



## **POLICY ROUNDTABLE:**

# **COMPETING VISIONS FOR THE GLOBAL ORDER**

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## 1. Introduction: Competing Visions for the Global Order

*By Michael C. Horowitz and Andro Mathewson*

With the rise of China and fears of increasing American retrenchment the current global order is under significant strain. As pressure on the contemporary global order grows, countries around the world are developing competing visions for what the future of that order should hold. Understanding those visions and the goals of the actors involved is crucial for academics and policymakers alike.

This past September, Perry World House, the University of Pennsylvania's hub for global affairs, hosted a colloquium on the current state of the global order. During the first day of the colloquium, academics and policymakers from across the United States and the world convened for discussions on themes ranging from great power competition to legal and institutional transitions. For one of those discussions, security scholars came together to consider the following questions: Is great power competition likely to persist and if so, is war inevitable? Each scholar took a different avenue to answer the question and focused on a different region, but the discussion, and this collection of essays, is useful for everyone from academics on university campuses to the policymakers in the Pentagon's E-ring trying to determine whether the risks of war in a changing global security order are exaggerated.

Asia is no longer the future of global power — it is the present. Given these shifts in global power, David Kang of the University of Southern California argues that the theories scholars and policymakers use to understand international politics require updating as well. According to Kang, there is a “deep bias in international relations” due to the field's almost exclusive basis in a European historical perspective. These theories and the use of European historical precedents complicate efforts to understand the future of global power since they “crowd out a larger universe of cases that show what is possible in international politics.” The tendency to focus almost entirely on European history, according to Kang, has led to an “outsized expectation that any type of similar power transition in East Asia would lead to war.”

Understanding East Asian history is, therefore, critical to assessing how shifts in the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific could influence the probability of international conflict. The historical perspective in East Asia regarding power transitions differs greatly from that in Europe. Most significantly, in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, political regimes rose and fell, not due to power transitions, but to the dynastic nature of these major regional powers. Since most political dynasties in the region collapsed from within, Kang argues that stable domestic politics are vital for any enduring hegemony. Consequently, for China, internal unrest may limit its ability to contest the current leadership of the United States. Yet, internal challenges pose a threat to American power as well. Kang asserts that a massive financial crisis or today's social divisions within American society may come to be the central challenges to continued American leadership.

The second essay in the roundtable comes from Stephanie Hofmann of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, who shifts the focus back to Europe. Hofmann writes that defining the global order and the nature of power has always been a challenge throughout the international relations community. Yet, most policymakers agree that "order" means the intentional structuring of political relationships by the most powerful actor in the system. Hofmann argues that this singular approach is misleading and ineffective. In reality, there are multiple actors that make an attempt at, and succeed in, ordering the global system. Accordingly, multilateral institutions and partnerships, such as NATO and the European Union, have a role to play in the global order as well. The growing tensions between the United States and the European Union have created a rift that could have long-lasting effects around the world.

Hofmann explores three lenses through which to understand global politics, using the creation of the European Common Security Defense Policy in the 1990s as an example. The first lens holds that the United States and the European nations "constitute a homogenous group of states." Consequently, when the defense policy was created it was seen as an internal organization, which would strengthen and align with NATO. The second lens claims that this initiative was an effort to balance American foreign policy and military strength in the region. Following this narrative, values are secondary to geopolitical strategy. Thus, the United States should ensure this defense policy is subordinate to NATO or remove itself from Europe and allow the European states to handle their security concerns on their own. Hofmann offers a third idea: "The ordering of the transatlantic

space...is a process in which allegiances shift over time, depending not only on existing geopolitical pressures or shared (il)liberal values, but also on domestic politics.” Essentially, the parties and leadership of a country matter to the global order. Using Donald Trump and Brexit as examples, Hofmann, echoing Kang, maintains that the greatest challenges to the transatlantic realm could stem from within these countries and not from outside competitors.

David Edelstein of Georgetown University argues in the third contribution to this roundtable that “the next decade is likely to bring intensification of great power competition.” Thus, despite legitimate concerns about Trump’s foreign policies, it is a mistake to place the blame for all turmoil in global politics at the feet of the U.S. president. China’s expansionist policies in the South China Sea were evident during President Barack Obama’s administration, as were Russia’s occupation of Crimea and its involvement in the Syrian civil war. Beijing’s expanding interests and Moscow’s resurgence in regions where American interests are shrinking could spur aggressive competitions for influence in these areas. According to Edelstein, the post-Cold War era is ending and great power competition is returning to “normal” historical levels. Although the possibility of conventional conflicts remains, nuclear weapons continue to successfully play their deterrent role.

Edelstein maintains that the greatest risk to the global order comes from a possible entrapment of the United States in smaller, limited confrontations with China and Russia, which in turn could escalate into more devastating conflicts. The United States is unlikely to directly engage in conflict with either competitor, but “smaller powers may be tempted to provoke China precisely to generate this American response.” And in this sense, “great power competition has never gone away.” It was only “muted...when American power was predominant.” Edelstein concludes by pointing to the important role policymakers and scholars alike play in preventing the escalation of great power competition to great power conflict.

Despite their different approaches, the security scholars who discussed the future of great power competition at Perry World House all agree that the global order is in a period of tumultuous change. Some believe the greatest challenge to that order stems from disruptive and unstable domestic politics, while others worry about an increased likelihood of armed confrontations.

What is most likely? In a survey<sup>1</sup> conducted by experts attending the discussion at Perry World House, three quarters of respondents said that the global order has become “somewhat” or “significantly” weaker. Shifts in domestic politics in the United States and a number of European states are taking a toll on transatlantic and inter-European relations, while Chinese economic and military expansionism is worrying academics and policymakers alike. Yet, China offers a different perspective on the matter. In Beijing’s view, the relative decline of the current order shows its unsustainability and thus the need for change.

