

Chapter One: This Time is Different

Excerpt

Exit from Hegemony: The Unravelling of American Global Order

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On July 11, 2018 at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Brussels, American President Donald Trump berated Germany for its dependence on Russian energy; he demanded that NATO allies double their defense spending commitments to 4% of GDP. Trump next travelled to the United Kingdom, where he chastised Prime Minister Theresa May for trying to negotiate its exit from the European Union (EU) rather than push for a ‘hard’ Brexit; Trump threatened to withhold a favorable trade deal with the United States.¹ Then, Trump made a final stop in Helsinki for a bilateral summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin. At the summit, the world witnessed the extraordinary spectacle of an American president openly siding with the leader of an adversarial regime against his own intelligence services when Trump declined to acknowledge Russian hacking and interference in the 2016 Presidential election. Trump’s seeming obsequiousness towards the Russian President was made even more remarkable by the fact that, on the previous day, he had identified the EU as the America’s “greatest foe.”²

Trump’s European trip sent shockwaves through world capitals. It spurred a wave of popular commentaries about the impending collapse of the so-called “liberal international order”: a common, although problematic, way of describing the American-led system of alliances, institutions, and global governance that first developed after the Second World War.³ And not without good reason. During his successful campaign for the presidency, Trump routinely disparaged NATO and other lynchpin American security relationships, rejected any serious role for democracy-promotion and respect for human rights in American foreign policy, and scorned the value of multilateral diplomacy and institutions. His behavior and rhetoric in Europe suggested that, despite inconsistency when it came to concrete policy, Trump remained ideologically and temperamentally committed to unraveling American-led international order.

Trump's dispositions also appeared to portend changing domestic US attitudes about America's global leadership role. In a public opinion poll following the summit, 48% of those surveyed expressed a belief that "the United States should not have to uphold its treaty commitments if allies do not spend more on defense," with two-thirds of registered Republicans agreeing that the United States should not honor its treaty commitments.⁴ In tandem with President Trump's aggressive protectionist trade agenda—and the levying of tariffs on the EU and Canada—the anti-internationalist agenda of "America First" seemed to be shifting the attitudes of at least some Americans. Particularly troubling for the durability of the American international system, Trumpism may transform foreign-policy principles once underpinned by bipartisan consensus—including strong support for NATO—into subjects of partisan conflict.⁵

While debates over Trumpism currently consume foreign-policy watchers, scholars of world politics generally focus on longer-term developments. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States faced no great-power peer competitors. It enjoyed uncontested status as the world's wealthiest country. The next seven largest economies all belonged to advanced industrialized democracies allied with the United States.⁶ American officials believed that the Russian Federation would become an important strategic partner. The American foreign-policy establishment convinced itself that integrating China into the global economy would nudge Beijing toward political liberalization while creating a basis for ongoing cooperation. Many foresaw a durable world order based on international liberalism and market democracy, with the United States maintaining a position of global leadership—what international-relations scholars call "hegemony."⁷

By the mid-2010s, though, this future looked increasingly unlikely. The United States had spent over a trillion dollars fighting wars, with mixed results, in Iraq and Afghanistan. These conflicts, and especially the Iraq War, damaged American prestige and exploded the image of invincible American power. In 2014, in response to what it perceived to be a US-backed coup-d'état in neighboring Ukraine that ousted President Viktor Yanukovich, Moscow annexed Crimea, supported insurgents in eastern Ukraine, and ramped up its efforts to destabilize Western democracies. In 2015, Russia intervened in the Syrian civil war. Far from a partner and ally, Moscow increasingly committed Russian resources to undermining the American international system.

As of 2019, the Chinese economy is, in nominal terms, on track to surpass that of the United States. In purchasing-power parity terms, it already did so in 2014.⁸ After assuming power in 2013, Premier Xi Jinping guided China toward a more assertive posture in international affairs. Beijing is using its economic clout to build a range of alternative development initiatives to those offered by the United States, Japan, and Europe; flexing its muscle in the South China Sea; and has begun to construct a modest network of overseas military bases.

Scholars see these developments as signs of a general power transition away from the United States. During such transitions, the leading power—or “hegemon”—faces increasing difficulties in maintaining its preferred international order; its relative decline encourages other states unhappy with that order to seek to renegotiate terms, build alternative arrangements of one kind or another, probe for weaknesses, and even directly challenge the dominant power or its allies. In the worst-case scenario, peaceful adjustment to the changing distribution of military and economic capabilities proves impossible; as it did in World War I and World War II, the system collapses into a devastating great-power war.⁹

This possibility, which political scientist Graham Allison calls “The Thucydides Trap” is currently something of a minor obsession in foreign-policy circles. However, American hegemony can unravel without anyone ever firing a shot. In this book, we contend that the international system has already gone quite far down several pathways out of hegemony. These include great power challenges, changing behavior of small or weaker states, and new forms of transnationalism that destabilize previous norms and agreed upon foreign policy frameworks. President Trump may be speeding up the journey, but major drivers of hegemonic unraveling predate him and will continue after his presidency. Indeed, Trump himself is as much a symptom of these developments as a cause, which has implications for those hoping to reverse his impact on international order.

