

**Trading Human Rights for Cheap Products:
The Rise of China and
the End of the Liberal World Order
in the Context of the Russia-Ukraine War**

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Abstract

In 1995, Michael J. Sullivan questions whether China's human rights violations would cease given increased trade with the democratic world. Today, the United States and the European Union import more from China than any other major power or state. The European Union, a defender of international human rights as enshrined in its constitution, is working on a major investment deal with China. However, China's human rights record did not improve; rather, China continues to violate the rights of Uyghurs, Buddhists, and other ethnic and religious minorities like Falun Gong practitioners and Christians. It now has the potential to directly challenge the liberal order of the United States. The Russian invasion of Ukraine will only increase China's power and influence. Russian isolation resulted from Western-backed sanctions generates an economic dependency on China. Thus, China's military power and political influence will continue to increase, furnishing its

position as a counter-hegemonic power to the United States. This article's first task is to deconstruct liberal and neoliberal institutionalism theoretical frameworks that dominated American foreign policy architecture since the early 1980s. Its focus on absolute gains enabled China's rise regardless of its totalitarian stance, specifically its human rights violations. China's influence is now global as it exports its development model to developing states. Democratic states are thus responsible for the rise of China.

Keywords: *human rights, free trade, China, Ukraine, Russia*

1. Introduction

The fall of the Soviet Union brought a renewed feeling of enthusiasm long forgotten since the collapse of Nazi Germany. Talk of “complex interdependence” and the “declining use of force” was one of the main tenets of this period. Many hoped for the End of History, that liberal democracy and capitalism (regardless of their imperfections) would lead states into a new period of peace and prosperity (Fukuyama, 1992). However, these desires existed alongside the international system's structure of anarchy, state competition specifically the need of states to help themselves to remain secure. This is best reflected in the Primakov Doctrine, a Russian grand strategy that desired to see a multipolar world driven by the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia (Brzezinski, 1997: 115). Russia regained much of its power due to its trade of oil and gas to Europe (Becker and Oxenstierna (eds.), 2019). Thus, in mercantilist fashion, Russian trade led to increases in military power and global influence, a strategic threat to the European Union (Balmaceda, 2021). The world is now watching a war in Europe, a war between Ukraine and the Western world against Russia. All the while China is

maintaining trade and investment ties with Russia, one of the few major states to remain engaged with Russia (*Business Insider India*, 27th February 2022). As a result, China stands to gain a great deal from its ability to secure its eastern border as well as steady access to resources. China may also benefit from Russia's adoption of the yuan as a reserve currency given Western sanctions and Russia's SWIFT system ban (Eichengreen, 2022). Simultaneously, China is expanding its military power, threatening Taiwan, India, and their international partners. Yet, trade with Russia and China was seen as some sort of Western civilization mission to democratize both states. President Clinton hoped that each would someday be socialized into adopting a fully democratic system. This flawed logic fed into the construction of these interactions over thirty years. In many ways, democracies consented to the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia; they enabled two authoritarian states to gain enough power to shift the balance of power and create today's multipolar world. Today, we are understanding the ramifications of these policies domestically and internationally. The Russian war machine was funded by the wealth driven by the oil and gas trade purchased by European states. China's oppressive political apparatus is also in part funded by Western trade and investment. The crimes against humanity against the people of China, especially the Uighurs, are particularly agonizing to study. However, as Amnesty International points out: "The international community has a responsibility to hold China to account for its repression of ethnic minorities and cultures, specifically in the XUAR [Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region] and Tibet Autonomous Region" (Zenz, 2019; European Parliament, 2022). Even after all this naming and shaming by Amnesty International three years ago, the European Union is still maintaining trade relations with China, even allowing China to become its most important trading partner (*Statista*, 4th November 2020). All this while China is violating the

rights of Uyghurs. This seems to be a major puzzle as well especially since the EU is supposed to protect and project human rights. What is interesting is the neoliberal logic that somehow trade with another country would create interdependence and then suddenly the authoritarian state would eventually become democratic. More important for international security, scholars must argue for more focus on relative gains. Neoliberal institutionalism advocates attention to political infrastructure to ensure that the gains of trade are deposited in productive areas for further development and growth. However, this is not always true and, as a result, states still have to be held accountable and their actions transparent to provide some assurance that gains will be used for peaceful purposes. Relative gains are still needed as the structure of the international system is still anarchic. It is thus necessary for states to choose their partners wisely as states can never be sure of intentions. Janet Yellen has made the case for friend-shoring, trading with allies over enemies to protect vital supply chains (*CNBC*, 19th July 2022). Such a prospect would be important to establish transparency circumventing relative gain worries. Yet, this seems a little too late given the military rise of China and the resurgence of Russia.

The article's first task is to deconstruct liberal and neoliberal institutionalism theoretical frameworks that dominated American foreign policy architecture since the early 1980s. Military affairs would decline in importance and usher in a liberal order with a focus on commerce and diplomacy. Realists answered that the relative gains dynamic would show that military affairs still mattered regardless of the advances in political discourse and interdependence. However, it is the focus on absolute gains that enabled China's rise alongside Russia's resurgence regardless of their authoritarian nature, specifically China's human rights violations and Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Its influence is now global, exporting its model of development to other states.

Democratic states are responsible for the rise of China and Russia's aggression. The article will then summarize s new role in international affairs, its global influence, and its ambition. After, it will explore the options currently being explored by the United States to balance against China's growing dominance, focusing on its human rights violations. The paper will also underscore Russia's violent ambition internationally, focusing on its war in Ukraine.

