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US Foreign Policy Backtracking and the Conflict with China (from 2008 till 2022)

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Dedication

Regarding what I have achieved so far my praise and thanks shall all go to Allah for guiding me through this path then to my dear parents for the care and support as well as to my brothers and sister.

This work is also dedicated to my wife and her family, my two daughters, my friends Ahmed, Djamel, Bilal, Ossama, Abdelkader, Souici, Nawrani, Abdelbaki, Omar and the rest.

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Abstract

Since the end of the presidency of George W. Bush, the US foreign policy has witnessed a slow shift from deep engagement to containment. This ongoing transition is leading many experts and researchers in the field of international relations to make hypotheses. This study aims at bringing to light the main aspects and causes of the switch in the US foreign policy, whether it is a sign of the end of its monopoly with the rise of China or not. In addition to analyzing how America is handling the backtracking of its hegemony along with the competition with China. To accomplish those aims, relevant data specific to the US foreign policy and its competition with China are collected, explored and analyzed. The aim is to show the signs of the US regression from the international scene to become more Western-centered in parallel with the emergence of China as a threat to the US hegemony and the way America is dealing with this matter to safeguard its image. The study found that America's image as the world leader is really shaken and the reason behind this recent development seems to be that it kept neglecting the rising alarms that China has revived to become a superpower. Hence, American policy-makers are engaged in a race to saveface.

Résumé

Résumé Depuis la fin du mandat du président Georges w. Bush, La politique étrangère des États-Unis a connu une lente transition d'une politique d'engagement à une politique d'endiguement, ce qui a incité les chercheurs dans les relations internationales à construire des hypothèses et dégager des attentes. La présente étude vise à faire la lumière sur les aspects et les raisons les plus importantes de ce changement dans la politique étrangère des États-Unis et si cela est un signe de la fin de son hégémonie en tant qu'unipolaire avec la montée de la Chine à laquelle les États-Unis doit faire face comme conquérant sur l'hege. En vue d'attendre les objectifs de cette étude, des données et des informations liées au sujet du déclin américain et la concurrence avec la Chine ont été recherchées, collectées puis analysées pour montrer la réalité du déclin américain sur la scène internationale et concentrer ses efforts sur l'occident en parallèle avec l'émergence de la Chine comme une menace pour l'hégémonie américaine. L'étude a conclu que l'image des États-Unis comme le leader mondial a récemment ébranlé après avoir ignoré les avertissements selon lesquels la Chine est en voie de devenir une grande puissance. À cet effet, les décideurs américains d'aujourd'hui se sont engagés dans une course pour sauver la face de l'hégémonie de leur pays.

المخلص

منذ نهاية عهدة جورج بوش الابن عرفت السياسة الخارجية الامريكية تحولا بطيئا من سياسة الالتزام نحو سياسة الاحتواء. هذا التحول الحاصل يدفع الباحثين في مجال العلاقات الدولية الى بناء فرضيات. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تسليط الضوء على اهم مظاهر و اسباب هذا التحول في السياسة الخارجية الامريكية وما اذا كان اشارة الى نهاية هيمنتها كقطب اوحده مع صعود الصين ام لا, و تحليل كيفية تعامل امريكا مع تراجع هيمنتها بالتزامن مع منافستها مع الصين. لبلوغ اهداف هذه الدراسة تم جمع بيانات ومعلومات تتعلق بموضوع التراجع الامريكي و المنافسة مع الصين وبحثها و تحليلها لاطهار حقيقة تراجع امريكا على الساحة الدولية وتركيز جهودها على الغرب بالتوازي مع ظهور الصين كتهديد للهيمنة الامريكية و كيف تتعامل الولايات المتحدة مع المسألة لحفظ هيبتها. خلصت الدراسة الى ان صورة الولايات المتحدة كقائدة للعالم اهتزت فعلا في السنوات الاخيرة, و يبدو ان السبب الرئيسي هو تجاهلها للاندراجات بان الصين في تصاعد لتصبح قوة عظمى. على هذا الاساس فان صناعات القرار في امريكا اليوم في سباق مع الزمن لحفظ ماء وجه هيمنة بلادهم.

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General Introduction

The concept of the world leader has changed from being an ideological military hegemony to rather mixing it with a soft pragmatic economic dominance focusing on interests. The US withdrawal from different parts of the world in the last fifteen years, mainly Iraq then Afghanistan, added to other signs of the retreat that can be seen in using agents like: in Europe as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Asia and Australia like the trilateral security pact which includes Australia, the UK, and the US (AUKUS) to primarily control the Chinese and Russian expansion instead of the direct presence of the US troops. There is also a change in the form of the military operations that focus more on drone attacks and funding allies with weapons. Besides this, the USA tends to rely on the weapon of sanctions on economies and officials. All these points raise the debate among different scholars of history and International Relations (IR). Are they to be considered a proof of the start of the backtracking of America as the world leader or just a readjusting of its foreign policy by being less liberal but more realist (pragmatic)? even though realism does encourage military solutions when necessary, to create a balance with the Chinese huge economic and military growth. An advancement that is not only overwhelming the world and shaping the political view of many countries that benefit from China, therefore becoming its partners and allies, but a proof that a multipolar world order is on the rise. China's rise in the global arena took place while America was busy waging wars against terrorism, so-called dictator regimes and promoting democracy since the end of the Cold War while ironically losing its position as the unipole.

Since the end of the Cold War, the American presidents felt that their country became indispensable and took the burden of making the world an image of itself. Presidents George H. Bush, then Bill Clinton started deploying troops almost everywhere in the world to maintain peace in regions of conflict or to impose new democratic regimes by replacing authoritarian ones. However, they would neglect conflicts in regions where allies have

interests and can do the job. They with George W. Bush, who came to be president after almost a decade, alike shared the belief that America was an “unrivalled military power”. Had they thought of a balance of power with China and Russia at that time, they would have focused on finding a way of restraining their economic and later on military advancements. A thing that Bush’s fellow republican, later, president Trump, started working on but it was late. Ten years after the first attacks on Taliban, President Obama announced in a brief statement that the number one terrorist for America was eliminated. Not only did the war consumed billions of dollars added to the loss of the lives of thousands of American soldiers, but it also failed to stop the Taliban’s insurgency that succeeded in the end to seize power back. In Iraq, things were not better, as the USA was facing a pressure since the international public opinion was suspicious about the claims that Iraq really possessed weapons of mass destruction. Years after the war, Obama declared, “Operation Iraqi Freedom is over”.

Meanwhile, China was spending billions of dollars on its infrastructure and helping other countries build their own. Much more money was and is being spent on technological research and founding a huge technological industry that would, after few years, compete with the biggest technology firms and go into every house in the world. China jumped from 1 trillion Dollars of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2000 to 14 trillion Dollars in 2020. Today, it produces almost everything from a lighter to huge machines, ships, fighter jets and a lot more other things for developed and developing countries. This fact annoys the USA since it, for a long period of time, dominated the industries of technology and weaponry and had a large international market. Consequently, it seems that the policies of the last three presidents tend to cope with the rapid evolution that China has reached for it is not only a matter of strengthening the economy but also a matter of dignity and control.

This study serves as an attempt to add to the already existing literature about the topic of the shift in the US foreign policy. More precisely, the seeming regression of America as

the world leader while other nations in the east like Russia and China work to end America's hegemony and make the world leadership more collective.

The reviewed literature to this paper proves the broad and international interest in the subject of American foreign policy as a key factor in the international arena, though, the field of IR is known to be dominated by American researchers and thinkers mainly representatives of the contestant theories Liberalism and Realism. To be specific, a researcher in international relations would frequently hear about Professors John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt who argue for the realist approach (Classical Realism). Both Professors have bilateral works such as books and articles. Most of the time they publish in the Foreign policy magazine and they are among the founders of the restraint-oriented think tank, the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft.

According to (Mearsheimer) The USA and China are meant to be rivals. The ideology of democracy promotion would lead to the imperative conflict between the two powers. Nationalism and the protection of sovereignty will form a rampart against the spread of liberalism and thus will lead the Chinese leaders to think of ways to overcome the American dominance by creating a mutipolar world order. (Mearsheimer) argues, as one of the defenders of realism, that spreading liberalism is an impossible dream simply because for a superpower to impose its ideology it needs the world to be unipolar. Consequently, Nations have to adopt the policy of the balance of powers to survive.