Déjà vu all over again?

This is not the first time that scholars and commentators have written an obituary for the American-led international order. The second half of the twentieth century saw a number of postmortems for American hegemony, all of which proved premature. At the time, the

moments that generated them all appeared to be key inflection points, ones often spurred by inward facing economic nationalism and rising geopolitical competitors.

In 1973, following the collapse of the Bretton Woods system, America's draining war in Vietnam, and the OPEC oil shock, international-relations scholars widely viewed American hegemony—even within its Cold War sphere of influence—as collapsing under the weight of its fiscal strains and systemic commitments.¹⁰ Scholars doubted whether, in the absence of overwhelming US power, the world economic system could remain open and its rules enforced.¹¹ And yet, as international-relations theorist Robert Keohane argued, the international system of rules and institutions governing economic relations proved remarkably resilient even in the face of eroding American power. Meanwhile, so-called Third World challenges to American global institutions seemed to lose steam as the decade progressed.¹²

Similarly, in the late 1980s, newfound concerns about the unsustainability of American overseas military commitments and mounting fiscal deficits prompted a new wave of studies of American decline. Among these, Yale historian Paul Kennedy's highly influential 1987 book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* argued that the United States, like a series of global hegemonies before it, had succumbed to an enduring cycle of military overexpansion that was eroding its own internal capacity.¹³ At the same time, public commentators argued that US standing in the world would be exploited by emerging challengers, especially Japan. They believe that Tokyo, by spending less on defense and devoting more resources to national industrial policy, had discovered the recipe for a superior model of nationally-directed capitalism.¹⁴ One prominent book, published in 1991, even warned that Japan's rise would lead to open conflict and, quite possibly, war with the United States.¹⁵ That very same year Japan entered a prolonged period of economic stagnation (it's "Lost Decade"). Tokyo failed to secure a seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), let alone a fundamental shift in global power.

Within just a few years of Kennedy's book, world politics itself shifted in a momentous and redefining fashion. Throughout Eastern Europe, Communist regimes, previously seen as enduringly stable, toppled in the face of waves of street protests and demands for political and economic reforms. The Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, prompting immediate negotiations over the reunification of Germany. In the following year, the United States orchestrated a military build-up and accompanying diplomatic effort in

support of a crushing defeat of Iraq—a former Soviet client state—that underscored its dominant status in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union unraveled under pressure from nationalist mobilizations and the collapse of planning structures previously relaxed as part of an effort to reform its economy.¹⁶

In August 1991, an old-guard of hardliners tried, and failed, to seize power. But the Soviet Union was already effectively hollowed out; its break-up assured by a series of independence referenda in its republics. On Christmas Day 1991, the USSR formally disbanded. Fifteen new sovereign states, including the new Russian Federation, replaced it. Almost overnight, the United States found itself alone at the top, a sole superpower with unmatched military might. It would soon experience a period of impressive economic growth, fueled by a technology boom centered around personal computers and internet communications. Rather than sliding into decline, the United States lacked viable competitors; instead of seeing its hegemony erode, Washington now could contemplate extending its preferred international order well beyond its Cold War sphere of influence.¹⁷

The Post-Cold War Order Rapidly Takes Shape: Challengers, Exit Options and Transnational Networks

The Soviet collapse transformed the global balance of power.¹⁸ The jump to the “unipolar moment” led to the consolidation and expansion of the values, institutions, and networks underpinning the American international system and its elements of liberal international order. The collapse of Communist systems produced bold claims about the “end of history” in the form of the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism.¹⁹ Indeed, the first issue of the *Journal of Democracy*, published in the Winter of 1990, featured articles about the ongoing crumbling of the Soviet system and the political reforms sweeping Eastern Europe. It also included critical pieces on the Chinese government’s crackdown on what seemed like a growing tide of political dissent.²⁰ As the push to reform the Communist bloc gathered momentum, Western policymakers adopted exaggerated ideas about the quality of democracy and market reforms, manifesting in new international rankings of state performance, benchmarks, and standards for membership in new regional organizations like the OSCE.²¹

The Order of the “New World Order”: Expand and Integrate into the West

The end of the Soviet Union led to the disintegration of the international institutions and governance arrangements that stitched together the Communist sphere. The Warsaw Pact, NATO’s rival for over 40 years, dissolved with little fanfare in 1991. COMECON, the system that governed trade and economic relations between the Soviet Union and Communist partners, also disintegrated in 1991; the now liberalizing post-Communist states began dealing with each other in the international market and transacting in convertible hard currency.²² The Komsomol, the Soviet-led transnational movement of youth groups, also disbanded. Moscow did manage to maintain a patchwork of international-ordering arrangements within the post-Soviet space,²³ yet these were ad hoc in nature. They would not be consolidated into regional institutions with functioning bureaucracies and permanent staffs until the 2000s.

