

From the Cold War to Cold War 2.0: Old Wine in New Bottles

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I am a professor of intelligence and security studies at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania with the distinction of being a three-time Fulbright recipient. Much of my professional focus lies within the Balkans region, and I am soon returning to Kosovo, where I conducted research during my first Fulbright expedition. This opportunity allows me to apply the principles I teach my students directly in the field, particularly in areas such as capacity building, civil society initiatives, rule of law, and efforts against state capture and political corruption. These endeavors are particularly pertinent in the context of post-conflict societies, such as the former Yugoslavia. My recent work has taken me to the Republic of North Macedonia for an extended period last year, preceded by a similar engagement in Kosovo two years prior and going back in January to continue my efforts in this vital area.

Here I offer a series of insights into what I perceive as the resurgence of the Cold War, albeit in a 2.0 version. Now, it is important to note that the work I conducted during my Fulbright is entirely my own, independent of the State Department's support, despite their funding. Why do I argue for the existence of a Cold War 2.0? Because I have explored this topic extensively in my two published books, so there must be something to it. My initial book focuses on the international system and its impact on the United States, particularly in the realm of great power competition involving the US, China, and Russia. The second book, *The Politics of US Foreign Policy in NATO*, is more about the intricacies of domestic politics within the US and highlights its dysfunctionality.¹

I need to be careful with my language because when we say international order and international community, you should know that many people in the United States simply mean the West when they say that. That is 20% of the world's population, not the entire world, and I am aware of that. Remember the beginning of 2023 with the spy balloon, the Chinese spy balloon and the hysteria that that had caused? That is nothing new in American political history, as we had the Red Scare in the late 1940s and 1950s

with McCarthyism. This is what I mean by when I say old wine in new bottles and the hysteria as it defined American politics. There is an emerging, almost bipartisan, consensus about the role of China as a strategic threat to the United States and the risks that come with that. My argument is it did not always have to be that way, but it is, and I think a lot of that is indicative of the structure of American politics.

Perhaps you saw *Oppenheimer*, the movie. It is a great film in many respects, but it is about how one man struggled to build an atomic bomb that kills a lot of people. Getting caught up in Christopher Nolan's approach, one has to remember that there was a horrible human tragedy that took place at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That was framed as 'we ended the war, we saved American lives', but how many lives had to be lost and killed in those two atomic bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki? The Cold War begins with the advent of atomic weapons and atomic technology. Today, what defines the US and China's strategic or security competition if not a chip war? A battle over the internet of things, artificial intelligence, machine learning, quantum computing, biotechnology, bioengineering, human enhancements—all these different advanced technologies that the two nation-states are competing over. It is a security competition between both countries, and it is similar to the Cold War 1.0, or the original Cold War, in that it involves competition around advanced technology.

Now I am going to come back to the United States. We say we are a democracy in the United States, but are we really democratic? I pulled these data points from Statista, which is just a reproduction or republication of the V-Dem statistical database. It measures the extent to which a nation-state is a democracy. As you can see here from the 1920s to the 1940s, using this definition, there weren't that many democracies. Certainly, there weren't that many what are called liberal democracies or electoral democracies. An electoral democracy is where there may be a free election, but there might not be protections for marginalized groups, for communities of color, for ethnic minorities. In places like the Balkans, in Kosovo, there are free and fair elections, but five percent of the country is ethnically Serb Turkish. What are the protections for those particular groups when one ethnic majority has significant political power in that country? A liberal democracy is a democracy that protects marginalized groups, targeted groups, and it's a narrow definition.

As you can see, in 2021, there are only thirty-four of them in the world, and the United States is categorized as a liberal democracy. But this was taken before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned last year. I do not know if it is going to continue in this category, to be quite honest with you, because of the removal of reproductive rights as a civil right. Presently, across the globe, there exist approximately eighty-eight closed autocracies or electoral autocracies, alongside approximately eighty-nine electoral or liberal democracies. Figure 1 represents this statistic.