2. The Contradictions of Neoliberal Logic: Ignoring Power

This section will highlight a major international relations debate: liberalism and neoliberal institutionalism and the realist critique. Indeed, realism will always remain a critique of other theories. The liberal/neoliberal institutional logic was that free trade would lead to a condition of mutual dependence (Keohane and Nye, 1989). This mutual dependence would tie the sovereignty of states together. Thus, any issue would be solved because of interdependence, and any potential future problems with China and Russia as authoritarian or international revisionist states would be lessened because of democratic reach into these states (Doyle, 2011). The focus was on absolute gains; states only cared about their growth due to their egoist nature (Keohane, 2005). This turned out to be incorrect as relative gains translated to military power, thereby undercutting Western influence. This would prove particularly destabilizing in a zero-sum world given the reemergence of great power conflict.

The state essentially is a political unit that separates itself from the outside world. However, the particular debate above omits a significant variable of international relations: gains and, as a consequence, the balance of power. Gains are differentiated absolutely and relatively (Grieco, 1988). Absolute gains define the perception of mutual benefit in

a non-zero-sum relationship where everyone wins (Wu, 2020). Even if one party benefits more than the other, that party is focused on its position more so than its partner. Relative gains are dichotomous: all gains are zero-sum, and states are focused, not simply on their own gains, but on whether their partner gains more than them (Grieco, 1988). More gains translate to more power and might result in an asymmetric form of interdependence. Asymmetric interdependence means that one state is more dependent on a partner. This means the more dependent state has less power and thus would be at the mercy of the more powerful state (Wu, 2020). Hence, cooperation is sometimes a major long-term security concern for states. Relative power becomes a major priority, especially in states locked in competition such as India and China (*ibid.*). Cooperation between India and China in China's One Belt, One Road initiative will benefit both India and China. However, the prospect that China might benefit more than India might explain India's reluctance to continue cooperation (*ibid.*).

Economic gains translate to power. This article argues that the gains from globalization have not been evenly distributed; some states have gained more than others. China, for instance, has grown by leaps and bounds compared to the United States. Uneven growth such as this has led to global conflict in the past (Gilpin, 1988: 591). Robert Gilpin understands conflict to be the product of uneven growth and the generation of unstable systems. He writes: "over time, the power of one subordinate state begins to grow disproportionately; as this development occurs, it comes into conflict with the hegemonic state. The struggle between these contenders for preeminence...leads to the bipolarization of the system...[which then] becomes a zero-sum situation in which one side's gain is by necessity the other side's loss" (*ibid.*: 591).

Uneven growth is thus the reason for great power and world conflict. The liberal system of globalization that we see today is a

product of United States hegemony. In other words, the international system we see today ultimately serves American hegemonic power (Ikenberry (ed.), 2002). China has benefitted from this system but is now seeking to supplant the United States given its own ambition to grow independent of the rules set by the United States (Zhang, 2015; Ploberger, 2017). This is because China understands its interests defined in terms of power. A system must then be understood as any "...aggregation of diverse entities united by regular interaction according to a form of control." (Mundell and Swoboda (eds.), 1969: 343). Whoever sets up a system of control will benefit the most as networks of dependency are created (Jacobs and Van Rossem, 2016; Hart and Jones, 2010). The American tariffs on China to correct trade imbalances are a manifestation of this struggle for control.

At its core, power "...may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man...power covers all social relationships which serve that end, from physical violence to the most subtle psychological ties by which one mind controls another" (Morgenthau, 1985: 11). Power is at the center of the state and how it functions. Without understanding the power expressed by states, theories of international relations are useless. Power takes a variety of forms as will be discussed, but it is the vehicle for survival and the protection of state interests. Power is a zero-sum game: if one state gains power then another is made insecure. Security and power are dichotomous terms. Attaining wealth through globalization may lead states to increase power due to an increase in global interests. This is altogether natural as Farid Zakaria (1998: 1) argues. The wealthier the state, the more likely it will increase its military power and its action across the world. Hence, due to the anarchical structure of the international system, the self-help system, and national security as a product of military power (and power in Morgenthau's abstract form), relative gains matter more than absolute

gains. Perceptions also matter, as states do not fully know what another state's intentions are, whether to tie down a competing state through economic dependence, to isolate it, or to dominate it entirely through military force (Walt, 1987). Given this, many international relations scholars have advocated for mechanisms that might help circumvent the seemingly intractable and violent international system.

In 1984, Robert Keohane (1984) posed a unique theory working within the assumptions of structural realism to advance cooperation within anarchy. The first assumption similar to realism is that states are rational actors. Keohane (2005: 27) adds the notion that they are rational egoists in that "...they have consistent, ordered preferences and that they calculate costs and benefits of alternative courses of action to maximize their utility of those preferences...[and]...their utility functions are independent of one another. Hence, states will focus on what they gain out of cooperation; cooperation is rational and thus states will cooperate. Yet, Keohane acknowledges that states still are concerned about the military capabilities of other states. If gains are not evenly distributed, then ultimately some states will benefit more than others which might interfere with cooperation. As a result, he builds on the contribution of Stephen Krasner who argued for the construction of international regimes. Made by states to encourage state cooperation, international regimes are "principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge within a given area of international relations" (Krasner (ed.), 1983: 2). Regimes are built to advance the goals of states like economic development, trade, and international financial flows. It provides the political infrastructure, providing a rules-based system to monitor the implementation of policies developed by the regime. Member states create the rules and are held accountable to these rules through mechanisms promoting transparency: "states are crucial actors, not only seeking wealth and

power directly but striving to construct frameworks of rules and practices that will enable them to secure these objectives, among others, in the future” (*ibid.*: 25).

