

# Consent of the Governed in the International Order

A Monograph

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Fort Leavenworth, KS

2021

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 02-04-2021		2. REPORT TYPE MASTER'S MONOGRAPH		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUNE 20-MAY 21	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  Consent of the Governed in the International Order				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)  Colonel Alan R Johnson				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  ADVANCED STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP STUDIES PROGRAM				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT <p>Power and influence over global affairs are dominated by a US-led core of Western nations and are exercised within institutional constructs which they designed. States gave their consent to be governed, to some extent, by the international order based on the context immediately following the Second World War.</p> <p>Now, power balances are different, more complex, and more dynamic. The concept of universal norms and values, which initially seemed valid, appears increasingly naïve and irrelevant. Legitimacy and cohesion in the order are undermined because member states perceive the leadership of the liberal democratic order as acting in illiberal and undemocratic ways. Rising discontent combines with increased means and opportunity to diverge from the order.</p> <p>This monograph proposes lessons for the global ruling elite in addressing such divergence drawn from analysis of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, and the European Union's dealings with increasingly illiberal members. It recommends that the global order's leaders should be deliberate and objective in responding. Short-term and reactionary approaches based on flawed paradigms will be counterproductive. Leaders must accept that they cannot dominate and enforce in all domains and dimensions of power, must accommodate diversity in values, norms, and political systems, and should focus on managing consent rather than balancing power.</p> <p>This more nuanced, collaborative, and pragmatic approach to maintaining the consent of the governed in the global order will bring about better security and prosperity for the United States, and more stability and peace for the entire globe.</p>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES  61	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Dr. Philip E. Hultquist
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code) 913 758-3300

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Monograph Title: Consent of the Governed in the International Order

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## Abstract

Consent of the Governed in the International Order: A Monograph at the School of Advanced Military Studies, by Col Alan R. Johnson, 56 pages.

Power and influence over global affairs are dominated by a US-led core of Western nations and are exercised within institutional constructs which they designed. States gave their consent to be governed, to some extent, by the international order based on the context immediately following the Second World War.

Now, power balances are different, more complex, and more dynamic. The concept of universal norms and values, which initially seemed valid, appears increasingly naïve and irrelevant. Legitimacy and cohesion in the order are undermined because member states perceive the leadership of the liberal democratic order as acting in illiberal and undemocratic ways. Rising discontent combines with increased means and opportunity to diverge from the order.

This monograph proposes lessons for the global ruling elite in addressing such divergence drawn from analysis of the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, and the European Union's dealings with increasingly illiberal members. It recommends that the global order's leaders should be deliberate and objective in responding. Short-term and reactionary approaches based on flawed paradigms will be counterproductive. Leaders must accept that they cannot dominate and enforce in all domains and dimensions of power, must accommodate diversity in values, norms, and political systems, and should focus on managing consent rather than balancing power.

This more nuanced, collaborative, and pragmatic approach to maintaining the consent of the governed in the global order will bring about better security and prosperity for the United States, and more stability and peace for the entire globe.

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## Abbreviations

DIME	Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (instruments of power)
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICC	International Criminal Court
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WW2	World War Two

## Introduction: Power in the Global Order

Power and influence over global affairs are dominated by a US-led core of Western nations and are exercised within institutional constructs which they designed. States gave their consent to be governed, to some extent, by the international order based on the context immediately following the Second World War (WW2).

The global context has evolved but adaptations of the systems have not kept pace, and the essence of the global order has not changed. Worldwide membership of the United Nations (UN) and a victor's mindset after the Cold War reinforced the view that Western values are universal, but evidence increasingly challenges this idea. Uniting factors, such as the fear of world war, have diminished. WW2, the Cold War, and associated events weakened nations outside the Western tradition, such as Russia, China, and Japan, that were previously regionally and globally prominent. More recently, many such nations regained relative power. The comparative utility of different instruments of power has also changed. Modern dynamics in the information domain challenge the historical dominance of military and economic levers, and other instruments of power are increasingly significant in addition to the traditional "DIME" set of Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economic. These power shifts between nations and between types of power make the world less unipolar and increasingly multipolar.

Different international relations perspectives disagree about the source and nature of national interests and objectives, but all broadly agree that national governments seek to advance those interests through their international relations.<sup>1</sup> When they no longer perceive that the best

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<sup>1</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1967), 5; Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Introduction: The End of the Cold War in Europe," in *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991*, ed. Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye, and Stanley Hoffmann, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2-4; Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Longman, 1999), 18, 24.

way to manage and optimize their power, security, or wider goals is within the current order, they reduce or remove their consent to be governed by it. The global ruling elite could modify the order to reduce the concerns of discontented nations. The negative implications of failing to do so increase as the power of dissatisfied states increases. The evolution of power dynamics in the international context has been gradual and continuous since the genesis of the current international order, albeit punctuated by occasional step changes like the end of the Cold War. However, if the pace of geostrategic change continues to outstrip the pace of institutional adaptation, increasing tension will eventually break the binding forces of the global order.

This monograph explores how the current ruling elite could manage international power dynamics to sustain the international order and to reduce international conflict. Based on the premise that a more nuanced and complex hierarchy of nations is developing, it looks at the European Union (EU) as an example of a multipolar international structure from which the United States can draw lessons for managing the global order. The monograph proposes that continued American attempts to dominate and retain a hegemonic position in multiple spheres of power are unlikely to optimize their security and prosperity. A more nuanced and collaborative leadership approach with less absolute control will be more effective.

## Methodology and Definition of Terms

The term “international system” in this monograph refers to a set of inter-state relationships and dynamics prevalent at any particular point in time. It is agnostic of any specific set of rules, principles, or hierarchy; the international system may be ordered or disordered, designed or emergent, controlled or anarchic.

The terms “rules-based international order” and “global order” refer specifically to the current dominant arrangement of institutions, processes, and agreements which is based primarily in the United Nations (UN) and its subsidiary organizations and other arrangements including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and predecessor



arrangements. Central to the rules-based international order are the values and principles enshrined in the UN Charter, and the political and economic theories on which they are based.<sup>2</sup> These institutions are backed by powerful states. Since the Cold War ended, the system's structure has been unipolar with the United States of America as the hegemon.

The term "ruling elite" is a loose term that refers to those who have controlling power and influence in the system. Both the EU and the UN nominally treat all nations as equals and grant them one vote each on most issues.<sup>3</sup> However, the ability to shape agendas and to influence the choices of others is not equally distributed.<sup>4</sup> The ruling elite is not a clearly defined group. The particular set of nations with controlling power is different for different issues, but the ruling elite form the core of all or most of the groups with controlling power in all important areas.<sup>5</sup>

The essence of power transition theory is that differing rates of power growth between countries cause a reordering of the hierarchy. If a rising state is dissatisfied with the status quo and senses that it is gaining enough relative power to change the system or compete for the lead, they challenge the leading state. These dynamics increase the likelihood of conflict.<sup>6</sup> The theory has expanded in scope and application since Organski first described it,<sup>7</sup> but the classic examples from geopolitics remain the two German attempts to upend British supremacy, the transition from British to US leadership around WW2, and the Peloponnesian Wars.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations" (UN, October 24, 1945), chap. 1, accessed November 28, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, "Summary of the Building a Sustainable International Order Project" (RAND Corporation, 2018), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, and Doug Lemke, "Power Transition Theory," *Oxford Bibliographies*, June 27, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Abramo F. K Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968).

By examining dynamics in the EU, this monograph presents parallels and lessons for the global order over the next few decades that are more historically and culturally relevant than the dominant historical examples. It aims to blend realist, liberal and constructivist perspectives to minimize ideological biases in identifying lessons and their application.

Part one of the monograph considers three possible causes of increased dissatisfaction among rising states which, if not sufficiently addressed, could increase the likelihood of these states challenging the existing order. Part two examines how the EU's ruling elite addressed these causes in two areas: the departure of the United Kingdom (UK) from the EU, and the EU's relationship with member states who are deviating from the organization's values and principles. Finally, an inductive approach will lead to normative recommendations on how the United States could lead the international system through changing contexts. G. John Ikenberry's *After Victory* discusses new orders developing after conflict. Rather than catastrophic loss of hegemony this monograph investigates whether the global elite can slow the erosion of the order and break the cycle of hegemonic rise and fall thus forming an adapted order without the stimulus of global conflict.

Two superpowers emerged in the years following WW2. When the Soviet Union dissolved, the United States was the sole remaining superpower with military, economic, diplomatic, and cultural influence that far exceeded any other nation or any coherent political grouping of nations.<sup>8</sup> The rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, the development of the European Union, and the increased global influence of non-state actors, all serve to spread power more evenly. Just as businesses like IBM, Microsoft, and Nokia had to adopt new strategies as their market dominance declined, so the United States should consider both reactive and proactive strategic adaptations as its dominance declines.

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<sup>8</sup> Hans Köchler, "The United Nations Organization and Global Power Politics: The Antagonism between Power and Law and the Future of World Order," *Chinese Journal of International Law* 5, no. 2 (July 2006): 328.

The EU is a regional microcosm of the rules-based international order in many respects. The EU's goals and the UN's purposes have shared themes including peace, security, justice, human rights, and cooperation.<sup>9</sup> These similarities are no mere coincidence – both organizations started in the same historical context and the drafters of both were from similar cultures.

Another similarity with the international order is the presence in the EU's membership of increasingly illiberal nations. Such nations have diverged from the values and principles of the organization resulting in internal tensions.<sup>10</sup> The departure of the UK from the EU provides insights into national decisions on leaving a particular order and how the elite of that order deal with such events.

The formal level of economic integration is much higher, and power in the EU is more evenly distributed than in the global order. France and Germany (and the UK from 1973 until 2020) were and are the EU's strongest economies.<sup>11</sup> Although these nations have the most influence over the direction of the institution, they do not dominate to the extent that the United States dominates global affairs.

Examining the EU, therefore, yields useful lessons for wider international relations as the international system becomes more multipolar.

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<sup>9</sup> European Union, "Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union," *Official Journal of the European Union* 55 (October 26, 2012): 16,17; United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," 1.

<sup>10</sup> Kristin Archick, *The European Union: Questions and Answers* (Congressional Research Service, October 27, 2020), 1, accessed November 28, 2020, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS21372>; Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (December 11, 1997): 22.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank, "GDP (EU and UK)," *World Bank National Accounts Data*, last modified 2019, accessed November 29, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=EU-GB>.

## Part 1: Causes of Dissatisfaction

The following analysis considers three causes of system tension which are present in both the global order and the EU. First, the ruling elite does not appropriately adjust the system's constructs in response to changing power balances over time. Second, nations reorient on their traditional cultures, values, and sense of status rather than the "universal values" and hierarchy espoused by the rules-based order. Third, nations perceive the ruling elite's behaviors as decreasingly benevolent and increasingly self-serving.