(Walt) defends the same realist orientation and adds that the US is asking the question: how it should use its power? It did once through the containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But, it started misusing it ever since. He devotes most of his writings to show the drawbacks of the policy of liberal hegemony and to reply to thinkers and politician who criticize the realist approach. He dedicated a whole article in the Foreign

Policy magazine to refute their arguments and explain how applying restraint policy does not mean isolationism.

(Ikenrery), who is the world's most known leading scholar of the liberal world order, expresses his worries that the two great powers USA and the UK, that have done the most to give the modern international order a liberal character, are pulling back from the project. He considered Donald Trump as a threat to the American-led order.

This study comes as an attempt to investigate the undeniable backtracking of the America's foreign engagements and rethinking America's priorities. This study takes into consideration other factors such as the domestic and the international public opinions, the political actors' (America and its Allies) own interests, political parties and interest groups such as the top five American defense contractors Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Boeing and Northrop Grumman. This research also aims to investigate whether the goal of counter-balancing the economy of China is attainable through rethinking America's foreign policy and focusing on the competition with it.

The following research question will guide the study in attempting to achieve its stated aims:

- 1) How can the seeming backtracking of the US foreign policy with regards to its invasion of other countries recently be explained?
- 2) To what extent is the rapid technological advancement of China and its accompanying international influence a motive for America to put more focus on its own economic growth to safeguard its global dominance?
- 3) How is America reorganizing its foreign policy to reflect the new global changes with the rise of China?

The previous questions lead to the following hypotheses. Firstly, America's backtracking is undeniable, most importantly, demonstrated by its recent withdrawal from

Afghanistan. The operation received wide criticism mainly from senior politicians in the USA. However, others consider the backtracking from the international scene as an act of wisdom, as the shift in the foreign policy is an inevitable approach to keep up with the events at the international level. Secondly, China's growth that once was focused in economy, has extended to include the military and is going in a fast pace. That would undoubtedly raise the alarm because China sees the USA as its first contender. The latter reacts on this ground to keep pace with its Chinese rival. Thirdly, the reaction of the US requires taking certain steps and sacrificing some of the principles of deep engagement and democracy promotion as the competition will be fierce and may require aggression.

This study investigates the regression of the USA as the world's dominant superpower amid the rise of new leaders in the eastern hemisphere like Russia and China in particular. This research is qualitative-analytical, in which qualitative data will be collected and analyzed taking into consideration the historical background and the events related to the topic. Therefore, a close exploratory reading of the views, quotations and facts will be presented to help understand the regression, its causes and aspects as well as the competition between the USA and China and how America can handle the competition.

The significance of this study lies in effort to mention and explain the way America's hegemony is in retreat by shedding light on its causes and aspects after decades of US dominance. It also goes back to the main reasons that left the US numb and helpless before the rapid progress of its most prominent competitor, China. In addition to the effort to develop a deeper view about the changes taking place in the American foreign policy decision-making to keep pace with China and how it would positively reflect on the image of the USA, internationally and domestically.

This work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to a background of the aspects that marked the US hegemony as a unipole, the aspects of the retreat of that hegemony and the reasons behind it and ends with showing some aspects of that retreat.

The second chapter covers the intense competition between the USA and China with a slight reference to Russia that succeeded to reincarnate and return stronger, thereby menacing its dominance. It also includes the levels where America and China compete and the signs that the possibility of a direct confrontation may take place.

The third chapter deals with the possible ways for the USA to benefit from the events and developments taking place inside and around its rival China. Furthermore, it clarifies the price and the different solutions for the USA to maintain its hegemony.

Chapter one:

US Foreign Policy

from Engagement to

Backtracking

Introduction

The US military power is an undeniable fact. This power was for decades an important factor in shaping US foreign policy. The USA intervened almost everywhere whenever it felt the need to maintain stability or deter a rising dictator regime. But, since 2008 when Obama has become president, this interventionist policy has become less appreciated, and the two last decades marked the regression of it. This first chapter begins by shedding light on the background of the countries and regions where the USA intervened militarily and peacefully to widen its circle of control. This chapter is also an attempt to bring to light the causes of the regression of the American circle of dominance and concludes with some aspects of the retreat.

1.1. Historical Background of US Military Interventions Since WWII

Today, there are hundreds of military bases, facilities, and locations around the globe where US troops are found. An obsession with being everywhere which started after WWII under the title “forward strategy” to contain Soviet expansionism. Americans believed that it is their destiny to bear the burden of saving other countries from being attacked, threatened, or bullied by aggressive regimes. They believed that conflicts should be discussed as humans can often come to grounds of agreement. However, there are also ones who may make things difficult and, hence, should be treated otherwise. You will keep safe as long as you carry your weapon with you and your eye on your enemy.

1.1.1. Reasons Behind Adopting the ‘Forward Strategy’

The ‘forward strategy’ was consolidated as a belief that wherever the US felt that the Soviets might take the chance to fill in a gap it should move as soon as possible to prevent the act. The defeat of Japan in the Second World War ended its control over the Korean peninsula. Soviets rushed to take the northern part then the Americans found themselves obliged to take on the responsibility of the southern side of the peninsula. The competition with the communist regimes continued when a war broke in 1955 between the communist-controlled northern part of Vietnam and the American-controlled south. Vietnam was united under a treaty signed in Switzerland but the Americans started funding the southerners and pushing towards separation from the north.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, the United States continued its interventionist policy in other regions. It felt that it must put an end to Saddam Hussein’s hostile mentality after he went to war with Iran then to the annexation of Kuwait. Even though, Saddam justified his attack that Kuwait petrol policy was undermining Iraq’s economy the US and its 35 Allies started the ‘Gulf War’ on his country and pushed his troops back. (Mearsheimer 54)

1.1.2. An Unhealthy Obsession with Credibility and Indispensability

It is human nature to seek power and leadership and it becomes hard to think about stepping down and leaving the lead to another power. The result will be resisting the decline by all means, especially if you have been a source of protection for some and nightmares for others. Hence, America is perhaps the most warlike nation in the modern history of humanity. The way to the top has made it fierce and brutal as other nations too have the same ambition of leading the globe. To convince the national and the international opinion of the necessity of

wars, US presidents keep using instruments like crises and emergencies to breach the law and overpass the authority of some institutions like the Congress and gain international sympathy. A fresh example of such behaviors is the recent conflict in Ukraine. President Biden keeps asking Congress to approve urgent and immediate military aids of billions of dollars for the Ukrainian resistance to stand against Russian tyranny since the beginning of the operation in February. He signed the ‘Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022’ to make it easier to export military equipment to Ukraine according to (Congress.gov). One of his speeches was delivered in the headquarters of the most dominant corporation in the weapon industry, Lockheed Martin, in May 3, 2022.

1.1.3. Places Currently Under American Control

Last but not least, military bases, lily pads¹ and American ‘former’ colonies are not granted full independence; the US kept control over the military bases in the Philippines, and implicitly annexed the Federated States of Micronesia in the Pacific when they agreed to give the responsibility of defense to the United States. It still uses the Marshall Islands for military training and nuclear tests as is the case with Palau². Other territories like: Guam, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa are openly declared American territories. (Vine 63,102)

1.1.4. Persuading More Allies to Join the USA

A decade later, George W Bush felt it was necessary for his country to wage war on terrorism and nuclear threats in Afghanistan and Iraq and took advantage of the 9/11 incident

¹ **Lily pads:** also known as “cooperative security locations” are places where the US keeps few if any troops

² **Palau:** a part of the United States-governed Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

to convince his allies to support him. The Allies are always convinced by the USA that they are under threat and need protection. Therefore, in Europe, for instance, more than a hundred thousand of its troops are deployed in the continent (statista.com). More European countries are asking to join NATO. Besides this, there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) funded by the USA in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Pursuing countries neighboring Russia and China to military cooperation with the USA like Ukraine.

1.2. Reasons Behind the US Backtracking or the Shift from a Global Approach to a More Western-Centered Policy

In Oct 2011 president Obama ordered the total withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by the end of the year. “I said I'd end the war in Iraq. I ended it”, he said in a rally in Hollywood on Nov4, 2012. He kept his promise about changing the attitude of the US foreign policy as he hinted before that this war was a mistake and caused America troubles and casualties. He had relied, then, on air strikes from drones to eliminate the leaders of the terrorist groups that jeopardize the security of the Americans and the expansion of democracy and freedom in the world. During his campaign in 2016 in Fayetteville, Trump criticized the US involvement in foreign conflicts. Trump said, “We will stop racing to topple foreign regimes that we know nothing about, that we shouldn't be involved with,” “Instead, our focus must be on defeating terrorism and destroying ISIS, and we will”. He openly adopted one of the basic beliefs of Realism when he added, “We will build up our military not as an act of aggression, but as an act of prevention, in short, we seek peace through strength.”