The more states cooperate, the more states will understand the gains from cooperation and, as a result, might not cheat. Hence, regimes help monitor states to facilitate cooperation by eliminating cheating and free riders. This will encourage states to work through issues by providing long-term frameworks. Once a regime is properly created, it will decrease transaction costs of finding partners and negotiating, monitoring, and punishing states. It helps to develop norms that define mutual expectations concerning behavior, establishing specific patterns of behavior that might help to clearly define intentions. Regimes thrive in situations where states have common and conflicting interests on several issues: it is possible to solve through negotiation, and regimes become valuable to states and even take on a life of their own.

Neoliberal Institutionalism is the architecture used to promote cooperation between the United States, China, and the rest of the world. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is an international trade institution that developed out of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The GATT is an international regime that was developed by the United States to promote the lowering of international trade barriers after World War II. The United States designed the GATT to serve its interests by expanding the norm and practice of free trade to economically balance against the Soviet Union and its socialist and authoritarian way of conducting international commerce. Trade agreements that hoped to encourage freer trade was a way to facilitate international engagement and hopefully reduce the likelihood of international conflict. The belief was that there was a significant relationship between global trade and world peace. The GATT grew from a mere 23 countries during its founding in 1947 to 123 members by

the time China sought entry in the 1990s. In 1995, the WTO was established. It sought to continue the tradition of GATT by decreasing trade barriers but also to include service and intellectual property to its roster. It also formulated mechanisms to solve disputes between states. Rules in the WTO are made unanimously and must be enforced reciprocally. Reciprocity means that all states enjoy the principle of “most favored nation” meaning all states can be expected to be treated the same and not be excluded by the benefits (see below). This lowers transaction costs for states seeking to be included in the international trading system as states would forgo having to negotiate bilaterally with trading partners. In all, the WTO is an institutionalized regime that achieves the following (World Trade Organization, n.d.):

- without discrimination — a country should not discriminate between its trading partners (giving them equally “most-favored-nation” or MFN status); and it should not discriminate between its own and foreign products, services, or nationals (giving them “national treatment”);
- freer — barriers coming down through negotiation;
- predictable — foreign companies, investors, and governments should be confident that trade barriers (including tariffs and non-tariff barriers) should not be raised arbitrarily; tariff rates and market-opening commitments are “bound” in the WTO;
- more competitive — discouraging “unfair” practices such as export subsidies and dumping products at below cost to gain market share;
- more beneficial for less developed countries — giving them more time to adjust, greater flexibility, and special privileges.

There are thus major benefits to joining the WTO. China would join the WTO to achieve these benefits as well.

China joined the WTO in 2001. China wanted to enter the international trading system and the WTO was an efficient way to achieve that goal. It would gain access to new markets and enjoy increases in investment as companies would clamor to take advantage of China's low-wage labor market. As a rules-based institution, the United States and other countries hoped by allowing China to enter the WTO, it would follow trade rules and move toward a more cooperative world. Many in the United States also hoped that China would gradually move away from its communist model. The more China benefits from international commerce, the more it would expose itself to the fruit of Western-style democracy. In 2000, President Bill Clinton himself would describe the hope he felt about China eventually joining the WTO:

Today the House of Representatives has taken a historic step toward continued prosperity in America, reform in China, and peace in the world. If the Senate votes as the House has just done, to extend permanent normal trade relations with China, it will open new doors of trade for America and new hope for change in China [...]

We will be exporting, however, more than our products. By this agreement, we will also export more of one of our most cherished values, economic freedom.

Bringing China into the WTO and normalizing trade will strengthen those who fight for the environment, for labor standards, for human rights, for the rule of law.

For China, this agreement will clearly increase the benefits of cooperation and the costs of confrontation.

America, of course, will continue to defend our interests, but at this stage in China's development we will have more positive influence with an outstretched hand than with a clenched fist [...]

Though China may be changing, we all know it remains a one-party state, and it still denies people the rights of free speech and religious expression. We know that trade alone will not bring freedom to China or peace to the world.

That's why permanent normal trade relations must also signal our commitment to permanent change. America will keep pressing to protect our security and to advance our values. The vote today is a big boost to both efforts, for the more China liberalizes its economy, the more it will liberate the potential of its people to work without restraint, to live without fear.

(The New York Times, 25th May 2000)

Hence, Clinton and others hoped that China would continue to open up to the rest of the world and possibly loosen its dictatorial system. However, China did not move closer to the United States. It also did not become democratic. Instead, China became increasingly more belligerent over time, especially under the leadership of Xi Jinping. The hope is that China would also be held accountable for any free trade violations.

Clinton would have similar remarks for Russia (US DOS, 26th February 1999). In the following, Clinton highlights the economic and political fragility of Russia, and signaled the willingness to help to understand that the stability of the world was in the balance:

The dimensions of this problem are truly enormous. Eight years after the Soviet collapse, the Russian people are hurting. The economy is shrinking, making the future uncertain. Yet, we have as much of a stake today in Russia overcoming these challenges as we did in checking its expansion during the Cold War. This is not a time for complacency or self-fulfilling pessimism. Let's not forget that

Russia's people have overcome enormous obstacles before. And just this decade, with no living memory of democracy or freedom to guide them, they have built a country more open to the world than ever; a country with a free press and a robust, even raucous debate; a country that should see in the first year of the new millennium the first peaceful democratic transfer of power in its 1,000-year history.

