A NEW WORLD ORDER: 
THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF AMERICAN PRIMACY

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

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Washington, D.C.
October 12, 2017
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ABSTRACT  

Over the past twenty-five years, the United States has moved from optimism to considerable pessimism about its role to do well in the world. Indeed, President George H.W. Bush’s “New World Order” stands unquestionably in stark contrast to today’s reality; from failed states in Africa to aspiring if not un-stabilizing states in Asia. Yet, when faced with such problems the United States does not know what it stands for, or what to do about them. In short, since emerging as a superpower the United States has, until of late, known what role it must play in terms of global leadership; whether it was making the world safer for democracy or in charge of a global economic order. Nevertheless, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the American led geo-political system, as a whole, has become more unstable not less.  

Using a multidimensional approach this thesis sets out a trio of structural factors: (1) Superpower China; (2) A liberal international order that is neither liberal, nor international, nor orderly; (3) Failed American foreign policy. Combined, these three factors have emerged to mean that American primacy is in real danger. This thesis also proposes that for Pax Americana to continue there must emerge a consistency between American values and the grand strategy that it pursues.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis mentor, Dr. Thomas M. Kerch. Your support has been crucial in the development of this thesis, and indeed, throughout the entirety of my time at Georgetown. I would also like to thank Ambassador Dennis Ross, and Ambassador John O’Keefe, for introducing me to the world of statecraft and international affairs.

Lastly, I would like to thank Associate Dean Anne Ridder for her insatiable capacity for kindness throughout the program.
To my parents, Edward and Janet:
Without whose love and support this could not have happened;
They are pivotal figures in my life, and I thank them for everything they have
done and provided.
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INTRODUCTION

From 1945-1952 American officials created the key institutions that still underpin the world today: NATO; United Nations; World Bank; International Monetary Fund. These same American officials formulated and implemented the strategy of containment while handing crises in a number of areas around the globe; at the same time as facing a major geo-political rival, namely the Soviet Union. The record in that period was not perfect, mistakes were made. But it was still a remarkably impressive attempt at global leadership. Similarly, between 1988-1992, President George H.W. Bush also did a remarkably good job: managing the collapse of the Soviet Union; the reunification of Germany; victory in the Gulf War; the Madrid Peace Conference.

By contrast, the record of American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War is at best mixed and at worst a failure, even though at the end of the Cold War the United States remained the world’s only superpower. In the words of Brent Scowcroft, when the Soviet Union collapsed it left the United States “perched on the pinnacle of power.”

Yet the optimism of President George Herbert Walker Bush and his belief in a New World Order stands in stark contrast to today’s reality; from failed states in Africa to aspiring if not un-stabilizing states in Asia. When faced with these problems the United States does not know what it stands for. Of course, the United States has, until of late, known what role it must play in terms of global leadership. Whether it was making

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the world safer for democracy, or in charge of a global economic order – America has led, for more or less a century, the process of globalization and the formation of global institutions like no nation ever could.

Nevertheless, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the geo-political system as a whole, for a host of different reasons, has become more unstable not less. In fact, over the course of the past decade America’s role has become less certain, more reactive, and more risk averse. What’s more, there seems to have been little to no emphasis placed on the notion of a New World Order, which was after all the central belief that followed the end of the Cold War.

In light of this reality, this thesis analyzes various dimensions of why American primacy did not lead to President Bush’s New World Order by (1) identifying the significance of China emerging as a superpower; (2) evaluating the failures of the liberal international order and the consequences of globalization; (3) proposing that failed military intervention in Iraq and Libya illustrates a broad and seemingly inherent problem within the U.S. foreign policy-making process.

To better understand the impact of Chinese power, Chapter I explains the extent to which the United States and China are locked in a deeply profound, mutually beneficial relationship of economic interdependence. An aspect of Chapter I that stands out is that instead of the continued dominance of the West, what has emerged is an increasingly authoritarian and assertive China; a country obviously interested in cooperation but on her own terms. Indeed, China is increasingly not relying on American backed institutions. For example, the Chinese led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
(AIIB) has had great success in the Asia-Pacific region; countries that have traditionally been unequivocal supporters of the United States have now begun to hedge in economic spheres hoping to benefit from the changing geo-political landscape.²

Chapter II looks at the liberal international order, exploring the extent to which it is truly liberal, international, or orderly. Of course, while it is true that American success after World War II and the Cold War was meticulously linked to the extension of international institutions that legitimized American power; G-7 countries have after all played a significant role in global leadership as guardians of the so called liberal international order. It is also true, however, that post-2008 financial crises such absolute confidence in America’s wisdom has withered significantly.³

It’s fair to say that confidence in the liberal international order was briefly lifted by the prospect of an effective G-20, and its aspirational hope that the largest twenty economies in the world would encourage greater unity, and possibly provide some form of public good; on climate change, trade agreements, or currency. The reality though is a little more prosaic, and appears in stark contrast with the forecast of George H.W. Bush and his belief in a New World Order. Take for example the fact that Global Trade Alert (an international research group) has recorded a marked increase in protectionist


measures passed by the members of the G-20 over the past two years; the United States hasn’t completed a major multi-national trade agreement since 1994.

Moreover, in terms of a pursuing a liberal order, the American response to the Arab Spring, for example, was haphazard at best; it helped to push the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak out, only then, a few years later, to allow another military tyrant – Field Marshal Abdel Fattah el-Sisi – back in. In other words, by most measures (including access to a free press) freedom in the world is actually lower now than it was around the turn of the twenty-first century.\(^4\)

Chapter II also does well to point to the history behind global connectivity and the historical consequences of globalization; doing well to point to the historical lessons that ought to be applied to the current challenges facing major liberal international institutions; particularly, the United Nations and European Union.

Chapter III details with two cases of American intervention abroad. In short, this chapter assesses the factors that contribute to success or failure in modern military interventions, and the remarkably bi-partisan nature that characterizes the lack luster performance of U.S foreign policy in achieving its objectives. To this end, Chapter III simultaneously provides a sort of guide, detailing what factors are essential for foreign engagements to be credible and viable in the future.

Building upon the assessments in Chapter III, the Conclusion, in line with principles of liberal study, will explore the role of values in formulating a future

American grand strategy. Using a multidimensional approach, this thesis concludes by proposing that there must be a consistency between a state’s morals and the grand strategy it pursues. Furthermore, moral purpose must be related to a series of practical steps that can be taken, for practical steps without moral purpose quickly become random.

After detailing the ways in which American Primacy has failed to deliver the promises of the post-Cold War era, this thesis ends with some reassuring thoughts as to what role the United States must still play on the world stage today. Absent a New World Order, American leadership must re-kindle the ideological aspect that it possessed during the Cold War. In other words, a moral purpose will provide the United States the assurance and the confidence to act in situations in which the choice is unclear and the where the scope for action is wide.
CHAPTER I
SUPERPOWER CHINA

We are entering, and indeed, have already entered a new historical era. The post-cold war period, which began roughly with the fall of the Berlin wall and continued roughly until the American withdraw from Iraq, was a period that historians will recognize as characterized by two things: (1) real American global hegemony, in which the United States emerged as the dominant world power militarily after the fall of the Soviet Union, and economically, after the information revolution allowed American companies to take the lead in technology; (2) as an era where the United States during the decade between 2001 and 2011 subjected itself to a series of challenges; challenges that historians will have a really hard time explaining.

Indeed, in a decade where China went from a middling power to a global superpower - in economic terms and increasingly in military terms. The United States, on the other hand, spent almost all of its intellectual attention, all of its extra money, and the vast majority of its military might fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, that in the end did not go nearly as well as planned.

The Makings of a Great Power Conflict

This new historical era is because of China; in which the United States relative to China declined and China relative to the United States rose. In classical international relations terms, this would set the stage for a great power conflict; a great power conflict traditionally has a very specific historical form in which there is a single dominant power - sometimes referred to as the status-quo power – that is challenged by a rising power.
Indeed, in classical international relations terms this is all too often a zero-sum conflict, in which every gain for a rising power means a meaningful decline for the dominant power.¹ For instance, the rise of Germany and its challenge to Britain led to World War I, though one could also take the historical analogies back to the rise of Athens and its challenge to Sparta which caused the Peloponnesian wars. Yet something fundamental distinguishes this conflict between the United States and China from other great power conflicts in the past.