### Power

When states perceive that there is a mismatch between their actual power and their ability to exercise that power, their resulting discontent can cause tension in the global order. Both the dominating and the dominated feel this tension. The United States is becoming less able to control the order while rising states see their own power increasing but they do not see the benefits.

Constructivist concepts explain why rising polities cannot simply exercise their increased power. The most influential designers of organizations can ensure that the structures, processes, and rules of the system give them an advantage in addition to their leadership and prominence in the organization.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, despite the principle and practice of sovereign equality,<sup>13</sup> the most influential designers have what Joseph Nye terms the "second face of power."<sup>14</sup> The design itself influences what issues are discussed, what positions are considered legitimate, and what

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Falk, "The United Nations After 40 Years," *Nation* 241, no. 8 (September 21, 1985): 233–234; Lama Z. Khouri, "The Normative Unconscious Of Nations: A Critical Geopolitical and Psychoanalytic Perspectives on the United Nations Security Council's Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 16, no. 4 (December 2019): 247.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," 1; European Union, "Consolidated Versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union," 18.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph S Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York, NY: PublicAffairs, 2011), 12–14; Köchler, "The United Nations Organization and Global Power Politics," 325.

outcomes are feasible. If this means that a state cannot effectively address its grievances or further its interests from within the construct, self-interest drives that state to seek alternative approaches.

Power in “traditional” domains, such as diplomatic, military, and economic indicators, ordered the hierarchy at the beginning of the rules-based international order and continues to maintain it. This is particularly the case for the United States whose leadership correlates with a dominant military and economic position. Global actors that have more recently developed considerable power in the information domain, in the cyber realm, and through cultural or social influence find that the system does not account for their power in these “new” domains and that the system is ill-equipped to deal with international dynamics in such areas.<sup>15</sup> The resultant frustration adds to discontent and tension.

The victorious Second World War allies, the United States, the UK, the Soviet Union, and China, sponsored the San Francisco Conference where fifty nations designed and agreed on the current rules-based international order. The principal architects of the UN were traditional realists who saw “materialistic calculations of power politics” as the basis of international relations.<sup>16</sup> These leaders saw the UN variously as a public relations device or a tool to achieve a “global supervisory role,” using the UN as an extension of the nation state, not as a liberal endeavor.<sup>17</sup> Motivations including peace and altruism may have influenced the design, but self-interest permeated the project through conscious effort, unconscious biases, and cultural perspectives.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Nye, *The Future of Power*, 81–84, 113–118.

<sup>16</sup> Falk, “The United Nations After 40 Years,” 232.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 232–235.

<sup>18</sup> Köchler, “The United Nations Organization and Global Power Politics,” 324; Christof Heyns and Willem Gravett, “‘To Save Succeeding Generations from the Scourge of War’: Jan Smuts and the Ideological Foundations of the United Nations,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2017): 574–575.

The power balance during the San Francisco Conference allowed the five leading nations (the four sponsors plus France) to be the most influential designers. They secured permanent seats and veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) despite opposition from other nations.<sup>19</sup> The power balance has changed since then but those with veto power can use it to maintain their positions in the organization. More widely, the mechanisms of the UN favor the leading architects. A Royal United Services Institute paper states that “competitive advantage should be defined as structuring the rules of competition to enable the use of one’s own comparative advantages and curtail those of one’s opponents.”<sup>20</sup> It is this competitive advantage that remains with the lead designers.

While Russia and China have nominally powerful positions as veto holders, the philosophical and political basis of the UN is not aligned with their traditional or current philosophical and political positions. This is true whether considering the Republic of China or the People’s Republic of China. The Western allies included China and Russia in the “big five,” not because they shared the values, but because as victorious allies they were key to agreement, and as major powers, their inclusion was essential for ongoing global power balance. A feature of the UN structure is that the permanent five have never been able to wield power based on their nominal position due in part to wide ideological and political divisions. Sharing the veto with China and Russia sacrificed freedom of action for the stability of the construct. The real power is with those who designed the construct for their own advantage. The values, politics, and norms, are all cast in an Anglo-America mold while the veto ensures that others in the organization cannot change the foundational design.

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations, “History of the United Nations, 1945: The San Francisco Conference,” accessed December 9, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/history-united-nations-charter/1945-san-francisco-conference/index.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Roberts and Sidharth Kaushal, *Competitive Advantage and Rules in Persistent Competitions*, Occasional Papers (Royal United Services Institute, April 2020), v.

Alexander Wendt suggests, “it is collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize our actions.”<sup>21</sup> The structures and the power that the structures confer therefore depend on members agreeing to collective meaning. As some states choose to depart from the collective understanding of meanings, the structures lose effectiveness. Thus, attempts by China and Russia to undermine the rules-based international system<sup>22</sup> perhaps pose a greater threat to American and Western interests than any potential military attack. A 2018 RAND report asserts that,

The essential bargain of the order was always built on collective self-interest. If key states and populaces come to doubt that the habits, norms, and institutions of the order offer strategic and, especially, economic value, it is likely to collapse... [T]he most significant overarching threat to the postwar order comes not from direct challenges by states but from rising grievances against the order’s underlying socioeconomic consensus.<sup>23</sup>

A realist explanation of power shifts is that nations whose military and economic power was significantly reduced by WW2, and nations whose military and economic power was suppressed by colonial rule, have had seventy-five years to rebuild. In 1945, such countries had little choice but to accept the proposed design of the rules-based international order, but their increased power now brings increased choice. Most notably, China’s economic power has increased considerably since 2005, both in real terms and relative to the United States,<sup>24</sup> yet its influence in the rules-based international order has not grown alongside. At the same time, small democracies like the Scandinavian nations, whose value systems align very closely with the

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 379.

<sup>22</sup> Keith B. Payne and John S. Foster, “Russian Strategy Expansion, Crisis and Conflict,” *Comparative Strategy* 36, no. 1 (January 2017): 7; Mazarr, “Summary of the Building a Sustainable International Order Project,” 17.

<sup>23</sup> Mazarr, “Summary of the Building a Sustainable International Order Project,” 6.

<sup>24</sup> Yves-Heng Lim, “How (Dis)Satisfied Is China? A Power Transition Theory Perspective,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 92 (March 4, 2015): 280; World Bank, “GDP (World Top Ten),” *World Bank National Accounts Data*, last modified 2019, accessed December 2, 2020, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2019&locations=US-CN-JP-DE-IN-GB-FR-IT-BR-CA&most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true&start=1990](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2019&locations=US-CN-JP-DE-IN-GB-FR-IT-BR-CA&most_recent_value_desc=true&start=1990).

stated values of the order, appear to have a greater influence in global affairs.<sup>25</sup> As discontented states increasingly reject the order, the leading states have less incentive and ability to use institutions as tools of control.<sup>26</sup> This double erosion of the system will be self-reinforcing if not addressed.

Economic and military metrics are the most used means to assess and compare national power in the context of security. A more nuanced measure, the Composite Indicator of National Capabilities also accounts for industrial and demographic indicators.<sup>27</sup> However, all such measurements are efforts to quantify the largely unquantifiable.<sup>28</sup> As Nye describes, power has many definitions, forms, and contributing factors.<sup>29</sup> At a global level, power is increasingly decided by much more than size of territory, population, military, or wealth. Factors such as power in the information domain, power to act in cyberspace, and power to influence populations through culture, are increasingly available to nations that lacked global power and position after WW2. American military dominance, particularly since the end of the Cold War may have accelerated this trend. Unable to directly counter or balance the United States, countries such as China and Russia chose not to strive to match American strength but to circumvent it.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Novosad and Eric Werker, “Who Runs the International System? Power and the Staffing of the United Nations Secretariat,” *Harvard Business School Working Paper* 15–018 (September 2014): 31.

<sup>26</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*, Princeton studies in international history and politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly M. Kadera and Gerald L. Sorokin, “Measuring National Power,” *International Interactions* 30, no. 3 (July 2004): 211–213.

<sup>28</sup> Michael Beckley, “The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters,” *International Security* 43, no. 2 (2018): 8.

<sup>29</sup> Nye, *The Future of Power*, 5–10.

<sup>30</sup> Jon R. Lindsay and Erik Gartzke, eds., *Cross-Domain Deterrence: Strategy in an Era of Complexity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3; Richard A. Clarke and Robert K. Knake, *The Fifth Domain: Defending Our Country, Our Companies, and Ourselves in the Age of Cyber Threats* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 220.



Shifts of power to less traditional instruments of power mean that nations which are more reliant on military and economic power have less freedom and ability to achieve their will<sup>31</sup> while those with more aptitude in the “new” domains have increased influence. The rules-based international order does not account for such power shifts in its constructs. The system has yet to develop the ability to oversee effectively in these domains to control or moderate power in the same way that it can in the military and economic spheres.<sup>32</sup> Power dynamics are, therefore, increasingly exercised outside of the constructs and controls of the international rules-based order.

Democratic Peace Theory, the idea that like-minded democracies do not fight each other, has a prominent place in Western geopolitical thought and the strategies of the global order’s ruling elite. While the theory correlates well with reality in terms of militarized conflict, it applies less well to diplomatic, informational, or economic conflict.<sup>33</sup>

The rules-based international order is therefore becoming less relevant as “a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations”<sup>34</sup> and less effective in “the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace.”<sup>35</sup>

## Culture

The most influential architects of the current international order not only designed it for their benefit, they also designed it based on their biases and value judgments.<sup>36</sup> The Western and

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “The End of the American Era.,” *National Interest*, no. 116 (December 11, 2011): 7.

<sup>32</sup> General Sir Nick Carter, “Chief of Defence Staff Speech RUSI Annual Lecture” (speech at the Royal United Services Institute, London, December 17, 2020), accessed January 10, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-defence-staff-at-rusi-annual-lecture>.

<sup>33</sup> Heather Chingono, “The Nexus between the Democratic Peace Theory and Economic Coercion: Why Democracies Fight Each Other?” *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 62.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations, “Charter of the United Nations,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Heyns and Gravett, “To Save Succeeding Generations from the Scourge of War,” 598.

Judeo-Christian basis of these norms were alien to or only partially shared by nations from other backgrounds. The distinctions largely remain.<sup>37</sup> All members of the emerging order saw the correlation between WW2 victors and these values, but the leading designers saw this as evidence of the superiority of their norms. The link between national culture and history on the one hand, and values, principles, and rationality on the other, is neither absolute nor permanent. However, active efforts cannot easily or quickly alter the relationship between the two.<sup>38</sup>

The global order now declares such values and the rights that flow from them as “inalienable,” “fundamental,” or “universal.”<sup>39</sup> More than a positive view of democracy and liberalism, it was, and remains, a negative view of non-democratic nations as being less advanced and as threats to the order.<sup>40</sup> Inaccurate threat perception by the West, incongruous democratization, and fear elsewhere that Western powers could arrive and impose an alien system, may combine to increase the likelihood of conflict.<sup>41</sup>

As with other aspects of the order discussed above, nations from non-Western backgrounds had little choice but to agree to the Western assertions at the founding of the order.<sup>42</sup> Some nations seemed to accept that the proclaimed universal norms were on the path to peace and

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<sup>37</sup> John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Vladimir Baranovsky, “Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?,” *International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2000): 445–447; Marina Ottaway, “Democratic Reversals,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, last modified Summer/Fall 2000, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2000/07/01/democratic-reversals-pub-763>.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (United Nations, December 10, 1948), accessed December 9, 2020, [https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR\\_Translations/eng.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Barbara Farnham, “The Theory of Democratic Peace and Threat Perception,” *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 2003): 395–398.