This disintegration opened the door to the expansion of Western international institutions and arrangements into the former Communist sphere. There was nothing inevitable about this. The major players considered other possibilities during the critical window of 1989-1990; as historian Mary Sirote argues, 1989 provided an opportunity for Western policymakers to consider many alternative ways of organizing Eurasian—and even global—international relations, including building new security architectures.

In the end, expanding (and modifying) Western organizations, principals and norms won the day.²⁴ The Federal Republic of Germany absorbed East Germany. NATO soon issued membership invitations to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In fact, the broad expansion of the European Union²⁵ and NATO would become a crucial part of both organizations’ agendas from the mid-1990s onward.²⁶ The US’s sweeping victory in the 1991 Gulf War underscored Washington’s global leadership. It demonstrated a massive qualitative gap between its military capabilities and those of second-tier powers.²⁷ Washington enjoyed a network of multilateral allies and supporters, both providing input into American diplomacy and conferring legitimacy upon it. American-led military intervention in the Balkan Wars reinforced America’s position at the top of the European security hierarchy. In 1998, American Secretary of State Madeline Albright declared the United States “the indispensable

nation” and confidentially proclaimed “We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.”²⁸

No Exit Options: Washington Consensus and Monopoly

The extinction of Soviet ordering mechanisms underscored that American-led “liberal” international order would serve as the main source of global governance, international rules and standards. Any talk about Japan or Germany potentially providing alternative options to the US-led system soon evaporated. Germany became consumed with managing unification. Japan, after a decade of advocating for a more state-friendly view of development in institutions like the World Bank,²⁹ dropped its own international aspirations as it turned inward to cope with chronic deflation and its own financial crisis.

Thus, the EU, the US, and other advanced industrialized democracies were, generally speaking, on the same page when it came to development assistance, human rights, international security, anti-corruption measures, trade, and other aspects of international order. While they might disagree over specifics, or sometimes let commercial or power-political interests take precedence, they tended on balance to push liberal notions of global governance. This meant that other countries lacked exit options when it came to matters of security or economic development; they had little choice but to play by the rules set by wealthy liberal democracies.

Further, the absence of exit options further empowered international organizations to embed liberal norms and values within their governance and membership criteria. For example, studies suggest that the economic conditionality associated with the IMF became more stringent for borrowing countries in the 1990s, precisely because they no longer had credible alternative patrons and thus little leverage. In consequence, states participating in the institutions of global governance faced the imposition of liberal political and economic conditions.

The Growth of Liberal Transnational Networks

The proliferation of a number of transnational networks reinforced the architecture of the post-Cold War order, often enhancing American and European power, by spreading broadly liberal values, standards, and worldviews.³⁰ In the economic sphere, the collapse and discrediting of centrally planned economies in the post-Communist world ushered in a wave of Western consultants and contractors. They designed new economic institutions and implemented transitions to the market—although, to put it mildly, not always with laudable result.³¹ Networks of international financial institutions, government regulators, and economists worked to produce and reinforce an elite consensus in favor of free trade and the movement of capital across borders—a version of liberal order more market-oriented than earlier ones. Such tight networks spread norms about the importance of independent and non-interventionist Central Banks.³²

On the political front, teams of consultants and technical assistance providers advised governments on how to design new constitutions, reform legal systems and design political party systems. National elections themselves came under new scrutiny by international election observer missions, most of them Western in origin. More broadly, the period saw enormous growth in the scope and intensity of transnational civil society. NGOs advocating for the expansion of human rights, gender equality, and environmental protection forged alliances with sympathetic states, media outlets, and international organizations. They scored victories in matters such as the campaign against landmines, which resulted in a treaty that secured a large number of signatories—but not the United States, Russia, and China.

Though not all such campaigns proved successful, the visibility and explosion of NGOs and transnational advocacy networks led some international-relations theorists to declare them a newly powerful type of actor in world affairs, one that even defied state sovereignty in the service of forwarding liberal norms and principles.³³ It seemed to many that activists fighting for their universal causes could now act nimbly and transcend borders. National-states, in contrast, often appeared clumsy, unable to cope with changes in communications and information technologies that non-state actors apparently exploited with great adroitness.

In sum, the Soviet collapse and the rise of (according to some) a “Pax Americana” occurred rapidly. It enshrined a whole set of institutions, networks, and norms that crystallized and gave shape to American power. American-led military action in Iraq and the Balkans cemented perceptions that the United States stood unrivalled as the leader of a unipolar system, but a wide variety of accompanying institutions—many initially developed during the Cold War—constituted the connective tissue, or critical infrastructure, of international order.

