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Lessons from the Past: Analyzing a Multipolar World and Shifting Transatlantic Relationships

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Abstract

Rival ideologies and states, some new, some ancient, are emerging to create a multipolar world

where regional spheres of influence arise out of the space abandoned by a weakening American

ideology and state. New challenges have arisen during this latest shift in global power dynamics.

States and the complex mechanisms and relationships that comprise them are now interacting as

a power vacuum develops, seeking both standing and hegemony. How these interactions affect

rising regional powers will have drastic consequences for future stability, peace, and progress

and the current state of affairs, if history is to serve as a lesson, is headed in the direction of

conflict that must be avoided through understanding of positions, influences, and relationships

between rising and diminishing powers. Historical precedence points to war, but the complexities

inherent in the systems of relationships and power that exist in this different age make a path to

peace and a successful transition of power on the world stage possible. This paper examines

those relationships, utilizing history and relevant scholarship, explaining the interactions shaping

our world and chart a course towards peaceful collaboration and transitions of power.

Keywords: balance of power, geopolitics, unipolarity, multipolarity, conflict, peace

Lessons from the Past:

Analyzing a Multipolar World and Shifting Transatlantic Relationships

Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia (1913):

Today, indeed, we live in a time which points with special satisfaction to the proud height of its culture, which is only too willing to boast of its international cosmopolitanism and flatters itself with visionary dreams of the possibility of an everlasting peace throughout the world.

These words remain haunting and are, unfortunately, applicable to our age. Emerging from a period of hope, peace, and prosperity that marked the fall of the Soviet Union and a dream of stability that accompanied unipolarity, rival ideologies, and states, some new, some ancient, are emerging to create a multipolar world where regional spheres of influence arise out of the space abandoned by a weakening American ideology and state. New challenges have arisen during this latest shift in global power dynamics. Looming climate and pollution catastrophes, superbugs and devastating outbreaks, and challenges not only external but internal, loom on the horizon. For the first time in modern history, the human race is facing challenges that exceed the capabilities of any one nation to combat and may result in a new, and harsh, reality. With rising sea levels, an expanding population, and the effects of climate change already being felt across the glove, the world is undergoing a period of intense geopolitical transition and market globalization that mirrors distant ages. The formation of the nation-state as a coordinated entity, the wars and conflicts of the colonial period through the defeat of Napoleon, and the tumultuous events erupting in the First World War all bear an uncanny resemblance to the 21st Century. Though this work suggests that a similar period of transatlantic relationships to those past days has arrived, it recognizes the subtle differences that require a new approach, one

focused on cooperation, to avoid conflict and successfully meet the challenges humanity faces.

The world has evolved into a delicate interplay between economies, states, and ideologies that

change dyadic relationships and struggles of hegemony into a multipolar world. However, the

past does not leave us without lessons and conflict is not inevitable. To prevent disaster and to

challenge the notion that conflict is inevitable presented, this paper reviews and analyzes

instances of total domination by one power, since the 16th century, and the eruptions of conflict

or emergence of peace that followed.

In this paper, I approach geopolitics with an understanding that analyzing the decision

makers, context, and diplomatic maneuvering that failed to prevent war provide insight on

approaches to peace. This field is vastly interdisciplinary, including but not limited to

economists, systems thinkers, academics, military planners, and policy analysts. This implies an

intertwining series of mechanisms at work in a complex environment and no one theme can

accurately convey the motive for war, its prevention, or its resolution. With this understanding, it

is necessary to analyze war and peace, through the literature and empirical evidence available, so

we may inform ourselves of the past to chart a course ahead in the future. Additionally, I argue

causes for war involve leaders, both strong and poor interacting, power vacuums of state or

ideology, and the exploitation of the environments those as mentioned earlier create the talented

leaders aiming to advance the position of their states or themselves. Stability at home is essential

to the conduct of a successful war. When those three things are aligned, peace is secondary to the

pursuit of hegemony. The world, today, suffers from similar interactions and friction.

A review of the literature will be discussed to form a basis for the foundation this paper

will build, focusing on balance of power theory, unipolarity, and multipolarity. Through this, we

can begin to deconstruct three historical cases to lay a foundation for the analysis of states and

their leadership that is currently jockeying for power and influence around the world. First, the

rise of the nation-state and the balance of power focusing on the efforts of Cardinal Richelieu.

Second, the Congress of Vienna. Third, the period from the mid 19th Century to the outbreak of

the First World War, and finally the period between the collapse of the Soviet Union and 9/11.