**Economic Interdependence**

The fundamental difference today is that China and the United States are profoundly economically interdependent with each other. China is by far the United States’ largest trading partner; the Chinese economy still remains overwhelmingly export driven. For its part, the United States is enormously reliant on China for buying its debt; China owns roughly 10% of outstanding U.S. debt.² A recent concrete example of what this interdependence looks like was the acquisition by China of Smithfield in a deal worth 7 billion dollars; Smithfield is the largest pork producer in the United States.³ Deals of such magnitude are not normally carried out by nations that are hostile to one

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another. It’s unimaginable, for instance, that similar deals would have happened between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

In historical terms, interdependency between these two countries on such an enormous scale is an anomaly, perhaps even a paradox. As China is the rising power, and the status-quo power being the United States, both countries are seemingly locked in a zero-sum conflict for geo-political dominance. While at the same time, both countries are in a deeply profound mutually beneficial positive-sum relationship of economic interdependence, in which they both gain and grow as a result of this interaction.

There also exists an element of mutually assured economic destruction. For example, if the United States was suddenly to say that it was going to stop buying Chinese goods, it of course would be challenging for many American retailers and rather frustrating for American consumers. But overwhelmingly, such an event would be an absolute disaster for China; the Chinese communist party relies for its legitimacy primarily upon economic growth, and the core engine of such growth remains trade, and the United States remains a crucial trading partner. Simply put, the Chinese economy could not survive without America as a trading partner. Moreover, the Chinese communist party, which relies for its legitimacy on economic growth, would cease to be worthwhile without access to American markets.

On the other hand, and for its part, China could choose to dump American debt. And although it couldn’t do so without hurting herself tremendously, nevertheless, the
resulting loss of confidence in U.S. debt would have significant consequences for the United States; particularly as along as America remains a debtor nation.

To be clear, this interdependent relationship is one that both sides would actually really like to reduce. The United States would like to owe less money to everybody, and certainly less to China. And for its part, China would like to diversify its economy, be less dependent on external trade, and less dependent on trade with the United States. In fact, the key for China to maintain mild economic growth would be to develop its domestic market; while developing a domestic market takes time, it remains the best way not to be fully dependent on trade partners.

A Superpower with Chinese Characteristics

A significant reason each of the countries fear such aforementioned interdependence is because they understand that they are vulnerable to the threats from each other. Such fear has grounding in the fact that there is an emerging bi-polar relationship, in which globally the United States and China are increasingly the significant global powers – the United States having been so, and China becoming so.

This bi-polar relationship is characterized by a paradoxical combination of struggle in the realm of politics, and co-operation in the realm of economics. While it is possible, it is very unlikely that there will be another Cold War. Rather, future Sino-American relations will more likely be characterized by a “Cool War” between both countries.⁴

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While China is certainly not yet a global superpower on par with the United States; this is especially true when considering China’s military capabilities. Equally, there is of course sound logic in reasoning that it is not in China’s immediate interest to challenge the United States, and certainly not in China’s interest to challenge the United States militarily in a global sense. Yet there are also significant signs to suggest that the military gap is closing and closing fast, and that China’s desire to become the regional power in Asia is in effect tantamount to China wanting to become a global superpower.

To make the first of these points all that is required is to take note of the headlines of the recent past; specifically, the cyber-attacks by China on American military technology providers. Indeed, as a result of these cyber hacks, China now has a fighter jet that looks very similar to the U.S. equivalent.  

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Furthermore, after China was caught stealing the plans for American’s global missile defense program, one could without difficulty infer that Beijing was engaging in such operations to either get around any such programs, or to build one of their own.6

In short, as we know from our everyday lives, if there is a product that is made in the United States, and should the blueprints then be handed over to China, China can with ease make that product at a high degree of quality for a fraction of the cost.

Though China is not yet in a position to invent its own technological advances, that fact does not matter if it can steal and steal effectively the blueprints for any such desired technological advances. Thus, in a world where the blueprints are easily accessible, and where China can build for that which it can steal the plans, the gap between the United States and China is not the twenty-year gap which experts confidently spoke of in the recent past, it is in fact something far smaller.\(^7\)

The second point concerning China’s growing interest in becoming the regional power in Asia is exemplified through its assertive action on and around the small islands off the coast of China that it typically claims as part of China, but which no other country typically recognizes as part of China. Going as far as to militarize many of these islands, Beijing is attempting assert some degree of sovereign control over the disputed areas. This point is compounded by the fact that China has committed to build its military at a rate of roughly ten percent per annum; Beijing recently made known the fruit of such investment by unveiling a new class of aircraft carrier.\(^8\)


States don’t build aircraft carriers to be friendly. Rather, China is building aircraft carriers because it does not want the United States to be the only global power with the capacity to send carriers into the Taiwanese strait.

The issue of Taiwan is important. China says openly that it believes that it should be a part of China. For its part, the United States does not say openly that it does not want that to happen; Washington follows a rather bizarre policy known as “Strategic Ambiguity.” To be clear, this is not to say that the Chinese intend to sail into the Taiwanese strait with its new aircraft carriers and declare war with Taiwan; after all, that might motivate the American public to want to defend Taiwan. Rather, it is in China’s

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interest to grow its military to the point where no one would credibly think in the United States that war is a viable option to protect Taiwan. However, if such aforementioned reasoning is convincing, and should that reality come to bear, what then is to stop China from simply assimilating Taiwan under comparable conditions to that of Hong Kong, and its ‘one country, two systems’ fiction.

Furthermore, logic follows that should Taiwan fall under the yoke of Chinese rule, would the United States ever intervene to defend Japan or South Korea? It’s certainly not clear why the South Koreans or the Japanese should believe that the decision to intervene by the United States would be any different from its position on Taiwan. If that’s the case, then China is not on its way to becoming the regional superpower in Asia, it’s in fact already in a position of being the regional superpower in Asia. And at more than half the world by population and more than half the world by GDP, Asia counts in practical terms as at least half of the World.

**Playing Both Ends against the Middle**

It would seem then that there now exists a world where there is a deep bipolarity. With the United States, on the one hand, alongside its western allies. And China, on the other hand, with its growing network of partners. Looking ahead, countries in the rest of the world will therefore matter enormously, and as in the Cold War, they will all be subject to the race for alliances. Yet, there is a big difference between what happened in the Cold War and what is happening today with respect to alliances. And the difference is not trivial.
Remarkably, in this new world order, allies of the United States and China can play both ends against the middle far more effectively. For instance, it is possible for a country to be militarily aligned with the United States, while being economically aligned with China. Indeed, South Korea and Japan are well known to be military aligned with the U.S.; they both desperately need the United States to make sure that they are not swept into total Chinese hegemony. However, both countries simultaneously engage in mutually beneficial trading arrangements with China.

It is then clear what is desirable for many countries around the world – protection by alliance with the United States, and economic prosperity via trading arrangements with China. Such an approach to alliances is all well and good for countries like South Korea only up until China economically pulls them into a more all-encompassing sphere of influence. For the moment though, the reality remains one where countries will continue to hedge one way for security and another for economic prosperity; such a geopolitical reality was unimaginable during the Cold War, where nations basically had to pick a side.

**Peaceful Rise Vs Peaceful Decline**

To understand where this is all going, it is imperative to recognize the internal governance structure of both China and the United States. In the case of the United States the key word is nationalism. And while there was a wonderful phrase that Chinese leadership once used to describe China’s rise – “China’s peaceful rise”– America’s
peaceful decline, on the other hand, is not a great slogan. For sure, it is certainly not a slogan that one could use to run for President of the United States.  

In other words, anyone running for president in the next cycle, and perhaps the cycle after that, is going to be put into the position of having to have a firm stance on where they stand in respect to China. And it will not be possible for that stance to be one of acceptance and delight in regards to Beijing emerging as the new global superpower.

Forecasting China’s future near term is more complex. This is chiefly because the Chinese internal system of government is much less well understood internationally, especially in the United States. Indeed, the popular consensus in the United States has long been to underestimate China on the basis of its governance structure. As Thomas L. Friedman put it, “in the long run depriving China’s people of freedom, a basic human right, will undermine their ability to realize their full potential.”