<sup>41</sup> D. Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 181; Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratization and the Danger of War,” *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 5.

<sup>42</sup> Ayşe Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West*, Cambridge studies in international relations 118 (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 85.

prosperity and attempted to adopt them.<sup>43</sup> However, "... the most earnest and heartfelt efforts to imitate some foreign model can never entirely succeed..."<sup>44</sup> As the dynamics which originally encouraged acceptance lessen, so the dissonance felt in non-Western nations increases and restraints on remedial action decrease.

After both WW2 and the Cold War, the West's successes reinforced assumptions that liberal democracy was objectively superior to alternatives. Hobson's revisionist argument is that Eurocentric conceptions govern the theory and structure of the international system but moreover, these conceptions are proactively designed and maintained to defend and promote the West.<sup>45</sup>

Even if the stated values and principles are, to some degree, a façade or a veneer of legitimacy for self-interest, they are pervasive in the structures, agendas, organizations, and power relationships in the global order.<sup>46</sup> The idea of the "common good" is bound up in culturally specific moral judgments.<sup>47</sup> The dominance of Western norms also contributes to a sense of stigma for the "outsider" nations. Whether these outsiders were truly persuaded by Westernism or not, they expected that conformity would bring legitimization and esteem.<sup>48</sup>

The tension between a nation's own culture, and the culture of thought and action demanded by the international system, is not static. National culture can change but the values of the international order also change. This latter change causes particular tension since the direction and pace of change are governed almost exclusively by the Western ruling elite who determine

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>44</sup> William H. McNeill, "A Defence of World History: The Prothero Lecture," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (1982): 77.

<sup>45</sup> Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, 1; Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony: The Unraveling of the American Global Order* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 64.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, 2. ed., repr. (London: Macmillan, 1989), 225–226.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>48</sup> Khouri, "The Normative Unconscious Of Nations," 248; Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 15,29.

which variations are acceptable and desirable.<sup>49</sup> Examples include the “responsibility-to-protect” doctrine and championing of certain minority rights.<sup>50</sup>

Sovereign nations may choose to “convert” to a previously alien system of norms for a variety of reasons. It may also be that the nation believes that its economic, diplomatic, and security interests are better served within the dominant system even if this means accepting internal tension for a time.<sup>51</sup> Particularly after defeat, there could be an internal debate over whether one’s value system was indeed inferior to the victor’s value system. The psychological reasons for joining, like seeking acceptance, esteem, and addressing feelings of being an inferior outsider, are perhaps as prevalent as pragmatic reasons but are more difficult to prove and less likely to be publicly declared as justifications.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the reasons, the people of the converting nation must pay an emotional price for “joining a system of states with very specific cultural origins – the rules of which they did not create, the norms of which were unfamiliar at best...”<sup>53</sup> If this is true, the majority of the world’s people are in this condition.

There are many examples, both from the post-WW2 period and the post-Cold War period of states emulating or adopting Western systems for the first time. There are almost as many outcomes: some successful and others which ended with failure and a return to previous systems. Some merely tried to give the impression of converting so that they could reap the benefits without paying the price. Others considered Westernization but decided not to or only did so in limited ways.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, 2; Köchler, “The United Nations Organization and Global Power Politics,” 326–327.

<sup>50</sup> Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 58, 95.

<sup>51</sup> R. P. Bootle, *The Trouble with Europe: Why the EU Isn’t Working, How It Can Be Reformed, What Could Take Its Place* (London; Boston: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2014), 12–13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Ivan Krastev, “Eastern Europe’s Illiberal Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (June 2018): 49.

After WW2 both the Republic of China and, since 1971, the People's Republic of China, played their part in the UN as a permanent member of the Security Council at least to an extent. However, the political and economic system within China retained a character based largely on their own culture and history. The nature of the Chinese system evolved through revolution and changes of leadership, but it has always been definitively more Chinese than Western. In the late 1990s, the Chinese Communist Party conducted internal debates where serious consideration was given to adopting, over the long-term, a more pluralist political system and Western-style democracy.<sup>55</sup> Although they ultimately decided not to, they adopted elements of Western approaches, particularly in the economic and industrial realms, both at the time and since.<sup>56</sup>

The widespread view in the West was that China's transition to full alignment with the liberal order was slow but inevitable. Increased integration with the rest of the world would, over time, bring them in line.<sup>57</sup> As history unfolds, assumptions about Chinese liberalization look increasingly misplaced.<sup>58</sup>

Not only is Westernization not inevitable, but it is also reversible. Russia is the dominant and most high-impact example of retreat from the order's norms although examples from South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia are numerous.<sup>59</sup> Under Gorbachev, Russia began to embrace Western concepts. Many former Soviet states did so more enthusiastically.<sup>60</sup> Russia's attempts to

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<sup>55</sup> The Honourable Kevin Rudd, "Understanding China's Rise Under Xi Jinping," (speech to Cadets, United States Military Academy, West Point, March 5, 2018), [https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/Understanding China's Rise Under Xi Jinping\\_1.pdf](https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/Understanding%20China's%20Rise%20Under%20Xi%20Jinping_1.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> CaspianReport, *Understanding the Chinese Mindset*, 2017, accessed January 15, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xD1nDGeiSAs>.

<sup>57</sup> Rudd, "Understanding China's Rise Under Xi Jinping," 6.

<sup>58</sup> Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Ottaway, "Democratic Reversals."

<sup>60</sup> M. Steven Fish, "The Hazards of Half-Measures: Perestroika and the Failure of Post-Soviet Democratization.," *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 2 (2005): 245.

emulate the West continued until Putin reversed the trend.<sup>61</sup> Whether the failure was in Russian adaption, Western accommodation, or fundamental incompatibility, the strong link between culture and Russia's national interests and ambitions is broadly accepted.<sup>62</sup>

Pirsig's analogy applies here: "if a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory."<sup>63</sup> Gorbachev and Yeltsin dismantled the "factory" of Communism, but the rationality of Russia could not sustain a "factory" of Western liberal democracy and so eventually, and inevitably, Russia's ruling elite under Putin constructed another "factory" based on specifically a Russian rationality, albeit one not shared by all Russians.

Emulation of alien concepts brings persistent internal cohesion consequences, and states that try remain unable, for years or decades, to shed their status as "outsiders."<sup>64</sup> The tension is greater if the pace of policy reform is too fast for the society to adapt. In this way, the international community may have been unwittingly contributing to the rejection of Western concepts by pushing for change too rapidly. The evolution of norms in the United States and the leading European democracies happened gradually over many years; there is little evidence to conclude that significantly faster evolutions can be forced in other countries.<sup>65</sup>

It would be simplistic to claim that while weaker nations must comply with the demands of the global order, China and Russia have not embraced Westernism because they have the power to choose another path. However, those nations that have more freedom to choose, align

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<sup>61</sup> Payne and Foster, "Russian Strategy Expansion, Crisis and Conflict.," 2.

<sup>62</sup> Baranovsky, "Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?," 448, 447; John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy.," *Eurasian Geography & Economics* 55, no. 3 (June 2014): 251–252.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Pirsig M, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*, 2005th ed. (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 98.

<sup>64</sup> Khouri, "The Normative Unconscious Of Nations," 248; Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 15,29.

<sup>65</sup> Ottaway, "Democratic Reversals."

more closely to their traditional values, cultural approaches to governance, and conceptions of legitimacy and rationality. This suggests an important link between a nation's culture and the governance models that will work sustainably within that nation. As Zaman notes, that link is evident throughout history.<sup>66</sup> The current international order does not recognize this link in its foundational principles.

The link between culture, values, and rationality has serious implications for the West's approach to conflict and to the persistent, often hostile, non-military competition that characterizes current geopolitics. In war, assuming universal rationality can lead to miscalculation of the enemy's intent and action.<sup>67</sup> In competition, the same is true. Miscalculations, miscommunications, and ill-fitting systems favor no one.<sup>68</sup>

E. H. Carr describes totalitarianism as a symptom, rather than a cause of declining consent in a system.<sup>69</sup> Likewise, the global ruling elite should consider democracy to be a symptom of a complex mix of historical, cultural, social, economic, and political factors, rather than an essential precondition from which desired outcomes in the international order flow.

## Elite Behavior

This section explores how the behavior of a system's ruling elite affects members' willingness to fall under its governance. Lessons from Athens over 2,400 years ago show how hubris and alienation of former allies can flow from dominance. Such lessons have parallels with the modern world.<sup>70</sup> E. H. Carr reminds us that international harmony requires "tolerant and

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<sup>66</sup> Rashed Uz Zaman, "Strategic Culture: A 'Cultural' Understanding of War," *Comparative Strategy* 28, no. 1 (February 18, 2009): 71–72.

<sup>67</sup> Donald J. Stoker, *Why America Loses Wars: Limited War and US Strategy from the Korean War to the Present* (Cambridge, United Kingdom; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 27, 39.

<sup>68</sup> Mansfield and Snyder, "Democratization and the Danger of War.," 5.

<sup>69</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, 225.

<sup>70</sup> Martin L. Cook, *The Moral Warrior: Ethics and Service in the U.S. Military*, SUNY series, ethics and the military profession (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 6–8.

unoppressive” leadership.<sup>71</sup> More recently, Ikenberry argues that those who wish to have power over others in the international system should limit the exercise of their power to make their position acceptable.<sup>72</sup>

Since “mankind will in the long run always revolt against naked power”<sup>73</sup> the ruling elite’s behavior and how they manage perceptions must adapt to changing context.

Sufficient general consent of the world’s sovereign nations is a condition of a stable world order.<sup>74</sup> The United States Declaration of Independence considers the consent of the governed as the source of the governing entity’s power. Although coercion and suppression are means to gain compliance or forced consent, the concept generally refers to a benevolent elite acting with justice and reacting to the freely expressed desires of the governed.

The section on culture highlights some difficulties with the concept at the international level. First, that ideas of justice vary across cultures, and second, that the desires of the governed are more varied, and there is more potential for clashes of desires, as the scale increases.<sup>75</sup> Liddell Hart’s proposed solution is to pursue diversity, mutual toleration, and recognition, which he argues will achieve peace and progress more effectively than trying to suppress differences.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Henry Kissinger argues that stability in the world order requires fostering “a perception of a joint enterprise that is not just about buying into an American project.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, 236.