With an understanding of those times and the conditions that destroyed the hope of peace and

ushered in war, I will conclude with the following assessments relating to the geopolitical

challenges facing a peaceful and prosperous world:

- Putin's position over the last decade has done little to build up the Russian state and,

instead, has bolstered his power and that of his inner circle. Without him, Russia will suffer the

same fate as the Soviets and the Czars. Putin has no interest in jeopardizing his position and aims

to avoid increasing internal instability. He will, however, aggressively maneuver to ensure he

retains it.

- The United States should respond to a risen China with an olive branch. A military

conflict would be lengthy, costly, and deadly. By partnering with China, the United States and its

allies can shape a mutually beneficial world rather than forge a new world order through conflict.

- The EU is ill-equipped to deal with domestic and international challenges. It is entirely

unable to face military threats and, historically, has proven ill-suited to unification under a

common cause unless pushed against the wall. It is reactive, not proactive.

- Germany is cautious concerning being perceived as a dominant force in the world. Its

remains divided economically and developmentally between the east and west and faces new

challenges as a result of mass migration. This results not in its emergence as the new leader of

the free world, but a European & Mediterranean power with reach and influence in the Old

World.

- Wars are costly. However, global conflict today will sap critical and limited resources from essential missions meant to ensure the survival and prosperity of humanity.

Literature Review

The virtues of organizations and leaders, societal tendencies and beliefs, and the complexity of managing networks with complex systems interactions contribute to the difficulty in navigating geopolitics, let alone analyzing and presenting recommendation of action. This paper recognizes that to succeed, one must apply multiple theories and the research of a diverse range of scholarly work. Thus, it draws on scholarship and analysis from a wide range of disciplines for inspiration, guidance, and interpretation of similar events to formulate a strategy to combat today's challenges.

That states are complex mechanisms, not limited to direction and policy alone, is understood. Multiple theories and research exist to explain the nature of their diplomatic affairs, decisions on war and peace, and the quests for standing influence. One such theory, European centric but applicable in today's globalized world shaped by players who created it, is the notion that a balance of power exists where one state, emerging to dominate the others, must be challenged via a collaborative effort to return affairs to one of balance and, perhaps, multipolarity. As Khachikian (1999) explains:

> According to this hypothesis, balance of power imposes constraints on unilateral
> intervention and induces the great powers to intervene collectively: since no single power
> is strong enough to intervene alone, a number of great powers intervene together to
> control the distribution of gains among themselves.

However, the application solely of this theory to analyze the current crisis unfolding between nation states is insufficient of itself to evaluate, recommend, and predict the complexities of

interstate interactions, war, and peace. In that belief, this paper considers the seminal work of

Organski (1958) and the development of power transition theory while also including more

recent scholarship that disputes the notion that states are rational actors in their own right

DiCiccio (1991) and that other factors, such as a question for legitimacy that may give credence

to the explanations of how and why populism and national rise, complicating the interactions

between the great powers of today Bornshcier (1989). DiCiccio (1991) provides further guidance

on the evolution of transition theories and the empirical research behind them.

The scope of standing and the relationships between states that influence the decision of

governments also warrants consideration – specifically the arguments of how polarity and the

domination of one power or equal power between a multitude of entities – contributes to conflict

and peace. The seminal research and data collected and published by Richard Ned Lebow (2010)

conclude that standing, above all else, is the primary motivation for interstate conflict. The most

aggressive states are rising powers seeking recognition as great powers and dominant great

powers seeking standing amongst one another and, importantly, within their region, carving out

spheres of influence akin to the Monroe Doctrine and the South China Sea. Though Lebow goes

to great lengths to expand upon the motivations of war and utilizes a remarkable dataset this

paper will reference, the issue, as he dutifully implies, of standing is multifaceted. Economic,

prestige, personal glory, as well as ideological and religious motivations, comprise a state, and its

actors, interpretation of their standing in the world. Combining Lebow's observations with the

Diplomatic Exchange dataset, one notes not only the rise of the nation-state system and formal

diplomatic exchanges on the heels of the defeat of Napoleon, but the sharp increase in

exchanges, stations, and interactions between great powers. This relationship implies that

standing correlates with exchange and a mean of "measuring" one's power and influence.