Although China is absolutely not a democracy, and while it is very much an authoritarian system, it is not a dictatorship. In fact, China has had peaceful transitions of political authority within the Chinese communist party three times at intervals of a decade. In those intervals, an internal process for the chosen group of leaders has taken place in a way that is not at all transparent, but was nevertheless visible, understandable,

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and predictable. In essence, the overall motivation of the Chinese communist party is to remain in power and to maintain stability, and for that it needs economic growth.

Yet economic growth alone is not enough. China also needs to achieve Chinese national commitment to a national project; China’s current President, Xi Jing Ping, has a slogan – “China dream.”¹² The idea here is that there should be a personal dream of economic success, but also a wider collective Chinese dream; a collective dream that operates not just at the national level but also the international level as well.

**The Way Forward**

It is not my intention to provide an impression of overwhelming pessimism when it comes to the future of Sino-American relations. Instead, the source for optimism could conceivably be exactly what characterizes the fraught relationship between both countries. Namely, the sheer depth of economic interdependence between the United States and China allows an extraordinary opportunity for leveraging the positive aspects of the relationship, but it also provides an opportunity to manage the structural conflict that is inherent within the relationship itself.

In effect, a positive outlook towards future Sino-American relations is based on a universal truth, namely, the power of human self-interest. To illustrate this point, simply look to realm of international trade law. For generations people have said that international law is a nice idea, but it’s not really law because there is no sovereign to enforce it.

Despite such aforementioned pessimism, international trade law is effective all over the world; the United States and China continue to belong to the WTO. Indeed, they both subject themselves to WTO tribunals which make judgments against them, they both pay the damages they are supposed to pay, and afterwards they don’t leave but rather they stay and re-subject themselves to the same trade regime again. China and the United States do this for one reason and one reason only – self-interest. The interest of both sides, and indeed of countries all over the world, in remaining in this regime is so great that it causes them to treat international trade law like it is really law.

There are many places where China and the United States can and does cooperate straightforwardly for mutual benefit. Since it would not be rational for each of them to go to war with each other, the positive self-interest motive will therefore facilitate greater communication, greater understanding, and reduce the likelihood of violence. Of course, pressure points like Taiwan or North Korea could serve to bring about conflict between both countries. So clearly the risks are real, they are great, and they are continuing. But the capacity and possibility for management exists through mutual self-interest, and that should be the goal for as long as it is possible.

Perhaps the only aspect that is certain, however, is that the continued dominance of the West that appeared so likely, alongside the belief in a New World Order, at the end of the Cold War stands in stark contrast to today’s reality. Indeed, the success of China as a one party, authoritarian led, communist regime, is a standing reproach to what the post-Soviet era was intended to represent.
CHAPTER II

THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDER IS NEITHER LIBERAL, NOR INTERNATIONAL, NOR ORDERLY

It was Voltaire who penned the well-known line, “the Holy Roman Empire is neither holy, nor Roman, nor an Empire.”¹ In the same vein, this chapter seeks to show that the ‘liberal international order’ is in fact neither liberal, nor international, nor very orderly.

More Disorder than Order

The 1990s were the high watermark of liberal optimism. The collapse of communism and the velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe helped to convince lots of very smart people that liberal democratic orders were the only viable model for human society. Indeed, public intellectuals, including Thomas Friedman, spent most of the 1990s arguing that globalization was forcing all countries to put on the “golden straight jacket” and embrace the liberal model of democracy, market economies, rule of law, and membership of key global institutions. All of this was of course meant to lead to unrivaled prosperity.² Indeed, in Europe, the European Union was expanding and developing, even producing a common currency. While in United States, the Clinton administration committed itself to enlarging the sphere of democratic rule.


In short, American leaders and foreign policy experts thought that the tide of history was coming their way, and that liberal principles would be easy to spread. The consensus was clear, sooner or later all of the other major powers, including Russia and China, would embrace the liberal model. Or so they thought.

The following Chapter will identify the foundational reasons why this New World Order, that was supposed to define international relations after the fall of Soviet Union, never came to fruition. To this end, Chapter II will illuminate the failure of ruling elites to appreciate the historically predictable consequences of what is now commonly known as ‘globalization.’ Indeed, globalization or as it has been known in the West – the liberal international order – has become a fashionable term used to characterize the increase connections that continue to grow across the world.

The term ‘liberal international order’ sounds benign on the face of it – notions of liberalism, internationalism, and order, together all conjure up images of peace and prosperity, democracy and freedom. Yet, when one puts together these idealistic notions the result is a rather fantastical view of history. In fact, this view of history sees the creation of international institutions post-1945 as a success story; the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Trade Organization, were all understood to exist in a type of custodian relationship with the global economy. Within which free movement of goods, of people, and of capital, would provide peace and prosperity for all.

Of course, if one looks at what globalization has done, it has in fact been enormously beneficial, but chiefly only to those who have benefited from global integration; particularly, in relation to the markets for goods and capital. In other words,
the result of globalization has not been beneficial for all because the benefits of trade liberalization have gone to such a small percentage of the global population.

It should therefore come as no surprise that populists have started to attack notions of a liberal international order by using terms like ‘globalist’ as insults. In this respect, the election of President Donald Trump serves as the symptom of a much larger problem.

**Push Back Against Globalization is Nothing New**

From the very beginning, greater global connectivity and backlash against it were really parts of the same process. Be it the age of empire or more contemporary events – greater global contact will inevitably provide more opportunities for agreement but also arguments for divergence. It should not be a surprise then that as greater diversity of people and ideas enter the international arena, disagreements widen rather than narrow. A fine example of this process occurred during the World Fairs of the late 1800s. For they became a prime illustration of the fragmentation and division inherent within the globalizing process.

World Fairs were intended to celebrate human unity and growing global connectivity. But in reality, they served only to highlight the differences and contradictions amongst the world’s peoples. In essence, such spectacles above all served to foster a growing awareness of cultural differentiations. Ultimately leading to the reinforcement of nationalist sentiment, rather than the embracing of global values.³

It is too often forgotten when discussing the current problems of our contemporary period that globalizing trends have been developing for a long time. At each stage of globalization, whatever the century, push back emerges in some way. In other words, globalization did not start in the 1970s with the emergence of global corporate business. Rather the big lesson of history is that these experiments of hyper-globalization are nothing new.

For instance, the period of 1870-1945 saw revolutions in communication and transportation that simultaneously expanded and shrunk the world; allowing people the opportunity to profit from global exchanges. Yet such interactions did not denote some new stage of convergence beyond nation and empire. For where the global and local met unpredictable encounters followed; the friction of “contact zones” was multiplied ever more by connective flows that increasingly networked the globe. Accordingly, the result was both creativity as well as oppression, co-production as well as imposition. In short, the perception of ‘the other’ as it relates to those who succeed or those who get left behind as a result of increased global connectivity was as fundamental an element of globalization over century ago, as it is today.

The nineteenth-century, for example, saw arguments over unequal distributional effects in the economic sphere become an ever-growing characteristic of globalization.

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European states tried in vain to avoid the unequal distributional effects that their citizens started to experience due to such increasing global connectivity. In fact, with the hope of reducing American exports, such as wheat, European governments opted for tariffs to counter falling transport costs.\textsuperscript{6} The irony here being that by the end of the age of European exploration, it was the Europeans themselves that were attempting to slow globalizing forces, the same globalizing forces that they themselves had created.

To be sure, the lesson that should be taken from the age of exploration is that the possibilities, but also consequences of globalizing forces are extremely variable, and they will continue to be so. One should not underestimate, therefore, the push back that history shows as being part and parcel of globalization as a whole.

**Faltering Liberal Institutions**

Europe after 1945 was a continent in search of an identity, as what it stood for before was unwelcome. Covered with the ruins of war, Europe - with significant backing from the United States - rushed to the ambitious concept that it was, in a sense, no longer enough to be a Frenchman, a German, or an Italian.