Great power competition seems likely to continue in the coming period. The so-called “Long War” against jihadi movements may continue in one form or another, regardless of specific policy choices by the United States in Syria. However, the U.S. 2018 *National Defense Strategy* clearly identifies nation-states as the key locus of future security threats, and tension between the United States and China, as well as the United States and Russia, is unlikely to significantly decline.<sup>2</sup> The arenas of competition have grown over the last several years, including the military, economic, and diplomatic domains. For example, Russia and especially China see emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence as a means to chip away at U.S. leadership in terms of both economics and military power. These tensions are very unlikely to escalate to conflict, as ever, but tensions will remain nonetheless. In another domain, on-again, off-again trade disputes between the United States and China, combined with intellectual property concerns, could remain a constant sticking point in the relationship.

Regardless of one’s perspective, the international system is at a turning point, and conversations like the one that occurred at Perry World House and here in this roundtable will prove essential for navigating that transition.

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<sup>1</sup> Colloquium Report on “Competing Visions of the Global order” & Status Report on The Global Order: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QVBxBCRUo96eE6YozvsYNnbdKx6UZQ4K/view>.

<sup>2</sup> “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” Department of Defense, January 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

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## 2. Power Transitions and Internal Challenges in East Asian History

*By David C. Kang*

Theories promoted by international relations scholars about the Western liberal order, state behavior, and the inevitability of certain types of conflict are less widely applicable around the world than often realized. Indeed, almost all ostensibly universal and deductive theories in the field of international relations are, in reality, inductively derived from European history.<sup>3</sup> It is often simply asserted that the European balance-of-power system is universal across time and space. Moreover, there is a “deep bias in international-relations and comparative-politics scholarship that helps perpetuate the states-under-anarchy framework.”<sup>4</sup> It is important to keep this bias in mind whenever assessing how the contemporary order may change.

While international relations scholars have begun to explore making their theories truly global, and to move beyond simple notions of “states-in-anarchy,” the discipline as a whole

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<sup>3</sup> John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Meghan McConaughy, Paul Musgrave, and Daniel H. Nexon, “Beyond Anarchy: Logics of Political Organization, Hierarchy, and International Structure,” *International Theory* 10, no. 2 (2018): 181–218, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971918000040>.

is not yet taking a truly global view of international order and subjecting it to careful scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> Structural analyses based primarily on Western examples are profoundly misleading, particularly because they crowd out a larger universe of cases that show what is possible in international politics. Idealized representations about the West are so ubiquitous that it is almost invariably invoked as the obvious reference point for the East. Indeed, East Asia is constantly being held to account for expectations emerging from Europe — but the opposite almost never occurs.

Yet, exploring what lessons East Asian history has to offer would likely generate different assumptions about international relations that, in turn, might lead to different conclusions about how politics work and how the contemporary Western liberal order might change.<sup>6</sup> One example is the mounting predictions that war between China and the United States is increasingly likely because of the possibility of a power transition taking place. For example, Susan Shirk has written that “History teaches us that rising powers are likely to provoke war.” More recently, Graham Allison has argued that “war between the United States and China in the decades ahead is not just possible, but much more likely than recognized at the moment. Indeed, judging by the historical record, war is more likely than not.”<sup>7</sup>

But, as I have noted previously,<sup>8</sup> the “historical record” from which Shirk and Allison are drawing is entirely European. Indeed, scholars and pundits overwhelmingly use the cases of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) and the rise of Germany in the 19th century and the Anglo-German rivalry of the 20th century as archetypical examples of how power

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<sup>5</sup> Janice Bially Mattern and Ayse Zarakol, “Hierarchies in World Politics.” *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 623–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818316000126>; Christian Reus-Smit, “Cultural Diversity and International Order,” *International Organization* 71 no. 4 (Fall 2017): 851–85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818317000261>.

<sup>6</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, “The American Tributary System,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 1–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poto02>.

<sup>7</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4; Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 184.

<sup>8</sup> David Kang and Xinru Ma, “Power Transitions: Thucydides Didn’t Live in East Asia,” *Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2018): 137–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445905>.

transitions unfold. And both scholars and policymakers regularly use these examples as a guide for analyzing the security situation in Asia today.

But why would we think that ancient Greek history provides any type of lens for understanding contemporary China? Why would we use Europe's past to predict Asia's future? After all, the culture, religion, languages, geography, and philosophies of the two regions are completely different — why would we expect the politics to be identical? Yet, because there were occasionally wars in European history that looked like power transition wars, there is an outsized expectation that any type of similar power transition in East Asia would lead to war. But there is plenty in East Asian history that tells a different story: The rise and fall of Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese dynasties were all *potential* examples of power transitions. But a closer examination leads to very different conclusions about the causes of the rise and fall of these countries, and it should also make us skeptical that a theory derived solely from European history is widely applicable and universal.

Rather than assuming that a shift in power dynamics in East Asia is due solely to China challenging the status quo, an examination of a different set of data points from history might reveal that self-inflicted wounds are also responsible for the weakening U.S. position in Asia. Indeed, America's voluntary retreat from leadership and its unwillingness to embrace the region and its issues are likely to weaken the U.S. position in East Asia — and even around the globe. Power transitions may or may not lead to war, but given the selective and partial (i.e., European) way in which conventional international relations scholars have examined the historical record, it is difficult to draw any systematic conclusions about exactly how dangerous power transitions truly are. The global order may be changing, but it is not at all clear that adequate scholarly tools are being used to make sense of those changes. If scholars and policymakers want to have a meaningful discussion about how to avoid a U.S.-China conflict, beyond simply turning to threat inflation, they will need to perform a more careful analysis of the East Asian historical record itself.