Though unipolarity may be a faux situation, instead a transitory period between a world of competing superpowers and one of rising regional powers and if a question or perception of standing arises, either gaining it or losing it, powers may unite to conduct war to address the grievance (Huntington, 1999; Nolte, 2010). Unipolarity does contain a modicum of an unequal distribution of power, giving rise to regional actors acting dominant in their spheres of influence. This is, I believe, is the situation today and though unipolarity has resulted in a peaceful period since the fall of the Soviet Union, collaboration, connectivity, economic prosperity, and the personality of leadership provide contributions to the Pax Americana. The same conditions, when contrary, have contributed to its disruption and cataclysm (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, & Wohlforth, 2011; Layne, 2012). A limited view of unipolarity implies that a nation at the top of the global hierarchy must suffer from some internal force before succumbing to the threats of external forces. This fails to account for the maneuvering of forces seeking to supplant the dominant power or diminish its influence, in part due to a lack of collaboration or mutual respect. There is a period where the dominant force can influence these forces and collaborate towards peace, as was the case after the Congress of Vienna and was the case during the Pax Americana and the end of the cold war. In the period between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrorist attacks of 9/11, a time of unquestionable unipolarity, only four conflicts between states erupted. If the opportunity passes and geopolitics not conducted recognizing the yearnings and desires of other nations and peoples to have a voice on the world stage, we are prone to miss the signs of impending conflict when a force of character, a power vacuum, and internal stability give rise to a struggle for hegemony. As Wohlforth (2009) concludes alarmingly, "unipolarity thus augurs for great power peace, and a shift back to bipolarity or multipolarity raises the probability of war even among great powers with little material cause to fight."

Previous scholarship debates, breaks down, and molds new theories for both the causes of war and peace, which implies that they are complex systems with leverage points that even now we fail to identify. Recognizing this, the analysis of unipolarity and transitions into multipolar worlds allows us to understand the precipice the world stands upon and navigate a way forward. Though this paper will conclude that the nation in greatest possession of strength of characters, internal stability, and the making to exploit a power vacuum is China, there is hope for a peaceful transition utilizing the lessons presented herein. When faced with conflict, collaboration is the most significant endeavor states may engage in to avoid it. If collaboration is not considered, war is almost inevitable in periods of transition. Thus, some insight into what forged our world warrants investigation.

The way forward is recognizing that a question of standing is arising, a unipolar world is giving way to transition via internal and external actors, and that in the past collaboration has led to diplomatic responses and agreements over a force of arms. However, the conditions in which these influences exist and play out must be understood and, at times, countered for collaboration to prevail.

Cases from the Past

Modern international politics is an institution, with a framework erected, modified, repaired, and maintained upon a professional administration with a diplomatic service. Though a western worldview, the great powers of Europe who participated in the systems rise and creation aided in its influence and acceptance through both simple interactions and direct conflict or colonialism. Thus, the system of today has its roots firmly grounded in the European interpretation of the nation-state. Though the history of diplomatic service and conflict dates as far back as history records, the modern diplomatic corps is traced to the Italian States of the 15th

and 16th centuries. During this period of immense change, hindsight grants the observers a view

of a dramatic shift towards calculated warfare and diplomatic maneuvering to a level of

professionalism surpassing much that had transpired in Europe in previous centuries. The 30

Years Year and the Peace of Westphalia are recognized as the turning point towards a system of

bureaucratic institutions supporting state interests.

　　　　The Thirty Years War reflects onto current affairs in two critical ways. First, it was

preventable and the result of failures both of international conciliation and religious zealotry

(Guttman, 1988, p. 751). Second, a powerful and intelligent leader emerged who exhibited

unrivaled supremacy due to the failings or shortsightedness of his contemporaries. It was the

French, led by the brilliant Cardinal Richelieu, which developed an identifiable concept for the

utilization of diplomatic force projection in the name of state interests. In so doing, however, the

France of the Sun King became the power in Europe, announcing its emergence when French

chevaliers marched into conflict in the Thirty Years War. It was the beginning of balance of

power maneuvering.

　　　　The interest of the state is primary and necessary, and under his guidance, France

undertook an intervention into the Thirty Years War that ushered in balance of power diplomacy

as a mechanism for controlling unipolarity. Importantly, Richelieu developed an early model of

hegemony through his unique innovation in the realm of foreign affairs. Additionally, the

Cardinal was a well-positioned and capable individual exploiting new ideas far ahead of his

opponents. Lambasted by contemporaries for entering the fray of the Thirty Years War and

aligning France with the Ottomans, the Cardinal pushed France into a dominant period that

would not be eclipsed until the wars with England in the early 18th Century and the Napoleonic

Wars. Crucial to understanding the importance of individuals positioned accordingly and

recognizing both power vacuums and opportunities, Richelieu had no equal and was surrounded by opportunities created not only by his foresight but by power vacuums. Turmoil in central Europe, a weak Spain, and an England embroiled in civil strife and the Nine Years War in Ireland. A power vacuum, both of talent and state, produced Richelieu's desired outcomes: a destroyed and weak German confederation and declining Hapsburg influence.