There was also a clear sense that the separation between globalization and nationalism - considering the integration of global markets - was drawing to a close. In fact, sovereignty as a concept took on a more international tone: “the limit of the state’s ability and willingness to protect its people are also the limits of its sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{7} In

other words, the European Union represented a new conception of state sovereignty, or more accurately, the abandonment of absolute sovereignty that had prevailed in Europe since the Treaty of Westphalia. It was hoped, therefore, that people would begin to identify themselves with a number of growing transnational currents, such as: collective security agreements; freedom of movement; universal human rights. What emerged, however, was a gap between what is and what ought to be.

Clearly, Europe saw where it had been, yet it could not then master the inevitable forces that emerge when pursuing continental wide unification. The 2016 Brexit vote was indeed a moment that caused many to reconsider the viability of such high-minded aspirations.

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Figure 4. Brexit defied liberal internationalist theorizing, leaving many in Europe, and indeed across the world, to wonder if there are inevitable forces of expansion and contraction with the framework of globalization. Source: Alex Hunt “Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU,” BBC. October 19, 2017. http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32810887, accessed October 2017.

The importance of the European Union should not to be underestimated. For it was a noble idea to try and attempt to transform Europe from a slaughter house into a place that would banished conflict, banished poverty, and banished all of the bad impulses which were there before. Moreover, the liberal international order as a whole, and the institutions that characterize it, all involve a trade-off to some extent. Whether it is the United Nations, NATO, the WTO, or indeed, membership of the European Union - All associations of this kind entail certain obligations on the part of its members. Moreover, in a global village someone else’s deficiency very soon becomes one’s own
problem. Especially when considering the fact that emerging economic and political challenges cannot always be meaningfully addressed within the nation state framework. Indeed, geographical borders are not adequate when attempting to tackle issues, such as: pollution; infectious disease; and terrorism.  

However, let it not be forgotten that nations are nevertheless linked by language and law, by habit and history, and by kinship and migration. These truths may be obscured at times by rampant globalism, but a nation is not just a random set of individuals born to another set of random individuals. For nations are inheritors of traditions.

What is more, the liberal international order underpinning the European Union did not in practice benefit all nations equally; on a micro-level, low income households have watched their situations worsen through ever closer union within the EU; on a macro-level, every continent in the world has grown economically, except Europe. Indeed, ever since the rise of industrial China and India, the shift of manufacturing production away the European continent has meant that there has never been an age where geographical proximity has mattered less than it does now. Yet from inertia, or what Milton Friedman called the “tyranny of the status quo,” countries remain inside the

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European Union, despite being part of the world’s only trade block that is experiencing no economic growth.⁹

In short, the problems of the European Union are systematic of the issues that lie at the heart of liberal international institutions. This is primarily because the promise of liberal international institutions - of which the European Union is one - are based on the notion of prosperity and greater stability for all. But that is not what has emerged, and Europe seems once again to be in disarray.

**The Ununited Nations**

The ineptitude of the European Union is but an example of the problematic nature of liberal international institutions. The United Nations, of course, is the most cited institution when it comes to pointing out the failures of the New World Order. According to Barbara Mackinnon, one could attribute the political failure of the UN with a certain global ethic of selfish national interest: “Democratic publics do not actually believe that the universal should trump their local interests.”¹⁰

In fact, on occasions when states do work together effectively, they do so only because they deem it useful, and not in the name of the liberal international order. It seems then that national interest will inevitably prevail over international institutions

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like the UN. After all, the struggle for power, proposed Hedley Bull, is the dominant feature of an “Anarchical Society.” The point here is that national interest is paramount in international affairs. Gérard Araud, once the French ambassador to the United Nations, did well to explain that “when you have a crisis where a major power has a national interest involved they will try to block interference by the Security Council.”

It would seem then that national sovereignty remains a formidable obstacle when attempting at achieving justice across borders, or instituting effective international or regional human rights rules. In the end then, the traditional notion of absolute sovereignty and what that implies, is a colossal obstacle to any attempt to form what might be called a New World Order. Accordingly, the dictum suggesting that the United Nations is a force for ‘good’ is somewhat hollow, since the ‘good’ (however one defines it) will only be pursued if a nation state deems it useful.

To sum up, in the contemporary world it remains hard to ignore the very powerful global pressures exerting themselves against traditional societal bonds. In other words, individuals are too often left isolated, reliant on their own plans to succeed in both private and public domains. These pressures extend across many dimensions, be it the global economic crash of 2008, or the Syrian refugee crises of 2015. In the end, liberal international institutions have been tested but found wanting.


The Biggest Winners Have Not Been Liberal Democracies

Taking down all barriers and restraints to capital flow has led ultimately to a succession of financial crises, to which the most spectacular was the financial crises of 2008. That is perhaps why the populist backlash finally came after a financial crisis. For it is clear that the political backlash has come, and in this sense, it is possible to consider the liberal international order as now resembling more a liberal international disorder.

However, the consensus amongst those who have gained most in the era of hyper-globalization takes a very different view. Such supporters argue that the liberal international order has been successful; particularly when compared to the next best alternatives. Authoritarian regimes in China and Russia (or indeed any other potential competitor to the liberal international order) are cited as examples of systems that are highly unattractive for finance, for people, and for states. It is thus concluded that continuation of the liberal international order is inevitable, based on the next best alternative not being that desirable.

The curious thing about such an argument is that the principal beneficiary of the liberal international order has been China, and the Communist Party that runs it. It was after all the Chinese president Xi Jing Ping, who recently defended the liberal international order at Davos. Emily Tamkin of *Foreign Policy* described the experience: “Xi Jinping, president of China and leader of the Chinese Communist Party, addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos. It was the first time a Chinese leader had ever done such a thing, but Xi made up for years of lost headlines by coming out as a
champion — and perhaps even the champion — of global trade and the current international economic order.”  

It does seem strange that arguments for free trade and free capital movement should come from an authoritarian Chinese leader. But it also provides a clue as to what is wrong with the liberal international order. Namely, the principle beneficiary over the last twenty-five years has been a one-party state that is anything but liberal. How can

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there be a liberal international order if the principal beneficiary is the People’s Republic of China, a one-party state?

**The Paradox of the Liberal International Order**

China has embraced the rules of the road when it comes down to trade and capital movement. Yet crucially, it has not made any moves toward democracy. Or indeed made any attempt at adopting western values; such as, free speech and freedom of expression. This then is the paradox of the liberal international order.

While it is true that liberal democracies initially created global international institutions – like the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund – to serve as guardians, and to solidify the rules of the road. The irony here is that after the decision was made to bend the rules (especially of the WTO) to involve China in the liberal international order, it was Beijing that took full advantage without actually becoming any more liberal. In fact, China’s system of one party rule has gone from strength to strength.

The case of China serves to show the central weakness within the notion of a ‘liberal international order.’ For it turns out that more unfettered free trade does not rid the world of authoritarian leaders, or lead to a New World Order. Indeed, it is no surprise that Francis Fukuyama’s vision of the “The End of History” never came to fruition.\textsuperscript{14} For the simple reason that illiberal pseudo-democracies and full-blown authoritarian regimes have actually done very well on the back of the liberal international order. In

\textsuperscript{14} Francis Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History and the Last Man} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), xi.
point of fact, on purchasing-power parity basis, China’s share of GDP is now larger than that of the United States and Canada combined.

**The Liberal International Order is Pax Americana**

If the world has been relatively more peaceful since 1945 than it was in the first half of the twentieth century, then it is because of the United States played a leadership role. Indeed, the only international aspect of the liberal international order would be that the United States, through a system of alliances and military deployments, imposed a Pax Americana.

Taking a step back, a striking feature of the post-Soviet era has been the crumbling of Pax Americana; its loss of economic legitimacy after the financial crises of 2008, and its loss of ability to achieve meaningful positive change in Iraq and Libya. As a result, it seems as though the ‘order’ as it relates to the notion of a liberal international order is be crumbling before our very eyes.

**The Future of Internationalism**

History shows us that globalizing forces are rather fickle and in some respect, repetitive. And that although context and actors may change, fundamentally, globalizing trends prove proficient at spreading cosmopolitan values and perspectives, while equally enhancing nationalist ambitions.

International institutions certainly know where they came from, but they do not know where they are going. Besides, while there is of course a laboratory of political possibilities, the distribution of authority still remains with the most powerful states. It is also clear that we have lived with the idea of sovereign states for so long they have
come to be part of the background, not only of diplomacy and public discourse, but also of culture, ethics, and norms. Certainly, village life and village culture still rules, and for many there is no single village, but many villages on our globe.

