our military capabilities to China, we still retain a marked advantage. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies, the US spends more than four times as much on its military than does China, even though its expenditures result in a mere 3.3 percent of its GDP.³⁷ It is true that Chinese military capabilities have reached parity with some aspects of US military strength, but that is not to say they have attained parity in every domain. The same RAND report which noted approximate parity in US-China military strength also identified US military advantages in areas farther from the Chinese mainland. Although China has achieved equivalence in air superiority, airspace protection, and anti-surface warfare, these improvements are only applicable in areas close to the Chinese mainland, such as Taiwan.³⁸ In areas farther from the Chinese mainland, such as the South China Sea, the Straits of Malacca, or India, the US retains the advantage in anti-surface warfare, cyber warfare, and air superiority; China simply cannot project as much military force as the US can.³⁹ US military strength is also

buttressed by strong reserves of soft power intrinsic to American society.

Irrespective of military strength, which is limited at best, Chinese soft power is a critical impediment toward their best efforts at contriving a new world order. Globally, there is not much appeal for “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” and its malfeasance in international organizations has not been propitious for the communist regime. In contrast, this is an area the US excels in; as former President Barack Obama remarked, “When trouble comes up anywhere in the world, they don’t call Beijing, [...] They call us. That’s the deal.”⁴⁰ Apart from material resources, US society still retains:

...a durable political system, rule of law, vigorous free press and information media, and a competitive and adaptable economy, as well as strong traditions of entrepreneurship and innovation, leadership and critical mass in new technology, and a history of resilience and flexibility in overcoming adversity.⁴¹

All of these factors contribute to what Nye has coined America’s “Soft Power” and will keep the US in its position of relative dominance well into the 21st century.⁴² Though soft power is necessary for a range of objectives, however, it is insufficient to ensure both the security of the US and the defense of its ideals on its own. As the post-war construction of Germany and Japan indicate, soft power needs a suitable political climate in order to flourish;⁴³ the US cannot afford to wait until China has coerced all of its neighbors into submission. The US, in cooperation with the WTO and its allies, should do more to remonstrate China for the intellectual property theft, currency manipulation, military exercises, and human rights abuses that any form of Chinese expansionism portends. Furthermore, the US should continue reaffirming the defense pact with Japan and support strategic partners such as the Philippines and Vietnam whose sovereignty has been violated. It has already been proven that US military power is particularly adept in this regard, so deploying these resources should not be necessarily difficult. Hence, the US must not be content with its soft power and take more politically active measures to protect its ideals around the world and, most importantly, at home.

Putin and Russia

China’s aggressive behavior is surpassed only by the intrusive and nefarious deeds committed by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Indeed, establishing a political climate conducive to America’s soft power is particularly difficult when dealing with this opponent. In order to discern Putin’s actions, especially over his annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, it is important to explore the national identity of the Russian people in light of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. When the breakup of the Soviet Union occurred, it lost over two million miles of square territory, putting to shame an empire that had been contrived since the time of Peter the Great.⁴⁴ This resonates particularly hard with many native Russians and former loyalists to the Soviet Union, including President Putin himself. A Pew Research Center study found that in

countries such as Armenia, Moldova, Russia, and Belarus, at least half of their populations view the USSR's dissolution in 1991 as a bad thing for their countries.⁴⁵ Additionally, 58 percent of adults in Russia see Stalin's historical role in either a "very" or "mostly" positive light, compared with just 22 percent who feel the same way about Gorbachev.⁴⁶ With few natural borders and a history of foreign invasions, a sense of insecurity breeds a fierce and atavistic appreciation for power, a desire which President Putin harnesses to "protect" Russia against Western domination.⁴⁷ This has manifested itself both in Russia's domestic policy and its foreign policy.