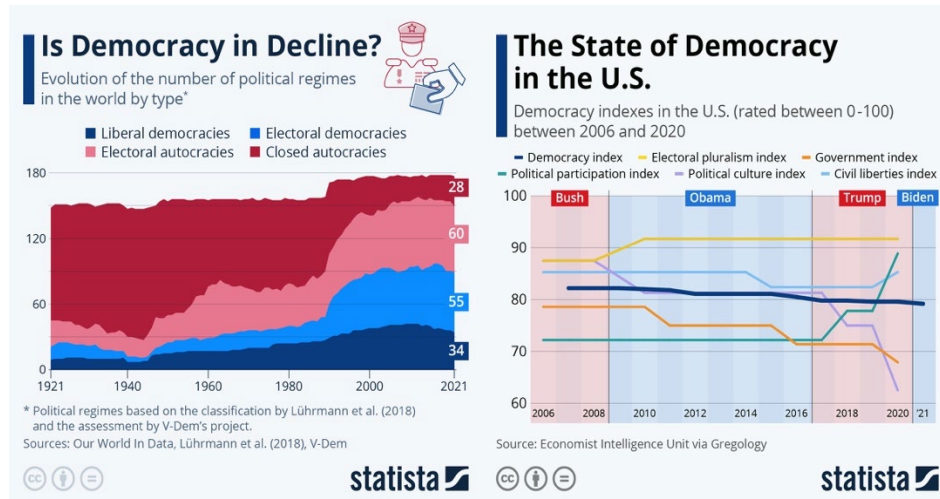
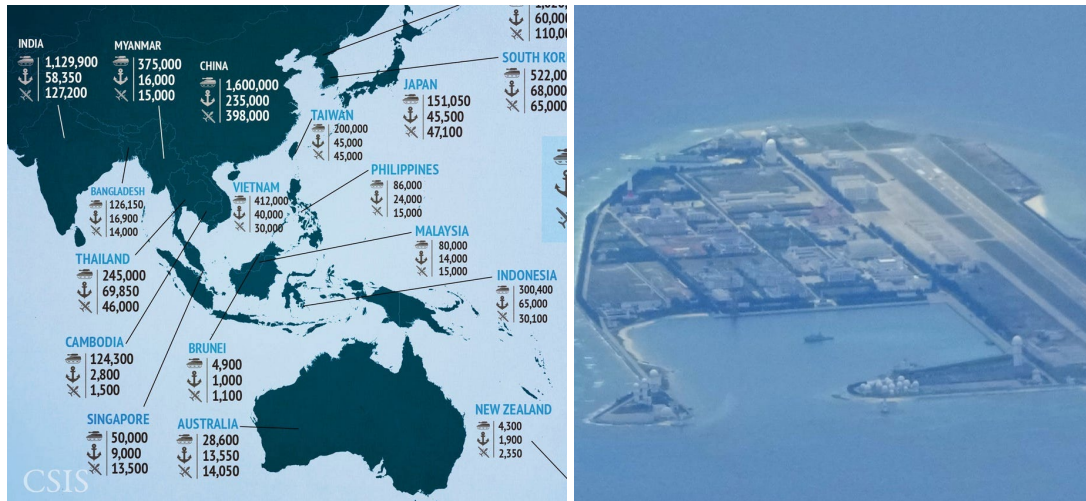


Figure 1(left). Type of Political Regimes Around the World. Source: Statista. Figure 2 (right). Democracy in the US Source: Statista.

The state of democracy in the United States, and this is the trend from Bush to Obama to Trump to Biden—the overall trend is a slight decline, or relative deterioration, of democracy in the United States over the last almost eighteen years. As you can see in Figure 2, we are becoming slowly more undemocratic as a country, yet we call ourselves normatively a democracy. According to the data and the statistics, there is a relative decline or relative deterioration of democracy in the United States.

Now I am going to go out to the international system. This is the way the US sees the so-called Indo-Pacific region of the world, where 50% of the world's population lives. The US notices a rising China with a militarization movement in the Indo-Pacific. An example is China building fake reclaimed projects and islands with airfields. The US understands these actions as a strategic threat to its interests. It looks at the Pacific, particularly the South China Sea, as a regional sphere of influence. The US promises to continue freedom of navigation exercises in areas of dispute with China. The building of these islands is perceived as a direct threat to the United States and American power.



Also, you can see here on the left, there is a significant level of military buildup in the region, and the United States is trying to form formal and informal military alliances with certain key nation-states in the region from Figure 3. The United States looks at the China-Russia partnership or what I call the China-Russia partnership as an even bigger threat. This has led to more of a less unipolar world and perhaps more of a multipolar or bipolar world. It is a bifurcated world—we could have a play on terms all day—but the way in which the United States sees this as China and Russia are moving together.

While they have had their history of differences, especially during the original Cold War, the US sees them as coming together, and they share a unified interest in opposing an American-led world. But there is more to the world than the Western-led world. This gets played out over the invasion of Ukraine. In my interviews with US policymakers, the way they see it is as follows: the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US had to respond militarily to assist the Zelensky government as a deterrent to what China and Taiwan. If the US did not provide Ukraine military assistance, that would be an incentive for China to move against Taiwan. China has said that by 2027 it will reunify or unify with Taiwan; however it defines that. That implies a potential full-scale military invasion. Larry Diamond, a famous scholar on Democracy, says that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is going to happen. Moreover, the US getting more and more involved in Ukraine is going to be even more of an incentive for China to launch a full-scale invasion of Taiwan. I do not know to what extent that is certain or if that is a clarion call for more awareness, but that is a relative consensus in the scholarship of American foreign policy.

My area of study is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), China, and Russia. In the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, the United States has moved to convey an approach of NATO Unity. The US and its European allies are now united; they are on the same page, pushing back against the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. They wish they had pushed back even harder after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, but there is a certain bit of hypocrisy associated with it. The United States did invade Afghanistan and Iraq, and now it is telling Russia that it is not allowed to invade Ukraine. I am just as critical of the United States as I am of Russia invading Ukraine. Russia did not have to invade Ukraine. I agree with much of the US response because the US has a Cold War mentality that flows from the Cold War. The Cold War mentality with the Soviet Union is now applying to Ukraine, and there is this view that if the US does not respond, it will only encourage China to invade Taiwan.