The G-20

After the financial crises of 2008, it was more noticeable than ever before that institutions like the G-20 were becoming increasingly ineffectual. Accordingly, Stephen Walt pondered that, “although one can point to any number of positive developments over the past 20 years (most notably the lifting of a billion or more people out of dire poverty), it is hard to escape the feeling that the current world order is rapidly becoming a lot less orderly.”

In short, after the financial crises it became apparent that leadership was lacking. Not to mention the fact that members including: China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, all continue to hold fundamentally different views on rule of law, democratic institutions, free markets, and human rights. Likewise, it became clear that the United States had to choose whether or not to compromise on such important values, in order to gain more cohesion within the G-20. Arguably, the United States still holds firm in the belief that western values are still superior and relevant. However, the problem with this principled method is that it effectively guarantees the doom of the G-20.

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In other words, in a world where U.S. led global institutions no longer function there are two choices: (1) Remain within the dysfunctional institutions, for example the Security Council or the G-20; (2) Choose leadership in a regional setting. For instance, in terms of climate, the United States chooses global but provides no leadership. Endless global summits – Copenhagen, Durban, Cancun, Paris – declare that something must be done. But nothing ever really gets done. In fact, ending global summits on climate change would actually be better than what has been happening between countries of the ‘liberal international order’ over the past twenty-five years.

Considering that at this juncture it is near impossible to get a group of the most powerful countries to agree on anything. Perhaps the best solution, and far easier solution, would be to get smaller groups of likeminded countries to agree on less global but more regional initiatives.

**The Mythical Powers of Globalization**

In light of current geo-political realities, it would help immensely if we were all to stop believing in the would be mythical powers of globalization, and realize how it is still very easy to misunderstand each other. Moreover, by learning the lessons of history we would certainly still help encourage globalizing trends, but also understand better the corresponding divisional facets which generally follow increasing global connectivity. Indeed, the idea of globalization, as a model of high scale flows connecting at a world level, should not exclude local and regional realities.

To be clear, globalization is a powerful force and it certainly can lift the well-being and living standards of those in both advanced and developing countries. But then
again, the liberal international order hasn’t been doing that satisfactorily, and so the challenge today is to make globalization work for as many people as possible. Therefore, liberal international institutions must endeavor in the future to find an arrangement in which nation states and corresponding institutions, together, seek to minimize coercion and maximize opportunity for its members. This would have the effect of increasing the desire to cooperate with one another, while at the same time openly working to achieve individual state objectives.

In conclusion, it is now well established that there is nothing certain about globalization. And thus social, cultural, political, and economic harmony, all need not necessarily fragment at all times, or be enhanced at others. The present international realities, however, will only likely improve if choices are made on behalf of strong effective nation states applying inspired leadership. The support too of vibrant electorates, conscious of their global obligations, is the bedrock of a truly liberal international order.
CHAPTER III
THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

When seeking to improve foreign policy outcomes, analyzing the recent past is a good place to start. This chapter therefore will evaluate American foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Moreover, this chapter will begin with some general assessments of American foreign policy, and then narrow down to specific cases of American involvement abroad.

America’s Unique Position

With the rise of American power, the globalization process served as the basis for optimistic post-Cold War visions of a peaceful future. Alas, that optimism has been shattered. In other words, a major puzzle of twenty-first century history is that most times the United States has intervened across the world, things have not turned out well. What makes this all the more surprising is that there now exists a foreign policy establishment that is larger, better funded, and filled with more knowledge people than ever before. Accordingly, one would assume that American foreign policy would be more effective as a result.

Furthermore, America is still the largest and most sophisticated economy in the world, and America is also still the only country with global military capabilities; spending more on defense than the next ten countries combined. And perhaps most importantly, America remains geographically separated by two enormous oceans, providing it extensive regional security; the continental United States has not been invaded since 1812, and even that was a war that America initiated.
To this end, U.S. history is very different than that of other major powers. Yet, a paradox exists. Since the United States is so powerful and so intrinsically secure, it thus has the freedom to wonder all over the world and intervene in various places of its own choosing. At the same time, there are few international issues that are going to have a significant impact on essential American safety. In other words, Washington can choose to get involve in most places, and if things go badly (as in Vietnam or Iraq) the United States comes home and is in essence unscathed. No other country has such a luxury.

However, America’s unique position creates a number of challenges for its foreign policy. Since the U.S. is stronger and safer than everyone else, it often finds difficulties when setting priorities. Put another way, when you have so many options it is often very hard to choose which matter most. As a result, American presidents find it very difficult to make comprehensive decisions, for the reason that so many people can offer so many different ideas about what options to pursue, what options to prioritize, and what options to disregard. In effect, by having such a vast array of options, American presidents face constant pressure to do something whenever anything happens anywhere.

In a sense then, the notion of American ‘credibility’ is effectively automatically engaged whenever a crisis erupts in the world; partly a consequence of its global military presence being divided into regional combative commands, and therefore American troops are usually somewhere nearby. For instance, just look at the places visited by the 68th U.S. Secretary of State, John F. Kerry, and how they more often than not involved juggling regional conflicts and disputes in Ukraine, Nigeria, South Sudan, Israel-
Palestine, Iran, and the Senkaku Islands. No other country would be expected to respond to all of these predicaments and conflicts around the world.

We know from our own lives that when one tries to do too much, one normally ends up doing none of it particularly well. Hence, in light of America’s position in the world, its foreign policy agenda tends to be overloaded. Yet the same time, because of such unique power and security, it is not worth spending a lot of blood or treasure on most of those problems. In effect, American foreign policy is both very ambitious and yet slightly feckless. Policy is directed toward being rather broad in scope, but rather shallow in substance.

The Marshall Plan in 1947, for instance, cost 5% of American GDP. A remarkable thing to have done. If a similar gesture was made in response to the Arab spring it would have cost $800 billion dollars.\(^1\) Clearly nobody was going to contemplate spending that amount of money trying to shape what was happening in Egypt, or elsewhere; in the end Egypt was offered around $1 billion dollars in debt relief. What this therefore illustrates is that there are not a lot of issues that Washington considers worthy of prolonged and committed engagement; Iraq is not an exception because Washington did not go into it thinking that it was going to be as expensive as it has turned out to be.

**Intervention Gone Awry**

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History tells us (plus a lot of social science) that state building and attempting to reshape domestic institutions is very difficult for anyone to do; let alone a Western country that is profoundly different and doesn’t necessarily understand Muslim majority states very well. Simply put, one reason why American foreign policy has not been successful is that it has ended up tackling a series of challenges that are extremely complexed. What that suggests is that even if Washington was running perfect by proficiently choosing objectives that were realistic, it would nevertheless face serious challenges overcoming the present geo-political realities in the world today.

Washington however is far from running perfectly when pursuing intervention abroad. What follows then is a study of two cases of failed American intervention, in Libya and Iraq. Indeed, the failed American interventions in Iraq and Libya have been selected for two principal reasons: (1) They both occurred in the recent past, so any claims that such interventions are not representative of contemporary methods, as it relates to U.S. military capabilities, can easily be dismissed; (2) Iraq and Libya are used because the administrations involved are generally thought to have held radically different world views; President Bush and President Obama were understood to have held profoundly differing views as it relates to America’s role abroad.

Ultimately, American intervention in Iraq and Libya demonstrates how two very different presidential mentalities, representing two opposing political parties, both managed to fail at remarkably similar hurdles. The following study is therefore emblematic of a broader and consistent flaw inherent to American foreign policy, and
indeed that the differences across presidential administrations since at least the end of the Cold War have been marginal.
FAILURES IN LIBYA

Chester Crocker once observed, “Smart statecraft does not dispense with hard power; it uses hard power intelligently, recognizing the limits as well as the potential of purely military power and integrating it into an over-arching strategy.”\(^2\) In other words, to be effective, intervention must start with being able to define clear, understandable, and meaningful objectives. Hardheaded assessments are therefore essential for refining the objective to fit reality, relevant ambitions, and means. From the outset, however, the Libyan intervention was characterized by flawed assessments giving way to a divorce between means and objectives.