<sup>72</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, xi.

<sup>73</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, 235–236.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>75</sup> Enrico Spolarore, “National Borders and the Size of Nations,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, ed. Donald A. Wittman and Barry R. Weingast, The Oxford handbooks of political science (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr, 2008), 781–782.

<sup>76</sup> Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York, NY: Meridian, 1991), 354.

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, “World Chaos and World Order: Conversations With Henry Kissinger,” *The Atlantic*, November 10, 2016, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/>.



The historical examples from ancient Athens to WW2 show that increasing tension between the leader and the led in a political system is common and likely. Michel's Iron Law of Oligarchy goes further and suggests that it is inevitable. The "law" claims that there are a series of causal links from organization, to bureaucracy, to concentration of power, to corruption.<sup>78</sup> In this context, power "corrupts" the elite's motivation which becomes the defense of their position rather than the defense of the organization's ideals and its members' interests. Wendt argues that identity defines interests from which we could conclude that identifying as the leader of the global order leads to an interest in maintaining that position and the order above all else.<sup>79</sup> A supporting constructivist view from Köchler claims that the foundational principles and structures of the UN contribute to this dynamic by permitting unilateral actions of the most powerful.<sup>80</sup>

Critics of the current global leadership point to the US-led actions in Kosovo and Iraq as prime examples of the powerful nations going against the collective will, values, and rules of the organization while simultaneously using other values and principles of the system as justification for their actions.<sup>81</sup> The United States has not ratified the UN Convention on the law of the Sea (UNCLOS) or the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Such exemptionalism is a natural consequence of exceptionalism and is a persistent characteristic in American international relations.<sup>82</sup> The arguments in all examples are complex, and opinion depends to a large degree on perspective, but the outcome is that international actors who already had a strained relationship with the leadership see double-standards and thus further lose any sense of

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<sup>78</sup> Darcy K. Leach, "The Iron Law of What Again? Conceptualizing Oligarchy across Organizational Forms," *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 3 (2005): 313.

<sup>79</sup> Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It," 398.

<sup>80</sup> Köchler, "The United Nations Organization and Global Power Politics," 324.

<sup>81</sup> Cook, *The Moral Warrior*, chap. 9; Nadezhda K. Arbatova and Alexander A. Dynkin, "World Order after Ukraine," *Survival* 58, no. 1 (March 2016): 71–90.

<sup>82</sup> Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power*, 34; Stephen M. Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy* Spring, 1998, no. 110, Special Edition: Frontiers of Knowledge (n.d.): 43.

joint enterprise.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, as America exempts itself from and distances itself from the international order, it compounds its losses of legitimacy, power, and influence.<sup>84</sup>

During the Cold War, most states faced a binary choice between a security and economic relationship with the liberal West or the communist Soviets. Even then, the Non-Aligned Movement showed that a middle path could be steered.<sup>85</sup> Now, in an increasingly multipolar world, flexible and nuanced alignments are even more achievable and potentially more beneficial. As global power dissipates both within and between various instruments of power, states may pursue a more complex network of relationships.<sup>86</sup> Increasingly, nations can look to different centers of power for different services. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative has created examples of nations who, for example, look to China for infrastructure investment, NATO for security, and the EU for diplomatic leverage on the world stage. Variations of this example with different services and different providers are found across the globe.<sup>87</sup>

Yet the United States has at times demanded an all-or-nothing approach. President George W. Bush, when he launched his anti-terrorism strategy following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, said “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”<sup>88</sup> While superficially a straightforward choice for lawful governments, the implication is that those who do not strongly support, in both words and deeds, the nature and extent of the American response are guilty of

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<sup>83</sup> Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 91–92.

<sup>84</sup> Shruti Ravikumar, “Adrift at Sea,” *Harvard International Review* 22, no. 2 (2000): 41.

<sup>85</sup> Lorenz M. Lüthi, “The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War, 1961-1973.,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 18, no. 4 (2016): 98.

<sup>86</sup> Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 64, 112.

<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Broder, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Does It Pose a Threat to the West?,” *CQ Researcher* 29, no. 4 (January 25, 2019): 1–55; Bilahari Kausikan, “The Sovereignty of Small States,” January 26, 2015, accessed January 9, 2021, <https://ipscommons.sg/sp2015-speech-by-ambassador-bilahari-kausikan/>; Terry Mobley, “The Belt and Road Initiative: Insights from China’s Backyard,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Fall 2019): 52,53,67,68.

<sup>88</sup> The White House, “President Declares ‘Freedom at War with Fear,’” *The White House*, accessed January 16, 2021, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

supporting terrorists. The option to support counter-radicalization but to oppose military operations in Afghanistan, for example, was implicitly excluded. The Bush example, although perhaps largely a rhetorical device at a time of elevated national emotion, represents a general sense that American foreign policy views other international actors as either fully with the United States or as adversaries. The withdrawal of US assistance from countries that accept significant Chinese investment contributes to this view.<sup>89</sup> Even the term “Great Power Competition”<sup>90</sup> implies a world in which the minnows must pick a side and play their part as directed by their “Great” team captain.

The transition from *hegemonia* to *despoteia* may be gradual or it may be that the realization of *despoteia* dawns slowly on those under domination.<sup>91</sup> The extent to which a global actor accepts the legitimacy of the hegemon governs that actor’s perceived need to conduct classic realist balancing of the hegemon’s power.<sup>92</sup> Proactive actions to maintain and rebuild the legitimacy of the global order will reduce the likelihood of challenge.

## Part 2: The European Union

This part of the monograph investigates how the EU’s structures, actions, and leadership have succeeded or failed to address the causes discussed in Part 1. Looking first at the UK’s departure from the EU, known as Brexit, the analysis considers factors that encourage or discourage continued membership of an international order. The second case study analyzes

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<sup>89</sup> Broder, “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Does It Pose a Threat to the West?”

<sup>90</sup> Alexander Boroff, “What Is Great-Power Competition, Anyway?,” *Modern War Institute*, last modified April 17, 2020, accessed January 18, 2021, /great-power-competition-anyway/; The President of the United States of America, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America 2017” (The White House, December 2017), 27, accessed July 19, 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power*, 103.

<sup>92</sup> Mazarr, “Summary of the Building a Sustainable International Order Project,” 10, 16.

rising illiberalism within the EU. Here, the focus is the EU's attempts to improve compliance and alleviate or tolerate tension in the system.

Both cases have relevance to the international order. Looking at Brexit will yield insights into how the global ruling elite might deal with states who no longer believe that they benefit most from operating within the international order. In some cases, the dissenters are seeking alternative providers of global services, in other examples, notably in the cases of China and Russia, they wish to become the provider of choice. The analysis of rising illiberalism has application to a global system in which hope is fading of cooperation based on universally agreed values and common principles.

A historical overview of post-WW2 European integration sets the context for the discussion.

In the aftermath of WW2, nations of Europe came together with the idea that economic cooperation would lead to greater interdependence between historically adversarial nations and therefore reduce the chance of conflict.<sup>93</sup> In 1951 six founding states (Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) established the European Coal and Steel Community, and in 1958, they formed the European Economic Community (EEC). Since then, twenty-two other nations joined, the organization became "The European Union," the focus broadened significantly from economics to wider politics, one nation left the organization, and seven are currently preparing for possible membership.<sup>94</sup> The multi-step, increasing scope and depth of integration is a deliberate part of the founders' intent.<sup>95</sup> From cooperation on coal and steel, the EU now has a single market across its membership, many members are in the Schengen zone of

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<sup>93</sup> Pascal Fontaine, European Commission, and Directorate-General Communication, *Europe in 12 Lessons*, 2018, 4, accessed November 28, 2020, <https://dx.publications.europa.eu/10.2775/206900>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

<sup>95</sup> Bootle, *The Trouble with Europe*, 9–12.

passport-free travel, structures are in place to increasingly align foreign and security policies, and EU law has primacy over national law.<sup>96</sup>

France, Germany (West Germany before reunification), and the UK (from 1973 to 2020) were and are Europe's strongest economies. Over the last decade combined they delivered around 50% of the EU's total GDP and more than half of the EU's total defense spending. The UK left the EU in 2020 after a narrow win for the "Leave" campaign in 2016.<sup>97</sup> Germany and France now account for around 42% of the EU's total GDP.<sup>98</sup> Throughout the history of the EU and its predecessor organizations, these two (or three) nations were also the most powerful and influential.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the EU's structural and cultural heritage stems from representatives of these nations who were the principal architects of the European organizations.<sup>100</sup> The balance between these nations ensured that none achieved dominant or hegemonic status within Europe. Now that membership is twenty-seven nations, the powerful few are even less able to pursue their own course, even if they did agree among themselves what that course might be.<sup>101</sup> The more

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<sup>96</sup> European Union, "Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union," *European Union Law*, last modified June 7, 2016, accessed December 5, 2020, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016ME%2FTXT&qid=1616967028913>, Annex A, Article 4, Paragraph 17.

<sup>97</sup> UK Electoral Commission, "Report: 23 June 2016 Referendum on the UK's Membership of the European Union," accessed January 17, 2021, <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/elections-and-referendums/past-elections-and-referendums/eu-referendum/report-23-june-2016-referendum-uks-membership-european-union>.

<sup>98</sup> World Bank, "GDP (EU and UK)"; Stefan Lehne, "The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy," *Carnegie Europe*, accessed January 10, 2021, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2012/07/05/big-three-in-eu-foreign-policy-pub-48759>.

<sup>99</sup> Lehne, "The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy"; Charles Grant, "How the EU Can Survive Brexit," *New Statesman* 149, no. 5506 (February 7, 2020): 25–26.

<sup>100</sup> European Commission. Directorate General for Communication., *The Founding Fathers of the EU*. (LU: Publications Office, 2013), 5–6, 19–22, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/98747>.

<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Eyal, "Macron Is Mistaken – NATO Remains the Continent's Best Defence," *RUSI Journal* 39, no. 10 (December 2019): 4; Ulrich Krotz and Joachim Schild, "France and Germany Will Dominate the EU after Brexit – but They Won't Go Unchallenged," *EUROPP*, January 30, 2019, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2019/01/30/france-and-germany-will-dominate-the-eu-after-brexit-but-they-wont-go-unchallenged/>.

even power distribution, the institutional mechanisms, and collective power of smaller states in the EU bring a degree of equality of influence between states that is less apparent in the UN. For example, compared with the UN, practicalities and lower variation in cultures and interests within the EU mean that a group of 14 small members can join together to bargain within the system in a way that a similar proportion of UN General Assembly members could not.