The Russian people will decide their future. But we must work with them for the best possible outcome, with realism and with patience. If Russia does what it must to make its economy work, I am ready to do everything I can to mobilize adequate international support for them. With the right framework, we will also encourage foreign investment in its factories, its energy fields, its people. We will increase our support for small business and for the independent media. We will work to continue cutting our two nations' nuclear arsenals, and help Russia prevent both its weapons and its expertise from falling into the wrong hands.

(US DOS, 26th February 1999)

The important issue for Clinton is to defend the precarious Russian political economy from failure. Like China, the United States had a remarkable opportunity of turning an enemy into a friend. The American perspective was simple: that democratic principles promoted through free trade would eventually lead to a much safer world. In Russia's case, economic collapse may mean the end of this renewed hope. Ultimately then, the United States needs to continue supporting countries seeking economic assistance for there lies the future of American security and dominance into the twenty-first century. This desire to dominate the global political landscape was in essence the focus of Clinton's presidency, along with subsequent president George W. Bush. The

NATO enlargement was among those desires done at the expense of Russian weakness at the time. (Marten, 2020; Radchenko, 2020)

More than anything, this article is about China's increased global influence from global trade. Rather than translating gains from trade to societal needs (development, health care, etc.), China has preferred to become progressively more aggressive internationally and domestically. In the 1990s, there was a hope that the state would wither away from the benefits of globalization and interdependence (Frankel, 2000; Giddens, 2002). The declining use of military force did not annul the need for the state to protect itself. Even though the units of the system may change (becoming more interdependent), the structure of the system did not (Waltz, 2010). The problem with the reductionist analysis is that it equates unit level interaction yet the whole is not always the sum of its parts. The structure of the international system simply did not change and, as a result, the mechanisms that govern state behavior remain constant. Hence, the security dilemma, a major contribution to international relations repeats itself:

Wherever such anarchic society has existed – and it has existed in most periods of known history on some level – there has arisen what may be called the “security dilemma” of men, or groups, or their leaders [...] Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on.

(Herz, 1950)

The wealthier China became, the more interest it acquired. The need to protect those interests from being interrupted meant investments in the military. Further, China's need to change the system to serve its interests given its size and scope must also be considered. Hence, globalization

and interdependence simply did not destroy the state's main vehicle for security: military investment.

The other area of concern is that globalization did not mold China into adopting fewer authoritarian practices; the reverse has happened. The reforms under China's former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping were not extended by successive leaders. The more powerful and influential China became, the more totalitarian its policies turn out to be. The interesting part of this is that its authoritarian principles are bleeding into its foreign policy. A possible invasion of Taiwan is at the intersection of domestic and foreign policy. Taiwan (Republic of China) is seen as a lost province of China that must be brought into the People's Republic. Similarly, Russia was thought to follow the same principles, that eventually it would see its destiny as tied to the wealth and prosperity of Europe.¹ Instead, Russia used its oil and gas resources to furnish European dependence on the commodity (Balmaceda, 2021). So like China, rather than following the neoliberal institutionalist theoretical expectation that trade would increase cooperation in the long run, Russia would use its geoeconomic advantage to pursue its geopolitical goals. However, its war with Ukraine would eventually force Russia into dependency on China, as Western sanctions limit Russian economic exchange limiting access to international markets, specifically European markets. Hence, China will become more powerful as Russia's dependence on it grows.

3. Human Rights Violations: Internal Aggression

Regardless of international efforts to democratically socialize China and Russia, these states have only become more authoritarian. Of course, China was a totalitarian state under Chairman Mao but the socialist state reformed and adopted some free-market policies after his death. The

state still operated with a strong central government, but the branch of the president declined in power in 1982 with a constitutional amendment (BBC, 11th March 2018). However, since Xi Jinping took power, there has been a reversion to a Maoist approach (*The Straits Times*, 18th October 2017). As a result, China has been undergoing a process of totalitarianism underscored by the so-called Xi Jinping thought. The recent release of his “14 Points” suggest a resurgent of classical Maoist ideas where socialist values, national reunification (with Taiwan), one-party domination, and party leadership are primary (*ibid.*). Part of this process is to increase party, and hence state, control over citizens. China is using valuable resources to track civilian movement both physically and digitally.

Digitally, the new social credit score system assigns a value to citizens and regulates their behavior to fit into Chinese Communist Party values (Maizland and Chatzky, 2019; *Fox Business*, 15th July 2019). Behavior approved of the CCP’s ideology will result in increased standards of living such as bypassing hospital lines and so on. Bad behavior, such as missing a bill payment or littering might result in a lowered score. Searching for forbidden topics like the “Tiananmen Square Massacre” will worsen one’s score. This infrastructure thus creates two classes of people. Such a system needs an intricate surveillance system, which leads to additional digital infrastructure such as 5G networks.

China’s Huawei is also developing sophisticated 5G technology that tracks Chinese citizens as well as citizens from foreign states who adopt Huawei 5G technology (*The New Yorker*, 26th April 2019). Citizens that do not fit the CCP mold are thus major threats to the party’s legitimacy. Ethnic and religious minorities are major victims in this process.