This Time it’s Different: 2019 vs. 1989

30 years later, the United States maintains its primacy in terms of military spending. In 2017 US military spending totaled \$610bn, reversing a decline since 2010, which was three times the level of the second biggest spender (China) and exceeded the \$578bn spent by the next 7 largest spenders.³⁴ However the state of play is very different than when the Berlin Wall collapsed. In all three areas that once supported the American international system—the disposition and trajectory of potentially revisionist great powers, the availability of exit options from American-led order, and nature of new and growing transnational networks—we see opposite trends.

Great-Power Challengers

The United States faces at least two great powers, Russia and China, that seek to revise, in one way or another, the current international order. Though publicly unified as partners against American hegemony, they do not use all of the same tools, and they do not share all of the same strategic goals. Moscow, especially since its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, wants significant changes in the rules, norms, and arrangements of world politics—the architecture of international order. Russian officials call for the replacement of the American international system with a more pragmatic “polycentric system,” where great powers control spheres of influence and engage in a mix of situational cooperation and conflict. In his Crimean annexation speech, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the West of failing to adhere to its own principles, ignoring international law and degrading its own institutions, thereby compressing Russia “like a spring” that forced it to “snap back.”³⁵

China also seeks to transform world order, but its approach does not, as of now, involve smashing existing institutions or norms, not least because its own rise and economic performance depended upon an open trading system and other economic arrangements associated with liberal international order. Rather, Beijing seeks to both amplify its voice within current international institutions and, critically, establish new regional and international bodies that can serve as vehicles to promote its interests and vision of a global community. By creating and underwriting new organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Beijing has introduced new organizations that it dominates and substitute for functions provided by American- and European-dominated arrangements.

China also launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which it announced to great fanfare (of its own making) in 2013. The BRI is a \$1 trillion global vision to invest in neighboring and developing countries, especially in areas of infrastructure. It aims to embed recipients in an emerging, China-friendly political community. The BRI has important implications for international order, as it threatens to bind countries economically to Beijing; China is also launching an international BRI court to adjudicate commercial and legal disputes that arise out of BRI programs. Accordingly, China's championing of these new vehicles and institutions may transform the ecology of international order itself, steadily increasing the power and activity of non-US sources of order.

Goods Substitution and Exit Options

If the emergence of Russia and China as revisionist competitors constitute a "top-down" challenge to the American international system, a less obvious, but no less significant, challenge comes from below. Even small and weak states now enjoy more readily available alternative patrons to exit the order on any given governance issue. This exit from hegemony via "death by a thousand paper cuts" operates precisely because regimes may simply seek domestic political advantage when they choose, or leverage, alternative suppliers of development assistance, military security, or other goods. That is, they may not intend to alter prevailing international order even as their actions have that effect.

As we discussed earlier, in the early 1990s the lack of any alternative providers of such goods made a Western-dominated international order—one with significant liberal components—effectively the only game in town. Obvious and sustained deviation from its principles and institutions of global governance usually marked a regime as an international outlier or “rogue state.” In doing so, it made it more difficult to secure international goods, and provided important ammunition to political opponents. This “patronage monopoly” also imposed costs for state governments and regimes around the world, usually in the form of political commitments or economic conditions. Thus, international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, imposed more stringent conditions on borrowers, while autocrats faced greater international scrutiny for holding problematic elections or otherwise violating democratic norms.³⁶ Thus, many of the popular and scholarly criticisms of globalization that emerged in the late 1990s emphasized the lack of alternative models or patrons for developed countries that did not want to implement the prescriptions and policies of the ‘Anglo-American’ (or ‘neoliberal’) model of open globalization.³⁷

But, as time went on, a category of “competitive authoritarian regimes” overcame these external democratizing pressures and consolidated their regimes. Some did so with the help of revenues from the sale of important commodities, especially oil. Others positioned themselves as strategically important partners for “War on Terror” prosecuted by the United States after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.³⁸

By the mid-2000s, the rise of alternative patrons in various areas of international governance started to mitigate the demands of Western patrons. The arrival of other providers of similar goods further diminished their vulnerability to the demands made by the United States and Europe—demands that often threatened recipient governments with political or economic disruption. For example, China’s development bank provided increasing development and investment funds to impoverished states in Africa, Latin America, and Central Asia, but without the conditions traditionally made by its liberal counterparts such as the World Bank.

Similarly, emerging patrons like Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the Middle East extended support to critical regional powers—for example, supporting embattled Egyptian government following the 2011 Arab Spring—thereby also undercutting the West’s ability to

leverage its control over the major suppliers of global governance into political influence. Other emerging regional powers such as Turkey, India, and Iran (and, for a time, Venezuela) all adopted new strategies of influence that relied on their newfound ability to provide public, club, and private goods to neighboring countries of interest—but, again, without the demands made by advanced industrialized democracies.³⁹

In the realm of political, military, and symbolic goods as well, these new patrons also began to supply alternatives. International election observation became a crowded and increasingly confusing field that featured dozens of new organizations. Many of these existed simply to rubber-stamp elections in hybrid and autocratic regimes.⁴⁰ In the post-Soviet sphere, monitors from regional organizations like the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the SCO, beginning in the early 2000s, sent election monitors to member countries who provided favorable assessments of obviously flawed elections. In doing so, they muddied and undercut the much more negative signals sent by their Western counterparts, such as the Washington DC-based Nixon Center or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).⁴¹ Indeed, by the mid-2010s, regimes around the world, from Ecuador to Tajikistan to Sri Lanka, seemed to prefer procuring goods from alternative patrons precisely to avoid the political externalities and conditions demanded by Western and Western-backed external actors.