### **Internal Collapse in East Asian History**

Perhaps the most important reason it is difficult to transpose power transition theory to East Asian history is that the forms of political regime, survival, and transition in East Asia



have all differed from what has been experienced in Europe. The four most long-enduring major powers in the region — China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam — were all characterized by political regimes that have been characterized as “dynasties,” and which had remarkable longevity. Political regimes rose and fell in East Asia, but not due to power transitions.

Table 1 provides an overview of the causes of the rise and fall of these dynasties. Most strikingly, only three out of 18 dynastic transitions that occurred prior to the 19th century came as a result of external war. The three externally caused transitions were the Tang/Silla alliance that crushed Koguryo in 668, the Mongol conquest of both Song dynasties from 1274 to 1279, and the Ming intervention in Vietnam in 1407 on behalf of one Vietnamese dynasty against internal challengers. All the other transitions were the result of internal rebellions, coups, or civil wars.

**Table 1. Dynastic Changes and Their Causes in East Asia, 500–1900 CE**

Country	Dynasty	Dates	Cause of fall	Internal or external
Korea	Koguryō	37 BC–668 CE	Tang/Silla alliance and decade-long war	External
	Silla	57 BC–907 CE	Aristocratic families, civil war, King was figurehead for last century. Koryō eventually conquered	Internal
	Koryō	907–1392	Yi Songgye rebelled	Internal
	Chosŏn	1392–1910	Japanese imperialism	External (in the 20th century)
Japan	Nara	710–794	Rebellion	Internal

	Heian	794-1185	Minamoto no Yoritomo seized power	Internal
	Kamakura Shogunate	1185-1333	Nitta Yoshisada rebellion	Internal
	Ashikaga Shogunate	1336-1573	Sengoku warring states era, Hideyoshi (2nd great unifier), Tokugawa (3rd great unifier)	Internal
	Tokugawa Shogunate	1600-1868	Meiji restoration	Internal
<b>Vietnam</b>	Lý	1009-1225	Trần Thủ Độ forced Lý Chiêu Hoàng to give the throne to Trần Cảnh	Internal
	Tran	1225-1400	Hồ Quý Ly rebellion	Internal
	Hồ	1400-1406	Ming China intervened on behalf of Tran dynasty	External
	Later Lê	1428-1788	Mac rebellion	Internal
	Mac, Le, etc.	1527-1788	Many rival civil wars	Internal
	Nguyen	1802-1945	French imperialism	External (Western)
<b>China</b>	Tang	618-907	Zhu Wen rebellion	Internal
	Song	960-1279	Mongol invasions	External
	Yuan	1271-1368	Zhu Yuanzhang rebellion	Internal
	Ming	1368-1644	Li Zicheng rebellion	Internal
	Qing	1644-1912	Empress Dowager Longyu, Yuan Shikai, and Sun Yat-sen	Internal

*Source:* Xinru Ma and David Kang, “Selection Bias in Power Transition Theory: The Lessons of East Asian History,” (USC, manuscript 2018).

## Lessons for Today

Just this brief look at the rise and fall of East Asian political dynasties reveals that most of them crumbled from within — not due to outside forces as Western historical data would suggest. For any country, a healthy political environment and economy are crucial components of national power. The lessons of East Asian history lead us away from identifying external competition as the culprit and toward a closer examination of the current political and economic health of the United States and China. It could well be that self-inflicted wounds will prove more dangerous to the United States than wounds caused by others.

Pessimists have been predicting an end to Chinese economic growth, and concomitant chaotic politics, almost as soon as the reform era started four decades ago. And, without question, China faces tremendous internal problems.<sup>9</sup> Far from dreaming of regional or even global dominance, it is quite likely that Chinese leaders are focused as much, or perhaps more, on domestic social, environmental, economic, and political issues. David Shambaugh wrote in 2015 that “China’s political system is badly broken,” pointing out the rapid increase in political censorship and repression under President Xi Jinping, the fact that money and elites are leaving the country, deep-seated corruption, and stunted economic reforms due to opposition by powerful interests.<sup>10</sup> It is well known that China’s budget for internal security is larger than its budget for external defense.<sup>11</sup> We should, however, be cautious about predicting China’s demise — it is not clear whether those internal problems will be solved, nor does it indicate inevitable collapse. Rather, the point is that any dire predictions of a titanic struggle between the United States and China need to be tempered by acknowledging the massive internal issues that China faces. Indeed, it may

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<sup>9</sup> Minxin Pei, “Everything You Think You Know About China Is Wrong,” *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 29, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/29/everything-you-think-you-know-about-china-is-wrong/>.

<sup>10</sup> David Shambaugh, “The Coming Chinese Crackup,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2015, [https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html - cg-news](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html - cg-news).

<sup>11</sup> Ben Blanchard and John Ruwitch, “China Hikes Defense Budget, to Spend More on Internal Security,” *Reuters*, March 4, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-parliament-defence/china-hikes-defense-budget-to-spend-more-on-internal-security-idUSBRE92403620130305>.

turn out that domestic issues are more consequential for the future of China than any competition with America.

Responding to increasing tensions in U.S.-China relations by over-inflating the threat is rapidly becoming the conventional wisdom inside the Washington beltway. Dark muttering about the inevitability of U.S.-China competition based on a blatantly selective reading of past history passes for prudent assessment of contemporary issues. But creating a self-fulfilling prophecy through theories based on biased and selective evidence harms U.S. foreign policymaking and blinds America to potentially greater challenges at home.