Understanding our modern predicament and trials in our own time hinges on understanding Richelieu himself and his system. As early as 30 years old, the Cardinal displayed an awareness of the folly in conducting religious warfare rather than pursuing it for secular, state-driven means and justifying action through both historical understanding and biblical narrative (Sonnino, 2002). He was a statesman first in this position and exemplified a firm understanding of the conditions around him (Kissinger, Date, pp. 63-65). His shrewdness and skill were contributions to the calamity that befell central Europe when peace was a glimmer of hope. Though partially foiled by the religious zeal of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Ferdinand II, peace in Europe after years of bloodshed was utterly destroyed by the intervention of Richelieu and France. Though not the wars initiator, he was its greatest instigator and protractor, contributing to the destruction and murderous rampage across the continent and ushering in a period of brief unipolarity before a return to multipolarity and conflict.

The meteoric rise of France is critical to the understanding of the conflicts that would follow, as Europe forged alliances hinging on recognizing and reducing unilateral power on the continent and in the ever-expanding colonial realm. Importantly, Richelieu had no contemporary rival and his coordination of agents, armies, and diplomacy exploited a weakened and divided state for the gain of another – a condition readily apparent today and arguably the motivation behind both Russian and Chinese interests. His position above his rivals, and his firm

understanding of the changing times before him, culminated in the dominance of the French

State and the entire system of power relationships utilized today. The statesmen who are

forward-looking and devoted to a deep understanding of the mechanisms around them have the

advantage and, in today's world, concrete examples of this appear from newspapers to social

media pictures of trade negotiations.

What were the results of this new quest toward hegemony for one and its destruction by

the many? States jockeyed for position as some rose to prominence and others sought to diminish

them. The post-Napoleonic era saw a drastic decrease until the outbreak of the first World War.

According to Lebow (2010) the 200 years from the rise of Richelieu and the downfall of

Napoleon experienced incredible frequency of conflict, with conflict erupting an astounding 83%

of the time (Lebow, 2010):

> Not surprisingly, the great powers were at war 95 percent of the time in the sixteenth and
>
> seventeenth centuries. The frequency of war drops to 71 percent in the eighteenth century
>
> and to 29 percent in a modified nineteenth century (i.e. 1815–1914). The years between
>
> 1815 and 1914 constituted the first century-like span in which there were more years of
>
> peace than of war. (p. 245).

1815 marked the end of a tumultuous series of conflicts arising from the French

Revolution and culminating in a drastic redistribution of power in Europe. The Congress of

Vienna continued the structured and professional approach to diplomatic engagement prevalent

since Richelieu maneuvered France into a position of power and the nation-state emerged on the

heels of the Thirty Years War. An essential and extraordinary affair, the Congress comprised of

the Big Four nations allied to combat Napoleon's aggression and, though much diminished in

influence at the outset, the French led by Talleyrand. The smaller states who assumed equity

would be established amongst the negotiators were sorely disappointed and found common

ground with their former foe through Talleyrand and France. Uniquely, the Congress, unlike the

Versailles accords, saw the inclusion of the defeated party and a root towards cooperation was

spearheaded by the conquering armies lead by Tsar Alexander I. As scholar Stella Ghervas

(2014) declared:

>The Congress of Vienna (1814-15) was marked by an outstanding innovation:
>
>Russia, Britain, Austria and Prussia consciously established an international system based
>
>on active cooperation, ushering in a period of relative stability in Europe. The great
>
>powers, spurred by Tsar Alexander I, made it an explicit policy to maintain peace at all
>
>costs. In doing so, they attempted to give up the system of the balance of power,
>
>effectively banning war among themselves for nearly four decades, until the outbreak of
>
>the Crimean War.

The Congress was a Euro-centric attempt, engaging the victors as well as the defeated,

into a formal affair of line drawing, disengagement, and cooperation through dialogue and

agreement. Reeling from the calamities wrought upon Europe, trade, and resources, sovereigns

sought an end to the challenges such upheavals created in their states. The peace was welcome,

and the initial labors of the authors described by George Ensor (1816) as the announcement of

the "practical virtue and wisdom of the Congress of Vienna and the liberators of Europe" (p. 37).