What is happening in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? China and Russia are forming a partnership. I do not know to what extent that partnership is lasting because they are not actually on the same page, as many people think. Rather, it is an informal alliance of mutual convenience in opposition to a US-led world. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US military assistance to Ukraine in the wake of that has led Russia to now form a partnership with North Korea. Russia is firing two million artillery shells in Ukraine per month, but it can only produce one million. In essence, it has run out of artillery or is running out of artillery. There are US sanctions on the Russian defense industrial base. Where is the world's repository of artillery shells? The Korean Peninsula. Vladimir Putin must go to Iran for drones because he cannot get parts to build his own drones, and now he has to go to North Korea for artillery. Last month, Kim Jong-un took an armored train car over to the Russian cosmodrome. It is kind of ridiculous; he is afraid to fly. He took his armored train car across the very narrow border with Russia. He meets Vladimir Putin, and they are dining on tea and fish, having a good time. But Russia is in a position where it needs North Korea. This creates a very dangerous situation.

When we are talking about the long-term implications of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the US response to it, this conference illustrates that. My conclusion is that we are now seeing the emergence of a security competition that could lead to the breakout of an all-out major power war. The weapons of today may not necessarily be nuclear. By the way, North Korea is interested in ballistic missile technology, technology that Russia has. That is even more destabilizing. There are long-term implications in Northeast Asia of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

I am going to return to US domestic politics. Why did Russia invade Ukraine? Why did it seize Crimea illegally in 2014? At the end of the Cold War, the United States promised that it would not move NATO towards Russian borders. Secretary of State James Baker famously promised in 1990, "We will not move one inch Eastward NATO," and that after the reunification of East and West Germany, that NATO would not expand beyond Germany.² Over the ensuing decades, NATO did move expand its border in that

direction and it increased from thirteen members. It is now going to be thirty-two members with the admission of Sweden inevitably next year and with the admission of Finland this year. That helps explain why Russia responded the way it did in Georgia in 2008. It helps explain why Vladimir Putin, in 2007 at the Munich security conference, issued his condemnation of the West. Then, of course, one year later, Putin launched the South Ossetia war in 2008, followed by the seizure of Crimea in 2014. NATO expansion is a crucial driver, but there is more there than just NATO expansion. That is part of a Russian disinformation strategic narrative to put the onus on the West. Therefore, Russia has to invade Ukraine because this is a war about NATO expansion, American expansion into its near abroad.

Certainly, there is much more complexity to behind this New Cold War. The color revolutions that took place in Ukraine, Georgia, Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, those really unnerved the Kremlin. That was a threat to the governments of Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin. Also, NATO began putting missile defense batteries in NATO countries in Central and Eastern Europe. All of this represented a threat to Russia and how it sees its sphere of influence. Now the United States is relying on its NATO Partners to push back against Russia. There's tension at the reigniting of tensions in Europe, the US and Russia are both responsible for that. In response to China's militarization of islands, the US is now forming what it calls more flexible, more adaptable informal alliances like the Quad—the US, India, Japan, and Australia—and the Australia-United Kingdom-United States Defense Arrangement. This is more about nuclear submarines and cyber security technology. President Biden just came back from a trip to Vietnam to raise Vietnam's role in US foreign policy.

So, what I'm going to do here is, in my conclusion, get back to American politics. My estimation is that what we're seeing here is more about what's happening inside the United States than anything else. Globalization is done in American politics. The era of economic globalization is over. What we are witnessing now is an economy that is gearing up for strategic security competition with China first and Russia second. We are seeing a Biden foreign policy that is nothing more than an extension of the Trump foreign policy. There are a lot of similarities between the two, yet I think that Biden has actually taken Trump's foreign policy and kind of put it on steroids. He has not eliminated tariffs against China. The Baser Act passed in 2021, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 passed, the Chips and Sciences Act, and the Inflation Reduction Acts were passed in 2022. Export controls on high technologies like AI and machine learning—all of that was sold to Congress, and much of this was passed with overwhelming majorities as an attempt to compete with China. Everything in the US economy that eventually evolved into the military-industrial complex was sold as a way of containing the Soviet Union. We are building a war economy, a war economy that existed even after the end of the Cold War, and that is now expanding to a great degree.

All that withstanding, and I do believe this, that the ultimate issue facing humanity is not the strategic competition between the US, China, and Russia, but climate change. There is so much that could be done in the area of peacebuilding. I saw this with my work in the Balkans, and there is so much more there in the area of cooperation. But I think that we are way past that now. The world in the future of human history is going to be defined more in terms of tension and competition, and it just did not need to be that way.

NOTES

1. Chris J. Dolan, *NATO, the U.S., and Cold War 2.0: Transformation of the Transatlantic Alliance and Collective Defense* (New York, Peter Lang, 2023); Chris J. Dolan, *The Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy and NATO: Continuity and Change From the Cold War to the Rise of China* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023).
2. “Record of Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker,” February 9, 1990. National Security Archive, George Washington University.
<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16117-document-06-record-conversation-between>