In fact, the key issue for the United States is probably not some possible conflict with China that could occur in the future. After all, no matter the rhetoric of some concerned policymakers inside the beltway, the South China Sea lies at the margins of U.S. interests. Instead, there is a clear argument to be made that the central challenge to continued American leadership is domestic — and involves an array of political, economic, and social issues.<sup>12</sup> In sum, instead of grafting European history onto East Asia, scholars and policymakers should look to the historical record in East Asia — which has important lessons for the United States.

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth A. Schultz, "Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 7–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2017.1406705>.

### 3. Global Ordering and Organizational Alternatives for Europe: NATO vs. the European Union?

*By Stephanie C. Hofmann*

During the Cold War, the “West” was understood to be ordered according to liberal principles, and in the 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global order has similarly been called “liberal.” The United States, the most capable and powerful economic and military actor for the last three decades, has been described as a major proponent of this liberal order.<sup>13</sup> With President Donald Trump in power, many pundits and scholars question whether we are now observing the U.S.-sponsored creation of an illiberal order. Whether the current global order is understood as liberal or as transitioning from liberal to illiberal, order is too often understood as an intentional and uniform structuring of political relationships by the most powerful actor in the system — the United States — with NATO often cited as representative of this order.

However, although the U.S. government still commands the strongest existing military and is still a so-called global power (no matter how power is defined), it is not the only actor that defines the global order. I argue that focusing on a single, static order creates political blind spots. Instead, scholars and policymakers should look at international actors’ ordering attempts, some of which are formulated on the global scale while others stem from regional dynamics. Various actors present and try to impose their visions for ordering the world

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<sup>13</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Robert Gilpin, “The Theory of Hegemonic War,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 591–613, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/204816>.

and/or their region with varying degrees of success.<sup>14</sup> In terms of their visions' substance, some have been formulated in juxtaposition to the U.S. understanding of liberal order. These different ordering visions might result in something resembling a global order — but an order by default rather than design. Even the transatlantic relationship is not immune to these dynamics.<sup>15</sup> In its relative decline, the United States arguably needs Europe more than ever. However, instead of stressing the common liberal aspects of the transatlantic relationship, the current U.S. administration has focused on contentious issues that antagonize some of America's European allies and bring their alternative ordering visions to the fore.

### **Liberal Global Order(ing)?**

Actors have different strategic and normative prerogatives, or what I call “ordering visions.” International organizations provide a forum where actors can push for their ordering visions to be heard. Many of these existing organizations are dubbed “liberal,” because they are supposedly open, rule-based, consensus-seeking, multilateral and, according to scholars such as Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry,<sup>16</sup> very resilient as a consequence. While the international system's open and rule-based features have taught some states restraint and accommodation, they have also led to contestations with implications for the so-called global liberal order.

The principles attached to that liberal order have been called into question many times. But now that these protestations are coming from rising or reemerging non-Western powers such as Russia or China (as well as the United States), they are heard more clearly. Meanwhile, multilateral action — taken through organizations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund — has been criticized for lacking accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, for example, in the form of asymmetries and inequalities.<sup>17</sup> Scholars have

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<sup>14</sup> Hayward R. Alker and Thomas J. Biersteker, “The Dialectics of World Order: Notes for a Future Archeologist of International Savoir Faire,” *International Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1984): 121–42, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2600692>.

<sup>15</sup> Stephanie C. Hofmann and Andrew I. Yeo, “Business As Usual: The Role of Norms in Alliance Management,” *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2015): 377–401, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1354066114533978>.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, “Liberal World: The Resilient Order,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August, 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-06-14/liberal-world?cid=soc-tw-rdr>.

<sup>17</sup> Phillip Y. Lipsky, *Renegotiating the World Order: Institutional Change in International Relations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

thus pointed to the limited ability of the liberal order to accommodate other voices and put them on equal footing.<sup>18</sup>

The proliferation of international organizations — which has prompted today’s international organizational environment to often be qualified with the adjective “complex”<sup>19</sup> — has arguably exposed many fundamental shortcomings of the so-called global liberal order. Given that many such organizations work on similar issues and address similar policy challenges and problems, international actors have created a system that needs *less consent* to decide on taking multilateral action, while providing more opportunities for countries to voice dissent, e.g., the Chinese-sponsored Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Consequently, there is not, and never has been, a “pure” global liberal order — only an approximation of it that might arguably have produced a liberal moment in the 1990s. What is often called the global liberal order is really a process of alternative ordering propositions that is built and rebuilt on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion — in itself not a very liberal activity.

### **Transatlantic ordering dynamics and European organizational alternatives**

Within the transatlantic security relationship, different attempts at political ordering have taken place since the end of World War II. E.U. member states have repeatedly tried to create security structures within the European Union since the 1950s. They finally succeeded at the end of the 1990s when they created the European Security and Defense Policy, which was renamed the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Perhaps ironically, if viewed from today’s perspective, the United Kingdom was one of the two architects of integrating security into the European Union during the Franco-British summit in Saint Malo in 1998.<sup>20</sup> The European Union has since built up its military, civilian, and civil-military security structures, formulated two security strategies, and intervened abroad in over 25 civil and

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<sup>18</sup> Beate Jahn, *Liberal Internationalism: Theory, History, Practice* (New York: Springer, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Karen J. Alter and Kal Raustiala, “The Rise of International Regime Complexity,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 14, no. 1 (2018): 329–49, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-101317-030830>.