As with the UN, the EU's origins were set against the background of WW2 and initially expressed in ideological terms. However, the founders and the decision-making elites of the most powerful states were realists and pragmatists with self-interest as a dominant influence.<sup>102</sup> France, after their third defeat to the Germans since 1870, saw the EU as a way to recover their power and status, hoping that "France called the shots, but the shots were fired by a much bigger entity." West Germany's prime concern was legitimacy. Fearing that the actions of previous German leaderships would brand them an international pariah, they sought – and bought – acceptance while allowing France to exercise the main leadership role.<sup>103</sup> More recently, a unified Germany caused nervousness, particularly in Paris, about power balances yet unification simultaneously suppressed German ambition due to the economic burden and the necessarily greater inward focus.<sup>104</sup> The British relationship with Europe was more complex. Winston Churchill initially envisioned that Britain would be outside of a "United States of Europe" keeping a fatherly eye on it from the sidelines. In the succeeding decades, the UK wanted to join. New leadership was one factor, but the new context had more sway. British assumptions of significant independent global influence faded as her empire melted away, the material and

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<sup>102</sup> Falk, "The United Nations After 40 Years," 232; Bootle, *The Trouble with Europe*, 14–15.

<sup>103</sup> Jeffrey J. Anderson and John B. Goodman, "Mars or Minerva? A United Germany in a Post-Cold War Europe," in *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991*, ed. Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye, and Stanley Hoffmann, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 24; Bootle, *The Trouble with Europe*, 8, 15.

<sup>104</sup> Keohane and Nye, "Introduction: The End of the Cold War in Europe," 11; Anderson and Goodman, "Mars or Minerva? A United Germany in a Post-Cold War Europe," 24.

psychological costs of war became clear, and America's global leadership became established. Like France, Britain saw that influence within a larger organization was now the pragmatic choice.<sup>105</sup> As expansion and a more supranational Europe started to form, France under President de Gaulle opposed such moves and twice vetoed Britain's entry into the EEC. It was not until after De Gaulle died in 1969 that the UK, along with Denmark and Ireland, joined the EEC in 1973.<sup>106</sup>

## Brexit

After 65 years of “history’s greatest instance of international cooperation,”<sup>107</sup> Europe saw the first meaningful and significant reversal of the trend in 2016 when the UK electorate voted to leave the EU. There are many reasons behind the UK’s decision to leave the EU. The existence of and the relative influence of each reason will remain contested for years to come. This section does not aim to outline all the reasons behind Brexit or even to give a broad or balanced picture of the rationale of the “Leave” and “Remain” campaigns. Rather, it is focused on how changes in the power balance, cultural tensions, and perceptions of EU legitimacy and accountability contributed to the process.

## Power

Evolving power dynamics across all instruments of power have affected both the UK’s desire and ability to pursue Brexit. In economic measures, the relative positions of the UK, Germany, and France changed little since the UK joined the EEC in 1973. However, the global standing and influence of London as a financial center gives the UK more financial power than GDP comparisons alone imply, particularly as the global economy rebalanced towards financial

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<sup>105</sup> Bootle, *The Trouble with Europe*, 8–9, 15.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Davis, “‘Why Did the General Do It?’ De Gaulle, Polaris and the French Veto of Britain’s Application To...,” *European History Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (July 1998): 373.

<sup>107</sup> Craig Parsons, “Power, Patterns, and Process in European Union History,” *Security Studies* 22, no. 4 (October 2013): 792.

services..<sup>108</sup> Within the EU, however, Britain's decision to remain outside the Euro meant that it lost significant influence over Europe's financial and economic policy compared to Germany and France..<sup>109</sup>

Militarily, since the end of WW2, the UK led its European partners in terms of defense spending as a proportion of GDP. However, more than spending, it maintained a global perspective, an independent nuclear deterrent, a willingness to deploy defense capabilities, and close military ties with the United States..<sup>110</sup> The UK military has been particularly globally active since the end of the Cold War. In contrast, France withdrew from NATO's integrated military structure from 1966 to 2009, and it principally conducts military operations in former colonial possessions. Since WW2, Germany, as it slowly emerged from mistrust of itself and suspicion from others, only deployed forces in active military roles outside its national borders from 1999.

From a diplomatic perspective, the UK's history and experience from its great power past, its UNSC veto, and leadership of the British Commonwealth, combine to let it punch above its weight. It has done so with increasing confidence as memories of the loss of empire fade..<sup>111</sup> Lastly, the enduring global dominance of the English language, although largely maintained by American influence and structural norms, gives the UK an advantage over other European leading nations in cultural influence around the world.

The above power context, perhaps fueled by great power nostalgia which had been suppressed after WW2, increasingly gave Britain cause to reassess whether its interests were best

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<sup>108</sup> World Bank, "GDP (DE, FR, UK)," *World Bank National Accounts Data*, last modified 2019, accessed January 14, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2019&locations=GB-DE-FR&start=1960>; Chris Gifford, "The United Kingdom's Eurosceptic Political Economy.," *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 18, no. 4 (November 2016): 783–784.

<sup>109</sup> Helen Thompson, "Brexit Forever," *History Today* 69, no. 3 (March 2019): 90.

<sup>110</sup> Lousie Richardson, "British State Strategies after the Cold War," in *After the Cold War: International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe, 1989-1991*, ed. Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye, and Stanley Hoffmann, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 150.

<sup>111</sup> Gifford, "The United Kingdom's Eurosceptic Political Economy.," 783–784.



served within the EU. The non-British elements of the EU ruling elite, however, pressed on with the project of “ever closer union” despite opposition from the UK and others. Politicians and academics have debated the balance between closer union and sovereign autonomy for the duration of the European project. Negotiated compromises have always been sought – and generally found – but as membership increased, the expanded constituency made common ground more difficult to find. Indeed, it may be that states cannot simultaneously achieve economic globalization, democratic politics, and national autonomy.<sup>112</sup>

## Culture

Common memories are an important aspect of cultural identity.<sup>113</sup> As shared memories of WW2 fade and even indirect personal links with WW1 disappear, the effects of the unifying factors that brought nations together after those events also diminish.<sup>114</sup> Britain, having lost less than 1% of its population killed in WW2, perhaps saw the memories fade more quickly than France which was invaded and lost 2% of its population, or Germany which was shamed, defeated, and lost around 10% of its population.<sup>115</sup> For Central and Eastern European states that joined the EU since 2005, the experience of life under communism and a desire to definitively reorientate to the West were more recent memories.

As unifying factors fade, deeper cultural differences come to the fore. Although the cultural differences between France and Germany (or any two continental European nations) are

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<sup>112</sup> Christian Joerges, “How Is a Closer Union Conceivable under Conditions of Ever More Socio-economic and Political Diversity? Constitutionalising Europe’s Unitas in Pluralitate.,” *European Law Journal* 24, no. 4/5 (September 2018): 264; Jonathan Bradbury, “The European Union and the Contested Politics of ‘Ever Closer Union’: Approaches to Integration, State Interests and Treaty Reform since Maastricht.,” *Perspectives on European Politics & Society* 10, no. 1 (April 2009): 17–18.

<sup>113</sup> Bouke Van Gorp and Hans Renes, “A European Cultural Identity? Heritage and Shared Histories in the European Union,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic & Social Geography)* 98, no. 3 (August 2007): 407.

<sup>114</sup> Simon Serfaty, “Europe 2007: From Nation-States to Member States.,” *Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (September 2000): 15.

<sup>115</sup> Bootle, *The Trouble with Europe*, 7.

significant, land borders are a powerful balancing factor. As an island nation, Britain's cultural differences had less counterweight. The eastwards expansion of the EU also changed the calculus as the cultural and economic balance point moved further from the UK.<sup>116</sup> The UK remained outside the shared currency "Eurozone" and the free movement "Schengen Zone." Although firmly British choices to not join these arrangements, they increased the sense of "them and us." For nations aspiring to join the EU or Eurozone, such a sense may encourage integration, but for Britain, it increased the sense of separateness.

Britain's historical world hegemony has a heavy influence on its identity and culture even if it has rejected most of the values and methods which underpinned the days of building the empire, and there is no sense that the ruling elite wishes to regain former possessions or dominance. While this difference sets the UK apart from revanchist former regional hegemonies such as Russia and China, there was still tension between their sense of identity and the reality of being merely one of twenty-eight EU member states. Global hegemony and large empire are well beyond the level of ambition of either the British ruling elite or the population, but either consciously or sub-consciously, they seek a sense of strength, autonomy, and perhaps exceptionalism. The pro-Brexit campaign both benefited from and contributed to this thirst for sovereignty and status. Newspaper coverage of Brexit was dominated by identity and emotional issues rather than pragmatic or academic perspectives.<sup>117</sup> Whether these perceptions and aspirations were substantive or populist "fantasy narratives" is less relevant than the fact that they influenced the campaign and voters' decisions.<sup>118</sup> It is indicative that England, the lead British

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<sup>116</sup> Spolarore, "National Borders and the Size of Nations," 781–782.

<sup>117</sup> Edoardo Campanella and Marta Dassù, "Brexit and Nostalgia," *Survival* 61, no. 3 (June 2019): 103–104; David A L Levy, Billur Aslan, and Diego Bironzo, *UK Press Coverage of the EU Referendum* (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, August 2016), 4–5.

<sup>118</sup> Christopher S. Browning, "Brexit Populism and Fantasies of Fulfilment.," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (June 2019): 230.

nation in the days of the Empire, was also the most pro-Brexit nation of the UK..<sup>119</sup> The proposed inverse relationship between the influence of Brussels in the UK and the chances of Great Britain remaining united offers another explanation for anti-EU sentiment..<sup>120</sup>

The reaction of the EU ruling elite was unsympathetic. They feared a domino effect if they gave concessions to the UK and could not undermine the narrative of sovereign equality. Even if the ruling elite had been inclined to compromise, any meaningful change to EU rules, processes, or structure would have needed the agreement of all nations.

### Elite Behavior

In a divisive UK national debate characterized by exaggerations on all sides, and biased, unverifiable predictions of what would follow either choice, there seemed to be one certainty: that EU membership meant less UK sovereignty. The populist characterization of the EU was of unelected bureaucrats imposing disproportionate controls and ignoring national preferences..<sup>121</sup> Most voters in democracies accept the principles of paying taxes for the greater good and surrendering autonomy for security and prosperity. However, the greater the physical and cultural distance between the individual and a particular level of government, the less obvious the benefits. The alignment between individual benefit and collective benefit decreases as constituency size and cultural variation increase..<sup>122</sup>

The Eurozone crisis of 2009 onwards brought these issues into sharp relief. National governments were unable to use domestic fiscal policies to manage their economies if they had

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<sup>119</sup> Tak Wing Chan et al., “Understanding the Social and Cultural Bases of Brexit.,” *British Journal of Sociology* 71, no. 5 (November 2020): 830.

<sup>120</sup> Thompson, “Brexit Forever,” 92.