Considering Putin's abhorrence of Western institutions and ideals, his annexation of Crimea in 2014 and his support of pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine is more ideologically based than strategic. In a speech recognizing the successful annexation of Crimea, Putin referred to the US as "constantly trying to sweep us [Russia] into a corner because we have an independent position."⁴⁸ Furthermore, he referred to the Eastern expansion of NATO as "making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory."⁴⁹ Yet, there are multiple inconsistencies in Putin's belief of a "humiliated" Russia. To start, there were no official agreements prohibiting the eastward expansion of NATO with Russia. Despite Russian military and economic attenuation, the US actually accorded Russia "great power status" on the UN Security Council.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Russia was invited into the Group of Eight, even though its economic and military power precluded it from joining.²¹ These facts prove that the Russian annexation of Crimea, contrary to what many realists believe, was not based on geopolitical concerns but mainly resulted from ideological reasons. If Putin really believed in a geopolitical solution to Ukraine, he could simply tell Angela Merkel, as Robert Manning speculates:

You accept the fait accompli in Crimea, guarantee a neutral Ukraine not in NATO, allow Ukraine and Russia a trade deal with EU, but allow Ukraine into Eurasian Union... lift all sanctions and return to pre-Ukraine relations, and I will withdraw all military forces, stop aiding rebels, and commit to no further use of force to change borders.⁵²

A weakened Ukraine would not seem to be in Russia's national security interests, yet Putin has escalated violence in the region solely to prove that Russia is still a great power.⁵³ Additionally, Putin has used domestic policy as an indirect affront to western values. Putin believes the west has strayed from its "Christian-occidental path and deteriorated into a hotbed of decadence, sin and...weakness."⁵⁴ Russian society, therefore, should represent Russia as a great eternal power. This has taken in the form of anti-homosexuality laws, the Dima Yakovlev law forbidding the adoption of Russian children by US citizens, the law to "protect religious feelings," and blatant falsifications of history.⁵⁵ Considering these unequivocal facts, it is chimerical to believe that Putin has somehow acted out of geopolitical concern. His actions, rather, are a testament to his own turpitude, brash behavior, and hatred of the west.

Strengthening NATO

Many critics of the continued US presence in Europe argue that the relatively small militaries of the European nations will eventually “balance out” a new and belligerent Russia. Furthermore, they contend, Putin would never dare launch an overt military occupation of Ukraine or any other Eastern European country because he does not have the manpower to do so. However, this cursory view does not take into account the other more nebulous ways Putin can tip the balance of power in his favor. In many Eastern European countries, particularly in the Baltic nations, there are sizable Russian minorities, providing Putin with a convenient excuse to threaten the sovereignty of these nations under the guise that he is responsible for the welfare of ethnic Russians.⁵⁶ A RAND study noted, “It is not hard to imagine a scenario in which Russia seeks to use the alleged “mistreatment” of the Russian minority in Estonia or Latvia as a pretext for making political demands on the two countries.”⁵⁷ Though a conventional military strike is certainly unlikely, Putin has at his hands a myriad of other ways he can surreptitiously bully these nations such as “deception, clandestine sabotage, and strategic ambiguity.”⁵⁸ This fact has been brazenly identified by the numerous forays of the Russian air force into Lithuanian airspace, a circumstance which caused NATO to scramble fighter jets a record 68 times.⁵⁹ On one occasion, Russian security operatives even kidnapped an officer of the Estonian Internal Security Service, dragging the officer at gunpoint in front of Russian cameras and charging the man with espionage.⁶⁰ All of these actions reinforce the image of a perfunctory NATO, delegitimizing the organization which has long been the bedrock for the peace and security of Europe. Unfortunately, Putin’s large and experienced conventional army, coupled with its near monopoly on oil in the region, has kept larger countries such as Germany and France from effectively countering these actions.