Contested Transnationalism

By 2019 the momentum once enjoyed by robust, generally liberal transnational networks had slowed, if not reversed. Right-wing illiberal counterparts now challenge them on matters ranging from LGBTQ rights to ethnic diversity to liberal-democratic governance. Meanwhile, illiberal regimes have found ways to limit—or even eliminate—the influence of liberal transnational advocacy networks and reformist NGOs.⁴²

Waves of popular uprisings and regime changes—the so-called Color Revolutions of the mid 2000s in the post-Soviet Space and the 2011-12 Arab Spring in the Middle East—played a key role in this process. Western governments and media framed these political changes as democratically-inspired. But they sent alarm bells ringing throughout

authoritarian and illiberal regimes, who took note of the geopolitical threat posed by the democracy and human rights promotion agenda.

In response, concerned regimes soon adopted a sophisticated playbook to curtail the influence and operating space of NGOs with foreign and transnational ties. State imposed new restrictions on receiving foreign funds, they limited the scope of political activities, and they stigmatized their activities by branding them as “foreign agents.” In other words, the norms of democracy and their civil-society champions, shifted from an often-desirable ticket into western order to a security threat. By 2015, over 50 states had passed legislation banning or restricting NGOs, with 45 passing restrictions on their accepting foreign funds (38 of these since 2003).⁴³ At the same time, governments also diluted the influence of liberal transnational actors by sponsoring counterparts of their own—also known as Government Organized Nongovernmental Organizations (GONGOs). These conduct advocacy in the media spotlight, but remain strongly supportive of government policies and positions.⁴⁴

Important changes also happened within the core advanced industrialized democracies. By the mid 2010s the proliferation of illiberal networks challenged the mainstream political consensus within the West. These sometimes took the form of left-wing radical parties, but more often of right-wing parties and movements. They openly questioned the values of international liberalism. They attacked the authority and questioned the benefits of continued membership in major institutions such as the EU and NATO.

While such movements and ideologies dated back decades, two developments helped tip the balance more toward a generalized “illiberal turn” in the West: the Great Recession of 2008 and the refugee crisis in Europe. The latter, exacerbated by the civil war in Syria, pushed refugee and immigration issues to the top of the populist agenda, shattering the EU consensus on migration and transforming the domestic politics of East and Central Europe.⁴⁵ As we will explore in greater detail in Chapter 6, illiberal parties also have developed transnational ties to one another; they receive both financial and moral support from, among others, Moscow—which views them as an instrument for wedging apart democratic governments and cultivating friendly regimes.⁴⁶

For example, the 2010 electoral triumph and re-election of Viktor Orbán in Hungary allowed his government to launch assaults on key liberal institutions, such as judicial independence and civil society. The June 2015 Brexit vote in the UK, backed by a campaign

with ties to Russian business interests, produced domestic turmoil in a European power known for its relatively hardline against Russia while driving a wedge through the EU. Not long after, investigative reporting into the Trump campaign found numerous ties to donors and organizations with an interest in weakening Western political institutions. Indeed, the Trump Administration itself appointed several Ambassadors to traditional NATO allies, including the Netherlands and Germany, who openly criticized EU values and the political norms of their host countries.

American Power without Order? The Trump Experiment Defined

Contrary to much public commentary, the Trump presidency is not a primary cause of the dynamics weakening the American international system. It is both a symptom and an accelerant of processes of hegemonic unravelling. Trump's presidency has certainly raised significant doubts about the durability of America's commitment to the system it helped construct. But, as we argue in this book, these pathways out of hegemony were already operating before 2017. Unfortunately, until very recently they have been largely ignored or dismissed, whether by 'the blob' (the mainstream consensus on foreign affairs associated with major liberal- and conservative-leaning Think Tanks and policy officials) or American international-relations scholars.

Indeed, past debates about the future of American primacy often revolved around comparing the power capabilities of a competitor—usually China—or highlighting the gap between revisionist ambitions and relative capabilities, especially in the case of Russia. Arguments about “unipolar stability” masked a steady, but unmistakable, transformation of the ecology of international order.⁴⁷ While commentators and observers did call attention to other processes of hegemonic unraveling and shifts in international order over the last fifteen years, some—such as the role of transnational anti-order movements in Europe and North America—received comparatively little attention before the success of the Brexit referendum and Trump's campaign for the presidency. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that these processes are interdependent, and even ‘bootstrapping’ on one another—that is, each is generating positive feedback for the others.