Physically, religious and ethnic minorities in China are being oppressed by the CCP security apparatus. Falun Gong practitioners,

Muslims, especially Uighurs in Xinjiang, Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Mongolians, and many other citizens. In 2018, Amnesty International described a report made by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and made the following summary:

- The arbitrary, prolonged, and incommunicado mass detention of Uighurs under the pretext of countering terrorism and religious extremism, with estimates of the numbers of detained ranging from “tens of thousands to upwards of a million”.
- The broad and unclear definition of terrorism, extremism, and separatism in Chinese legislation, which has the “potential to criminalize peaceful civic and religious expression” targeting ethnic minority groups, in particular Muslim Uighurs and Buddhist Tibetans.
- The marginalization of the use of Tibetans’ and Uighurs’ languages and punishment of Tibetan language advocacy.

(Amnesty International, 30th August 2018)

Oppression of Uighur Muslim populations is particularly disturbing. Human Rights Watch released a report in April 2021 citing several alarming policy developments such as crimes against humanity and even genocide (Human Rights Watch, 19th April 2021). The report cites several sources, including government documents, Stanford Law, and other human rights groups such as the International Consortium of Journalists, *The New York Times*, and the Uyghur Human Rights Project (*ibid.*). These sources corroborate the following (*ibid.*):

- Mass arbitrary detention and arrest of an estimated million Uyghur and other minority groups housed in between 300 to 400 government-built “political education’ camps.

- China's court system sentences individuals to long prison sentences without any due process, some for practicing religion.
- Detainees and prisoners are made to do forced labor or torture.
- Outside these facilities, populations are subjected to mass surveillance, separated from their families.
- Erasure of cultural and religious presence.

According to leaked information, authorities are told to “round up everyone who should be rounded up” (*The New York Times*, 16th November 2019). The main targets are those that are “infected with unhealthy thoughts” like well-known academics, writers, journalists, doctors, entertainers, and anyone who is highly educated (Abbas, 2019). In many instances, the people who are sentenced are those practicing their religion; these examples include:

- Jin Dehuai, a Hui Muslim, serving life imprisonment for “splittism” for organizing trips abroad to study the Quran, inviting religious figures from other countries to Xinjiang, and holding religious meetings in the region between 2006 and 2014;
- Nebijan Ghoja Ehmet, a Uyghur, convicted of “inciting ethnic hatred and discrimination” for telling others “what is *haram* and *halal*,” and sentenced to 10 years in prison [...]
- Nurlan Pioner, a Kazakh, convicted of “disturbing public order and extremism” for educating over 70 people in religion, and sentenced to 17 years in prison [...]

(Human Rights Watch, 19th April 2021)

Many are tortured; *Radio Free Asia* reports that there were 150 deaths in come camp in second half of 2018 (*Radio Free Asia*, 29th October

2019). Uighur people are beaten by staff, hung from ceilings, deprived of sleep, and shackled for prolonged periods (*ibid.*). Some are seated in tiger chairs, metal chairs, for long periods. People are electroshocked, chained in a poorly ventilated crowded cell with as many as 68 people per cell with everyone urinating and defecating within their position. Women detainees are gang-raped, sometimes with electric batons. Some are raped on more than one occasion (BBC, 2nd February 2021).

These so-called education camps are not simply to imprison, but to reeducate and to erase culture and religious ties; to “wash hands” and “cleanse hearts” (Zenz, 2019). Detainees have to learn and sing songs praising the CCP and its leader. Speaking in Turkic is forbidden and there is heavy surveillance to punish anyone breaking this directive. Another CCP leaked directive stated that there is to be “full video surveillance coverage of dormitories and classrooms free of blind spots, ensuring that guards on duty can monitor in real-time, record things in detail, and report suspicious circumstances immediately” (*ibid.*). These and other practices against the Islamic faith, Turkic language, and culture are part of a cultural genocide effort. However, there is also an actual genocide effort to destroy the next generation of Turkic people. There are real efforts to violate the reproductive rights of Turkic women as some women are forced to have an intrauterine contraceptive device (IUD) (*The Washington Post*, 5th October 2019). In other instances, women suffered forced abortions with some undergoing forced sterilization (*ibid.*).

From this, many have concluded that China is committing gross human rights violations and crimes against humanity (Reuters, 19th April 2021). The Rome Statute defines crimes against humanity as any “committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack”. From the above description, China’s policies against the Uighur population meet that

criterion. Amnesty International's Deputy in East Asia, Lisa Tassi said "The Chinese government must now heed the call to tackle serious human rights violations. Rather than dismissing the Committee's recommendations, it must immediately set out the next steps to address them" (*ibid.*). Apart from the sanctions levied on China in March 2021, little has been done to punish China. It remains the responsibility of the international community (even though China is not a member of the International Criminal Court system in the Hague) to act by imposing further targeted sanctions, increasing visa bans, lodging criminal cases with international courts, and not doing business with entities using slave labor (*ibid.*). Yet, this might not be enough to curtail China's behavior.

The international community so far is continuing to engage China regardless of its actions against the people of Xinjiang. In other parts of China, governmental authorities are destroying any semblance of democracy in Hong Kong. Andreas Illmer reports that changes to Hong Kong's electoral system by the CCP as well as the national security law of 2020 destroyed democracy (BBC, 4th April 2021). Only people approved by the CCP can run for public office and any person who criticizes the CCP might be given a life sentence.

Hong Kong is no longer a hub for freedom in an authoritarian state. Mainland China has now consolidated its position in areas they perceive as different from the CCP model of government. From here, the next target might be Taiwan. China's aggression toward the outside world will be discussed in the following section. From these major policy developments, it is clear that China is becoming more authoritarian. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China is both an authoritarian, even totalitarian, state. However, given the increasing aggression and rhetoric against Taiwan, and the destruction of Hong Kong's autonomy, it is also clear that it is an internationally revisionist state. In all, China seems to

possess a great desire to overturn the status quo, both domestically and internationally, to organize the state's resources without any oversight or negotiation with those impacted.