The peace was tenuous, and the same author infers that through the distribution of lands and

borders without thorough consideration would lead to dissatisfaction and conflict. Though the

peace all but contained local clashes and revolution, the system was precarious and relied on

cooperation between the major European powers. Though balance in the true sense of the word

may be an illusion, the outcome of negotiations and cooperation between delegates did usher in a

relatively peaceful era in comparison to Europe's past with states engaged only 20% of the time (Lebow, 2010).

What can be learned from this? Peace through collaboration and cooperation, a sacrifice of some interests, and mutual respect, though imperfect, may contain conflict. Driving a decision against a significant conflict between powers in the intervening years is a general acceptance of the status quo and complacency with global hierarchy (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, & Wohlforth, 2011, p. 30). The question of that time and today becomes one of standing and the ability of states and the people and organizations supporting them to cooperate and collaborate on their respective positions.

<center>The Failure of Cooperation: Crimea and German Unification</center>

The Crimean War is a significant event highlighting the relationship between personalities, power vacuums, and hegemony that drive geopolitics today. Appearing between two cataclysmic global conflicts, it is also not readily investigated as a case for peace. The Revolutions of 1848 disintegrated the concert of Europe and cooperation gave way to a resurgence of raison d'état. The events that unfolded surrounding Napoleon III, who sought to regain the power and influence France had constructed in the years before Britain's rise to dominance after the 7 Years War, led to increased suspicion and planted the seeds for conflict. The revolutions of 1848 created numerous opportunities for power vacuum exploitation, and Napoleon's policies would result in clashes with Russia, the consolidation of Richelieu's greatest fear in a united Germany and set the wheels in motion for the outbreak of the First World War.

Though the discord that erupted as the Concert of Europe disintegrated in 1848 and finally collapsed with the outbreak of the Crimean War, the rise of nationalism and the wars of German Unification redefined European borders along the lines of national identity, with some

exceptions. Militarily and industrially, Germany became the most powerful country on the continent. By 1870, Germany boasted of a larger population than its most immediate contender, France, and by 1914 outstripped it both in population and military power. Despite clear dominance and a recent victory over France, the micromanagement of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his ministers would prove to be a turning point. The Kaiser was poised to alienate foreign leaders and haphazardly unravel the critical alliances and rivalries constructed by Bismarck throughout the mid-late 19th Century created to ensure its' survival and diminish the prospect of a two-front war. Bismarck had constructed a unipolar situation on the continent, masterfully, and exploited the power vacuums and lack of internal stability in other states to piece together a complex puzzle of states into a United and powerful Germany.

The interactions of characters and policies and fear of German hegemony on and beyond the Continent is what drove Europe to the brink of destruction and threw the world into chaos. Though anti-Russian fears do sway public opinion, Germany knowingly began to dismantle its alliance with Russia to pursue one with England and, instead, ended up alienating both. The relationships and importance of standing are not only apparent in the race to carve up previously uncolonized or unexplored sections of the world, but also the jockeying for positions that broke down diplomatic accords constructed by Bismarck to position Germany safely between two fronts. The lack of cooperation, and a lack of likeminded and capable individuals pursuing increasingly competitive goals, contributed to the tinder box of events that ignited the First World War. Germany, arguably, dismantled its own continental hegemony in the years between 1871 and 1914, pushing other states through failures in diplomacy to contain them and, in the case of France, position them to regain standing lost to German gains. This is certainly a lesson for today.

The End of the Cold War – Unipolarity Briefly Returns

Understanding the world of the past can lead us to a world we can understand and react to preserve peace. The American dominance on the world stage that lasted nearly two decades is rapidly coming to an end as rival powers and ideologies emerge on the world stage (Layne, 1993). Previously an American dominated hierarchy, that dominance over competing and rising regional powers returns to a multilateral system. The world on the horizon is not unique, the American domination of the globe was. With globalization, environmental challenges, and a march towards dangerous ideology, it is crucial to the survival of the free world and of humanity for world leaders to elect a path that avoids conflict and ushers in collaboration and partnership; one the United States must be a part. Within today's world, full of populist and nationalist ideology, is the undercurrent of conflict ready to rapidly engulf the globe. As unipolarity gives way to multipolarity, internal conflicts, and power vacuums as the United States shifts or reduces focus, and talented individuals and organizations interact in ways that, seemingly daily, could connect to cause global catastrophe and plunge the world into conflict.