The central analytical question posed by the Trump administration is whether it is possible to decouple the maintenance of American power from key, and particularly liberal,

elements of the American hegemonic system. The usual purpose of hegemonic orders is to lock-in a system of benefits that accrue to the leading power. Thus, hegemons generally turn revisionist against the order that they've helped construct at their own peril. Yet this is where Trump's dispositions lie. Trump and some of his advisors openly regard supporting the infrastructure that helps maintain this system—multilateral alliances, international organizations, and at least some commitment to liberal values—as a threat to American power.

Moreover, Trump's public admiration for “strongman” regimes in Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia contrasts strikingly with his obvious disdain for traditional democratic allies and transatlantic partnerships. This suggests that his preference would be to replace America's global role and international commitments with a series of bilateral (and more ephemeral) bargains. In other words, the wager is that stripping the global system of its ordering arrangements will yield a “dog eat dog” world where the sheer superior power of the United States will ensure that it most often comes out on top; the Trump administration believes that aggressive increases in military spending, plans for nuclear modernization, and scrapping agreements that constraint American security policy will ensure that the United States retains the necessary military superiority to triumph in the geopolitical scrapheap.

In this respect, Trump's attempt at international disruptions exhibits key similarities and differences with Mikhail Gorbachev, who also attempted to reshape the foreign policy of a superpower in the service of a refocused domestic agenda. Gorbachev recognized that the Soviet Union's high levels of defense spending simply made it unable to meet the domestic demands and adjustments required in a globalizing world. Thus, he sought the Soviet Union's integration into the Western international system—and soon, quite unintentionally, oversaw the disintegration of the Soviet order. Whatever dividends these policies yielded were lost in the chaos of the final months of Soviet collapse and the immediate stress placed on Russia by its sudden independence.

Three years into his presidency, it is clear that Trump can rattle the infrastructure of the system constructed by the United States and its allies, but it remains uncertain how much of it he can, or is willing to, pull apart. But because Trump is both a symptom and accelerant of general trends, his presidency calls attention to the broader pathways out of hegemony that the world is increasingly walking.

The Plan of this Book

In the next chapter, we explore the theory and practice of the American hegemonic system. We argue that there are three distinct principles of liberal international order: democratic political systems that broadly respect political and human rights, free economic exchange within and among states, and the management of international affairs via multilateral institutions and other forms of intergovernmental cooperation.⁴⁸ There is no reason why all three must coexist, but it became conventional wisdom in the 1990s that these three ‘pillars’ of liberal order mutually reinforced one another. From the Clinton to the Obama administrations, American grand strategy sought accordingly to enlarge liberal order via the expansion of American leadership from its Cold War boundaries to the entire globe. Thomas Wright refers to this as the “convergence” wager, which held that the major powers would come together around all three ‘pillars’ of liberal order, and “stop treating each other as rivals and begin to work together to tackle common challenges.” By the late twenty-teens, this wager appears to have failed.⁴⁹

To better understand why and how the convergence wager failed—as well as the current trajectory of international politics—we take a close look at the concepts of hegemony and international order. We argue that international orders have *architectures*, made up of prevailing rules, norms, and values. International orders also have *infrastructures*, composed of the relationships, practices, flows, and interactions that underpin them. Overall, we suggest conceptualizing international orders as *ecosystems* or as having specific ecologies, within which a variety of different state and non-state actors operate. In Chapter 3, we use these concepts to make sense of the different pathways through which hegemonic orders—and, for the matter, international orders more broadly—unravel.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 each explore and illustrate a different pathway that is undermining the US-led order. Chapter 4 focuses on the rise of Russia and China as revisionist powers, exploring both their common grievances with the US-led international order, but also the different strategies that they have adopted as challengers. Chapter 5 looks to uncover less obvious “bottom-up” dynamics by exploring how states in various regions, even smaller and weaker ones, are increasingly undermining the order by exiting from its institutions and rules and soliciting assets and governance from alternative providers. Our key analytical point in this chapter is to show how regime security, once thought by rulers to

be guaranteed by the security, governance and social status conferred by their association with the liberal international order, is now threatened by its intrusions into domestic sovereign affairs. New findings about the domestic political effects of Chinese aid in Africa as well as case studies of Hungary, Turkey, and the Philippines all demonstrate how regimes are shifting to new and alternative providers of public and club goods in a bid to consolidate their domestic power and authority. Chapter 6 explores how the transnational networks of the 1990s that enhanced the liberal order have been curtailed by states and tracks how new networks that promote illiberal forms of order—national culture, sovereignty, transitional values and closed borders—are now interacting and openly disrupting what had appeared to be a domestic political consensus in the West.

Chapter 7 then turns to the foreign policy practices an agenda of the Trump administration. It examines the deeper domestic origins of Trumpism and highlights how Trump intersects with all three of the pathways that are eroding liberal internationalism.