Speaking about how one of the theorists of Realism sees it “Waltz, on the other hand, emphasizes that the structure of the system causes states to compete for power but that states

should not strive to maximize power. Instead they should aim to control an “appropriate” amount of power.” (Mearsheimer 25) In April 2021, President Biden ordered all US soldiers to pull out from Afghani grounds by September 11 of the same year, ending one of the longest and most expensive wars America has ever waged. A process that would embarrass America and her Allies, and leave question marks over the objectives of the operation and the future of democracy around the globe, and the ability of the USA to maintain the world order. People inside America were divided on whether the troops should come back home or not but the majority have elected these three presidents because they promised to end wars and focus more on the American economy and domestic issues that are the concern of every American.

Christopher Bertram, a former director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London and one of Germany’s foremost strategic thinkers, wrote in 1995, “To disband NATO now would throw Europe into deep insecurity.... It would be a strategic disaster.” He goes on to say that

If the United States turned its back on Europe, NATO would collapse and the European Union would be strained to the point of disintegration. Germany would stand out as the dominant power in the West of the continent, and Russia as the disturbing power in the East. The United States would lose much of its international authority as well as the means to help prevent European instability from igniting international conflict once again. (Mearsheimer 7)

However, those American military personnel, employees and their families scattered around the globe would cost the state treasury millions if not billions of dollars every year. Moreover, they produce opposite effects as people living next to them feel uncomfortable and

angry with the existence of foreign troops around them. Rafael Correa, the president of Ecuador, spotted this rarely declared truth in 2009 when he refused to renew the lease for a U.S. base in his country. Correa told reporters that he would approve the renewal on one condition: “They let us put a base in Miami—an Ecuadorian base.” “If there’s no problem having foreign soldiers on a country’s soil,” Correa quipped, “surely they’ll let us have an Ecuadorian base in the United States” (Vine 9,10)

1.2.1. A Common Conviction to Bring the Troops Home

This troop withdrawal started during the Obama presidency when he called for US soldiers to be out of Iraq. He and Trump do not belong to the same political parties and ideologies. However, they were under economic pressure, mainly; America was living in the aftermath of the worst recession of its modern history. Trillions of dollars that were supposed to help build a better country for US citizens were being spent on an unending war against terrorism far from their country and the benefiteres were few. They just kept paying more taxes. Trump after that called for a full retreat of the US soldiers from Syria in 2018. In September 2021, the former vice president of Obama, President Joe Biden ordered his troops in Afghanistan to come back home. The process was chaotic and was criticized for being an embarrassment for the USA. If the operations in Afghanistan did nothing but generated more violence and new terrorist groups and militias, so why had not the USA pulled its troops a decade ago? How would US allies and rivals look at it? There is no doubt that Russia and China will replace it and be allies with a country torn by America and its allies.

Politicians can provoke wars in other regions distant from America and gain as much profit as they can with much less casualties. They did so in many occasions in the first half of the twentieth century. America funded Europe during WWI and WWII with weapons, ammunition, uniforms, medicines, crops and many other goods, some of them as humanitarian aids and the rest were sold to Europe for money. Either way, the USA would benefit and guarantee the continuity of the economic cycle. Though it did not act neutral, it was not fully involved in the two wars. More than that, it came out from the wars victorious and economically the strongest. So, why not do it now? The same policy is being adopted nowadays with Ukraine and Taiwan.

1.2.2. Realism and Liberalism Standoff

In fact, it is not easy for any US president to oppose the country's tendency to liberal thoughts. They are often surrounded by cartels, powerful people, groups of interest, and shareholders who promote the ideals of freedom and democracy, preferably by force, to gain profits by selling their petrol, weapons, medicines, and even spreading certain ideologies and cultural ideas that allow them to promote their entertainment industry around the globe. Groups of interest also include intolerant scholars and thinkers of IR, from the school of 'Liberalism' mainly, that attack those who defend the 'Realism' namely, as Mearsheimer repeats what one of the members of the millennial reflections panel on realism John Vasquez suggests that research by realist scholars does not "deserve continued funding, publication, and so forth". He believes that realists should not be hired by political science departments (Mearsheimer 29,30). Such people are not just university professors who are doing the job of teaching, more than that; they are godfathers and policy influencers who may influence the decision-making of the presidents. "Superficially, it seems hard to argue against maintaining

U.S. bases overseas. It seems logical enough that more bases mean more security. Since the bases have been there for decades, it's easy to assume that there must be good military reasons for them" (Vine 16). Therefore, they need a strong argument to act 'individually' and the history of the United States in full of such instances.

In September 1940 President Roosevelt declared that he was providing Britain with fifty destroyers without congressional approval. Sixty years later, George W Bush would shock the national and international public opinion when he declared war on Afghanistan and later on Iraq assuming that America and world peace are in risk. "The U.S. Constitution bestows the president with dominant power to make diplomatic and military decisions and the privilege to breach laws under a state of emergency. Over the past century, the U.S. government has been using crises, wars, and emergencies as an instrument to gain greater power. The president and military-political interest groups have been the biggest beneficiaries."(Why does the US)

1.2.3. Lack of Support of Wars by American Taxpayers and Allies

Public opinion inside the country has its say as candidates for the presidency run campaigns to convince people to elect them. Hence, they adapt their future programs and speeches during rallies to persuade the electorate to vote for them. Candidates consult surveys and reports done by research centers and journalists to know what the opinions of the public say and build their programs on that. During the last two decades, at least, Americans felt they have been lied to by presidents and their assistants concerning the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the economic status of their country, and the future of their security. Wars brought nothing but more enemies and hate. People who suffered US invasions are not happy with it and hold a grudge against all that is American. Besides, Americans keep paying taxes and gaining a little. For them, it was not logical to continue that war after ten years of the killing

of Bin Laden. Even though Americans tend to support freedom and believe in the principles of liberty and world peace that require force sometimes Liberal Hegemony, they could not deny or oppose the reality that this war was nothing more than a headache to them primarily. They could see that allies and friends of the US are also tired of supporting a losing team.

Wars, military bases, and interest groups have consumed almost everything. Democracy and freedom are retreating giving way to authoritarian regimes that Americans always feared to have control over the world. China and Russia have recovered and returned stronger than the last time Americans thought they have permanently gone. Adding to the fact that not all communities in the world are made to accept the beliefs and principles of Liberalism, it has always lost the war to Nationalism. People in the occident keep rejecting and pushing it back to where it comes from and this is something that American officials and citizens began to realize. Things did not become any better in Afghanistan because most Afghani people do not think that democracy is the best solution to their problems; the beliefs of communism did not disappear in China or Russia. People there may accept eating at McDonalds, watching American movies that propagate Americans as superheroes, and using mobile phones made by Apple but are not ready to give up on their ideals the next day. Instead, they use American mobile phones and social media applications to promote their traditions and way of life because they think it is beautiful. In other words, they do not accept the kind of democracy that America recommends it is “a democracy dominated by money” as the Chinese state-owned Xinhua news agency described it in an article (What’s wrong with the US). The USA had planned with its allies in the Middle East to change the unfriendly regimes In Syria and Libya, but things did not go as planned and the situation became chaotic as no political solution seem to be close.

The liberal ideas that keep growing beyond freedom and free trade and always coming up with new notions such as: imposing democratic systems on tribal-based communities, feminism, same sex-marriage, undermining the patriarchal tradition, and many other unacceptable ideas in eastern societies. All these led to the consolidation of nationalism in most of these countries and even to tense relations with friend countries as is the case with Saudi Arabia. The circle of US dominance keeps shrinking from Asia and the Middle East to become tight and western-centered where countries are more open to such ideas and notions.

Inside the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement, for example, is clear proof that democracy suffers in its stronghold. “The US is far from a ‘beacon of democracy’ and has nothing worth showing off given the chaotic American society”, said Chinese academic Lu Xiang (GlobalTimes). Several necessary sectors in the USA, like education and health, struggle to stand while billions are spent on military bases. President Biden keeps asking Congress to approve more military and humanitarian aids with billions of dollars for the government and people in Ukraine.