The global structure of power in the Cold War was basically bipolar; the emerging structure is very different (Huntington, 1999). Unipolarity was temporary, lasting nearly two decades before seeing the reemergence of a strengthened Russian Federation, economic power in the European Union, Brazil in South America, and both China and India in Asia. The world is, again, multipolar and the unilateral actions by the allies and states of the United States (Iraq), Russia (Ukraine and Crimea), and China (South China Sea) suggest cooperation, even under the auspices of UN discussion, falls on deaf ears. The structure of power today is multipolar, with varying degrees of military, economic, and diplomatic power emerging in regional actors. The most powerful and influential of which are the European Union and Germany within it, the

Russian Federation, China, and the United States. Though all push and pull at the strings of

power and influence, China and the United States are the greatest contributors to the push and

pull of power and influence on the world stage. What of other regional powers? None can match

the magnetizing pull on power that China and the United States project.

<div align="center">European Union</div>

Brexit, a possible Italexit, and differences in culture, politics, and economic resilience

paint a diverse and, increasingly, unwieldly coalition of nations. An experiment in European

collaboration of immense optimism, the collaborative spirit of pan-European association appears

to be coming apart at the seams. This issue results in a lack of a coherent foreign policy.

Coherence is an essentially component of foreign policy and is integral to exerting influence

abroad. However, being divided over matters of reaction (to populism, mass migration, US

friction, and Russian aggression) creates a dilemma that destroys cohesion, resulting into

individual policy preferences not aimed at achieving a common goal.

This confederation of European ideology, while sound for economic and collaboration on

internal affairs, proves a breaking point for the outward and forward focus required to attain

influence, if not hegemony, on the world stage. Public diplomacy in general, and soft balancing

specifically, is about positioning a nation in a wider context and strategically using relationships

to accomplish foreign policy goals (Yang, Klyueva, & Taylor, 2012). Brexit presents a severe

challenge to cohesion and collective action in a world in which EU influence is increasingly

resisted or contested. Internal conflict means misalignment and the inability to position itself as

one nation, but instead as a multitude of individual preferences aimed at shoring up popular

support or diminishing the influence of nationalist movement. In this atmosphere of turmoil, the

European Union is not positioned to emerge into a broader role in the international community

and serves only as a regional influencer and local power. This not only because of its economic

clout, which remains substantial, but due to the lack of standing, stability, and direction of the

states around the Mediterranean.

Viewing the EU as a collection of states or a confederation, rather than a federalized

authority guiding foreign policy, is necessary. A multipolar system, the one faced today, has

several major powers of comparable strength that cooperate and compete with each other in

shifting patterns (Huntington, 1999). A coalition of major states is necessary to resolve important

international issues. European politics approximated this but fails to attain the coordination

necessary to act as one, unified, collective voice. Something critical to the success of Richelieu

and to the Allies of the Second World War. Though there is great strength when united, the

conditions are not in place for the European Union to participate effectively on the world stage

during this transitory period.

<div align="center">Germany</div>

Hailed as the future leader of the free world, Angela Merkel and Germany stood at the

forefront of international politics when the Obama era came to a close. Germany is not

positioned to take this lead, nor will it, and is poised instead to be a leader in Europe. Germany

does not have aspirations to rise to such heights, instead preferring a path of stability in a hotbed

of instability. It also struggles with the effects of reunification, including economic, political,

cultural, and educational consequences (Lechner, 2000; Reimer & Pollak, 2009) that still plague

Germany since reunification.

The German people generally prefer to refrain from foreign entanglements. Surveyed in

2016, only 52% of respondents showed interest in foreign affairs and when faced with the

prospect of confronting challenges, the one on the minds of Germans as late as October of 2017

was one exerting external and internal pressure – the refugee crisis (Körber Foundation, 2016).

The crisis continued to exert enormous pressure on the German system, which garnered

extensive criticism from Germans to other EU member states on the sheer mass of refugee

acceptance versus other member nations (Berry, Garcia - Blanco, & Moore, 2015). In the midst

of this crisis, criticism is also levied by allies and partners and Germany, thus far, has remained

at least critical of, if not downright dismissive, calls to assess and improve both security policies

and military action (Seung-Jae OH, 2018). Though the economic success of the German system

is noteworthy, Germany (Bulmer & Paterson, 2013) remains challenged and possesses neither

the power vacuum nor the well-positioned leadership to exploit it. As such, it is inward focus

precludes it from rising to the challenge and exploiting one of the three necessary conditions for

attaining great power status. The inability to fill the power vacuum and fill the role as the new

leader of the free world in the absence of the United States.