Chapter 8 reprises the book's main findings and arguments and offers some possible scenarios for what a post-liberal international order might look like. We assess the likelihood of an emerging US-China Cold War, explore the dynamics of an international order without liberal values, and call attention to the rise of transnational oligarchy as a distinct political force that is supported by the institutions and legacies of the liberal order. Although we anticipate that a future new Democratic administration will attempt to revive American global leadership, commitments to allies, and to upholding again liberal values and norms, we conclude that the international system is too far down multiple pathways to allow for a return of America's former hegemonic role. Exit is upon us.

¹ "Trump blasts UK PM May's Brexit plan, says it puts trade deal in doubt." *Reuters* July 11, 2018.

² "Trump Calls EU a 'foe' on Trade: CBS News Interview." *Reuters* July 15, 2018.

³ In this chapter, we use terms such as "liberal international order" as a shorthand for how American and European powers have ordered significant dimensions of world politics. We discuss the concept, and its limitations, in more detail in subsequent chapters. For overviews of the relevant debates, see Graham Allison, "The Myth of the Liberal Order," *Foreign Affairs*, June 14, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/myth-liberal-order>; Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, "The Liberal Order Is Rigged," *Foreign*

Affairs, April 17, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2017-04-17/liberal-order-rigged>;
Alexander Cooley, “Ordering Eurasia: The Rise and Decline of Liberal Internationalism in the Post-Communist Space,” *Security Studies* 28, no. 3 (May 27, 2019): 588–613, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2019.1604988>; Daniel Deudney and G John Ikenberry, “The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order,” *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 1999): 179–96; G John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); G. John Ikenberry, “The Plot against American Foreign Policy: Can the Liberal Order Survive,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (February 2017): 2–9; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “The Liberal Order Is More Than a Myth,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2018-07-31/liberal-order-more-myth>; Rebecca Friedman Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper, “The Day after Trump: American Strategy for a New International Order,” *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445353>; Paul Musgrave and Daniel Nexon, “American Liberalism and the Imperial Temptation,” in *Empire and International Order*, ed. Noel Parker (London: Routledge, 2013), 131–48; Patrick Porter, “A World Imagined: Nostalgia and Liberal Order” (Washington, DC: The Cato Institute, June 5, 2018), <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/world-imagined-nostalgia-liberal-order>.

⁴ “Nearly half of Americans link defense of NATO to allies’ spending: Reuters/Ipsos poll.” *Reuters* July 18, 2018.

⁵ Paul Musgrave, “International Hegemony Meets Domestic Politics: Why Liberals Can Be Pessimists,” *Security Studies* 28, no. 3 (May 27, 2019): 451–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2019.1604983>.

⁶ Daniel H. Nexon, “On American Hegemony, Part I,” *Lawyers, Guns & Money* (blog), July 27, 2018, <http://www.lawyersgunsmoneyblog.com/2018/07/american-hegemony-part>.

⁷ See Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 2018; Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power* (Yale University Press, 2017), chap. 1.

⁸ This assumes the rough accuracy of measurements of Chinese GDP.

⁹ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983). On Third World challenges to declining US power, see Krasner, Stephen D. *Structural Conflict: The Third World against Global Liberalism*, (Univ of California Press, 1985).

¹¹ Charles Poor Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929-1939*, (Univ of California Press, 1986).

¹² Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, (Princeton University Press, 1984). Indeed, as Carla Norrlof and others have shown, American economic power may actually have increased in the wake of the collapse of Bretton Woods (see Chapter 2). Carla Norrlof, *America's Global Advantage: US Hegemony and International Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹³ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987).

¹⁴ Ezra F. Voegel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1985).

¹⁵ George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan*, (St Martins Press, 1991).

¹⁶ On the roles of Soviet republican nationalist movements and uncertain property rights, see, respectively: Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet State*, (Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Steven Lee Solnick, *Stealing the state: control and collapse in Soviet institutions*, (Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Initially, only a few commentators recognized this—among them, Charles Krauthammer, who coined the phrase “unipolar moment” See Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 2, 1991, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/1991-02-01/unipolar-moment>. It would take the failure of European powers to handle warfare and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans to make the new reality of American primacy absolutely clear.

¹⁸ Crude indicators, such as share of global military spending, suggest that it was, at least for the moment, the collapse of the Soviet Union, not an absolute rise in US military power, that drove this shift. See Nexon, “Hegemony, Part I.” However, the 1990-1991 Gulf War demonstrated that American precision-strike and combined-arms capabilities easily exceeded those of other major powers—whose military planners took note. See Rebecca Rose Lissner, “Grand Strategic Crucibles: The Lasting Effects of Military Intervention on State Strategy” (thesis, Georgetown University, 2016), 236ff,

<https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1042837>; Jacqueline Newmyer, "The Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 4 (August 1, 2010): 483–504, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2010.489706>; David S. Yost, "France and the Gulf War of 1990–1991: Political-military Lessons Learned," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1, 1993): 339–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399308437522>.

¹⁹ Fukuyama, Francis. "The End of History?." *The National Interest* 16 (1989): 3-18.