Former president Trump, who had a profound pragmatic economic vision, thought that the US money, should have been spent on strengthening the country’s economy and infrastructure to keep pace with specifically the Chinese economic and military fast growth. He, therefore, ordered the withdrawal of the US troops from the Middle East to help build America and imposed sanctions or more taxes on Chinese goods and technology. He tried to restrain the growth of the Chinese economy but in reality it was too late to do so. Even after he stepped down he never fails to seize the opportunity to severely criticize those who declared wars on other nations even if they were republicans. In a rally he held in May 2022 he described George W Bush as “one of the worst presidents in our history” (brietbart).

1.2.4. Different Tendencies of Eastern and Western Allies

In addition to the rejection of the notions of liberalism, peoples in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Palestine and Iran have suffered American injustice, criminal acts, torture, drone attacks, and economic sanctions. As a result they hold a feeling of hate and grudge toward all that is American. Friends of America in these countries no longer believe in its project in the region. “Once again the diplomats on the other side of the table made it painfully clear that they thought we were way off in la-la land with our talk of building democracy and a strong civil society and everything we were offering”, wrote Vali Nasr, one of the consultants in the Obama administration when he described the reaction of diplomats from Pakistan and the Arab world he met in New York (Vali 16).

In Europe, there is this shift in the direction of votes in favor of the Far-Right parties that are considered extremist or have a Nazi ideology. These parties today form coalition governments in countries like Austria or even have full control over it like in Poland and Hungary. This electorate tendency is due mainly to their governments’ handling of the problem of immigrants. Riots are taking place in many European countries. Immigrants, especially from African and Muslim countries, suffer racist attacks almost every day.

1.3. Aspects of US Backtracking

In his book “A World Safe for Democracy”, Dr. G. John Ikenberry writes when speaking about the international Liberal project:

Today, this grand project is in crisis—a crisis most profoundly manifest in a lost confidence in collective solutions to common problems. Surprisingly, the retreat from liberal internationalism is coming from the very states that had been the postwar

order's patrons and stakeholders. The two great powers that have done the most to give the modern international order a liberal character—Great Britain and the United States, the world's oldest and most venerated democracies—now seem to be pulling back from this leadership...The EU has been the silent bulwark of the Western liberal order. In each decade of the postwar era, it was Europe's political advance—its efforts to bind together its liberal democracies and diminish old geopolitical and nationalist divides—that most fully embodied the liberal international vision. But that advance has now come to a halt. (23)

Trump then came to consolidate the doubts about the future of liberalism in the world. He called for a review of the different cooperation treaties that America has with other countries like NATO, saying Europeans have to pay for the protection that the USA provides for them. He also announced the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accords and other areas like human rights and immigration. Britain, which is the closest ally of the USA never felt at ease with the BREXIT as it did during the Trump administration. Not only his policies affected his country, but threatened the unity of Europe and encouraged rivals such as Russia to plan an invasion of neighboring countries years later. He wanted all US troops back in the country from 'unnecessary' wars in other parts of the world. In a meeting in Canada in 2018, the president of the European Council Donald Tusk put it, "Trump is 'undermining the world the US created'. He added, "The rules-based international order is being challenged, not by the usual suspects, but by its main architect and guarantor, the US."(independent)

Americans have withdrawn from Iraq in 2008 and then from Afghanistan in 2021. Biden declared, "After consulting closely with our allies and partners, with our military leaders and intelligence personnel, with our diplomats and our development experts, with the

Congress and the vice president, as well as with [Afghan President Ashraf Ghani] and many others around the world, I concluded that it's time to end America's longest war. It's time for American troops to come home,”(defence). In fact, that feeling of boredom and discomfort has started years ago when Obama sent one of his consultants, Richard Holbrooke, to the UN meeting to convince America’s friends in the Arab region and Pakistan to show support for the war. “...And when it was their turn to talk, they said just that. “It is much better you buy local warlords to keep al-Qaeda out of Afghanistan,” our host responded. “I figure that will cost you \$20 billion, which is what, one-fifth of what you spend every year in Afghanistan? Spend that and then just go home!” (Vali 16)

Americans are leaving the burden of protection in eastern Asia to the Japanese and the Australians (QUAD¹ and AUKUS²). They are encouraging more Middle Eastern countries of the Arab peninsula to normalize their relations and even to form the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) with Israel which is a type of military defense alliance to stand against Iran. In the last three years Israel has started to bear the burden of its security itself by launching air strikes on targets in Syria and Iran. The relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have never been worse since their beginning between the two countries. The USA keeps frosty or no relations with several African countries that once were European colonies and it thinks that the greatest threat is mainly located in Asia. US troops did not bring too much change since they started operating in Syria and at present Assad did not step down. Many assume that the USA lost the battle with the Russians on Syrian grounds and could do nothing more but protest when Russia occupied Crimea in 2014.

¹ **QUAD**: a strategic security dialogue between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States

² **AUKUS** : is a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States

Countries like Iran and Syria and the militias working under their command present themselves as enemies of the United States. Turkey presents itself as a friend but keeps disobeying orders from the US when it comes to its interests. Beijing is presenting itself as a better mediator in conflicts that take place around the world and more countries are accepting its way of dealing with their internal affairs and the respect for their sovereignty.

Back to the end of the previous millennium, the administration of President Clinton failed to settle disputes in Rwanda and Sudan in Africa, for instance, and the USA says it is still going after the members of the Al-Shabaab movement in Somalia. After decades president Biden ordered the redeployment of 500 ground troops to chase its members. Clinton could do nothing about the nuclear tests in Pakistan and India. It did not intervene to end the ethnic conflict in the Balkan region, between Bosnia and Serbia, until the end of the 90s. Though, he was accused of keeping his eyes closed about the crisis. Fifteen years later, the attempts to change the regimes into democratic systems in Libya, Syria and Egypt under the name of 'The Arab Spring' turned the situation into unending civil wars and 'dictators' are still in power.

Conclusion

The dominance of the USA of the international scene was a long process and the result of the good policy of investing in wars off-shore especially in Europe. The end of the Second World War marked the real appearance of the USA as the world's mightiest nation. Therefore, it took the burden of containing any possibility of the rise of other powers shifting its policy from containment of the USSR to liberal hegemony after the end of the Cold War. However, liberal hegemony showed to be bearing the seeds of its extinction as the ideology it promotes has always crashed into the wall of nationalism and sovereignty. Consequently, non-liberal regimes rose to push back liberalism as they feared they would lose their identity to it and hence the USA was obliged to pull back.

**Chapter 2: The Rise
of China and
America's More
Focused Approach
to Safeguard its
Global Dominance**

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Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the US backtracking from the international scene which led to spotting the rise of China as the most important reason. Having spotted this main reason led to this second chapter that is devoted to explore the rise of China and how it led to the US to retreat and hence focus on reorganizing itself to keep pace with China. The competition takes place at various levels starting from economic and military, to technological and cyber warfare besides the provocations from both sides especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Consequently, the possibility of an inevitable war is growing high, which is the point tackled in the end of this chapter.

2.1. The Chinese serious Threat to American Dominance

In the last two decades, the Chinese economy has grown to break all records in manufacturing, exportation, and increasing the country's GDP to historical levels. China has made a good use and benefited a lot from the international free trade treaties set by the liberal order. As Mearsheimer puts it, "A hyperglobalized economy undermines in yet another way: it helps countries other than the unipole grow more powerful, which can undermine unipolarity and bring the liberal order to an end. This is what is happening with the rise of China, which, along with the revival of Russian power, has brought the unipolar era to a close." (Mearsheimer 2). Still, China is not part of the World Trade Organization (WTO) because its rules do not comply with the interests of China's economy.