<sup>20</sup> Stephanie C. Hofmann, *European Security in NATO’s Shadow: Party Ideologies and Institution Building* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

military operations, including in Kosovo, the Aegean Sea, Congo, the Gulf of Aden, and Afghanistan. This raises the questions of whether the CSDP could ever be considered an alternative to NATO or not, and what that would mean for re-ordering the transatlantic space. There are typically two narratives of how the CSDP and NATO relate to one another, each built on different understandings of order that relate to different theoretical traditions.

According to the first narrative, a liberal foundation unites the United States and the E.U. member states,<sup>21</sup> and NATO is one expression of this shared outlook (though many would also point to geopolitical security concerns that at times can trump liberal values). This ideational foundation is able to accommodate dissatisfactions and tensions with an emphasis on compromises and consensus-building. For example, Baltic and other Eastern European NATO member states have asked NATO for a strong military commitment to their borders. To this end, the Trump administration — perhaps surprisingly to some — has continued President Barack Obama’s commitment to NATO’s Eastern members with a small military presence in the region both in form of the Enhanced Forward Presence (in particular in Poland) as well as the U.S. military operation Atlantic Resolve. According to this first narrative, striving for efficient, multilateral policy-making and consensus ought to lead multiple, autonomous institutions and initiatives, such as NATO and the European Union’s CSDP, to accommodate — and even strengthen — each other.

The second narrative emphasizes military power and disregards the ideational elements that might bring states and international organizations closer together or drive them further apart. Some scholars see the establishment of the CSDP not as a way to strengthen NATO but as a tool for (soft) balancing the United States.<sup>22</sup> They understand the CSDP as an act of counterbalancing U.S. foreign and security policy, with some even trumpeting the ascendancy of a united European Union as the new global superpower. In this narrative, liberal values are secondary to geopolitical concerns. Therefore, the United States, if it does not want to lose its position as a global hegemon, should either make sure that the CSDP is

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<sup>21</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*; Thomas Risse-Kappen, *Cooperation Among Democracies: The European Influence on U.S. Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Barry R. Posen, “European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?” *Security Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 149–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410600829356>; Robert J. Art, “Europe Hedges Its Security Bets,” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T. V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 179–213.



subordinate to NATO, or disengage from Europe and let the European Union conduct its own security business.

I suggest a third narrative: The ordering of the transatlantic space via the CSDP and NATO is a process in which allegiances shift over time, depending not only on existing geopolitical pressures or shared (il)liberal values, but also on domestic politics at a given moment. To better understand how CSDP and NATO relate to one another, it is therefore necessary to look at who governs, i.e., which leaders and parties run a particular country at a particular point in time.<sup>23</sup>

When looking at the current U.S. administration under Trump, we observe a political leader who challenges the liberal ordering from within. Trump has questioned some of the core values of the transatlantic relationship: He questions multilateralism for multilateralism's sake and challenges the practice of consensus-seeking — which reflects the view of much of Trump's base.<sup>24</sup> This extends to his approach to NATO, whose destiny Trump portrays as being in his hands, demanding that European NATO allies acquiesce to his requests, including by increasing their defense budgets (sometimes Trump mentions the agreed upon 2 percent of GDP goal, other times he demands 4 percent).<sup>25</sup> He has also left it vague as to whether the United States, under his leadership, would fulfill its Article 5 commitment of mutual defense. Thus, the shift in domestic U.S. politics and Americans' views of foreign involvement are playing a major role in the (re)ordering of the transatlantic relationship. What Trump's demands overlook, however, is that NATO's E.U. members have created a security institution outside of NATO that will not only benefit from increased European defense spending,<sup>26</sup> but will provide a platform from which they can organize their own security — and not necessarily in coordination with NATO.

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<sup>23</sup> Hofmann, *European Security in NATO's Shadow*.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Trump renegotiated NAFTA though some observers argue that not much has changed between NAFTA and the USMCA, see Sheelah Kolhatkar, "Trump's Rebrand of NAFTA," *New Yorker*, Oct. 3, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/trumps-rebrand-of-nafta>.

<sup>25</sup> Uri Friedman, "Trump vs. NATO: It's Not Just About the Money," *Atlantic*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/07/trump-nato-allies/564881/>.

<sup>26</sup> Jordan Becker and Edmund J. Malesky, "Yes, NATO Is Sharing the Defense Burden. Here's What We Found," *Washington Post*, Dec. 9, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/09/yes-nato-is-sharing-the-defense-burden-heres-what-we-found/?utm\\_term=.c495bofed14d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/09/yes-nato-is-sharing-the-defense-burden-heres-what-we-found/?utm_term=.c495bofed14d).

Some political actors in the European Union, such as the British Conservative Party, agree with Trump that multilateralism in and of itself ought to be questioned — others not so much. Since Trump came to power and the British government, under the Tories, has started their country's exit from the European Union after British voters narrowly approved the measure in 2016, the French and German governments in particular, as well as the European Commission, have pushed for strengthening the CSDP. This should come as no surprise. For years, the British Conservative government successfully delayed several E.U. security initiatives, fearing that they would compete with NATO. For example, the British government has resisted an increase in the European Defense Agency's budget for six years, and in 2011, vetoed the creation of an E.U. military headquarters.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, however, by leaving the European Union, the United Kingdom is surrendering its ability to shape E.U. security policy from within.