Like China, Russia is also facing this resurgence of anti-democratic practices. In many instances, it has been argued that Russia, along with China and even some aspects of the United States is becoming more authoritarian, adopting fascist tendencies.² In the tumultuous experiences of the 1990s, Russia's long-term hope was not simply prosperity or survival, but some return to, and recognition of, greatness (Pavlova, 2018). With the presidency of Putin, there was a great desire to return to tradition strictly speaking. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports that Russia is more oppressive today than in the Soviet era (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). The government erodes freedom of speech making it almost impossible to publish or protest the government. Non-governmental organizations that promote LGBTQ+ rights are barred from an operation or banned completely. The Russian government controls and monitors the internet and search history. There are also human rights abuses in Muslim-majority Chechnya with homosexual men disappearing from the streets of Grozny. Like China, Russia's internal security is getting increasingly oppressive regardless of American efforts to enhance democratic government since the fall of the Soviet Union.

4. Revisionism: International Aggression

Revisionism in international relations is defined as any action taken by a state to undermine or change the status quo to its favor (DiCicco and Sanchez, 2021). This means amending the political order as is. Rules, norms, structures, practices, the territorial integrity of other sovereign states, and a possible reformulation of the international system itself

(especially shaping the balance of power to its favor) (Danilovic and Claire, 2007). Part of this endeavor is revising (hence the term) the existing political system to serve its purposes. The term comes from power transition theory which describes state behavior as a struggle over the construction (makeup) of the international system. As a result, there are hegemonic states (the power or set of powers that protect the international system) and revisionists. Russia and China are revisionist powers given specific behaviors within the anarchical international system.

Russia's war on Ukraine is an attempt to change the international status quo by redefining Ukrainian sovereignty and possibly redrawing its borders (BBC, 23rd February 2022). As mentioned, Russia had long been concerned with NATO expansion (Mearsheimer, 2014). In the 1990s and into the 2000s, Russia expressed concerns over former Soviet satellite states joining NATO. Russian leadership understood that NATO's past purpose was containment signaling a clear threat to Russia's national security. The United States and Europe continue to sanction Russia for its invasion. The United States has even banned Russia from its SWIFT regime, making it more difficult for Russia to engage with international markets (Eichengreen, 2022). This move has only pushed Russia to find alternatives to SWIFT. The more isolated Russia becomes, the more it might challenge the status quo, making further revisions to the international system, its established borders, laws, norms, and expected behaviors. It is also likely that China is to benefit largely from this isolation, as Russia will have no choice but to increase ties in the face of Western punishment. Russian isolation will thus play into China's power and global influence.

China is a revisionist power given its behavior in the past decade. There are several areas of contention between China and the rest of the world. This section will focus on three major areas:

- China and the Republic of China (Taiwan): the end of Taiwanese sovereignty and incorporation into China.
- China and India over Ladakh and the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- China and the South China Sea: the incorporation and control of all seas and territories within the 9-dash line (including island-building projects).

These three examples illustrate the drastic changes China is seeking to make given the increases in its military power. The more powerful China becomes, the less likely the United States and other states may seek to maintain the current order. This is because status quo powers may not be willing to defend the current order. It becomes necessary then to discuss increasing Chinese aggression and revisionist drive to further understand the nature of China and the misguided theoretical insights of theories and perspectives predicting the declining relevance of the state and the power of globalization.

Taiwan is an island state off the coast of Mainland China. It practices regular elections and maintains a military including the army, navy, and air force. It conducts diplomatic missions around the world and enjoys recognition by a small number of states. The United States once recognized Taiwan as the representative of the Chinese people. However, in 1972, the United States and China entered into an understanding: “the United States acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain there is but one China and that Taiwan is a part of China. The United States Government does not challenge that position” (Office of the Historian, US DOS, 1972 (Document 203)). In 1979, the Carter administration further established the one-China policy but also maintained that “the people of the United States will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan” (AIT, 31st March 2022).

Regardless of various communique and declarations between the United States and China, the United States still maintains relations with Taiwan. Taiwan is a major buyer of American weapons, recently buying USD\$1.8 billion (BBC, 22nd October 2020). This deal only increases tensions between the United States and China as China sees Taiwan as a sort of renegade province. The United States does not have an explicit alliance with Taiwan, but there is an understanding that the United States will come to Taiwan's aid if attacked.

Unifying Taiwan with China is part of Xi Jinping's 14 points (point 12: Upholding the principle of "one country, two systems" and promoting national reunification) (*The Straits Times*, 18th October 2017). To do this, China has sought to isolate Taiwan from the international community. For instance, China has pressured other states to stop recognizing Taiwan, stopped Taiwan from being an active participant in international organizations such as the World Health Organization, and violated Taiwanese airspace daily with fighter jets (Blackwill and Zelikow, 2021). The violation of Taiwanese airspace is particularly alarming. On June 15, NPR noted that China sent a record 28 military planes (NPR, 15th June 2021). Before that in April, China sent 25 planes. The June 15 flyover included 20 fighter jets, four bombers, and other planes including antisubmarine aircraft (*ibid.*). The ultimate goal is to intimidate Taiwan into surrendering without a fight. Regardless of the independent and democratic status of Taiwan, China is seeking unification (or "reunification") with the island state; if necessary, China will use force to do so.