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According to statistics from The World Bank, the Chinese economy has grown 2.3 percent in 2020, the same year when almost all the countries around the world were suffering the effects of the lockdown because of the spread of COVID19. The USA was not an exception and its economy has fallen to -3.4 percent. The Chinese GDP has jumped from 1.2 trillion dollars in the year 2000 to 14.2 trillion in 2020. This was not the first time when its growth defeats its rival of the USA. Actually, it has been the case for the last two decades as Americans were preoccupied with the war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Though the American economy reaches an annual income of about 20 trillion, its economy grows on a very slow pace and is today facing the risk of recession as inflation rates reached historical picks. The spending rather focused on military operations and personnel, a thing that threatens to turn the US into a thin nation that only has a strong military but a weaker economy. In the same year, the American national public debt reached 99.3 percent of GDP. 37 percent of this debt is owned by foreigners and China holds 1.3 percent of it. (ticdata.treasury.gov)

2.1.1. The Rise of Bounded Orders and Independence from the International Order

“For an order to be international, it must include all of the world’s great powers. Ideally, it would contain every country in the system. In contrast, bounded orders consist of a set of institutions that have limited membership. They do not include all of the great powers, and they are usually regional in scope. In most cases, they are dominated by a single great power, although it is possible for two or more great powers to form a bounded order.” (Mearsheimer 5,6)

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This totally defines what China and Russia have been working on in the last few years. It required them to rise as superpowers and the next step was to strengthen their bilateral relations at all levels. Then, they moved to convincing more trustworthy countries with sound economies and certain military abilities. Being from the same region closer to China and Russia is optional. Based on this, the first summit of the countries forming the BRICS bloc was held in 2009 following the preparations that started in 2006. A primarily economic coalition of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (joined in 2010) who are also members of the G20 (BBVA annual report 2012) One of the main points scheduled in the very first summit in 2009 was the need for a new global reserve currency. This was an indirect threat to the dominance of the US dollar and hence to the USA. In May 2022, the Chinese Foreign Minister declared that the BRICS should expand to include more countries (reuters).

2.1.2. New Alliances and New Institutions

“It is in our interest for the EU to have a strategic relationship with Turkey as well as with Russia that brings stability, that will in the long term and bring more strength and coherency,” said Macron in a news conference in Helsinki alongside Finnish President Sauli Niinisto (cnbc). A rational statement from the French president in 2018, which was neglected by the Europeans driven by the USA and the UK to make Russia the ‘most direct threat to the world order’ as the president of the European Committee Ursula Von Larsen openly declared four years later on May 12, 2022. There was a hope that Russia is more resilient to join the Western liberal model than China. The two could not pose a threat if pulled apart. Nevertheless, it seems like China’s promises to Russia were more persuasive. The two powers have set grounds on which a new world order is built with new coalitions and institutions

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away from the UN, the World Bank, Swift Bank, the World Trade Organization and many others that form the core of the liberal system. The two countries have started from huge bilateral trade exchanges that overpassed 110 billion dollars in 2019 in terms of energy (Power of Siberia Line), arms, technology and even tourism. They now use their own currencies in trade (russia-briefing).

2.1.3. Examples of New Partnerships and Institutions

Besides the BRICS bloc that China promises to expand to include more allies, there is the Russian Eurasian Economic Union that includes countries like: Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and others. This project has been merged within the Chinese Silk Belt and Road which not only includes countries from the surroundings of China but goes far to reach Europe and Africa. Projects like those may lead to US isolation as it is geographically away from the rest of the continents. There is also the Shanghai Pact that was formed in 2001 and includes about 40 percent of the world's population (msn). The economists in China and Russia have put the bases for a new monetary system, away from the Swift, to facilitate and secure money transferring between them. This system can grow broader for more partners to join.

2.2. Major Areas of Competition between the Two Giants

The competition between the two countries takes several forms that it would be a mistake to limit it the military level. The Republic of China has today one of the biggest economies and is a member of the G20. It is a leading country when it comes to technology and innovation. It is also the number one country in the exportation of rare minerals and raw materials (institute forenergyresearch). Not to forget that it exports its goods and products to

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almost every corner of the planet. Still, statistics focus more on military spending and might as things often get tense between the two countries.

2.2.1. The Insane Arms Race

“China has been benchmarking their military modernization against the US for decades. It's only been fairly recent since the US military has been benchmarking its capabilities against China's. In that respect, both militaries are pretty well fixated on conflict with one another at this point,” said Drew Thompson, who was director for China, Taiwan and Mongolia in the US Secretary of Defense's office from 2011 to 2018 (i3investor). It is old to say that the two nations' armies race to build and develop new weapons to deter the other side and create a state of balance. There could be piles of magazines, books and newspapers in which the subject has and still be discussed.

The discussion moves forward to talk about new technologies that may reduce the casualties in army personnel as the attacks could be launched from launching pads inside under the ground or even from space. There is an increasing concern inside the USA that China has really succeeded to finally make a type of hypersonic or ultra fast boost glide missiles that are unlike ballistic missiles. They can re-enter the atmosphere again and glide with high speeds to reach targets thousands of miles away. This can only contribute in the escalation and aggravates the threats. Besides this, the military maneuvers and naval drills that take place among the military powers like: Pakistan, India, Iran under the command of Russia and China in the Middle Asian region and the South China Sea.

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2.2.2. A keen Technological Competition

The field of technology has been a ring where the two powers fiercely fight. China broke the monopoly of the USA to the field and is now competing at an international level. Today there is almost no house in the world where we do not find a product with the label 'Made in China'. Microeconomies in China have switched from copying products of famous brands to making their own reliable products and launching big firms of famous Chinese brands. More than this, American biggest technological companies like: Apple and Tesla have their factories settled in China and exporting from there. This does not only threat of stealing the technological secrets of theses giant firms but also undermines the job market in the USA.

The space race is no longer just between America and Russia like it used to be during the Cold War. China has its own space station and is launching rockets, satellites and space exploration flights. Satellites are widely used in the military field to spy, collect information and even launch missile attacks from the space. This is a proof that the technological advancement has its positive impact in developing the Chinese weaponry. Americans are more concerned that China succeeded to develop hypersonic ballistic missiles that can reach their homes within minutes. This is something which the American weapon industry is still working on. Not only to make missiles to guarantee the balance of fear but also to make missile-defense systems that can interrupt them in the air.

2.2.3. The Cyber and Electronic Warfare

Though the terms are usually used interchangeably, there is a difference at the levels where the two wars take place. A cyber warfare today is widely tied to hacking or spying,

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actually it is bigger than that, where hackers, groups or individuals, use the internet and programming codes to breach into an official or private computer system or a network of a government, ministry, big companies, social media sites to steal governmental or personal information and data. These data theft operations turn to an auction as hackers usually tend to sell the information with sums that reach millions of dollars to those it may interest. Electronic warfare, which makes part of cyber warfare, is widely used in the military field. "EW includes radio waves, microwaves, infrared, ultraviolet, and X-rays, used for military communication, radar, weaponry, and situational awareness." (Fritz 183).

As a matter of fact the Chinese gave too much importance to this domain that they can dedicate a whole literature for the terminology, specialties and definitions of every different domain. Cyber and electronic warfare come under the broader title Net-Centric Warfare. But, because cyber attacks are often attributed to unethical hackers, the governments tend to disassociate themselves from them and pin the whole thing on outlaw groups and individuals. They even claim to cooperate to fight this phenomenon. Officials in the competing countries, make accusations of benefiting from the cyber attacks, which is something undeniable, regardless of the actor. President Trump accused the Chinese communication company HUAWEI of using its 5G technology to spy on the United States and sanctioned it. In 2019, the CNCERT (China's National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team) report suggests that the scale and intensity of the US cyber attacks is starting to resemble an all-out cyber war against China. On May 2022, Canada, one of the prominent partners of the USA announced that it is banning HUAWEI 5G towers and equipment due to security reasons (cbc).

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2.2.4. Medical and Scientific Race

After the pandemic (COVID19) hit the globe, China and the USA tried hard to develop their own vaccines and raced to deliver them to all countries, most of the time for free. This was another domain where the USA and China competed to win the confidence of more countries and a justification for the USA to prove that it is ready to use soft manners as it used invasion on several occasions to spread democracy. The race to make and distribute the COVID vaccine is unseen as China, the USA and Russia assume they are committed in a global cooperation to fight the pandemic. There are of course other technological and scientific fields like Quantum computers and communication, nano technology, microchips, hybrid or electric vehicles and a wide range of innovative ideas.

2.3. The Inevitable Confrontation

Pessimism dominates the scene among politicians and specialists in the domain of IR. Many scholars believe that we are in a situation of an actual Cold War between China and the USA and that it is a matter of time for the two rivals to go on a hot war. The USA has never been exasperating to China as it is today since the Cold War. There are arm sales agreements at a rapid and wide range with Taiwan which China claims to be an inseparable part of the geography of the country. Adding to this, there are other agreements and treaties between the Americans and the countries near and surrounding China, which are mostly military, in an attempt to contain China.