The Russian military is quite unique from its Western counterparts. Though it pales in comparison to the military capacity of the US, it has shown a remarkable level of ingenuity which academics and historians have likened a new military revolution. One of the most notable characteristics of this new military is its use of cyberattacks, a tactic first employed in the 2008 invasion of Georgia. In this operation, Russian hackers:

...broke into fifty-four Web sites serving the government, media, and banks. They stole military information and immobilized the nation’s Internet. Georgian officers struggled to send orders to troops, and bewildered citizens had no way to find out what was happening.⁶¹

During the annexation of Crimea, the Russians used “SMS messages to text Ukrainian frontline troops to demoralize their frontline forces [including] references to their wives and children back in Kyiv.”⁶² NATO servicemen stationed on the Russian border are also not exempt from this tactic. A common occurrence among Estonian conscripts, in close proximity to the Russian border, is the “creepy hiphop” music, which frequently appears on their phones, a prelude to having nearly all their data scrambled.⁶³ Buttressing these attacks have been the raw

military power of the Russian land forces. Current estimates suggest that the Russian military is numbered at about 776,000 personnel, approximately 78 percent of the intended target of 1 million men in uniform.⁶⁴ With over 350,000 combat soldiers, 757 main battle tanks, 1,200 combat aircraft, the Russian military is the most formidable opponent in Europe.⁶⁵ Coupled with its imposing size is the practical experience this organization has accumulated after military operations in Syria and Eastern Ukraine. This has been accomplished largely as a result of the Russian policy of rolling deployments, a process by which units are deployed on short tours ranging from three to four months, as opposed to ten to twelve months.⁶⁶ According to one report, this policy has provided much more practical experience than conventional military exercises, increasing the war-fighting capability of the Russian military even during times of economic hardship.⁶⁷ Indeed, “professional military service, especially now that it is relatively well paid, is an attractive career option in Russia’s current economic crisis.”⁶⁸

Current US actions against the Russian government in response to its forceful annexation of Crimea have been both dilatory and insufficient in dissuading Putin from continuing his recalcitrant behavior. For instance, at a time when the Ukrainian government pleaded for heavy military equipment including body armor, night vision goggles, and antitank weapons, to resist incursions into its territory by Russian backed insurgents, the Obama administration only sent field rations to support the beleaguered Ukrainian military.⁶⁹ To be fair, Obama did place punitive sanctions on Putin’s regime, but this has had only a marginal effect since the Russian economy slightly improved from 2014 to 2017.⁷⁰ Additionally, the US has largely remained aloof from negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, preferring to let Chancellor Merkel and former French President Hollande to take the lead in ceasefire talks.⁷¹ Entrusting this traditional US responsibility to nations which lack any effective military resources to counter Russia’s aggression cannot lead to a long term solution in Eastern Europe and will certainly fail to diffuse the connivance of our adversaries. Thus, the US remains the only country, armed with both its ideals and its military power, able to counter this threat.

NATO has been and continues to be the bedrock for the peace and security of Europe. However, it has grown weak in the modern era and must be infused with more US military support, especially for eastern European nations, including Ukraine. It can do this by furnishing weapons, munitions, and other essential supplies needed to defend against Putin’s forays. Indeed, when the Russian annexation of Crimea occurred, the Ukrainian air force was largely in a state of disrepair, whilst the army suffered from a lack of transportation and troops of doubtful loyalty.⁷² These military deficiencies are also apparent in other Baltic countries, such as Estonia, a nation which only has a 5,000 strong army and an air force with no jets.⁷³ This country has fulfilled its military spending to NATO and has expressed a fervent desire to retain its democracy.⁷⁴ The responsibility for their security lies not only on the shoulders of the US but also on Germany, the most powerful and economically prosperous European nation.

Unfortunately, this country has only garnered a tepid response from its citizens. With its

unwillingness to use force abroad, derived from the indelible impression of Nazism, Germany has deliberately remained ignorant of Putin's schemes. As Georgetown University Professor of Political Science Robert Lieber notes, "the reductions in Germany's defense budget to barely more than one percent of GDP is consistent with popular sentiment."⁷⁵ This attitude is largely reflective of the persisting fragility of the NATO alliance, whose members disagree on the course of action to take. Without unanimity among the European powers, or effective military resources, negotiations so far have lacked the impact that Europe's size, demographics, and economy should have dictated.⁷⁶ Currently, the United Kingdom is the only member of NATO which allocates more than the alliance's minimum of two percent defense spending.⁷⁷ In the year 1980, US spending took up over half of NATO's budget but now, it comprises over 72 percent.⁷⁸ The US must make clear to participant nations in NATO that they must devote more of their resources toward military spending. Having a Europe committed to the defense of both its physical security and its democratic ideals will serve as a permanent barrier to Putin's machinations.