The United States has a choice: to intervene on behalf of Taiwan, or to let Taiwan fall to Chinese forces. If the United States allows Taiwan to be annexed by China, then ultimately Taiwan would befall the same fate as Hong Kong: democracy would come to an end. More alarming

for international security is the fact that the geopolitical space of Taiwan, along with all military assets, including all American-made weaponry (missile defense systems, fighter planes, and other materials) will be captured by China. Further, the industries of Taiwan will come under Taiwanese control. This includes the vital Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), the most powerful company producing the most dynamic and technologically advanced microchips (*Financial Times*, 27th June 2021). Furthermore, surrounding states like Japan, South Korea, The Philippines, etc., may feel insecure. Taiwan is geopolitically important to these states as it forms the so-called First Island Chain (Yoshihara, 2012). The First Island Chain comprises of the following states: Taiwan, Japan, The Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, and Vietnam (*International Policy Digest*, 17th March 2020). These islands are particularly important to contain China. If China infiltrates the First Island Chain, then it will be able to attack neighboring states much easier (Yoshihara, 2012). It will also weaken the ability of states to counterattack, as midair refueling will become impossible (Yoshihara, 2012; *International Policy Digest*, 17th March 2020). Simply put, an independent Taiwan decreases China's power projection in the region, something it is already attempting to do with its island-building project.

China's island-building projects are for the sole purpose of extending its control and influence in the oceans surrounding China. China builds artificial islands by dredging up the seafloor along shallow areas, on rocks, and coral reefs. Tons of cement and materials are poured into the sea thereby creating islands. Using this technique, China has added over 3200 acres to its territory (*Newsweek*, 29th March 2017). These new territories can be used to project power and thus threaten neighbors opposing these operations. The Asia Maritime Transparency

Agency is particularly alarmed by these developments stating, “Beijing can now deploy military assets, including combat aircraft and mobile missile launchers to the Spratly Islands at any time” (*ibid.*). China is using these islands like stationary battleships, placing complex area denial weapons systems like anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles on these islands (*Defense News*, 5th June 2018). With these developments, it seems like China is seeking to increase its power projection in the region to secure, not simply dominance but regional hegemony.

Along with artificial islands, China’s 9-dash line declaration demands control of much of the South China Sea undercutting many states like Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia. What makes the 9-dash line particularly revisionist is that it that the International Criminal Court at the Hague ruled that such a demarcation is illegal and ultimately violates the sovereignty and rights of surrounding states (*The Wall Street Journal*, 12th July 2016). Interestingly, point 5 of the 1979 communique between the United States and China states “Neither should seek hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region or any other region of the world and each is opposed to efforts by any other country or group of countries to establish such hegemony” (AIT, 31st March 2022). China is seeking hegemony in the South China Sea through its island-building projects and its assertion of the so-called 9-dash line. These two developments are changing the political landscape in the pursuit of revisionist international policy.

The final area of concern for the status quo is in the east with India in Landahk along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Before 2020, China and India were members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and collaborated on several global development projects. However, in May 2020, Chinese troops breached the (LAC), the effective border with India which led to serious clashes, the worst since

the 1962 war. China's main complaint is that India built a road that may serve to bring troops to the border. This issue could have been dealt with diplomatically. Instead, at least 20 Indian soldiers were killed in hand-to-hand combat. China has yet to confirm its casualties (BBC, 16th June 2020). The violence calmed after some time, but the relationship between India and China is now badly damaged. China is now building its villages, roads, and military installations in Bhutan, a move that threatens India (*Foreign Policy*, 7th May 2021). As a response, India is moving closer to the United States through the Quadrilateral Defense Dialogue (QUAD): members include the United States, Japan, and Australia (*The Washington Times*, 5th October 2020). The QUAD is being compared to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, but instead of containing Russia, the aim is to contain China (*ibid.*). China is now considered a major threat to all of its neighbors, from the East to the West.

5. Conclusions

Before it invaded the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany imported 74% of its phosphate, 67% of its asbestos, 65% of its chrome, 55% of its manganese, 40% of its nickel, and 34% of its oil from the Soviet Union. In total, Germany was dependent on the Soviet Union for 70% of all imports. A trade deal between the two states in January 1941 increased this dependence in these substantial areas, but also grain (Dimbleby, 2021). This degree of dependence may have lulled Stalin into a false sense of security and complacency. Once Operation Barbarossa began, Stalin could not believe that Nazi Germany would invade his state; he was in denial (Uldricks, 1999: 626). Stalin's idea was that high levels of dependence on these critical goods, especially given the British blockade, would appease his new friend and anti-West ally Hitler (*ibid.*:

626). Instead, he thought that the Soviet Union would be spared from attack because the high level of trade alleviated Nazi Germany's isolation. However, by June 22, 1941, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union had begun. Stalin was taken completely by surprise, leading to massive Nazi victories.

In the case of Nazi Germany, high levels of economic dependence did not alter its expansionist policies. In the same way, Russia and China are pursuing international political revisionism regardless of economic and political interdependence. Russia seems to have thrown away its economic relations with Europe to pursue war with Ukraine. However, from the Russian perspective, it seems that American expansionism into the historical or traditional Russian sphere of influence is to blame. Putin states:

We understand what is happening; we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and Eurasian integration. And all this while Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West. We are constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues; we want to strengthen our level of trust and for our relations to be equal, open, and fair. But we saw no reciprocal steps.

On the contrary, they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, and placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They kept telling us the same thing: "Well, this does not concern you." That's easy to say [...]