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2.3.1. The Level of Willingness of the Two Countries to Wage War

It seems that no one of the two parties would like to be in war with the other as they both know that the cost of such action will bring destruction not only to both countries but for the rest of the world. Both of them are nuclear powers which might have learnt from history that if a superpower feels it is on the verge of its decline it would preferably choose not to die alone. Yet, there is a great possibility that if the war broke it would take place on neutral grounds like what is happening between the NATO and Russia in Ukraine. There are plenty of examples of using a third country's grounds for the conflict between the USA and the Soviets throughout the Cold War.

The kind of treaties the USA is making in the Indo-Pacific region like the QUAD and AUKUS, which critics consider unhealthy because they focus on military cooperation and should rather trigger economy, make matters worse and do not meet enough agreement from countries of the region. The ASEAN lacks serious higher representation especially from the Americans and was held through video-conferencing during the pandemic, though President Biden promises to revive it.

Trump's administration thought that it is better to impose sanctions on the Chinese economy, trade and some of the dominant technological companies like Huawei. He went further to accuse the company of spying on Americans and China of spreading the pandemic to kill people and hurt the big economies in the world. "We can't continue to allow China to rape our country, and that's what they are doing, it's the greatest theft in the history of the world", Trump openly stated in his presidential campaign in May 2016. He strengthened ties with Taiwan and denied the Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea. He thinks that

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the US withdrawal from Bagram base in Afghanistan is a big mistake as the US had its eyes on the Chinese nuclear program from there and called the whole operation 'a surrender'.

Americans could have kept their deals with Taiwan at the technological level. Taiwan is well placed to host the big American companies that their industries require a high tech facilities and infrastructure. It is, for example, the first exporter of microchips and was once the major exporter of goods of all sorts. There is a disagreement inside the countries that form the Indo-Pacific group because some parts think that the American policy of militarizing the region will bring conflicts while they should be cooperating with the US to build stronger economies for the best of all.

On the other side, China is following an approach of soft expansion to dominate and influence the governments' decisions in other countries. It sees no use of spreading its ideology. It rather promotes goods, supplies, humanitarian aids and helps countries build their infrastructure and even lend them money to fulfill their projects. The Chinese believe that they can be also friends with the countries that are allies of the USA. There is hot debate at the level of the EU whether or not to accept Chinese offers and help which means accepting partnership deals which can cause cracks and splits within Europe and will certainly face rejection from the USA.

China is starting now to use the technology it owns and its financial resources that it gains from being the world's fastest growing economy to build stronger military abilities to dominate its surroundings. Like the USA did after WWII, China will then try to move its dominance westward and within the American region. The Chinese hold a vendetta against the USA, the West and Japan as they were deprived of their claimed territories in the South

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China Sea throughout the 'Humiliation Century'¹. Not to forget the bombardment of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by the US air force in 1999.

2.3.2. The Chinese Claims in the Asian Region

For several decades, China has been claiming territories and coastal areas in the South and East China Sea. It was deprived of claiming such territories for various reasons. One of which is that it was a Japanese colony during the Second World War. China was not strong enough after that to confront the USA to take back its most important claim, the Island of Taiwan. All these happened throughout what the Chinese call the 'Humiliation Century'. Another reason is that China has territory disputes with countries that it prefers to win as partners like India and Indonesia. "China and India should help each other accomplish goals, instead of "draining each others' energies", said Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (reuters). The USA uses those claims as arguments to gain the countries in dispute to its side.

2.3.3. The War of Threatening Messages

There are voices rising inside the USA criticizing the administration's way of handling the crises in Ukraine, saying that Americans have nothing to do with this war. President Biden has ordered aids with more than fifty billion dollars since the beginning of the Russian operation in Ukraine on February, 24. Many politicians and human rights activists think that

¹ **Humiliation Century:** is a term used in China to describe the period of intervention and subjugation of the Qing dynasty and the Republic of China by Western powers and Japan from 1839 to 1949.

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this money should be invested to help Americans overcome the aftermaths of the pandemic and the inflation that is hitting the country. But, the US officials have another opinion as they think that they have to show that the liberal world is united against odds and to deter other powers of thinking to invade any territories. The USA and Britain exchange roles in this regard. They are sending arms and money, imposing technological and economic sanctions on Russia and paying visits to key cities in Ukraine. The USA goes further to accuse China of being a 'silent partner' in the war in Ukraine. China from its side, denies the accusation but says that Russia has the right to defend itself. This might be a message to the world that China is preparing to move militarily to take back Taiwan. President Biden announced from South Korea, on May 2022, that his country's alliance with Seoul is to deter North Korea and keep the Indo-Pacific region free.

Despite this, the weapons of sanctions and threat do not seem to work and are ineffective as the Russian economy seems slightly shaken because the European economies are highly dependent on Russian energy supplies. More than that, they are now obliged to use the Russian Ruble to pay for these supplies which made it hit historic records against the US Dollar. Besides this, the Russians have captured one of the most important cities and ports they have been claiming for the last three months. This moral victory is definitely frustrating to the Western world but encourages China to take a step further to claim what it considers its lands.

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Conclusion

Perhaps one of the most important reasons why the USA is today reconsidering its foreign policy is the rapid economic and military advancements of China besides its territorial claims in the Indo-Pacific region; a thing that US officials believe is a menace to the American dominance and threatens of decreasing democracy and freedom in the world. The rivalry between the two countries takes many shapes in various domains. But, the specialists often focus on the two fields of technology and military. Pessimists say that the competition is fierce and tensions may take the shape of war. Tensions rise almost every day and the USA fears that if the Russian operation in Ukraine ends well for the Russians it will give a strong motive to the Chinese to start 'an operation' in Taiwan.

Chapter 3:

Reorganization of

American Policy in

Reaction to the

Emerging Global

Order

Introduction

Since Obama declared the withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq, his followers on the head of the state felt easy to withdraw the rest of the troops from other parts of the war where America kept losing money and troops. This chapter attempts to manifest the change in the American foreign policy in the beginning, then it moves to the alternative ways and the price the US administration is ready to pay to maintain its position as the leader of the world. This chapter will also try to make clear that the US is not totally abandoning its ideology of democracy promotion but is rather going slowly in the process by adopting several techniques that are meant to weaken its rivals and contain them, mainly China.

3.1. Attempts at Maintaining US Position in the World

“China is, in fact, our pacing challenge and it is my priority focus. You've seen that through quite frankly our actions. My first overseas trip along with Secretary Blinken was over to the Indo-Pacific region”, said US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin addressing the Senate Appropriations Committee during a hearing on May 2022. This announcement depicts the overall orientation of the US foreign policy over the last years. Americans have that feeling that they were distracted by wars while China was hardly working to form a new world order that shakes their credibility as ‘an indispensable nation’¹.

America did not give up on its military bases around the globe. It deploys about a hundred thousand soldiers and military consultants in Europe. There are also considerable numbers of them in Japan and South Korea, it is a leading member in the NATO, it funds the army in Ukraine and the government of Taiwan with money and heavy weapons, though it

¹ **indispensable nation:** an expression used by both some American democrat and republican policy-makers to describe the USA.

says it is not in war with Russia nor with China. It also keeps an eye on South Korea to hold back Northern Korea. It keeps good relations with India and it is accused of plotting against Khan's government in Pakistan. There is also this race with Russia and China to donate the COVID vaccine to almost all countries around the globe. All this, is a proof that pulling out troops from a region does not mean retreating from the international scene. There is also an attempt to achieve a moral win by demonizing some politicians or countries and their bodies like: MBS¹, Putin, China and the OPEC.

During his presidency, Trump warned Germany in 2018 not to sign more energy supply deals with Russia. He went further when he said that "Germany is totally controlled by Russia". President Putin said during talks with his Belarusian counterpart in April 2022 that he agrees that the United States of America is ready to fight till the last Ukrainian (txtreport). This means that the Russians understand that they are in an open war with the US whether it openly confesses it or not. The US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin admitted in a press conference on Apr 24, 2022 "we want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine." Biden always insists in many occasions that the West must intensify sanctions on Russia, which is a way to take over the money it has in the Western banks and also the properties of the Russian Oligarchy members living in the West and aims at weakening the Russian economy.

3.2. Futility of Democracy Promotion

The longest war in the history of the United States with trillions of dollars lost, thousands of troops killed and injured was waged to spread democracy in Afghanistan, but

¹ **MBS:** Mohammed Bin Salman, crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

failed. In addition to a domestic and international rejection and rage and the wall of nationalism, all these became valid reasons for the USA to think of new ways to dominate. "Setting a standard for democracy after the US system is undemocratic. Meddling in other countries internal affairs in the name of democracy would only hurt the people in those countries", declared Foreign minister Wang Yi in a press conference on May 7, 2021.