**Assessments Must Be Based on Reality Not Faith**

To understand the failures in Libya is also to know the failure of assessment. For it is hard to marry objectives and means when the objective is difficult to explain. Such a gap between objectives and means when the United States and its allies went into Libya was due in no small part to the fact that the assessments were based on faith, not on reality. Thus, it is critical if intervention is to be successful that ideological goggles are removed.

As the legal interpretations of Resolution 1973 made clear, the original undertaking in Libya was not to seek to topple Colonel Qaddafi’s regime, let alone kill him. The declared aim was in fact solely the “protection of civilians,” based on the

Responsibility to Protect. It is no surprise then that NATO’s mandate was continuously spoiled by differing interpretations of what the realistic or desired objectives were in Libya.

The British and French, for instance, were fervently anti-Gaddafi and pro-regime change, but without the means to achieve such an objective. In reality, even against an enemy as weak as Libya, NATO would still need the overwhelming support of the United States to fight proficiently. In fact, it wasn’t just that NATO countries had too few combat jets; America provided all surveillance and reconnaissance for battlefield analysis, as well as refueling and equipping most NATO jets. The real issue was that while some members were willing to participate, other countries contributed little or decided not to participate at all.

Regardless of the shortcomings within the capabilities of some NATO members, in general terms, the very nature of Resolution 1973 was profoundly problematic, as it did not lend itself to military planning. After all, the “protection of civilians” does not indicate an end state to be achieved, nor does it identify a specific enemy.

For a successful intervention to be planned and executed properly, its outline needs to be precise. Of course, greater military commitment on the ground must be only a means and not an objective; too often administrations adopt solely military means while having objectives that can only be achieved using political means - Clausewitz.

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was of course right when he observed that war is an act of violence to achieve political ends.⁴

At this juncture, it’s worth keeping in mind that to some degree faith exists in all intervention strategies. And most able policymakers set objectives that aim to take conflicts from where there are, to where they ought to be. In that sense, the common understanding is wrong, for there is not always a dichotomy between assessments based on either faith or reality, as it relates to creating effective foreign policy.

If a successful political transition in Libya was truly the objective, it would have required huge effort and patience to conduct such a long and extremely difficult negotiation. Yet as bombing continued, the Obama administration for all intents and purposes ended up choosing de-facto regime change while simultaneously having its officially stated goal being quite other.

It was only logical that once the immediate threat to civilians had been removed (the rationale for the Resolution 1973) the most realistic option to forge any credible form of political transition was to stop the bombing before all institutional capacity was utterly destroyed. Indeed, it’s likely that an effective assessment of the realities on the ground would have established that the means of air power alone could never have achieved any of the objectives stated by the Obama administration. Instead, Washington

“Leading from behind” watched from the sidelines as a sectarian civil war engulfed the country.\(^5\)


Successfully seizing the initiative and declaring that Gaddafi must go would require more than just expectation. In the end, the Obama administration undoubtedly

lacked a clear assessment that reflected a good reading of the situation. From the outset, the failure to have assessments based on reality resulted in the formulation of unattainable objectives.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of the Libya intervention is that it was, according to the Obama administration, meant to serve as an example of how the international community is supposed to work, perhaps even a model of “smart power.” However, in the end the struggle to fill the power vacuum triggered by Gaddafi’s fall has shown that the victors, it appears, are many of the radical militias that the Obama administration had vowed to oppose and extinguish.

**Objectives Must Be Clearly Framed**

Effective intervention always requires the ability to get out in front of the issue and force others to respond to one’s own formulation and actions. In Libya, the Obama administration not only failed to anticipate the chaos, the looting, and the complete breakdown of law and order. But it also failed to adjust its calculus or increase its effort; instead of getting out in front of the issues, Washington was left only reacting to them. Though it may seem obvious, it must be noted that like most objectives in life, the higher the stakes involved, the greater the effort needs to be.

Intervention done well requires that administrations are working in a unified way; making sure that effective assessments and accountability – including both

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planning and follow through – are prioritized. It is critical therefore to be able to frame what is at stake in a way that not only can mobilize and sustain domestic support, but also in a way that makes objectives legitimate internationally, thereby raising costs to those who would oppose it. Such an approach must include active diplomacy (including back channels) and the composition of inducements and penalties. Unfortunately, the Obama administration failed to frame objectives in a way that would get others to accept its legitimacy.

The Obama administration fumbled and floundered into regime change without ever providing a clarification as to why regime change was essential to “protect civilians.” Even after acquiescing to support United Nations Resolution 1973, and after declaring that Colonel Qaddafi had lost his legitimacy and had to go, the Obama administration still maintained that it was simply its political position.

In short, the Obama administration failed to start as it meant to finish by not framing objectives clearly and decisively. Rather than providing clarity, the Obama administration continued to frame its objectives ambiguously; the inability within the administration to frame objectives clearly was most apparent months before Gaddafi was even removed from power. For instance, speaking on Libya, President Obama maintained that, “broadening the military mission to include regime change would be a mistake.” Yet given the situation on the ground, how could regime change not be the

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objective? As air strikes continued and funding of rebel groups grew ever more substantial, the outcome was inevitable. In effect, the administration had created a *fait accompli* in regards to regime change in Libya.

**Leading from Behind**

When undertaking assertive foreign policy, administrations must work hard to persuade and explain why it is important for such engagement to continue. Clearly, policies made well before any intervention can indirectly lead administrations into trouble when trying to frame issues as realities change.

In Libya, “leading from behind” hindered the Obama administration from fully controlling the agenda and framing all of the issues. As a result, the administration was often left reacting to obstacles that occurred rather than seeking to anticipate and solve them. Even when the administration recognized the obstacles to achieving its objectives, it did not manage to bridge them successfully, it simply disguised them.

Successful intervention abroad requires an administration to frame objectives clearly, and to seize critical moments. For instance, the fact that Qatar was providing small arms to groups with questionable motives within Libya was an affront to any chance of a peaceful political transition.

For intervention to be successful administrations must appreciate the role of others; both those who share America’s purposes and those who do not. In short, objectives cannot be achieved when means used by coalition partners run diametrically opposed to the administrations stated goals.

**Legitimacy and the World Stage**
The removal of Muammar Gaddafi has been a historic development in Libya, yet, six years later it is safe to say that intervention in Libya did not bring about desirable change. Simply put, statecraft requires realistic assessments, and the present reality is that Libya, with a population smaller than that of Scotland, poses an outsize security threat to the region and beyond.


Did the 2011 intervention stop a humanitarian catastrophe or merely help create one of a different kind? Plainly, what is quantifiable is that the looting of Qaddafi’s
enormous weapons caches during the intervention has fed the Syrian civil war, and empowered terrorist and criminal groups from Nigeria to Sinai.\(^8\)

The time of thoughtless intervention is over. From now on, Washington must frame objectives from the start clearly, using assessments based on reality, ensuring that all objectives are married to available means. Then, and only then, can intervention succeed.

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FAILURES IN IRAQ

This study of the American intervention in Iraq in 2003 will focus upon the Bush administration’s failure to provide the necessary resources required to achieve the objectives that it stated publicly; in the words of President Bush, “Iraqi democracy will succeed, and that success will send forth the news from Damascus to Tehran that freedom can be the future of every nation.” The reader will of course note that aspects from the previous study on the Libya intervention in 2011 are apparent in the case of Iraq. Clearly, the inability of the Bush administration, as was the case for the Obama administration, to marry its objectives and means was one of the major characteristics of the intervention in Iraq, and perhaps American foreign policy at large.

To have good objectives, and to have objectives and means related to each other, there must be assessments that guide them. Of course, assessments need to be reality based, not faith based. Though, at this point in time, the mistaken assessments of the Bush administration are so well known, and have been so widely studied and discussed, that getting bogged down in the debates over the existence of weapons of mass-destruction will not be what is central to the following study. Specifically, the following pages will focus on the policy failures of Iraq, as they relate to provision of adequate resources to bring about meaningful change. And indeed, the changing nature of war,

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and the effect that is having on the ability of the United States military to achieve success on the battlefield.

Importantly, the failure of the United States to usher in a New World Order after the end of the Cold War is not only because of the large structural challenges that have been touched upon in Chapter I and Chapter II, but also because of Washington’s failure to adequately commit to operations abroad. Put differently, as a result of such unique power and security, American foreign policy has time and again been ambitious but incompetent, and too often focused on overarching goals that are broad in scope but shallow in substance.