²⁰ *Journal of Democracy* 1 (January 1990).

²¹ Alexander Cooley and Jack Snyder, eds., *Ranking the world*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²² On COMECON, see Randall W Stone, *Satellites and Commissars: Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade*, (Princeton University Press, 1996).

²³ The Russian federation maintained some institutional structures to cope with the Soviet dissolution and some governance and security issues in its former Soviet republics. For example, Russia concluded leasing arrangements to ensure continued access to a network of Soviet-era military and strategic installations, including the Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol (then part of Ukraine) and the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. And the very proclamation of December 25th that disbanded the Soviet Union established a looser Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which eventually was joined by all the post-Soviet states except the Baltic states and Turkmenistan. However, the CIS mostly served to manage the institutional legacies and coordination issues inherited from the Soviet system rather than define a new basis for cooperation on regional matters; Russia organized and dispatched CIS peacekeepers to guard ceasefires between the government forces and breakaway territories in Georgia and Moldova, and decisively intervened on behalf of the government of Tajikistan during the Tajik Civil War (1992-1993). It

²⁴ Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe - Updated Edition* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁵ The European Union came into being, as such, in 1993 as a result of the Maastricht Treaty.

²⁶ Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004); Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers*

Exploit Power Shifts (Cornell University Press, 2018); James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010).

²⁷ Lissner, "Grand Strategic Crucibles."

²⁸ Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Interview on NBC-TV "The Today Show" with Matt Lauer, Columbus, Ohio, February 19, 1998, As released by the Office of the Spokesman, U.S. Department of State. <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>.

²⁹ Wade, Robert. "Japan, the World Bank, and the art of paradigm maintenance: The East Asian miracle in political perspective." *New Left Review* (1996): 3-37.

³⁰ Valerie J Bunce and Sharon L Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 283–304; Valerie Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, "Transnational Networks, Diffusion Dynamics, and Electoral Revolutions in the Postcommunist World," *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications* 378, no. 1 (May 2007): 92–99, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2006.11.049>.

³¹ Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and collusion: The strange case of Western aid to Eastern Europe*, (St. Martin's Press, 1998).

³² Juliet Johnson, *Priests of prosperity: How central bankers transformed the postcommunist world*, (Cornell University Press, 2016).

³³ The seminal work in this area is Margaret E. Keck, and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: Advocacy networks in international politics*, (Cornell University Press, 1998).

³⁴ SIPRI Military expenditure database. <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>

³⁵ "Address by President of the Russian Federation." *President of Russia* March 18, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

³⁶ On the IMF's enhanced credibility in imposing its conditions in Africa in the 1990s, see Thad Dunning, "Conditioning the effects of aid: Cold War politics, donor credibility, and democracy in Africa," *International organization* 58, no. 2 (2004): 409-423.

³⁷ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*. Vol. 500, (Norton: New York, 2002).

³⁸ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. "The rise of competitive authoritarianism." *Journal of democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65. On Central Asia's securitization and rising authoritarianism post-9/11, see Alexander Cooley,

Great games, local rules: The new power contest in central Asia, (Oxford University Press, 2012). On similar dynamics in Africa, see Cédric Jourde, “The International Relations of Small Neoauthoritarian States: Islamism, Warlordism, and the Framing of Stability,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51,2 (2017): 481–503.

³⁹ Diamond, Larry, Marc F. Plattner, and Christopher Walker, eds. *Authoritarianism goes global: The challenge to democracy*. (JHU Press, 2016).

⁴⁰ Judith Kelley. "The more the merrier? The effects of having multiple international election monitoring organizations." *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (2009): 59-64.

⁴¹ On the rise of the Russian-led CIS monitors, see Rick Fawn, "Battle over the box: international election observation missions, political competition and retrenchment in the post-Soviet space," *International Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2006): 1133-1153.

⁴² See Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴³ Darin Christensen and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Defunding dissent: Restrictions on aid to NGOs." *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 77-91. On the restrictions of foreign funding, see Kendra Dupoy, James Ron, and Aseem Prakash. "Hands off my regime! Governments' restrictions on foreign aid to non-governmental organizations in poor and middle-income countries." *World Development* 84 (2016): 299-311.

⁴⁴ Stephen W. Kleinschmit, and Vickie Edwards. "Examining the Ethics of Government-Organized Nongovernmental Organizations (GONGOs)." *Public Integrity* 19, no. 5 (2017): 529-546.

⁴⁵ Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (U. Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

⁴⁶ Anton Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western far right: Tango Noir*, (Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁷ See, for example, Stephen Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July 2002): 20–33; Ikenberry, *Leviathan*; Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing Against the United States,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 7–45; T.V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 46–71; William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 5–41.

⁴⁸ Paul Musgrave and Daniel Nexon, “American Liberalism and the Imperial Temptation,” in *Empire and International Order*, ed. Noel Parker (London: Routledge, 2013), 131–48.

⁴⁹ Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power* (Yale University Press, 2017), 1.