3.2.1. Democracy and freedom between reality and slogans

It seems ironic that the promoters of freedom and democracy use force to spread it. But it becomes understood when one knows that the aim is hegemony and control. Practically, the USA has been on war for at least the last three decades under the title 'promoting freedom and peace' worldwide. However, it prefers to share the effort with the Allies using its super economic and military powers and intimidation so that they always feel they are in need for it to lead the operations and for protection. It deploys soldiers on the grounds of the ally countries and they are asked to pay for protection. In 2018, the French president Emmanuel Macron was severely criticized by Trump for calling the European Community to think of its own defense organization away from NATO and protect itself from cyber attacks even from the USA. Now with the war in Ukraine, more European countries request to join the NATO. President Biden hails the request saying that Sweden and Finland (who recently lodged the application to join the NATO) have a total support from the United States.

The truth behind this obsession with control is deeper than what it looks. There is always a belief that the presidents of the USA are just a façade and that they cannot go astray when it comes to approving what they are told to do. It does not matter whether they belong to democrats or republicans, there is a power that exceeds their will and imposes on them what to decide. This supreme authority has a plan for America that it wants to be the same for

the rest of the world. America and its allies have agreed on liberal internationalism as ‘the project’ to spread in a number of ways, one of which is waging wars on those who reject it.

Further to this, there seems to be a lack of understanding or negligence in the West to the fact that this world is ‘naturally’ multi-polar.

3.2.2. The US policy of Despise

Since the end of the Cold War, precisely after the election of Bill Clinton at the head of the country in the 90s, there was an American tendency to carry on the project of spreading the liberal ideology. However, this was often done without giving attention to the opinion of other countries or the consent of the once superpowers like the USSR. The world order has become unipolar and the USA was strong enough to independently act whenever it felt the need to do so. The policy continued throughout the following two decades with Presidents Bush and Obama with the Western and NATO expansion to the borders of Russia and the fueling of instability in the surroundings of China.

In 2007, President Putin of Russia warned of such a policy when he addressed the European Community in Munich. His warnings were faced with neglect, so he had to militarily act a year after in Georgia. The Russian backlash continued after that in Crimea then in Ukraine as the threat became serious. The USA is accused today by the Russian officials of working in secret biological laboratories with the government in Ukraine to launch a biological attack on the Russians in the Donbass and inside Russia (washingtonpost). In 2022, the Chinese foreign minister repeated the warning by saying that “The world has to listen to the Asian voices.”

3.2.2. US Reaction to the Undermining of Its Dominance

Perhaps the only president to revolt against the rule of the supreme authority in the USA was Donald Trump. He disdained all that was liberal inside and outside the country. He was accused then, of working with the Russians in electoral fraud. An accusation he would use later when he lost the elections to Joe Biden. Trump was seen as a threat to the US hegemony. His policies undermined the existence of the country in the international scene and thus pushing it back to isolation under the slogan of 'America First'. As a superpower the USA has made itself allies as well as enemies. Those other rising superpowers would then take their revenge and destroy a legacy of decades of hard work. Trump was seen as the tool used mainly by Russia to destroy the liberal project.

US officials in the White House, the defense chief and the FBI chief keep declaring their country will not tolerate that China wants to reshape the world order. Even though, Chinese officials do not openly say so as the Russians do. After the attack on Ukraine President Putin and his Secretary of foreign affairs Lavrov said clearly in a television interview on Apr 11, 2022 that this war aims at ending the US hegemony over the world and that the USA must get used to the fact that its dominance is something from the past. This war came as a wake-up call for the USA that losing the leadership has become a serious matter. Consequently, it is working by all means to make profit of the war as it did during WWII, with the hope to neutralize the Russians.

3.3. The Price of Maintaining US Hegemony

The price is so far paid in US dollars as Americans do not just spend on their military bases here and there. Today, America is funding NGOs¹, cultural and artistic events, it has yearly financial commitment with many countries, it funded the Arab Spring, it spends billions on space race and on weapon improvement, and it provides financial and military help to friend countries with billions as is the case with Ukraine today. This latter, has had a negative impact on the US economy and citizens as inflation has hit record rates because of the unstoppable rise in the prices of goods and petrol. But the government does not seem to stop because the communist party in China believes in this same policy of spending and financial aid to win more friends. There is even a debate that threatens of dividing the Europeans about whether to accept or resist the Chinese financial temptations or be part of the Chinese Belt and Road².

3.3.1. The Global Concern about a Potential War Between the Two Superpowers

Would America go to war against Russia or China as a further step? A question that a number of scholars and politicians are seriously asking especially after the clear intervention of the USA in the war in Ukraine and declarations from the American president that they will not allow the annexation of Taiwan by any means or allow China dominate the Pacific region. In September 2021, a trilateral treaty was signed by the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia (AUKUS) to help Australia acquire nuclear submarines. The treaty also includes cyber cooperation and providing counter-hypersonic capabilities. This is

¹ **NGOs:** Non Governmental Organizations.

² **Belt and Road:** a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government.

considered as a provocation and a threat to the Chinese security and pushes the question of a possible war to the surface.

Americans know that going into war with one or both countries, which are the super-powers of the East, will not be as easy as things went during the Cold War. China is not the same country that it used to be decades before. A nuclear threat is becoming more serious and officials in the US and Europe keep saying is inevitable if the war breaks out. Moreover, Russia and China were working during the last decades and succeeded to develop a type of hypersonic missiles that can carry nuclear heads. These Ballistic missiles are said to be able to hit the main cities USA and its allies in just few minutes. On May3, 2022, the national television in Russia showed a video simulating a missile attack on unfriendly European countries and how a nuclear attack from a submarine could flood the United Kingdom.

3.3.2. Elevating a Strategy of ‘Deterrence by Denial’

The strategy is based on manipulating or persuading a rival power to overthink the actions it might take, as the cost and risks can outweigh the benefits. Hence, the opponent may reconsider going into war. If this rival decides to take action, the other side will make it as costly as it can be to drain the resources, the military and the economy of the contender. Therefore, because of the central importance of US differentiated credibility to the coalition’s proper functioning, the United States must ensure an effective defense of each ally; including the most vulnerable states.

Despite this, the Russian reacted severely in many occasions because the US, since the end of the Cold War, kept breaching the terms of the agreement that it once signed with the Soviet Union not to allow further eastward expansion of the NATO to its borders. This was

considered as a provocative intimidating act of testing the abilities of the Russians which led to their interventions in Georgia, Crimea and recently in Ukraine.

As was the case with Iraq, when the USA seized the opportunity of the Kuwait invasion to destroy the Iraqi military, it and the Allies in Europe and Asia keep funding the war in Ukraine and imposing sanctions to weaken Russia then may move back to the point where it started during the Cold War but with China this time. The question is: How long will it take Russia to use its nuclear power if it feels that its existence is on the line?

3.3.3. From 'Ideological Liberalism' to 'Agnostic Realism'

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has dealt with other nations with an ideological liberal approach. That means that the country that is taking the lead tends to spread its political system and ideology and not behave in a fully pragmatic style. An agnostic power would not, on the other hand, tend to spread its ideology as it does not promote values and all it cares about is enforcing its economy, and military force to keep pace with its rivals. That was the case throughout the Cold War and might be the same in the future especially if Russia and China succeed to overcome the aftermaths of the US intervention in Ukraine and the Pacific region and survive the sanctions imposed by the West on these two allied countries. "Liberal international orders can arise only in unipolar systems where the leading state is a liberal democracy." (Mearsheimer 1). This means that America may shift to be more focused on itself if a president like Trump is elected or at its best be Western-Centered and abdicate its responsibility of democracy promotion.

3.3.4. Liberalism Vs Off-Shore Approach or the Restraint Approach

In his speech in the annual State of the Union on May 2022, President Joe Biden said, “In the battle between democracy and autocracies, democracies are rising to the moment and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security”. A statement that proves the USA still holds on liberal approach of democracy promotion. There are, however, eminent thinkers from the school of classical realism who think that Joe Biden is continuing with the approach of containment revived by Trump. They claim that there is today, a common belief in the US administration that ‘deep engagement’¹ policy has proven unsuccessful. Professor Stephen Walt, dedicated a long article in the Foreign Policy magazine to demolish the arguments of those who reject the ‘restraint’ policy. He argues that it has nothing to do with ‘isolationism’ and has proven to be effective during the Cold War (Walt).