<sup>121</sup> James Martin, “Rhetoric of Excess - EU Referendum Analysis 2016,” *EU Referendum Analysis*, July 2016, accessed January 19, 2021, <https://www.referendumanalysis.eu/rhetoric-of-excess-eu-referendum-analysis-2016/>.

<sup>122</sup> Ruben Ruiz-Rufino and Sonia Alonson, “Democracy without Choice: Citizens’ Perceptions of Government Autonomy during the Eurozone Crisis.,” *European Journal of Political Research* 56, no. 2 (May 2017): 320–321.

adopted the Euro and, with it, centrally controlled monetary policies. Although not directly affected, British voters saw how national governments had lost the autonomy to act on behalf of their citizens, and how the EU, dominated in terms of economic policy by Germany, could insist on austerity measures and spending controls. The context demanded that European leaders act decisively and centrally but their approach, dubbed “authoritarian managerialism,” reinforced perceptions of an undemocratic elite.<sup>123</sup>

The promise of a referendum on EU membership was in the Conservative party manifesto in 2015 and a parliamentary bill enabling the referendum was passed in December of the same year. Yet, in the six months or so between then and the referendum taking place, there was no coherent, agreed, and communicated view from the EU’s leadership on alternative strategic desires for Europe or on any adaptation in response to the concerns that drove Brexit. Although there were academic and political discussions in EU states about an adjustment to the EU’s course, there was no consensus view. There are ongoing debates within the EU on topics like differentiated integration, liberalization versus control, and degrees of federalization but major policy changes or policy statements are infrequent events centered around EU Summits. The official statements on Brexit, therefore, centered on vague principles, short-term issues, and factors affecting each leader’s own countries.<sup>124</sup> The EU’s ruling elite was unable or unwilling to meaningfully contribute to the debate on the strategic future for the EU. This failure conceded some battles to the Leave campaigners in the UK and undermined the Remain campaign. It further reduced any optimism that the EU might become more accountable and decentralized.

The EU’s leaders also faced a paradox. The more they spoke with a single, central voice, the more they “proved” the Leave campaigners’ claims of unaccountable, centralized power.

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<sup>123</sup> Joerges, “How Is a Closer Union Conceivable under Conditions of Ever More Socio-economic and Political Diversity? Constitutionalising Europe’s Unitas in Pluralitate.,” 263.

<sup>124</sup> Tim Oliver, “European and International Views of Brexit.,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 9 (October 2016): 1322–1324.

Leaders of the remaining twenty-seven EU states agreed on an approach to Brexit negotiations in which there would be no bilateral discussions, only collective negotiations. This approach helped secure the EU's vital ground – the organization's enduring unity – but it reinforced perceptions of the EU as an impersonal machine with little concern for national autonomy or interests.<sup>125</sup>

## Rising Illiberalism

The last decade offers a significant body of evidence that the march of politics is not inevitably towards increasing liberal democracy and integration. If the resurgence of authoritarianism in Russia and China are the least surprising of the cases, perhaps the most surprising cases are those in Eastern Europe, notably Poland and Hungary.<sup>126</sup>

Not all retreats from *liberal democracy* are full retreats from democracy. The Western ruling elite conflates and combines the terms, but each has existed without the other, and regimes often use democratic empowerment to justify anti-liberalism.<sup>127</sup> Although a large and nuanced subject, the key aspects of liberalism include individualism, human rights, and multiculturalism. It is an ideology whereas democracy can be seen as a political system that has existed under a variety of ideologies and values sets. Authors have used the term “democratic backsliding” and “democratic reversal” to describe rising illiberalism<sup>128</sup> but equating liberalism and democracy clouds objective analysis. The specific word, “backsliding,” is laden with value judgments about a failure to maintain a morally virtuous position. While liberalism speaks of inclusion and tolerance, its strongest adherents look down on “traditional values” as unenlightened or outdated. More generally, conflating *liberal democracy* with *democracy* elevates *liberal democracy* to the

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<sup>125</sup> Nicolai von Ondarza, “Europe’s Take on Brexit,” *World Today* 75, no. 1 (March 2, 2019): 34.

<sup>126</sup> Ottaway, “Democratic Reversals”; Krastev, “Eastern Europe’s Illiberal Revolution,” 49.

<sup>127</sup> Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” 22–26.

<sup>128</sup> Věra Stojarová, “Moving towards EU Membership and Away from Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 2020): 221; Archick, *The European Union: Questions and Answers*, 1,6; Ottaway, “Democratic Reversals.”

position of the only rightful holder of the title, and reinforces the view that liberal democracy is the inevitable and universally beneficial destination for all nations. Conversely, Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, says “democracy is not necessarily liberal” and claims Hungary will remain democratic while abandoning liberal methods and principles.<sup>129</sup>

Semantics aside, illiberalism is a direct challenge to the EU’s values and principles. In Poland and Hungary, constitutional changes have redistributed power from courts and parliaments to leaders, and from the collective population to the majority at the expense of minorities. Cultural education and historical reinterpretation combine with the persecution of journalists to control the narrative. It has been described as “democracy with authoritarian elements.”<sup>130</sup> While Poland and Hungary have gone the farthest, increasing illiberalism is evident across Central and Eastern Europe, and, to an extent throughout the continent. Italy and Austria offer examples where politicians who are frustrated by liberalism’s perceived failures have made it into government. A quieter but no less important voice is from small EU nations with concerns that the EU ruling elite are driving towards a presumptuous goal of further centralization of power.<sup>131</sup> In addition to Hungary, Italy, and Poland, populist parties are winning significant shares of the vote in the UK, France, Latvia, Slovakia, and the Netherlands.<sup>132</sup> How the EU leadership deals with the trend is, therefore, of critical importance to the survival of the order.

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<sup>129</sup> Krastev, “Eastern Europe’s Illiberal Revolution,” 50.

<sup>130</sup> András Körösenyi and Veronika Patkós, “Liberal and Illiberal Populism. The Leadership of Berlusconi and Orbán,” *Corvinus Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 8, no. 3 (November 15, 2017): 315; Jacques Rupnik, “Surging Illiberalism in the East,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 4 (October 2016): 77–79.

<sup>131</sup> John Lloyd, “The New Illiberal International,” *New Statesman* 147, no. 5428 (July 20, 2018): 35.

<sup>132</sup> Statista, “Populist Vote Share in EU Elections 2019,” *Statista*, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1027735/populist-vote-share-in-eu-elections/>; Paul Lewis et al., “Revealed: One in Four Europeans Vote Populist,” *The Guardian*, accessed January 21, 2021, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/nov/20/revealed-one-in-four-europeans-vote-populist>.

## Power

In terms of power balances, one plausible explanation for rising illiberalism stems from these states' recent emergence from Soviet dominion. For Poland, Hungary, and other Eastern European countries, domination by outside powers has been a repeated feature of the last few centuries.<sup>133</sup> These nations' motivations for willingly turning to the EU after the breakup of the Soviet Union included an assertion of a change of direction, defense against "recapture" by another hostile regime, and economic pragmatism. Thirty years later and national internal confidence has increased. So too has European political centralization. Populist politicians can therefore readily claim that the country must change course to prevent yet another period of domination by outside forces.

Like Britain regaining confidence after the loss of global hegemony, former Soviet states have taken time to develop self-belief, robust political mechanisms, and cohesive but distinct cultural identities. The development of these factors raises the relative importance of the domestic "chessboard" in Putnam's two-level game compared to the international relations board.<sup>134</sup>

A key element in the power dynamic between the EU leadership and illiberal states has been a partnership between the illiberal states. In a disagreement with the EU, Hungary and Poland were able to establish a strong bargaining position because a sanction against one member requires the unanimous agreement of all other members. Hungary and Poland were, therefore, able to provide a degree of mutual immunity to EU censure. With strong democratic mandates from their electorate and protection from repercussions, the illiberal regimes of the EU can frustrate the majority in a liberal organization.

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<sup>133</sup> Krastev, "Eastern Europe's Illiberal Revolution.," 54.

<sup>134</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 433–434.

## Culture

Emigration from Eastern Europe in the months and years following independence saw a disproportionate number of liberals leave their home countries. The more educated, wealthier, and less nationalistic were more likely to depart leaving the political and cultural makeup of the countries skewed politically to the right and culturally to the traditional. The cultures and beliefs that give rise to illiberalism are not new but are now less balanced by liberal voices or by the memories of communist rule.

In Eastern Europe, the authority of the European Court and European human rights law meant that these nations had to accept and incorporate liberal values and rights, particularly minority rights, which were less widely accepted by their populations. The more secular leanings of the EU elite compared with the more religious leanings of Eastern European populations is one reason this factor caused tension.<sup>135</sup>

With nationalism more prevalent, immigration was another issue that challenged the culture in these countries. Early in the ongoing refugee migrant crisis, both Hungary and Slovakia brought cases to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to argue that the EU's centrally dictated scheme for the mandatory relocation of asylum seekers across the member states was unlawful. The court dismissed the cases and later launched infringement proceedings against countries that did not take appropriate steps in resettling their allocated asylum seekers.<sup>136</sup> More than simply a legal tussle, the clash of cultures challenged national identity. The case for welcoming refugees is not morally and objectively universal. Neither political nor legislative fiat can cause acceptance of a counter-cultural imposition in a community. Attempts to do so are likely to lower respect for

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<sup>135</sup> Oliver Hidalgo, "Religious Backgrounds of Illiberal Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.," *Religion & Society in Central & Eastern Europe* 12, no. 1 (December 2019): 3–21.

<sup>136</sup> Stephen I. Pogany, "Europe's Illiberal States: Why Hungary and Poland Are Turning Away from Constitutional Democracy," *The Independent*, last modified January 9, 2018, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/europe-s-illiberal-states-why-hungary-and-poland-are-turning-away-constitutional-democracy-a8143821.html>.



and a sense of belonging to the imposing organization while increasing the appeal of populist politicians.<sup>137</sup>

### Elite Behavior

As with Brexit, opponents of the EU in illiberal states portrayed the EU as forcing economic policies and acceptance of migrants on hapless nations. Many of the arguments in the Brexit section also apply here. However, in this section, the focus is on how, as they look to the future, the EU leadership balances the tension between unity and common values. Just as the elite behaviors discussed in the Brexit section can apply here, the principles discussed here have application in the context of exits from an order.

Politicians, academics, and media accuse the EU leadership of sacrificing values and principles in accommodating, or at least tolerating, rising illiberalism in Europe.<sup>138</sup> The leadership of the EU must decide definitively whether wide membership with flexibility in values or smaller membership with more coherent values better achieves peace and prosperity for the EU as a whole. Any indecision or dissonance between their narrative and actions will undermine the trust of both liberal and illiberal member states.