<p style="text-align:center">Russia</p>

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not usher in a new world order, but a temporary

setback for the Russian state. Rising on the heels of a disaffected population, struggling

economy, and massive losses in both territory and influence, Vladimir Putin emerged to lead the

Russian Federation into the 21st century (Agarin, 2014). His election resulted in a realignment of

Russian goals with his Soviet predecessors (Russian influence in Eastern Europe), a safe and

effective warm water port to counter the US and European military interests, and economic

prosperity. However, his position atop a precarious and fledgling new state awash in corruption

created a power vacuum he masterfully exploited, consolidating power and creating an oligarchy

reliant on his approval and satisfaction. The result is not a Russia with interests beyond

traditional spheres of influence, but a Russia to support and maintain the Putin regime.

Even aggressive action, in the Ukraine and Crimea, under the guise of local uprisings and mysterious military units, precludes a perceived threat to Putin's power and an attempt to consolidate his hold further and enrich his supporters (Roberts, 2017). Unilateral action to consolidate power and partake in revanchist adventures are both related to the narrative of Putin's Russia and a result of the power vacuum left in the wake of a weakened United States and Europe. The general malaise and lackluster responses to political and civil instability by the United States and its allies in Libya, Syria, and throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East opened an opportunity that Russia recognized and exploited through the expertise and skill of Sergei Lavrov.

Embroiled in a world-wide conflict with troop deployment on no small scale, the United States would be powerless to respond to an action. An equally invested Europe, struggling under the weight of a disintegrating Mediterranean world and looming migrant crisis, would be as equally unable to respond. So the chance was taken, and that risk was meant to build the Putin image and legitimize his rule. Putin's Russia will poke the coals but will never jump into the fire. As presented by Feifer (2018):

> Putin has continued to use that top-down system to maintain his grip on power in the years since and is now modifying it to suit the times. Recently, he has begun to replace his crony circle's now mega-rich stakeholders with weak young bureaucrats who owe their loyalty solely to him. The hope is that they will help preserve his highly personalized system of rule, the only one they know.

China

With Nixon's handshake came the rise of regional power and, in the aftermath of domination by the United States, a genuine contender to the diplomatic, economic, and military

power comprising a great power. Of exponentially more consequence to the possibility of conflict is the rise of China. China has evolved the operations of European colonizers in smart and resourceful cultivation of other states through local leadership and infrastructure under the guise of its Silk Road initiative. Militarily, investments in outreach and projection, in the South China Sea, Djibouti, and beyond, position China to secure and defend interests throughout the world. It recognizes that the United States is abandoning the international stage, rapidly and in disarray. It would be hard not to interpret the lack of filled positions in the State Department and internal strife in the United States as a case for the rise.

Yet China is not without immediate challenges, as improvements in relations between Japan and India have created a buffer network of cautious allies (Nye, 2010). China and the United States are linked, economically, through complex network of transaction at the state and corporate levels. Though challenged in the present day, the interconnectivity is generally recognized as mutually beneficial and difficult to disrupt. Thus, the dominating issue is one of standing and a quest for hegemony. China, however, seeks the former and not the later and has implied through its posturing that a multipolar landscape is acceptable over conflict.

The issue with China is one of standing, with the United States poised to lose standing in a conflict many felt would center on Taiwan. Increasingly, it is centered on Pyongyang and the South China Sea. The folly of the United States would be to engage in a war of standing and a war in which, increasingly, both sides aim to lose. Casualties from a predominantly air and sea conflict, economic instability, and interruption of global trade notwithstanding, the unknowns of two nuclear powers in open conflict is reason enough for cooler heads to prevail (RAND Corporation, 2016). By the same estimate, China stands to lose the most and has no reason to enter into direct conflict with the United States.

In fact, China seeks to avoid conflict, instead, developing connections across regions where the United States has shown little interest or sees influence waning. Though a base in Djibouti suggests otherwise, this strategic African port city is crucial to Chinese interests and situation in an area increasingly disillusioned with American influence and presence. Rather than exerting external pressure in the name of expansion, it has positioned itself, increasingly, in a buffer zone of colonial-power-and control apparatus' in Africa and physical buffer zones through shaping land and ocean to its will. Through these efforts, and authoritarian control exerted through General Secretary Xi Jinping, it has emerged as a leverage point shifting the balance of the world order away from the United States, but not entirely usurped American power and influence. The United States is in a precarious position here, one China is able to exploit. Why? China, under Secretary Jinping, China is able to recognize a power vacuum, is led by a capable leader backed by talented forces and is relatively stable internally. China understands the United States is losing influence in Southeast Asia as countries grow concerned over the mixed messages, lack of attainable goals in foreign policy, and the questionable backing of alliances and commitments. The last hurdle is isolating South Korea from the United States. That hurdle, once insurmountable, can be cleared. They also understand the United States cannot stomach a prolonged conflict on shaky moral ground and the people will not accept a United States-led campaign on the Korean Peninsula.