**Means and Objectives Must Be Married**

The principal failure in Iraq, as it relates to implementation, was the gap between means and objectives. More precisely, a severe man power deficit on the part of the United States ensured that its objectives were bound to fail. For instance, one of the stated objectives was to destroy or remove weapons of mass destruction: “The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder.”¹⁰ Notwithstanding the fact that the WMD assessment was vacuous, in terms of the initial policy failure, the Bush administration’s decision to limit its means was inexplicable.

In other words, even if there were weapons of mass destruction, the United States would have been in no position to prevent Saddam Hussain from smuggling such weapons out of the country. In short, stating an objective but not marrying it to your means will inevitably lead to a fiasco.

Another objective in Iraq was to promote democracy. Yet, the enduring manpower deficit ensured that the United States did not have enough troops to maintain law and order, thus, any chance to create a democratic environment was doomed to fail. To illustrate the importance of providing the necessary means when pursuing intervention abroad one only needs to look at the history of intervention within Iraq itself, and some striking comparisons arise.

**Boots on the Ground**

When Britain occupied Iraq in 1917 (after creating Iraq as an independent state) there was a major counter insurgency that spewed across the country, creating a great headache for the British government; in due course, the Iraqi insurgency was defeated using air power and ground forces. What is most important to recognize from the British experience in Iraq is the significance of having ‘boots on the ground.’ For instance, in 1917 there were roughly 20 Iraqis for each British servicemen on the ground.\(^{11}\) Compare this ratio to the 210 Iraqis for each American servicemen on the ground in 2006. Of course, while at different times the ratio varied somewhat, the point is clear. American

troop commitment on the ground in Iraq never came remotely close to the 20:1 ratio that the British successfully employed in 1917.\textsuperscript{12}

Time and again, Iraq was characterized by a divorce between means and objectives. Indeed, another fundamental premise of intervention in Iraq was that everything should fall into place after Saddam was gone, and that the state wasn’t going to fall apart; this rational was central to Donald Rumsfeld’s plan to draw down from 160,000 troops to 25,000 troops over a period of 3 months.\textsuperscript{13} Clearly, the Bush administration presumed everything was going to fall into place, and did not feel the need to budget for forces beyond 25,000 troops.

\textbf{The Changing Nature of War}

America has little difficulty winning battles, but once it begins to occupy territory it gets into trouble. There are of course scholars who provide answers for this seeming disposition. Indeed, Lyall and Wilson see the troop deficit in Iraq as emblematic of a long evolving historical process, in which increasing mechanization within state militaries is producing unexpected consequences as it relates to achieving objectives on the ground. Rather than blaming the Bush administration entirely, Lyall and Wilson point to force structures of modern militaries that are increasingly inhibited from

\textsuperscript{12} Shareef Mohammed, \textit{The United States, Iraq and the Kurds: Shock, Awe and Aftermath} (New York: Routledge, 2014), 90.

information collection among local populations.\textsuperscript{14} The significance of this historical process is that interventions will suffer from far more serious insurgencies than ever before.

There is no doubt that Lyall & Wilson are correct in their assertion that technology plays a role in the success or failure of intervention, however, the essential message remains - means must marry objectives. There is no getting around that simple fact. In other words, regardless of the force structure, the Bush administration chronically undermanned the occupation force in Iraq.

**The Future of American Intervention**

Iraq serves a clear example of what is most dire about the nature of American foreign policy today. Simply put, due to America’s position in the world its foreign policy agenda is overburdened. At the same time, because its unique power and geographic security, it seems like Washington does not consider it worth spending a lot of blood or treasure on most of its problems. Indeed, to reiterate what was said at the beginning of this chapter, American foreign policy is both very ambitious and yet spineless. In a sense, policy is directed toward being rather broad in scope, but rather shallow in substance.

With the election of Donald Trump, it would be a fool who failed to recognize the growing consensus within the United States that feels like America should no longer be the global sheriff for security and perhaps not even the cheerleader for global values. Of course, on reflection such sentiment is hardly surprising after two trillion dollars spent on failed intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq. And with technological networks growing at unprecedented speeds, intervention abroad will be scrutinized faster now than ever before. This will in turn enable more commenters via social networks to level more charges that “American values promoted abroad too often lead to instability rather than stability.”

But is the solution simply to stand back and watch from the sidelines? Was letting tragedy unfold, in Syria or Rwanda, objectively the right course of action? No, is the answer to both those questions. In other words, the answer to bad medicine is not to cease production of all medical treatments, but rather, it is to improve and ensure that medicine achieves its required aims. The solution, then, to failed American intervention is not “no boots on the ground” or opting for retrenchment and isolationism. The correct course of action is to improve, by assessing and learning from the mistakes of the past. In a sense, using applied history.

The gloom within the American public will not last forever. For populist and isolationist policies eventually discredit themselves, mainly because their consequences are disastrous. In fact, the fragility concern as it relates to intervention and public opinion

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15} Christopher Layne, The Peace of Illusions (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), ch.6.}\]
has a simple fix – no longer will (or should) the American public support an administration that stumbles into conflict with no unified objective, as was the case in Iraq. Equally, nor should an American public support an administration that is content “leading from behind” while an entire region disintegrates, as was the case in Libya. Future administrations must instead lead by framing clear and achievable objectives, and act upon them decisively.

It has been over two thousand years since Cicero aptly pointed out that statesman who settle for peace without honor sometimes lose both because of their own inaction. So, while American allies would all still agree with Cohen that, “there is something uniquely reassuring about permanently stationed US troops abroad.”16 Washington nevertheless needs to understand that global leadership today is no longer a right to be conducted without thought or wisdom.

The United States must now lead by example, fostering and maintaining its credibility in an increasingly multipolar world. But that also means giving more credence to notions of “offshore balancing,” because protecting U.S. global access through naval, air, and space power must remain paramount.17 This is not to say, however, that America will always be able to act as a master helmsman, guiding the international community steady and true through the unpredictable waters of war and peace.

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Too often learning the lessons of past interventions is done only rhetorically. The focus instead should be, in a clear and tangible way, to show how American engagement abroad can be credible and successful in achieving its aims once more.
CONCLUSION

No ideology, strategy, or plan has remained unaffected by time. The evolution of history, therefore, will inevitably bring about a change. Whether such change will be for the benefit of the United States remains contingent on the nature of the opposition and on the vitality of competing values; as well as on the success of major foreign policy initiatives by opposing powers. Whether change will go in a direction beneficial to the United States, or whether it will confirm existing stereotypes depends very importantly on the performance of the United States. In other words, the proposition that without effort on America’s part that history will be kind is wrong.

A Republic, Demoralized

Since America operates in a civil society, a successful strategy, whatever it might be, must have some degree of public support. Yet the necessity of public support comes at a time when respect for ruling elites is declining. The risk here is that if the American people obtain the idea that its government are artificially or unnecessarily creating calamities, then re-creating the divisions of the Iraq War are more likely. This process in turn contributes to the demoralization of the American establishment, resulting in unexpected election results within a democratic system, as was the case in 2016.

Another significance of such constantly shifting domestic perceptions of the realities in international affairs results in a paralyzed existence for administrations trying to formulate consistent policy. To put it another way, administrations increasingly find themselves in the paradoxical situation of having enough domestic support to lay down a ‘red-line’ but not quite enough to act once that threshold has been crossed; in Syria, the Obama administration learned this lesson to its detriment.¹

The Importance of Having a Moral Purpose

There should be no inconsistency between America’s principles and the strategy it pursues. It is vital therefore that moral purpose must be related to a series of practical steps that can be taken, since practical steps without moral purpose quickly become random. Moreover, without moral purpose no leader will have the assurance and the confidence to act in situations in which the choice is unclear, and the where the scope for action is wide. Ultimately, the dichotomy between moral purpose and pragmatism is unseemly. For without strong moral purpose, there cannot be effective U.S. foreign policy.