In qualifying for and accepting EU membership, a state must agree to abide by certain regulations across the spectrum of government responsibilities. When Poland started to move away from the judicial independence requirements of EU membership, the EU's response was telling. The EU leadership could not directly command the Polish leadership so the ECJ brought a case against Poland's elected government. However, without an enforcement mechanism, the judgment was non-binding and easily ignored. The Polish government implemented its plan to

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<sup>137</sup> Joerges, "How Is a Closer Union Conceivable under Conditions of Ever More Socio-economic and Political Diversity? Constitutionalising Europe's Unitas in Pluralitate.," 266.

<sup>138</sup> Körösenyi and Patkós, "Liberal and Illiberal Populism. The Leadership of Berlusconi and Orbán," 315–316.

wrest power from the judiciary.<sup>139</sup> Poland is not the only EU member to disregard ECJ rulings but examples such as the Czech, Danish and Italian challenges were on issues like pension calculations and tax fraud prosecution. The Polish case was a direct clash between the will of democratically elected leaders and the enforcement of basic liberal principles. It is one of the best, but certainly not the only example, of a critical issue that faces the EU's ruling elite.

There is no mechanism in EU law to expel a member, but the European Council could strip Poland of its voting rights. However, that would require the unanimous agreement of the other member states, and Hungary would not agree. Alternatively, Poland could be issued with a fine that the EU could deduct from the large net payment to Poland. (Hungary and Poland are the largest net beneficiaries of EU funding.)<sup>140</sup> However, the fact that Poland and Hungary both have voting rights meant they could veto the EU budget for 2021-2027 and insist they would only lift the veto if the EU withdrew the plan to reduce the funding of states which do not comply with ECJ rulings.<sup>141</sup> After four rounds of ECJ investigations, infringement judgments, Polish maneuvering, and brinkmanship, an agreement was reached at an EU summit in early December 2020. However, critics warned that the deal "lets Hungary and Poland off the hook" as it includes a long delay and additional process before the EU can enforce its rule of law values on errant member states. Although French President Macron claimed after the December agreement that "Europe moves forward, united, and displays its values," his assertions, like similar statements from other EU leaders, ring hollow.<sup>142</sup> The failure of the EU leadership to decide between unity

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Mezyk, "Member State's Lawlessness and European Law - the Case of Poland.," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of European Studies* 12, no. 1 (May 2020): 54–58.

<sup>140</sup> Statista, "Which Countries Are EU Contributors and Beneficiaries?," *Statista Infographics*, last modified January 13, 2020, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/chart/18794/net-contributors-to-eu-budget/>.

<sup>141</sup> Jan Strupczewski, "Poland Ready to Drop EU Budget Veto for EU Summit Declaration on Rule of Law," *Reuters*, December 3, 2020, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-eu-budget-poland-idUKKBN28D2T8>.

<sup>142</sup> Lorne Cook and Raf Casert, "EU Strikes Deal on Landmark Budget, Virus Recovery Fund," *AP NEWS*, last modified December 10, 2020, accessed January 21, 2021,

and values leaves both factors in question and makes further tests of resolve from illiberal members more likely.

## Recommendations for the Ruling Elite

In analyzing the EU, this monograph seeks recent and culturally relevant parallels, rather than the Cold War and British-to-American hegemonic transition parallels, which litter current debates. Even so, parallels are simplifications and approximations. Any analysis must account for differences between examples, not simplistically focusing on similarities. In 1739, David Hume wrote that “there can be no demonstrative arguments to prove that those instances of which we have had no experience resemble those of which we have had experience.”<sup>143</sup>

The framework for interpreting events and behaviors must also be objective. Anti-China sentiments are endemic in American political discourse. However much of this is justifiable, there is a danger that cognitive biases, assumption walls, and thinking shaped by beliefs rather than facts will overmatch objectivity.<sup>144</sup> Samuel Huntington warns that humans are often incapable of thinking and acting effectively because simplistic or outdated paradigms frame their thoughts. He suggests we are so guided by paradigms that even if they lose their explanatory value in the face of new facts, they cannot be displaced until a new paradigm is formed and adopted. This displacement rarely occurs until many years after the events occur which invalidate the original

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<https://apnews.com/article/technology-europe-viktor-orban-poland-summits-7ee3e15e387768707e2b0ccc571c7378>; Deutsche Welle ([www.dw.com](http://www.dw.com)), “EU Breaks Deadlock on Budget, Coronavirus Recovery Fund | DW | 10.12.2020,” *DW.COM*, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-breaks-deadlock-on-budget-coronavirus-recovery-fund/a-55899233>.

<sup>143</sup> David Hume, “A Treatise of Human Nature, by David Hume,” accessed March 2, 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm>.

<sup>144</sup> Douglas E Waters, “Senior Leader Competencies,” in *Strategic Leadership Primer for Senior Leaders*, ed. Thomas P Galvin and Dale E Watson, 4th ed. (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute Press, 2019), 63, accessed March 2, 2021, <https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/3689.pdf>; Maree Conway, *Foresight Infused Strategy* (Thinking Futures, 2019), 40–42, 169–170.

paradigm.<sup>145</sup> The magnitude of the objectivity challenge demands strong leadership and intellect to deliver assessment and to implement decisions.

Throughout this recommendation section, readers should consider both author and reader frailty in applying models and interpreting within paradigms.

An outline high-level scenario will constrain the analysis. China's rise and their refusal – along with Russia, Poland, Hungary, and others – to dutifully abide by the international order's rules and norms, have prompted predictions of the end of American hegemony and radical global power shifts.<sup>146</sup> This section is not based on such a hypothesis. Historical predictions of significant system changes proved wrong, and current predictions lean on linear extrapolations of trends, narrow definitions of power, or overemphasis of factors that encourage change relative to factors that inhibit change.<sup>147</sup> The EU survived the Eurozone crisis, the migrant crisis, increased membership, illiberal states, and Brexit with less damage than many predicted. Globally, President Nixon's withdrawal from the gold standard that underpinned the Bretton Woods system, the 1973 oil crisis, the end of the Cold War, and the Trump presidency all prompted predictions of the end of the order, yet it fundamentally survives.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "If Not Civilizations, What?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 5 (December 11, 1993): 186–187; Adda B. Bozeman, "Time Warp in American Politics," *Society* 31, no. 5 (August 7, 1994): 24.

<sup>146</sup> Examples include: Yan Xuetong, "The Age of Uneasy Peace: Chinese Power in a Divided World," *Foreign Affairs* 98, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 40; vpro documentary, *The New Chinese World Order - VPRO Documentary - 2016*, 2017, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRdNpfmFmWM>.

<sup>147</sup> Michael Beckley, "China's Century?," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (2011): 41–44; Beckley, "The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters," 7–9; Bentley B. Allan, Srdjan Vucetic, and Ted Hopf, "The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order: China's Hegemonic Prospects," *International Organization* 72, no. 4 (2018): 1–2; Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 82; Nye, *The Future of Power*, xi–xiii.

<sup>148</sup> G. John Ikenberry and Daniel H. Nexon, "Hegemony Studies 3.0: The Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders," *Security Studies* 28, no. 3 (May 27, 2019): 395–421; US Department of State, "Nixon and the End of the Bretton Woods System, 1971–1973," *Milestones: 1969–1976 - Office of the Historian*, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/nixon-shock>; Walt, "The End of the American Era," 6–16.

System complexity, interconnectedness, diffusing norms, bureaucracies, and powerful vested interests, all contribute to inertia that will, to a greater extent than in the past, resist sudden or significant changes to the order. The complexity confounds simplistic solutions. Brexit showed that disconnecting from just one institutional aspect of an order is difficult. The EU's handling of illiberal states demonstrates the fallacy of simplistic "for or against" or "friend or foe" positions. Even those who predict a significant power shift in the next decade or two see China's priority as a "liberal economic order built on free trade."<sup>149</sup> This suggests that China aims to retain significant elements of current architectures if not their relative position in the hierarchy.

An imminent rapid or violent global system change may not be likely, but a return to the situation of the 1940s or the 1990s is equally improbable. The distribution of power between nations and the relative utility of different instruments of power will continue to change. This will affect relative positions and influence the hierarchy of nations. Norms and values – and the extent to which they are common – will continue to evolve.

The hypothesis here is that, as with the EU, nations will disconnect from elements of the global order, and diverge from established organizational norms. They may do so openly, violently, quietly, or diplomatically. They will maximize their "free-riding" and make it more difficult for leading status quo powers to realize the benefits they seek from the system. Motivations will vary between actors and over time, but dissatisfaction with the global order will be the theme.

When the tectonic plates of system architecture and geopolitical context do not move together, tension builds. If not released in iterative minor tremors, a damaging earthquake becomes more likely.

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<sup>149</sup> Xuetong, "The Age of Uneasy Peace: Chinese Power in a Divided World.," 42.

## Power

Power always depends on context.

—Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power*

If power is “the ability to get what we want” or “the capacity to... get the outcomes we want,”<sup>150</sup> America must decide if it wants security and prosperity, or dominance. It must decide if would rather pursue stability and peace, or American conceptions of values, justice, and fairness.

US leaders may have historically considered that dominance, order, and American leadership of that order were key ways to maximize security and prosperity. Despite historical utility, these *ways* must not become *ends*. A clear focus on core aims frees analysts from incorrect assumptions and enables a more nuanced orchestration of all available ways. Dominance and order have positive effects but, if retaining dominance compromises security and prosperity, a downward spiral is likely. The situation demands a similar approach to sharing the UNSC veto in 1945 where America sacrificed freedom of action for stability and peace.

The key recommendation in this section is that America should accept that it can no longer dominate in all dimensions of power.

What worked for one nation in the military dimension yesterday may not work at another time, in another dimension, or for another nation. Since the context changes – and is changing more rapidly and significantly than in the past – the means to achieve power and the application of power must change too. Even if America continues to dominate militarily, have significant influence economically, and lead diplomatically, it cannot dominate the entire order. State and non-state actors have learned how to circumvent and frustrate America’s military dominance. Economic disparities are closing. In any relationship between states, nations will have individual

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<sup>150</sup> Nye, *The Future of Power*, 5–6.

“domain-specific asymmetric advantages.”<sup>151</sup> The powerful effects of cyber and information activities have repeatedly breached American defenses. Meanwhile, belief in, and acceptance of, universal values is declining, not just among the ruling elite of nations that challenge the order, but within populations of core members of the order.<sup>152</sup>

The choice for America is to view the situation as a problem to solve, or as a context to manage. If the former, the aim is reversing power diffusion by increasing American power across all dimensions of power at the expense of other actors. Whether such a course of action is possible, even with unlimited money and will, is far from certain.<sup>153</sup> But a better question is whether such a course of action is desirable. If dominance produces resistance, the pursuit of continued dominance would be an expensive way to merely delay the inevitable boiling over while adding fuel to the fire. Stephen Wertheim and others argue that the costs of dominance are more enemies, fewer friends, environmental damage, human suffering, and less prosperity and security for America.<sup>154</sup> Deterrence through power overmatch may delay action but it leaves differences unresolved, intent strengthened, and may accelerate adversaries’ preparations.<sup>155</sup>

Changing power balances contributed to both Brexit and illiberalism among EU members. This factor combined with system architectures and a context that lessened the need for some forms of national power. The result was that nations had both the motivation and the means to diverge from the order. The EU leadership does not have the option of military dominance to police the order. Their experience with attempting financial sanctions against Poland and

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<sup>151</sup> Roberts and Kaushal, *Competitive Advantage and Rules in Persistent Competitions*, v.