Objections

The recent election of Donald Trump casts into doubt whether the US will pursue a policy based on primacy. The strongest objection to this foreign policy method has arisen from the neo-isolationist school of thought which has proffered numerous grievances toward the perceived failures of primacy in the 21st century following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These objections include the US handling of humanitarian concerns, nuclear proliferation, and efforts at regime change, all of which have accentuated the failures of American hegemony. Although these statements are well-intentioned, they are insufficient to seriously derogate the validity of primacy and rely on clear misunderstandings of the international order.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, the responsibility of the US in defending liberal hegemony should have been eased. After the Soviet Union's implosion, the US was the last remaining superpower whose preponderant supply of military and economic power should have made managing world affairs less difficult. However, new challenges arose as a result of unanticipated changes in international events, a phenomena which can be best described as the "weak state dilemma."⁷⁹ No longer needing to undergo the endless cycle of negotiations and build-ups characteristic of the Cold War, the US now had to traverse the intricacies posed by new states which "either attacked elements of their own population or failed to protect their own people from attacks."⁸⁰ These states lack the capacity to control events within their own borders, and their governmental authority is either extraordinarily weak or inchoate. Whether it be Bosnia, Somalia, or Iraq, during the 1990's, the US vacillated on what their responsibilities really were, considering the seemingly incorrigible issues they were called upon to solve. Although they were largely successful in ending violence in these

areas, such as the use of air strikes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the US still could not create capable governments which could ensure peace without external support.⁸¹ Furthermore, the US could not prevent developing nations from obtaining nuclear weapons of their own, a task which had been key to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty agreed upon by the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. In their quest for statehood, states such as Pakistan, India, and North Korea, created extensive stockpiles of nuclear weapons despite US protestations. These perceived failures were enough for some pundits to declare that liberal hegemony has failed ignominiously.

Because of the aforementioned events, some realist thinkers have erroneously concluded that the purpose of liberal hegemony is to promote some grand strategy directed toward diffusing peace through liberal democracy and international institutions, that the US possesses a subconscious yet inimical desire to spread its ideals abroad no matter the costs.⁸² The desire for this, the ultimate *bête noire* of realist doctrine, is often referred to as the “responsibility to protect” theorem, otherwise known as R2P, an idea which states that if a country is derelict in its treatment of its citizens, it is the duty of the world community to intervene according to humanitarian concerns.⁸³ The US, it must be admitted, retains an enigmatic relationship toward this ideal, oscillating between the need to protect innocents and the increasingly pejorative objective term of “national building.” Especially in light of the intervention in Libya, which began out of humanitarian concerns and evolved into regime change, some countries are dubious toward and have started protect against American machinations.⁸⁴ Indeed, Russia and China view this doctrine not as a way of preventing genocides or other human rights abuses, but as a facade the West can employ to intrude on their sovereignty. Instances such as these support the view that the role of primacy is not the protection of the American homeland, but some quixotic mission of proselytizing the world according to American ideals. Because of this, some may say, American hegemony has made the world less stable. Though these assertions may seem cogent, they are not enough to pierce the veracity of primacy.

It is true, American hegemony is reliant on principles such as liberal democracy, participation in international institutions, and economic openness, but it would be a grave mistake to believe that the promotion of these is its fundamental purpose. In fact, a more concise reading of primacy would read that the US should defend, spread, and deepen liberal values around the world where feasible. The easiest way of diffusing American hegemony is not through “nation-building” efforts, but through strengthening existing agreements and partnerships between reliable allies. In fact, a strategy of primacy does not have to include any stipulation which obliges a nation to forcefully interfere into the sovereignty of another state. Such occurrences would “violate the rights of an independent people struggling with its internal ills,” and could destabilize relations between other states, as had already occurred with the intervention in Libya.⁸⁵ This intervention, coupled with other US actions, have led countries such as Russia and China to be fearful that R2P and its truncated form of sovereignty could be used against them on the whim of decision-makers in Washington.⁸⁶ Yes, instances

such as the interventions in Somalia, Libya, or Iraq were mistakes, but this need not obviate the justification for primacy or the benefits it confers to the international community, such as security, economic progress, and, most importantly, a sense of predictability. R2P should not be confounded with primacy, a mistake which critics think invalidates the outlook altogether. Nothing could be farther from the truth, especially when current adversaries that are strong states with relative political maturity, such as Russia or China, have threatened the homeland directly, especially Russia.