At the same time, however, when one translates moral purpose into foreign policy one has to look at the realities of the situation, or else one runs the risk of empty posturing. In this calculation, there is of course the danger of moral confusion, especially if the opponents of the prevailing policy, whatever the prevailing policy is, state their case in absolute terms; for they will not be responsible for the consequences of their assertions, and they don’t necessarily look at the alternatives that were in fact available. Of course, it is in those terms that a problem exists. In other words, the public must come to understand that they now live in a more complicated period than the one in which people formed their historical perceptions.

The Philosophical Problem of ‘Grand Strategy’

Martin Heidegger, a philosopher, once pointed to the central problems to which philosophers addressed themselves were about perception, and whether in fact we have any certain knowledge at all. Heidegger concluded that such considerations are not in fact what is central to the human situation, and proposed that we aren’t separate subjects
looking through some sort of clear glass window into an objective reality which is out there and to which we all try to relate, or of which we try to get knowledge. But rather, Heidegger reasoned that we are from the very being, in amongst it all.

Theorists of American grand strategy need to consider Heidegger’s work more often. In fact, the Heideggerian terminology of “everyday coping” and the primacy of “practical everydayness” is an excellent way to describe and think about the reality that surrounds 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.²


Once you enter the White House, the concept of grand strategy is in many respects dis-regarded as purely academic. Yes, presidents do have their own ideas and values. Yet reality has a way of imposing itself once the oval office is where you reside day-to-day. In short, presidents are unlikely to work according to strict notions of ‘Grand Strategy.’ This is primarily because they are confronted with a whole series of realities and events where they have to decide how to act on the basis of incredibly imperfect information, and very tough choices.

**Realpolitik Does Not Inspire**

It was clear that on issues which are truly global in scope, President Obama understood the West not to be the dominant force that it had been in the 90’s. Indeed, Obama understood that there now existed a more distributed set of actors on the world stage, and that military power used narrowly to achieve specific political objectives was more often than not counter-productive or unlikely to succeed. This was a fair assessment when all are things considered. However, the practical realist thought-process that the 44th president of the United States personified had one major flaw. Strategic patience or ‘don’t do stupid shit’ is not a worthy approach for the world’s most powerful nation.3

America’s global credibility has suffered tremendously in no small part because of such hardheaded practical realist considerations. But this is not to say that President

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Obama failed to hold himself to a high ethical standard. To the contrary, there were virtually no scandals, no conflicts of interests (not professionally, nor personally, not with his family, nor with his business friends). Moreover, Obama was a president who cared deeply about the way people were treated, and he was a president who cared deeply about trying to create more equality and diversity in the United States, as well as globally.

Yet, if one takes a dispassionate and detached view of the United States that Obama’s legacy leaves, as well as the world at large that his legacy leaves. Then one observes a much more fractured world, in which U.S. foreign policy remains largely in tatters. In fact, the United States is not only weaker diplomatically, but her alliances are more challenged than ever before. Despite the structural factors that led to this geopolitical recession; bearing in mind the rise of China. The failure of the Obama administration to achieve, for example, the completion of a major multi-national trade deal - TPP - was significant. Accordingly, the failure to deliver on the larger policy - ‘The Pivot to Asia’ - has done lasting damage to the ability of allies across Asia to look to the United States as a partner they can count on, and the same can be said of allies around the world; this was all true before Trump even got elected.

The sad irony, in other words, is that Obama was analytically so sharp, and yet he was not much of a leader. This fact got him trouble with Moscow particularly; Russia ran rings around the Obama administration while being at the same time the world’s 14th largest economy, smaller than that of Canada. The idea that the Russian’s could engage in systematic hacks to delegitimize the U.S. election is astonishing. And the fact that the
Obama administration did relatively nothing in response, because it did not want to be seen as partisan, is even more astonishing. Whether the Obama was too polite or too political is a matter for debate, but the fact is that the U.S. president is the leader of the free world. Therefore, American national security should come before the perception of the president appearing partisan on behalf of Hillary Clinton. To sum up, the failure to provide effective leadership over recent years was a massive failing, and the fault lies completely on the Obama administration.

The larger point here is that despite eight years in office, of perhaps the most celebrated president in recent history, the liberal international order appears now more than ever like an illiberal authoritarian led disorder. For it seems as though Moscow and Beijing are still playing by the ‘rules of the jungle’ and not by the liberal international order that was meant characterize international relations after the end of the Cold War era.

In terms of a New World Order, it would be fair to assume that the Trump administration is perhaps more comfortable dismissing the possibility of the future that seemed all to possible after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a consequence, allies and partners around the world have become increasingly disillusioned with such overt American pragmatism.

**Jefferson and the New World Order**

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty,
and the pursuit of happiness.”⁴ Those words were written by a man who held slaves. And who, on the basis of other statements that he made around the same time in the *Notes on the State of Virginia* made it really quite clear that he literally didn’t believe that African-Americans and Caucasians were of comparable equality. Firstly, it’s important to recognize that Jefferson’s statement is a profoundly human statement, and thus shot through with its own contradictions. Secondly, Jefferson’s phrase that comes before “all men are created equal,” that “We hold these truths to be self-evident” is indeed a fascinating contraction too. For if something is “self-evident” there is no apparent need to prove it. If it’s true, just say “its self-evident that…” In short, why then does Jefferson include “We hold” in this foundational document?

Jefferson understood that such words, like “We hold,” are the words that humans use to produce a community. In a sense, the “We” is a oneness building exercise. In other words, Jefferson was making a profession of faith to produce a community. Thus, a statement like that isn’t meant to be a descriptive one, it’s meant to be aspirational, and it needs to be foundational.

A New World Order is similarly a profession of faith. It should be considered, to some extent, aspirational. It could be argued that President Bush, therefore, was making a profession of faith to produce a community of like-minded nations. Of course, his vison has not come to bear for the reasons that this thesis has pointed out. Yet it still should

not be overlooked that the idea of a New World Order is one that can be revived today if only in aspirational terms.

**The Need for Optimism**

Structurally speaking, the United States remains a vital and hopeful exemplar. Despite all the shocks, the public in the United States remains less cynical than in any other country. Moreover, the belief that America is still the best hope against all forms of tyranny and authoritarianism is not just empty rhetoric: “When it comes to every important international issue, people of the world do not look to Beijing or Moscow to lead - they call us.”

To put it simply, if Washington does not lead, there will be no leadership.

Winston Churchill said of Americans that after trying every other alternative, they can always be counted on to do the right thing. Yet today’s policymakers seldom step back and consider past achievements holistically. If they did, they would realize that civilizations follow a rhythm and a certain sequence of events, and thus, it would be quite wrong to constantly invoke pessimism. In the words of Abba Eban, “Diplomacy should be judged on what it prevents, not only by what it initiates and creates. Much of

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it is a holding action designed to avoid explosion until the unifying forces of history take humanity into their embrace.”

Therefore, it would be far more instructive to understand what the trend of events are, and whether they are in a positive or negative direction. After all, reversing trends takes more than pessimistic approximations about the shape of things to come.  

**Constructing Better Policy**

While sometimes trends are reversed unintentionally, policy cannot be made with the expectation of a miracle. The problem of policy making is to get some conscious control over events. In other words, if an accident helps you, you’re lucky, but you cannot conduct affairs on the basis analogous to the expectation of winning at roulette.

Of course, playing for time with expectation of some change is sometimes permissible; it was a perfectly rational expectation that the death of Stalin would bring about important domestic changes in the Soviet Union, and therefore playing for that time was a reasonable course of action. Nevertheless, to the extent possible, there must be some rational expectation that one is waiting for. In short, one cannot conduct policy waiting for a favorable accident.

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America’s role remains indispensable. If America is disengaged, regions become unstable, vacuums are created, and sinister forces flow into those vacuums. Moreover, the United States is the largest country in the world, in terms of footprint, and understands that it has a role to play in the international system. But at the same time, the world has to understand that the United States cannot carry all of the burden of maintaining order in the international system. In other words, there has to be more burden sharing. For example, European countries that cut their own defense spending, and then complain that American commitment to NATO is lacking, clearly have to do more on their part to maintain order in their regions of interest.

Advocating for a New World Order after the end of the Cold War was always going to necessitate a distinct new style of American leadership. A key tenant of which would include value oriented objectives, based on realizable goals, sustained via adequate means. As luck would have it, such an approach to American leadership is needed today, now more than ever.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