3.4. Getting Prepared for the Confrontation

John Mearsheimer argues that if the USA does not follow the path of containment policy that president Trump traced, it will not succeed in enhancing its shaken image. The engagement policy that previous presidents used with China did not succeed to make it a liberal nation and always hits the wall of ‘Nationalism’. In fact, this is the case with many other countries where Americans wanted to promote their ideology. For Mearsheimer and the defenders of the Classical Realist theory in international relations the only way that would work properly for the US to maintain its supremacy is to abandon its policy of democracy promotion because not all peoples of other countries are ready to accept it. On the contrary, there is a great possibility that they take this obsession of liberal expansion as a threat and

¹ **Deep engagement:** is applied in diplomacy as a synonym for a wider range of more specific practices of contact between an international actor and a foreign public.

thus may react aggressively out of fear. Therefore, the USA should be more pragmatic following the Chinese model of soft dominance.

3.4.1. Copying the Chinese Model of Soft Invasion

Meanwhile, other powerful nations have the same beliefs about human nature but prefer to act differently. For China, for instance, it is not quite common sense to have a large number of military personnel everywhere in the world. Though China deploys some troops in few regions in the world, it rather prefers to deploy builders, craftsmen, doctors, engineers and experts, use its experience and invest its money to help friend and neighbor countries as well as making new friends and allies in other continents.

China is peacefully making new allies while building its Silk Road starting from Pakistan to Europe and coming along the way down to Africa. Be it so, and since the old powers in the East have risen again, the United States presidents became aware that the circle that their American 'Empire' once dominated is shrinking and that there are other better ways to win more allies, reduce the number of their enemies and as a result reduce losses and casualties. This in the end would reflect positively on American citizens and the ugly image of the country. Professor John Mearsheimer states:

But occasionally a liberal democracy encounters such a favorable balance of power that it is able to embrace liberal hegemony. That situation is most likely to arise in a unipolar world, where the single great power does not have to worry about being attacked by another great power since there is none. Then the liberal sole pole will

almost always abandon realism and adopt a liberal foreign policy. Liberal states have a crusader mentality hardwired into them that is hard to restrain. (12,13)

America would then change its strategy from being directly involved in Afghanistan and Iraq, to maintaining the alliances like the NATO in Europe which is trying to expand eastward as more European countries hope to join the organization, or even create new ones such as the AUKUS in the Pacific region and sending military consultants to participate in the formation of foreign soldiers. For American politicians these days, working to strengthen the economy and infrastructure of the country does not mean abandoning military power. Because, whatever theory they adopt Liberalism or Realism they both advocate a necessary level of a military might. “It has become fashionable to say that the world after the Cold War has moved the power of politics to the age of geoeconomics. Such clichés reflect narrow analysis. Politics and economics are connected. International economic systems rest upon international political order”, (Nye 90-102)

3.4.2. Alternative Ways to Keep Pace with China

The American invasion of Afghanistan was to defeat Taliban and handle the government to pro-west people. But, it also aimed at creating an atmosphere of instability and chaos in the surroundings of China to exhaust it with an endless war against terrorist groups or the attempts to bring peace to the region. Another goal was using the Bagram air base to spy on the Chinese nuclear facility near the borders. Now that the US troops are out of Afghanistan, this does not mean that it has withdrawn from all Asian regions. It is a strategic move to settle down in the Pacific region using the border claims of China to frighten and convince other countries in the region to join the USA.

There are other ways like moral weapons where the USA uses the mainstream media to demonize its rivals to gain enthusiasm and turn their allies against them. The Uyghurs cause, which showed to be ineffective, is brought to the surface whenever America and its allies feel the need to win Muslims in the Gulf and MENA¹ region to their side. The same weapon was used when George Bush declared war on terrorism in 2001.

Nicholas Mulder, an assistant professor of history at Cornell University published an article in “Foreign Policy” talking about another tool the USA has been using over the past century against its adversaries. Though he states evidence that ‘sanctions’ proved to be ineffective, at least when it comes to changing the policy of the opponents, there scarcely be an occasion of a foreign policy or domestic issue where the USA would not use economic coercion. This weapon is used today against, Venezuela, North Korea, Belarus, Iran, Russia and many other governments, organizations and personalities. There are assets that worth billions of US dollars frozen by Western governments for various reasons (Mulder). Now countries are ready for the sanctions and they are taking countermeasures that hurt the USA and its allies. China says that it has ‘nuclear financial bombs’ to use if the West imposes sanctions on it like they did with Russia (newswars).

¹ **MENA:** abbreviation for Middle East and North Africa

Conclusion

The USA seems to have no choice but to lessen or maybe abandon its policy of democracy promotion and be more pragmatic, to maintain its dominance and strengthen its economy. Retreat does not always mean isolation. Interference should be kept limited just when a hostile act needs to be deterred so as to keep a fear balance away from unnecessary wars. US leaders must live with the idea that the world cannot always be ruled by a monopoly and that there is a chance for multiple powers to coexist. Because, it is obvious today more than any time before that a new world order is taking place.

General Conclusion

This study, aimed at manifesting proofs of the US dominance is shrinking with reference to its reasons and aspects mainly at the international level. This paper also intended to clarify the idea that the aspects of the competition with China are too wide to be limited to military escalations now and then. In terms of economy and technology, China might be beyond reach. Nevertheless, America is trying to go back to the policy of containment that once proved to be effective. The approach requires, for instance, the inclusion of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region in treaties that exceed military cooperation to real economic strategies.

Based on the data presented, the regression of the US hegemony is proved to be real and happening progressively, sometimes at a rapid pace, its signs are obvious starting from pulling back troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. Hence, the US policy-makers are becoming, more than any time, aware that their country's dominance is under threat especially with the rise of China and other powers that reject a unipolar world order. This led them to reconsider their foreign policy for the good of the country and its dignity as the old fashioned policy of democracy promotion proved to be useless. Such a project required convincing the friends in the West to use the international institutions like: the UN and its affiliate organization the WTO, the UNICEF, the UNESCO and the Security Council in addition to the NATO to expand the geographical and the economic borders of the liberal world. The expansion was going through free trade, mutual interests, cooperation but sometimes through coercion by invasion and sanctions. But today the Allies seem to be less enthusiastic about the liberal project.

Expansion through enforcement led to the rise of a spirit of nationalism and resistance as human nature often rejects threat out of fear. The wave of rejection extended to reach even countries that became once allies to the West. Invasions were counterproductive and America won itself more enemies than it planned, in addition to the financial and human casualties.

The strongest resistance then, came from Russia and China as these two reincarnated to become the East's superpowers. Russia's power lacks solid economic ground; however, China is America's strongest rival today upon whom the US is putting more emphasis. Focusing the competition with China comes as a result of the American realization that it is running out of time and the threat to its monopoly has become a reality. As a result, specialists say the USA is obliged to give up on the liberal project and the shift in the American official decision is becoming obvious. The examples to prove this argument are many, among which, is the conviction of the last three presidents that it is high time the US troops returned home and that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were 'unnecessary'. The competition between the two rivals is taking place at different levels, militarily, economically, technologically and others. The risks of a direct confrontation are on the rise as statements from both sides indicate an escalation.

As of this writing, the escalation in the Indo-Pacific region and Middle Asia is becoming more dangerous especially after Russia has launched what it calls 'a military operation' in Ukraine. President Biden has a full schedule as he is working on several fronts to stop the Russian attack and tighten the noose on China and warning of its intentions to impose its dominance on the region. On the other hand, there are those attempts from the US government to adapt with the changes in the world by adopting a soft dominance through economic and cultural partnerships with countries in different continents trying to copy the Chinese modal.

Adding to the main step of troops withdrawal that Biden and his predecessors, Presidents Trump and Obama, has taken the USA is reconsidering its liberal policy and whether it is better to move forward with it or at least make balance between engagement and containment but not isolation.

USA : United States of America

IR : International Relations

WWI : World War one

WWII : World War two

NATO : North Atlantic Treaty Organization

BREXIT : Britain Exit

QUAD : quadreplate caolition

AUKUS : trilateral security treaty that includes Australia, the UK and the USA

MENA : Middle East and North Africa

MESA : Middle East Strategic Alliance

COVID19 : Corona Virus 2019

GDP : gross domestic product

G20 : group of twenty

BRICS : Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CNCERT : China's National Computer Network Emergency Response Technical Team

MBS : Mohammed Bin Salman

OPEC : Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries

NGOs : Non Governmental Organizations

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