Putin, Trump, 2016 election

In light of the Russian attempts at influencing the 2016 presidential election, a realist argument would conclude that, though Putin's actions are unacceptable, it does not harm the physical security of the US and, therefore, should not warrant continued US presence in Europe. These same people assume that if the US would forfeit its "overbearing" position in Europe, the nations of Western Europe would naturally "balance" Russian aggression. Although Russia has not jeopardized the physical security of the US, its activities have jeopardized the integrity of our nation's elections, ultimately seeking to affect the outcome of the 2016 Presidential election. When the very democratic processes necessary to ensure the peaceful transition of power are under attack, what other rationale exists for complacency? If the US chooses to turn a blind eye toward Russian intrusion in the Presidential election, it no longer supports the ideals which its founding and existence rest upon. Unfortunately, Russia does not need to harm the physical security of the US to succeed in accomplish this degradation.

It is an indisputable fact that Putin meddled in the 2016 Presidential election in order to heighten Donald Trump's chances of being elected President. According to the Obama administration, Putin was "setting out to encourage the 'breakup' of the European Union, destabilize NATO, and unnerve the object of his keenest resentment – the United States."⁸⁷ Hence, a political change in US foreign policy would grant Russia a "free reign in the post-Soviet space."⁸⁸ The first inkling of this desire was revealed by a tactic known as the "weaponized leak."⁸⁹ In early 2014, an aide to the Russian deputy prime minister tweeted a reference to part of a wiretapped conversation, posted soon afterward to YouTube, between Victoria Nuland, a US Assistant Secretary of State, and her colleague Geoffrey Pyatt, the US Ambassador in Ukraine. Nuland is heard saying "Fuck the EU" – a line that the Russians knew would cause difficulties between the Americans and their EU counterparts.⁹⁰ In the case of the 2016 Presidential election, the cyberattacks were just as simple and designed "to deepen an existing state of disarray and distrust" within the political electorate.⁹¹ This was done via the hacking of emails and the setting up of false identities on prominent social media sites. These tactics have been used to target other political figures, such as Angela Merkel in her bid for reelection in 2017, or to support political allies to the Kremlin, such as the right-wing candidate of the 2016

French Presidential election, Marine Le Pen.⁹² Thus, through the use of these cyberattacks, Putin can possibly tip the balance of power in Europe in his favor without ever directly harming the physical security of states. If the Trump administration were to give in to Putin's schemes, it would justify the enormous risks Putin has taken since 2014. However, if the US does not back down, "the Putin administration will be confronted with huge problems both domestically and in its foreign policy."⁹³ The US can still apply economic pressure to an already beleaguered Russian economy by lessening Europe's reliance on Russia oil via its own exports, strengthen the security of its domestic institutions, and use military maneuvers to deter against any future Russian incursions. It is time to face the fact that US incredulity has ubiquitous consequences both for the protection of its allies and of its homeland.

Conclusion

The US is at a critical moment in its history. Though it still has the capability to project its power in a positive way, it seems less willing to do so today. The consequences of inaction are already becoming salient as our political institutions at home become increasingly under attack by adversaries abroad. Remaining passive in the face of these revisionist powers will reverse the momentous gains the US and the free world have made since the Second World War. If the US still cherishes its liberal foundation yet refuses to continue its leadership of world affairs in accordance with those ideals, such would be the worst antinomy in its history. This will not happen as long as the people of the US believe in the responsibility to protect its ideals both at home and abroad.

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