China is poised to emerge in a better strategic position to ensure its hegemony in Southeast Asia and not the world. This is the crucial distinction between our previous cases in history and that of China. Though it possesses the characters, recognizes a power vacuum, and is internally stable (admittingly through force and control) it does not possess the will to exploit them beyond acceptance as an influential global power and recognition as a regional power akin

to the United States position with European powers under the Monroe Doctrine (Yang, Klyueva, & Taylor, 2012; Green, 2015). This assessment argues that to avoid misunderstanding and military conflict benefiting neither party, the United States should respond to a risen China with an olive branch. A military conflict would be lengthy, costly, and deadly. By partnering with China, the United States and its allies can shape a mutually beneficial world rather than forge a new world order through conflict. The United States must recognize this and approach China within this context; it must recognize that the path to peace welcomes China to the world stage rather than attempting to disrupt its efforts at regional dominance and global recognition. Only then will the fears of Wohlforth fail to come to fruition.

<center>Cost of War in a Multipolar Environment</center>

Existing scholarship suggests that returning to multipolarity at this stage hinges on the cooperation between powers. As Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen (2008) warn, "When relations between the superpowers deteriorated in the 1980s, the combination of proxy warfare, destabilization strategies and weak or collapsing states became even more vicious" (p. 702). Though major interstate conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States was avoided, the world now faces a similar prospect as the states and peoples of the centuries before us. When a quest for standing and hegemony ensues, and the right combination of power vacuums, talents, and a quest for standing arise, war has historically erupted. Headlines comprise of such gloomy predictions, and if war were to erupt the costs would be immense. In a global conflict between state and non-state actors, the Global War on Terror, the United States alone spent nearly 1 trillion dollars and, in the height of the war in 2008, 4.3% of its GDP on defense (Daggett, 2010). This without direct intervention via a declaration of war by another state actor. The most likely source of conflict remains between China and the United States, which would most likely erupt

over the actions between allies of either country. Not limited to the Korean Peninsula, a conflict

between China and Vietnam, Japan, and or the Philippines is a possibility all of which could

draw the United States into direct warfare and explode. Though estimates of conflict between the

United States and China are useful to determine the costs of a war in this context, it is also

appropriate to point out the costs of previous global conflicts. Though the disruption of trade,

population growth, and general prosperity is well researched and understood surrounding the

First and Second World Wars, an important revelation can be gleaned from research into the

Thirty Years Wars.

The Thirty Years War saw disruption of every system from family to state in the areas

affected, and its consequences exacerbated issues in areas untouched by conflict. Disruption of

such ordinary tasks as filing birth and death certifications is noticeable across Germany as well

as the highly recognized wanton destruction of some regions, displacing or killing nearly 90% of

the population (Kaman, 1968). Population declines, in general, of 35-40% in war-torn areas of

the Holy Roman Empire accompanied drastic declines in price increases and production crises

that spread throughout Europe and disrupted trade networks (de Vries, 2009). In a world not as

globalized as today, this later point is disturbing to consider. How a major global conflict,

including not only the conventional tools of war but the keystrokes and commands that can

cripple networks, would disrupt our capability to file for permits or navigate would have

profound micro-effects adding a seemingly infinite pile of pennies onto the final tab.

Conclusion

The world is again in a transition period between the hegemony of one state and the

evolution of others. Though history has dire predictions for the future, additional challenges and

an interconnected world may allow cooler heads to prevail and collaborate to stave off conflict

and usher in a peaceful transfer of global influence and power to multiple states. Though regional

actors such as Germany and Russia are powerful and positioned to influence global affairs, the

pole is shifting increasingly towards China. Though it may never eclipse the United States, it is

gaining both influence and standing rapidly. The United States must act to recognize this,

learning from the mistakes and interactions of the past, to avoid a war over this shift. The world

has evolved into a delicate interplay between economies, states, and ideologies that change

dyadic relationships and struggles of hegemony into a multipolar world. However, the past does

not leave us without lessons and conflict is not inevitable. To prevent disaster and to challenge

the notion that conflict is inevitable presented, this paper reviewed lessons from the past,

highlighting the conditions that prevented peace and contributed to conflict. An analysis of these

lessons and current events resulted in the comparison of major powers and how their roles are

shifting in this new world. Finally, a case is made for cooperation between the United States and

China – a power diminishing and one rising – that historically has led to conflict without

diplomacy, negotiation, and cooperation to offset the conditions that make conflict inevitable.

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