With Brexit looming, the European Union has increased the European Defense Agency's budget, created an admittedly small military headquarters as well as mechanisms to increase investment and cooperation in military capabilities based on the principle of institutional flexibility (i.e., not all E.U. member states have to participate), established a European Defense Fund, and increased consultation and review mechanisms.<sup>28</sup> The current U.S. administration is not at all amused about these developments, even though it has pushed Europeans to contribute more financially to their own security. Katie Wheelbarger, U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, has said in response to some of these developments, "We don't want to see E.U. efforts pulling requirements or forces away from NATO and into the E.U."<sup>29</sup>

Even a possible threat from Russia does not necessarily have the potential to unite actors on both sides of the Atlantic. The current discussion about hybrid threats in both the European Union and NATO, in light of Russia's revisionist policies, provides an opportunity for the

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<sup>27</sup> Stephanie C. Hofmann, "Brexit Will Weigh Heavily on European Security. Here's Why," *Washington Post*, Oct. 18, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/10/18/brexit-will-weigh-heavily-on-european-security-heres-why/?utm\\_term=.49a8ae63e0e0](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/10/18/brexit-will-weigh-heavily-on-european-security-heres-why/?utm_term=.49a8ae63e0e0).

<sup>28</sup> Ronja Kempin and Barbara Kunz, "Washington Should Help Europe Achieve 'Strategic Autonomy,' not Fight It," *War on the Rocks*, April 12, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/washington-should-help-europe-achieve-strategic-autonomy-not-fight-it/>.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Steven Erlanger, "U.S. Revives Concerns About European Defense Plans, Rattling NATO Allies," *New York Times*, Feb. 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/18/world/europe/nato-europe-us-.html>.

European Union to present itself as more suitable than NATO for providing security on the continent as it combines both civilian and military security instruments and policies. Even political leaders in Central and Eastern Europe who have understood NATO as the bastion of collective defense, are now also turning to the European Union to ensure their security.

We are at a juncture where both European Union and NATO member states are presenting their ordering visions for the European and transatlantic realms. One major driver of these visions is domestic politics — that is, political parties and leaders and their domestic support. A focus on domestic politics contributes to a better understanding of how these ordering visions will relate to one another and to what effect. At this particular moment, nationalist and populist parties are driving a wedge between transatlantic and European partners. This has resulted in a search for more flexible institutional structures that can accommodate more homogenous sub-groups of governments, some of which can potentially contest U.S. leadership.

## Conclusion

The transatlantic relationship is neither static nor is it built on a single foundation, whether shared ideas, as outlined in the first narrative, or power, as outlined in the second narrative. Instead, domestically elected actors on both sides of the Atlantic continuously articulate their respective visions of the most appropriate way to order the transatlantic and European spaces, which informs their calls for institutional reform. Sometimes, this leads to negotiated compromises, and at other times to more open-ended dynamics.

In questioning multilateral institutions, NATO included, Trump questions whether the United States shares common interests — and a liberal “creed” — in managing current and future challenges with its allies across the pond. American values are multiple and Trump often cherry picks those that lend themselves to powerful slogans.<sup>30</sup> This has brought alternative European visions for how to organize the European security space to the fore, with European allies turning to institutional alternatives. While these institutions have the potential to strengthen and reform NATO, they could also lead to inter-institutional competition. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg observed that the European Union’s security investments “are an opportunity to further strengthen the European pillar within NATO and contribute to better burden-sharing. But with opportunity comes risk. The risk of

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Seymour Lipset, *American Exceptionalism. A double-edged sword* (New York: Norton, 1996).

weakening the transatlantic bond.”<sup>31</sup> If both sides do not strive for a consensus, the current U.S. administration might find itself increasingly isolated from its transatlantic partners — not only because it chose to distance itself, but also because they did. The ordering continues.

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## 4. The Persistence of Great Power Politics

*By David M. Edelstein*

The next decade is likely to bring an intensification of great power competition. This is not a new or recent development, although Donald Trump’s approach to national security has drawn attention to it:<sup>32</sup> Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea was evident during the

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Erlanger, “[U.S. Revives Concerns About European Defense Plans.](#)”

<sup>32</sup> *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

Obama presidency and Russia's occupation of Crimea, of course, predates Trump's election.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, understanding what this burgeoning competition means for global order requires answering three questions. First, what is the prognosis for great power competition in the foreseeable future? Second, is war among great powers becoming more likely or do structural or normative considerations mean the risks are being exaggerated? Third, what is the likely evolution of the international order in East Asia, where China is reasserting itself? To answer these questions briefly: Great power competition is, in fact, likely to intensify in the coming years. Moreover, the risk of limited war during this period of competition will be moderately high but, nevertheless, nuclear weapons will continue to limit the likelihood that a major war will break out. Finally, the combination of a rising China and a relatively declining United States creates the possibility for much uncertainty and potential conflict in East Asia.

### **Why Has Great Power Competition Returned?**

Over the last few decades, the United States and China have cooperated more than many theorists of international relations might expect.<sup>34</sup> Forging extensive economic ties has been in the interest of both countries. However, those ties have also served as the foundation for Chinese economic growth — growth that has effectively translated into military might. As I have argued elsewhere, the particular combination of American and Chinese time horizons have allowed this cooperation to flourish.<sup>35</sup> While Washington was

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<sup>33</sup> "Stirring Up the South China Sea: A Fleeting Opportunity for Calm," International Crisis Group, May 7, 2015, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/china/stirring-south-china-sea-iii-fleeting-opportunity-calm>; Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2014), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2014-04-17/russias-latest-land-grab>.

<sup>34</sup> *Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China* (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations Press, April 2015), <https://www.cfr.org/report/revising-us-grand-strategy-toward-china>; John J. Mearsheimer, "Can China Rise Peacefully?" *National Interest*, Oct. 25, 2014, <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>.