<sup>152</sup> Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, “Reality Check: American Power in an Age of Constraints,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (April 3, 2020): 47.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>154</sup> Stephen Wertheim, “The Price of Primacy: Why America Shouldn’t Dominate the World,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (April 3, 2020): 19–22; Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 184.

<sup>155</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 10; Lindsay and Gartzke, *Cross-Domain Deterrence*, 32.

Hungary shows the difficulty in applying economic levers in a very interconnected liberal system. Internationally, some nations' dependence on Russian hydrocarbon imports and most nations' dependence on Chinese imports across a wide range of consumer products have limited how the importers have been able to influence Russia and China. In all cases, solutions are characterized by compromise, a long-term view, and broad action across multiple instruments of power.

If the dam is in danger of breaking, letting a little water through in a controlled way is more effective and efficient than repairing and reinforcing concrete or trying to prevent rainfall upstream.

### Culture and Values

Framing the goal of strategy as the defence of open-ended principles ... yields a policy that is both reactive and untenable – allowing opponents to shape the rules of competition.

—Peter Roberts and Sidharth Kaushal, *Competitive Advantage and Rules in Persistent Competitions*

The founders of the current global order and the EU were not primarily motivated by values. The ruling elite used a values narrative to buy domestic and wider international support for the projects. Since then, elites of both structures have shown considerable flexibility in the application of values and principles by departing from them in examples such as the Kosovo intervention, the Kyoto environmental summit, securing Chinese and Russian imports, and tolerating illiberalism.<sup>156</sup> This suggests that values are not guiding objectives but rather continue to be used to support a narrative.

Quoting Saint Augustine, President Biden stated that, “a people was a multitude defined by the common objects of their love.”<sup>157</sup> EU expansion, particularly from fifteen to twenty-seven

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<sup>156</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “International Relations: One World, Many Theories,” *Foreign Affairs*, no. 110 (Spring 1998): 43.

<sup>157</sup> Joseph R. Biden, “Inaugural Address by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.,” *The White House*, last modified January 20, 2021, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/01/20/inaugural-address-by-president-joseph-r-biden-jr/>.



members between 2004 and 2007 showed that, as the constituency of the organization expands, the degree of commonality reduces. So too globally, as historical cultural identities emerge from a period of suppression since WW2, commonality declines. Whether the ruling elite accepts the validity of alternative values or not, values are losing utility as persuasive and cohering forces in the global order. Adda Bozeman describes a perception failure deepened by inclinations “to dissociate values from facts, to treat values as if they were norms, and to assume that privately or locally preferred values are also globally valid norms.”<sup>158</sup> The Cold War and its immediate aftermath enhanced the illusion that values and norms could be simplified and imposed. As the fallacy is revealed, the strategy to which values and norms are central must change.

Brexit showed the danger of not applying at the transnational level, values such as democracy, accountability, and liberalism which elites preach – and people accept – at national levels. Like British voters, populations across the world are increasingly aware of and intolerant of the hypocrisy in using illiberal and non-democratic means to uphold a liberal democratic order. Cries of “they are against the order” ring hollow when the accused supports many aspects of the order while the order’s leaders are guilty of selectively abiding by their own values. A veteran British politician in his final speech to the House of Commons noted that, although the country is acclaimed as one of the oldest democracies, and a founding and core member of the global order, only a few generations ago, just two percent of the population had the vote, “we do not elect our head of state; we do not elect the second Chamber... enormous power is vested in the prerogatives. The Prime Minister can go to war ..., sign treaties ..., agree to laws in Brussels ..., and appoint bishops, peers and judges without consulting [parliament].” Stephen Krasner notes that America is in some respects becoming less democratic.<sup>159</sup> The global order’s leaders must

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<sup>158</sup> Adda B. Bozeman, “War and the Clash of Ideas” *Orbis* spring 1976, quoted in Uz Zaman, “Strategic Culture,” 72.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, “Learning to Live With Despots: The Limits of Democracy Promotion,” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (April 3, 2020): 54.

decide what divergence from the order to accept from others and do so with honesty, humility, a sense of history, and pragmatism. EU member states' illiberalism also highlights nuances, like that between democracy and liberalism, that could be ignored in a bipolar world. When responding to challengers, the ruling elite must objectively consider what the challengers are contesting - the architecture, the rules, or the power distribution and leadership – and respond appropriately.<sup>160</sup>

This section is not implying that values are unimportant or that the values narrative will cease to have any utility. Rather, values must take their place as *ways*, subordinate to the central aims, and limited in scope, applicability, and effectiveness. Pragmatics more than principles, and bespoke arrangements rather than universal ones are needed. Moderating the values narrative in international discourse would free the ruling elite from easy accusations of hypocrisy, perhaps preventing further damage to their legitimacy.

### Elite Behavior

To preserve the existing status quo, the principal objective of the dominant country and its closest allies is to expand satisfaction in the international system. The dominant country must be careful not to allow disputes or perceptions of inequitable treatment to metastasize into dissatisfaction with the system. This is particularly true among great powers that are or eventually could become challengers.

—Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, and Doug Lemke, *Power Transition Theory*

The key recommendation on elite behavior is that the ruling elite of the global order must transition from managing power to managing consent.

In a hegemonic system, as opposed to an empire, leaders do not earn legitimacy through dominance. Rather, members confer legitimacy upon the leader.<sup>161</sup> Brexit showed how perceptions of imperial, undemocratic ruling elites fuel disconnection from an order. At the least,

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<sup>160</sup> Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 58–59.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 7, 11.

elite behavior supplied a ready narrative for those making the case for Brexit. Britain's loss of empire supports the assertion that nations with a significant difference between historical and current status are more likely to diverge from an order. A systems approach warns that suppressing dissent "by strengthening the rules or their enforcement usually [gives] rise to still greater system distortion," and recommends understanding "rule beating as useful feedback" to prompt revision.<sup>162</sup>

In the context of national electoral systems "elites extend franchise as a response to the declining viability or legitimacy of the political system."<sup>163</sup> An analogy to sharing power in the international system may be valid. "Leaders need followers,"<sup>164</sup> and the EU ruling elite's experience in managing the direction of the union, even with the most liberal members, is that patient, consultative consensus management, and at least the perception if not the reality of sharing power, are needed to maintain a following. Lowering ambition, ruthlessly focusing on core issues, and carefully avoiding provocative and destabilizing behaviors have characterized the EU's growth and survival and are a pragmatic option for enhancing sustainability in the global order.<sup>165</sup> Brexit and illiberalism are reminders that even if this approach is the right one, there is likely no perfect balance point. Such power-sharing adjustments do not mean the end of the global order, American leadership and great power status, or human rights, and free trade. Neither does a change in relative power mean less absolute power or vice versa.<sup>166</sup> A binary approach that demands victory in every battle will fail.

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<sup>162</sup> Donella H. Meadows and Diana Wright, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Pub, 2008), 136.

<sup>163</sup> Adam Przeworski, "Conquered or Granted? A History of Suffrage Extensions," *British Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 2 (April 2009): 291–321.

<sup>164</sup> Krotz and Schild, "France and Germany Will Dominate the EU after Brexit – but They Won't Go Unchallenged."

<sup>165</sup> Mazarr, "Summary of the Building a Sustainable International Order Project," 15, 22.

<sup>166</sup> Cooley and Nexon, *Exit from Hegemony*, 184–185.

Domestic concerns may be the largest obstacle to adjusting American behaviors. Any accommodation of China for the sake of peace, stability, and prosperity could be perceived by political opponents and by voters as weakness, and the psychology of climbing down is a powerful counter to pragmatism.<sup>167</sup> Kortz suggests that to break with ingrained enmities like that between France and Germany before 1945 requires: a deep sense of a need to break with the past; a significant common threat; leadership will and authority; and previous differences to be seen as temporal behaviors, not immutable national characteristics.<sup>168</sup> Such conditions seem implausible between China and America in the short-term. Liddell Hart's warning that downfall tends to come from internal issues and exhaustion from fighting, poses a challenge whichever path America's leaders choose.<sup>169</sup>

## Summary

The Principle of my Reform is to prevent the necessity of revolution. I am reforming to preserve, not to overthrow.

—Earl Grey, *Debate in British Parliament* (1831)

The international order is experiencing increasing internal tension as the global context moves further from the context as it was at the order's birth.<sup>170</sup> Among causes are a changed, more dynamic, and more complex power balance, rejection of universal norms, and counterproductive leadership behaviors. The ruling elite of the global order should be deliberate and objective in responding. Short-term and reactionary approaches based on flawed paradigms will worsen the situation. Leaders must focus on core aims rather than on methods of achieving

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<sup>167</sup> Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 358; Xuetong, "The Age of Uneasy Peace: Chinese Power in a Divided World.," 43.

<sup>168</sup> Ulrich Krotz, "Three Eras and Possible Futures: A Long-Term View on the Franco-German Relationship a Century after the First World War.," *International Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March 2014): 338–344.

<sup>169</sup> Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 359.

<sup>170</sup> Mazarr, "Summary of the Building a Sustainable International Order Project," 7.

aims that worked in the past. They can reduce tensions by accepting they cannot dominate and enforce in all domains and dimensions of power, by accommodating diversity in values, norms, and political systems, and by focusing on managing consent rather than balancing power. Leaders must have a clear position on resolving the tensions between internal, international, and economic liberalism.

The concept of the consent of the governed is explicit in the United States Declaration of Independence and is central to any system of governance. Whether the ruling elite or academic theorists believe that such concepts from national political systems apply to the international order is less relevant than whether other nations believe that they do. Experience from the EU implies that such application is increasingly valid. The mix of persuasive, attractive, deterrent, and coercive measures used to achieve the consent of the governed varies with the leaders' philosophy and the context. Absent a tyrannical leadership with the means to enforce its will, sovereign choice in order adherence is an increasing part of the international context. As other nations directly challenge the US monopoly on the provision of goods in the global commons, like a business, America must alter its behaviors to prosper.

Predictions of the current global order's imminent collapse have been common since its establishment. The most recent such predictions may be as flawed as earlier ones. However, the changing context demands a changing response. History suggests that trying to prevent or reverse changes to the context will fail. A more nuanced, collaborative, and pragmatic approach to maintaining the consent of the governed in the global order will bring about better security and prosperity for the United States and more stability and peace for the entire globe.

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