[...] They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a

limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.

(The Kremlin, 18th March 2014)

Russia sees itself as a victim, and its violent actions in Ukraine are to maintain some balance within the international political order. Putin hence sacrificed its economic relationships and reputation for the ability to make decisions for Ukraine. This has only made Russia weaker internationally, and as economic isolation increases, Putin should expect China to have more leverage over Russia.

Russia is not the only state to sacrifice years of economic intercourse for what it perceives as within its national interests. In 1995, Michael J. Sullivan published an article entitled “Development and Political Repression: China’s Human Rights Policy Since 1989”. In it, Sullivan asks the following questions:

Will the increasing appeal of China’s ‘big market’ result in human rights violations ceasing to be on trial? Will the silencing of human rights concerns allow China’s human rights violators to determine the course of political change? Or, will the solitary cries of protest synthesize into humane reform of Chinese politics?

(Sullivan, 1995: 26)

Over twenty-five years have passed since these questions were posed. Today, the United States and the European Union import more from China than any other major power (*Statista*, 4th November 2020; European Parliament, 2022). The European Union, a defender of international human rights as enshrined in its constitution³, is working on a major investment deal with China (*CNBC*, 15th June 2021).

It seems that these major democratic powers are clamoring to do business with China regardless of human rights violations. However, China's human rights record did not improve; rather, China continues to violate the rights of Uyghurs, Buddhists, and other ethnic and religious minorities like Falun Gong practitioners and Christians (Human Rights Watch, 24th February 2021). This result must be compared to past expectations. For instance, in 2002, Condoleezza Rice said of China:

China and the United States are cooperating on issues ranging from the fight against terror to maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula. And China's transition continues. Admittedly, in some areas, its leaders still follow abhorrent practices. Yet China's leaders have said that their main goal is to raise living standards for the Chinese people. They will find that reaching that goal in today's world will depend more on developing China's human capital than it will on China's natural resources or territorial possessions.

(The White House, 1st October 2002)

In 2009, the United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs had a hearing about these human rights violations. This hearing discussed the 2008 human rights report published by the United States Department of State:

During the year the Chinese Government increased its severe cultural and religious persecution of the ethnic minorities in the Tibetan areas and in the Uighur Autonomous Region. Executions of Uighurs, whom authorities accused of separatism, but which some observers claim were politically motivated, were reported during prior reporting periods. Regulations restricting Muslims' religious activity, teaching

in placing of worship, continued to be implemented forcibly in the Uighur Autonomous Region.

Measures to tighten control over religion in the Uighur Autonomous Region included increasing surveillance of mosques, religious leaders and practitioners, detaining and arresting persons engaged in unauthorized religious activities. The government in the Uighur Autonomous Region took measures to dilute expressions of Uighur identity, including measures to reduce education in ethnic minority languages.

During the year, authorities increased repression in the Uighur Autonomous Region and targeted the region's ethnic Uighur population. The Chinese Government continued to repress Uighurs expressing peaceful political dissent and independent Muslim religious leaders often citing counterterrorism as the reason for taking action.

(U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 10th June 2009)

Hence, regardless of these violations, China's economic influence over the United States has only increased in size and scope. Hence, Sullivan's question can be answered: China's big market pushed its human rights violations to the margins, allowing China to dictate the speed at which reforms take place. This emboldens China to continue the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities we see today. Why did democratic states directly contribute to China's economic growth and development? The fact that China has managed to do this presents a major puzzle to the field of international relations, especially since the EU and the US are supposed to project and protect human rights. Why was China allowed to join the international community after the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre in Beijing (1989) which killed an unknown number of students and other Chinese citizens? (Brown, 2021) These protests

fought for democracy, free speech, an end to corruption, and other reforms, and they were crushed (Amnesty International, 30th August 2018). Nevertheless, the human rights record in China did not improve; rather, China has continued to be a major human rights violator (Cliff, 2015). Even still, for the past thirty years, China's military power and political influence have increased significantly making it a global power (Khoo, 2020). It now has the potential to directly challenge the liberal order of the United States. Today, China is challenging the status quo by violating the sovereignty of independent states like India, The Philippines, and Taiwan, violating human rights and democratic processes in Hong Kong, and economically punishing states like Australia for voicing concern for Chinese action in the South China Sea. These issues have not deterred the US and EU as these three parties continue to trade. It would seem that the US and EU are locked in a dependency relationship with China. As a result, democratic states may not be able to rein China in for its gross violations of human rights. Like the case of Nazi Germany, an expansionary China may certainly reserve the right to pursue change in the international system through violence if it perceives it as in its best interests. If true, then this is a case study that should impact the study of international relations for years to come.

Notes

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1. For a detailed analysis of Russia’s trade relations with Europe, see: Lucia Tajoli (2022). Too much of a good thing? Russia-EU international trade relations at times of war. *Economia e Politica Industriale*, Vol. 49, Issue 4, pp. 807-834.
2. For a complete summary of fascist tendencies of the three mentioned states, please read: Hanna Samir Kassab (2022). Internal security: The encroachment of state security on global liberty in a multipolar world. *Democracy and Security*, Vol. 18, Issue 2, pp. 123-146.
- 3.

“The European Parliament endorses the Constitutional Treaty and wholeheartedly supports its ratification”(*): it creates greater clarity as to the nature and objectives of the Union, gives it greater effectiveness and a strengthened role in the world, improves democratic accountability and gives more rights to its citizens.

(*European Parliament resolution of 12 January 2005).

(European Parliament, 2005)

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