<sup>35</sup> David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

focused on other short-term threats to its security, Beijing was patiently “biding its time,” recognizing that its brightest days as a great power lay ahead.<sup>36</sup>

In recent years, this dynamic has shifted. Most importantly, for a mix of both domestic and international reasons, China has become more assertive in the South China Sea, prompting questions about its long-term intentions.<sup>37</sup> In turn, Washington has become increasingly nervous about the consequences of China’s economic growth and military expansion, and policymakers in the Beltway are now asking whether America’s strategic approach to China has been misguided.<sup>38</sup> The consequence has been heightened tensions with rising concerns about the prospects for a military clash between the two countries. A more cooperative relationship might be restored if either America’s or China’s time horizon were to shift back to what it was, but all signs at the moment point to continuing growth in Chinese ambitions and concomitant growth in American concern.<sup>39</sup>

While shifting time horizons are critical to understanding the evolution of Sino-American relations, a real and perceptible decline in American relative power together with a relative rise in China’s power, is crucial to understanding why great power competition has returned.<sup>40</sup> Simplistic arguments about the “Thucydides Trap” ought to be rejected, but the simple dynamics of relative power in the international system can explain a great deal.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Denny Roy, *Return of the Dragon: Rising China and Regional Security*, ed. David C. Kang and Victor D. Cha (Columbia University Press, 1960), 31, Chap. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Gabriel Dominguez, “USS Decatur Has ‘unsafe’ Encounter with Chinese Destroyer During South China Sea FONOP,” *IHS Jane’s Defense Weekly*, Oct. 2, 2018, <https://www.janes.com/article/83508/uss-decatur-has-unsafe-encounter-with-chinese-destroyer-during-south-china-sea-fonop>.

<sup>38</sup> Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/usa/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

<sup>39</sup> “The Belt and Road Initiative,” *The State Council, The People’s Republic of China*, <http://english.gov.cn/beltAndRoad/>.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Auslin, et al., “Policy Roundtable: Are the United States and China in a New Cold War?” *Texas National Security Review*, May 15, 2018, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-are-the-united-states-and-china-in-a-new-cold-war/>.

<sup>41</sup> Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (New York: Mariner Books, 2018).

China's increase in power may very well produce fear in the United States, but the two countries can manage this shift in power dynamics in ways that will make war and peace more or less likely.<sup>42</sup> As the relative power of the United States declines, it may become less willing and able to defend previously defined American interests around the globe.<sup>43</sup> Recent history gives us two examples of this: Chastened by his experience in Libya, Barack Obama grew increasingly reluctant about projecting American power abroad, while Donald Trump has signaled a reticence for American involvement in international affairs and organizations.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, as China continues to grow, it has slowly been expanding its presence throughout Asia, meeting little resistance along the way.<sup>45</sup> At some point, expanding Chinese interests will encounter the remnants of American interests (shrinking though they may be), and it is in these spaces that competition will occur.<sup>46</sup> One could tell a similar story about Russia. While Russia's relative power has not been increasing at the same rate as China's, the country has been emboldened to pursue its interests in ongoing disputes such as the Syrian civil war.<sup>47</sup> Where those interests butt up against American

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>43</sup> Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic* (April 2016), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>; Griff Witte and Michael Birnbaum, "A Year of Trump's America First agenda," *Washington Post*, Jan. 20, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-year-of-trumps-america-first-agenda-has-radically-changed-the-us-role-in-the-world/2018/01/20/c1258aa6-f7cf-11e7-9af7-a50bc3300042\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.f5af12940129](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-year-of-trumps-america-first-agenda-has-radically-changed-the-us-role-in-the-world/2018/01/20/c1258aa6-f7cf-11e7-9af7-a50bc3300042_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f5af12940129).

<sup>45</sup> Derek Lundy, "How to Respond to China's 'Salami Tactics' in South China Sea," *National Interest*, July 11, 2016), <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/how-respond-chinas-salami-tactics-south-china-sea-16914>.

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer Lind, "Life in China's Asia," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2018), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/life-chinas-asia>.

<sup>47</sup> "Russia Says 63,000 Troops Have Seen Combat in Syria," *BBC News*, Aug. 23, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45284121>.

interests, for example over Iran, is where we ought to expect to see the most intense competition in the coming decade.<sup>48</sup>

### Competition Turning Into Conflict

Is this competition likely to lead to war between the United States and China, Russia, or other countries? In short, the probability of great power war is higher now than it has been in some time, but nuclear weapons continue to limit the likelihood of a systemic great power war breaking out. However, as the United States becomes more concerned about Chinese intentions and as Beijing becomes more focused on short-term targets of opportunities in the South China Sea and elsewhere, the probability of conflict rises.<sup>49</sup> Where war is most likely to occur is through a process of alliance entrapment, a potentially volatile scenario that has been underappreciated by advocates of an American-led global international order. Skeptics of entrapment have typically pointed to the experience of the Cold War to argue that the likelihood of great powers becoming entrapped by their weaker allies is limited.<sup>50</sup> During the Cold War, however, both the United States and the Soviet Union defined their interests globally, making it difficult for either to be entrapped into a conflict it had not defined as part of its interests. Today, the United States may be more tempted to define its interests more narrowly even as it recognizes the risk posed by a rising China. The result is a higher likelihood of American entrapment in conflicts it might otherwise prefer to avoid.

Such entrapment is a particular risk for great powers like the United States that remain absolutely powerful but are arguably in relative decline. The United States has an interest in not seeing China become a hegemonic power in East Asia. At the same time, the United

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Layton, “To Engage China, or Balance It?” *War on the Rocks*, July 20, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/07/to-engage-china-or-balance-it-lessons-from-a-failed-grand-strategic-exercise/>.

<sup>49</sup> Edelstein, *Over the Horizon*.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Beckley, “The Myth of Entangling Alliances: Reassessing the Security Risks of U.S. Defense Pacts,” *International Security* vol 39, no. 4 (Spring 2015): 7–48, [https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00197](https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/10.1162/ISEC_a_00197); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: Why the Sole Superpower Should Not Pull Back from the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).



States is not likely to confront China directly over its growing interests and aspirations in the region. The anticipated costs of direct conflict between the two countries are likely sufficient to dissuade either side from initiating such a war. Instead, conflict is more likely to emerge when a friend or ally of the United States — such as Vietnam, the Philippines, or Japan — finds itself in a crisis with Beijing. Washington will be tempted to intervene on behalf of these friends in order to put the brakes on any growing Chinese influence in the region. Dangerously, smaller powers may be tempted to provoke China precisely to generate this American response. Military clashes in the waters of East and Southeast Asia are relatively easy to envision, and have already occurred in recent decades — consider, for example, the Mischief Reef disputes in the 1990s, or the Scarborough Shoal incident in the 2000s.<sup>51</sup>

Fortunately, such clashes are likely to remain limited in scale. While some worry that innovations in nuclear weapons technology have made such weapons more usable and more practical in the conduct of warfare, the dynamics of escalation from the use of a small, low-yield nuclear weapon are still difficult to predict.<sup>52</sup> The dangers of a catastrophic nuclear conflagration will continue to place a lid on any possible future conflicts between the United States and China. Importantly, however, the risks of continuous crises and skirmishes are significant — and escalation is possible.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Future of the Asian Order**

An emerging structure of the Asian international order may take some time to become evident, but what might that order look like? First, the U.S. commitment to East Asia is

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<sup>51</sup> Steve Mollman, “Photos: How a ‘Fishermen’s Shelter’ on Stilts Became a Chinese Military Base” *Quartz*, Dec. 15, 2016), <https://qz.com/863811/mischief-reef-how-a-fishermens-shelter-on-stilts-became-a-chinese-military-base-in-the-south-china-sea/>; Richard Heydarian, “How the Scarborough Shoal Came Back to Haunt China-Philippines Relations,” *South China Morning Post*, June 23, 2018, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2151923/how-scarborough-shoal-came-back-haunt-china-philippines>.

<sup>52</sup> Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “The New Era of Counterforce: Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence,” *International Security* 41, no. 4 (Spring 2017), [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00273](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00273).

<sup>53</sup> Aaron Miles, “Escalation Dominance in America’s Oldest New Nuclear Strategy,” *War on the Rocks*, Sept. 12, 2018), <https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/escalation-dominance-in-americas-oldest-new-nuclear-strategy/>.

more likely to weaken than to strengthen. If American relative power continues to decline compared to China's, it will be difficult for the United States to sustain a presence in East Asia that is more reassuring than it is dangerous.<sup>54</sup> Second, China is likely to become a more dominant presence in the region. While smaller powers may pursue various strategies to constrain assertions of Chinese power, their options will be limited, especially if the United States signals that it is unwilling to be drawn into a war in East Asia. One ought to expect to see efforts by some smaller powers in the region to balance against an increasingly assertive China, but other countries may also pursue opportunities to benefit from cooperation with China, despite the threat China might pose over the long-term.

Just how much China would seek to disrupt the existing international order remains unclear. China has certainly benefited from an international order that has allowed it to prosper from relatively open trade with other countries. At the same time, China is less enamored of other aspects of the so-called "liberal international order," including the promotion of democracy. While China may desire a dominant position in East Asia, it is unclear how concerned Beijing might be about the prospects of South Korea or Japan were they unconstrained by their American ally. In short, reaction to Chinese revision of the international order may be enthusiastic in some areas, but it may be more reluctant in others. Beijing's ability to carry through on such revisions to the order will depend on its ability to combine coercion and persuasion in its relations with other countries in Asia and beyond. The more it has to rely on coercion, the more likely conflict between China and its neighbors — as well as other great powers — becomes. In short, little is foreordained about the nature of a Chinese-led international order. How such an order is likely to evolve depends on Chinese preferences and behavior, but also on how others react to its efforts to shape the East Asian order.

## Conclusion

In short, great power competition has never gone away in the way that many had hoped in the years following the end of the Cold War.<sup>55</sup> Such competition was certainly muted during

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<sup>54</sup> Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Jessica Tuchman Mathews, "Redefining Security," *Foreign Affairs* 68, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 162-177, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20043906>.

this era, when American power was predominant, Russia was in decline, and China's rise was in its nascent stages. But all of that has changed now. The United States is in relative decline, Russia is resurgent, and China has acquired the capabilities to act more assertively. At the same time, the time horizons of all of these powers may be shifting in foreboding ways: The United States is becoming more attentive to the long-term threats of these great powers, while both China and Russia become more assertive in the short-term, which will, in turn, provoke more long-term concerns in Washington. The implications are likely to be more competition and, indeed, the possibility of great power war.<sup>56</sup> Nuclear weapons may very well provide insurance against the outbreak of a catastrophic war, but the dangers of smaller conflicts — and the ways in which they might escalate — are significant and worrisome. How to prevent great power competition from escalating to great power conflict is sure to be one of the significant challenges of the coming years for policymakers and scholars alike.

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<sup>56</sup> Peter Mattis, "From Engagement to Rivalry: Tools to Compete with China," *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 4 (August 2018), <https://tnsr.org/2018/08/from-engagement-to-rivalry-tools-to-compete-with-china/>.